

CHAPTER 4

OUR RESPECT FOR THE CHURCH AND FOR ONE ANOTHER MUST NEVER PREVENT US CONFRONTING FALSEHOOD WHEN WE SEE IT

³*Let no one deceive you in any way.....*
2 Thessalonians 2:3(a) (ESV)

⁸*See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.*

Colossians 2:8 (ESV)

¹⁶*Thus says the LORD of hosts: "Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you, filling you with vain hopes; they speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the LORD.*

¹⁷*They say continually to those who despise the word of the LORD, 'It shall be well with you'; and to every one who stubbornly follows his own heart, they say, 'No evil shall come upon you.'"*

Jeremiah 23:16-17 (RSV)

¹³*Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. ¹⁴Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. ¹⁵Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress.*

¹⁶*Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.*

1 Timothy 4:13-16 (ESV)

¹⁴*Your prophets have seen for you
false and deceptive visions;
they have not exposed your iniquity
to restore your fortunes,
but have seen for you oracles
false and misleading.*

Lamentations 2:14 (RSV)

If the only thing we needed to do was to avoid offending or wounding each other, and we were given no other duties or goals, life would be simpler. But, amongst other things, we are also called by Jesus to have "*the love of the truth*" and to "*contend earnestly for the faith*".

That means we have to stand up for what is true and to withstand anyone, and anything, that is false or heretical. Even then, if those opponents of the truth were always non Christians, that wouldn't be so difficult. But, what if the people doing or teaching those false things happen to be part of the Church, even the real Church? What then?

The reality is that even real Christians, not just the false ones, are at every kind of level in terms of their maturity, knowledge, character and integrity. We are not all the same. We do not all have an equal knowledge of or commitment to the Gospel or an equal respect for Scripture or equally sound doctrine.

So, most of the time, when we contend earnestly for the faith, it is actually with fellow Christians that we need to contend. That makes it much more difficult. How can we both love and honour our fellow believers and yet stand up for the truth and defend accurate Bible doctrine all at the same time? Even apostle Paul found that difficult, so we are unlikely to find it easy.

We are commanded to stand up for accurate teaching and to oppose false doctrine

The problem is that many, if not most, of the people who are teaching and passing on false doctrines are inside the churches. It makes sense that the demons would induce such people to join churches or cause existing church members to go off the rails and start pushing heresies because that is how they can do the most damage. They are far more likely to be heard and listened to by immature Christians if they operate inside churches than if they pushed their false teachings from outside the churches:

¹⁷ I appeal to you, brethren, to take note of those who create dissensions and difficulties, in opposition to the doctrine which you have been taught; avoid them. ¹⁸ For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by fair and flattering words they deceive the hearts of the simple-minded.

Romans 16:17-18 (RSV)

In this next passage, Paul warns us of what is coming in the future in terms of false teachings and unbiblical practices being brought into the churches. Such heresies began to enter the churches even in the middle decades of the first century. However, in this passage I think Paul's prophecy relates primarily to the huge avalanche of falsehoods that would be introduced when the Roman Catholic church was formed in the 4th century.

I say that because he refers to them forbidding marriage, which Catholicism does for "priests and nuns". To be precise, celibacy was not brought in as a Catholic doctrine until much later, in the Middle Ages. It was done to give bishops greater control over their priests because a married 'priest' would be more likely to argue when told to move parish or to do unreasonable or improper things and more likely to disobey:

¹Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, ²through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, ³who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. ⁴For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, ⁵for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.

⁶If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed. ⁷Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; ⁸for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.

1 Timothy 4:1-8 (ESV)

Especially in the “End Times” or the “last days” false doctrines and false teachers will arise within the churches , not just outside them

There has always been false teaching and also false, evil, selfish and domineering leaders. They were there even in the first century which is what prompted apostles Paul and John in particular to write letters to refute their heresies and evil behaviour.

In the period of time leading up to the end, the levels of deception, false teaching and corruption in the churches are going to rise sky high. If you look around at the lamentable condition of most churches today, it is hard not to conclude that we are living in those “last days”:

¹But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. ²For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, ⁴treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, ⁵having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people. ⁶For among them are those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions, ⁷always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth. ⁸Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, men corrupted in mind and disqualified regarding the faith.

2 Timothy 3:1-8 (ESV)

One of the hallmarks of the last days is that people in churches will not tolerate sound, authentic, honest Bible teaching. They can see immediately when the Bible is rebuking them, no matter how politely you try to express it. And they don’t want to be rebuked about their behaviour or corrected about their beliefs. They want teachers and leaders who will agree with them, endorse their sinful lifestyles and tell them nice things about themselves.

Again, I have to conclude that we are living in those last days because I am increasingly seeing such attitudes at stratospheric levels everywhere I go. This is especially so online where so many people have no self control and can’t endure being disagreed with. When contradicted on Facebook they reply with the online equivalent of road rage, lashing out with extreme rudeness, insults and mockery rather than calmly discuss the issues.

²preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. ³For the time is coming when people will not endure sound^l teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, ⁴and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.

2 Timothy 4:2-4 (ESV)

Likewise, in Old Testament times there were some evil people and evil practices within the Temple and the priesthood

On the whole, things are terrible today and most churches are in a bad way with false teaching proliferating and the appetite for sound biblical teaching at an all time low. Nevertheless, the fact remains that there have always been some false teachers and wicked practices, even in the Old Testament, before the Church began. So, the situation we face isn’t brand new. It is just far worse than it has ever been, which is saying something, because things have always been bad:

⁴ And the king commanded Hilki'ah, the high priest, and the priests of the second order, and the keepers of the threshold, to bring out of the temple of the LORD all the vessels made for Ba'al, for Ashe'rah, and for all the host of heaven; he burned them outside Jerusalem in the fields of the Kidron, and carried their ashes to Bethel. ⁵ And he deposed the idolatrous priests whom the kings of Judah had ordained to burn incense in the high places at the cities of Judah and round about Jerusalem; those also who burned incense to Ba'al, to the sun, and the moon, and the constellations, and all the host of the heavens. ⁶ And he brought out the Ashe'rah from the house of the LORD, outside Jerusalem, to the brook Kidron, and burned it at the brook Kidron, and beat it to dust and cast the dust of it upon the graves of the common people. ⁷ And he broke down the houses of the male cult prostitutes which were in the house of the LORD, where the women wove hangings for the Ashe'rah.

2 Kings 23:4-7 (RSV)

We are commanded to beware of false teaching even if it comes from well known leaders

One of the things that inhibits sincere Christians from exposing and opposing false teachers is a misplaced sense of deference. They have been brought up to think they ought to respect church leaders, and even to “obey” them, and so they feel it would be wrong to contradict or even question what leaders say. That is the wrong way to think.

Leaders should be respected, just as we should respect everyone, but not in a docile, servile fashion whereby we switch off our discernment. Here we see Jesus warning His disciples about the false teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Plainly, He did not consider it wrong for Him to warn people of these men or for His followers to be wary of them:

⁵ And the disciples came to the other side of the sea, but they had forgotten to bring any bread. ⁶ And Jesus said to them, “Watch out and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” ⁷ They began to discuss this among themselves, saying, “He said that because we did not bring any bread.” ⁸ But Jesus, aware of this, said, “You men of little faith, why do you discuss among yourselves that you have no bread? ⁹ Do you not yet understand or remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets full you picked up? ¹⁰ Or the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many large baskets full you picked up? ¹¹ How is it that you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread? But beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” ¹² Then they understood that He did not say to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Matthew 16:5-12 (NASB)

Likewise, apostle Paul did not hesitate to describe false teachers in the most robust fashion and to warn churches about them. Plainly, therefore, it cannot be said to be wrong for us to warn people today of such men and that must be all the more so if I am right that these are the “last days”.

³ If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, ⁴ he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, ⁵ and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain.

1 Timothy 6:3-5 (ESV)

We are to confront error and wrong teaching even when the people concerned are sincere

Remember also that not all false teaching is done by “rapacious wolves” who are seeking to devour the flock. Very often the false teaching is passed on innocently by well meaning but misguided, ignorant and badly taught church members, even when they are real Christians.

Many of them are not aware that they are passing on heresies to others. Even so, they still have to be challenged and corrected, as gently as possible. However, if they won’t stop, or accept correction, then a more direct, robust and even public approach may be needed.

We are meant to correct others gently and politely, but the fact still remains that we are meant to correct each other

Gentleness and courtesy are important, even essential, but not everyone will respond well to that approach. Nevertheless, some will and with such sincere people a gentle correction will solve the problem and they will listen and change what they are telling people and adopt a biblical stance:

²⁴ And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, ²⁵ correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, ²⁶ and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.

2 Timothy 2:24-26 (ESV)

However, some people will not respond well to gentle, courteous correction and will carry on teaching and spreading heresy. They will become angry with you for having the “impertinence” to challenge their teaching or their opinions or to presume that you could be qualified to correct them. They see it as you claiming to be better than them.

Sadly, many leaders think like that and are too arrogant to allow anyone to correct them, or even to question them, least of all if the person doing so is not himself a leader. Such ‘clergy minded’ leaders have an attitude that they are above ‘ordinary’ Christians and should not be contradicted. Therefore they become angry. Nevertheless, Paul tells us such men must be rebuked:

⁷ For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, ⁸ but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. ⁹ He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

¹⁰ For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party. ¹¹ They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach.

Titus 1:7-11 (ESV)

We are also commanded to confront and oppose corruption, immorality and carnality within the church

It is difficult enough confronting false teaching and heresy in the churches. However, the problems we face go far beyond teaching and doctrine. We also have to deal with corruption, immorality and

carnality within churches, and even within the leadership of those churches. I give several examples of this in my Book 6.

But confronting such wickedness and immorality creates even more anger, resentment and hostility than we can expect if we confront false teaching. Nevertheless, there is no alternative. Therefore, no matter how angry they get, such people must be confronted and if necessary removed from our churches. It is our duty:

⁹ I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people-- ¹⁰ not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. ¹¹ But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler--not even to eat with such a one. ¹² For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? ¹³ God judges those outside. "Purge the evil person from among you."

1 Corinthians 5:9-13 (ESV)

Which takes priority, love or truth?

When we find ourselves under great pressure, which is the most important objective for us to choose? Should we mainly emphasise love, or should it be truth? To some extent the question is a misleading one because it implies these things contradict each other, which they don't. Real love and real truth are not contradictory or mutually exclusive. Jesus perfectly embodies both these qualities at the same time.

Even so, for those of us who have less maturity and wisdom than we need, how are we to tackle this vexed question? I have had to grapple with it many times. Sometimes I have been at a loss to know what to do for the best.

However, given our very limited wisdom where we are unsure what to do and how far to go in taking a stand, our surest and clearest guide is truth. Therefore, be guided mainly by that. Love is a fruit of the Holy Spirit, but it is a slow-growing one and also less clear cut.

When we only have limited maturity, and have not yet developed much of the fruit of the Holy Spirit in our character, it is harder to be guided by the imperative to love one another than it is to be guided by conscience. I have found truth an easier and clearer guide when unsure what to do because it is usually black and white, whereas love is harder to define and to put into practice and takes longer to develop in our character.

Therefore, where we are in doubt as to how strenuously we ought to contend for the faith and for sound teaching, we can make our task easier by resolving never to compromise on any important point of doctrine. We must never believe, or pretend to believe, something false just to keep the peace.

To do so would be wrong and a well informed conscience would never select that option, irrespective of the need to love one another. Indeed, we cannot 'love' people by being false, or by tolerating falsehood, especially if it has to do with doctrine. That is the very opposite of love because we are letting other Christians down if we stay silent in the face of heresy or corruption.

The reason I emphasise this is that for many people in churches today their default setting would be the opposite. They would usually choose to sacrifice truth or true doctrine in order to preserve the peace

and avoid upsetting people. They justify this on the basis that it is “the loving thing to do”. That is because they wrongly define love. In fact, there are times when the most loving thing we can do is to tell people the truth – even if it hurts them.

Apostle Paul provides a tremendous role model for us. He was the most gifted, and probably the most mature, of all the apostles. Yet whenever truth was at stake he never shrank from speaking out, even at the risk of offending others or causing a rift. He tried very hard to be polite and to preserve unity. Nobody tried harder.

But, in the end, Paul always took a clear, firm stand for true doctrine and to oppose whatever was false, no matter who else was involved or who got upset, even when it was Peter. Look at how Paul dealt with a particular dispute over doctrine when he saw that Peter was in the wrong. He opposed and corrected him to his face and he did it publicly because Peter’s error had been made publicly:

¹¹But when Cephas came to Antioch I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. ¹²For before certain men came from James, he ate with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. ¹³And with him the rest of the Jews acted insincerely, so that even Barnabas was carried away by their insincerity. ¹⁴But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, 'If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?'

Galatians 2:11-14 (RSV)

Note also the very firm way that Paul speaks out openly about other Christians and their wrong actions and false teaching in his letters to Timothy and Titus. He criticises and openly names several men including Hymenaeus, Alexander, Phygelus, Hermogenes and Philetus:

¹⁸This charge I commit to you, Timothy, my son, in accordance with the prophetic utterances which pointed to you, that inspired by them you may wage the good warfare, ¹⁹holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting conscience, certain persons have made shipwreck of their faith, ²⁰among them Hymenae'us and Alexander, whom I have delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.

1 Timothy 1:18-20 (RSV)

¹⁵You are aware that all who are in Asia turned away from me, and among them Phy'gelus and Hermog'enes.

2 Timothy 1:15 (RSV)

¹⁵Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth. ¹⁶Avoid such godless chatter, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, ¹⁷and their talk will eat its way like gangrene. Among them are Hymenae'us and Phile'tus, ¹⁸who have swerved from the truth by holding that the resurrection is past already. They are upsetting the faith of some.

2 Timothy 2:15-18 (RSV)

¹⁴Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds.

¹⁵Beware of him yourself, for he strongly opposed our message.

2 Timothy 4: 14-15 (ESV)

Likewise apostle John openly names and criticises a man called Diotrephes who had been telling lies and spreading false teaching:

⁹ I have written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority. ¹⁰ So if I come, I will bring up what he is doing, talking wicked nonsense against us. And not content with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers, and also stops those who want to and puts them out of the church.

3 John 9-10 (ESV)

Nevertheless, to put the importance of standing up for the truth in proper balance, we must remember that Paul also said that, wherever possible, *unnecessary* quarrels are to be avoided. So, we need not take issue with others over every difference of opinion on matters which are not vital points of doctrine.

Thus, for example, if someone disagrees with us about the timing of the Rapture, just let them say what they believe. By all means reply and say what you believe, but there is no need to fall out with them over such issues. That said, when we do speak up, our dealings with others, even on vital matters of doctrine, are always to be conducted with the utmost courtesy and gentleness:

²³ Have nothing to do with stupid, senseless controversies; you know that they breed quarrels. ²⁴ And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kindly to every one, an apt teacher, forbearing, ²⁵ correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant that they will repent and come to know the truth, ²⁶ and they may escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.

2 Timothy 2:23-26 (RSV)

¹ Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for any honest work, ² to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarrelling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all men.

Titus 3:1-2 (RSV)

We are to value the qualities and giftings in every fellow believer

Every Christian, however new and immature they may be, has some role or purpose in the body of Christ. Therefore it follows that they will inevitably have one or more areas of talent or gifting, no matter how hidden or undeveloped those gifts might be.

However, most of us are only concerned about ourselves and only give any attention to promoting our own ministries. We need, as well, to be on the lookout for the potential in each other and to see the gifts and skills which God has given to those around us.

If we do we will be better placed to encourage each other and to help fellow Christians to fulfil their potential. The encouraging of others is a vital ministry in itself and one to which we are all called. We should all cultivate it, whatever else we may do. I speak of this in my Book 7 and refer to it as “the ministry of encouragement”.

Seeing the qualities and gifts in others also helps us to see their faults in a better perspective and to be more patient and tolerant about their areas of relative weakness or ignorance. It also makes us better able to see the ways that God is working in and through every true Christian, not just ourselves. There

is a temptation to see one's own areas of gifting or ministry or one's own doctrinal emphasis as the most important.

If so, the ways in which God uses other Christians, or the different issues He asks them to focus upon are seen as unimportant, because they are not the things God has asked us to focus on. It is a common error to see ourselves as central and our own interests and priorities as obviously the right ones and the most important.

I have done it many times and it has also been done to me, which is when I notice how arrogant and hurtful it is. The reality is God uses every part of the body of Christ to do one task or another. Every one of those jobs or areas of focus is important even if you are not called to do those things. What we do is not necessarily more important than what others do.

We are all in the same boat, however much or little talent we have been given, and however high or low our position. Our rank or job title also makes no difference in God's eyes. We are each simply required to be obedient and faithful to Jesus in our own area of calling, whatever it may be, and, to help others in their different areas. So, a faithful piano player in a small church might receive a bigger reward than a famous evangelist who isn't so faithful.

Such an approach takes our eyes off ourselves and also helps us to promote the ministries of others. That is an approach in which God takes delight and which He will greatly bless. So, let us aim for it and try to promote and encourage the ministries of those around us, provided that what they are doing is in line with Scripture

We must not automatically assume that our theology is right

Have you ever noticed that most of the people you meet in all denominations, have the tendency to assume that what they have been taught, or what they grew up doing, is obviously correct? It is considered so completely self-evident there is no need to check it or think about it at all. That complacency is very dangerous.

To paraphrase the late Chuck Missler of Koinonea, the greatest obstacle to finding the truth is the assumption that you already have it. Instead of being yet another loyal and unthinking supporter of a denomination, we must break free of that straitjacket, go solely by what the Bible says, and exercise discernment as set out in Acts 17:11?

¹¹Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.

Acts 17:11 (ESV)

Apostle Paul praised the Christians in Berea because they did not allow their respect or admiration for any man, however eminent, to take precedence over their respect for the Bible. Thus, any teacher, whoever he may be, had to have his teaching checked out against the Bible to see whether it was correct. Nobody was assumed to be too senior to be checked out.

That approach will protect you from being deliberately deceived, or accidentally misled by others. It will also develop in you a capacity for independent study and thinking which will stand you in good stead. It will prevent you from being a denominational 'yes man' who just goes along with whatever

he is told, without ever thinking for himself or checking what the Bible actually says, as opposed to what the denomination's position is.

The vital importance of being part of a small group, meeting in a house, for Bible study, prayer and fellowship

In addition to the need to search for a good and biblical church (see below) it is also important to become part of a small group or house group which meets weekly or at least fortnightly for Bible study, prayer and fellowship (i.e. building relationships). Many churches are far too large and therefore if you only attend the main weekly meeting, they aren't suitable to help us in making strong relationships.

However, in a small group of perhaps 5-10 people, meeting in a home, every person present can learn, participate and grow as a disciple. That is where most of the real growing is done, because that is the place in which we can be most open and active. If you are already part of a small house church then that kind of intimacy can already be achieved even in the main weekly meeting. However, if your church is larger then you certainly need to be part of a small mid week house group as well.

Most people's experience of being part of a large Church is mainly as a spectator, not as a participant. But if you are part of a small group the opposite is the case. Therefore seek for, and become active in, a small group. Be loyal to it, but also be willing to move out and look for something more suitable if the group you join is not faithful to Scripture or does not enable you to grow in maturity. Your growth as a disciple is too important for you to put it at risk by staying in the wrong group.

The extreme difficulty today of finding a genuine and biblical church led by sincere men

Given the benefits and importance of church, the undeniable fact is you need to be part of one. The real question is how to find one? The problem is these are increasingly hard to find. So what should you do? When I became a Christian in 1981 it was possible for a new believer just to walk into pretty much any Evangelical or Pentecostal church and expect to be reasonably well taught and disciplined, such that they could grow as a believer.

That is not true anymore. Things really have changed. The decline of the Western church over the last 70 years, and especially the last 40 years, would be difficult to exaggerate. There has been a collapse of integrity and of true Bible teaching within much of the apparent church in the Western world since World War Two, and particularly since the 1960s.

That decline has gathered pace and has particularly intensified since the start of the 1990s, such that now the Western church is infested with unbelief, scepticism, liberalism, wokeness, false doctrine, mysticism, ecumenism, New Age ideas, the occult, environmental nonsense and humanistic psychology, all mixed up with fragments of real Christianity.

A mature disciple can see each of these things and can distinguish one from another. He can identify which parts of the teaching and practice of a given church are genuine and which are false. But a new and inexperienced Christian cannot easily do so. Therefore you need to pray that God will guide you and help you meet up with some genuine, non woke, Bible believing Christians near to where you live. Such people, and such churches, are still to be found dotted around, here and there, but they are not plentiful.

Some genuine churches with sound doctrine will be large, but they are now rare. Today largeness is closely correlated with falseness and therefore real believers are increasingly to be found meeting in homes or in small churches or fellowships. Often these are very small, even as few as 3 or 4 people.

The key is not to find a large church, which may seem in the eyes of the world to be ‘successful’, but to find a genuine one, which truly honours and teaches the Bible. It also needs to be one in which the people love and care for each other and are diligent and also discerning about keeping out false teaching and false practices.

Such genuine churches, whether small or large, are now rare. You may also think you have found one, only to discover later that it is not quite what it seemed to be. That said, you do need to be willing to put up with the idiosyncrasies and immaturity of others and to show patience and forbearance about their faults.

Hopefully they will return the favour by being patient with you about your areas of immaturity. However, that does not mean that you should tolerate false teaching or wrong practices, especially where those relate to central aspects of the Christian faith. But the need to take a stand on the accuracy of doctrine does not apply where there are honest disagreements or mistakes about minor or peripheral matters, such as who wrote the letter to the Hebrews. On such matters we are all entitled to our own opinions.

However, the decision as to whether an issue is central or peripheral is, in the end, a matter of judgement, and of conscience. God will have to guide you. However, if it is central, or if the wrong practice to which you object is seriously wrong, or sinful, then you will need to be willing to move from that church and, perhaps, to move again repeatedly, until you find somewhere genuine and faithful.

I wish I could be more encouraging and reassuring, but the truth is a number of such moves from one church to another are likely to be needed, as you search around for a valid church. Often it is only when you have been in a church for a few months, or even a year or two that the true nature and extent of its qualities or faults, or even its falseness, become fully apparent to you.