



PREPARING TO STAND

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“In this age, just prior to the second coming of Christ in the clouds of heaven, God calls for men who will prepare a people to stand in the great day of the Lord.” SW 3/21/1905

WILL THE CHURCH FALL APART JUST BEFORE THE GREAT FINAL CRISIS?

by Jim Buller

Recently I have noticed a common thread in several issues that are facing many local churches, as well as the church at large. These patterns are disturbing, because these issues are threatening to tear churches apart. Will the church that God has raised up to give the end-time message, and to prepare a people to be ready for Jesus' second coming, fall apart just before the great final crisis? While thinking and praying about these things, I have come to realize that it was prophesied that this would happen! —and sure enough, here we are in the middle of it!

The Olivet Discourse ends with four parables which warn us about deceptions that will be common *in the church* in the end-times. The Parable of the Faithful and Unfaithful Servant in Matthew 24:45-51 is the first of these parables.

Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing. Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods. But if that evil servant says in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming,' and begins to beat his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards, the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him and at an hour that he is not aware of, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Please note that this parable isn't just for church leaders as we have all been given the job of caring for the Master's household until He returns.

And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith. (Galatians 6:9-10.)

Unfortunately, there *are* many of us who are saying in our hearts, “My Master is delaying His coming.” It usually goes something like this: ‘My great-grandfather thought Jesus was going to come when he was a teenager. And guess who hasn’t showed up yet? So He probably isn’t going to come until sometime after my grandchildren have gotten old.” In saying this, we willfully ignore verses like Romans 13:11.

And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed.

What’s even worse is, just like in the parable, as a result of thinking “My Master is delaying His coming,” we end up ‘beating’ our fellow servants. Of course there are more ways to ‘beat’ our fellow servants than by just physically beating them. More often, this abuse is emotional or spiritual, and it can also simply result from our neglect care for and encourage each other as we have been instructed to do.

Why are we so willing to ‘beat’ each other? While thinking about this, for some reason I started thinking about ‘politics,’ and decided to look up in the dictionary. What I found was very interesting! One definition for ‘politics’ was, “the defense of [a nation’s] existence and rights against foreign control.” While this type of ‘politics’ is necessary at the national level, we unfortunately bring this same attitude into other areas of our lives. We don’t want *any* type of ‘foreign control’ telling us what to do! We’re ready and willing to defend our ‘rights.’ And we’re proud of our independence!

But isn’t this the same attitude that brought Lucifer down? Isn’t this the same attitude that he infected Adam and Eve with at the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil? Notice what he told Eve in Gen 3:5.

... In the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.

In other words: If you eat this fruit, *you* will be like God, and you’ll know *for yourself* what is good and bad. You won’t need God to tell you what to do any more. You don’t need to submit to *any* ‘foreign control.’ But look at all the pain and problems this attitude has caused!

No wonder there are various Scripture which counsel us to “submit to God,” and be subject to the civil authorities, that children should obey their parents, and wives should submit to their husbands. (See, James 4:6-7, Romans 13:1-2, Ephesians 5:22, 6:1, Colossians 3:18-20.) The only way we can get along with any kind of harmony is by cooperating with recognized leadership. This is true in the family, in the church, in the nation, as well as in the universe.

But ever since the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil we don’t like the idea of ‘submitting’ or ‘being subject’ to *anyone*! We each have our *own* position, our *own* agenda, our *own* ‘rights’ that we are seeking to advance. And if necessary, we are quite ready and willing to defend ourselves against *any* ‘foreign control!’ And so we have ‘politics’ in the family, and in the church —and instead of caring for each other, we end up ‘beating’ one another.

To make matters worse, in order to strengthen our positions we attach 'spiritual values' to them, and quote Scripture to support our ideas. And since others have done the same thing, we attack their 'spiritual values' because we perceive that they are getting in the way of our collective 'spiritual' progress. I've even had someone tell me that because 'so-and-so' was in 'such-and-such' position, God was not blessing our church. (Of course they didn't 'mention any names,' but from the way it was said, it was quite obvious who they were talking about.) And so the prevailing attitude is that we need to get rid of the 'Achan(s) in the camp,' and remove those who are obstructing the way!

All these attacks, and counter-attacks are tearing local churches apart, and even threatening the church at large! Oh Lord, will the church that You have raised up to give the end-time message and prepare a people to be ready for Your coming fall apart just before the great final crisis?

But notice what it says in Patriarchs and Prophets, page 497 about the 'Achan in the camp.' Although much of this quote appears to support the 'prevailing attitude,' let's be sure to read the whole thing, and not take things out of context just to support our position. Especially note the last sentence!

Achan's sin brought disaster upon the whole nation. For one man's sin the displeasure of God will rest upon His church till the transgression is searched out and put away. The influence most to be feared by the church is not that of open opposers, infidels, and blasphemers, but of inconsistent professors of Christ. These are the ones that keep back the blessing of the God of Israel and bring weakness upon His people.

When the church is in difficulty, when coldness and spiritual declension exist, giving occasion for the enemies of God to triumph, then, instead of folding their hands and lamenting their unhappy state, let its members inquire if there is not an Achan in the camp. With humiliation and searching of heart, let each seek to discover the hidden sins that shut out God's presence.

Instead of holding an inquisition, to search out and getting rid of the offending party, we need to search *our own hearts* to be sure *we* are not the 'Achan in the camp.' This goes together with what we've been told in 1 Corinthians 11:28 and 2 Corinthians 13:5. We are to "*examine yourselves.*" Brothers and sisters, we have *not* been given the job of examining and judging others. "Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls." (Romans 14:4.)

We find this same message is in the parable of the wheat and the tares in Matthew 13:24-30.

Another parable He put forth to them, saying: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way. But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared. So the servants of the owner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?' He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.'

The servants said to him, 'Do you want us then to go and gather them up?' But he said, 'No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn."'"

When the servants discover the tares, they want to gather them out and get rid of them! But the Master says, "No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest." Notice also what will happen at the harvest in Jesus' explanation of this parable.

... The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels. ... The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend ... (Matthew 13: 39, 41.)

It will be the *angels* who will "gather out" of God's kingdom the "things that offend." Even to the very end, we, the servants, will not have the job, (or the 'satisfaction'), of searching out and getting rid of those whom we have perceived to be standing in the way.

Although the following quotation from *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, pages 299-300, is a bit lengthy, I have included the whole paragraph here for context, and because of some of the other ideas that are mentioned in the course of things. Notice particularly what it says about our "narrow ideas" that want to "control" and "bind about" God's work.

Oh, that the Lord might guide you! You should never in a single instance allow hearsay to move you to action, and yet you have sometimes done this. Never take action to narrow and circumscribe the work unless you know that you are moved to do so by the Spirit of the Lord. Our people are doing work for foreign missions, but there are home missions that need their help just as much as these foreign missions. We should make efforts to show our people the wants of the cause of God, and to open before them the need of using means that God has entrusted to them to advance the work of the Master both at home and abroad. Unless those who can help in ----- are aroused to a sense of their duty, they will not recognize the work of God when the loud cry of the third angel shall be heard. When light goes forth to lighten the earth, instead of coming up to the help of the Lord, they will want to bind about His work to meet their narrow ideas. Let me tell you that the Lord will work in this last work in a manner very much out of the common order of things, and in a way that will be contrary to any human planning. There will be those among us who will always want to control the work of God, to dictate even what movements shall be made when the work goes forward under the direction of the angel who joins the third angel in the message to be given to the world. God will use ways and means by which it will be seen that He is taking the reins in His own hands. The workers will be surprised by the simple means that He will use to bring about and perfect His

work of righteousness. Those who are accounted good workers will need to draw nigh to God, they will need the divine touch. They will need to drink more deeply and continuously at the fountain of living water, in order that they may discern God's work at every point. Workers may make mistakes, but you should give them a chance to correct their errors, give them an opportunity to learn caution, by leaving the work in their hands.

If we persist in advancing our own “narrow ideas” there is the risk that we will, “not recognize the work of God when the loud cry of the third angel shall be heard!” Unless we are willing to submit to God, and let Him take “the reins in His own hands,” we may very well miss out on the ‘latter rain’ outpouring of the Holy Spirit which is connected with this “loud cry.”

Notice also that at that time, “the Lord will work ... in a manner very much out of the common order of things, and in a way that will be contrary to *any* human planning.” Are we willing to let Him take “the reins in His own hands,” and let Him deal with things the way He sees fit? —even if it means caring for the very ones we think are hindering the progress of God’s kingdom and keeping back His blessings?

Brothers and sisters, in stead of attacking this one or that one, we “need to draw nigh to God,” we “need the divine touch,” we “need to drink more deeply and continuously at the fountain of living water.”

Let’s also pay attention to that last sentence before we move on. “Workers may make mistakes, but you should give them a chance to correct their errors, give them an opportunity to learn caution, by leaving the work in their hands.” If someone makes a mistake, instead of ‘beating’ them and getting rid of them, we are to “give them a chance to correct their errors, ... by leaving the work in their hands” —isn’t this the way we would want to be treated?

Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets. (Matthew 7:12.)

Before I share the next quotation, I have to make a confession. When God first show this to me it was a ‘hard pill to swallow,’ because at the time I believed that there was indeed someone who was “hedging up the way,” (to use the wording of this quote). It took much prayer, and several re-readings of this passage over time before the message finally ‘sunk in,’ and my heart was changed. It may be the same for you. But I want to encourage you to let God take the “reins in His own hands,” in your life and in your situation, and “never feel that God has forsaken His work.”

Our greatest need is faith in God. When we look on the dark side we lose our hold on the Lord God of Israel. As the heart is opened to fears and conjectures, the path of progress is hedged up by unbelief. Let us never feel that God has forsaken His work.

There must be less talking unbelief, less imagining that this one and that one is hedging up the way. Go forward in faith; trust the Lord to prepare the way for His work. Then you will find rest in Christ. As you cultivate faith and place

yourselves in right relation to God and by earnest prayer brace yourselves to do your duty you will be worked by the Holy Spirit. The many problems that are now mysterious you may solve for yourselves by continued trust in God. You need not be painfully indefinite because you are living under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. You may walk and work in confidence.

We must have less faith in what we can do and more faith in what the Lord can do for us, if we will have clean hands and pure hearts. You are not engaged in your own work; you are doing the work of God.

More love is needed, more frankness, less suspicion, less evil thinking. We need to be less ready to blame and accuse. It is this that is so offensive to God. The heart needs to be softened and subdued by love. The strengthless condition of our people results from the fact that their hearts are not right with God. Alienation from Him is the cause of the burdened condition of our institutions. (*Testimonies for the Church, Vol 7, pages 211-212.*)

We have been so “ready to blame and accuse” others, yet “*it is this that is so offensive to God!*” Remember, Satan is “the accuser.” (See Revelation 12:9-10.) So when we “blame and accuse,” aren’t we really being satanic?

Regardless of how things may appear, God *has not* “forsaken His work.” Instead of “imagining that this one and that one is hedging up the way,” we need to focus on placing ourselves “in right relation to God and by earnest prayer brace [ourselves] to do [*our own*] duty.” Let’s allow Him take the “reins in His own hands,” especially in our own lives. Let’s be sure we are in our place in His plan, and that we are doing *our* duty—which in some way will be caring for His “household,” giving “them food in due season.”

There is an interesting parallel in the experience of Jesus’ disciple just before His arrest and crucifixion. Like us, they were arguing among themselves as they headed into the crisis. They were so focused on their disagreements that they didn’t recognize what was about to happen—even though Jesus had plainly told them He was going to be killed, and they should have understood the timing coinciding with the Passover. (See Matthew 16:21 and Daniel 9:26-27.) Even during the first part of the ‘Last Supper’ they were disputing among themselves who was the greatest, and each was seeking to advance his own position. (See Luke 22:24 and *The Desire of Ages*, pages 643-644.) Then Jesus, the one who was obviously and unquestionably *the greatest*, takes the job of the lowest, the job none of them would do—especially considering the current dissension. After He washes their feet, He tells them,

If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. (John 13:14-15.)

Brothers and sisters, instead of blaming and accusing, instead of “imagining that this one and that one is hedging up the way,” like Jesus, we should be willing to serve, help, build up, and encourage each other. But please note that we cannot develop this

willingness to serve on our own, it can only happen as a result of allowing the Holy Spirit to change our hearts. Accordingly, a little later Jesus told His disciples,

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another. (John 13:34-35.)

Notice that we don't show that we are Jesus disciples because we embrace and promote a cohesive set of fundamental beliefs, or because we rigidly uphold church standards, or even because our position is Scripturally correct. We show that we are His disciples—that we have spent time with Him allowing His Spirit to change us— by the genuine love and care that we have for one another.

... Love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. (1 John 4:7-8.)

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