

VI. SCHISMS AND SCHISMATICS: The church faces the fact of division and disharmony.

**A. The Idea**

The teacher in this course has for many years been associated with a body of Christians popularly called "Plymouth Brethren" but preferring the general designation "Christian Brethren" or something like that. The group has a history of divisiveness that is not enviable although the ideals are of a good sort. This lecturer has been happy there.

But a few years ago he was invited to write a history of the group for a new encyclopaedia. He determined to write it without spending all of his time on the arguments, divisions, and battles. However he discovered this was not possible..since the stuff of history is largely a recounting of problems encountered and solutions attempted.

Schism is the concept of dividing a body in a less than friendly atmosphere. The more modern word is "split" and it carries with it some unpleasant implications. Fragmentation is the ultimate result of schism and it is certainly one of the most visible factors in the church of today. Our treatment does not cover all schisms, of course, but in the materials of the earlier centuries you will find the patterns that still apply today.

**B. Schism in Biblical Perspective**

1. The community Ideal: Oneness..seen in the apostolic company and in the prayer of the Lord in John 17. It is apparent, however, that the oneness is empathetic and not organizational.. on the line that "he that is not against us is for us."
2. But schisms are part of the biblical picture. The schism of Rehoboam's time was ordered by the Lord, Himself. (It will be healed one day in the prophetic ideal of Zechariah) And in the New Testament there are such sectarian schisms as are described in 1 Cor. 1 and later in the matter of Diotrephes in the Johannine letters. There are hints of others.
3. We may say, then, that while schism is not the desired end or means, it is also not the unforgiveable sin. The reality of the body is maintained by the Lord..we should seek to reflect it and follow the pattern of Ephesians 4:1, etc.