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Were We Right?

Tract No. 5

Years ago when an obsession to introduce new methods into assembly practices began, though disturbed, we felt we could go along with it, so long as Divine Principles were left alone. But now, the same obsession in certain brethren to change everything, has led from undignified methods to an infringement on the principles of truth. This alarming trend has forced us to raise a voice of warning to the assemblies of God's beloved people.

Let us examine the history of saints who, in deep exercise of soul, left denominationalism to meet simply in the Lord's Name alone:

Were we right when we left the unholy mixture of sectarianism to appreciate God's pattern of salvation, baptism and fellowship in the local assemblies of His people? Were we mistaken in discerning the order and work of the Spirit of God in conviction, contrition, conversion, confession in the waters of baptism and continuance in the Apostles' doctrine, fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayers? (Acts 2) The four aspects of devotion in verse 42 are simply manifestations of our love for God's truth, God's people, God's Son and God's creatures who are lost in sin. Do we not thank God that we were willing to occupy "the seat of the unlearned" (1 Cor. 14:16) until we were convinced that this was God's pattern and then to experience the holy joy of being received into all the privileges and responsibilities of assembly life?

Compare this godly order with the present practice of many professed assemblies. Baptism is set aside as a non-essential, even some of the leaders refuse to bow to it. Reception now is not through conviction but for convenience and that of everyone who says he is a Christian, irrespective of what he believes. This has led to the ignoring of the Scriptural practice of letters of commendation. No wonder that the majority of the young people do not know the difference between a denominational church and an assembly of God's people.

Were our early brethren right in leaving the sects of men, with all their ecclesiastical trappings, to lay hold of and follow the simpler pattern of the New Testament church? Were they right in laying their religious titles at the feet of their Lord, with a godly contentment to be brethren only in Christ? They believed sincerely that the Scriptures taught that spiritual gift was to be Spirit-taught and Spirit-trained in the assembly. The fruit of this exercise is seen in those Spirit-taught men becoming the most able teachers of the Word of God.

But now we are told they were wrong. Godly saints were shocked to see in the May 1966 issue of an assembly magazine an advertisement urging young men to go to Trinity Divinity School with a view of getting a degree and becoming better equipped for the service of the Lord. At this Seminary certain sectarian professors, who never saw the truth of the assembly pattern, are to teach our young men. First it was a Bible School, which was the thin edge of the wedge, now it is a fully-fledged theological seminary. Next, we fear, as some are already advocating, only the men who come from the seminary with their degree will be welcome to certain assembly platforms and conferences. Such is the alarming speed

of departure that is at work among the people of God today.

Associated with this is the growing practice of inviting sectarian men, or men with one foot in the assemblies and the other in denominationalism, to assembly platforms. While we believe that many of these men are godly in life and sound in the gospel and we can love them and appreciate them as members of the Body of Christ, yet it is all part of a trend to revert to what God brought us out from.

Were we right when we left organization and came out to the Scriptural assembly pattern where spiritual gift was to be developed and trained in the assembly by the Spirit of God? Were the early assemblies right when they demanded that full-time workers be first tested in character, gift and usefulness, before going forth with the gospel? Were these workers right in going forth to pioneer with the gospel and to establish New Testament churches? Were they right in taking nothing from the Gentiles but looking to the Lord alone to meet every need? The fruit of their work is seen in hundreds of assemblies functioning without the props of a clerical one-man ministry.

But now, they say, the apostolic pattern is not suited for our modern enlightened age. Young men come forth from Bible School, soon they will flow from theological seminaries, with brain-waves of great projects that bring them into the limelight and make them world travellers at the Lord's people's expense. [A passage here could not be read in the scan.] never went into the backwoods to live and tramp from house to house with the gospel. Pioneer work, away from the glamor and applause of the

fickle, is not to the taste of religious adventurers. Having never learned the ways of God, some of these have become professional salesmen, going from assembly to assembly [A passage here could not be read in the scan.] preach the gospel with clarity and power: fewer still would know how to plant an assembly after God's order.

If we were right in rejecting denominationalism and clericalism with their whole unscriptural machinery. If we were right in coming "outside the camp" to a rejected Lord and to God's simple pattern unfettered by the arrangements of men. If we were right in coming out to the place selected by our Lord (Matt. 18:20), secluded from the world: to a large place, to a place large enough for the Spirit of God to work, for the gifts of the Risen Head of the Church to function, for all the Word of God to be practiced, we say, if we were right, then the present moves to organize, to centralize and to fraternize with the religious world are wrong.

God give us leadership! Men of conviction, character and courage whose feet point in the right direction. Men who will buy the truth and sell it not, not for popularity nor position. Men with keen spiritual perception, who know right from wrong and will do the right, who know truth from error and will teach the truth. Men, who, in fellowship with God, can discern the subtle wiles of the enemy and warn the saints of the corrupting influences at work among them. Men who can see the danger that wherever a distinctive assembly testimony to the whole truth of God is destroyed, God's people will be sucked into a whirlpool. They will become a link in a great ecumenical false church which is in process of formation

and thus an unconscious builder of another tower of Babel.

Ye Serve the Lord Christ

A word to all who serve the Lord. Tract No. 6

One of the greatest privileges conferred upon us is to be called, of God, into specific service. To know God is to love Him and to love Him is to serve Him. But privileges bring their corresponding responsibilities. With that in view let us think of

The Servant's Preparation

Our Lord trained His servants in secret for what He wanted them to do in the open. The apostles companied with our Lord for three and a half years, imbibing His spirit and character and learning His ways in the work of God. They were first disciples, then evangelists, then teachers. This is God's order. Moses thought to be a leader in Israel before he matured in the school of God in the backside of the desert. But God rejected him. Elisha must walk with and learn from Elijah before the mantle falls upon him. Paul is sent into Arabia to learn God. Then he spent some years in Tarsus, his home district, before going to Antioch from whence he was recommended to the grace of God. He himself testified, "after I was tested I was put in trust with the gospel" (1 Thess. 2:4).

The assembly, with its privileges and activities, is the best training ground for God's servants. Here young believers may sit under a variety of ministry by godly and gifted servants of Christ, both local and itinerant. Here also there is opportunity to engage in every branch of its work, such as open air work, Sunday School, tract distribution, cottage meetings, etc. There is also the

benefit of wise counsel from godly elders and the opportunity of maturing in an atmosphere where "thus saith the Lord" is paramount. There can be no substitute for the assembly as God's training ground. As one learns God in the secret of His own presence, and the ways of God in fellowship with His people, in the assembly, he may put it into practice in the circumstances of everyday life, whether in the office, the factory, the high-school or the university. This leads to strength of character and to a stable personal testimony for Christ.

We shall now look at

The Servant's Commendation

The greatest commendation one can have is his own character and ministry. This should be apparent to all of the Lord's people. Anyone who is not acceptable to his own home assembly and to the assemblies in his own immediate vicinity will never be acceptable nor useful anywhere else. Elder brethren should not irresponsibly commend such and put an intolerable burden on assemblies elsewhere, either at home or abroad.

The one who is called of God into full-time service will commend himself to the consciences of the Lord's people, both in character and gift. The assembly will seek to discern in him three qualifications that Paul looked for when he was about to associate Timothy with him in the work of the Lord. In Timothy Paul found a man of good character—he was well reported of by the brethren (Acts 16:1, 2); a man who was gifted by the Holy Spirit (2 Tim. 1:6, 7) and a man who was intelligent in the Word of God (2 Tim. 2:15; 3:14-17). Elder brethren will be wise if they refuse to be satisfied with anything less.

The Word of God says "know them that labor among you." The Lord's people have the right to know what manner of men go out from them and move in and out among the assemblies of God's people. What is their character? Are they Christian gentlemen, both in ministry and behaviour? Or are they exacting, inconsiderate and unmannerly? What is their ministry? Have they won souls to Christ and established the saints in the ways of God? What are their motives? Are they in the work for the glory of God or for filthy lucre, the praise of men or an easy, aimless life of travel at the Lord's people's expense?

Moreover, commendation is to the gospel. Medical work and homes for the orphans and aged are good and commendable in their place, but they are secondary and should not displace or assume greater emphasis than the gospel and establishing of New Testament assemblies. The Word of God knows nothing but commendation to the gospel.

Let us think now of

The Servant's Commission

With which he is entrusted. It has been observed in Matt. 28 that there are two commissions, a false one by the elders and priests of Israel to the soldiers and a true one by our risen Lord to the disciples. The soldiers were commissioned to preach a dead Christ, to preach a lie, and large money was promised them. The disciples were to preach a living Christ, to tell the whole truth, and not a word is mentioned of money. They were to go forth in dependence on Him, taking nothing from the Gentiles. They were taught to tell their needs to no one but Himself. What a contrast to present day methods. Often

needs are advertised in circular letters. Money looms large in so much of what is professedly the Lord's work. The path of faith that the servant was to walk is destroyed by a kind of professionalism.

The Scriptures designate those who serve the Lord as laborers. But the modern trend is otherwise. Are we degenerating to the level of the religious world which considers preaching to be a profession with a specific salary? Shame on any servant, whether at home or abroad, who leaves the path of faith to look to men. Let us remember that he who pays the piper will call the tune. To be bought with money means to be governed by the buyer.

There are three things joined in the Lord's commission that we dare not put asunder. They were to make disciples out of all nations. They were to mark disciples in the waters of baptism and they were to mold disciples by the teaching of the whole Word of God. This commission was carried out to the letter in the Acts of the Apostles: they made disciples (14:21 marg.), they baptized the converts (2:41; 8:12, 38; 9:18; 10:47; 16:15, 33; 18:8; 19:5), they established them in local assemblies. When they had taught the saints, they appointed elders in every church. Then they put the responsibility to function and witness on the shoulders of the converts and left them in order to allow the saints to work out their own salvation (Acts 14:23; Phil. 2:12). It is true that the apostles returned to minister to these assemblies, not to do their work for them, but rather, by their ministry and counsel, to equip them to do their own work better (Eph. 4:11-16).

Let us notice the four "Alls" in this commission. Our Lord said, "All authority is given unto Me." That means that He alone has the right to command, to control and constrain us. This authority He will not share with another. In the realm of a scripturally instructed conscience, Christ must reign supreme. "All nations" would suggest that the world is the parish of the Church. The gift of tongues in the early church was given as a sign to the Jewish nation that it had neglected to share the knowledge of God with "men of other tongues." The Church is now called to take its place as God's witness to men. We are now responsible to give to the people of every language the gospel in their own tongue. This is our debt to the world. We thank God that there is one thing the Church has excelled in above all others. It is in the learning of languages. Today the gospel goes out to all the world and the Word of God is translated into most languages.

"All things" suggests that the Word of God is the creed of the Church. It contains our marching orders. It alone is the guide as to how the work of God should be done. Paul said, "As a wise master builder I have laid the foundation" (1 Cor. 3). He was the superintendent of the blueprints. He saw the pattern of God's assembly at Corinth in laying the first stone. Elder brethren should be sure that each one commended to full-time service is acquainted with the pattern of the New Testament assembly. He should feel it his solemn responsibility, not only to preach the gospel, but to baptize the converts and gather them into scriptural assemblies. He should beware the snare of clericalism, "which thing the Lord hates." He should be sufficiently intelligent in the Word of God to teach the converts to assume responsibilities

in priesthood, ministry and eldership, and then get out of their road and let the faith of the saints work. Distinguished gift, we must emphasize again, is given, not to do the work of the saints for them, but to equip them to do their own work. A knowledge of this divine principle in the Lord's work would save us from the spirit and methods of the religious world and lead to healthier indigenous churches of the saints.

"All your days" vouchsafes to the Church the presence of her Lord until the day of her testimony is ended. In this lovely promise we have the companionship of a Friend, the watchfulness of a Guard and the guidance of an eye that neither slumbers nor sleeps.

Our closing reminder would be

The Servant's Subjection

The principles by which assemblies function can only operate aright when there is spirituality among the Lord's people. It is possible, and indeed happens, that because we have no board of directors or centralized body of men to control, those out in full time work have opportunity to become a law unto themselves. Therefore, in the absence of a tender conscience and personal devotedness to the Lord, one may make the preaching or missionary profession an excuse for a lazy, aimless existence. He can use the assemblies as a tramping ground for touring the world, with the Lord's people paying the expenses; or he may settle on a mission station to do nothing except to hinder the native believers from assuming their proper responsibilities in the local assemblies. Or he may become a weekend preacher with neither a burden for the lost nor a care for the weary and poor of the flock. Mr. Harold St. John

once said that when one is working for an earthly master he will give him at least eight hours a day and when one is working for our heavenly Master he should give Him no less. This Christian gentleman divided his own day into three parts: the morning for prayer, study and writing, the afternoon for visiting and the evening for preaching.

It is because the New Testament principles that guide the work of God as carried on by the assemblies can only work where there is godliness and spiritual intelligence, that assemblies should be doubly careful to see that only godly, devoted and indispensable servants should be released for full-time work. Trace the path of godly servants in the Book of Acts. It is indispensable men that are released in ch. 13:1-3. They did not make a tour to tell what they were going to do, but plunged right into the work of preaching the gospel and planting assemblies. Then after a while they returned to their home assembly to declare what the Lord had wrought (14:26, 27).

Follow their path and see how they were completely under the Spirit's control. "They were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the Word in Asia" (Acts 16:6). This teaches us that the need of any country does not constitute a call to go. Then, "The Spirit suffered them not" (v. 7). Then, "A vision appeared unto Paul in the night" (v. 9). Here doors close and open to them as they move in the path of the will of God. There are three conversions in our chapter that laid the foundation for the first assembly in Europe. Each soul needed a different approach. But men trained in soul-winning will find the approach to broken hearts. The first is the picture of a seeking soul (v. 14), the second a deceived

soul (vv. 16-18) and the third the out and out sinner (vv. 30, 31). Notice the equipment that was used in these conversions. In the first, the emphasis is on the Word of God; in the second, it is on the Name of Christ; in the third it is on the power of the Holy Spirit. Such equipment is better than Saul's armor to meet the giant that holds souls in bondage. We must let this emphasis remain on God's equipment for His servants. There can be no substitute for the Word of God, the authority of Christ, enshrined in His lovely Name, and the power of the Holy Ghost.

I shall close with these words of a devoted servant of Christ: "The want of the age is men. Men of thought. Men of action. Men who are not for sale. Men who are honest to the heart's core. Men who will condemn wrong, whether it be in friend or foe, in themselves or in another.

"Men whose consciences are as true as the needle of the compass is to the pole. Men who will stand for the right though they stand alone. Men who can tell the truth and can look the world right in the eye.

"Men whose courage comes from within and whose joy springs from the soul's deep fountain. Men through whom the current of everlasting life runs still and deep and strong. Men too large for certain limits and too strong for the bondage of men. Men who know their message and tell it. Men who know their place and fill it. Men who are not too lazy to work nor too proud to be poor. Men—real men—Men of God."

A Plea for Divine Simplicity

New Testament Assemblies

The great commission of our Lord, the four parts of which are seen in the last chapters of the four gospels, was threefold: the disciples were commissioned to preach the gospel and by the truth of the gospel, to make disciples out of all nations; they were to mark disciples in the waters of baptism and they were to mold disciples by the teaching of the whole Word of God.

The Book of Acts reveals how this was carried out. When souls were saved through the preaching of the gospel, they were baptized and gathered in congregations unto the precious Name of our Lord. The apostles never became pastors over each congregation but put the burden of responsibility on the shoulders of the converts. Then, as soon as possible, they moved on and allowed the faith of the saints to work.

There are three reasons for the planting of New Testament assemblies: worldward, they consolidated the gains of the gospel and became outposts for the further advancement of the gospel of Christ.

Churchward, they were to be places of holy concord where the saints could share their joys and sorrows. They were to be for mutual edification and care and the training ground for the development of spiritual gift and leadership.

Godward, they were to be little sanctuaries from which the incense of worship and praise would ascend continually.

By what names are they to be known?

There is one Divine principle that guides us in this. Any name or names that do not embrace the whole, is sectarian. Paul rebukes the Corinthians for factionalism when they said, "I am of Paul, and I am of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ." Each name only embraced each party, to the exclusion of all others.

The Spirit of God points to three serious sins that are committed in assuming unscriptural names: it is a sin against the Person of Christ, "Is Christ divided?" It is a sin against the work of Christ, "Was Paul crucified for you?" It is a sin against the Name of Christ, "Were ye baptized in the name of Paul?" (1 Cor. 1:10-13). The one Name of our glorious Lord is set over against all other names, as the only Name that can unite the saints in a practical way (v. 10). The truth of gathering in His Name alone, means to gather in subjection to the authority of Christ which is enshrined in that Name. There only can true unity be realized.

By what features are New Testament churches to be distinguished?

Let me point out a few.

1. By the weekly celebration of the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper was the center of the church life of the early saints. It was the hub from which all their activities radiated. Paul, by the Spirit, taught the Corinthians that in the Lord's Supper they expressed a fellowship (10:16-17); they proclaimed a fact (11:26); they remembered a Person (11:24); and they cherished the hope of the Lord's return (11:26).

It is this weekly feast that has preserved the assemblies from the apostasy of the religious world, for in it the Spirit of God interprets the meaning of the Cross every Lord's day.

In the early days of assembly testimony, godly saints recognized that a physical circle was a beautiful symbol of our gathering around our Lord Himself, and of His presence in the midst of His own. The seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3 formed a physical circle to give us the picture of our Lord in the midst of His own. Moreover, the physical circle lends itself to the type of meeting that we seek to conduct in the fear of God. We do not go to listen to a lecture where the seats are arranged for the audience to see a man on the platform or in a pulpit. We go to meet around Himself and where the Spirit of God has liberty to use the variety of priestly functions and spiritual gift, for the unfolding of the glories of Christ to every saint.

But the Devil could not leave these little companies alone. He hates Divine simplicity and Scriptural order. Today, some have an obsession to change everything. They seek to push the Lord's Supper into a corner and make it secondary to other things. As other things crowd in, the worship of the saints is disturbed. When the emblems are passed around, there is no time for that word of ministry, when the hearts of the saints, melted by the felt presence of the Lord, are ready to receive it. Some assemblies are getting used to going through the procedure without the Word of God being opened at all. This new emphasis has created a restlessness among the Lord's people so that, not infrequently, two or three hymns are given out, one after the other, with no exercise on the part of brethren to rise up and worship.

In many places the physical circle is destroyed. It is too much trouble to have to fix the seats for a more important meeting to follow. Thus the emphasis on the Lord's Supper is only superficial, compared to those early days when it was so precious to the hearts of God's people. A new generation has risen up, with its emphasis on youth and religious entertainment. Yet with all the unbounded activities among the young, there are few that come out with deeper convictions on the things of God and a deeper knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

2. The New Testament church was distinguished as the repository of Divine truth (1 Tim. 3:14-16). Truth is embodied in Christ, "the truth as it is in Jesus." It is enshrined in the Scriptures, "Thy word is truth," and entrusted to the church, "the pillar and ground of the truth." A casual acquaintance with the religious world will reveal that, in all, many truths are ignored or denied. Interdenominationalism exposes God's people to the errors of all. The safety of the assemblies lies in their separation. The role of the assemblies is to maintain a simple testimony to the whole truth of God. Only then will they become a haven of rest for weary saints, who, when tired of the whole sham and mixture, seek a resting place for their confused spirits.

3. Another mark is the freedom of the Holy Spirit to work. In His Sovereignty He imparts gift (1 Cor. 12:11), and in His freedom He uses it as He pleases (1 Cor. 14). In all ecclesiastical systems this important feature of the New Testament pattern is ignored. One, only, is recognized with the right to teach and to preach and that by human ordination. We must insist on the Spirit's unfettered activity in the assembly, if we are to keep to the New Testament order. Here again we must sound

the alarm among the people of God. Any professed assembly that appoints one man to be a pastor over them, runs contrary to the Word of God and challenges the Sovereignty of the Spirit of God in His own House. Pastors are shepherds and shepherds are overseers. These are appointed by the Holy Ghost and are in the plural in every New Testament church.

4. Another feature of early Christianity was government. Bishops, overseers, pastors, shepherds, elders, are names given to the men who take the oversight in God's assembly. These godly men give leadership to the Lord's people and carry out discipline whenever called for. Christendom is a far cry from this Divine pattern. Some, who never bought the truth, are prepared to sell it for an easy religious life. They speak now of appointing a pastor for each assembly, meaning, of course, that he will become preacher and teacher as well. They are willing to pay a good salary to a man who will do all their work for them. This is not just a change of method, it is an infringement of Divine principles and departure from the truth of God.

Today we have acquired great organizational ability until many godly saints wonder if the Spirit of God will be organized out of business. We are convinced that the Devil is setting up machinery in many companies of the Lord's people that will make it easy for their return to Babylon and be swallowed up in the ecumenical spirit of our age.

5. Another distinguishing mark of the early saints was a faithful presentation of the Gospel. In their preaching, sin was exposed, sinners were convicted and God's remedy for sin and the sinner was clearly presented.

Assemblies are compared to lampstands to shed the light of truth upon the darkened souls of men. Conversions were accompanied with repentance. Are we producing conversions today without repentance? Are we not too often satisfied with a wishy-washy, sentimental believism? In some places, with a program of chorus singing and a "hurrah-boy" display, the whole thing is geared to attract only children and imbeciles. Let us "quit ourselves like men and be strong." The dignity of the assembly can only be maintained by an intelligence in the truth of God. The Bible anticipates every age, and, if rightly interpreted, is more than a match for its opponents today. Let us establish ourselves in its blessed truths and, with humility and courage, carry the battle to the gate of the enemy. Let us equip our young people with the truth so that they will not be ashamed, in the college, the university or in the field of their profession. There is enough religious entertainment in the sects. Let the assemblies become in reality, "the pillar and the ground of the Truth."

6. Another mark of Divine simplicity was the autonomy of each assembly. Centralization, either of funds, government or teaching, is contrary to what is written. There is a fellowship of assemblies because we are sharers of the whole truth of God. We should refuse to adopt any silly methods in the work of God that would grieve and offend godly saints that are seeking to maintain Divine simplicity. But in government, every assembly stands upon its own base, responsible to the Lord alone. Therefore we must, in faithfulness to truth, set our faces against any attempt to centralize, whether in teaching, as in a Bible school, or government, as in a central oversight; or in funds, as in a missionary society.

Our path then is to walk apart from the religious world. Our aim should be to please our Lord alone and seek to reclaim a knowledge of the truth of God. Then when weary souls, tired of the sham and confusion of Babylon, seek rest, they will find in the assemblies of the Lord's people little "Bethlehems" where there is "bread enough and to spare" without the mixture of the notions of men.

Change and Decay

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We live in a world of change. Politically, socially and morally the world is changing. The spirit of Nationalism raises its head on every continent, resulting in dictatorial regimes, more cruel than the Colonial powers they displace. Morally the standards are lower than ever. Society is rotting at the core. Sin is not only condoned but endorsed. Every rule of decency is broken with shameless pride. The result is that chaos and disaster prevail on a universal scale. Leaders and statesmen are staggered as they see no way to stop the incoming tide of lawlessness which tends to overthrow the accepted standards of justice and decency.

It is a cause for alarm that this spirit of change, and to change, is insidiously creeping into the assemblies of the Lord's people. Ethical standards are lower than ever. That spiritual sensitiveness that recoils from everything that is low and mean and unjust is rare. The standard of appraisal is perverted by external criterions that fail to recognize the spiritual worth and godly character of saints.

To the spiritual and observant mind it is obvious that many of the changes taking place among us neither add to the dignity nor the unity of the testimonies that meet simply in the Lord's Name.

The principles of the New Testament assembly can only function properly when characterized by spirituality and simplicity. As spirituality wanes, godly simplicity is displaced by fleshly innovations which religiously

entertain and appeal to the carnal mind. Godly and exercised saints wonder where it will all end.

Enforcing many of these changes has not only caused friction and confusion among the saints but some of them infringe on divine principles and lead to the obliteration of those features that distinguish the New Testament Church. Let us think of some of these for the consideration and prayers of God's people. Think of the truth of

Administration

that God has entrusted to godly, matured and scripturally qualified overseers. In many places this has been displaced by the business meeting where every babe or novice has an equal voice. The spiritual judgment of godly, experienced shepherds is set aside for a system of voting that appeals to the worldly and untaught. When we examine the New Testament we learn that temporal problems as well as spiritual were put into the hands of matured and qualified men who had the confidence of the saints. We know of course that some men have used the truth of oversight to gain power

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deaconship, godliness and maturity are demanded by the Word of God and the saints are to acknowledge what the Holy Ghost has appointed. Then, consider the matter of

Spiritual Gift

Distinguished gift that may take on an itinerant nature is given, not to do the work of the saints, but to equip them

to do their own work (Eph. 4:11-12). Such men went forth to plant assemblies and to water them with periodic visits. Their aim was to establish the saints in the truth of God and foster the development of local gift; then leave them to function for the glory of God. When such men went into an assembly to remain for a year or two as Paul and others did it was for the purpose of defending the saints against the inroads of false doctrine or to guide them in the exercise of discipline or other serious matters. Not one of these men ever became evangelist, pastor and teacher to an assembly to the stifling of exercise of local gift. The assemblies of the New Testament were planted and watered by itinerant preachers who moved on and allowed the faith of the saints to work.

When the spirit of pioneering disappears and the assemblies become stopping places for the tourist and professional preacher, many of them with lesser gift than that possessed by the local assemblies they use along the way, then a spirit of laziness settles down in some meetings resulting in a craze to encourage young men, preferably with a college degree to become a pastor. The excuse is that such is needed to do the visiting in the neighborhood that brethren working with their hands have no time to do. But it invariably ends up with the pastor becoming evangelist and teacher as well. This leads to the discouragement of all local exercise, it feeds the spirit of laziness and has often led to division and confusion among the saints.

Another dangerous change today is associated with a change of emphasis on the importance of the Lord's supper. For many years the Lord's supper was considered by the godly as the most important meeting

of the saints. This emphasis was the secret of the preservation of assemblies from doctrinal error. At this meeting the physical circle was looked upon as the symbol of the Lord's presence in the midst of His gathered people and the Word of God was prominent, both in the worship of the saints and in exhorting to practical Christian living.

Today the emphasis is changing. Many are content to see such a meeting rushed through without the Word of God being opened to make room for other meetings to follow.

This lighter emphasis on the Lord's supper is much in evidence at times by some who will absent themselves from the feast, yet turn up at the second meeting to listen to a sermon or teach a Sunday School class.

Another change that is not for the good of the work of God is found in the Sunday School or the young people's meetings. The old fashioned children's hymns that built up a body of truth in the souls of the young have given place to chorus singing. Many of these are as empty and light as a feather and many downright silly and childish. Religious entertainment is edging out the Word of God and prayer. Are the golden shields of truth being replaced by shields of brass? Better dim gold than the shining brass of change and decay.

The perfect balance of experience and energy that should blend to the glory of God has been almost destroyed by a separation of the old from the young. Both sides perhaps are to blame. The old for failure to encourage and train the young in the ways of God and the young for cultivating a rebellious and independent spirit against the old. The steady hand of experience

should be on every meeting of the local assembly. Where this is not so, the tendency is to drift or fall apart.

We are not opposed to changes, provided they do not infringe on divine principles or destroy the dignity and reverence of the assembly. But we see nothing of God or of Christ in that ruthless determination to change everything and destroy the old land marks of assembly life and testimony.

Our need today is not more machinery or a ceaseless change of methods. We need God. For our poverty we need the gold of the knowledge of God; for our nakedness we need the character of Christ, and for our ignorance we need the eye salve or the intelligence of the Holy Spirit (Rev. 3). Without Him there is vacuum and defeat. With Him we can go forward to victory. It is for us to make our choice. Will it be machinery or God, religious externalisms or Christ, fleshly energy or the power of the Spirit of God? God help us all to bring Him into our lives, our homes and our assemblies and go forward with Him to meet the hostility of all our foes.