

The background image is a photograph of the interior of a large Gothic cathedral, likely York Minster. The view is from the rear of the nave looking towards the altar. The architecture features high, ribbed vaulted ceilings and tall, slender columns. Rows of blue chairs are arranged on either side of a central aisle. The lighting is warm, coming from large windows and chandeliers. The text is overlaid on this image.

DAVID HARRISON

HEALING
THE DIV-
IDED
CHURCH

WHAT WENT WRONG [WITH COVID]
AND HOW CAN WE FIX IT?

HEALING A DIVIDED CHURCH

WHAT WENT WRONG [WITH COVID] AND HOW CAN WE
FIX IT?



DAVID O. HARRISON

THRIVE!

BOOKS



CITATIONS

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



DAVID HARRISON was born and raised in England and emigrated to Canada in 1973 at the age of 21.

When he was 35, David became a Christ-follower. He is married and the father of two adult children. He attended a Brethren Bible Chapel in Scarborough for 25 years, ten of those years as an elder.

For 23 years David ran an audiovisual integration company in Toronto, Canada, catering primarily to universities, banks, and law firms.

In 2006 David founded Bus Stop Bible Studies, a ministry which used public transit advertising panels to display messages of encouragement from the Word of God to many millions of people in Canada.

For 10 years David was the Board Chair of Daystar Native Christian Outreach, based on Manitoulin Island.

Now ‘retired’, David and his wife, Wendy, run a Bed & Breakfast in Muskoka, and David (who failed miserably in English at school) has taken to writing as a hobby.

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To those who want to be obedient to Jesus.

JESUS SAID



“If you love me, keep my commands.”

DIVISION—A CONTENTIOUS TOPIC



Back in November 2010, I had the opportunity to visit Israel. One of the places we stopped was Tabgha, on the north-west shore of the Sea of Galilee where Jesus prepared breakfast for his disciples, and where He ‘reinstated’ Peter.

As I leaned up against the rock plateau on which Peter and Jesus likely sat side-by-side, I felt as though I heard Jesus whispering those same words to me, “David, feed my lambs. Take care of my sheep. Feed my sheep.”

If I fail to believe God’s Word, if I fail to instruct, if I fail to lead and encourage, then I have failed this call miserably.

Please LORD, strengthen me.

As I was thinking about writing this book, I had no qualms about poking the proverbial hornets’ nest. I knew many of the answers would be contentious, but I also knew they had to be stated.

This is not a book that needs to be liked. It is a book that discusses a *deadly* problem and its cause, that is the division in the Church, and it clearly lays out the [drastic] corrective remedies needed.

DIVISION—A CONTENTIOUS TOPIC

Almost from the outset of the COVID epidemic, a clear divide has ruptured many communities, church communities and, tragically, even some families. Concerning the Church, I want to emphasize from the outset that COVID is not the source or cause of the problem, it is merely a symptom of a much, much deeper problem.

Firstly, there were the specific areas of disagreement:

- The seriousness of the epidemic.
- Wearing of face masks and their effectiveness.
- Vaccination – its efficacy, testing and approvals.
- Alternative therapies.
- So-called ‘conspiracy theories’, of which there are too many to list here.
- Government direction and mandates.
- Interpretation of biblical law

Secondly, there appear to be four categories of response to the aforementioned areas of disagreement:

- The government has no right to tell me what to do. I will believe what I want to believe. I will do as I please.
- I don’t necessarily agree with the government, but I will follow their instruction anyway.
- I generally agree with the government and its experts, and it is my duty to obey government mandates.
- I accept the scientific evidence of virus contamination on the human body and the resultant respiratory infections, and take precautions against such.

Thirdly, there are divergent interpretations of Scripture in the Church community.

- Scripture is often quoted out of context.
- Scripture is often misinterpreted.

- Scripture is used as a weapon against those we might disagree with.
- Scripture is ignored.
- Jesus' call to obedience is ignored.

The above attitudes apply both within and outside the Church. This book specifically addresses the problem within the Church—local churches in particular. But we should not read too much into the COVID situation uniquely, it has only highlighted the real issue and is not the cause of the division we see.

Sadly, there are those that either ignorantly or, maybe, deliberately distort Scripture to make their case, along with those who are afraid to apply Scripture. The latter, those who are afraid to apply Scripture, are often in positions of church leadership who have not provided sound teaching and completely ignored imposition of biblical discipline.

If leaders don't lead, then what hope does a church have?

I did a Bible word search for the word 'division'.

I was startled by the very first New Testament reference to division I came across. Words from Jesus himself:

"I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to undergo, and what constraint I am under until it is completed! *Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division.* From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three. They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law."

Luke 20:49-53

Whoa! What's this all about?

DIVISION—A CONTENTIOUS TOPIC

As I will do occasionally in this guide, when I have difficulty fully understanding a passage of Scripture, I go to Eugene Peterson's *The Message* as a resource to provide clarity. This is how Eugene interprets Luke 20:49-53

"I've come to start a fire on this earth—how I wish it were blazing right now! I've come to change everything, turn everything right-side up—how I long for it to be finished! Do you think I came to smooth things over and make everything nice? Not so. I've come to disrupt and confront! From now on, when you find five in a house, it will be—

Three against two,
and two against three;
Father against son,
and son against father;
Mother against daughter,
and daughter against mother;
Mother-in-law against bride,
and bride against mother-in-law."

As I thought about this passage and its implications, I realized that this is a source of great encouragement. There are two possible contexts:

- a. The gospel message will be a source of division within families—those who choose to follow Jesus and those who reject Him.
- b. Division between those who obediently follow Jesus ("If you love me, obey my commands.") and those who are more interested in "Me. My rights. My freedoms. My opinion, etc."

Why do I find the teaching encouraging? Because it forces me to [re]orient myself to submitting to Christ's absolute authority and it

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encourages me to take a stand for truth, even at the risk of losing family and friends.

“Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.”

Matthew 20:37-38

- Division is the symptom.
- Disobedience is the problem.
- Obedience and repentance are the cure.
- Forgiveness can lead to healing and the restoration of friendships and the church.

I'M RIGHT—YOU'RE NOT



I would never be so arrogant as to assume that I have the interpretation of Scripture down pat. I have not been to Bible College or Theological Seminary, but I have been taught and discipled by many wise and godly individuals. I do believe I have been blessed with the spiritual gifts of faith (belief in God's Word) and prophecy (speaking a word of encouragement into someone's life from Scripture). These gifts obviously enhance and flavour my reading of Scripture.

So, to the individual who might challenge my interpretation of Scripture as presented in this book, "David, I'm right and you're not," I invite you to examine and meditate upon opposing Scriptures, Scriptures that contradict what I have written or included here. There is but one caveat—you must quote and reason using Scripture *in context*.

Maybe the discussion needs to go back to an underlying definition. Before we can even talk about the issues, we need to decide if we think that the Church is accountable to God alone and governments have no say whatsoever in what it says and does. In other words, are the government, the medical community and other institutions and establishments able to speak into how the Church should function (in a practical,

rather than theological sense), or is the Church above the law of the land and accountable only to God?

If we believe in the right of man alone to establish the rules of the land (as it says in the American Declaration of Independence, “We the people...”), then each local church, and hence the Church, has an accountability to our elected officials. But if we believe that God alone is responsible for all matters concerning his Church (the spiritual, theological and practical expression of), local and corporate, then the one’s local church is not governed by man-made laws. It and its members do not need to wear masks, do not need to social distance, do not need to get vaccinations, do not need to limit social relationships. This is clearly the position of some church leaders, and this thinking, to a greater or lesser extent, infects a whole church. Where does this line of reasoning end? Not needing building permits, not needing smoke detectors, no capacity limits in buildings, not respecting zoning laws, etc.?

So that may be the whole rub here. The premise that Scripture needs to be followed, when it comes to government decree, may be at the very essence of the debate.

Still, the fundamental question that must be answered in all of this is, who is responsible for the health and physical wellbeing of society as a whole? If it is not the Government, then who? If the Church, is it allowed to have a contrary set of rules to the Government’s, and then how is one supposed love one’s neighbour—protecting them from an epidemic [an epidemic that some deny even exists]?

PSALM 32. A PSALM OF DAVID



Oh, what joy for those whose disobedience is forgiven, whose sin is put out of sight! Yes, what joy for those whose record the Lord has cleared of guilt, whose lives are lived in complete honesty!

When I refused to confess my sin, my body wasted away, and I groaned all day long. Day and night your hand of discipline was heavy on me. My strength evaporated like water in the summer heat.

Finally, I confessed all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide my guilt. I said to myself, “I will confess my rebellion to the Lord.” And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone.

Therefore, let all the godly pray to you while there is still time, that they may not drown in the floodwaters of judgment. For you are my hiding place; you protect me from trouble. You surround me with songs of victory.

The Lord says, “I will guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch over you.

Do not be like a senseless horse or mule that needs a bit and bridle to keep it under control.”

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Many sorrows come to the wicked, but unfailing love surrounds those who trust the Lord. So rejoice in the Lord and be glad, all you who obey him!

Shout for joy, all you whose hearts are pure!