

"SOME NEW THING"

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"(For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing)" Acts 17:21

We live in an age when there is a great desire for that which is novel and different. The trend seems to be that what is old must go because what is new must be better. The world constantly desires change and we are not surprised at that because nothing the world provides can ever satisfy the human soul. But what is alarming is the way in which these trends have invaded the church. They have wrought such havoc that churches which once stood fearlessly for biblical truth and where the gospel of grace was clearly proclaimed have become almost unrecognisable. And what are such desires but symptoms of a deep-rooted dissatisfaction with what the church has been given by God.

Paradise

We see this sad characteristic at the very dawn of human history. Our first parents were placed by God in Paradise, a perfect environment, but soon the tempter came to them with the suggestion that they could have something more, something different, something better than the state in which God had placed them and in that way sin entered the world.

Israel

We may go on in biblical history and think of Israel in the wilderness. Again they had what God provided - manna from heaven - but soon they become dissatisfied and foolishly lusted after the things which were part of their state of bondage, "We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick: But now our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes...And the people spake against God, and against Moses... our soul loatheth this light bread" (Numbers 11:5-6; 21:5).

Not long afterwards followed the rebellion of Korah, Dathan and Abiram. Korah was a Levite, one of that tribe which assisted the priests in their duties and had many privileges. But he was not satisfied with that, he wanted change, he wanted more, something different, something new - he wanted the priesthood itself. Moses said to him: "Seemeth it but a small thing unto you, that the God of Israel hath separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to himself to do the service of the tabernacle of the Lord, and to stand before the congregation to minister unto them? And he hath brought thee near to him, and all thy brethren the sons of Levi with thee: and seek ye the priesthood also?" (Numbers 16:9-10).

Moses

Moses recognised this dangerous desire for change when he summarised the conduct of the Israelites during the 40 years in the wilderness. He said, "they forsook God which made them, and lightly esteemed the Rock of their salvation. They provoked him to jealousy with strange gods, with abominations provoked they him to anger. They sacrificed...to new gods that came newly up, whom your fathers feared not. Of the Rock that begat thee thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God that formed thee" (Deuteronomy 32:15-18).

The Ark

Much later, in David's day, when the ark of the covenant was being brought to Jerusalem, the divine order for transporting it - on the shoulders of the Levites - was neglected and instead we read that "they carried the ark of God *in a new cart* out of the house of Abinadab: and Uzza and Ahio drave the cart" (1 Chronicles 13:7). As a result, Uzza touched the ark and the Lord smote him. Subsequently David made sure that the ark was carried in the proper manner saying to the Levites, "For because ye did it not at the first, the Lord our God made a breach upon us, for that we sought him not after the due order" (1 Chronicles 15:13).

A large part of Israel's subsequent history is a sad record of their failure to preserve and treasure all that God had given them and their turning aside to follow the practices of the world around them. Every deviation brought trouble and eventually fearful judgment upon them.

Apostles

In the days of the apostles we discover that churches soon began to listen to those who would superimpose practices upon them which were not authorised by scripture - indeed a number of Paul's epistles were written to deal with such problems.

Subsequent church history affords numerous examples of this unhealthy trend but the situation today seems to have reached unparalleled proportions. We see now an almost frantic desire for new things - new versions of scripture, new hymn books, new styles of preaching, new methods of evangelism, new approaches to worship characterised by what we might call a friendly and familiar attitude which often degenerates into an unholy and sometimes an altogether uncontrolled situation. There is a dissatisfaction with the orderly and reverent way in which the church has worshipped for centuries and many fellowships now seem to be an absolute law unto themselves in which novelty, not scripture, is king.

But for a belief in the sovereignty of God and the certain knowledge that He works all things together for the good of His Church and for His Own glory, the state of the professing Church and much of modern evangelicalism would lead us to despair.

Madness

We can sum it up by saying that a kind of madness seems to have overcome many in the churches today, a madness which leads them to behave in ways that to many of us seem incomprehensible and almost unbelievable. But although such behaviour seems to be a peculiar characteristic of this present age, we find a biblical situation, long ago, in which a respected leader of God's people acted in an irresponsible and wicked way.

Aaron

I refer to Aaron, who weakly yielded to the demands of the Israelites while Moses was away in the mountain receiving the law of God. Can you believe what Aaron did? It seems as though some madness overtook him. Though a leader, he acted in a wholly irresponsible manner and in response to the foolish desire of the people, he made a golden calf. He built an altar before it and then made a feast to the Lord - as though he could behave in such a wretched way and still believe he could lead the people in the worship of Jehovah.

Should not Aaron have stood firm? What kind of leader was he to yield to popular demand and gives way to carnal excitement? He was a good man, a godly man but on this occasion, he demonstrated a lamentable weakness. Good man though he was, he was not a Moses. He failed when the moment of crisis came. And his excuses were woefully weak for when Moses said, "What did this people unto thee, that thou hast brought so great a sin upon them?" Aaron replied, "Let not the anger of my lord wax hot: thou knowest the people, that they are set on mischief. For they said unto me, Make us gods, which shall go before us ... And I said unto them, Whosoever hath any gold, let them break it off. So they gave it me: then I cast it into the fire, and there came out this calf" (Exodus 32:21-24).

Aaron seemed to imply that he was not really responsible, but we read in Exodus 32:4 that "He received the golden earrings at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt." This was folly of the highest order and God's great anger is clearly seen in the words found in Deuteronomy 9:20 where Moses told the people, "And the Lord was very angry with Aaron to have destroyed him: and I prayed for Aaron also the same time."

Need

There is a great need today for leaders like Moses in the church - men who will stand firm, who will not be swayed by false teaching nor by opposition, either from outside the church or from within it. The last eminent leader to stand in such a way was Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, but in the twenty years since his death there has been a terrible decline - a decline in many areas of doctrine, in church practice and in forms of worship - a decline which has turned into a landslide in more recent times.

Strong words

The days in which we live are very similar to those which drew such strong words from so many of the prophets. Isaiah was grieved in his day and lamented, "And judgment is turned away backward, and justice standeth afar off: for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter. Yea, truth faileth; and he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey: and the LORD saw it, and it displeased him that there was no judgment" (Isaiah 59:14-15).

Such words are ominously applicable to the situation in which we find ourselves today. We live in days of tremendous pressures which constantly make great demands upon us and we need to pray earnestly for that grace which will enable us to "stand in the evil day and having done all, to stand" (Ephesians 6:13). To stand until that day when God Himself, who alone has the right, will "make all things new" (Revelation 21:5).