

Our Missionary Societies

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SOMETHING GOD DID NOT MAKE

The purpose of this discussion was to prove three things about all missionary societies, including our own *de facto* variety—namely, that they are economically unsound, spiritually dead, and scripturally impossible. This was predicated upon the golden triangle of personalities involved in all gospel work—God to be honored, the worker to be strengthened, and the unconverted to be saved. The order of consideration was reversed. It has been maintained that in so far as the unconverted are concerned, the society way does not get the job done economically, because it takes from one-third to two-thirds of the money contributed to the work to lubricate the machinery. It has been insisted that from the standpoint of those contributing, the society plan is as dead as a mackerel. It stirs no depths of interest and reflects no glow of animation in the doer of the work. In reserving the "scripturalness" of them until the last, the necessity of discussing that phase has almost been obviated. Can God be the author of a thing that is economically unsound and spiritually dead?

Societies are nothing but leaves, supplying a shielding shade for religious pride. "Clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots." And one of these days "every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up."

CROSS FENCES

Our missionary societies, in common with all others, are fence builders and fence riders. They are great classifiers, systematizers, and departmentalizers. They fence the kingdom of God off into various pastures. They make a map of it, and sell it out in lots. One line they run through the kingdom is marked by the missionary fence. All gospel work is missionary. To designate one phase of gospel work as missionary to the exclusion of all the rest is illogical and utterly without excuse. It corrupts our speech and perverts our thinking. Faults in thinking lead to accidents in performance. Building cross fences in the kingdom of God can produce no good, and it will bear fruit in evil. We ought to keep our speech pure, and all talk about mission work and missionaries is definitely impure speech. The fences should be torn down and the material carted away.

The society runs another line across the kingdom of God, separating general and local work. This is seen when an effort is made to harmonize gospel work by the direction of the elders of the congregation, and gospel work directed by missionary societies. J. W. McGarvey, one of the greatest scholars of the Restoration Movement, made a heroic effort to square his teachings on society work with what he had previously written about the field and function of the eldership, but failed. (See Gospel Advocate, 1891.) It was an impossible task.

The congregation is the only functioning unit of the kingdom, and the whole world is its field. Even when we say that there are two scriptural units for work, the individual and the congregation, there are certain reservations implied. Practically, the individual can function as such; but theoretically, he is under the direction of the elders. Where the elders know the individual and the individual knows the elders, he can do much practical work without first calling the elders together for discussion. But if the work he does runs counter to scriptural teaching, the individual as a functioning unit vanishes.

Work done through missionary societies is not being done either as an individual or as a congregation. The

society, being larger than a congregation, cannot be subject to the elders. The society usurps the field of general work, circumscribing the elders to the work in their own community. If the society can usurp one territory, why cannot it usurp another? There is a strong tendency for it to do so. Sooner or later it invades the sacred precincts, where it first admitted that the elders ruled, and virtually dictates the affairs of the congregation. Given a free hand, it would make every congregation merely a tool of the society.

But our societies actually hide behind the skirts of a congregation, to organize a missionary society. That cannot help them, for a congregation has no right to operate a missionary society. It has no right to plan and execute a work to be done by the whole brotherhood. There is no scriptural precedent for a congregation sending messengers to another congregation to raise money. The messengers of the Macedonian churches were selected for one thing—namely, to carry their contribution to Jerusalem. Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, requisitioned them and sent them under his own apostolic authority to Corinth to assist Titus. And while Titus, so far as his attitude was concerned, "went of his own accord," from the standpoint of authority, he went under the cloak of Paul's apostleship. Why should one congregation presume to send messengers to churches of equal rank and order to tell them what they should do? What does the sending church have that the other churches do not have? Our societies cannot borrow authority from a sponsoring congregation, nor from any other source, for the work they do. It is utterly without authority or excuse.

THEY ENCOURAGE REBELLION

They are amphibious and carnivorous. They simply cannot be discouraged. They are often cast down, but not destroyed. They bear in their bodies the marks of professional beggars. I believe that it was Cæsar who said that all Gaul was divided into three parts, but it was still—*all' Gaul!* If the Spirit-appointed overseers refuse to receive them, do they respectfully bow to their authority and go on to other fields? They do not! They may go out at the front door, but they sneak around to the back, flatter the lambkins, and come up with a children's Bible class transformed into a unit of a missionary society!

They presume upon the courtesy of the congregation, but show none in reciprocation. They make their appeal to denominational pride, with seasick visions of what "our missionaries" are doing. They appeal to the sense of sportsmanship, letting their own uninvited presence force the issue. Would they lord it over the churches if they could? The only evidence needed is the roughshod manner in which they override the judgment of the elders and impose themselves upon the membership. In the name of the salvation of lost souls, *they are sowing the seeds of rebellion in the congregation which they visit!*

In their adamant code of ethics there is no such thing as courtesy; their vocabulary has no such word as "modesty." True, theirs is a hard task; but it is so utterly useless! A professional beggar suffers humiliation. Eventually he loses his stage fright. He becomes seared as with a hot iron. Then his modesty goes. And finally he loses all respect for his audience. He has but one rule of soundness, one test of fellowship—subscriptions for his scheme. His "cause" becomes the only consideration. Those who subscribe are suckers, and those who refuse are skinflints. Respect for congregational authority? No society has respect for congregational authority. It stands in its way. Sooner or later congregational

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The Return of Our Lord

BATSELL BAXTER

That our Lord is to come again is a matter of faith with everyone who believes that he is our Lord. He plainly says in the Scriptures that he will come again. When the Lord talked with his disciples on the night he was betrayed, he said: "I will come again." This settles the matter with all who believe in him. As he was ascending to heaven, the angels announced to his disciples: "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." (Acts 1: 11.)

WHAT HE WILL DO

What will the Lord do when he comes again? This is a question that has agitated the minds of professed followers of Christ ever since he went away. "I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." (John 14: 3.) Note, he does not say, "Where you are, there will I be"; but, "Where I am, there ye may be also." He does not come to earth to live with us; we go where he is to live with him, in the place that he is preparing for us. This place is "in my Father's house." (Verse 2.)

WHAT IS JESUS DOING?

Many controversies have arisen about what Jesus is doing now. The Scripture plainly states what he is doing. He told his disciples: "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you." That is one thing Jesus is doing—preparing a place for his disciples, so that we may live with him. He is reigning over his kingdom (the church) at the Father's right hand. He is reigning on the throne of David. God had sworn with an oath to David that he would raise up one to sit on his (David's) throne. Jesus is also receiving our prayers at the throne of grace. (Heb. 4: 14, 15.)

PLAIN SCRIPTURE STATEMENTS

But do the Scriptures say that Jesus is reigning on the throne of David? The Scriptures say that in plain words: "Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him [David], that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; he seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption." (Acts 2: 30, 31.) The Scripture plainly says that this has its fulfillment in the resurrection and exaltation of Christ. "This Jesus hath God raised up"; "Being therefore by the right hand of God exalted"; "God hath made" him "both Lord and Christ." (Verses 32-36.)

IN SO MANY WORDS

"But," says one, "do the Scriptures anywhere say that Jesus is reigning now? Do the Scriptures plainly say how long he will reign? Do they say what he will do when he ceases to reign?" Yes, plainly, "in so many words." "Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all." (1 Cor. 15: 24-26, 28.)

SOME PLAIN STATEMENTS

Peter plainly states that Jesus is reigning now upon the throne of David. Paul plainly states that Jesus will continue to reign until he has put all his enemies under

his feet; that when this has been accomplished, Jesus will deliver the kingdom back to God. Paul plainly states that this will be when Jesus has abolished death. Then, instead of the Lord's reign coming after the resurrection of his saints, the Scripture plainly states that it will cease at that time. The Lord is reigning now.

AT GOD'S RIGHT HAND

"But," says one, "how can Jesus be at God's right hand—at the right hand of the throne of God—and at the same time be reigning on the throne of David? If Jesus is at the right hand of God, is not God doing the reigning?" God is reigning over the universe, as he has always reigned. Jesus is reigning over his own kingdom which is the church. At the resurrection Jesus will deliver his kingdom back to the Father that God may be all in all. (1 Cor. 15: 28.) We are in that kingdom now if we are Christians—in "the kingdom of the Son of his love." (Col. 1: 13.)

WHAT SPECIAL PROVISION?

"But," says one, "is there no special opportunity to evangelize the world after the coming of Christ; is there no special opportunity for the unrighteous dead to accept Christ?" No, the only opportunity to accept Christ is while we live—before we die. "It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this cometh judgment." (Heb. 9: 27.) "Marvel not at this: for the hour cometh, in which all that are in the tombs shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment." (John 5: 28, 29.)

DEEDS DONE IN THE BODY

Our final destiny depends upon what we do while we live in the flesh. "For we must all be made manifest before the judgment-seat of Christ; that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad." (2 Cor. 5: 10.) The Scripture speaks of the time "when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day." (2 Thess. 1: 7-10.)

SOME SUMMARIZING THOUGHTS

We have learned from the Scriptures that Jesus has been reigning on the throne of David since the day of Pentecost; Jesus will continue to reign until he comes at the resurrection; Jesus will then return the kingdom to God; Jesus is preparing mansions for us "in my Father's house"; when he comes, Jesus will take us to be with him; at his coming we will be judged according to the deeds done in the body.

Our Missionary Societies

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authority must bow, if the society survives. Autonomy relinquished at the point of courtesy is just as definitely gone as if it were ground beneath the steam roller of a powerful missionary society—one that visibly and vocally proclaims that it is a society!

Away with such a sinister influence in the churches of Christ! Missionary societies by sufferance! Missionary societies by affliction! Missionary societies by outraged courtesy!