

THE LAMPSTAND—THE CORPORATE TESTIMONY OF JESUS CHRIST (PT. 4)

~Other Speakers G-L: Allan Halton:

Last time we talked of individuals who had the testimony of Jesus Christ. John on Patmos had this testimony. The messenger who was showing John the things he wrote about in the Revelation had this testimony—so powerful a testimony of Jesus Christ that John was tempted to worship him. He thought the man was Jesus Himself.

This is a very tremendous thing—individual men coming into the testimony of Jesus Christ. But as great as it is, it doesn't hold a candle to what God has in mind. We admire great saints, but God is not satisfied with just one person here and there coming into this tremendous testimony. His desire is that this testimony be revealed in something called the church, where all the members—every man and woman and boy and girl—are shining forth this pure testimony together as one Man.

Remember that in the Old Testament it was the tabernacle that was called the “tabernacle of the testimony.” The tabernacle in the wilderness had a testimony—had something to reveal about God, something to say about God. But the tabernacle was just a “figure” foreshadowing Christ—the corporate Christ, that is—Christ in union with His bride, His body. Some very good teachings are available on this, showing how every aspect of the tabernacle speaks of Christ and His church. The bread on the table of showbread, for example. This speaks of the body of Christ. Paul said, “For we, being many, are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread” (1 Cor. 10.17).

And the lampstand in the tabernacle. John saw the Son of man walking in the midst of the seven golden lampstands. And he said these seven lampstands were “the seven churches” (Rev. 1.20). A single lampstand, then, represents the local church, which is to have the light and testimony of Jesus Christ shining in it. (See also Rev. 11.3,4, Zech. Ch. 4.)

To some extent—certainly not in full measure, but to some extent—the church in Corinth had this testimony. It was a lampstand in which the Testimony of Jesus Christ was shining. As we read 1 Corinthians we discover the wick in the lamp needed trimming, but nevertheless the Corinthian church was a genuine lampstand shining forth the testimony of Jesus Christ.

Earlier we quoted the passage in which Paul said he had come to the Corinthians with “the testimony of God.” How did Paul come to them with this testimony? It was not the Torah Paul came to Corinth with. It was “Jesus Christ, and Him crucified,” that Paul testified of. And the result of his testimony was that the testimony of Jesus Christ was reproduced in the Corinthian church.

I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ;
That in everything ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge;
Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you:
So that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ:
Who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.
God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord (1 Cor. 1.4-9).

This is quite the thing. The Corinthian church had the “testimony of Christ” confirmed in their midst—a living word expressed corporately, as well as the manifestation of the Spirit, the shining forth of Christ in the gifts of the Spirit—also a corporate expression. It's quite something, isn't it, that this church that is given the reputation for being such a carnal church had a testimony like that. “The testimony of Christ was confirmed in you...” Paul said. That is awesome to read! In other words, people coming into the Corinthian assembly became aware of Christ.

What was the evidence that the testimony of Christ the Anointed One was confirmed (established, made firm) in the Corinthian church? It was that, as a result of the Spirit of Christ in their midst they were enriched “in all utterance, and in all knowledge.” They had spiritual knowledge, and not only that, they could give it forth; there was a vital “discourse” taking place in their assembly—the sharing together of the things of Christ with one another. And they came behind “in no gift.” Paul brings these more fully into view in Chapter Twelve. Diverse manifestations of the Spirit were abundant in the Corinthian assembly, and functioning together produced “the testimony of Christ.” With a word, a psalm, a doctrine, a tongue, an interpretation, a prophecy, a revelation, a healing... each one of the Corinthians in differing ways and differing measures participated in the Testimony of Christ. All were involved in this (1 Cor. 14.26).

There's a lot of emphasis on the ministry these days. There are a lot of great pastors around. Because of the Internet there are a lot of great messages available. But it's painful how little of the corporate testimony there is—of this "one loaf, one body," of this lampstand wherein the Oil of the Holy Spirit is aflame and light shines forth, light shines forth in the lampstand—in a church, I mean, every single member being vitally involved in the shining testimony. You hear of anointed preaching. But where is the corporate anointing that enables all in the body of Christ to function vitally? As it is, the saints are pretty much used to leaving it all up to "the ministry," and the ministry for the most part are content to leave it that way. But this kind of church order is short of the glory of God. We must seek the corporate testimony for Christ's sake—for the glory of His Name. It's only as this corporate testimony comes into being that the communities around us will see the glory of the Lord.

"By one Spirit are ye baptized into one body," said Paul. I anticipate, then, that the baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire—it is my conviction that this is yet ahead for us, though I know we have seen a measure of it in the past—is going to cause great shakings throughout the ten thousand denominations of Christendom. God is going to bring into being local churches that function as one anointed body in which every member is vital—not just the pastor behind the pulpit.

And these local lampstands are going to be one in the Spirit with all other lampstands. This thing called denominational Christianity is going to go up in smoke as a result of this powerful baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire.

And this baptism is going to cause great shakings in the "come-out-of-her" groups as well. For, there is as much a sense of oldness about the come-outer groups and home fellowships these days as there is about the denominational system. (I am encouraged by this; something new is at the door.) In fact I would say there are many out there in the denominational system who, walking in the light they have, are walking a closer walk with Jesus than some of the "come-outers."

Come-outers like to remind people that the true meaning of ekklesia is the called out assembly. And they are the called-out ones, they insist. But so was the Corinthian church a called-out assembly. Just how far had they come out? They were still in many ways carnal, Paul said, and walked as men. Because of it their lamp sent up a dirty, sooty flame. There were divisions in their midst. There was immorality. And though they had been given abundant knowledge, they ended up priding themselves in the knowledge they had. They thought they knew a lot. Paul had to humble them on this account. I think it is something like ten times in his first letter to the Corinthians that Paul—obviously deliberately—provoked them with the words, "Know ye not...?" "Know ye not...?" "Know ye not...?"

It isn't knowledge that is the light that must shine in the lampstand, Paul said. It is love that is light.

And so the great High Priest through His servant Paul had to trim the wick of this lampstand in order that the Testimony of Christ continue to shine brightly in Corinth.

The lampstand—a church—is a corporate witness. Yes, each of us is to have a testimony which is the Testimony of Jesus Christ. But the fullness of the Testimony of Jesus Christ is the corporate testimony. Jesus prayed in His high-priestly prayer, "I have made known unto them Thy Name, and will make it known, that the love wherewith Thou hast loved Me may be in THEM, and I in THEM." Them, He says. I in them. It is a corporate thing. If Jesus is in you as well as in me, how can there be any discord or division between us? Or between churches?

I know there has been much emphasis on "the baptism," and the gifts of the Spirit over the past century or so—more specifically since the 1948 revival at North Battleford, Saskatchewan, from which the Charismatic movement got its beginnings. They got that name from the charismata—the gifts of the Spirit. It wasn't really God's plan, but it seems He permitted men to take the charismata back into their denominations instead of coming out of the denominations and by one Spirit being baptized into one body. Of course they realize they must have unity—the Bible calls for unity among Christians. But they are determined they will have unity their own way—they will have "the baptism" and maintain their denominations in the process. It is frightening disobedience to the Spirit of Christ. Deception—great deception—is inevitable. We are seeing it already.

And so let us be very watchful not to get drawn into it.

But let us be filled with anticipation also. Yes, deception abounds. The beautiful realm of the gifts of the Spirit

has become contaminated. The lights that once burned brightly have faded and yellowed. Charismatic is almost a dirty word these days. But there is more ahead of us than behind us. There is yet a mighty baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire ahead for us. I believe we are yet going to see manifestations of the Spirit, manifestations of Christ, that will utterly—and literally—floor us, and cause us to weep... and cry for joy. People will fall on their faces and worship God.

And I believe we are going to see a wondrous unity come forth as God baptizes us by one Spirit into one body. We have known so much of division. We have mourned and wept over it all. Who of us has not anguished with Christ over the divided condition of the body of Christ? But His word still stands. “By one Spirit are ye baptized into one body.” The fire of this baptism must, then—and will—consume all that is discordant with the Lord Jesus Christ. A corporate testimony of Jesus Christ is going to come forth.

Beloved, we must be encouraged in this dark hour to know that our Lord Jesus Christ is not finished yet. He who walketh among the seven golden lampstands will not rest till His pure testimony is shining forth in every place. And Jesus Christ Himself is seen in the churches!