

GOD'S NEW MAN, WHERE ARE YOU?

Arthur G. Custance, an English Theologian and Scientist, in his book *The Seed of The Woman* makes this interesting observation on Genesis 3:9: "When God cried out 'Adam, where are you?' God was not searching for fallen man (whose whereabouts He surely knew) but for unfallen Adam who had simply disappeared. It was Adam as created, physically immortal and spiritually alive, who had vanished." In another beginning, on the day of Pentecost, God created another man. The words of Paul tells us that "...by abolishing in his flesh the enmity, which is in the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, that in himself He might make the two into one new man" (Eph. 2:15). In the symbolism of the New Testament the church is pictured as a woman, the bride of Christ, but in this case the church is said to be God's "New Man". Where is this new man today? It seems to me we could answer this question by finding where the church today is in regard to the practices of the church as related in the book of Acts. That which characterized God's New Man was: the Apostles' doctrine (teaching), fellowship, the breaking of the bread and prayer, (Acts 2:42).

What was the "Apostles' doctrine" and is it important to the church today? We find the answer in an examination of the sermons in Acts and the letters in the New Testament. The primary message found here is the fact that Jesus was crucified but was raised from the dead and is living today, continuing his work in the world through his church. These men had spent three and a half years with Christ and had witnessed his death on the cross and now that he was alive their message would be what this meant to the church and the world. Jacques Ellul in his book *The Subversion of Christianity* shows the importance of the resurrection in these words: "The world contains spiritual powers, variously described as thrones, powers, and dominions, etc. Residing in the world, these powers hide in institutions, people, etc. But they have all been destroyed by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ". He continues: "How has it come about that the development of Christianity and church has given birth to a society, a civilization, a culture that are completely opposite to what we read in the Bible, to what is indisputably the text of Jesus and Paul?" We would add that it was not only Jesus who emphasized his resurrection and not only was it Paul's message in all his sermons and epistles, it was what best describes "the Apostles doctrine". The Hebrew writer sums up his teaching in the first seven chapters of Hebrews by saying "Now the main point in what has been said is this: we have a high priest, who has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a minister in the sanctuary..." (Heb. 8:1.2). Paul makes it plain that the power of the church is "in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ when He raise him from the dead and seated him at His right hand in the heavenlies" (Eph. 1:19,20). Marva J. Dawn in *Powers, Weakness and the Tabernacling of God* asks this poignant question: "Because of our technological wonders, are we failing to live out of the weakness that displays God's power? Do we rely on

'exciting' video clips and power point presentations or on the truthful power of God's Word? Please know that I don't deny the usefulness of video or computer technology, but we must ask if we depend on technique to convince people of the truth of the gospel rather than on the One who is the Truth." God's New Man, where are you when it comes to the Apostles' doctrine?

After the Apostles doctrine Luke lists fellowship as an essential element in the life of the early church. This was not comparable to "a fellowship hour" we may have after services or a time of simply having a fellowship meal. It is common today for churches to serve Starbucks coffee and Dunkin donuts at their services. There is no problem with this unless this is what constitutes their "fellowship". Fellowship in the early church was a deep devoted commitment of sharing in one another's needs. For those wandering souls today who hop from church to church trying to get their "felt needs" met, their quest is empty until they understand the Scriptural meaning of "fellowship". The word for "fellowship" is variously translated in Scripture. It is translated "contribution" in Rom. 15:26, and II Cor. 9:13, "sharing" (communicate, KJV) in Heb. 13:16, "communion" (sharing, NASV) in I Cor. 10:16, "participation" in Phil. 1:5, and II Cor. 8:4, "fellowship" in Phil 2:1, 3:10, to mention a few passages. In these passages we see the word "fellowship" could well include the Lord's Supper and the sharing of their possessions. Yet it is listed separately, so I am taking it to mean a serious commitment in sharing deeply in each other's needs and carrying one another's burdens. Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* says the word "fellowship" as used in Acts 2:42 is not used here to describe having "all things in common" or for the communion service but is a "spiritual term for the fellowship of brotherly concord established and expressed in the life of the community". Hastings said in *Great Texts of the Bible* the word described "a sharing in common which created a spirit of mutual recognition, a manifestation of common interests, and a closer partnership with each other in the blessings and privileges of others". This is illustrated by Paul, speaking of an offering to relieve the poverty of the Jerusalem saints, tells the Corinthians that the Macedonian churches out of their deep poverty, not according to but beyond their means, besought the apostle that they might share in this fellowship of ministering to the saints (II Cor. 8:1-5). All this was true in the first "mega-church" which started with 3,000 souls and expanded to an estimated 30,000. Could this be said of churches today? God's New Man, where are you in your fellowship?

The breaking of *the* bread is the literal reading of what we describe as the Lord's Supper. They "continued steadfastly" in the Lord's Supper as well as the other elements mentioned as being a part of their new-found life. As much attention should be given to the breaking of bread in our services that is given to the Apostle's doctrine, or preaching of the word, fellowship and prayer. In I Corinthians 10:16-17 and 11:20-24 Paul make the Lord's Supper the heart of Christian worship. This is also reflected in Luke's statement in Acts

20:7: "And on the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread..." This in no way minimizes the importance of the other acts of worship mentioned in Acts 2:42, but rather emphasizes the importance of not neglecting any one part of what has been set forth as our example of what we are to do when we come together in worship. It is a tragedy that so many churches today neglect the Lord's Supper, observing it only on rare occasions, or regulating it to a separate room telling worshippers that if they choose to partake, they have that opportunity. Some churches are abandoning it all together. According to John Calvin in *Institutes of the Christian Religion* one of the primary issues in the controversy of the Protestant Reformation was the fact that the Roman Catholic Church admitted its members to the Lord's Supper only once a year. Perhaps the reason the breaking of bread has not been of primary concern among Christians is that we reduced it to a mere ritual without seeing the real significance of what it means in our daily life and the life of the church. The Lord's table signifies both victory and judgment. Victory because it proclaims his death and resurrection and judgment against believers who partake unworthily, not discerning the Lord's body (I Cor 11:27-29). If it is judgment against believers who transgress, how much more does it proclaim damnation to a world in rebellion against God? It is a time of self examination when we are to judge (discern, KJV) the Lord's body (not his body hanging on the cross, but his body of which we are a member, the church). That is, are we in right relation with every member of the body?

Whenever and wherever the Lord's Supper is practiced it seems to be only a small portion of the service in comparison to the time allotted to other elements of worship. Eberhard Arnold in *The Early Christians in Their Own Words* quotes Justin Martyr, one of the early "Church Fathers" (early influential theologians and writers of the church after the Apostles) describing the Lord's supper as practiced by these early believers: "No one is allowed to take part in it except he who believes that the things we teach are true, who received the bath for the forgiveness of sins and for the new birth, and who lives according to the teachings handed down by Christ. For we do not partake of this meal as if it were ordinary food or ordinary drink. The bread and cup containing water mixed with wine are brought to the overseer of the brothers. He takes both and gives praise and glory to the Father of the universe through the name of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. He offers thanks that by him we have been deemed worthy to receive these gifts. At the end of the prayer and the thanksgiving all the people assembled give their assent, saying, 'Amen'. When the overseer has given thanks and all the people have assented, those we call table stewards give each one present some of the bread and wine with water that was accepted with thanksgiving and take some of it to the homes of those who are absent." This is not quoted to suggest a pattern in our churches today, rather it points out the gravity of the occasion. The contemporary techniques of the "church growth" experts many times eliminates the Lord's supper because it is considered one of the traditional practices which does not "appeal" to the outsiders they have lured into the worship hour. God's New Man, where are you when it comes to the breaking of bread.?

They continued steadfastly in prayers. The Apostles along with the 120 meeting in the upper room "were continually

devoting themselves to prayer" (Acts. 1:14). Prayer was nothing new to the three thousand souls who had "received his word and were baptized (Acts 2:41) but now something new came into focus. With the giving of the Holy Spirit God was now approachable as He had never been before. To quote Jacques Ellul in *Prayer and Modern Man*: "Prayer is nothing more than 'God with us'. It is the nearness of God who comes. There can be nothing more extreme than in God's act. Prayer is the attestation of this God with us. It is permission granted by God that we speak to him face to face." Along with twenty-minute inspirational and lively pep talks taking the place of the Apostle's doctrine, coffee and donuts passing as fellowship, and the Lord's table being neglected, our modern technology and the efficacy of human means has become so effective we do not have to rely much on the Lord. Therefore, we can see results that are perfectly obtainable without prayer. Having none of the modern tools now available to the church, the early believers could only rely upon prayer as their only means of surviving in a hostile world and accomplishing the Lord's work. Acts 4:24-30 offers the best example of prayer in the early church. Compare this with some of our rote prayers in our assemblies today. They were in "one accord" and they recognize God as the Creator of all things (ver. 24), they quote Scripture showing what God had done in the past (ver. 25,26), they recognize what God is doing in the present time (ver. 27, 28) and it is only then they ask God for something, and that is to give them confidence to speak the word while He extended His hand in signs and wonders (ver. 29,30). The answer is both immediate and amazing (ver. 31,32). God's New Man, where are you when it comes to prayer?

POLITICALIZATION OF THE CHURCH

Since this is election year and we are being inundated with the regular political pitches which are common to our way of life, I thought I might add my political comments... comments not on those running for office, but comments on politics and the church. Again not on the church becoming involved in politics, but on the fact that more and more the church today is being politicized.

It is not unusual today for people to vote for the politician who can, or who says he can, deliver the governmental programs that will benefit them the most. This same false emphasis has for some time been gaining power in the religious area. There are many variations to this pattern. Their approach to church is: What are your youth activities? What about young couples? What can you do for us?

Such people are not worshipers, nor truly believers. They are consumers. They want the church to be a religious shopping mall catering to them as consumers. Their demands as consumers must, they think, govern the church. What they are less honest in stating is that they assume God exists to meet their consumer needs. There are even books written about prayer which encourage this fantasy. God is seen as a super-servant who is ready to jump as soon as He is paged.

All this is simply paganism. There was no worship in pagan temples of old. They were places to buy favors from the gods. Paganism is by no means dead in our society. Political idolatry has become the god of many religious consumers.

