



# **Bible & Life**

## **Bible Teaching Newsletter**

**BIBLICAL DOCTRINE & NEW TESTAMENT ASSEMBLY LIFE**

Vol. 26, No. 2

March 1, 2019

### **Its Time We Faced the Facts:**

#### *Why is the Church Powerless?*

by William MacDonald (1917-2007)

Spiritually we are in a shocking condition. The status of many local fellowships is bad news, and deteriorating by the minute. It is fairly well known that there have been scandalous cases of immorality involving even elders and full-time workers. Of course this type of news never gets into the magazines; there everything is sweetness and light. But the awful truth is that some respected spiritual leaders have fallen into gross sin in recent months and the only reaction seems to have been to hush up the whole thing, lest the word get out and our reputation be impaired.

#### **What Are the Facts?**

We have been arrogant, and have not rather mourned (I Cor. 5:2). And that isn't all. We have become materialists to the core. Supposing that gain is godliness, we have degraded ourselves to the worship of money. We have become more proud of the number of successful businessmen in our churches than of the number of men of God. The dollar has become our master. The claims of the business world have been given more place than the claims of Christ. The corporation counts more with us than the Church. Our condemnation is found in the words of Samuel Johnson,

*“The lust of gold, unfeeling and remorseless, is the last corruption of degenerate man.”*

We have become a status-seeking people. We sacrifice everything for prestige jobs, prestige homes and prestige cars. And we have prestige ambitions for our children.

Truth is that in our mad desire to see them successful and comfortable in the world, we are causing many of them to pass through the fire in this life and to suffer the pains of hell in the next. Too often we are living double lives. Outwardly there is an appearance of piety and respectability. But in business there are bribery, shady deals, dishonesty and numberless forms of compromise.

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***“And we need to repent. Never in the memory of most of us has a meeting been called for the express purpose of repentance. And seldom in any of our meetings has confession ever been mentioned. But we need to do it. We desperately need to do it.”***

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And in our personal lives there are coldness, bitterness, strife gossip, back-biting and impurity. We are living a lie.

Many of our children have been involved in hard drugs, liquor, free love and sex-perversion. To say nothing of the many others who have become rebels and apostates. We have lived to see the fruit of our permissiveness and indulgence. But are we broken before the Lord?

We have become thoroughly worldly, living for the love of passing things. We have been enraptured victims of the idiot tube, and lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God. Most willingly have we been poured into the mold of the world, its fashions, amusements and ideals.

### **The Condition of Our Churches**

The sin of prayerlessness has been all too apparent. In our abounding wealth and self-sufficiency, we have not had any strong inward necessity driving us to prayer. Many of our prayer meetings need closing down.

And finally there is our pride and impenitence. Rather than admit our low spiritual conditions, we endeavor to hide sin, to sweep it under the carpet where no one can see it. After all, we muse, time heals all things.

But does it? Are we getting away with it? Or are we reaping the fruit of our backsliding in more ways than we care to admit?

What about the broken homes, the divorces, the separations? What about the tears of heartbroken parents and children that cover the Lord's Table each Sunday morning? (See Malachi 2:13).

When will we realize that God is speaking to us through sickness and tragedy? It is true that there is always a certain amount of sickness, sorrow and accidents. But when they come in unusual volume, and under most unusual circumstances, we should not be insensible to the fact that the Lord is trying to get through to us.

Think of the number of believers who are spending small fortunes in psychiatric treatment. Once again we grant that a certain amount of such cases are to be expected. But when the trickle becomes a flood-tide, it might just be that God is saying something to us.

There are other results of our departure from God. Many of our children hate their parents, and wish they were a million miles from home. The heavens are brass above our heads our canned prayers never seem to get through. God has punctured our bags with holes; we work, and scrimp and save, but never seem to get off the treadmill. Because we wouldn't tithe to the Lord, we tithe to the doctor, the dentist, and the garage mechanic.

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We are suffering a famine of the Word of God. The ministry lacks unction. Too often it is a rehash of the obvious. How seldom in meetings are we conscious that the Spirit of God has spoken to us in power? We live on a diet of pabulum. And don't put all the blame on the preachers!

The worship meetings are often dead. Dull, awkward pauses are the fruit of prolonged occupation with the never-never land of TV. The evangelistic meetings are an exercise in futility—fishing in a bathtub where there are no fish. Years pass without the conversion of one single person.

### **What Is the Remedy?**

If we cannot see that God is dealing with us in all these judgments, what more can He do to wake us up? We are like the people in Isaiah 1, beaten from head to foot, yet still too dull, too obtuse to realize that God is speaking.

*“Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, offspring of evil doers, sons who deal corruptly! They have forsaken the Lord, they have despised the Holy One of Israel, they are utterly estranged. Why will you still be smitten that you continue to rebel? The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but bruises and sores and bleeding wounds; they are not pressed out, or bound up, or softened with oil. Your country lies desolate, your cities are burned with fire; in your very presence aliens devour your land; it is desolate, as overthrown by aliens. “And the daughter of Zion is left like a booth in a vineyard, like a lodge in a cucumber field, like a besieged city” (Isaiah 1:4-8 RSV).*

We need some prophet, some man of God to lead us to repentance! That is the need of the hour— TO REPENT – to break at the foot of the Cross and sob out the confession so hard to come by, “We have sinned.” We need to repent in our individual lives to confess and forsake the sins that have brought us into this place of spiritual barrenness. We need to make right personal feuds and animosities, asking forgiveness from those we have wronged.

### **The Need of the Hour**

And we need to repent as assemblies of God's people. Never in the memory of most of us has a meeting been called for the express purpose of repentance. And seldom in any of our meetings has confession ever been mentioned. But we need to do it. We desperately need to do it.

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3116 Gulfwind Dr., Land O' Lakes, FL 34639

## March 2019

### INFORMATION

Bible and Life is published periodically and sent out free of charge, supported entirely by the freewill offerings of the Lord's people. Checks should be made out to "Bible and Life Ministries, Inc."

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The time has come, for spiritual leadership that will bring us to our knees quickly before we are consumed by God's awful wrath! We need to eat the sin offering like Daniel, making the sins of others our own (Dan. 9:5). We need to lay hold of God's promise in II Chron. 7:14,

*"If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from Heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land. It is time to seek the Lord. He is calling us, through the voice of Hosea:*

*"Return O Israel, to the Lord your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity. Take with you words and return to the Lord; say to him, "Take away all iniquity; accept that which is good and we will render the fruit of our lips." (Hosea 14:1,2 RSV).*

We have been a proud people, boasting in our heritage of renowned evangelists and Bible teachers. We have claimed a special corner on scriptural knowledge and on church order. We have looked down our theological noses at other believers. Now the Lord has stained our pride. If we only knew it, our halo is shattered.

### Conclusion

There is only one hope! "In returning and rest you shall be saved" (Isa. 30:1-5) The way to renewal and revival is to confess the awful truth about ourselves, to make right the wrongs of the past, to forsake our sins, and to get desperate with God about a perishing world and a powerless Church.

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William MacDonald was an Bible teacher, educator, and writer. He authored over 80 books. He lived in San Leandro, California until his death. He wrote this article in 2005.