

Articles and Sermons :: The Modern Church by Vance Havner**The Modern Church by Vance Havner - posted by LoveHim, on: 2007/9/10 8:59****The Modern Church by Vance Havner**

What Is Wrong With The Church?

IT IS VERY FASHIONABLE nowadays to ask, "What is wrong with the Church?" It is no new subject. There has always been something or other wrong with the professing church, and there have always been speakers aplenty to discuss it. Unfortunately, their speaking usually relieves only the speaker and not the situation. One is reminded of the soap-box orator in London some years ago. He was lambasting the government with a vengeance. Somebody asked a policeman: "Why don't you do something with him?" "Oh, leave 'im alone," the bobby replied, "It relieves 'im and it don't hurt us."

I venture to suggest three characteristics of the New Testament Church that are out of style today. There are other marks of the Early Church that are also out of style, but one cannot cover everything in one message. I think that if we seriously considered these lost characteristics and recovered them we would be a long way toward answering the question, "What is wrong with the Church?"

The New Testament Church was an intolerant church. At once we throw ourselves open to a broadside of protest. "Intolerant" is a scandalous word to use these days, for if there is anything that is in style among our "progressive" churches it is that word "tolerance." You would think that intolerance was the unpardonable sin. We are majoring as never in all church history on being broad-minded. That we have become so broad we have become also pitifully shallow never seems to disturb us. We must "broaden or bust." Of course, some experts in tolerance can be amazingly intolerant of those who do not share their broad-mindedness, but that does not disturb them either. There is, of course, a false, pharasaic intolerance that has no place in a true church. And one encounters it again and again among conservative Christians. It has brought about the remark that the modernists are arid and the fundamentalists are acrid, that the former lack clarity and the latter charity. It has nicknamed the fundamentalists "feudamentalists" and gotten them a reputation for spending so much time sniping at each other that they have little time left to go after the devil.

But there is a proper intolerance, and the New Testament Church had it. They were intolerant of any way of salvation except Jesus Christ. "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). That makes it straight and narrow, and it isn't what you are hearing in some localities these days. You are hearing that Jesus is the best way but that other ways are good and will lead to God just the same. Union meetings of Catholics, Protestants, and Jews create the impression that a general faith in God is enough without specific faith in Christ. Now, that cannot be true if no man comes to the Father but by Christ. The devils believe that there is one God and tremble: men believe it and do not even tremble, but expect to reach heaven by theism instead of by Calvary.

The New Testament Church was also intolerant of anything that threatened to compromise this Gospel of No Other Name. In Galatia men tried to mix in a little legalism, and in Colosse they were slipping in a bit of false mysticism -- and Paul would have none of it. He could have said nothing about it. I am sure that some of the false teachers must have accused him of seeing bugaboos and hobgoblins. He could have told Timothy to play ball with the apostates of his day, but, instead, he wrote, "From such turn away." He advised Titus to reject a heretic after the first and second admonition, which sounds uncomfortably intolerant. And even the gentle John forbade hospitality to those who abode not in the doctrine of Christ, asserting that "he that bids him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds." To be sure, we are not advised to bawl him out and throw stones after him until he is out of sight: but neither is there any encouragement for that fashionable modern fellowship with unbelievers.

Intolerant Of Sin

The New Testament Church was intolerant of sin in its midst. When serious trouble first showed up in Ananias and Sapphira it was dealt with in sudden and certain terms. When immorality cropped out in Corinth Paul delivered the offender to the devil for the destruction of his flesh. It was in line with our Lord's teaching on discipline in the eighteenth chapter of Matthew. To be sure, it was to be done in love and tenderness, and the brother overtaken in a fault was to be restored by the spiritual ones, and Paul was quick to recommend the restoration of the Corinthian brother. But, still, sin was not to be

glossed over and excused as we condone it today in our churches until liars, gamblers, drunkards, and divorcees fill prominent places in Sunday schools and on boards and have never as much as heard that we must be clean who bear the vessels of the Lord. We have let the camel get his foot in the door and then his head, until now the whole camel is inside and along with him other animals far more unsavory. Peter added even hogs and dogs to our spiritual zoology, and the lambs today are so mixed with every other species that what was once a sheepfold has become a zoo. Our Lord warned us that the shepherd who did not stand his ground when the wolves appeared was only a hireling. We are bidden to feed His sheep but not to feed wolves. I grant you that it is often a complicated problem and can be handled only on one's knees. But we are paying an awful price today for our sweet tolerance of sin within the Church. If the church of the Acts had overlooked iniquity and by-passed evil and smilingly looked the other way while the devil sneaked into every phase of her life as we have done today, Christianity would have died in infancy.

The New Testament Church had a healthy, holy intolerance. It got somewhere because it started out on a narrow road and stuck to it. It might easily have taken up a dozen wide boulevards and ended in destruction. We face the peril of the wide gate and the broad way today, and it tantalizes us all the more because "many enter through it." We were told a long time ago that "few there be" who take the S. and N., the Straight and Narrow. We Americans especially are gregarious; we like to run with the crowd. We had rather be called almost anything on earth than narrow; yet our Lord chose the adjective, and faithfulness to Him will prove that it still fits today.

The Early Church "Exclusive"

I am sure that there were those who called the Early Church "exclusive," and predicted that it would never get anywhere until it became inclusive. "Exclusive" is another word that is anathema today and has been shoved into the limbo of the outmoded, along with "intolerant" and "narrow." But the New Testament Church was the most exclusive fellowship on earth. It was not just a society of people with good intentions. It was not a club for improving the old Adam. It was a fellowship of people who believed in Jesus Christ as the one and only Saviour. It seemed not to have a chance in the face of the great Roman world. It could easily have let down the bars and taken in all sorts of religiously minded folk, but it stuck to "Jesus Only."

People didn't join this church carelessly. They were afraid to. There was a holy awe that kept Tom, Dick, and Harry at a distance. People didn't rush into this fellowship just because it was the nice thing to do. It meant something to unite with this crowd. There was a holy repulsion, and I know of nothing that the church needs more today. It is the last thing we think we need. We are always trying to attract. Our programs, prizes, picnics, and pulpit pyrotechnics are aimed at drawing the people in. Here was a church that made people stand back! We have catered to the world, we have let the world slap the church on the back in coarse familiarity. Here was a church that prospered by repelling!

Taking A Stand Today

You will observe that all this followed on the heels of the death of Ananias and Sapphira. If the church took a stand today on sins within; if we thundered out, as Peter did here, against lying to the Holy Spirit, it would make the world stand at a respectful distance, and the fear of God would fall on a generation that laughs at the church. What was the sin of Ananias and Sapphira? They pretended to make a full consecration which was not real. And are not our churches filled with men and women who sing, "I surrender all," when they have not surrendered anything? The church is cluttered with people who should never have joined. She already has too many of the kind she has. We need a holy repulsion. You don't have to be different to be a church-member now. There is little about the average church to make men stand back in reverence. In other days we at least had church discipline. I can recall the old Saturday church meetings, when Ananias and Sapphira were dealt with. Some mistakes were made but there was a healthy regard for the sanctity of the church. When the church takes a stand, it repels careless "joiners."

Recover The Power Of God

God help us, as Christians and churches, to recover the power of God among us until a holy awe shall rest upon us. God help us to deal with sin until men shall be afraid to lie to the Holy Spirit. When we do, outsiders will not dare to join us; the people will magnify us; believers will be added to the Lord. Today we Christians are living, for the most part, on the momentum with which the New Testament Church started and on fresh waves of momentum started since through others who were sensational in their day. Savonarola and Luther and Knox and Wesley and Whitefield and Moody let nobody go to sleep in their vicinity. Intolerant, unpopular, sensational, such was the New Testament Church. And so will we be if we dare to follow in that train. What kind of people were these New Testament Christians? They believed in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. They did not live on a memory; they believed in One who had died, had risen and was coming again. They were filled with the Spirit. They were living a supernatural life in this present world. They were all witnesses. To them a missionary was not somebody to visit the church now and then to talk about Africa or China. Every Christian was a missionary.

Let us try that today, and something will happen. Personal faith in a risen, coming Christ. The infilling of the Spirit, our duty and privilege, as we yield all, receive, trust, and obey. The daily practice of Galatians 2:20, living by the faith of the Son of God. Every Christian a missionary. Let a few in any church start living that, and the impact will shake the community. For that is the way it started.

Vance Havner (1901-1986) - Vance Havner started preaching at 14, and didn't stop 'til he went to glory! He is one of the most quoted evangelical speakers in the 20th century.