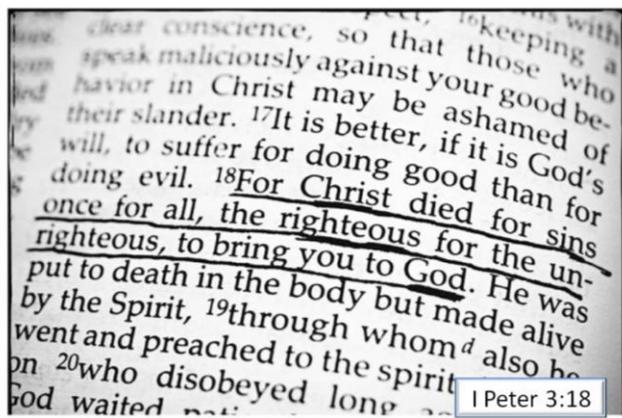


## Chapter VII: THE CHURCH

From Genesis to Revelation the Bible observes a dichotomy between two types of humanity-the righteous and the unrighteous. This goes back to the fall of Adam. As the apostle Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians 15: 22, "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive." In Adam, all die; that is a pretty



take some men (call them out from among the sinful majority) and make them holy and sinless in order that he might commune with his creatures. In order to do this he must have first devised a way to restore man to a state of sinlessness; this was done by sending his son in the flesh to die in the place of each of us on the cross. It was on the cross that Jesus died to satisfy God's perfect justice against our sin.

God's perfect justice required that the guilty be punished so Jesus took the place of every man that ever lived and reaped the result of the sin we have sown. In this way



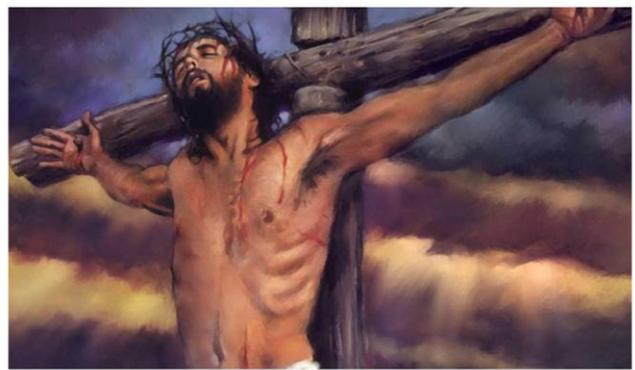
reap the favor of God that he deserves.

## VIII. The Church



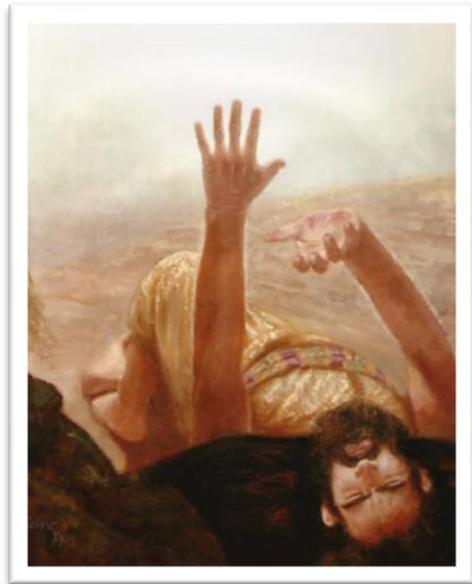
straight forward teaching of the doctrine of original sin. Through Adam's disobedience all of humanity inherits the taint of original sin. In Romans 3: 9 "...they are all under sin." Again in Galatians 3: 22 "But the scripture hath concluded all under sin...", and as James says in James 2: 10 "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all."

The scriptures uniformly teach that God loves and desires fellowship with men but since God is holy and man sinful he has to



God satisfied the demands of perfect justice without destroying his creation which he desired to restore to fellowship with himself. The sinner's identification with Christ is so complete that his righteousness becomes your righteousness and your sin becomes his sin. Thus, he is punished and suffers for you while you are rewarded and benefit from his righteousness. He reaped the punishment you deserved while you

This is true not just for the individual Christian but for the collective body of believers, the church. When Saul of Tarsus was knocked down on his way to Damascus to arrest the believers there, the Lord asked him *"Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?"* Strictly speaking, Saul was not persecuting Jesus but only his followers, yet so complete is Christ's identification with his church that to persecute his people is to persecute Him. In like manner to judge his people is to judge him, to condemn the church is to condemn Him.



The immediate cause of salvation is trusting Jesus Christ to take away our sins and give us righteous standing with God. The means God uses to affect this is the preaching of the gospel and the gospel is published in the earth by means of God's people, the church. Thus the church is the vessel that carries God's message to the world proclaiming to sinners that they can now end their exile and return home to their rightful Prince and take their place in his kingdom. Of course this message is brought to individual sinners by individual Christians but actually there are no such things as individual Christians because every Christian is a member of the body of Christ, the Church.

When a person trusts Jesus to take away their sin then that person is engrafted into the vine, which is Christ. This may happen before actually joining or even attending a local assembly of believers, but churchgoing or unchurched, a born again Christian is a member of the one true church-the body of Christ. That said, in scripture a Christian's public life becomes official, as it were in the eyes of the Christian community at baptism, which in scripture came immediately upon conversion. So one may be saved, filled and walking in the Holy Spirit and yet be only a private Christian or one who is not publicly a part of the local Christian community. In such a



case, spiritual growth will be limited and communion with Christ will not be what it should. John Wesley said there is no such thing as an

individual Christian. It is not then a question of salvation but rather of obedience and maturity to go on and become a part of a local Christian church.

## HOW CHRIST WALKS IN THE MIDST OF THE CHURCHES

In Revelation 1:20, Jesus explains the symbolism of the vision that the apostle had just seen.

*"The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches."*

In the scriptures, the number seven has a symbolic significance. God finished the work of creation in seven days. Here the number seven denotes completeness; God completed his work in seven days. On the most holy of days in the Old Testament, the Day of Atonement, the actual atonement for the sins of the world on the cross was symbolized. On this most holy day the high priest entered into the holy of holies and sprinkled blood on the altar seven times. He was signifying that God's provision for man's atonement was for his complete atonement (Leviticus 16: 14).

This is to remind us that we are completely forgiven and received into God's favor by the sprinkling of the blood of Christ. As it says in Proverbs 24:16, *"A just man falleth seven times and riseth up again."*

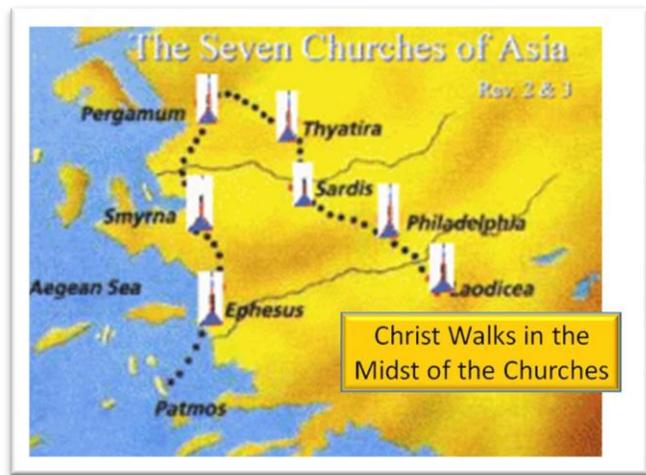
In other words though they who have been made just (or righteous) by the blood of Jesus may fall completely or totally, yet God is always able to make them arise. No matter how totally we screw everything up and make a wreck out of our lives Christ's atonement was complete.

When God forgives man's sin, he forgives completely. Completeness was what Jesus emphasized when Peter asked him how often must we forgive others, seven times? To be certain no legalist would come along and limit forgiveness to seven times the Lord made sure even those who see only the letter and not the spirit would understand that forgiveness has no limits. Till seventy times seven! He told him. In other words, completely forgive and even beyond that for we are commanded not only to forgive, but also to go beyond that and love our enemies

I have digressed somewhat to show that seven in the Bible means all or total or completeness, but that was to establish what

Some teach that the seven churches represent seven historical periods in the history of the church; some teach that they represent all true churches The most often overlooked interpretation is the obvious and true historical meaning that they represented seven actual churches that existed at the time the book of Revelation was written;

Clearly, this is true but it is just as clear that this prophecy, like so much of biblical prophecy has more than one meaning. Obviously, the primary reference was to those historical churches but also to all churches, the complete and total Christian community throughout history.



The first point to notice about these churches is that they were more often rebuked and threatened with chastisement than they are commended. Some of them, as some of us, had grown lukewarm and no longer loved the Lord as they ought. Some of them, like some of us, had fallen into sexual sin. Some of them, like some of us, loved money and had fallen into false doctrine. Yet look at Revelation 2: 1, "*...these things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who WALKETH IN THE MIDST OF THE SEVEN GOLDEN CANDLESTICKS.*"

Do not say that you want to walk with Jesus if you will not go to church. Where two or more are gathered in his name he is present in a way that is different from when we are alone, and there is edification just in being in that presence. If you want to be where Jesus is then go where the Bible says he is - in church. Frail and full of human folly and fault and sin though these churches were, Christ walked in their midst. The risen savior can walk in the midst of such sinning and imperfect assemblies but we are too holy to have fellowship with anyone who doesn't agree with us in every detail? The sin of presumptuously separating from a true church over non-essential doctrine has become so widespread and accepted that no one thinks it any sin at all to just get offended and go out and presumptuously start their own church. Or for those who aren't inclined to start a church we have the type who will find some non-essential doctrinal point to disagree about and so justify himself for not going to church anymore.

We have thousands or maybe more of these separatists who must excuse to their own consciences their sin of separating from a legitimate church, and so they find fault, usually over non-essential doctrine. I have known a man stop going to church because he read in the newspaper of a case of sexual sin, which involved some well-known pastor, even though it wasn't his pastor or his church. In such cases, it is easy to see that Satan has settled on a strategy of discrediting the church in order to provoke disgust in some of her members and cause them to sin by disobediently forsaking the assembly of saints. I fear that with some he doesn't have to work very hard to convince them to quit going to church for their hearts seem set on finding some excuse. Remember Peter's admonition in 1 Peter 5: 8 "*...your adversary the devil goeth about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour.*" And which of the flock is it that gets devoured in nature but the one who separates himself from the rest of the herd, as everyone must have seen on one of those African wildlife programs before.

#### **HOW GOD LOOKS AT THE CHURCH AND SEES NO SIN**

If we start in the book of Numbers at chapter 11, we will see that the people of Israel murmured and complained and displeased the Lord. In verse 4 it says some fell to lusting. Verse 20 says they despised the Lord. Think of that! They despised the one who brought them out of slavery. In Numbers 14: 1, it continued. They cried and wept; hardly the actions of people of faith. Verse 2 says they murmured against Moses and Aaron. In verse 11 God asks Moses, "*How long will this people provoke me?*"

In Numbers 16 Korah leads yet another rebellion and God destroys him and his family, and in Numbers 20 God even passes judgment on Moses and Aaron. In Numbers 21, the people complain and the Lord sends fiery serpents as a judgment on their wickedness. In all this, we see clearly that God is only restrained from destroying them by the voice of the tireless intercessor, Moses. According to the scriptures God's estimation of these people is that they are faithless and stiff-necked (which means too proud to humble themselves before the Lord) sinners worthy of judgment which they undoubtedly would have suffered were it not for the intercessor.

They were rebellious, constantly straining at the yoke of their Heavenly Father's parental discipline. How could we think of them as the elect, God's holy people? However, for Joshua and Caleb, one would think that God could see nothing in them which would make him acknowledge them as his own. Yet how different God sees from the way man sees. After all those rebukes and chastisements it is truly amazing to find God's estimation of his people. In Numbers 23 the gentiles (those outside the church) hire a prophet to curse the children of Israel. After all the trouble the people had given him one would think that God would let them, or at least make Israel humble herself and cry unto him for deliverance. Instead, we must stand in humble amazement at the answer of the Lord. How much higher than us he is, how past finding out are his ways. The prophet opens his mouth to curse Israel; the same people who were described in at least the preceding thirteen chapters as rebellious and stiff necked, and the spirit of the Lord speaks these truly amazing words, *"He (God) hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel."* (Numbers 23:21)

Are you not stunned to see how different God sees things? What! He rebukes and chastises for thirteen chapters and then turns to the accuser and says I see no sin in them. I can hear the skeptic now pointing this out as an example of the inconsistencies of scripture. Nevertheless, just because the carnally minded cannot understand how God can look at a sinning people and see no sin doesn't mean the mind enlightened by the gospel should have the same difficulty. Cast off then that carnal mind and behold the God who justifies the ungodly.

Having shown to the satisfaction of everyone I hope, that since Christ is in the midst of the assembled believers and therefore to separate from the church is to separate from Jesus, let us answer the normal objection of those who through zeal for the truth and a desire to separate from sinful or carnal individuals go so far that they will not keep fellowship with anyone.

While such people should be commended for the very desire to walk in holiness and separation from sin and worldliness they too err in their severity. They do this because they don't properly understand what the Bible teaches about the need for forbearance and charity among the brethren. They also err in not understanding the distinction between essential and non-essential doctrine.

To understand what the scriptures teach we must look at the practice in the apostolic churches. To begin with, let us look at some New Testament churches that fell into sin so grievously as to make them look like anything but the body of Christ on earth. The church in the Greek city-state of Corinth had every advantage spiritually. It was founded by an apostle, it was not just well taught but was perfectly taught. It had an unquestioned right to be called a true church. If any church should have shined as an example of perfection, it was this one. Yet what do we read in 1

Corinthians 5: 1, *"It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you."*

That must have cut the great apostle Paul to the heart to hear that. Paul, who suffered the loss of all things to win these people to Christ's kingdom, had to hear the common report probably from the mouths of unbelievers, who always take great delight in the fall of God's elect. Again, the church at Corinth was guilty of a sinful pride (1 Corinthians 4: 7).



Paul called them carnal (1 Corinthians 3: 1). They put no distinction between themselves and the sinful world (1 Corinthians 5: 9-13). They fought at communion service (1 Corinthians 11: 17-22), and most outrageous of all they had even abandoned the doctrine of the resurrection! One would think that if any church should be avoided like the plague it would have been this one. Leave them to God's judgment, most of us would say, I'll not go anywhere near that mess. But the great apostle never anathematized or excommunicated except in the case of that one man who was in unrepentant sexual sin and he was quickly restored to fellowship by order of the apostle himself in 2 Corinthians 2:6-7.

So in separating and cutting ourselves off from what we think are false doctrines we are being more strict than the apostle Paul, which of course we have no right to do. All of that terrible mess that church in Corinth was in and he never withdrew from fellowship or refused to go to that church, and in Philippians 3: 17 he tells us to follow his example. So are we following his example by creating a schism in the church and separating from it? The men God gave us as examples (Philippians 3: 17), the apostles themselves, never quit going to church just because the church was less than perfect or even because the church was in serious sin. They never deserted the church or refused the name church to an assembly even when an essential doctrine was compromised; though they might have if the church in Corinth had refused doctrinal correction. If one reads the whole of 1 Corinthians one can see that the great apostle simply stepped in and corrected the problems, very gently in places and quite sternly where he needed to be.

To separate would be to run from the problems and Paul had a habit of running towards, rather than away from a fight. (See Acts 21:13) The apostle feared neither man nor devil. It was the same in the Old Testament. Almost the whole Old Testament is a sordid record of the sins of God's own people. Even in the most apostate periods, we see the prophets refused to break fellowship with the Old Testament church. As corrupted as the pure worship of God had become in the days of Isaiah we do not find the prophet attempting to call men to come out of Israel or erecting another alter where the worship could be undefiled by exclusion of the corrupt. Rather Isaiah's call was to work to change Israel for the better; to call the people of God to repentance, to purify the church, not to separate from it.

I'm quite sure the typical American Christian would have thrown a fit, and considering himself too holy for that crowd and would have gone off and started his own church



presumptuously or at least found another one to go to. This happens every day in America. Someone gets offended and takes it upon himself to cause a division in the church and separate and go start their own church where they can do it their way. That's why there are so many different churches right now. How is it that there is a church on every street almost and things just keep getting worse and worse? Could it be that we are not as effective as we should be because we keep separating rather than having the guts to stick around and make things better? Could we be more effective if we allowed a difference of belief over non-essentials? What unity and power the American church would have.

Are we holier than the apostle Paul that we cannot be in the same church with anyone who believes something different or interprets the scripture differently than we do? So if sin is not a legitimate reason for separating from a church then what is? At what point do we no longer recognize as a church, a community that calls itself a church? In Revelation 2: 5, Jesus threatened to remove the candlestick of the church at Ephesus out of its place and in Revelation 3: 16, he threatens to spew the lukewarm Laodiceans out of his mouth, both apparent references to a point at which the church can cease to be a true church.

We have all heard of some mainline denominations that have long since replaced the gospel with worldly philosophies. Recently there was a debate in the Methodist church as to whether it is right to perform a marriage ceremony for homosexual couples or not, and another of the denominations has had a running debate about the propriety of ordaining lesbians to the ministry. Such abominations, which cannot but bring grief to the heart of all Christians, demonstrate the obvious truth that just calling themselves a Christian church doesn't necessarily make them one, but what of the more doubtful cases wherein it is not so clear? To continue our example of the apostle Paul let us turn from the Corinthian example to the Galatian church.

The church in Galatia had no sexual sin that we know of; no drunkenness or worldliness is mentioned. This church was concerned with outward godliness to such an extent that they had slipped into that most subtle snare of Satan, legalism. The church at Galatia started trying to add works to the finished work of Christ on the cross. Look at the greetings of the apostle to the Corinthians, "*Unto the church of God, which is at Corinth, to them, that are (present tense) sanctified in Jesus Christ.*" They didn't sound too sanctified to me but thank God, the Lord and his apostle felt differently. Contrast that with how he salutes the Galatians, "*I marvel that you are so soon removed from him that called you...*" Galatians 1: 6. Moreover, after the harshest rebukes he delivers to any church he asks, "*O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you...?*" Galatians 1: 6.

He treated the Galatian church far differently than the overtly sinful Corinthians because the sin of this church was far more dangerous than anything the Corinthians were doing. The Galatian church was falling into the one sin that can destroy a local church quicker than any other.

They had, without even realizing it, given up the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith and were teaching men not to trust Christ but rather their own good works. He said that anyone who preaches this doctrine is accursed, (Galatians 1: 8). He never half so much threatened the carnal Corinthians. He never pronounced this terrible curse on them though they had even begun to deny the resurrection.

The reformers separated from the Roman Catholic Church because it was no longer a true church though there can be true Christians even in it. It was not a true church because it had abandoned the doctrine of salvation by faith and taught salvation by works instead. Many so-called churches do this today.

The Jehovah's Witnesses started out as a sincere Bible study by Christians who separated from the churches because they didn't feel were spiritual enough. The United Pentecostal Church started out in the revival fires of Azusa Street and yet quickly abandoned the apostle's doctrine which they so proudly proclaim to be their own and taught the Galatians wicked Christ-rejecting doctrine of salvation by works instead. The Worldwide Church of God was started by a pride filled man named Herbert Armstrong, who was too wise in the scriptures for the church he felt wasn't right in their doctrine. These are but three examples of pseudo-Christian cults, which grew out of the Galatian heresy.

These groups do not teach the same way of salvation that the apostles did and can no longer be considered a part of the Christian community, the church, although there are certainly individual Christians to be found within their ranks. God is delivering them from their sin of legalism all the time. So it is at this doctrine that we must certainly separate.

At this time it seems best to deal very briefly with the doctrine of apostolic succession. When the reformers, who basically had to rebuild from scratch the religion of the New Testament, separated from the Roman Catholic Church they were accused of the sin creating a schism in the church. They were reviled and condemned as men who tore apart the seamless garment of Christ, who split the body of Christ, as if such a thing could ever be. Of course they themselves were excommunicated, turned over to Satan, and cast out into outer darkness. The reason why they were so condemned was because they dared to teach the Bible in opposition to the Roman Church which had fallen into more man made traditions than ever the Pharisees did.

Every Christian ought to feel outrage at the regulations of the church that did not allow men to possess a Bible in their own language or the theology that taught them that they could obtain God's forgiveness by going to this saint's shrine or that martyr's tomb. Moreover, when the reformers taught God's word in the place of superstition and were cast out of the church, the authorities warned any who might follow them that if they left the Catholic Church they would be damned for all eternity. The justification for this position was the doctrine of apostolic succession, which is briefly, the doctrine that the church is the one true church outside of which is no salvation. This is because the church is directly descended in unbroken succession from the apostles. Not only the Roman Church but also the Coptic, Eastern Orthodox and even Anglican communions hold this doctrine. This is based on the presupposition that the apostolic succession can be passed on. The present bishops were consecrated by their predecessors who in turn had been consecrated by their predecessors and so on going all the way back to the apostles. But here is the flaw in this belief: who is a true successor to the apostles?

#### **WHO IS A TRUE SUCCESSOR TO THE APOSTLES?**

Who is a true successor to the apostles? Is the Bishop of Rome or of Antioch. Just because they occupy the same position in the hierarchical organization of the church that the apostles did? The Jews had Abrahamic succession and thought that they didn't need faith and doctrine because they had Abraham for their ancestor; but Paul says that a true successor of Abraham is not a mere biological descendant of the patriarch but one who is in spirit and in faith, like Abraham. As he writes in Romans 9: 8-7, "*Nor because they his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, " It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring.*"



So then, the Bible teaches that he is a Jew only who is one inwardly not outwardly and can we take the same position as the Pharisees did? That God will not take the apostolic succession from us though we are only followers of the apostles outwardly? No, assuredly, if he is a successor to Abraham who is a Jew inwardly then they are successors of the apostles who are like the apostles inwardly, whether they are direct successors outwardly or not. In John 8:39 we read *"They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, if ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham."*

So it is not mere biological descent that makes one a child of Abraham, but doing the works of Abraham makes one a true descendant. We should not trust in our apostolic succession the same way the Jews trusted in their Abrahamic succession because, as John the Baptist told them, *"...say not within yourselves, we have Abraham to our father; for I say unto you that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham."*

Therefore,, clinging to mere outward forms they lost the mandate from God, indeed were replaced just as Jesus predicted in Matthew 21: 43 *"Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof."* (Luke 3:8)

This is exactly the same thing that happened to the Roman Catholic Church. They put their faith, not in the doctrines of the apostles, which they gradually changed into something the apostles would never have recognized, but in the unbroken succession of bishops going back to the apostle's time, would Peter or Paul have recognized the popes, eastern patriarchs, or Archbishops of Canterbury as their successors when these men taught not their doctrine? No more than God will recognize the Pharisees and their lineal descendants as heirs to Abraham, as it is written,

*"Even as Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham."*(Galatians 3:7)

In other words a true Jew or true descendant of Abraham is the one whose faith is counted for righteousness and is saved like Abraham was. I thank God that I became a Jew when I converted to the Jewish messiah and the true Jewish religion-Christianity. So then, who is a successor of Abraham? They, which are of faith. In like manner, who is a successor of the apostles but they who hold the same faith or doctrine that the apostles held? Therefore, the apostolic succession consists not in the unbroken succession of bishops going back to the apostles but in the faith and doctrine of the apostles.

### **THE DISPENSER OF THE SACRAMENTS**

In addition to being the custodian and keeper of true doctrine in all essentials of the faith, the church is also the dispenser of the sacraments of baptism and communion, both instituted by the Lord himself. The Sacraments are covered in a following presentation.

### **CHRISTIAN PLURALISM**

Having already touched on the danger of presumption in the ministry, i.e. when self appointed men find fault with the church and separate from a legitimate church in order to go out and start their own church where they can run things their way and be free from the restraints of church discipline and accountability ; having already touched on this subject I will but add a finishing touch for consideration.

During the early years of the reformation in England within the church there emerged two parties; one was the more traditional party which felt that there was nothing wrong with images of the saints and the virgin and were not unsympathetic towards the Roman Church.

The other desired to rid the church of all extra-biblical influences and recognized no authority save scripture; these were known as the puritans for their desire to purify the church and bring her as close as possible to the biblical ideal. This split within the Church of England was the beginning of Christian pluralism or the multitude of different churches that we have today. Certainly the puritans were correct in their initial goal of restoring the church to the biblical ideal, but soon there arose men who quarreled over non-essential doctrines and details and the churches split and then split again and soon there were a number of Sects and offshoots of what was formerly one church.

This became known as independency and in time, this all finally led to a civil war in England.

Eventually the government was overthrown and the King was executed and later the monarchy was restored but the most significant lasting effect of this was that the English-speaking world would



always know a multitude of denominations and sects. There is a well-known passage from Voltaire in which he describes the religious situation in England more than a century after the revolution, *"...there the Jew, the Mahometan and the Christian deal with one another as though they were of the same religion; the only persons whom they count as infidels are those who go bankrupt; there the Presbyterian trusts the Anabaptist and the Anglican accepts the Quaker's promise. When they leave these peaceful and free assemblies, some go to Synagogue, others go to have a drink, this one goes to have himself baptized in a large cistern in the name of the father proceeding via the son to the Holy Ghost: that one has his son's foreskin cut off, mumbling over the child some Hebrew words which he does not understand: those others go to their church with their hats on waiting for divine inspiration, and all are content. If only there were one religion in England there would be a risk of despotism, if there were two they would cut each other's throat's: as it is there are thirty, and they live happily in peace."*

Voltaire was a wit as well as a hater of the gospel but I quote him to show how unique the religious pluralism, the multitude of denominations and sects were to the England of his day. Elsewhere one either lived in a Catholic, or a Lutheran, or Calvinist country. Outside of the English-speaking world this pluralism, which we take for granted and accept as normal simply did not exist.

## THE AUTHORITY OF THE CHURCH

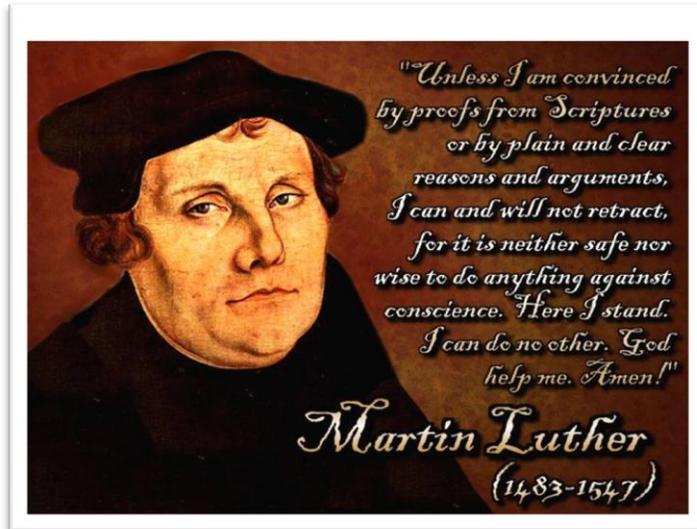
The church, as the container of Christianity and vessel through which God walks among men, has been given by God a certain authority among men. We see this clearly in the case of the unrepentant man in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. The church had the power to cast this man out of their midst and to deny him admission to the communion of the body and blood of the Lord. This the apostle termed turning him over to Satan, which means that since Satan is outside the church and Christ within, the one who is banned from fellowship with the church is living and moving in the realm where Satan has power. Again, rather than take the position that it's none of our business, Paul prohibits us from even keeping company with people who profess to be Christians and yet live in unrepentant sin. *"If any man that is called a brother (a fellow Christian) be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no, not to even eat."*

The beginning of such discipline is private admonition as is taught in Matthew 18:15 when we are instructed to resolve private differences by going to the brother who has offended us and tell him his fault and then if he won't hear us tell it to the church. The reason for all this is that sin is contagious, and a Christian who continues in unrepentant sin, say a fornicator, will always have others who will follow the wicked example he sets. I have seen such a sin spread throughout a congregation like a disease and some pastors look the other way under the pretence that it is not their place to judge. Paul emphatically teaches otherwise. 1 Corinthians 5: 12 *"For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within ?"*

The whole point of 1 Corinthians 6 is to rebuke the church for not judging their own, and of course it is more, much more an act of love to hold each other accountable than to allow each other to fall into grievous sin and perhaps suffer the terrible consequences. The church is even vested with still greater authority.

We hold with all Christians that the Bible is the inspired word of God. Of course, it is easy enough to justify holding that position with regard to the Old Testament because Jesus accepted the Hebrew Scriptures as authoritative but what about the New Testament? It is not like Jesus or even Paul left us a completed New Testament with the example of themselves referring to it as the word of God. Generally Pentecostal and Charismatic people have tended to view Christian history as ending with the apostles and picking up again at Azusa Street with pretty much nothing in between. This is a seriously flawed view. The dilemma this view presents for those who hold that the church in the apostle's days was authoritative by their very presence to guide it but after that it was subject to apostasy and corruption is : 1.) they do not consider that Jesus promised to remain in the church through the Holy Spirit, and to lead and guide the church always. In addition, 2.) they do not stop to consider that the only reason why we believe the apostles is because they wrote the Bible, but the only reason why those particular works of the apostles were chosen was because the church picked and chose which books were divinely inspired and thus were the word of God. Moreover, the church determined this in about 150 A.D., long after the death of the last apostle. Luther, in the 16th century gave us the doctrine of sola scriptura that we should recognize that the highest authority in the church was not the hierarchy or the bishops or pastors but the Bible. Even the apostles themselves were held accountable to the scriptures (Acts 17:10), and were rebuked when they tried to go beyond the clear boundaries imposed upon them by doctrine, as when Paul rebuked Peter for just giving the impression that those who would impose the Jewish laws on the gentiles were correct ( Galatians 2: 11-16).

Therefore, we hold with the reformers that nothing is higher than the word of God, yet we would have all men remember that it is only on the word of the 2nd century church that we accept the New Testament as the word of God. "But how can this be?" someone might complain. "How can we know that the 2nd century church picked the right books or that they did not leave something out?" However, such an objection shows that you do not believe Christ, who promised to lead and guide his church always; that you do not trust the God who has never, not even for a moment, left man without provision for his salvation. Since our savior, who cannot lie,



has promised to guide us into all truth can any sane person doubt that that they were guided by the Holy Spirit just as he promised?

The church is often thought of as a man made institution rather than ordained of God. This is because the ideal of the church in the Bible is perfection and since we see clearly how far from perfection any church on earth has ever been we tend to judge more by our sight than by what God's word says. Though the church now is full of imperfect, frail, and yes, sinning people, we think, " This can't be the bride of Christ spoken of in scripture as being

without spot or wrinkle. This can't be that bride of whom it is written Thou art all fair my love, there is no spot in thee."(Song of Solomon 4:7) However, it is.

The God who looks not on the outward appearance and who calls the things which be not as though they were calls the church perfect in the assurance of what she will someday be, not what she presently is. This tendency to see the church for what she is now rather than what God says she is has caused many to not submit to her authority and to live apart in a dangerous condition of spiritual isolationism simply because they do not know or understand the length to which Christ is in the church.