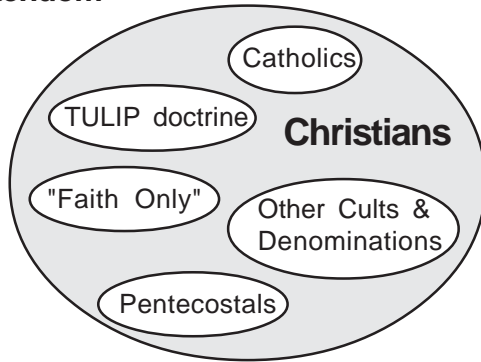


type of doctrine can be called "Pentecostal" or charismatic.

Several other denominations and cults formed over these years, each holding to its own set of human teachings.

A circle representing all who claim to belong to the kingdom of Christ (Christendom) would look like this:

Christendom



**Does Jesus want us
to divide up
into sects,
or should we simply be
Christians?**

Jesus prayed for the unity of His followers. (John 17:20-23) But the denominations disagree about very important teachings such as who can be saved, how to be saved, how to worship God, and what is the nature of God's kingdom. Many do not teach God's pattern for saving man, so they, like the Pharisees whom Jesus condemned, do not enter God's kingdom, and they don't allow others to enter, either.

Denominations are founded on human teachings which divide people, and, in spite of the doctrinal problems connected with the sects some Christians become quite devoted to them. But the divisions can only be maintained using man-made names and man-made creeds. Someone who studies only the Bible could never find his or her way into one of the denominations because Jesus didn't start them (so they're not in the Bible) and the Bible warns against them. Denominations are not all equally good. They are equally bad in God's sight.

You Have a Choice

Be part of the solution, not part of the problem. You do not have to belong to a denomination. Denominations are not a necessary evil. When you choose a church to worship with, look for one that loves and uses only the Bible and rejects all creed books and human teachings. Look for one that is independent from all other churches and that decides for itself how to serve God. Look for one that is trying to be the church we read about in the Bible.

You can be united with God's people. You can be simply a Christian.

For help finding people who want to follow the New Testament pattern and simply be Christians, contact the person who gave you this material, or contact InkMan@MyPreachingPen.com.

God bless you to make the right choice.

The Forgotten Choice

A Lesson in Unity

by Randall McPherson

edited by Ink Man

"Israeldom"

God chose the family of Jacob (Israel) to receive special blessings, including His Law through Moses. This chosen family was called Israelites, or Hebrews or Jews. Sometime between 400 B.C. and the time of Christ, the Jews divided their family up into sections, or sects. The Pharisees were known as the religious leaders. Paul described them as "the strictest sect of our religion." (Acts 26:5) The Sadducees were the social elite - - fewer in number but typically more wealthy. There was also a sect called the Essenes as well as some sub-sects like the Zealots and Herodians which are seldom mentioned in the Bible.

The Pharisees and Sadducees were divided over important doctrinal issues. In Acts 23, the Jewish ruling council, the Sanhedrin, was assembled.

(6) When Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, "Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee; concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged!" (7) And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and the assembly was divided. (8) For Sadducees say that there is no resurrection -- and no angel or spirit; but the Pharisees confess both. (Acts 23:6-8)

The assembly was divided. Paul's statement divided it only because it stood divided since long before Paul arrived. Jesus said, "If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand." (Mark 3:24)

The Pharisees, although strict, were notorious for adding to God's law. For example, they had said that a person's hands must be washed before eating, and they criticized Jesus' followers for breaking that human tradition. (Mark 7:2-3) Jesus used that opportunity to point out their hypocrisy:

(6) "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: 'This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. (7) And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.' (8) For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men." (Mark 7:6-8)

Jesus went on to condemn the Pharisees for trying to find ways around God's will. (Mark 7:9-12) The text points out twice that the Pharisees did many such things. (verses 4 and 13)

The Sadducees, as well, had adopted the doctrines of men. They believed that there would be no resurrection, so they tried to make the idea of a resurrection look foolish by creating a hypothetical situation. (Matthew 22:23-28) Jesus

said, (verse 29) "You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God. In verse 31 He showed why they were mistaken: "Concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God...?"

In spite of the doctrinal problems connected with the sects, some Jews became devoted to them. For example, Paul was proud to have been both a Hebrew and a Pharisee. (Philippians 3:5) But devotion to man-made divisions with their man-made teachings was wrong. Jesus condemned both groups (sects) and clearly didn't want people to become part of either sect. In fact, Jesus disapproved of the Pharisees' evangelistic efforts:

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves. (Matthew 23:15)

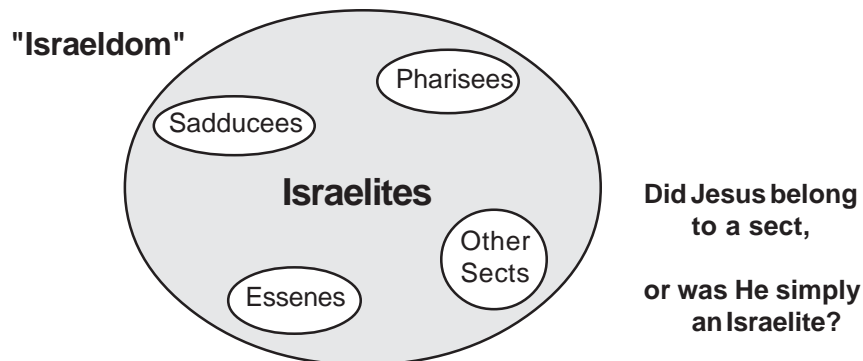
Was Jesus implying that all Pharisees would be lost?

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in." (Matthew 23:13)

It may be shocking to you to hear Jesus condemn a whole group of Israelites, but the entire chapter of Matthew 23 is just such a condemnation, and Jesus also calls them fools and blind guides.

The divisions among the Jews could not have been maintained without man-made names and man-made creeds. Someone who studied only the Old Testament could never become a Pharisee, because the Old Testament never talks about it.

A circle representing all who claimed to belong to the kingdom of Israel ("Israeldom") would look like this:



What choice would someone have had back then? Were potential converts to Judaism required to choose a sect to belong to, or could they simply become Jews? Jesus never affiliated Himself with any sect. Jesus was an Israelite, plain and simple. He wasn't a Pharisee-Israelite or a Sadducee-Israelite or an Anything-Else-Israelite. So it was possible to be simply an Israelite and to help maintain the unity of God's people.

Christendom

Nowadays, God has adopted those who believe in Jesus Christ as His family to receive special blessings. (Ephesians 1:3-5) These believers are called followers, or disciples, of Jesus, or Christians (Acts 11:26), but they are not united.

The Break-up of the Family

The A.D. 100's

In spite of the Holy Spirit's warnings (see Acts 20:30; 2 Timothy 3:1-9), some church leaders led the disciples away and slowly reorganized them. The Catholic church has its beginnings in this effort and had its first pope around A.D. 606. Since that time, the Catholic church, because of its concept that authority rests equally in living leaders as well as the Bible, has continued to add many non-Biblical practices such as infant baptism, prayer to or through humans, purgatory and limbo, instrumental music in worship, not eating meat on Friday, celibacy for priests and a distinction between clergy and "lay" people. (See 1 Timothy 4:1-3.)

The 1500's

A Catholic priest in Germany named Martin Luther tried to lead people back to the Bible. Ironically though, he wanted to take the book of James out of the New Testament because he thought a person could be saved by faith only. (Compare James 2:24.) Luther's followers took his name and started a sect (against his wishes), and today many churches teach salvation by faith only.

Around that same time, a Frenchman, John Calvin, formulated the TULIP doctrine. Each letter stands for a teaching:

- T** = Total depravity. Man is born sinful. [But Ezekiel 18 says that the soul who sins will die.]
- U** = Unconditional election. God elects, or chooses, people by name to be lost or saved, regardless of their thoughts or actions. [But according to Ephesians 1, we are predestined "in Christ" - we choose to get into Him. (Galatians 3:27) Besides, the gospel is preached to give people knowledge and faith by which to decide whether or not to become Christians.]
- L** = Limited atonement. Jesus died to save only the elect. [But Jesus died to save "the whole world." (1 John 2:2)]
- I** = Irrresistible grace. You cannot resist or cancel God's election. [But 2 Peter 1:10 teaches that the elect must be diligent and that their salvation is conditioned upon their obedience.]
- P** = Perseverance of the saints, or "once saved, always saved." If you are ever saved, you can never be lost. If you are ever lost, you were never saved. [But Hebrews 6:4-6 and 2 Peter 2:20-22 teach that the saved can be lost.]

The 1800's and 1900's

Some Christians divided from others over the working of the Holy Spirit. They taught that the same spiritual gifts seen on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) happen today and are proof of a person's salvation. Any church teaching this