

Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight. (Isaiah 5: 20, 21)

And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. (Matthew 16: 18)

Whose Church Is It, Anyway?

Recently, the London Sunday *Telegraph* reported that two male Anglican priests were “married” in a ceremony that included rings, vows, the Eucharist (communion) and the use of one of the denomination’s most traditional wedding rites. As you might expect, this has aggravated divisions within the Anglican Communion between conservatives and liberal-progressives and threatens to further split the Anglicans into separate groups along those lines.

Now, I know what you’re thinking, but this is not going to be a discussion of homosexuality in the church or even in general (although there is much to be said on *that* particular topic). Why? Because there are other sins in the church that are equally destructive and that God condemns just as severely but which do not get as much ink space or air time as the “hot button” topic of homosexuality – for example, *heterosexual* sin (or marriage vows being ignored, repudiated or taken far too lightly), greed, the belief that faith in Jehovah is on the same level as other religions or that “one’s just as good as the other” (which is nothing less than pantheism).

Instead, I submit that all these things are but mere *symptoms* of an even greater problem. I want to address what I believe is at the core of most, if not all, the problems in the church; the growth among Christians of a “country club” mentality regarding the Church – that the Church somehow belongs to *them* and not to God.

As the church continues its drift away from God and His Ways and takes on a more material viewpoint, it is easy for people’s thinking to become distorted. They see the decline in memberships experienced by many local congregations (especially in Europe where many old church buildings are reportedly nearly empty on Sunday mornings) and conclude that *our* (!) church is not inclusive enough; that we must have a greater outreach to others in order to keep up the membership (and income) – and if the new folks come in still clinging to secret and besetting sins and seeing nothing wrong with them or openly denying the Scriptures that directly quote God saying people must not live this way, well, just let it slide. *Our* church is dying, and if

we don't do something, its doors will close for good and the building sold and turned into... I don't know, maybe a nightclub or something.

Even among congregations and believers that *are* sold out to Him, we forget sometimes and start using the personal, possessive tenses to describe what Jesus specifically reserved for *Himself*, as can be found by the reference in Matthew above. The Church is His Body (Ephesians 5:30) and, as such, it – and we – belong to Him. It is His job to build the church, and ours to get out of His Way and let Him do as He pleases. When we try to be the brain for Him, then the message flow goes backwards from its intended path. It's like the hand trying to tell the brain what action it will take. We end up trying to dictate to God; not only is this frightfully arrogant (and downright silly when you think about it), but it also means that we take on more work than He intended us to do. And when you exclude the Holy Spirit and His job as the "guide into all truth" (John 16:13) from the local congregation, you are left to soldier on yourself, limited to purely human solutions for situations that are best left to God.

It is God who routed much larger armies using only 300 people, as was the case with Gideon, and sometimes turned Israel's enemies against each other. It is God who fed thousands with, essentially, a sack lunch – not once, but twice in Jesus' ministry. It is God who knows us better than we know ourselves and who alone knows the good and perfect path for our lives individually, corporately and nationally. Do you really think He *doesn't* know what's going on with the congregation? Or that perhaps one reason people are leaving the church is that the people are finding God in other locations and not within the walls of the congregation? Does it no longer occur to anyone that perhaps instead of trying to compromise with a world system (that – *hello!* – is trying to get away from Him as fast as it can) just to keep up appearances or keep the money rolling in, maybe we should try to check in with the Head and ask what *He* would like to do?

Whose church *is* it, anyway?