

the truth outside of the established Jewish church buildings. So the Christian church eventually was forced to separate from the unbelieving Jews.

But even in these times, there was no call for separation at all. John writing to the seven churches in Asia, in Revelation chapters 2 and 3, never calls anyone to come out and form a new church organisation, even when some of the churches had powerful heretical factions within them, some even being called “*synagogues of Satan*” (Revelation 2:9, 3:9). Rather the call is to “*him that overcometh,*” (Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21).

The Lord is looking for individuals in the churches who overcome individually. They don't follow the heretics, but follow the Lord as individuals. No mention is made anywhere of it being a good idea if they came out and started a “purer” church down the road.

And then in John's third epistle, we see that he had written an earlier letter to a church asking them to receive some brethren, but:

“I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church.” 3 John 9,10

The leader of the church refused to obey John, and instead threw these brethren out of the church altogether. So, what did John do? He wrote this epistle to Gaius, a man in the church who he knew (to the best of his knowledge) to be a true believer, and told him what had happened, asking him to receive these brethren himself personally instead, despite the evil leadership in the church. He also made mention to him of Demetrius (v.11), indicating that he was also a trustworthy brother in the Lord, and that he could help him in this matter. See what John is doing. No call to come out and form a new denomination, but rather calling the true believers to stay in the current one, despite the evil in the leadership, and organising them to operate like a church within a church. This is the Biblical pattern.

Having said all this, in practice, in today's church scene, we have a completely different scenario. Now the can of beans has been spilt, as it were, and so many different separatist groups have already been formed in many lands, the concept of going back into the national church would be difficult, if not impossible. If some of us started to do so, it would mean practically that all our closest Christian companions would probably still be in the separatist churches. This goes to show how evil separatism really is. Where is the witness for Christ, when so many different groups exist, all with absolutely no connection with each another?

So, what do we do? We should firstly distance ourselves from the whole concept of membership in any humanly organised church. If we become members of any church, we are identifying ourselves with all its distinctives in doctrine and practice, whether they are right or wrong. As they will all be wrong somewhere, do we really want to do that? Rather, we should attend the best church that is most practical to do so, without worshipping it. No matter what situation the Lord has put us in in His providence, our true witness is always personal, not organisational. Our home is in heaven. Our striving should be to keep ourselves, personally, separate from sinful practices in our hearts. If we can live our lives in this manner, at least we will be free of all blame on the day of judgment.

“And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

Philippians 4:7

What Church do I Join?

“What is truth?” This is the question Pontius Pilate asked Jesus (John 18:38) before delivering his judgment that “*I find in Him no fault at all.*” We could very well be as perplexed as Pilate when we look at the church scene today. Jesus Christ on an earlier occasion said:

“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man cometh unto the Father but by me.” John 14:6

So if Christ was who He claimed to be, then it is vitally important that we find out what truth is and follow it.

But there are so many different organisations, all claiming to be the true church of Jesus Christ. Which one is the true church? Well, as the Bible is God's Word, is all truth, and is God's final revelation to men; we could say that we should join ourselves to a Bible-believing church. But there are so many of them! Jehovah's Witnesses, Pentecostals, Baptists, Presbyterians, Anglicans, Brethren, all claim to be “Bible-believing” churches, but they all believe different things. They can't all be right. They claim to follow the Bible, but they all differ in the way they interpret it. So who is right?

The answer is none of them. We must get this into our heads at the beginning. Whereas there is only one truth (which is found in the Bible), because of the fallen nature of man, no one church or denomination or organisation of any kind in this world has got everything right. Not even those who really claim that they have, and demand unswerving obedience. In fact, any person or church that demands such, should be avoided, because it is a sect, not a church. To think upon and begin to believe the whole concept that none of them are completely right, is a breath of fresh air, as it stops us from either worshipping an organisation, or worshipping a silver-tongued smooth-talking preacher.

So if no one church or organisation has got it right, where are all the true Christians? The true church of Jesus Christ is invisible. We can't see it or detect it with our senses. It consists of all those people who have truly had their hearts changed by the Lord, and who have become "*a new creature*" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

We can't see anyone's heart but our own, so we can know if we personally have had our heart changed, but we can't know if this change has occurred in anyone else – only God can see the hearts of every man. As we cannot detect who is the Lord's or not, so we must surely humble ourselves, and:

"judge not, that ye be not judged." Matthew 7:1

This should change our outlook on the church completely. The home of the truly born-again, Bible-believing Christian, to whom God has given a new heart, is in heaven, not on this earth.

"If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God." Colossians 3:1-3

Therefore we shouldn't look for a home, or a visible church to call home, on earth.

In the light of this, we should no longer be tempted to worship any one organisation, leader or visible church anywhere. This does not mean that we should not go to a church at all, as it is always good for us to be:

"not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching." Hebrews 10:25

But should we really follow any one denomination, want status in it, want a position where everyone in the church will look up to us and see us as a great Christian leader in it? Indeed, recognising the weaknesses of churches, should we ever have a desire to split and form a new church, even with the seemingly good motive of

forming a purer church than the one we have just come from? Should any of this really be the Christ-like man's desire?

We should always remember that if we are truly in receipt of new hearts from the Lord, we should be humble creatures:

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."

Philippians 2:5-8

Also, we should learn from Christ. What did He do? There were plenty of separatist groups in Christ's day, such as the Essenes, who kept what are now known as the Dead Sea Scrolls. But the only places of worship that we have Biblical record of Christ actually visiting were the synagogues of the national church and its temple in Jerusalem. Christ was not a separatist.

He righteously condemned the abuses that went on in the church and stood up against them. The synagogues and temple of Christ's day were places full of disorder, insomuch as He called the temple a "*den of thieves*" (Matthew 21:13).

The church leadership in Christ's day was split into at least two factions, the Pharisees and the Saducees. Both hated each other, but nevertheless they were still in one national church. Christ hated them both:

"Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?" Matthew 23:33

His preaching the truth put Him at odds with the leaders of the national church of His day, so much so, that they eventually handed Him over to be killed.

But at no time did Christ ever say to His disciples, "To 'keep the testimony to the truth' we're coming out and forming the Free

Sanhedrin (Continuing)!" No, Christ was never a separatist. On the contrary, despite the absolute wickedness of the church leaders, He said:

"The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: all therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not." Matthew 23:2,3

Note, no call to split and form a purer church and, incidentally, no desire to enter into a leadership position in the church either.

Despite the many corruptions in the church of Christ's day, yet He made no separation from it, but rather, when He had opportunity, he preached both in the temple and the synagogues. If the Separatists are right, He ought to have fled from amongst the Jews, and not so much as once to have come into the temple or taught in their synagogues; but on the contrary He joined Himself with them. Therefore we must conclude that the Christian way, following Christ's example, is that we cannot in good conscience ordinarily disjoin ourselves from the national church of our land.

The reason that the Church of England is so bad is because a vast majority of the evangelicals have left. If they all came back, stood up for what they believe as individuals inside the edifice of the church and started praying for the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Synod, the church would be transformed. And a similar thing can be said for whatever country we are in.

What we should do personally (not organisationally) is to :

"Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them" Ephesians 5:11

We should stand up for truth as individuals, as much as we know what truth is. Of course we will make mistakes, but we do our best not to make them, by being led by the Holy Spirit to interpret the Bible as best as we have the capacity to understand it.

The Apostles, when eventually (in the Lord's providence) they were thrown out of the synagogues, had to continue preaching