

The first church of truth deserters

The church of Jesus Christ was foretold of coming into existence in the OT (I Sam. 12: ; Isa. 2; Dan. 2:44ff; etc.). The fulfillment of church prophecy took place on the day of Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2. The first church was established in Jerusalem as three thousand souls obeyed the gospel, being baptized into Christ. It did not take long, however, before baptized believers began to depart from the truth they originally cherished. The apostle Paul began world evangelistic efforts to cause the universal church of Christ to grow. Paul first traversed through Galatia with Barnabas, teaching the truth and denying the need for Mosaic circumcision, terming the process a liberty (cf. Gal. 2:4). Some circles of brethren were offended by Paul and spread rumors that his teaching differed from the other apostles' doctrines. Equipped with said complaint these rebels contended that Paul was not an apostle at all (cf. Gal. 1:1, 11-12; 2:7-10). Luke records, *"And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, saying, Except ye be circumcised after the custom of Moses, ye cannot be saved. And when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and questioning with them, the brethren appointed that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question.... But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees who believed, saying, It is needful to circumcise them, and to charge them to keep the law of Moses"* (Acts 15:1-5). Such a doctrine would bring brethren into bondage to sin and destroy their eternal souls (Gal. 2:4). A faction among brethren was born and would grow into a hideous monster during the New Testament days. We may say that the "First church of Truth Deserters" was formed in the NT days.

Error had officially crept into the church. While returning to Palestine after a stay in Macedonia, Paul spoke to the Ephesian elders saying, *"I know that after my departing grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them"* (Acts 20:29-30). The church of truth deserters gained membership over time. Men who loved faction and a vainglorious following received what their hearts so longed for (cf. Phil. 2:3). Factions existed in the church in Corinth (I Cor. 11:17-19), and Paul warned Titus of such individuals (Titus 3:10-11). The apostle John's writing indicates a ferocious spiritual warfare between brethren of once like precious faith that now had fallen away, saying, *"Little children, it is the last hour: and as ye heard that antichrist cometh, even now have there arisen many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they all are not of us"* (I Jn. 2:18-19). Know assuredly that those brethren who depart from truth, gain a following, and establish their own "church of truth deserters" have treasured up for themselves judgment in the day of wrath. Paul said of God's judgment, *"who will render to every man according to his works:... but unto them that are factious, and obey not the truth, but obey unrighteousness, shall be wrath and indignation..."* (Rom. 2:5-10).

Those who do not love truth are not spiritually with those who do. Jesus said, *"He that is not with me is against me, and he that gathers not with me scatters"* (Matt. 12:30). What has the faithful child of God to do with members of the "church of truth deserters?"

Identify members of the "church of truth deserters"

Paul clearly identified the truth deserters. To the Philippians Paul said, “*For many walk, of whom I told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ.*” (Phil. 3:18). Jesus, Paul, and John identified the truth deserters by name (Matt. 23:13; II Tim. 2:16-18, III Jn. 9-10). John explained the testing process of those who represent error as opposed to truth and then stated, “*By this we know the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error*” (I Jn. 4:6). Let the faithful Christian today identify the man or woman who loves the praise of men more than the praise of God (Jn. 12:43). There are those who value their “*fleshly wisdom*” as being equal to the Word of God (II Cor. 1:12; 2:17). Said members of the “church of truth deserters” are to be marked within the faithful Christian’s mind (cf. Rom. 16:17-18). Let the faithful open wide their spiritual eyes and identify these erring brethren.

Do not coddle, court, be infatuated, bow down to, cower, nor happily engage members of the “church of truth deserters”

Paul told the Thessalonians, “*Now we **command** you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walks disorderly, and not after the tradition which they received of us*” (II Thess. 3:6). Here were members of the body of Christ who had once “*received*” the doctrinal teachings of the apostles yet now they were termed “*disorderly.*” The command is to “*withdraw,*” not to court, coddle, be infatuated with, cower to and so forth. The faithful are not to give “*greeting*” to such a one (II Jn. 9-11). At II Thess. 3:14-15 Paul commanded the faithful to “*have no company with*” the one who does not obey truth but rather, “*admonish him as a brother*” (II Thess. 3:14-15). Brethren belonging to the church of truth deserters are not to be companied but rather put away from the faithful (I Cor. 5:1-13). Let the faithful today be filled with indignation against sin and follow through with God’s commands “*lest thou also be tempted*” (Gal. 6:1) and be infected with their cancerous “*gangrene*” error (II Tim. 2:17). Beloved, know assuredly that “*The Lord knows them that are his*” (II Tim. 2:19).