

Chairman's Remarks (No. 3)

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I want this time to consider what Scripture says about "Striving together." God has provided us, in His Word, with a pattern for life in His Church. It is therefore essential that we again refer to Scripture regarding our interactions and relationships with fellow Christians. The customs and practices, which were established in the churches of the New Testament times, are to be followed by all the congregations of the Church of Christ. In giving directions as to the saints' conduct when they come together, Paul indicates that those at Corinth should do that which is done "in all the assemblies of the saints." We like the Thessalonians are to be "imitators of the congregations of God in Judea." Our only binding traditions are those given by the apostles to the first formed congregations, as recorded in the New Testament for our instruction.

There are, however, two great hindrances to our searching the Scriptures: on the one hand is apathy; on the other is misguided energy. One may neglect to apply the test "What saith the Scripture?" to Christian relationship issues because one is content with things as they are or because they have become convinced of something through their own arguments. Sometimes business and family interests occupy us so much that God's house suffers through sheer lack of attention in the same manner as it did in Israel as we read in Haggai chapter 1. It was apathy, indifference and lukewarmness, which caused the Lord to condemn the church at Laodica. This condition of soul is usually characterised by lack of private prayer and study, by absence from the worship services and other opportunities for fellowship, and by leaving the care of fellow saints to others. On the other hand, one may take an active interest in every gathering and opportunity for fellowship, and yet do so with zeal not according to knowledge. Such zeal may be marked by diligent application of some Scriptures or doctrines to the neglect of others, and by forgetting that "if any man think that he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know" (I Cor. 8:2).

Saul of Tarsus, before his conversion, was by no means ignorant of the Scriptures, but his pride in what he did know prejudiced him against that which he had still to learn. Although we may enjoy much of God's truth, it is still necessary to search His word for more. "Then shall I not be ashamed when I have respect unto all Thy commandments" (Ps. 119:6). Let us, then, read the Scriptures carefully to enquire whether our contacts with other Christians fully conform to the pattern given to us therein. We shall not fail to be impressed by the dignity and responsibility which God attaches to each company of saints who, out of a pure heart, call on the Name of the Lord. To the church the Lord assures His presence and power, He confirms its actions when taken in His Name and in His fear.

The Lord's presence, vouchsafed to, and recognised by, the congregation, gives character and value to its work and labour. Indeed, as Paul points out in I Corinthians 14:25, a congregation or group of Christians who are properly functioning causes the unbeliever who sees them, not to say that they are mad but to acknowledge that "God is among you of a truth." Yes, that is the strength of testimony God gives to those who seek to do His will in living in unity and peace.

We need to remember what we are taught in Matthew 18:20 that the Lord is in the midst of each gathering of His people. He is there viewing each gathering as representative of the whole church for which He died: He values each congregation and member. He cherishes them accordingly, as a company redeemed by His own precious blood. Appreciation of this truth, as to the dignity and responsibility of the Christians one towards the other tends to produce rich spiritual growth in each. It encourages all to "strive together for the faith of the gospel" (Phil. 1:27). Although only some men are given the special responsibility of preaching the gospel, all the saints are to contend for the faith of the gospel; that is, for all the truth of God, which He has revealed for the obedience of faith, and of which the church is the pillar and bulwark.