

Christ Condemns Elitism

Have you ever stopped to wonder why Jesus Christ chose His disciples from a group that were mainly fishermen and regular working people, rather than the rich and educated? After all there were many in Ancient Israel who were highly educated scholars of the law – Scribes, Pharisees and the priestly Sadducees. In fact we find that all of these came in for Christ's condemnation, and they proved hostile to the Gospel He brought, while His following was often found among the poor and despised. In fact the Apostle Paul explained in 1 Corinthians 1: 26-29, *'For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.'*

There is great danger in the accumulation of wealth for it can lead to a barren spiritual life, as the rich young ruler found. Which is why Jesus explained in Matthew 19:23, *'And Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven.'* He further illustrated that in His parable of the sower, Mark 4:19, *'but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.'*

Christ desires that those who are called become fruitful, and do not concern themselves with worldly riches, Matthew 6:19-21, *'Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.'* In seeking first the Kingdom of God by our sharing of the gospel with others, we may gain that fruit to be added to God's family. The result will be our reward in God's Kingdom and God's promise to provide for our basic needs in this life, verses 33 – 34, *'But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. "Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.'*

However, Jesus well knew that even within God's church the tendency to concern ourselves with worldly riches would remain a threat. Jesus Christ is a time traveller. As His Father's 'hands on' Creator, He exists outside of His creation, which includes time. That's why the Bible is able to reveal detailed prophecy which we can daily see being fulfilled.

So, He specifically warned His apostles, and all of His future ministers, against elitism, Matthew 20:25-28, *'But Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."* Jesus Christ knew that some of His servants in the ministry would begin to consider themselves an elite group, superior to God's people, the lay members. They would begin to separate themselves from those they should serve, give themselves grand titles and privileges and regard their congregations as the source of riches, e.g. Matthew 23:14, *'Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows' houses and for a pretence you make long prayers; therefore you will receive the greater condemnation.'*

With that separation would come the dominion Christ warned against, a love of authority, power and control over God's people, and a love of wealth and the things it can buy. The apostle Peter remembered Christ's warnings against this and repeated them to us in 1 Peter 5:1-3, *'So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; **not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering** over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.'* This emphasis on the ostentatious display of wealth in the Church would

become clearly evident in the Laodicea era, Revelation 3:17, *'For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.'*

God deliberately provides us with the pattern and example of the New Testament Church and it is one of simplicity. There is not one mention of a church building in the New Testament, much less of wealth among the Apostles, colleges for the ministry in lavish accommodations, superior chariots for their transportation, or luxurious cultural buildings to provide concerts to impress the worldly. All of these things are symptoms of deviance from Jesus Christ's instructions; deviance which pollutes God's Church, its ministry, and eventually even the brethren. If you have seen these abhorrent symptoms at first hand you will have noticed the evil results.

The focus of God's people becomes directed towards a man or men, who are elevated above the brethren, rather than the minister remaining among God's people and directing their attention and loyalty to Jesus Christ and his words. This is idolatry.

The Church begins to accumulate wealth and those who are there to serve God's people are the ones who benefit from it. Expensive homes and cars, large salaries and luxurious accommodations typify the deviant church.

The laity find the monetary demands of the church can become abusive in order to satisfy the demands of 'God's Work'. There is a scramble to join the elite ministry as the material advantages of wealth and power become obvious.

The need to protect those advantages results in exclusivism. It is claimed that this is the "one true church" and the only way into God's Kingdom. People are not allowed to attend the church until they accept the sole authority of its doctrine and government. Fear of expulsion and thus the loss of that future, is used to prevent any questioning of those doctrines promulgated but not found in the Bible.

The Church becomes no longer open, but secretive, publishing one gospel publicly, but denying Christ's words privately in their practice. The love which Christ requires of His people is no longer found, Matthew 22:39, *'... You shall love your neighbour as yourself.'* Not that your neighbour is allowed to attend, and would not be welcome if he tried! Cf. John 13:35, *'By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.'*

Under these circumstances, the Church becomes no longer capable of obeying the scriptures because of the strictures placed upon it by its deviant ministry, Romans 12:9, *'Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good.'* NLT. Those who may question false teaching, or any of the other unbiblical doctrines, are regularly put out of the Church, or even 'marked' so that members are not allowed to meet with, or communicate with them. Any member attempting to help or encourage such an excommunicant is themselves put out of the Church in clear contradiction to the scriptures – Proverbs 10:12, *'Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offenses.'* 1 John 2:9, *'If anyone claims, "I am living in the light," but hates a Christian brother or sister, that person is still living in darkness.'* 2 Corinthians 2:5-9, *'Now if anyone has caused pain, he has caused it not to me, but in some measure—not to put it too severely—to all of you. For such a one, this punishment by the majority is enough, so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. So I beg you to reaffirm your love for him. For this is why I wrote, that I might test you and know whether you are obedient in everything.'*

In conclusion, we have seen the evil results of elitism and exclusivism, but sadly in this materialistic world, many are more impressed with the trappings of power and wealth than the simple pattern of love and service set by the New testament Church and its Apostles. Those who allow themselves to be diverted from that pattern will not be selected by Jesus Christ to become His bride in the first resurrection.

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