

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

Current events in the world are paving the way for the fulfilment of Biblical prophecy and along with this, there is a growing conviction with many Christians all over the world, that the second coming of the Lord Jesus is near. This expectation is the result of the operations of the Holy Spirit; and there is no doubt that His mission and longing is to prepare the people of God for that glorious moment when the Lord Jesus will rapture His own to Himself and then come forth with them to reign over the earth, where He was once cast out and crucified.

A presentation of the supreme excellence and glory of Christ is necessary to reach this end, and, as a prelude to this, special attention has been sovereignly called to the Person and services of the Holy Spirit. Such a ministry of Christ in the power of the Spirit, and as a result of His operations inwardly and faith in the soul, would lead to ardent affection for Christ, and, combined with the prospect of soon seeing Him as He is, would lead to increased purity, practical righteousness, holiness and sanctification, involving the removal of all that would hinder both internally and externally. This would bring about the restoration in character of the assembly's first love for Christ, and of evangelical activity - the prime features of the end of the dispensation. (see Rev.22:16/17).

During the reformation, Martin Luther was used of God to revive the truth of justification by faith, and in the last century there was a movement of the Spirit of God drawing attention to the fact that the Lord Jesus in heaven is the glorified Head of His assembly consisting of every believer on earth united to Him by the Holy Spirit. Many in various parts of the earth were gathered out to the Lord's name, breaking bread in the light of the whole assembly; and the work was undoubtedly unified by the Lord Himself.

In spite of divisions, the work continued and expanded, with a living ministry calling attention to precious features of the truth; particularly, in more recent times, to the Persons of the Godhead and the supreme majesty of the blessed God, with light as to the Lord's supper and the service of God.

Latterly, alas, declension has set in, resulting in the evolving of a system not in accord with Christian liberty, characterised increasingly by undue prominence being accorded to one in the lead and to ministers generally, instead of attention being focused on the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The outlook in Scripture is that the Lord Jesus is Head of the assembly, Son over God's house, Himself being the corner-stone, and has the first place in all things; being everything and in all, and the great Leader of His own. (Col.1:18 & 3:11, Heb. 2:10, 3:6, 12:2, 13:20, Eph.2:21, 1 Cor.1:10)

Brethren, while having a right judgment of systems around, have almost lost the sense that we are part of the breakdown of the assembly publicly; and we have often acted in practice as if we were "the assembly" and spoken of, and acted towards, other lovers of the Lord Jesus in a derogatory way that must be very grieving to His heart.

Far-reaching and pretentious claims to assembly status and "position" have been made, in spite of solemn warnings on the part of J.N.D., F.E.R., C.A.C., and J.T. The oft-repeated statements "the Lord is with us" and "the Lord is with the position" betray presumption and spiritual pride, and belie the true condition.

Much is made, rightly so, of the Spirit's present voice to the assembly, but this is now being identified in brethren's minds with the voice of one man and, combined with the conception of "authoritative ministry" has resulted in ministry being given an equal or even greater authority than the written Word of God, thus weakening the latter's absolute authority over the conscience and the soul.

The interpretation and application of the Word by a brother in the lead is held to be binding on all and the Scriptures are manipulated to enforce "current ministry". Often one passage only is taken as a truth, instead of considering all relevant passages. (see 11 Pet.1:20/21).

For a long time, liberty to express difficulties or to make honest enquiry as to the ministry has been virtually denied, whereas the bondman of the Lord "should be gentle.....in meekness setting right those who oppose". (11 Tim. 2:24/26).

The leader legislates on the application of Divine principles in detail and these applications, some of which are not sound nor in accord with facts, have the force of laws, which must be obeyed by all. The result is that the basis of fellowship is no longer confined to the apostles' doctrine but includes the acceptance of an increasing number of man-made rules, thus making the position sectarian.

The claims of conscience, as obedient to the Word of God, are constantly infringed, thus preventing the maintenance of a good conscience before God (1 Tim.1:5) while the threat of excommunication from fellowship, leading to their being cut off, as evil persons, from relatives and friends, has caused many to give lip service to false teaching contrary to their own inner convictions before God.

The spirit of the dispensation has been virtually set aside and the extreme supporters of the system are sadly lacking in love, grace, shepherd care, and even normal human feelings, thus causing extreme stress and anguish. The teaching, and the methods of rigour and harshness used, have become constitutional in many, so that the very character of the person has been changed for the worse. This phenomenon (i.e. change of character) is similar to that which has taken place in those who have dedicated themselves to Romanism, Nazism, Fascism, Communism and other totalitarian creeds. The salient features of fanatical flesh are the same, wherever they manifest themselves (see 11 Tim. 3:2/5). Persons marked by these features are usually admired by some - especially those who are immature (see 11 Cor.11:19/20) and they are able, for a time, to dominate others by fear. But because they are against God, they cannot prevail. (11 Tim.3:9).

For some time, servants of the Lord, responsible to Him, have been hindered in the free exercise of their gift received in sovereign grace from an ascended Christ by the Holy Spirit, and have concentrated on the reiteration of what is current in order to be allowed to continue with their service. The power to affect the heart and conscience, experienced so frequently in earlier days, has therefore disappeared.

The Scriptures make clear the necessity for a constant ministry of foundation truth (11 Pet. 1:12/13) but this has, generally speaking, been relegated to the background, and those who have sought to supply the need, have been under reproach. In result, a generation has grown up with little moral foundation and Christ, generally speaking, has not been formed in them (Gal.4:19). On the one hand there have been many moral lapses and, on the other, young men have been called upon to stand for "the truth" (so-called) in their localities without any regard to the necessary qualifications of eldership, and have acted in a hard, fanatical and unseemly manner.

The theme of purification, inward as well as outward, was developed at meetings in Exeter and the withdrawal of this book and the wicked exhortation to burn it, has weakened this side of the truth so sorely needed at the present time. Appalling moral evil has come to light in leading men, meticulous as to outward separation, in the very city where the book was first attacked.

The teaching that all believers should drink alcoholic beverages to prove their Christian liberty, has caused many to drink intoxicants with dire results. This is very serious and the Lord's word comes to mind as to offending one of these little ones. (Mat.18:6).

It is now taught that eating and drinking is an act of fellowship, and that all on earth, including myriads of devoted and godly Christians, with the exception of those in fellowship, are in no different position from the man referred to in 1.Cor.5:11, and that brethren may only eat and drink with those with whom they are in fellowship, with the exception of certain communal meals. This is contrary to the truth of Scripture and the antithesis of the teaching and example of the Lord Jesus and His apostles (see Mat.9:10/11, Acts 27:35/36 etc.) We are exhorted to follow in the holy steps of Jesus as a Man here on earth (1 Pet.2:21) and to be imitators of Paul as he was of Christ (1 Cor.11:1) and liberty is granted by the Spirit of God, through Paul, to eat "if so minded" in the house of an unbeliever and this liberty remains (1 Cor.10:27/8). Paul says "the things that I write to you, that it is the Lord's commandment". (1 Cor.14:37).

Testimony is almost beclouded. Brethren are now regarded as a fanatical sect and even Christianity itself is brought into disrepute.

Cruel methods have been practised against beloved servants of the Lord and others, and they have been cast out of "the assembly" on insufficient and sometimes trivial grounds. As withdrawal should only take place when every other means has failed, and only be on the basis that the one concerned is unfit for Christian fellowship anywhere on earth, many "assembly" judgments are manifestly wrong.

Confessions before "the assembly" reminiscent of what is practised by a certain Group, have been frequent in many places recently, and have brought the assembly into disrepute.

The principle of local responsibility has also been violated by leading men, who have forced their opinions on local companies in matters of discipline, on the assumption that they have the gift of government. This has led to grave miscarriage of justice in some cases.

While outward separation from the world has been insisted on, many brethren's links among themselves, have been largely of a social character, and they have almost lost the ability to speak of the Lord Himself in their contact with each other, and with men. Many have lived in a round of meetings and for many engaged in an occupation, there has been insufficient time for personal communion, meditation, practical Christianity, personal service and fulfilling the responsibilities of family life. By the enforcement and carrying out of legal enactments brethren are under bondage to the principles of the world. (Gal.4:3,8,9).

It is possible, in view of developments, that the teaching as to non-eating may be modified, but if this is so, it will only expose the system still more.

Instead of submission to the rights, leading and power of the Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit in the assembly, it is taught that the system is to be maintained by self-appointed local leaders maintaining contact with the universal leader, whose dictum must prevail. Control of publication of ministry is vested in one central depot and is to be subjected to censorship.

The whole system is a challenge to the authority and character of God, and to the truth and working of the body. (1.Cor.12).

May the brethren reach a judgment of this system before the Lord as iniquitous; and seek His face for grace, guidance, and courage to act according to His will, so as to have part in what is of real church character and to be radiant witnesses to a glorified Saviour at the end of the dispensation.

The writer is deeply humbled as to his own guilt and failure and would desire only to boast in Christ Jesus and in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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