

"THE STRICTEST SECT"

Recent developments among the Taylor party of Exclusive Brethren such as the rule which forbids them to eat with unbelievers or other Christians are so utterly contrary to scripture that it is amazing that persons can be so misled. By forbidding eating or social intercourse with a person because he does not subscribe to the special teachings of the party, or is not in fellowship with them, this sect claims that they alone of all the millions of the Lord's people in the world are clean persons. They reject all others who love the Lord as unfit for Christian fellowship. This is pharisaical presumption of the most extreme kind. In 1 Cor. 5:10 the apostle makes it clear that believers cannot refrain from all intercourse with unbelievers, for he says, "then ye must needs go out of the world". The rule which forbids Christians of this sect to eat with men of the world is therefore a flat denial of the apostle's teaching. Nor is there any scriptural authority for the teaching that members of this sect are doing wrong if they eat or have social intercourse with a godly believer, even though he may have left their party because he cannot accept their special teachings.

Many, however, who have been alarmed by this extremism, and have left the Taylor party on account of it, have failed to discern that the root of this and other errors of this sect lies deeper and goes farther back into history than the last few years. The recognition of one man as their universal leader, whose authority was not even to be questioned by scripture is a direct challenge to the Lord's command "neither be called leaders for One is your leader, the Christ". (The word may be translated leader or guide) Matthew 23: 8-10. This is popery in principle, and should never have been tolerated. Alas, it was upheld often by men who had a reputation for spirituality, and any who resisted were crushed. Fear restrained any criticism. The doctrine of "authoritative ministry" a Romish doctrine was thus accepted.

Coupled with all this there was spiritual pride. The party boasted that it alone had a living ministry, which implied that the Holy Spirit was not working in any outside the Taylor party and was tantamount to saying that the Lord had left the rest of His flock, numbering millions of saints, without spiritual food. What an insult to Christ, and what a reflection on the Spirit and the Word!

But the root lies deeper still, and the saints who have been taken in this snare will not be delivered till they have judged exclusivism in its entirety. I have no doubt that what we call the Brethren movement was, in its beginning, a movement of the Holy Spirit, but let us remember that no revival in the Church's history has retained its original power and purity.

At its commencement this movement was characterised by a desire to return to the simplicity that marked the early Church. All believers were brethren, members of the one Body, and it was emphasized that every godly saint who held the fundamentals of the faith was entitled to the fellowship of the Lord's table and to break bread.

Satan used the Newton heresy to sow discord among brethren. Notwithstanding that Newton abjured his own teaching and left Brethren altogether, and notwithstanding that most of the saints hardly knew what it was all about, a violent controversy arose, and the movement split into two streams. Exclusivism began, and its history is its condemnation. It is a lamentable tale of division and sub-division, each division being accompanied by bitterness and strife unworthy of saints. Instead of shame and humbling, there was boasting. The loss of thousands of brethren was hailed as victory. The idea was promulgated that those who took a certain line (in reality followed a certain man) were on the Lord's side. The Lord was said to be sifting the saints, and those who got through were the "fine flour". Nowhere has this proud, sectarian spirit been more evident than in the Taylor party. At long last in the government of God the fruit of this sowing is being reaped. All outside the relatively small circle of the Taylor party are regarded by them as vessels to dishonour, to be shrunk from - not even to be eaten with. This is a perversion of scripture, and lies at the root of much of the error of Exclusivism. The passage in 2 Timothy 2 about vessels to dishonour clearly refers to false teachers, such as Hymenaeus and Philetus. The Taylor party have fallen into the error of applying these words to true believers simply because they do not belong to their sect.

Let it be clearly understood that we are not condemning persons: our object is to expose an error which has wrought much havoc among the people of God in the past, and has recently manifested itself in this extreme form. May it not be that God has allowed this evil fruit to ripen that all concerned might judge the root, and in humble dependence on the Lord seek His guidance.

T. W. C.