

The Broadmoor Bulletin

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No One Left Out

The conversation took place many years ago, but I remember it vividly. A well-known preacher was in town to conduct a gospel meeting. As I gave him a tour of some of the sights of our area one morning, I was surprised at how he confided in me.

Tears rolled down his cheeks as he spoke of health afflictions that had beset his family. For many years friends were constantly dropping by. Now, hardly anyone even called. Age and infirmity had separated him from most of those who had once been close.

I've seen it on other occasions. Those who enjoy good health are welcomed into the mainstream of social activities. When limitations make it difficult to get out, everyone seems affected. Isolation makes the burden of physical afflictions even more painful.

A scene from long ago is recorded in Nehemiah 8. A remnant of God's people had returned to Jerusalem from Babylonian captivity, and they were gathered safely behind newly-rebuilt city walls. Ezra led the assembly in reading the law of God, assisted by several Levites.

As the reading continued, sobbing was heard, "for all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law" (Neh. 8:9, NKJV). Ezra urged them not to cry, "For this day is holy to our Lord. Do not sorrow, for the joy of the Lord is your strength." How unfortunate that not all could be present to hear Ezra's exhortation on joy. As in any community, some were unable to meet due to age, infirmities, illnesses, etc. However, these were not forgotten on that occasion. Ezra instructed them to "Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared" (Neh. 8:10). No one was to be left out. Spread the joy to all, they were told.

God still teaches that all need encouragement. To whom did the Son of Man grant admission to the "kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world"? Two criteria mentioned were "I was sick and you visited me; I was in prison and you came to me" (Matt. 25:31, 36).

If people cannot come to our assemblies, must they be forgotten? Must the old adage that says "Out of sight, out of mind" describe the Lord's church?

Spending time with an aged friend in a nursing home may not be a popular pastime. We can give many reasons for not paying a visit to someone no longer able to be out, but again we must ask the piercing question: Whom do we serve?

"Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world" (James 1:27).

Tim Hall

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

1 John 4:7 – 8

Shall We Surrender This Plea?

The "Restoration Movement" in America swept the country like wild fire in the days when our communication was very limited. It caught the attention and captured the interest of the religious world. All recognized that this plea was different. In the midst of confusion and warring factions, the plea was that every departure from Scripture was wrong and that peace and harmony could be had only by sacrificing creeds and dogmas and by returning to the sacred ground of inspired truth.

This plea won instant acceptance with some but open opposition from many more. However, thinking people were arrested by the challenge: "We speak where the Bible speaks; we are silent where the Bible is silent." The cause grew, but with the growth came bitter opposition and persecution. However, the ground was not surrendered, and the victory was assured.

What Was This Plea?

Many a rustic preacher had to climb on the polemic stand to do forensic battle with higher echelons of theological scholarship. Yet the truth prevailed because it was truth. And the whole world came to recognize a difference and respect a line of demarcation between the church of Christ and the denominational world. Although it faced sneers and ridicule, the church grew daily in strength and respect as each member went his way declaring, "We call Bible things by Bible names. We do Bible things in Bible ways."

With the contention that if a thing is scriptural, then there must be a scriptural term to describe it, they deplored the language of Ashdod, and they quoted, "For who among men knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of the man, which is in him? Even so the things of God none knoweth, save the Spirit of God. But we received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is from God; that we might know the things that were freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Spirit teacheth; combining spiritual things with spiritual words" (1 Cor. 2:11 – 13). The religious world didn't much like the sound of that challenge – but they respected it.

Who and What Were These People?

Had those stalwarts of the restoration movement surrendered a single principle, they would have invited disaster to their cause. Any compromise would have meant certain defeat and a forfeit of their right to exist. Knowing this, they were adamant in their demands: "Let us return to the inspired ground, rally around the cross of Christ, and accept His authority alone." They were branded as "modern Ishmaelites, whose hand is against every man," but their plea became a rallying point for all who realized the tragedy of sectarian strife. The wrath of religious bigots only intensified the zeal of these discerning people.

The whole world recognized the success of those who launched this movement, but have we analyzed the factor which made for success? (Continued on Page 2)

Shall We Surrender This Plea?

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It must be agreed by all that it was the distinctive plea and their adherence to its principles that won battles. They triumphed over opposition because they clung to the Scriptures and would not be driven nor enticed from them. And as a result of their fearless proclamation of truth, we have received as our heritage a church which has come to numerical strength, power, prestige, and popular acceptance. Now, shall we surrender the ground our forefathers hallowed?

Rumblings in the Church Today

There are awesome rumblings deep within the church today, and dark forebodings hover on future horizons. The ominous pall comes not from things or persons without, but from the conditions which are arising from within the body and promoted by our own members. None can carefully weigh trends and developments within the church today and yet contend the real force of the restoration movement is not being blunted by a newly acquired “means of approach” and “up to date” methods of doing things.

The stalwart defense of the faith is being supplanted by “diplomacy and tact.” Bitter opposition has been overcome for the most part, but we have failed to realize why we are not encountering the bitter opposition. We have won evasive battles by “sparing feelings,” but at the same time we have lost golden opportunities to save souls from the sins of denominationalism.

The Power of the Truth of Christ

Every achievement to which the church can point today was staked out and made possible by the courageous work of pioneer preachers who were unflinching in their denunciation of every false way. Their speech may have been rustic, but it was effective in defense of the truth. They didn’t present the veneer of culture, but they were the solid oak of truth. When they strode out of the corn field or cotton patch on Saturday afternoon, they really had a quality to “grace God’s pulpit” the next morning. It was to “preach Christ and Him crucified” that filled their thoughts (1 Cor. 2:1 – 2). They didn’t try to polish up on fancy phrases nor cultural approach. They knew the tragedy of sin and horrors of eternal hell, and they were campaigning for the souls of men.

Their sermon may not have been scholarly, but it was scriptural. They didn’t get big pay checks, but they got results. They couldn’t eloquently gesture to a beautiful baptistery, but they led myriads of candidates into rivers, ponds, and creeks, and there they buried them in baptism for the remission of their sins. They didn’t expend all of their energies harping on congregational autonomy and local financial responsibility, but they instructed the young converts: “Now, you have a story to tell. Get out there and tell it to all that you can. So the word grew!

When the campaign moved out of the old brush arbor into small meeting houses, then into large, nicely furnished buildings, churches somehow lost sight of the worth of the individual soul and began to spotlight “big programs,” “city-wide campaigns” and attendant promotional activities. As a result, the individual Christian became engulfed in the whirlpool of “church programs,” and failed to talk to that neighbor about obeying the gospel of Christ for salvation from sin. More and more we came to lean on professional preachers and less and less on qualified Christians doing evangelizing “everywhere, preaching the word” (Acts 8:4).

“Moving on Up”

The preachers’ speech took on a polish unknown in the “pioneer days.” They studied the means of approach and psychology to better present the message of salvation, but, in some devious way, tact and diplomacy shaded into compromise and conformity. The socialized gospel from religious neighbors began to infiltrate the ranks. Too, the preacher came to feel at home on an “ecclesiastical pedestal” which was fashioned for him by well-meaning but ignorant followers. Many preachers became “business managers” for their congregation, as well as a spiritual instructor. Many preachers in churches of Christ became involved with building programs, finance committees for schools, orphan homes, and other such affairs in “the brotherhood.”

As an impotent people, the restoration movement had no church buildings, no orphan homes, no “Christian schools”, and no homes for the aged. And youth encampments, youth rallies, and quite a few other activities of our day were unknown. Today, churches of Christ have buildings costing a million dollars or more. We have long lists of colleges, schools, orphanages, old folks’ homes, lectureships, encampments, retreats, etc. We have educated and polished preachers, educational directors, youth counselors, marriage counselors, and professional song directors.

We Have Finally Arrived

Yes, we have arrived – but where are we? Are you ready to carefully weigh these matters? The whole world knows who we are, but do they still fully understand what we are? We advertise where we meet, but have we also informed them as to just where we stand? Why not? In all of our great programs of evangelizing, are we having the impact that was felt in our earlier days? With our great “educational programs”, are converts going forth to sow the seed as in the days of the pioneers? Are our “youth retreats” being used to instruct the youths in a more decorous retreat from what are now unpopular truths? Is the world still seeing the same difference between the church and the denominational world?

Let’s Get Back to Our Plea!

The world must be constantly reminded that we have: “No book but the Bible; no creed but the Christ; no way but His Way; and no church but His church.” We accept no authority but Christ and refuse to be governed by any synod, council, or conference. No human creed can regulate our worship. We believe the Bible is an all-sufficient guide for all matters in religion and feel that any addition is an insult to God who gave it. Let the whole world know that anyone who is going beyond this Book “hath not God” (2 John 9 – 11). And therefore, we stand self-condemned if we fellowship error (Gal. 2:18).

Any “regrouping of forces due to changing conditions” is a sinister threat against the church – whether it is spawned within or without the body of Christ. The primitive order of things cannot be forsaken nor any compromise tolerated. If new converts are not grounded thoroughly in this plea, we may soon find we have won many members while losing our cause. One generation can see the loss of all the ground won by the noble restoration. Let us not despise a single Biblical achievement or accomplishment we have gained, but let us beware lest that which was won by a distinctive plea become lost by apostasy.

Dillard Thurman (June 19, 1959)