



Articles and Sermons :: Two Portraits of the Church

Two Portraits of the Church - posted by lwpray (), on: 2004/11/12 11:28

Two Portraits of the Church

So he said to me, "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the LORD Almighty." (Zechariah 4:6)

ON OUR FARM IN PENNSYLVANIA there were cherry trees which were attacked by little parasites of some sort. A parasite would get into a little branch, pierce the bark and exude a gum. Then the branch would get a knot on it and bend. All over the trees were those little bent places with gummy knots. After two or three years, those cherry trees would not bloom. If they did, the blooms usually dropped early and the cherries did not come to fruition. If the blooms did not drop early, the cherries would be flat and undeveloped or only red on one side.

My father was not too interested in fruit. He was interested in cattle, horses and grain. If my father had known how he could have protected those trees before they got into that wretched condition and properly sprayed or treated them, he could have gotten rid of the worms and bugs and saved the trees and fruit.

I believe that a pastor who is content with a vineyard that is not at its best is not a good husbandman. It is my prayer that we may be a healthy and fruitful vineyard and that we may be an honor to the Well Beloved, Jesus Christ the Lord, that He might go before the Father and say, "These are mine for whom I pray, and they have heard the Word and have believed on Me." I pray that we might fit into the high priestly prayer of John 17, that we would be a church after Christ's own heart so that in us He might see the travail of His soul and be satisfied.

In order for us to be a vine like that, there must be basic purity. Each one must have a great purity of heart. I believe that there are no emotional experiences that do not rest upon great purity of heart. No one can impress me or interest me in any kind of spiritual manipulation if his or her heart is not pure—even if it is raising the dead. Sound righteousness in conduct must be at the root of all valid spiritual experience.

Re: Two Portraits of the Church - posted by lwpray (), on: 2004/11/12 16:21

A new wave of religion

I am afraid of a new wave of religion that has come. It started in the United States, and it is spreading. It is a sort of esoteric affair of the soul or the mind, and there are strange phenomena that attend it. I am afraid of anything that does not require purity of heart on the part of individuals and righteousness of conduct in life.

I also long in the tender mercies of Christ that among us there may be the following:

1. A beautiful simplicity. I am wary of the artificialness and complexities of religion. I would like to see simplicity. Our Lord Jesus was one of the simplest men who ever lived. You could not involve Him in anything formal. He said what He had to say as beautifully and as naturally as a bird sings on the bough in the morning. That is what I would like to see restored to the churches. The opposite of that is artificiality and complexity.
2. A radiant Christian love. I want to see a restoration of a radiant Christian love so it will be impossible to find anyone who will speak unkindly or uncharitably about another or to another. This is carefully thought out and carefully prayed through. The devil would have a spasm. He would be so chagrined that he would sulk in his self-made hell for years. There should be a group of Christians with radiant love in this last worn-out dying period of the Christian dispensation, a people so loving that you could not get them to speak unkindly and you could not get them to speak uncharitably.
3. A feeling of humble reverence. I am disappointed that we come to church without a sense of God or a feeling of humble reverence. There are false religions, strange religious cults and Christian cults that think they have God in a box some place, and when they approach that box they feel a sense of awe. Of course, you and I want to be saved from all paganism and false cultism. But we would also like to see a company of people who were so sure that God was with them, not

in a box or in a biscuit, but in their midst. They would know that Jesus Christ was truly among them to a point that they would have a sense of humble reverence when they gathered together.

4. An air of joyous informality. The great English preacher who was pastor for many years of Westminster Chapel in London, G. Campbell Morgan, left his church and went down to Wales where the Welsh revival was going on under Evan Roberts earlier in this century. He stayed there awhile and soaked up the glory of it. I read the sermon that he preached to his congregation afterward, and it was as near to scolding as that great preacher ever got. He said to them, "Your singing is joyless, your demeanor is joyless, and you do not have the lift or joy that I saw in Wales." He urged them that they might get into a place where that sense of joyous informality might be upon them.

5. A place where each esteems others better than himself or herself. As a result of that, everyone should be willing to serve, but nobody would be jockeying for position. Nothing is quite so bitterly humorous as ambition in the church of Christ. It would be as though a man who was on a lifeboat being saved from certain salty death in the ocean depths should become ambitious to become captain of the little boat on its way to save those on board. It is as though a man were to enter a disaster area where an earthquake had hit and people were dying and would fight for a high position there.

Re: Two Portraits of the Church - posted by lwprayer (), on: 2004/11/13 0:58

No place for the ambitious or lazy

The church of Christ is no place for the ambitious or the lazy. I would like to see our Christian communion be a place where each one esteems the other better than himself or herself. For that reason, nobody should push and nobody should jockey for position. On the other hand, nobody should refuse to serve.

6. A childlike candor. I love children because of their unbelievably beautiful candor. They look at you and say the most utterly simple things. If they were just a little older they would blush to the roots of their hair, but they are utterly and completely candid. I like to talk with them and have them come up and chat with me because they are bound to tell me things before they leave. If you do not want it told, do not tell the little ones because they just tell anything. They do not have anything to hide. I believe that with the limitations proper to our adult years we ought to be at a place where spiritually we should be so candid there would be no duplicity, no dishonesty.

A duplex is a house where there is more than one dwelling; there are two dwellings. Duplicity is the same thing—it means two. Judas Iscariot, for instance, was duplicity incarnated. He was so slick that even the disciples did not know which one was the traitor. They said, "Lord, is it I?" And Jesus said, "There's the man. When he dips into the dish you'll know him." He had to tell them. This son of perdition had lived with Jesus and His eleven disciples for three years and had fooled them so completely that they did not know which one was the traitor when the showdown came. They had to have a little sign to indicate. That was the slickest piece of duplicity I know about. He was two-faced, and he could change faces with the occasion. He was so slick in the change that nobody caught on. He showed one face to Jesus and His disciples and the other to the enemies of Jesus. Now that is duplicity.

Re: Two Portraits of the Church - posted by lwprayer (), on: 2004/11/13 11:59

A people without duplicity

In Christian communion we ought to be a people without duplicity. Each one of us has only one face. I know that if you have more than one face to present to the public, something is desperately wrong. One of your faces is going to fall under an awful judgment of God.

We must be without duplicity, dishonesty and hypocrisy. What is hypocrisy? Hypocrisy is an old Greek word used for an actor on stage, somebody who pretended to be what he or she was not. He was not Job but he pretended to be Job, so he put on a mask of some sort and strutted around the stage. People do it today, too. They get up on the theater stage or on TV, glue whiskers on and put on makeup to become people they are not. A hypocrite is an actor, somebody who is playing a part.

7. A presence of Christ that is as the fragrance of myrrh and aloes. When you become accustomed to the smell of His garments you will be spoiled for anything less. If we never smell the myrrh and aloes out of the ivory palaces, we may go along a lifetime and not miss it. But one beautiful whiff of the fragrance of these garments and we will never be satisfied with anything less.

When my wife and I were first married we attended a church of The Christian and Missionary Alliance in Akron, Ohio. There was something on that church, a sense of the fragrance of God. The great Dr. Gerow preached there in those days. The church had some sweet Christian brethren, some wonderful men and women of God, and there was a fragrance on that place. I have never forgotten it. I was between nineteen and twenty one for the three years I spent in that church, and I do not remember getting help from others of my age. But how I remember getting help that is with me to this day from the older saints whose garments were fragrant with the myrrh, aloes and cassia out of the ivory palaces!

8. Answers to prayer; miracles should not be uncommon. I am not a miracle preacher. I have been in churches where they announced miracle meetings. If you look in the Saturday newspaper you will see occasionally somebody who will hit town and announce, "Come out and see some miracles." That kind of performing I do not care for.

You cannot get miracles as you would get a chemical reaction. You cannot get a miracle as you get a wonderful act on stage by a magician. God does not sell Himself into the hands of religious magicians. I do not believe in that kind of miracles. I believe in the kind of miracles that God gives to His people who live so close to Him that answers to prayer are common and these miracles are not uncommon.

John Wesley never lowered himself to preach miracles once in his life. But the miracles that followed John Wesley's ministry were unbelievable. On one instance he had to make an engagement, and his horse fell lame and could not travel. Wesley got down on his knees beside his horse and prayed for its healing. Then he got back up and rode, without the horse limping, to where he was going. He did not publicize the miracle and say, "We'll have a big tent here and advertise it." God just did those things for him.

Re: Two Portraits of the Church - posted by lwpray (), on: 2004/11/13 16:57

While C.H. Spurgeon did not preach healing, he had more people delivered in answer to his prayer than any doctor in London. Those are the kinds of miracles I am talking about.

In light of the Scripture, in light of the Judgment Seat of Christ and in light of eternity, is what I am asking unreasonable? Is the description I have given unreasonable? Is this portrait of a true church an unreasonable portrait? Is it undesirable and impossible that we should have this kind of church? Is this an unscriptural picture?

The church should be a healthy, fruitful vineyard that will bring honor to Christ, a church after Christ's own heart where He can look at the travail of His soul and be satisfied. Among the people should be a beautiful simplicity and a radiant Christian love so it would be impossible to find gossips and talebearers. There should be a feeling of humble reverence and an air of joyous informality, where each one esteems others better than himself or herself, where everyone is willing to serve but no one jockeys to serve. Childlike candor without duplicity or dishonesty should mark the church, and the presence of Christ should be felt and the fragrance of His garments smelled by His beloved. Prayers should be answered so regularly that we think nothing of it. It would be common because God is God, and we are His people. When necessary, miracles would not be uncommon.

Is that, in the light of Scripture, unreasonable and undesirable to expect of a church? Is there something better? If there is something better, you name it!

Is this impossible? Is anything impossible with God? Is anything impossible where the Lord Jesus Christ is? Is this unscriptural? No! The only thing that is unscriptural about this vision is that it is not up to the standard of Scripture yet. The scriptural standards are still high.

If you answer, "No, it is not unreasonable, undesirable or impossible," then you are saying you believe in this. If you believe in this, if you would like to become the church that could begin this reformation, this change toward the better, this recapturing of the ancient power of God in the souls of people, then there must be a radical psychological break with the prevailing religious mood.

Re: Two Portraits of the Church - posted by lwpray (), on: 2004/11/14 3:37

I have told you by careful description what a church ought to be. Now I am going to describe churches as they are, with beautiful exceptions, of course. There are pure saints in almost all the churches, a few here and there, but the prevailing religious mood is self-centered instead of world-centered. Instead of being outgoing and soul-winning, the average church is self-centered and self-satisfied. We make our reports and we spend pages telling what wonderful good boys and nice girls we have been. Self-satisfaction seems to be upon us all.

Worldliness of spirit is the prevailing mood in the average church, along with carnality of heart. To the Corinthians, Paul

said in effect, “You are carnal and I cannot speak to you of spiritual matters. I would like to come to preach deep things to you, but you are too carnal.”

Another prevailing mood of the average church is to be Christian in name but in practice to be unchristian. Our trouble is not that we refuse to believe right doctrine, but we refuse to practice it. We have the peculiar contradiction of believing the right thing and living the wrong way, a strange anomaly within the church everywhere.

In the church many are lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God. If you do not like what I am saying, I want to ask you something. Think about the company you run with. What do they talk about most? God and the love of God, or other things? You decide that.

Many Christians today will not endure sound doctrine. Paul described these people as having “itching ears” (2 Timothy 4:3). They did not like sound doctrine, but they were Christians. They called themselves Christians, but their ears were itchy.

A commentator I read some years back explained this. In Paul’s day the pigs had a disease called “itching ears.” The symptom was that their ears got inflamed and itched terribly. The only way they could get relief from these inflamed ears was to go to a pile of rocks and rub their ears earnestly and vigorously. The stones scratched their ears for the time being.

Paul saw that, smiled a sad smile and said, “I am running into Christians here and there who are just like that. They love pleasure more than God and will not endure sound doctrine. They have itching ears so they will be eager for something else beside the sound doctrine and holy ways. They will pile up teachers everywhere and rub their ears for dear life.” That is a most dramatic and colorful illustration. A lot of so-called Christians have to have piles of rocks to rub their ears. They will not endure sound doctrine. I think that is a description of the churches, Protestant and evangelical.

In the light of New Testament predictions, teachings and standards, is what I just said about the prevailing religious mood untrue? Is what I have said about the prevailing religious mood uncharitable? Is it extreme? I do not think it is, but I only ask you to do one thing: Look around you and look in your own heart. See which of these pictures describes the churches you know.