

IS THERE SECTARIANISM IN THE BRETHREN?

F B Hole

F B Hole talks and writes in Assembly Principles about those in brethren assemblies who meet to remember the Lord in accordance with the New Testament pattern and, as consequence, it is very easy for them to slip into sectarianism which is an adherence to a particular set of views which gives qualification for membership and, as a result, how this increases some to be externally separated from the great mass of believers. The danger of sectarianism can be increased by the greater knowledge of Scripture which may be used or abused as it was with the Corinthian church especially over gifts. Scriptural knowledge can be misused and can become the badge of a sect which therefore becomes sectarian and, consequently, light becomes darkness. In order to have fellowship with such people you have to give credit to and accept their interpretation of Scripture as they see it. If not, such groups will not receive saints and their membership or association is ruled out. Some regard this as their holiness and justification of dismissing or excommunicating those who may not hold their views. They stress that they are preserving truth and maintaining holiness by the exclusion of those who may not agree with all they assert and therefore they become ultra-exclusive and independent.

The Church is the Body of Christ into which all believers have come. It is not a minority group who alone has all the truth exclusively. It must not be a minority group standing on its own for that is a practise not authorised by Scripture.

Within such groups extravagant and unscriptural discipline is exercised. Nothing is fiercer than party spirit and often the most severe position is taken which is in conflict with pastoral care and love. This creates division and minor points are elevated to be of such importance that they become an essential badge of fellowship. Secondary doctrine is often elevated to be primary and essential doctrine and, sometimes, a secondary doctrine becomes an essential qualification for membership and so a sect is formed. Confusion is caused and there is ill health and worry and some depart from the faith they once professed. Anything that turns a saint away from the Lord is a grievous sin and to bar genuine saints from fellowship is also sinful. It is one thing to discipline saints over immorality or some serious misbehaviour but we are not to judge them if they do not believe the doctrines and practise we invent which are not blatantly obvious in the Scripture.

If a sister does not wear a hat at meetings is that an essential doctrine to be applied vigorously? If a brother believes that the church will go through the Great Tribulation is that primary doctrine and just cause to excommunicate him or discipline him? If a brother believes in the Trinity and the Deity of Christ but may express it in something other than Brethren jargon is he to be disciplined?

Our walking with saints is to be in a general way and if they all have a pure heart then that is the basis of fellowship one with another. Much is made of the verse about how can two walk together unless they be agreed? The important issues are the inspired Word of God, the salvation provided in the Lord Jesus, His Coming again, eternal destinies, the Trinity and the Deity of Christ and so on. To this must be added living the life that pleases God,

There are those who make a firm stand on non-association with evil and falsely apply this to those who do not believe everything that they themselves believe and assert that all their doctrines are right and all members must adhere to them.

The evils are set out in 2 Timothy 2;
profane and vain babblings
iniquity
flee youthful lusts
foolish and unlearned questions

And the people who practise these things we must turn away from.

However, some brethren will say that iniquity is when others do not believe all the variations which they uphold strongly.

In the Old Testament iniquity is crookedness and perverseness. In the New Testament it is worthlessness, vanity, naughtiness, mischief, lawlessness, one without law, evil. Some times the word sin is used and sin is a deliberate disobedience against God Himself.

Is a hatless sister performing iniquity? Is a brother who believes that the saints are going through the Great Tribulation guilty of iniquity? Surely not!

In the 1930s, some brethren developed or established a new doctrine based on a tract by J N Darby which is not in his hand or signed by him and considered to be fraudulent. It was found in 1938, fifty six years after his death. If that doctrine is a primary and essential doctrine it would not have been established in the 1930s as an essential doctrine or at any other time. It would have already been known in the fourth century and proclaimed even earlier.

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