

the BODY of CHRIST

Occasionally, I have to put up with sniggers when I say that I belong to the True Jesus Church - "What? Can you say that again?" And when I politely repeat the name, the look says it all - "*You mean to say my church is false?*" He wonders how anyone could be so audacious as to imply that his church is false. Meanwhile, from the pulpit of his own church and in his own mind, he is reminded that there are many false churches in the world. And so begets the illogical reasoning - *Your church must be false because you say that mine is!*

I have been in the True Jesus Church since my baptism as an infant. I am not moved by such illogicality. But because the True Jesus Church as a matter of course encourages its members to confirm the teachings of the church from the Bible, and when I realised what it meant to be a member of this unique church, intellectual and spiritual freedom have led me to do some serious soul searching. Let me share with you some of the questions that I brought myself to face as I grew up in the church.

So Many People Unsaved?

I grew up experiencing the grace of God. I learnt the wonderful Word of God. One of these teachings was that Christ had but one body. Now, this meant that there is only one church of God. It was easy to accept initially because all was well in the church. However, when I saw the bigger world around me, it troubled me to realise that if what I believed were true, there would be so many people who would not be saved.

It would be so much easier if one belonged to a larger denomination or accepted an ecumenical perspective that Jesus has true believers in all the different churches. It would be so much more convenient. However the underpinnings of religious education required that I not take the easy way out but instead search the scriptures for God's point of view.

I found out that throughout history, the people of God were always in the minority. More often than not, a very small minority. There were only eight persons saved when God destroyed the world with the Flood.¹ When God decided to choose a people for His own, He only chose Abraham and his offspring through Isaac and Jacob.² He did not choose one Abraham from each nation throughout the world. The Chinese, Indians, Europeans and the native tribes of the Americas had to wait till Christ broke down the dividing wall of hostility between the Gentiles and the Jews.³ The Jews were never a large nation in the world. When Jesus was in the world, the number of His believers was always small. When the number increased tremendously, Jesus would say something really difficult and those who remained were again few in number.⁴ Jesus alerts us, "Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few"(Matt 7:13,14). The Christians during the time of the apostles were always fewer than the Jews. In fact, they were often considered a deviant sect of the Jewish faith.⁵

I was reassured from the Bible that being in the minority doesn't mean that one is immediately wrong. Quite often, the true prophets of God such as Elijah⁶ and Jeremiah⁷ were a minority in their time. This however should not be taken to mean that the majority is always wrong. Instead it teaches us that we should look beyond mere democracy and not heed only the cry of the crowd when it comes to knowing the will of God.

Exclusive?

A common barb aimed at the True Jesus Church is that she is 'exclusive'. By this, her detractors mean that her claim of being the only true church smacks of arrogance. They are hurt, understandably so, when they think that the teaching of the church excludes other Christians from being the children of God.

From the many years I have been in the church, I can see that it is never the intention of the church to claim that she is better than everyone else. In fact, the church is highly aware of the limitations of her members. Not many of us are rich, powerful or intelligent. Indeed, our claim lies in the belief that what we are doing is right and is the will of God. We sustain our effort not through our power, for we have nothing to boast of in ourselves but in the power of God. While I have seen some church members who are smug on the

belief that we are the one true church, these form the exception rather than the rule. Furthermore, the Church frowns on such a lack of love. Members are reminded that God has chosen them not because they are of great value but because of His grace.⁸

The teaching from the Bible is that Jesus has one fold and that there are other sheep of His that as yet do not belong to His fold.⁹ The solution to this situation, as the Lord said, is to seek out His sheep so that there will be one Shepherd and one flock. For this reason, the True Jesus Church is best perceived as 'inviting' and open to any who seeks God and would obey His voice. We are not exclusive in the sense of a posh country club where membership is restricted to those of the highest social order. Instead, the love of God invites all to His body with this just qualification of faith - For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome (1 Jn 5:3. See also Jn 8:31,32).

Can't we live and let live?

Once, when I was in secondary school, three other Christians in my class asked me to join them in preaching Christ to the rest of our class. Since we belonged to different churches, one of them suggested that we divide the class into four equal groups. Each of us would then preach to one group each and we were not to infringe on another's

turf. I could not agree. My friends asked why I couldn't let others preach Jesus according to what they believed. They reasoned that if they could accept that I was a Christian, why couldn't I also accept them? "Isn't it enough that we all preach Christ to those who don't even know Him instead of fighting with each other over the interpretation of the Bible?"

By then, I had realised that preaching the gospel was not as straightforward as my friends had made it out to be. Firstly, it is not enough to just preach Jesus. We must preach the true Jesus.¹⁰ Secondly, although my friends had seemed to indicate that they were willing to accept me, in reality, they had rejected my belief. They did not sincerely examine nor search for the truth, instead they held on to their beliefs and refused to fully discuss with me the doctrines of salvation. Because of these reasons, it was not fair that three quarters of the class would not be allowed to listen to what I believed was the complete saving truth.

I also realised that the majority of our church members are genuinely concerned about the salvation of other Christians. To them, it is not a matter of why the True Jesus Church cannot 'live and let live' but rather if we shirk our duty of preaching the complete gospel we will 'live and let die'. This is our sincere belief.

On the other hand, I have also become

aware that bigger churches do give comments which are backhanded compliments. They claim that they accept us as Christians and wonder why we do not accept them also. On deeper inspection, the remark implies that our doctrines of salvation are wrong because these churches want us to accept them without the need for them to change in any way. It is impossible to reconcile the doctrine of the necessity of baptism for salvation with the common Protestant belief that one is saved just by confessing Christ as saviour.

Again, there are many that do not mince their words and simply tar us as heretical. At the same time, they feel offended when the True Jesus Church preaches that if one does not follow the teachings of the Bible, they do not belong to God. The True Jesus Church has encountered much abuse, judgement, spite and plain ignorance against her from bigger churches. We have been accused of drowning babies during infant baptism. Many churches brush us aside because of their unshakeable belief that anyone who does not believe in the Trinity is a heretic. Consider the similar situation between Jesus and the religious leaders of that time - The officers then went back to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them,

“Why did you not bring him?” The officers answered, “No man ever spoke like this man!” The Pharisees answered them, “Are you led astray, you also?[Judgmental] Have any of the authorities or of the Pharisees believed in him?[Pride] But this crowd, who do not know the law, are accursed.[Spiteful]” Nicodemus, who had gone to him before, and who was one of them, said to them, “Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does? They replied, “Are you from Galilee too? Search and you will see that no prophet is to rise from Galilee [Exposing their own ignorance”]” (Jn 7:45-52).

How sure am I that the True Jesus Church is true?

The members of the True Jesus Church are far from perfect. In virtue and knowledge, we have much to improve. What distinguishes the True Jesus Church from the other churches is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the observance of the basic doctrines of salvation. These do not require a person to be superior to others. Rather it is the grace of God to those whom He has chosen and who has accepted His gift in humility.

So then this is it. I believe that the True Jesus Church is the true church of God because the church has the Holy Spirit. I can see this because the members speak in tongues.¹² I also believe that the church is true because the doctrines of salvation taught by her is easily verifiable from the

Bible. There is no theological double-talk to squirm around difficult questions. This is often done in churches which have a long tradition. So what happens is that leaders have to justify the traditions of man masquerading as the teachings of God.¹³ As in the days of the apostles, the gospel is not to be understood only by the wise in the world but to anyone who will be guided by the Spirit when he searches the Scriptures¹⁴. The truth was never meant to be the sole domain of theologians in musty libraries of old universities. It is however also not so simplistic and illogical that only those who are brainwashed can actually follow.

In addition to these two important reasons for my faith, the True Jesus Church, since her beginnings, is imbued with power to perform signs, wonders and miracles to testify of the presence of God.¹⁵ I have heard and read reliable testimonies of wonderful miracles performed in the church. In addition, just as many other believers, I have experienced in my own life, some wonderful works of God. These wonderful acts in the church are not the sole basis of our faith but they do testify strongly that God is with us.

What is God's Framework of Salvation?

Predominantly, when a person opposes a certain concept, it is because

he has already his own different concept. Consider the issue of the one true church. The arguments against such a concept can be seen to be based on a particular view of God's framework of salvation. Firstly, because God is gracious and loving, many conclude that He will save many people. Hence, a church of God must be big. Next, the older the church, the more probable that it is close to God. This means that new young upstarts are to be viewed with suspicion. Finally, since God is glorious, His church on earth must also exhibit a similar secular authority and influence. Thus the church of God must walk with princes.

Let me expand on the earlier Biblical examples so that God's framework of salvation can be made clearer.

In the case of the Flood, God saved only eight human beings. God chose Noah and his family because Noah was righteous in His eyes. God's love seeks to blot out sin through the acceptance of the cleansing blood of Jesus in faith. But it does not force salvation on those who would reject Him, either outright or by refusing to obey His will.¹⁶ Because man is more likely to reject God and not because God's love is limited, God's framework of salvation includes only very few people. Read Matt 7:13,14 and the story of Abraham's intercession and the destruction of Sodom and Gommorrah¹⁷.

One of the main reasons why the Jews rejected Jesus was that they perceived He

was teaching something opposed to the established order.¹⁸ The disciples later faced the same problem¹⁹ and the early Christians were often seen as a deviant sect of Judaism²⁰. We know that the teachings of Jesus were founded firmly in the Old Testament and that the Jews at that time were dogmatically holding on to their own interpretation of Judaism. In fact, they could not even agree among themselves on many matters of the Law.²⁷

Jesus was a carpenter and the son of a carpenter. This fact made it difficult for many to accept that He was the Christ.²² Christians in the time of the apostles were generally not powerful nor influential. Christianity was not a religion you joined to hobnob with the high and mighty. It is mentioned earlier that God often chooses the things which are despised to shame those who would think that they are great in the world. This is often the framework of God - that His power may be shown through those who are not mighty in the world. Consider also the chosen nation of Israel. They were not a mighty people in the sense of numbers or geographical size. But God chose them. The true church of God need not be a powerful church with

great political influence. What is important is that there must be the power of God with her.

In short, God's framework of salvation is such that one should not be surprised that the church of God is not huge, is not powerful nor influential and is not old.

What does the Bible tell us about the church of God?

1. It is the body of Christ (Eph 1:22,23). The body is one (Eph 4:3-6). The body without the spirit is dead (Jas 2:26).
2. It is the pillar and the bulwark of the truth (I Tim 3:15). It must uphold the truth which is founded on the teachings of the apostles and the prophets with Christ Jesus being the chief cornerstone (Eph 2:20).
3. It is the bride of Christ (Eph 5:22-32). Jesus has only one bride.
4. It is a chosen people, separated from the world (I Pet 2:9). The church is in the world but not of the world. In many ways it is like the chosen nation of Israel in the Old Testament. There was only one chosen nation. There were others whom God had chosen but they had to be one through the redeeming sacrifice of Jesus which reconciled Jew and Gentile. Yet again,

Conclusion

It is good to accept the differences of others and to live with them in peace and harmony. There are however some differences important enough to separate us for Christ and from the world.

I pray that this article will help members in the True Jesus Church understand our doctrine of the one true church. With this understanding, we may grow stronger in the conviction that God is truly gracious to us who do not deserve Him. He who chose us from among the many millions of souls in the world. All the more, we should find in our hearts the desire to repay the debt we owe Jesus by preaching the gospel so that as many souls as possible may be saved. We should also have compassion for those who belong to God so that like Cornelius they may be brought back to the Good Shepherd. Then there will be one flock and one Shepherd.

1. I Peter 3:20
2. Genesis 35:9-12
3. Ephesians 2:11-16
4. John 6:60-66
5. Acts 24:5
6. I Kings 18:17-40
7. Jeremiah 20
8. I Corinthians 1:26-31
9. John 10:16
10. Matthew 24:24; John 15:1
11. Isaiah 9:1
12. Acts 10:44-46
13. Matthew 18:1-9
14. I Corinthians 2:1-13
15. John 11:40-45; Matthew 11:2-6
16. Matthew 7:21-27
17. Genesis 18:22-33, 19:1-29
18. Mark 2:23-3:6
19. Acts 5:27-40
20. Acts 24:5, 28:22
21. Acts 23:6-10
22. Mark 6:3-6; Matthew 13:55-58

*Tay Eng Guan
Singapore*