

A walk with Mr O (18)

A living, bright reality

Mr O, I know we've talked about this already, but can we please talk again about church troubles? In recent months I've heard of even more of them. Surely there's something that can be done about it.

Yes, there is. But we can never avoid such troubles entirely. You will remember that in 1 Corinthians 11:19 the Word of God says, 'There must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you.'

I've read that, but I don't actually know what it means.

It means that if the banknotes in your pocket are worth anything at all, someone will try to counterfeit them. If no one tries to counterfeit the money you carry, it is because that money is of no value. The gospel is of incalculable worth, which is why there are false gospels everywhere. To God, every believer is a treasure; so, the devil is flooding the world with counterfeit believers. Church troubles are inevitable. Without them, it would be much more difficult for us to know who is who, and which gospel is which.

For me, that sheds a whole new light on everything. But, that said, do there really have to be as many church troubles as there are at the moment?

No, I don't think so. Counterfeiting is not always the issue. Many churches are in a mess simply because they are managed by their church officers, rather than directed by Christ Himself.

That's a very strong statement, Mr O, and I think that you'll have to give me an example of what you mean.

Well, take the average church officers' meeting. It goes something like this. There is an opening prayer and Bible reading, and sometimes a short 'word' or meditation. The rest of the time is then business, business, business, with a time of open prayer at the end.

That sounds quite encouraging to me, so what's wrong with that?

There's no real depth to it. It's all a bit like a family firm. Christ is recognised as the Owner, but the day-to-day running of the business is actually done by a number of family members who set out to enact what they think the Owner would approve of.

How should it be done, then?

Christ must be in the room. The event is primarily a meeting with Him. The whole purpose of the gathering is for the church officers to have a corporate spiritual life and, as a close-knit band of brothers, to commune intimately with the Risen Lord. It is to be a time of prayer, of study of the Word, of stirring each other up spiritually, of waiting on the Lord, of basking in the wonder of His presence, and of consciously considering each item of 'business' in communion with Him. The ambition of each man individually, and of the group of men as a body, is to know Him – and, therefore, to know His mind.

But that could take ages!

Of course! But spiritually-minded men will come dancing to a meeting where they are going to spend a few hours with their Saviour, in company with their nearest and dearest friends on earth. And in that atmosphere of spiritual appetite and delight they find that the 'business' of the church gets done more easily, more pleasantly, and infinitely more wisely and courageously than under the present system.

But I'm not at all sure that the Lord Jesus Christ is that real to the average church officer.

But He wants to be! And He says to them what He says to us all: 'You will seek me and find me, when you search for me with all your heart' (Jeremiah 29:13). I would suggest that one of the deepest needs in our churches is for our church-officers to be men who will pray, pray and pray in the following way. And of this we may be certain: when they do, unnecessary church troubles will be massively reduced.

O Jesus, make Thyself to me
A living, bright reality,
More present to faith's vision keen
Than any earthly object seen;
More dear, more intimately nigh
Than e'en the closest earthly tie.

Charlotte Elliott (1789-1871).