Where the Roads Split, Part One — The Short Version

Paper 12 in a 12 Part Series

by Escape the Mustard Tree

A plain-language companion to Paper 12, Part One. Everything here is worked out at length there, with the Scripture, the objections, and the sources.

Different roads

Every paper in this series so far has compared Word of the Kingdom teaching with churches that share its starting point: one God in three Persons, Jesus as God come in the flesh, and the Bible as God's word. This paper looks at groups whose roads leave that main road.

Picture a highway with exits. Some groups take the exit right at the start. Others drive a long way beside us before they turn off. And a few keep passing the same road signs while they're actually on a different road. **Where a road splits** is the useful question, because a split is a definite place you can find and check against the Bible.

Part One covers three splits at the foundations:

- **Who God is**
- **Who decides what the Bible means**
- **Whose name "Christ" is**

Part Two covers splits closer to home.

Two ground rules hold for the whole paper. Every group is described from its own published teaching before anything is said against it. And saying a group's teaching left the road isn't a verdict on any person sitting in its pews: "The Lord knows those who are His" (2 Tim. 2:19).

Split one: who God is

The Bible teaches one God, without beginning, who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and it teaches that the Son came in the flesh as Jesus. Four groups leave the road here, each heading a different direction.

This matters for the kingdom, because the kingdom passes between Persons. The Father tells the Son to sit at His right hand "till" His enemies are made His footstool (Ps. 110:1), and the Son is *given* the kingdom (Dan. 7:13-14). Change who God is, and that whole story changes with it.

Latter-day Saints (commonly called Mormons) teach that God the Father was once a man, and that faithful people can become gods. One verse closes both doors:

> "Before Me there was no God formed, Nor shall there be after Me." (Isa. 43:10)

God didn't become God, and no one else will. This series does teach a real future glory and a real share in Christ's rule for the faithful, but it's always rule *with* Christ and *under* God (Rev. 3:21). An heir receives what belongs to someone else. He doesn't become the one he inherits from.

Jehovah's Witnesses teach that Jesus was the first thing God created, the archangel Michael. John answers that in his opening lines:

> "All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made." (John 1:3)

If everything that was made was made through Him, He isn't one of the made things. And Hebrews says the world to come won't be put under angels (Heb. 2:5), so its King can't be one.

Witnesses also read the 144,000 of Revelation 7 as a literal number, just as this series does. But they turn the twelve tribes of Israel into a picture of Christians from every nation. This series reads the whole passage straight: twelve thousand from each tribe of Israel, sealed during the Tribulation (Rev. 7:4-8). John even sets the two groups side by side, first a counted number from Israel, then a crowd "of all nations" that no one could count (Rev. 7:9). **Same number, opposite reasons.**

Oneness Pentecostals confess that Jesus is fully God, and that's good ground. But they teach that Father, Son, and Spirit are one Person playing three roles. At Jesus' baptism, though, the Son stands in the water, the Spirit comes down on Him, and the Father speaks from heaven (Matt. 3:16-17). They also teach that a person must be baptized in Jesus' name and speak in tongues to be saved. When a jailer asked Paul what he must do to be saved, the answer was, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 16:31). Baptism matters a great deal for the walk that follows; it isn't a condition of being saved. (Most Pentecostals are Trinitarian and aren't part of this group. Their teaching on the sign gifts comes up in Part Two.)

Christadelphians may stand closer to this series on the kingdom than anyone else in the paper: a literal reign from Jerusalem, Israel back in her land, a judgment of Christians before the kingdom begins. But they teach that Jesus didn't exist before Bethlehem and that the devil isn't a real being. Jesus prayed about "the glory which I had with You before the world was" (John 17:5). And the kingdom story needs a real devil. He's the ruler who still holds this world until the rightful King takes it from him (Luke 4:5-6). Take him out of the story, and there's no one left to replace.

Split two: who decides what the Bible means

A group doesn't have to add books to the Bible to change it. It only has to let one person's voice decide what the Bible means. Two movements did exactly that.

Seventh-day Adventism affirms the Trinity, so its split comes somewhere else. It grew out of a prediction that Christ would return in 1844. When He didn't, a new explanation took shape: on that date Christ began a judgment in heaven, reviewing who is truly in Him. Ellen G. White's visions confirmed the idea, and the church still holds that her writings carry prophetic authority. But Daniel 8, the chapter behind the date, describes a sanctuary trampled and then set right (Dan. 8:13-14). It doesn't describe that judgment at all. The judgment of Christians in Scripture waits "until the Lord comes" (1 Cor. 4:5), and it decides rewards, not whether a person belongs to Christ (1 Cor. 3:15).

Adventists also keep the Saturday Sabbath as binding on every Christian. Scripture calls the Sabbath a sign between God and Israel (Exod. 31:16-17), and Paul calls it "a shadow of things to come" (Col. 2:17). What it points to is the thousand-year reign, the great seventh day, and that reign is both

heavenly and earthly, with Christ's rule reaching the earth itself: "we shall reign on the earth" (Rev. 5:10). The Adventist picture keeps the saints in heaven for those thousand years and leaves the earth empty, so the earthly portion never comes.

Armstrongism is the teaching of Herbert W. Armstrong's Worldwide Church of God. He taught that people can be born into "the God Family," that Britain and America are the lost tribes of Israel, and that Christians must keep the Sabbath and Israel's feasts. Then something rare happened. After he died in 1986, the church's leaders checked his teaching against Scripture one point at a time, and they gave it up. It cost them about half their members. Today the church is Grace Communion International. **It's the only group in this paper whose road bent back to the main one**, and it bent because, when its leaders had to choose between their founder and the text, they chose the text.

That test goes for every teacher, including the ones this series learns from. The Bereans checked even the apostle Paul:

> "They received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so." (Acts 17:11)

No teacher is above the Book.

Split three: whose name "Christ" is

The last set of movements is the hardest to spot, because they keep every road sign. They talk about Christ, the Christ within, sons of God, ascension, the kingdom. **Same vocabulary, different dictionaries.**

- **Theosophy** treats "Christ" as a spark or stage any soul can reach. Its leaders even described Jesus' body as a "vehicle" the Christ once spoke through.
- **Christian Science** puts it in one line from its textbook: "Jesus is the human man, and Christ is the divine idea."
- **Popular spiritual books** carry the same idea into ordinary churches. One bestseller calls creation itself God's "first incarnation" and says that "long before Jesus's personal incarnation, Christ was deeply embedded in all things—as all things!"

In the Bible, "Christ" means the Anointed One, Israel's promised King. It's a kingdom word. The angel told Mary to name her Son Jesus and said that God would give Him "the throne of His father David" (Luke 1:32). A King needs a body and a throne, and the same Jesus who went up is the one coming back (Acts 1:11).

The apostle John faced this in his own day. A teacher named Cerinthus said the Christ came on Jesus at His baptism and left Him before the cross. John drew the line right there:

> "Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God." (1 John 4:2)

The test isn't whether someone speaks warmly of Christ. It's whether he says Jesus *is* the Christ.

Bank tellers learn to catch fake bills by handling real ones until a fake simply feels wrong. Here are **four things that should feel wrong**:

- **Prayer spoken to an angel** instead of to God. Angels refuse it (Rev. 22:8-9).

- **"I AM" in a person's own mouth.** That's the name God gave Himself (Exod. 3:14).
- **Commands instead of requests**, where prayer becomes a decree that makes things happen. Jesus prayed, "not My will, but Yours, be done" (Luke 22:42).
- **"Christ" without "Jesus"**, a title floating free of the man from Nazareth.

The "decrees" of the ascended-master movements carry all four, and they've traveled into ordinary churches. In 2021 a crowd at a church conference was led in a prayer built on one of them, and hardly anyone noticed until someone laid the two texts side by side.

What this is not

A paper like this one is easy to misread, so three things need saying up front.

This is not a list of who's saved. The paper weighs teaching. God weighs people, and He knows His own (2 Tim. 2:19).

This is not saying these groups get everything wrong. Several hold things this series holds, like a literal thousand-year reign or a restored Israel. But reaching the same conclusion by a different road doesn't make the road safe. It only means the roads ran together for a stretch.

This is not a reason to distrust every familiar word. The words are good words. The question is always what they mean, and Scripture is the dictionary.

Why this matters

Every one of these splits, followed far enough, changes the kingdom. Change who God is, and the heir becomes what he inherits from. Change the Son, and an angel rules the world to come. Take away the devil, and there's no ruler to replace. Empty the name "Christ," and the King has no throne.

That's why the words alone can't be the test. Plenty of people say "kingdom," "sons," "overcomers," and "Christ." The test is what's underneath the word, checked against the Bible itself.

Same words. Check the dictionary.

Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version.