

Lowest Common Denominator Christianity

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In trying to restore the pristine unity of the apostolic church to the present-day, great, big Body of Christ which is so splintered by denominationalism and the sectarian doctrines of men, despite God's attempt to restore unity through the Charismatic Renewal, we need to begin by looking past the particulars of our own cherished doctrines to find what I refer to as "Lowest Common Denominator Christianity." Lowest Common Denominator Christianity, or LCDC is essential Christianity. Essential Christianity consists of those parts of Christianity which every Christian agrees on. Once we determine what all true-blue Christians believe in, we can set the rest aside momentarily, and begin to agree to agree on what we all agree on. That's a good starting point for trying to restore unity to the Body.

In order to determine what is LCDC, we must first decide who's in and who's out. Why is it important to decide who's in and who's out? The reason it's important is because the more sectarian, denominational groups we include, the less commonalities will exist among the various groups. In other words, if we start including the Jehovah's Witnesses, we will not be able to include the eternal Deity of Christ as an essential element of LCDC because the JW's do not believe in the eternal Deity of Christ. Likewise, if we include the Catholics, we will not be able to include the Pauline doctrine of justification by faith alone, apart from works, as an essential element of LCDC. So do we include JW's and Mormons as members along with us of that one, big Body of Christ?

One way we can start to determine the limits of LCDC is to begin with a study of the essentials of salvation mentioned in the Word of God. But before we can do that, we must ask the question, "What is the Word?" You see, there are some groups who claim that the Word includes such books as Joseph Smith Jr.'s "Doctrines and Covenants," the "Pearl of Great Price," or the "Book of Mormon." Other groups such as the Jehovah's Witnesses claim that the best translation of the Scriptures is the "New World Translation" and that other versions contain varying degrees of human error of translation. Likewise, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church includes books like the "Book of Enoch" and "Jubilees" in its canon of

Scripture, the Roman Catholic Church includes such books as “Tobit” and “Sirach,” and the Eastern Orthodox include such books as “Third Maccabees” and “Fourth Maccabees” and the “151st Psalm.” By the same token, the great reformer Martin Luther rejected the canonicity of the “Epistle of James,” calling it an “epistle of straw.”

So which is the correct canon of Scripture? Dr. Brother Bob Dinkins tells us that the correct canon of the Old Testament is the one defined by the apostate, anti-Christian Jews at the Council of Jamnia in 110 A.D. Dr. Bob argues that although they had rejected Christ, the Jews were still able to identify which writings not to include in the list of Old Testament books. But is a canon even scriptural? Did God intend that the canon be closed and that no other revelations be considered canonical? Where in the Bible does it say that there are only sixty-six books in the Bible? Or where in the Bible does it tell us which books to include in the Bible? The answer is that the Bible does not tell us which books to include or how many books there are. As Dr. Bob points out, the restricting of the number of Bible books to the number “66” is a matter of supernatural, Holy-Ghost revelation which is something quite separate from the Word of God. The godless, Jews received this Holy-Ghost revelation despite themselves and defined which books belong in the list of Old Testament Books at the Council of Jamnia in 110 A.D. The rest of the Jewish writings found at Qumran among the Dead Sea Scrolls were omitted because of the Holy Ghost revelation the Jews received.

When it comes to determining LCDC, however, we cannot rely on the anointed revelations of Dr. Brother Bob even when they burst forth from the Feema, because many believers question whether Dr. Bob’s revelations are truly inspired by the Spirit. So what can we do? Well we can start with only the books which all various groups claiming to believe in Christ agree upon. In order to do this, we must include the second-century Christian Marcion who accepted only the Pauline epistles and his particular version of the book of Luke. Based on a study of history and of the various groups claiming to believe in Christ over the centuries, the canon of LCDC would be the canon of Marcion minus any variants in the gospel of Luke which are peculiar to Marcion’s version. Why would this be the canon of LCDC? Because all Christian groups, including the Marcionites, can agree that portions of Luke and all of the Pauline Epistles are truly inspired by God. The rest of the writings laying claim to the title

of “Scripture” are up for grabs based on your own man-made tradition, or based on the incomplete revelation of various of God’s prophets such as Dr. Brother Bob Dinkins, “for we know in part and we prophesy in part.”

Now that we know the canon of LCDC, we must ask ourselves, Which translation of Scripture should we use? Should we use the King James Version, the translation of Joseph Smith, Jr., or the New World Translation? Should we use the NIV, the NASB, the Living Bible, the New Amplified Bible, or some other such translation? Well, we took a survey of various groups claiming to believe in Christ and found that among all the groups, the one version which seemed to be the most acceptable to the widest number of people was the King James Version, or Authorized Version.

So, now that we have determined the canon of LCDC and the most acceptable English translation, we are now ready to search the KJV of the gospel of Luke and the Pauline Epistles, searching this canon for the most clear-cut and simple recipe or recipes for salvation. Remember that, to really get to the lowest common denominator, we must cut back everything which appears superfluous or non-essential. Strikingly, as we searched Luke and the Pauline Epistles, we were left with two different base-line recipes for salvation. One recipe is found on the lips of the Savior in Luke 13:23-24 where it says, “Lord, are there few that be saved? And he said unto them, Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.” The other base-line recipe is found in the writings of Paul in his “Epistle to the Romans” in Romans 10:13 where it says, “Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” Strangely, here in Luke and Paul we seemed to face the same conflict of faith versus works which led Martin Luther to reject the “Epistle of James” as an “epistle of straw.”

In Luke, Jesus tells us that we must strive to enter in at the strait gate of salvation. Now “striving” involves “work.” It involves labor and exertion of force—something which Paul tells us does not play any role in salvation and, in fact, is a demonstration of not relying only on God and not on your own works. Now the Eastern Orthodox will claim that salvation involves us exerting our will through the enablement of God’s grace, but once again, we are left with the fact that the view of the Eastern Orthodox is a view peculiar to them and so it can’t be an element of LCDC. So we are left with a question—Which statement, whether Jesus or Paul, is the

element of LCDC? Now, remember, we are not saying that either statement is untrue. Our purpose here is simply to look for the lowest common denominator which all Christians can agree on. We already know that many Lutherans, Baptists, and even some Methodists and Pentecostals believe that salvation does not and cannot come through works, so the peculiar view of the Eastern Orthodox cannot be considered an element of LCDC. Neither can the command of Jesus to “Strive to enter in.”

Having identified that element of LCDC which provides the LCDC recipe for salvation, we must now ask what it means. Again, to restate Paul’s minimalist, LCDC recipe for salvation, “Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”¹ What does Paul mean by this statement? What is this name of the Lord to which he refers? What does it mean to call upon the name of the Lord? And how many times must one perform this act in order to be saved? One time? More than once? Must it be an ongoing, never-ending activity? Or is once enough? We are now left with the question of how to determine what the proper interpretation of this verse is. We could consult Dallas Theological Seminary or the seminary at Notre Dame. Or we could ask some professor at the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary or one at Concordia University. Or we could ask one of the professors at the Holy Cross Greek Orthodox Seminary or Life Bible College. The problem, though, is that we’re going to hear different answers to this question.

We mustn’t let that discourage us, however, we can still determine the LCDC interpretation of Paul’s recipe for salvation by simply looking at the lowest common denominator of interpretation held by all the groups in question. Most will agree that “the name of the Lord” referred to here is the name of Jesus. There are those, however, who, like the Jehovah’s Witnesses, will be quick to point out that this quote is a quote from the Old Testament book of the Prophet Joel, saying that the word “Lord” here is the divine name of “Jehovah.” Joel, however, lies outside of the canon of LCDC and the Greek of the Epistle to the Romans is ambiguous. It could refer to simply the title “Lord” or “Kyrios,” or it could refer to the divine name, YHWH, or “Jehovah.” So in terms of LCDC theology which would it be?

In order to answer this question, we had to ask representatives of each of the groups individually three different questions in the following order: 1) Is the word “Lord” here referring to a title of God or is it

referring to the Divine Name, and 2) Is the name referred to here the name of Jehovah? and, finally, 3) Is the name referred to here the name of Jesus?

Interestingly enough, we found that there was consensus among all those polled that the name of the Lord here refers to the name of Jehovah, although some groups also modified this by saying that the name of Jehovah here is also the name of Jesus. But all groups agreed that “the name of the Lord” mentioned in Romans 10:13 was an Old Testament reference to the name of Jehovah. So we had reached the lowest common denominator regarding the name of the Lord.

Another important question we asked these groups had to do with what was involved in the practice of calling on the name of the Lord? There were many answers to this, but as we looked at the lowest common denominator, we found that all agreed that one must call on the Lord at least one time through an act of prayer. Whether or not baptism was a part of this or some other practice was answered differently by various groups and can, therefore, not be included in LCDC.

Having determined the LCDC theology of the LCDC recipe of salvation as spelled out in the LCDC canon of Scripture, we are now ready to use this information to evaluate which groups fall within the rank of Lowest Common Denominator Christianity. What we’re talking about here is essential Christianity. The rest is unessential, consisting either of man-made traditions or else Spirit-inspired revelations of truth which are up for grabs for each individual believer.

As we evaluated the standards of each group, we discovered that the perimeters of Lowest Common Denominator Christianity were much bigger than we had expected. We found that even Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses are included because they also believe in calling upon the name of the Lord at least one time for salvation. Even groups disagreeing about the very nature of salvation were able to meet on this common ground of Lowest Common Denominator Christianity.

So how can this information be used in helping to restore unity to the Body of Christ? Well, first of all, we can embrace all those who call upon the name of the Lord as our brothers and sisters in Christ. That includes Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses and even some of the most notoriously “heretical” groups in history. Secondly, we can all recognize that our interpretations of Scripture and even the very content of the Scriptures is a

matter of private interpretation. Lastly, we must recognize that there must be some other way of establishing what is true and what is not so as to arrive at a consensus of unity in the splintered, divided, mangled, and torn-asunder Body of Christ.

I believe the answer to this last question of how to determine the truth is a question of confirmation of the Word through signs and wonders. Without that confirmation, we are only left to wonder what is true and what isn't.

While it is true that anyone can take the Constitution of the United States and attempt to recreate the United States, what he will end up with will not be identical to the United States already in existence because the history of such a *new* United States would be different from the old one. Likewise, anyone can take the Bible of the Church and recreate the Church as a new form of the Church, but what he or she will end up with is a different entity from any other church already in existence. In such cases, we must just agree to disagree in the same manner we agree to disagree with pagans, Jews, and Muslims. At the end of the day, after all is said and done, the most important thing is to have an emotional experience of Jesus and have a feeling of assurance that one is truly saved and also know how to reject the lies of the enemy which would make you question your salvation. 

ⁱ We shall leave aside the question raised by Jesus statement in Matthew 7:21 that "Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven."