

## **SOME SIGNS WHICH SHOW THAT MANY CHURCHES OF CHRIST HAVE LOST THE PRIMITIVE SIMPLICITY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT PATTERN**

1. In many churches of Christ there is a great emphasis on "materialism" -- a sign that the times in which we live has a stronger influence upon God's people than does the word of God. Jesus warned against this when He said, "*No man can serve two masters; or else he will hold to one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.*" (Matt. 6:24).

One outstanding example to show that materialism has a strong influence upon many of God's people is the meeting houses that are being built today. These meeting houses are very elaborate "show-places" in the community, costing twice to four times that which was need for them to be comfortable and adequate. Many times these houses are twice as large as was really needed to serve the congregation because there was no potential in the community for such growth as it would take to fill them. Sometimes we find two congregations almost in the same community with these over-sized buildings. When this happens, it becomes evident to any observer that if one of the buildings is filled, the other will go half empty. The spirit of materialism that brought these large "show-places" into existence to begin with is the same carnal spirit that will (and does) bring about rivalry between congregations to fill the buildings. This brings about a sad situation when there is continual "proselyting" of members from one congregation to another just to satisfy some preacher's pride or an eldership's pride -- all of which could have been avoided to begin with if the preacher and (or) the elders had denied their pride and taken a realistic view of the situation and their potential for growth.

Another sign of "materialism" and "sectarianism" in connection with these "show-places" is the decoration that is found on them. They are decorated with symbols of the "nations round about" --steeple and crosses! Were it not for the sign out front, one would conclude that it belonged to the First Baptist of the Methodist group. I was taught as a "boy preacher" that the people of God preached the cross -- they did not display it! That made a lot of sense to me then, and it does now!

There are some things we need to keep in mind when it comes to meeting houses: In apostolic days the church of the New Testament did not evangelize the Roman world through the instrumentality of fine meeting houses. The place of meeting (which is authorized - Heb. 10:25) is not the subject of emphasis in the New Testament. Little is said in either sacred or profane history about the places in which the early church met. Also, remember that, according to reliable church history, the seeds of the great apostasy had been sown before the construction of fine meeting houses began. And brethren, never forget that fine meeting houses are no indication of deep consecration and spirituality, nor are they an acceptable substitute for the inner graces of the child of God. The church of Christ in any community should be a million times more interested in building Christian character than in building fine meeting houses!

When a jeweler has a fine diamond -- one without flaw -- he sets it in a very plain band so that its beauty will not be detracted from by the setting. But when he has a very small diamond -- with flaws-- he puts it in an elaborate setting so the diamond can hardly be seen. So it is with God's people when they have the truth and are endeavoring to practice it with all their being. The place they meet is secondary because the thing they want people to see is the truth -- and they want others to enjoy the same relationship with God that

they do. However, when God's people lose their spirituality and fail to hold on to all the truth, they must attract people with something else -- part of that something else is an elaborate meeting house!

2. In many churches of Christ New Testament teaching has been diluted and watered-down until it has lost its power. The teaching of Christ is revolutionary, disturbing and demanding. His gospel draws sharp and clear distinctions between the true and false, the right and wrong (II Cor. 6: 14 - 17). Gospel truth can be diluted in two areas: (1) manner of life, and (2) form of doctrine. Many churches of Christ are so denominational in practice that they are not going to draw a sharp distinction between the New Testament church and denominationalism. The world has so invaded many churches that they dare not let the preacher (even if he wants to) speak against such things such as adulterous marriage, immodest dress (shorts, hot-pants, skin-tight pants, bikini bathing suits and mixed swimming), social drinking, cheating in business, dancing and vulgar talk!

3. The extension of individual and group power is another sign that many churches have lost the primitive simplicity of the New Testament pattern. Men hunger for power and search for ways to increase that power (Mark. 10: 35 - 45). This has been a problem from the beginning of the church (III John 9 - 10). The extension of power appears in three forms: (1) An organization may be established to which many congregations contribute their money and turn over a certain part of their work. The officials of such an organization assume improper authority and control over these churches. (2) Men of unusual energy achieve personal power and extend it over the churches and preachers. This is done by these men developing instruments for the effective wielding of this power (such as a school or paper). These men with their "instruments of power" may become the dominant influence on the church over a large area -- including many churches and preachers. The condemnation or censure from one of these "seats of power" has more influence over these churches than does Jesus Christ! (II Thess. 2:4). (3) Many times a gifted evangelist harmfully extends his power. Congregations become so filled with "hero-worship" for a certain preachers that his word becomes law (I Cor. 4:6).

4. Many churches of Christ have become concerned with large group programs and brotherhood programs. They are more interested in big inter-congregational programs of work than they are in the Lord's plan for each congregation to do its own work of edifying (building character), preaching the simple gospel to the lost, and doing its own benevolent work. Modern churches and their preachers have despised the day of small things (Zech. 4:10) !

5. In many churches today there is a decreased emphasis on a "thus saith the Lord". Peter said, "*If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God;*" (I Pet. 4: 11). This should be the cornerstone principle of all preaching and teaching, but it is a principle that too many preaches have gotten away from! Many use human reason and logic in their preaching to prove the rightness or wrongness of a thing and hardly ever turn to the word of God! As a result of this kind of preaching, the general thinking of members of the church is guided by the opinions of men -- chiefly preachers (I Cor. 4:6) ! Therefore, their faith stands in the wisdom of men and not in the power of God (I Cor. 2:5). The church can only be strong when preachers use the Bible as their authority for being for or against a thing. Let us prove all things by God's word !

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