

PRESENT TRUTH

A Teaching Letter of Lifestream Teaching Ministries

For this reason I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, though you know and are established in the present truth. (2 Peter 1:12 NKJV)

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Schismatics

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Introduction

I have been teaching a series on the Book of Revelation and we just finished the section on the Seven Churches of Asia described in the first three chapters of the book. This led to discussion and thinking about the Church and what it means to be a “lampstand” church, which is what the seven are called in Revelation. Jesus makes it clear to the church of Ephesus that He can remove their “lampstand”, indicating that they would no longer be a church if He did so.

The Church in Ephesus was a great “defender of the faith”. As the original Apostles died, many heresies from false teachers and false apostles began coming into the Church. Jesus does not condemn them for exposing the darkness. He even says that they worked hard at doing that. What He does have against them is that they lost their primary focus—they left their first love and no longer did the deeds that they did previously. In other words, they concentrated so much on defending the faith and exposing the false that they neglected their primary directive or work. This was serious enough that Jesus said that if they didn't get back into balance and re-focus on their primary work, He would remove their lampstand; that is, they would cease to be a Church before Him.

Since this is so serious and has application to us, we should ask ourselves, “what does it mean to leave our first love and what type of deeds should we be doing?” This is actually quite simple; but, we have complicated the simplicity of Christ with too much activity. What did Jesus give us as our primary directive?

Matthew 28:19-20 NASB "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, (20) teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

We call this “the Great Commission” but we have forced our understanding of this into too small of a mold. We are not to make “converts” but we are to make “disciples”. That is our primary objective, our “first” work—evangelism and discipleship.

According to Jesus' commission, making disciples involves two things: baptizing and teaching, We are to teach them to observe all the commands of the Lord. This continues to the end of the age.

What is the primary commandment of the Lord? He called it a new commandment—that we love one another as He has loved us. If we are out of balance in our defending the faith, we have lost the love that we should have for one another and this was the problem of the Church of Ephesus.

It is when we are contending for the faith, arguing over doctrine that we produce division and schisms among the believers. I am not saying that we should ignore false teaching because we shouldn't; however, we should be able to examine the scriptures and by the leading of the Holy Spirit come to mutual understanding of doctrine.

Unity

We have the erroneous idea that “unity” is something that we create by compromising our beliefs or doctrines so that we can all get along. That is far from the truth. Paul makes it clear.

Ephesians 4:1-3 NASB Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, (2) with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, (3) being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

We already have unity of the Spirit. We received unity when we received the Holy Spirit. However, we must be diligent to preserve it, to keep it. The natural man does not walk in the Spirit and cannot keep the unity of the Spirit. As long as we operate from the natural man we will create schisms and divisions. And that is where the problem is with the modern church.

Paul went on to mention seven areas of unity that we should preserve in the Spirit.

Ephesians 4:4-6 NASB *There is* one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; (5) one Lord, one faith, one baptism, (6) one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

I believe that every schism that we have in the church has come about because of a doctrinal argument dealing with some element of one of these seven areas of unity.

In the book of Acts we see the Enemy immediately begin to try to disrupt the unity of the early believers in three primary ways:

1. Over doctrine—whether circumcision was a requirement or not
2. Over care/ministry—the widow's supply and prejudiced distribution
3. Over personalities—I am of Peter, of Apollos, of Paul, etc.

We have continued to divide over these same three areas until we have the thousands of denominations that exist today.

This raises a very important question. Since the Lord has given us these seven areas of unity and we are consistently dividing and dividing rather than unifying, does the Lord consider anything that we have today to be a “lampstand” church? Then the follow-up question, if you are not a lampstand church are you a church at all?

These are serious questions that I believe we are going to have to answer.

Schisms

The history of the people of God is a history of division. Paul labeled this “carnal or soulish” thinking.

1 Corinthians 1:10-13 NASB (10) Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment. **(11)** For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's *people*, that there are quarrels among you. **(12)** Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of Christ." **(13)** Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

1 Corinthians 3:4-5 NASB (4) For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not *mere* men? **(5)** What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave *opportunity* to each one.

We have done the same thing with our natural carnal thinking. Only we say, “I am a Baptist”, “I am a Methodist”, “I am a Presbyterian”, “I am Church of Christ”. What is the difference between what we are saying and what the Corinthians were saying?

The people of God have become “schismatics” and it seems to be continually getting worse. Here is how Webster's Dictionary defines the word”

Source: *Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary (1913)*

Schismatic \Schis*mat"ic\ adj -- Of or pertaining to schism; implying schism; partaking of the nature of schism; tending to schism; as, schismatic opinions or proposals.

Schismatic \Schis*mat"ic\ n.-- One who creates or takes part in schism; one who separates from an established church or religious communion on account of a difference of opinion.

From this definition it appears to me that the people who formed their various denominations were all schismatic in nature. The question is “where is the original church?” Have the divisions proliferated to the point the we can't locate the original?

Even during the days of the Apostles there were the beginnings of divisions and schisms. However, the real church with Christ as the Head continued to grow. through the work of the Holy Spirit. The turning point seems to be about the time of Constantine when the church became an official state sponsored religion. For all practical purposes the Emperor Constantine became the head of the “official church”, immediately making it a false church. He called together councils to decide doctrinal disputes which made him the judge to determine doctrine and structure. The resulting Catholic Church-State had little resemblance to the true Church of the Lord. making it a false system of religion. The Protestant Reformation caused many to split off of the Catholic Church-State system and attempt to restore some lost truths. However, if you divide from a false system and yet still maintain the basic foundational structure of the false and do not return to the original, you are a false system yourself. This is what has happened as

schism after schism has occurred.

It is my opinion that this Catholic Church-State is referred to as “Mystery Babylon” in the Book of Revelation and she is the “Mother of Harlots” which appears to me to be the various denominations of the protestant reformation. That is why God says “come out of her My people”. Many of the people of God are held captive within the harlot system; however, the harlot system is NOT the Church.

So, where is the Church, the real Church? Where are the “lampstands” in our cities? I must say that in my little town of about fifteen thousand people with over 70 “churches” there is not any assembly that appears to be a “lampstand” church. Each one is a division, a schism from the original or from a schism of a schism.

The Lord who is the Head of His Church, who is the one who is building His Church, establishes “lampstands” or removes “lampstands”. I don't think that the Lord will make any group of believers a “lampstand” if they don't operate under His Lordship or on the basis of the whole Body. The Lord will not allow sectarianism. When the Lord looks at my little town, He doesn't see 70 “churches”; He only sees His Church. At least, I hope He sees His Church. While there may be quite a number of believers here, they may not have been built into His Church. They may only be piles of living stones rather than a built together Temple of the Lord.

We need to give some serious thought to this and what it means to us and to the Lord. Have we allowed traditions to frustrate the work of the Lord? Have we fallen for a religious system, a structure with a form of religion but denying the power of the Spirit? Do we need to repent of our divisions, our sectarianism? Do we need to cry out to the Lord to build us together; make us the real thing?

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