

BRETHREN AND PENTECOSTALS

Decline in Brethren Assemblies and upsurge in Pentecostals.

An investigation

Various contributors

One of the current trends among some Christians, and in the world itself, is that Brethren Assemblies and/or Plymouth Brethren Assemblies, are getting fewer and fewer in number and are subject to hostility. Many meetings are closing down and others have a very few in attendance with sisters who have their hair up in buns and they must wear hats as it is sarcastically reported, as is the equally unkind statement that they also have a few old brothers who take the meetings while the frumpy sisters sit in silence.

Some people highlight the strange behaviour of some of the very exclusive and extreme brethren who can only marry within their group and that television, sport and having a pet is not allowed and so on. Although these are extreme views, they are not about doctrine. It certainly does not mean that all brethren are like this. They are not, but many brethren seem to be subject to criticism which is often hostile and unfair.

These criticisms are amplified by comments that the local Elim Pentecostal and charismatic churches have large congregations, lively songs, dancing, raised hands, speaking in tongues and it is said that these types of churches are vibrant and fun. The dancers are pretty girls and the pop group consist of handsome young men wearing modern gear which might include a Dr Who tee shirt and torn jeans and hats !... nothing like the handful of brethren who go to the Gospel Hall.

Everyone is said to be welcome at Elim, but it is claimed that this is not so at the brethren. People complain that there you may have to be vetted and bring a letter of introduction. At Elim, or any charismatic house fellowships, they have the 'advantages' of many social gatherings which are fun and they might even have a football team.

It is up to each individual to make their own choices, of course, but there are some vital things to consider.

Does a Christian live by and follow the Bible? It is a rhetorical question. Of course they should, and they must.

This being so, then doctrine is vital. For example, one doctrine of the Bible is that Jesus Christ is the Saviour of all who accept Him as such. Another doctrine is that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. Doctrine is vital.

Both church and modern worship cannot embrace or have false doctrine, but some do and this is said here not in judgment or in any offensive way but in truth and, we hope, in love. The writers of this article are not perfect by any means!

Elim Pentecostals and charismatics have doctrines and, at least, two of them are not Biblical and therefore, erroneous. In their doctrinal statement, it reads that the evidence that you are baptised in the Holy Spirit is that you speak in tongues, and some say that until you speak in tongues you are not saved. I have heard this preached in Elim churches.

The apostle asks, Do all speak in tongues? (1 Cor 12.30). If the answer were yes, he would not have asked it. He also makes it clear that there are a variety of gifts and not everyone has the same gift (1 Cor 12. 8 etc.)

A friend got up and spoke in tongues in an Elim church and another interpreted it as a direct message of Biblical purport. What this friend did was to speak in Polish, his native tongue, about his recent holiday in Switzerland. There are many other examples of this type of fraud. Perhaps he should not have done this, but it showed that the interpretation was both untrue and false.

Another case was when a plot was overheard before a meeting. Someone was to speak in tongues and a chosen interpreter was to stand up and interpret that previous speaking in tongues as the Lord had instructed Mrs Jones to give her brand new piano to the Sunday School. Mrs Jones knew nothing about this.

The other false doctrine of Pentecostals is that healing is included in the atonement. The atonement is that Jesus died for our sins according to the Scriptures, but now some state emphatically that He also died for the common cold, cancer, heart disease or indigestion. Many Pentecostals state that healing for all illness is included in the atonement and that is in their doctrinal statement, and, if you are not healed, it is your fault because of your lack of faith.

The apostle Paul had some infirmity, a so-called thorn in the flesh, whatever that was (2 Cor 12. 7) but he was not healed. Timothy apparently had a weak stomach (1 Tim 5.23). He was not healed and so the doctrine ' Healing for all conditions is included in the atonement ' is further shown to be untrue.

The Lord did not die for my diabetes!

The extreme exclusive brethren are wrong about keeping pets etc but these are not Biblical doctrines and they do not contradict anything that the Bible says, whereas the Pentecostals do.

However, we have had many dealings with the Brethren and have not found any false doctrine with them but, rather, a loyalty to the Scriptures. It has to be said that some disagree on certain issues but not on the fundamental doctrines. But as the charismatic leader, Michael Harper, wrote, ' Doctrine is not important; only love is. '

There is a warning in the last chapter of the Bible that we are not to add to the Scriptures (Revelation 22. 18) and Paul writes to Timothy that in the last days false doctrines will ensnare many and it is happening now (2 Tim 4.3). We have false teachers and preachers in some churches who thrive on razzmatazz and entertainment. We remember a Pentecostal preacher in Bradford saying that at the age of 54, he was, at long last, potty trained!

As to lifestyle in the church, worship, according to the Bible, must be presented as reverent and quiet. God is not worshipped with hands and so the raising of hands as practised in many Pentecostal churches has no Biblical authority whatsoever, neither has dancing. It is claimed that, as David danced before the Lord, that makes it acceptable, but what David did was vile displaying himself even before young girls, and even he admitted it to be so. It is argued, and we have heard it said, that if the Lord came back today he would dress scruffily and strum a guitar or bang on the drums in a Christian rock or pop group. We cannot see the holy Son of God doing this.

It is constantly said that the only way to get young people into churches is by using methods that are on their wavelength such as pop music and dance. Many who go to such places of worship enjoy it and say, ' It is as good as a pop concert on the telly and great fun and entertainment. '

Some of the modern worship songs are also erroneous such as, We are going to lift Jesus higher. That cannot be. He is already in the highest place there can be. There are worship songs about dancing which, in view of what we have said, may well be unwise. We could quote many examples of false theology in modern songs of worship. Here are some phrases from such song:

Being myself in the Lord.

Have you ever felt you wanted to touch the brother next to you ?

As we worship we build a throne for You.

Teach me to dance to the beat of your heart.

The pop music culture has infiltrated modern worship and the modern church. Of course, we can understand this style receiving enthusiastic response from some people, just as when your favourite team scores a winning goal. People who like this type of music will respond favourably to this style and they will probably not consider any other argument. But your taste in music should not take preference over doctrine. And, to be fair, we can understand that old fashioned music such renaissance, baroque and Victorian anthems in our big city churches will not suit everybody.

You can detect and sometimes hear what is being said, 'Those three elderly people who go to the Brethren meeting are so sad, and so behind the times and, by comparison, look at the Pentecostal church which is full up and successful achieving so much, unlike that decrepit trio who are achieving nothing'. Then other comments are made such as, 'The brethren think they are the only ones who are right and the only ones who preach the Gospel.'

Arthur Cundall in his excellent exposition of the prophet Isaiah comments on Chapter 50 in which a few people respond to the prophet's appeal but are appalled at the smallness of their number. A E Cundall makes the valid point that numbers are not everything and the Lord assures the few of His faithfulness towards them. In Zechariah, we are told not to despise the day of small things (Zechariah 4. 10).

That Brethren think that they are the only people who are right is not so. The reverse is true. Pentecostals and charismatics are on record saying that they are the only ones who are right and they add that this is evidenced by their being the fastest growing churches and fellowships in the world.

Some of their leaders have actually said, 'Only we have the whole truth.' One such leader said, 'Only the young people have the answers.'

The majority of frauds are in Pentecostal and charismatic leaders and this is frightening. Aimee Semple MacPherson wanted a telephone in her coffin so she could phone God when she was dead ; Lonnie Fisher condemned homosexuality and yet that is what he was; Marjoe Gortner manipulated money from audiences; Billy James Hargis was self-promoting and involved in sex scandals with both male and female students, and Jimmy Swaggart preached morality and yet had many affairs including some with prostitutes. There are many more.

And we hear of Catholic priests who abuse children!

There is a ridiculous notion that all Christians must be perfect.

It may seem unfair to mention these people and, of course, there are crooks in other denominations, and in many secular walks of life, and, in the exclusive brethren, there were the two Taylors who were outrageous.

Brethren assemblies are reducing in numbers because people probably do not value God or the Lord Jesus. They turn their backs on doctrine, or they came into the assemblies because of family connections. Some may have been treated unwisely by the elders, and traditionalism is now unacceptable and a thing of the past. Some believe that assemblies run on autopilot. True adherence to the Scriptures has worked well in the past but it is said that it does not work anymore. These are the conclusions in a recent article in the magazine, Precious Seed. There are also personality clashes and some want to build empires of their own. But these problems exist in many denominations. We have seen power struggles in some churches. The Pentecostals are free and easy, while the brethren are sometimes considered to be too strict on doctrine but, as doctrine is vital, we cannot see that this is wrong.

The New Testament speaks of the day when people will not endure sound doctrine but be taught and believe fables, turning away from the truth (2 Tim 4. 3ff). They will embrace teachers with false doctrines having itching ears. Something new and/or interesting will always have adherents. Modern teaching and practice are in the ascendancy while traditional truth is in decline.

No wonder it is asked that when the Lord returns will He find faith on the earth ? (Luke 18.8).

The day may be coming when there will be no assemblies and those who love the truth may have difficulty finding a comparative place of worship. This will be very distressing and lonely.

We trust that this essay will be regarded as fair since that is our only purpose. There are many Pentecostals who faithfully preach the Gospel and this must always be well-spoken of. We have met many who are truly lovely people and we are also aware of some Pentecostals who reject the doctrines of speaking in tongues and also reject that healing is included in the atonement and we rightly honour them.

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