

The Real Danger for the Church

by Erlo Stegen

The real danger to the Church is not persecution from outside, but rather the attack from within, particularly the rise of false teachers and disunity among brethren.

Scripture: John 13:34-35, John 17:21-23, Romans 12:10, 1 Corinthians 1:10, Ephesians 4:3, Philippians 2:2, Colossians 3:14, Hebrews 10:24-25, 1 Peter 5:8, 2 Peter 2:1-3

Topics: "Unity in the Church", "Internal Dangers"

Description

Erlo Stegen emphasizes the real danger facing the Church, which is not external persecution like that from Nero, but rather the internal threat of disunity and false teachings. He highlights how Peter's letters address both the comfort needed during external trials and the more insidious dangers from within the Church. Stegen points out that lack of unity among believers hinders the Church's testimony to the world, as Jesus prayed for His followers to be one. He stresses that true unity and love among brethren, made possible by Christ living within us, is essential for a powerful witness. The sermon calls for self-examination and repentance for any role in fostering disunity.

Transcript

1 and 2 Peter

Peter writes the first Epistle approximately 64 AD and the second one about 3 years later. He was to be martyred soon after he penned his last letter. Nero was about 25 years of age when he became Emperor and he was to rule for a brief 5 years. Historians record that he committed suicide when he was 30. Nero wanted to build a huge palace for himself and some say that he deliberately started a fire in Rome to make way for his new palace. He blamed the Christians and punished them terribly. He used the corpses of Christians as lamps to burn at night.

Nero was a real danger to the Church. Through him, many brethren suffered great persecution and many were martyred. It is said that Peter and Paul were executed during his reign.

As dangerous as tyrants like Nero were to the Church there was a much bigger danger. Indeed, the danger from without caused much stress and pain to God's people. In Peter's first letter he is full of comfort and encouragement regarding this danger attacking them from the outside.

But in Peter's second letter he addresses something far more sinister for Christians - the attack from within. In chapter 2 the first 22 verses, he deals specifically with the rise of false teachers through which the "way of truth would be evil spoken of". This danger for the church was far more pernicious than the danger from persecutors like Nero. It is still true today.

Our real enemy is from within. Yes, satan loves attacking Christians from without and making life miserable for them. But that is bearable and Christians can still bear good testimony to the Lord Jesus.

One of these dangers from within is the lack of unity among brethren. Think of the Reformation. God did a marvelous work but it was harmed by disunity from among the Reformation leaders. Great works of God, revivals, are often spoiled by Christians' lack of unity among themselves. In John 17 we read of the prayer that Jesus made to the Father. In Jn 17:21 He prays for the unity of His children. And what a prayer! "That they may be one; as thou, Father, are in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me."

What prevents the world from believing that the Father sent Jesus? Lack of unity among brethren - not attacks from outside. The real danger is among Christians. What tremendous unity Jesus prays for - as the Father was in Him so too He would be in us! And, more than that, He gives us His glory (vs 22) How is this accomplished? "I in them, and thou in me, that they may be one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me,...". His living in us makes us truly one and this is the only living testimony to the world. Our sermons will not convince them - only our God-given unity.

Also, the love among the brethren is more convincing than anything we might say. In John 13:34 we read of the "new commandment" to love one another. Unity among the brethren is only possible when we love one another. And this is only made possible by Jesus living within us.

No wonder the devil seeks to destroy from within the church. Yes, satan's attacks from without are awful but that does not destroy the testimony of the church. The lack of loving unity is the real danger to the church. Are you part of the problem?

How will you stand before the judgement seat of Christ if you are part of the disunity in His church? Repent today!

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