

Following the Man With a Pitcher of Water

by C.A. Coates

The sermon emphasizes the importance of recognizing the universal unity of the one body and following righteousness, faith, love, peace, and separation from evil.

Scripture: Proverbs 3:5, Matthew 18:20, John 16:13, 1 Corinthians 12:13, 1 Thessalonians 5:21, Hebrews 10:25

Topics: "Church Unity", "Spiritual Discernment"

Description

C.A. Coates preaches about the importance of recognizing the truth of the one body in the fellowship of saints, emphasizing the universal unity of believers and the vital organic unity that transcends local assemblies. He discusses the historical context of breaches among brethren, caused by introducing contrary principles or refusing light from the Lord, leading to permanent separations. Coates advises seeking spiritual discernment through personal communion with the Lord to understand where the Lord is and where souls are truly gathered to His name.

Transcript

9 October 1934.

Dear brother in the Lord,

I am interested to have your letter, and to know something of your exercises before the Lord. I feel assured that He will help you, as you continue to seek Him about the matter, and will give you light as to the path in which He would have you to walk.

I am glad that you have arrived at a definite judgment as to the failure of Open Brethren to recognise the truth of the one body in its practical bearing on the fellowship of saints. This will make your way clear as to continuing association with them and it will also help you much in regard to other difficulties which beset the path of faith in this day.

It is easy to answer the first part of your question. The Christians with whom I am privileged to walk do recognise the truth of the one body, and this not only in an abstract way (as I suppose all Christians do) but in its practical bearing. That is, the essential and vital unity of the body is not merely local but universal; 1 Corinthians 12:13 establishes this. So that local assemblies are not independent congregations who may agree to work and walk together with mutual inter-communion, but the saints who meet locally in assemblies form an integral part of a universal unity, and thus no assembly can be

independent of any or all the other assemblies. It is not merely a question of agreeing to act on the same principles, but the unity is a vital and organic unity. So that any disciplinary or administrative action is taken in the light of the universal fellowship and the divine principles which govern it, and also as recognising the vital unity of the body, which underlies that fellowship.

The brethren at Bethesda chapel, Bristol, in 1848 did not recognise that saints generally were as definitely committed to the refusal of evil which had come to light at Plymouth as were those who had the immediate responsibility of dealing with it. They held that a judgment of evil in Plymouth did not necessarily bind other assemblies; each assembly must judge for itself, or not judge at all, if it thought best to be neutral! This was clearly to make the assemblies independent units, and this principle is still maintained by those known as Open Brethren. What was judged at Plymouth was a clericalism which would have set aside all that the Spirit of God was recovering as to the truth of the assembly. Later it was found that along with this grave error there was the propagation of most serious evil teaching as to the Person of Christ. The latter was professedly judged at Bethesda after division had been caused by the refusal to judge it, but the principle of independency (which had left it an open question whether it should be judged or not) was never judged as evil, but is still maintained.

The second part of your question, in which you ask, "Seeing there are so many different companies of 'Exclusives', how can one know for certain which is the true expression of the one body?" is more difficult to answer. To begin with, I doubt whether the Lord would have us to look for a company which should be the true expression of the one body. I think this would be too pretentious a ground to take in the midst of all the confusion of these last days. I believe the Lord would have His saints to recognise the truth of the one body, and every other part of the truth, and to seek to maintain consistency with it by following righteousness, faith, love, peace, and that in so doing there will be found a divine path of separation from evil, in which they can walk in the light of all the truth of the assembly, and have the Lord with them in so doing. But each heart seeking to be in the truth and power of what is of God, and to give expression to it according to the measure of what is made available to us.

To find the company which has the Lord's approval and presence is a matter which involves not only the truth and principles which have been in question in each case, but also where the different companies stand spiritually at the present time. I would not care to attempt to prove that one certain company was right. It is largely a matter of spiritual indications which the Lord will undoubtedly afford to any who only desire His mind. To follow the man with a pitcher of water is a good guide. Look out for a living and spiritual ministry of Christ, and for purification from the influences of the world. But this calls for spirituality of discernment which can only be acquired by nearness to the Lord. So that we cannot look for certain guidance apart from our own personal communion with the Lord. For, after all, it is a question of where the Lord is, and of where souls are truly gathered to His name. And this, as I think you will understand, can only be appreciated in a spiritual way.

As a matter of history each breach amongst brethren which has resulted in permanent separation has been caused either by the attempt to introduce principles or teachings which were contrary to the truth, or by the refusal to accept light which the Lord was giving and which could be substantiated by Scripture. These things speak indeed of human failure, but they have been permitted as an exercise for faith; they cannot now be ignored, and therefore they cast every enquiring heart very much on the Lord, who does not fail those who wait on Him.

I cannot offer you better counsel than to suggest that you continue to wait much on the Lord, with readiness to follow any spiritual leading which He has given you, or which He may yet give you. As you move in faithfulness to the light which He gives you it will increase and your path will be made very clear to you. I shall be interested to hear from you again, if you care to write and let me know how you are being led.

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