

**“IT IS HIGH TIME!”**

**AN OPEN LETTER**

**BY**

**C. S. KENT.**

# 'IT IS HIGH TIME!'

AN OPEN LETTER BY C. S. KENT.

Dear Brethren,

**F**EW problems present greater difficulty than that of maintaining a correct balance. This remark applies both to the church and to the individual Christian. Some churches are what are sometimes called "morning meeting assemblies," by which expression one is to understand that while the members of such an assembly gather in goodly numbers on Lord's Day morning to remember the Lord, the interest and participation in assembly matters of the majority begin and end there. It seems never to enter their minds that they should rally enthusiastically to the support of the Gospel meeting, or that they are called upon to attend the prayer meeting, or are needed to visit the sick, or should help in any other assembly activity. Too often, alas! from their ranks are recruited "armchair critics," not unnaturally, for one's energies are usually employed in either the constructive or destructive, and the idle still find mischief to do.

An assembly, like an individual Christian, should be leading a full-orbed life. Worship, prayer, spiritual feeding and service should comprise the "daily round, the common task." To worship and not to serve is to fail to achieve a considerable part of the Divine purpose for the people of God. To serve and not to pray is necessarily a waste of effort. To take in spiritual nourishment and not to indulge in spiritual exercises must result in spiritual dyspepsia, and there are many such dyspeptics about. Exercise without

nourishment, on the other hand, leads to spiritual enfeeblement. An assembly—again like an individual—is a testimony of some kind or other. It can be leading a self-centred life, oblivious of responsibilities and privileges alike, neglectful of opportunities. It can be in a groove which gradually deepens until it differs little from a grave.

Maintenance of doctrine is good and increasingly necessary. It is not sufficient. Maintenance of Scriptural church principle and practice is also good and increasingly necessary, but, again, it is not sufficient. Maintenance of regular meetings for prayer, teaching and Gospel preaching is good, but may also be insufficient. All these are eminently desirable, but it is possible to maintain them religiously and yet be spiritually poverty-stricken.

The time has come for the assemblies of God to wake up and bestir themselves. The time has not come to lament that things are not as they used to be. They never were! Or to lament that it is a day of small things. It isn't. Every assembly is surrounded to-day by hundreds and thousands of men and women in spiritual darkness and the shadow of death. Gospel opportunity was never greater and never more urgent. What is your assembly doing about them? You reply: "We have a Gospel meeting for them." Yes, but what are you doing about them? They don't come, do they? Why not? It is no good wringing your hands and bemoaning the fact. Have you invited them? When did you invite them last? And how did you invite them? And if they accept the invitation, will they be attracted or repelled by the ordering and the atmosphere of the meeting? Will it be just an hour's service, or will it be obvious that you are concerned with winning them for Christ? Is it the kind of meeting that it is fair to ask an unsaved man to attend? Is the power of God present in the meeting, or is it

a moribund religious fixture? It is time we got to grips with reality. Let us not push our heads into the sand and persuade ourselves that things are as they should be if they are not.

Pursue another line of thought for a few moments. Think how few conversions you have had in your assembly Gospel meeting this year so far. Why so few? The Gospel is still God's power unto salvation. Has it been faithfully preached, and by those with the gift to preach it? Is the preaching merely a theological discourse on the doctrinal aspects of the Gospel, or is the Lord Jesus Christ presented as a living Saviour Who hath delivered, doth deliver and will yet deliver? Does the assembly really rally to the support of the preacher by fervent prayer and by presence at the meeting?

I repeat myself for the sake of emphasis. It is high time we overhauled our thinking about our Gospel work. Conservatism has its benefits and advantages, but, like other good qualities, it can be overworked. This is an age of enterprise. And what more glorious enterprise than that of winning souls for Christ? And who exhibited more enterprise with the Gospel than Paul, the pioneer? We have been ultra-conservative and have allowed convention and precedent sometimes to gain a strangle-hold on Gospel enterprise. Custom is not necessarily justified by precedent, or progress to be condemned because something new is attempted. What has always been is not all that should be, and what has never been may yet be desirable, permissible and advantageous. I am not advocating the adoption of sensational or undignified or anti-Scriptural methods. (I believe the current trend towards the formation of choirs to be unwise, undesirable and subversive. If continued, it will defeat its own object).

"Ah!" exclaims the cynic, "it is easy to point out the failure, but what is the remedy?" I had that stone

thrown at me in connection with my booklet, "Whither are we Drifting?" Well, if there is a malady, the first step requisite is diagnosis. What are the contributory causes? If, as in the case of "Whither are we Drifting?," the reconciliation of practice with Scriptural principle will cure the serious trouble, it is not necessary to prescribe laborious treatment. Cure is automatic. But something more active and potent is required in connection with our Gospel work.

What are the causes of low vitality of Gospel work? Perhaps first among them is a poor spiritual tone of the assembly. This will directly affect service. Lack of spirituality means, to churches and individuals, little enthusiasm for the Gospel and the salvation of souls. Every member affects the spiritual tone of a church, and thus influences the Gospel work for good or ill. Then it is vital that every member of the assembly should realise individual responsibility to bear some share in its evangelistic activities. It cannot be too often or too emphatically repeated that we are members of one body, that no one member can be spiritually weak or ailing without lowering the spiritual vitality of the whole body, and that no one member can fail to function, whether from worldliness, laziness or indifference, without loss to the whole body.

When these causes are realised and remedied, attendance at the Gospel meeting will follow as a matter of course and conscience, unless service for the Lord or other duties prevent. What a change would be wrought in our Gospel services if all Christians strove to come and, more, to bring unconverted people with them. Furthermore, it will speedily be recognised that prayer is vital. There will be no power without prayer. Private prayer will increase, and the assembly prayer meeting will soon be growing in size and power. Real spiritual enthusiasm is infectious. Would that it might become epidemic among the Lord's people!

All these factors are cumulative. With an assembly alive and alert, it will not be long before there is a cry, "How can we get more people to the Gospel meeting?" Well, again, I ask, "What are you doing? There are numerous possibilities. Have you, for instance, tried a periodical house-to-house visitation?" It is seldom any good, merely to leave in the letter-box a tract, so old-fashioned in appearance and matter and form as to evoke a smile or worse. Especially is this the case in urban districts. A carefully-planned campaign of visiting, so that the inhabitants of all houses within a reasonable radius are invited in person courteously and tactfully at regular intervals, is a good investment of time and energy in the Lord's service. Some will come. Others will appreciate the interest and feel that at least somebody cares for them. But do let the printed matter be well produced and on good paper. The difference in cost between good and poor printing is negligible. But some of the productions one sees issued in connection with Christian activities would be unworthy of a cheapjack in a slum area. "Nothing less than the best" should be the motto for everything and everybody in the Lord's service.

What kind of a welcome do people get at your Gospel meeting? Do they get a welcome? All should receive a handshake and a smile when they come and when they go. We should do our best to make them feel at home and that they are welcome. This is far more important than is generally appreciated. People will not come again if they feel uncomfortable or out of place. We need to dispel a prevalent idea that all our meetings are "close" corporations, and that the attendance of the general public is not encouraged.

It would do us good to put ourselves in the place of the man in the street, and to try to judge his psychological reaction to what he sees and hears in our meetings. Does he find a lack of the dignity and

the reverence which he instinctively looks for in a place of worship? He is used to regularity. We can overdo informality. Dignity and reverence are not incompatible with brightness. Let the singing be worthy of the Gospel. There is no spiritual virtue in "dirge-like" singing. Keep faith as to time. If the meeting is supposed to last an hour, let it last an hour. A forty-five-minutes' sermon is often a mistake. Surely a sermon to unconverted people need not exceed twenty-five or thirty minutes. We must remember that, generally speaking, people are used to fifteen or twenty-minute sermons nowadays.

We are losing sight of another point, namely, that we have developed a theological language of our own. We understand it, but other people don't. Many well-educated people have not even an elementary understanding of such an expression as "the grace of God," and I am quite sure that the statement that "Christ died for the ungodly" conveys something quite different to strangers within our gates from what we apprehend it to mean. The Lord preached simply and clearly. Let us follow Him in this as in all else, that we may be clearly "understood of the people."

In conclusion may I suggest the following points:

- (1) Let us each do our individual part to maintain and improve the spirituality of our respective assemblies, by having our affections set on things above, and by seeking first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness!
- (2) Let us unite in support of our assembly Gospel work! This is both Scriptural and common-sense. We shall not help by avoidable absence. We are helping the whole Church if we help our assembly. We cannot help or hope to build anything better or more pleasing to God than a Scriptural church. Work outside an assembly may compromise an assembly's

position and fellowship. Let us always remember that the Scriptural order, and the only Scriptural order, is conversion, baptism and adding to an assembly.

- (3) Let us be enthusiastic, but not eccentric or unbalanced!
- (4) Let us remember that thousands are perishing around us!

Shall we whose souls are lighted  
With wisdom from on high,  
Shall we to men benighted  
The lamp of life deny?

- (5) Let us pray and work!
- (6) Let us honour God by our faith in Him and He will honour our faith!
- (7) Let us preach the Word—in season and out of season!
- (8) Maranatha!

Yours sincerely,

C. S. KENT.

Rosedale,  
Cedar Road,  
Sutton,  
Surrey.