

A Strong City
and
New Wine in New Wineskins

Commenting on the spiritual life of the church in Cornwall

Paul Sherbird

“No one puts new wine into old wineskins ... new wine must be put into new wineskins.” (Lk. 5:37,38)

Cornwall may be one of the most desperate parts of the UK in terms of the spiritual condition of its churches. There is barely a church, fellowship or Christian organisation in Cornwall which is not compromised with false doctrines and un-Biblical practices. So often, when meeting with others throughout the county who love the Lord Jesus, and have in their hearts a longing for His truth, we hear the cry, “there is nowhere to worship!” Some of these true believers cling on in places where they are unhappy and hope for change; others forsake their local gatherings and feel compelled to worship alone, preferring that to the alternative of compromise with ungodly ministers and congregations.

In this sad condition, what can be done? Humanly speaking, very little, the problems created by years of spiritual and doctrinal erosion are many and various, and have become too imbued into the life and thinking of the church for any human agency to tackle effectively. It is enough to overwhelm and discourage the strongest saint. But God is not overwhelmed, the true church is His, purchased with the precious blood of His Son (Acts 20:28), He has not forsaken it, He knows those who are truly His (2Tim. 2:19), and is well able to help and provide for them in the present circumstances.

The Lord has brought to mind two particular scriptures from Isaiah which I believe speak into the current situation:

*For You have been a strength to the poor.
A strength to the needy in his distress.
A refuge from the storm, a shade from the heat.
For the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall. (Isa. 25:4)*

*In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah:
We have a strong city;
God will appoint salvation for walls and bulwarks.
Open the gates,
That the righteous nation which keeps the truth may enter in. (Isa. 26:2)*

Allow me to break down these scriptures a little, and share how the Lord has been ministering in my heart from them:

The Current Condition

Strength to the poor and needy. The Lord is able to uphold His people through their times of weakness and distress, He has many ways to minister to our needs. Sometimes he uses human agents, often through His word; sometimes His Spirit will speak directly into our hearts and minds and minister there. While many lack regular fellowship, and keenly feel the loss of support which good and regular fellowship provides, the Lord is sustaining and meeting needs. Nevertheless, the Lord is concerned for His people who are suffering in lonely situations, and desires something far better for them.

We can be sure that God always hears and answers genuine cries for help from His people: He did it for the children of Israel when they were enslaved in Egypt (Ex. 2:23-25; 3:7-9); and in the

days of the Judges when they cried for deliverance from their oppressors (Jdg. 3:9; 3:15; 4:3; 6:7; 10:10); He did it for the apostle Paul in the midst of persecutions (2Tim. 4:14-18). God is today hearing the cries of His people who feel oppressed, isolated, and who are dismayed at the proliferation of false teachers and false doctrines. God will answer, and He has a plan to meet the need, He will act on behalf of those who are crying out to Him and seeking His help.

A refuge from the storm a shade from the heat. Church ought to be a place of safety, a shelter from the storms of life, somewhere to find relief from the searing heat of persecutions and trials. Sadly for many, church is just the opposite, and can be a place where making a stand for Biblical truth brings its own storms and persecutions. We expect mis-understanding and persecution from the world, and to an extent we learn to live with it; but when opposition and persecution comes from within the church it is hard to bear (compare Ps. 55:12-14). The Lord is surely grieved when he sees His own people being persecuted by those who themselves claim to be His followers, and His word tells us of His anger against those who, while claiming and appearing to be shepherds of the flock, are in fact caring only for themselves, and neglecting His people in their time of need (e.g. Ezk. 34). I do believe the Lord desires a place of safety and refuge for His people in Cornwall, where Biblical truth is soundly taught, and where His people are loved and cared for, while being nurtured in discipleship and the true things of His kingdom.

In the meantime, and in the absence of a suitable worship venue, there is great need for those who are like-minded to seek to fulfil, as much as possible, the exhortation of Heb. 10:24,25, taking every opportunity to meet together, encouraging and supporting one another, and stirring one another on in service for the Lord. This Biblical exhortation not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together, especially as the Day [of the Lord] approaches, is very relevant and needs to be taken seriously. Times of fellowship with like-minded believers who share similar experiences are vital, and efforts must be made to facilitate and attend meetings with like-minded brothers and sisters whenever possible. Such meetings do not have to be full-blown church services, they can be times of prayer, Bible study, encouragement, sharing about the Lord, etc. The act of deliberately forsaking fellowship when it is available is a serious issue of disobedience, and will result in further sense of isolation, and spiritual weakness; taken to its extreme it may well lead to loss of blessing and chastisement from the Lord. When sound fellowship is genuinely unavailable, the Lord is able to sustain and provide for us individually, but it should not be expected that He will bless and meet needs when there is wilful neglect of available fellowship.

The blast of the terrible ones. The number, power and influence of apostate, heretical movements in these days can seem overwhelming. They appear to be gaining the upper hand and pulling in hoards of followers. There seems to be no restraint upon their growth, while those who refuse to accept them, and who speak out in opposition to them seem to be few, and are marginalised and denounced as dogmatists and pharisees, even portrayed as enemies of God, and hinderers of the Holy Spirit. We should not be too surprised at this, Scripture clearly warns that apostasy will increase in the last days, and many will fall away from the truth (1Tim. 4:1; 2Tim. 4:3); and the symbolism of the harlot in Revelation chapter 17 pictures the compromised end-times apostate church, persecuting the true, and within which is found the blood of the saints. The danger in all this, for those who are holding onto truth, is that they begin to wilt under the constant heat of opposition, and become increasingly discouraged at the growing influence of apostate groups, while lack of fellowship leads to spiritual weariness and loneliness. The result can be fear and timidity in proclaiming truth, there can be a pulling back from the absolute standards

of truth, a lowering of moral standards, and compromise and associations with those of doubtful doctrinal persuasion. The threat is very real, and we should not belittle the very real associated pressures and trials that often accompany the true disciple of Jesus in these days. This is of course nothing new, many forsook Jesus when he taught the deep things of the kingdom (Jn. 6:66), and Paul experienced much the same (2Tim. 4:16). The challenge for the disciple of Jesus, is to stand firm, and not to give in to the temptation to compromise.

A Plan for the Future

A strong city. Isaiah 26:2 speaks to me of the church that the Lord wants to see in Cornwall, and the symbolism of a strong city is a relevant one. The true church must be strong in its stand against error, and in its proclamation of truth. Paul wrote of the church that it is, “the pillar and ground of truth” (1Tim. 3:15). An essential aspect of the church is therefore, that it boldly and soundly maintains foundational Biblical truth and proclaims those truths faithfully, fearlessly and without compromise.

Salvation for walls and bulwarks. This interesting phrase speaks of the need to be prepared to defend against an enemy. The Hebrew words translated “walls and bulwarks” relate to the defensive and protective structures built around a city, and which serve to give protection from its enemies. Such structures were designed to make it as difficult as possible for an enemy to gain access to the city, while providing a vantage point for the inhabitants of the city to defend themselves and so deter the enemy. It stands to reason, that the better a city’s defensive structures, the more secure are the inhabitants, and the less likely an enemy to mount an attack, a strong city is one whose defences are sound and secure.

Salvation translates the Hebrew noun *yeshuah*, derived from the verb *yahsa* (to deliver, save or set free), and from which we get the name for the Saviour, Jesus (*Yeshua*). Relating this to church, it seems very clear, that the church’s understanding, teaching and proclamation of the way of salvation is key to its effectiveness and ministry if it is to be the church as God intended. To put it negatively, a church that fails or compromises on its teaching of the basic and essential doctrines of salvation is not the church as God intended. We may further add, that a church that fails to maintain and promote correct Biblical understanding of salvation, is a church that is open to attack from the enemy, a church where its members are not safe, and who will be very vulnerable and susceptible to all manner of false doctrine; there must in such case, also be doubt as to whether it is in fact part of the true church of God.

Salvation in the Biblical sense is primarily deliverance from the consequences of sin, i.e. death. Those who experience Biblical salvation enjoy the wonderful assurance of eternal life, and are secure in the knowledge that salvation was granted as a free gift upon repentance and faith in the Saviour, Jesus. How important then, that the church ensures that it presents the true gospel of salvation, and the true Saviour, so that lost souls may find true salvation. Can people be deceived into accepting a false version of Biblical salvation? Yes, unfortunately they can, and far too many churches are today presenting false gospels and deceiving poor souls into accepting a false notion of salvation, and with it a false sense of security. The church is called to preach repentance and remission of sins, and to present Jesus as the only Saviour from sin (Lk. 24:47; Jn. 14:6; Acts 4:12; 10:43). There is no salvation unless sin is forgiven, and any church that fails to present the truth about sin and forgiveness of sin is failing in its God-given task. We have to ask, if a church is not truthfully presenting the most basic Biblical doctrine regarding salvation, how much more does it have wrong? It is certainly not going to be a place of safety for the disciple of Jesus.

The devil is very active in blinding minds to the gospel (2Cor. 4:4), how sad that large sections of the visible Christian church are helping him out by presenting false gospels. The church which preaches the true gospel has strong defensive walls and bulwarks, and creates a safe environment where lost souls can meet the Saviour, and find forgiveness of sin, and eternal redemption, secure in the sure knowledge that the precious blood of Christ paid the price of their redemption, and that He having Himself borne their sins on the cross, is now the Shepherd and Overseer of their souls (1Pet. 1:19; 2:24,25).

Open the gates, that the righteous nation ... may enter in. The word of God makes it clear that no one is righteous, and that righteousness can only be obtained through faith in Jesus (Rom. 3:10; 21,22). The true church of God comprises of those who, having repented and accepted Jesus as their Lord and Saviour, have been redeemed by His blood, and have been imputed with His righteousness. No one else can make a Biblically valid claim to be a member of the true church. Any church which presents any other means of entrance to its membership is not the true church of God. The gates of the true church are open to all who will come through faith in Jesus alone, this is an essential aspect of the narrow gate, spoken of by Jesus, which leads to life (Mt. 7:14; Lk. 13:24). There is no "broad way" into God's kingdom, and any attempt to make it such is a serious deviation from Biblical truth.

New Wine

I do believe God has a plan to meet the present need for the isolated members of His church in Cornwall, and specifically to provide for those who long to see a sound church, which is glorifying to His name, and upholds His truth. If that is true, then it is necessary that those of us who love Him, and long to see true church, seek Him in prayer, and commit to make ourselves available to be part of that plan.

As I have prayed about this over several weeks, with the Isaiah scriptures in mind, and lifting the need before the Lord, He has brought the scripture used at the beginning of this article (Lk. 5:37,38) to bear, and related to that, certain thoughts:

1. New wineskin: The Lord is looking to build something fresh and new, and I don't mean the Lord is going to do a 'new thing' which is outside of His word, or that there needs to be a new 'revelation.' The Lord has been building His church for a long time, and will continue to do so according to the principles of His word, until the day of His return. But, there needs to be a new start, on a new work in Cornwall, with the correct Biblical foundations and structure, and with the aim of glorifying the Lord by upholding His truth. The true gospel must be central, and at the forefront of its preaching and teaching, there must an emphasis on sound doctrine, and a willingness to speak out against, and remain separate from, those who are doctrinally in error.

2. Old wineskins: This new work cannot be contained by the old wineskins. Most of what is called church in Cornwall is tainted by compromise and by erroneous doctrines. And while the Lord can, if the people are willing, cleanse and purify an old lump to make it fit for His glory (1Cor. 5:6,7), I do not believe He will do so in Cornwall. There comes a point where the old becomes so tainted that it is like a poisoned cooking pot, marred beyond restitution, and which poisons all that goes into it (see Ezekiel 24); in such a case the Lord's call is, "come out of her My people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues" (Rev. 18:4). The Lord is looking for those who will separate themselves from all that is unholy, unrighteous, and that bears

the taint of false doctrine.

3. *New wine*: The new wine is to go into the new wineskin. If the wineskin represents the church structurally, then the wine represents the people who will populate the church. Believers are new creations, created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness (Eph. 4:24), but some have lost the newness, have lost the first love, have become settled in their ways, have become insensitive to error, have compromised for the sake of peaceful relationships, and have drunk of that old wine for so long that there is no desire for the new, and so they refuse the new saying, "the old is better" (Lk. 5:39). The Lord is looking for those who will cast off their old ways of thinking, along with their old associations with those who are not fully committed to truth. In practice, this will mean disassociating from churches where truth is not upheld, it will mean withdrawing support from compromised organisations which do not uphold Biblical truth, it will likely mean isolation and loss of friends, but positively such separation will mean clear-cut availability for the Lord and His purposes at this time. I believe this is a "where the rubber hits the road" challenge to many, it is the Lord saying,

"It is one thing for you to talk about standing for truth, and lifting up the banner of truth, let Me see it in action. Let Me see a clear line of distinction between you who claim to love My truth with those who are in error. Too often the distinction is blurred, the lines are grey, there is a sitting on the fence, and I will not reveal My will to a compromised people. But for those who keep themselves separate from the false, I will make known My plan, and I will give to them the wisdom, the power and the authority to execute My plan; they alone shall declare My glory, and I will be with them to fulfil My purpose in this place."

The Terrible Ones

I think that in Cornwall you could find representatives of just about every contemporary heresy and apostate movement, and I would here highlight some of the influences which are prominent in Cornwall. Some are so ingrained that they can be considered to be 'within'; others have been introduced relatively recently, but will soon become part and parcel of the 'Cornish spirituality'. If you want to walk in truth you must be aware of these things, and separate from them. I would present the following brief overview of heretical movements as a kind of litmus test, and leave it to you, the reader, to prayerfully examine your own spiritual life, and ask whether you have indeed received and taken on board anything from these influences, and therefore need to repent and separate from it.

British Israelism with its completely unhistoric and unscientific claims that the Celts are the lost tribe of Israel has significant support in Cornwall. Tales of Jesus coming to Cornwall with his uncle Joseph of Arimathea, et al, are popular and appealing, but are founded on myths, and contain absolutely no Biblical or historic truth.

Freemasonry is very powerful in Cornwall, and may well be endemic amongst Anglican and Methodist ministers. One can visit Truro Cathedral, and view the abominable and blasphemous inscription on its foundation stone celebrating its laying with full masonic honour in 1880 by HRH Prince of Wales (Edward VII). Freemasonry is occultic, and anti-Christian, and involves worship of Satan.

Churches Together/ecumenism is developing into a movement for so-called 'unity'; it incorporates, by necessity, a compromise of the gospel and denial of the Biblical way of salvation, its natural progression leads to inter-faith efforts such as Dor Kemmyn. Promoted very strongly in

Cornwall, this 'unity movement' feeds the demonic lie that God will be so pleased with the laying aside of doctrinal differences between denominations and faiths that He will send revival. These moves toward an all inclusive religious unity are paving the way for the end-times anti-christian, compromised, politically correct, and apostate harlot church depicted in Revelation 17.

Faith and prosperity gospels, New Apostolic Reformation, Bill Johnson Ministries, God TV, etc. These are all American influences from what we might call the 'hyper-charismatic' wing of the church. The influence of their false doctrines has so subtly crept in, and is now so deeply embedded in church life, that many do not realise that they have accepted, and are following, and are promoting their erroneous teachings. There is a great need for discernment and testing of all things, and where there is even the slightest doubt about teaching and practices, the true disciple must test carefully with the word of God, and be prepared to separate from those found to contain any taint of error.

It is worth noting that recent developments have seen hyper-charismatics such as Kenneth Copeland and Joel Osteen making moves to unite with the Roman Catholic church. Such moves, combine charismatics with the unity movement mentioned above, and, I believe, should be considered as further preparations in the formation of the end-times apostate church of Revelation 17.

Hebrew roots theology of the wrong sort is growing more influential, it uses a form of spiritual seduction (i.e. "bewitching," see Gal. 3:1), and is deceiving many. While there is a right and proper understanding of Israel and the Jewish roots of New Testament Christianity, when what is taught leads to feelings of obligation to observe feasts, and other aspects of Torah, it becomes legalistic heresy, and must be rejected.

Female leadership in the church is, I am convinced, one of the signs of apostasy. It is not a matter of culture, nor of equality, nor of the times we live in. It is related to creation, to the events which led to the fall, and the subsequent effects of the fall on humanity (Gen. 2:21-24; Gen. 3:1-19; 1Tim. 2:11-15). The promotion and acceptance of women in ministry should be considered a contradiction and rejection of God's ordained order within the church. As with Adam, so it is today that men are relinquishing their God-given authority, and allowing women to take the lead. Just as Adam's surrender to Eve (who had been deceived by the devil) gave the devil sway, likewise the church, in accepting women in ministerial roles, gives place to the influence of deceiving spirits in the church.

Needless to say, that in my opinion, any new work in Cornwall that is going to be glorifying to God, and firmly grounded in truth, must be free from from taint or association with any of the above.

A Narrow Way

Many will view my comments in this article as overly dogmatic, and as out of step with the tolerant mindset which is being promoted amongst christians currently. In my defence I would point to the words of Jesus, "... for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Mt. 7:13,14; KJV); and ask that you test what is written in this article against the word of God.

There is great need, for those of us who are genuinely seeking to serve the Lord in truth, to be prayerfully seeking the Lord as to whether we are indeed walking on the narrow way, standing firm against the temptations to succumb to a broader way, and separated from all that is opposed

to His truth and righteousness. If so, then God will surely reveal His purpose, and direct and empower such people to fulfil His plans to have new wine in a new wineskin, to build a safe and strong city, representative of the true church in Cornwall at this time. May the Lord make it so.

I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth that is in you, just as you walk in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth. (3Jn. 3,4)

Paul Sherbird; June 2014