

The Presence of the Lord With His People, and Its Effect

by J.B. Stoney

The Lord's presence with His people is marked by the disclosure of evil, which must be exposed before the blessing can come.

Scripture: Judges 16:21, Psalm 25:14, Ezekiel 14:4, Hosea 4:17, Habakkuk 1:13, Matthew 28:20, John 4:39, 1 Corinthians 1:23, 1 Corinthians 11:19

Topics: "Repentance", "Revival"

Description

J.B. Stoney preaches about the presence of the Lord with His people, emphasizing that His presence is often revealed through the exposure of hidden sins and the purification of His church. When God is near, He exposes unconfessed iniquity and calls for repentance, both in individuals and in the assembly. The Lord's presence brings about a separation of the faithful from the lukewarm and worldly, leading to a clearer acknowledgment of His truth and the removal of hindrances to genuine revival.

Transcript

The Lord has said, "Behold, I am with you all the days, until the completion of the age", Matthew 28:20. It becomes us to ascertain from Scripture the way in which He declares this.

In the broken-up state of the church, and the varied divisions, there is little or no demonstration of His being with us. Yet surely His being with us would be in so marked a manner that those with any spiritual sight would recognise it. In every time of failure on the part of God's people, the first and unequivocal evidence of His presence with them (for this I regard more as power exercised by Him in His own house, not His presence in the midst of His gathered people) is the disclosing of hitherto secreted evil. The more the Lord connects Himself with His people, or with a servant of His, at any time, the more severely does He expose and condemn the hitherto unobserved or unconfessed iniquity. This must be the first effect of the presence of Him who is "of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity", Habakkuk 1:13. The Lord cares for and loves each one of His own, but if any persist in his own course, like Ephraim, the word or dealing of the Lord practically with him is, "Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone", Hosea 4:17. Samson must grind in the prison-house, which his own unfaithfulness has plunged him into (Judges 16:21). The Lord either keeps aloof, like the sun in winter, or, if near, His countenance is "as the sun shineth in his strength" (Revelation 1:16), and this to scrutinise the condition of His people.

With an erring individual, the moment the soul is subject, He is near to wash the feet, in order to restore communion, but this cannot be effected without discovering the stain and evil which created the moral distance, though this discovery be made by the very action to remove it. This must be the first effect of the Lord's presence with any one out of communion. Now if it be so with an individual, it surely must be so with the assembly. The first effect of His connecting Himself with any company of His people in a day of failure like this must be to expose the evil that has been, in some instances, long covered up, and in others, from obtuseness of conscience, neither felt by the delinquents themselves nor the effect of their association or leaven felt by the assembly.

Now when the Lord begins to work in any place, or with any company of His people, the first mark of it will be that not only will evil hitherto unknown be brought to light, but troublers, as I may call them, men continually a trial to God's people, and from whom there seemed to be no escape, will, by a suicidal act of their own, become detached from the assembly. There is no principle in Scripture more universally insisted on than that which is of the flesh cannot glory in the presence of the Lord, and now more than ever, because "we preach Christ crucified ... Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God", 1 Corinthians 1:23,24. It is well to bear in mind the double action of light, because of His being with us, not only to expose the concealed evil, and bring it to the surface, but also to cause, by the increased devotedness of some, that the lukewarm and worldly, who are not sincere, in His eyes, in the profession they make, should voluntarily part company, as did Lot, or "all ... which are in Asia", in another day. It was the godly decision of Abram which led to the separation of Lot from him, and in his separation he betrayed the regnant principles of his heart, and he ate of the fruit of his own lusts.

We see from the Acts of the Apostles a confirmation of the principle. Wherever the Lord was working, there was, together with the blessing of souls, the immediate discovery of evil, and, therefore, I should say, the two marks of the presence of the Lord with His people now are the disclosure of evil, and this concurrent with help to souls. I have dwelt on the former, because, in our present broken state, the correction of evil must appear before the blessing, though they work simultaneously. Faithfulness to Christ, which really means honest purpose of heart to follow Him, is rewarded by some distinct excision of a long tolerated hindrance, or the fruit of unfaithfulness. Thus Ishmael was cast out on the great festive day when Isaac was weaned. Thus Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, dies at Bethel. Thus Moses after being commissioned of God for the deliverance of Israel, is well-nigh destroyed because he had not circumcised his son. There is a clearance of old carnal association. The Lord is more acknowledged in His own place. Thus the uncrucified judaism of such a man as Barnabas was exposed, and Paul was set free from his influence, consequent on the great conference at Jerusalem, when the light of the truth as to Jew and gentile had come out in the clearest way.

What is true of an individual is true of the assembly. Joshua learns what he ought to have known, that the Lord would have fought for Israel if something had not happened among them which hindered him. There must be the exposure of the evil first. Thus, with Gideon, the altar of Baal must be broken down before there is any demonstration of the Lord's support. The more we meditate on these two marks of the Lord's being with His people, the more we shall see how united they are. When He draws near to bless, when He leads the beloved to build up themselves in their most holy faith, the very action of His power must expose those who will not; as the onward movement of the wise virgins discovered the unreality of the foolish ones. God is light, and His light is the pioneer of His love, because His love could not rest where His light could not be. Hence our blessed Lord exposes while He helps. "He told me all that ever I did", John 4:39. The Lord cleared Gideon's army of the cowardly element, and also of the worldly element, before He used

them. It was the energy of faithfulness on the one hand which precipitated the exposure of the real condition of the others. It cannot be otherwise. When the Lord is near, He increases the faith and purpose of the truly honest. Paul's faithfulness at Rome drove all those in Asia to turn away from him. If they had not had an incipient disloyalty, the persecution and imprisonment of the apostle would not have been the occasion for them to abandon the truth he specially had taught them, and with which he was identified. The hour of suffering which proved the apostle's faithfulness, exposed their insincerity in faith and purpose. The test which brought to light the truth of the apostle, exposed the lack of it in them.

The moment the ground is cleared, there is active blessing. Souls are not only converted, that has been going on always; but any revival in the house of God, the greater it is, the greater the sifting. The man untaught of God, or worldly, like Demas, sinks to his level; but the honest and true, however errant he has been, in that hour comes forth valiant for the truth, like Mark, who had departed in the brightest hour, but now, being true of heart, returns as "profitable ... for the ministry" in the darkest.

The man that is honest and conscientious in his course, though with small knowledge of dispensational truth, is sure to be led of the Lord. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him", Psalm 25:14. But when a man has set up idols in his heart, the Lord will answer him according to those idols (Ezekiel 14:4). When the strain comes, as we all know, the chain breaks in the weakest link, and that, after all, was the real measure of its strength. The Holy Spirit testifies of Christ, and as each one is led by Him, he is in the testimony, and as he is, he must discard the traditions of men, as well as every element of the world. Conversion or the happiness of souls, is not the testimony, though in proportion as the testimony is maintained, so is the Lord blessing, on every side, according to His pleasure.

Most assuredly the Lord is not unmindful of the errant and indifferent of His own; but at the same time He honours those who honour Him; and as in the time of the judges ending with Samuel, He empowers even one faithful man to effect rescue and deliverance for all the Israel of God, if they will avail themselves of it; so is it now. I mean that though the Lord cares for every weak and failing one, yet that He loves the true disciple, and makes him His friend, in order that the truth of the gospel might be rescued from the corruptions which have darkened it, and that the name of Christ may be better acknowledged in the scene of His rejection. Nothing is dearer to the loyal heart than allegiance to Him, and any revival that is genuine cannot fall short of this testimony, and, in a day of failure like this, it cannot be obtained but with the exposure of every hindering element, in proportion to the faithfulness of the energy. Then the true are declared; hinderers detached, on the principle, "there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you", 1 Corinthians 11:19. The watchword and assurance for every man of faith and courage in this day, is the same as in another day, "the Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour".

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