

CONTROVERSIES IN ZION

(Discourse given in Bellingham, Washington, Oct. 25, 1970 by Lawrence E. Kirkham)

There is controversy today—controversy in Zion. It is nothing new to have controversies in the Church. They have existed since the Lord left the Church in the care of the 12 Apostles. But nothing is so hard to accept, for we profess the highest form of conduct—love of God and man above self. We preach the glorious unity of the spirit and the oneness of the Church; but we do not think the same on the issues before us. Some understand and some misunderstand. Why, if our God is one and His spirit is one, do these divisions of thought and action, yes, and of conduct and character, occur in our midst? Why is it that we do not live up to our professions? Why is it, that we as Bible Students do not live up to our expectations of what the Church should be?

There are a number of Scriptures that prove the point that there are controversies in the Christian church. Rom. 16:17 and 18 is one of them, “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.” Another Scripture is 1 Cor. 1:10-13, “Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?” Still another one is 1 Cor. 11:17-19, “Now in this that I declare unto you I praise you not, that ye come together not for the better, but for the worse. For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it. For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.” And 1 Cor. 3:1-9, “And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat; for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal; for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal? Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one; and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour. For we are labourers together with God; ye are God’s husbandry, ye are God’s building.” And verses 18 to 23, “Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise. For the wisdom of this world

is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness. And again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain. Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's and Christ is God's."

There are many reasons for trouble in the church. Some amongst us may be insincere. Some amongst us may enjoy being leaders; some may desire adoration. Some amongst us may want to be thought of as great teachers, expounders, or discoverers of truth. It behooves us all, dear brethren, to consider whether we have these tendencies within our hearts and minds, for these tendencies are promoting controversy in Zion. Within any group of people there are many different personalities, mentalities, many different ingrained habits and attitudes. Heredity and environment have produced a multiplicity of individuals. When we came into the Truth, we consecrated to do God's will. We began the endeavor to become Godlike, Christlike, images of our Father and Elder Brother. We are all at different levels of development in this pursuit, and age may or may not be a factor. And so, this difference of background and development accounts for some of the controversy in Zion.

Satan sees in the completion of the Church, his final demise. Throughout the Gospel Age, he has attacked the church's concept of God's character, God's ways and God's plan. If he cannot confuse the Church on a major issue, he confuses it on minor issues, knowing that eventually minor issues become major issues. Minor issues grow into major issues. Error has a way of spreading like leaven in bread, and thus the Lord uses leaven as a symbol of sin and error. Thus the Adversary is responsible for controversy in Zion. We remember our Lord spoke of the leaven of the Pharisees—"Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees." (Matt. 16:6) And Paul tells us that "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?" (1 Cor. 5:6) In 1 Pet. 5:8 and 9 we are warned to "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour; whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world."

All this God allows—He has not prevented it. What then must we say about the controversy in Zion? Is it good or is it bad? Because God allows it, does not mean that it is good, right or proper; but because God allows it, means that it serves a necessary and useful purpose; for God does not allow sin, or evil or difficulty without a purpose. Brethren, God's purpose for allowing controversy in Zion is to test you and me. We note 1 Pet. 4:12, "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you."

What is He testing? He is testing above all our love and devotion to Him. Our dedication to the principles of God's character and his laws are being tested. We are

being tested to see if we are motivated by love and by righteousness. We are being tested to see whether reason and logic control our lives, or whether we are controlled by emotion and foolishness. We are being tested to see if we can develop those Godlike qualities that will qualify us to be righteous, wise and reasonable judges, sympathetic, loving and concerned priests; forceful, upright and effectual Kings, set for the defense of God's people and God's truth. Yes, dear brethren, our lives are a series of learnings and testings, without which you and I cannot make our calling and election sure. Therefore, let us glorify God. Let us rejoice and be thankful that God has allowed controversies in Zion. "Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations; that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ." 1 Pet. 1:6, 7.

To some these testings and controversies are stumbling stones; to others they are stepping stones. Each brother and sister is individually responsible to God for his own life, his own trial, his own overcoming. Yes, the controversies of Zion can be those stepping stones which will help us spring forth into the spiritual phase of God's Kingdom, to be joined with the risen sleeping saints. Let us not stumble over them or be crushed by them. Let us study the issues clearly; and when God reveals to us His ways and His will, let us follow with faithfulness, courage and integrity. Let us not deviate from that which God has revealed to our new minds. Let us not compromise the heavenly visions which have been opened to the eyes of our understanding. Let us continue to rejoice in these things. Let us continue to be encouraged by them, and uplifted by them. The apostle tells us to "Despise not prophesyings. Prove all things; hold fast that which is good." (1 Thess. 5:20, 21) "Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby; if so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious. To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Zion a chief corner stone, elect, precious; and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. Unto you therefore which believe he is precious; but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, and a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient; whereunto also they were appointed. But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light; which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God; which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy." (1 Pet. 2:1-10) If others do not believe, if others do not appreciate, if others do not understand—do not be discouraged; for so it always was, and so it shall be until the earth is completely restored to Edenic conditions of perfect heart, mind and will.

A particular controversy or issue at hand is sometimes of little importance, for these change from year to year and season to season. But what is important? It is important that we study to show ourselves approved before God, rightly dividing the word of Truth. We must first understand the issue before we can be tested upon it. We must indicate an interest in learning before God will teach us. We must, through prayer, study and meditation, determine God's mind in the matter. Once we have decided how God thinks about this thing—how God would act in this instance, what God would do, it is our responsibility to act on this understanding. To act in accordance with this understanding—we must not compromise, we must not deviate, we must not defect or neglect that which God has given us. This is part of the real issue of controversy amongst us. “Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” (2 Tim. 2:15) “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you; for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?” (Matt. 7:7-11)

And when we act upon the issue and embark upon the course, how do we do it? Be it the defense of the truth, the witnessing to the world, the service to the brethren, our prayers to God or the ministry of the word—how do we do it? What motivates us? What methods are we practicing? How important that we do these things according to God's methods and not by Satan's methods. So these are points in every issue, regardless of the nature of the particular controversy. We must follow out the sound principles of love as outlined by the apostle Paul in 1 Cor. 13:1-13—the well-known chapter on agape love.

And now dear brethren, I would like to direct your minds and attention to a thought that has always impressed me. I believe that the truth will always rise to the surface. That the truth, no matter how long suppressed, will always win the battle. I have great confidence in this principle, that right and truth will win out. One thing I look for in any controversy is hard facts. For if we can but know the facts the conclusion is simple and the judgment sure. How easy it would be for the judges of the land to make wise decisions if they knew the facts. Brethren, I am assured that in the word of God is all the wisdom, understanding and facts to make wise decisions in the controversies in Zion. God has not left us without chart or compass, without information about these controversies. I am convinced that there is a “thus saith the Lord,” for those who will search and seek, for those who will pray, for those who will meditate, for those who are sincere and humble in heart and mind. “Seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened up unto you.” This is the promise of our God. And so in every controversy let us look to the Word for guidance and pray to the Lord for the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Let us reflect and

meditate upon his word that we might know the mind of God. “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” 2 Tim. 2:15.

Some say that the Lord is not reigning; others say that he is reigning. Still others say, “How can we know?” It is a controversy in Zion. Still others say, “It makes no difference.” Some of these seem to speak forth the loudest for their particular thought. If it makes no difference, why do they spend so much time talking about it? Brethren, I believe it does make a difference and I believe by the Lord’s grace we can understand what God’s mind is upon this matter. Yes, there are hard facts in the scripture to show us God’s mind. Through the Lord’s grace and through the Lord’s servant we have been pointed to those scriptures that reveal the mind of God. The word of God says that when the Lord reigneth the nations would be angry; that when Michael would stand up there would be a time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation; that the Lord of the harvest would wear a golden crown upon his head, that in the days of these kings the God of heaven would set up a kingdom; and that his kingdom would be set in the tops of the mountains or kingdoms while the kingdoms still existed. What more do we need from the word of God to tell us that Jesus Christ, our Saviour returns as a King with a Kingdom and begins His reign, by the destruction of the present evil order that he might establish his kingdom in the earth with peace and righteousness for all?

As Cyrus, the Mede, crept under the walls of Babylon in the darkness of night to overthrow the great Babylonian empire in the hands of Belteshazzar, so our Lord comes in the darkest hour of earth’s experience as the general-king to destroy the nations of this world. Feasting and rioting, they are oblivious to their soon demise, his presence, power and his kingdom. They will soon awake to find out that their kingdoms are gone and their power has vanished. To me these scriptures are hard facts, hard evidences which reasonings prove to my mind the validity of the statement, “Thy God Reigneth!” I believe this with my whole mind and heart. There is no controversy in my mind over this issue.

If others choose to believe differently, that is between them and the Lord. If they are sincerely wrong or I am sincerely wrong, perhaps there will be no harm done to either. But one thing is for certain—one of us does not have the ability to reason correctly on the word of God, and that one’s reasoning ability, judgment and logic have failed a test. This I know for sure—if either becomes bitter, using Satan’s tactics of insinuation, false accusations and misstatements, he will have stumbled greatly on the controversy. And the one, who in the spirit of love seeks to present his views as clearly and understandably as possible, who in tolerance for the foibles of the fallen mind, continues to love (and fellowship) and seeks the good of his brethren, that one will prosper in his actions and attitudes toward the controversy. And if perchance he is wrong, still he will be right in his attitudes and reactions. There is much to this Christian way of life. The testings are

severe and many-sided, sometimes complex. Above all, let us be entirely devoted to God, our Father—be entirely devoted to the principles He stands for.

Let us serve God with a pure heart and pure motive. Let us not be overcome with evil. Let us think cleanly and clearly. Let us not be fuzzy headed, wishy-washy, sentimental in our thinking processes. Let us be as Godlike as possible in all the aspects of the Christian life.

Another controversy in Zion today says, “Is the millennium begun or is it yet future?” First, we must decide what we mean by the word millennium. Before the time of Christ, millennialists believed that the seventh thousand-year day would see the glorious time of God’s kingdom on earth. This view was labeled heresy by the Roman Catholic Church during the dark ages, indicating that some believed this idea even then. I believe that the millennium is the 7th 1,000 year day of earth’s history. I believe it is the day of the Lord spoken of by Peter, which day, Peter explains is a thousand year day. It began when the Lord returned in 1874. I base these thoughts on 2 Peter, 3rd chapter. I believe that when Peter speaks of the day of the Lord he is saying that when Christ returns his day begins and that that day is a thousand years. I believe that he is saying that when the Lord returns, the earth and heavens that now are, will pass away with a great noise. I believe that that noise is everywhere evident around us today. I believe that the Jubilee type was a type of the day of the Lord and the times of restitution. Who would restore the earth by taking it from the greedy owners of the present evil world? Surely not Satan, nor the nations who have set their minds and hearts against the Lord’s purposes. The Bible’s chronology of man’s history upon earth is clearly explained for us by Bro. Russell in the *Studies in the Scriptures*. One, by going through those lessons with Bible in hand, can understand that 1874 marks the seventh Millennium. Some chronologists take issue with this date. However these points of differences are clearly covered by Bro. Russell, and appeal to my mind. The signs that Christ gave of his presence clearly corroborates the fact that Christ returned in 1874. Some today are saying that he cannot be here because “where is the resurrection?”; “where is restitution?” Death has not stopped and disease continues. Such are ignorant of the signs of the Lord’s presence. When the Apostles asked the Lord of the signs of his presence, he did not say anything about the resurrection or the end of disease. No, he gave signs of disaster and destruction. Why? because he came for this very purpose—to destroy the old that he might establish the new. This is an essential part of the Lord’s kingdom project.

As we go back into the Old Testament to prophecies of the Lord’s day, we find that they speak also of the destruction in that day. For without the destruction of the old, the new cannot be established. That was the lesson of the wineskin and the torn old garment. The housecleaning must take place first; the slum-leveling must first occur; the ulcer must first be removed. The land must be tilled and the earth broken before it can be sown. Brethren, we live in the day when the plowman is overtaking the reaper and the

destruction of present governments and systems is occurring before our eyes. It is a gradual process. The wise among men understand that this is happening, that governmental effectiveness is diminishing; that turmoil is everywhere and no one can stop it. Yes, the word anarchy is in every publication today. Some 90 years ago, the Lord returned and revealed to the watchers that the very conditions that we see today would soon come to pass, as a result of his presence. He revealed that he would dash the nations with a rod of iron; that the stone of his spiritual kingdom would strike the Image on its feet, grind it into little pieces, that the winds of anarchy might blow it away. At that time, vast colonial powers still possessed most of the world. Today, the last vestige of colonialism has been swept away. England, France, Germany, Portugal, the Netherlands, Italy—where are these today?—second rate powers. Where are their vast colonies?—gone: hardly an image of the former grandeur and glory. We stand upon a sea of glass and we see that the affairs of the world are being guided by our returned Lord and the risen saints. Surely it is no longer being guided by Satan or the nations, or it would not be in the process of destruction. This is the way God sees it; this is the way the scriptures describe it; this is the privilege of the saints.

There seems to be no controversy amongst us as regards the fact that the mediatorial reign has not begun. This is so obvious as hardly to seem worth mentioning. The confusion here is that some think that without mediation there is no reign. Brethren, consider—if the King did not come and dispose of present kingdoms, would there ever be a kingdom of God upon earth, or any mediation? No, these kingdoms would not give up their power without a fight. It is this battle we see taking place today. The result is sure, and one which we all desire—the establishment of the Lord’s kingdom in the earth.

There is a controversy in Zion about the times of Restitution. Some think that they have not begun, some think they have. The key to this matter is to realize that the Apostle, in speaking of the times of restitution was hearkening back to the old testament and the Jubilee type: that great type of restoration that God made for our learning. This type had special timing involved. There was a definite time when restoration was to be made—in the 50th year, not in the 49th, but the 50th. What other times could Peter be talking about? Our controversy today says that the times of restitution is yet future and that the Jubilee is some 1,000 years future—after the Millennium. Consider, what took place on the typical Jubilee: the man who sold himself into slavery was released from slavery—the land of his possession was restored to him. Now how do you suppose he got his freedom and got back his land? Do you suppose his master said, “It is the year of Jubilee, you go free now?” Do you suppose the great landholders, who had gained wealth for 49 years, opened their books and said “this land must be returned to the original owner?” Knowing human nature to be what it is, I am sure that the only people who got their freedom and possessions returned to them, were those who asked, demanded and even fought for them. It is the same today—the world of mankind is clamoring for their real and fancied rights, rights of restitution, rights of freedom, rights of dominion and ownership of land.

This clamor has and is causing a turmoil such as the world has never seen. I can but imagine that it took perhaps the whole year of Jubilee to straighten matters out, to check records, to prove the validity of claims, to persuade slave and landholders to obey the provisions of the Jubilee. I can imagine that this took place only with pressure from the priests and judges. The things that happened in the year of Jubilee, the trouble of getting things straightened out, the joy that followed—this brethren, is typical of the times of restitution. And what other times are referred to in the scriptures regarding the beginning of restitution? None other to my knowledge. This is the only times mentioned.

Yes, dear brethren, there is controversy in Zion today. God has allowed it so that you and I can prove our faithfulness to Him and His truth, and make our calling and election sure amidst trial and tribulation. Let us speak forth the truth in love, be alert and vigilant, test new teachings, prove all things and hold fast to that which is good. Let none of us fail through disinterest, carelessness, laziness or foolishness.