

Is the Modern Church's Condition an Indicator of Jesus' Return?

When we think of the prophetic signs of the last days, we typically begin with Israel, examine the closeness of the world to the appearance of the riders of the apocalypse, and perhaps turn our attention to the formation of the beast kingdom that's now rapidly taking shape. These are excellent places to look, and they lead us to a myriad of related signs that unmistakably point to Jesus' soon appearing.

I would like to suggest that the condition of today's church also shouts with the message that we live in the last moments before the Rapture of the church.

In 2 Timothy 3:1-5, Paul depicts that the rebellious nature of people would mark the "perilous times" of the last days. We certainly see these attributes everywhere we look in our world. Sadly, however, they also exist among professing Christians, even among many who are truly born again.

When I look at the apostle's list, the traits related to pride immediately catch my attention:

1. Lovers of self
2. Proud
3. Arrogant
4. Swollen with deceit

These qualities are far too common within the body of Christ and, more than any other sin, cause division among the saints and harm the cause of Christ in our world. Most, if not all, of the false teaching that exists in churches stems from those who believe their interpretation of a text is far superior to

the actual intent of the author who penned the biblical text in question.

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As a result of the prideful condescension to other viewpoints, particularly those related to Bible prophecy, believers who believe what the New Testament teaches about Jesus' imminent appearing often find that they are no longer welcome at the churches they attend. I know this has been the experience of a great many followers of Jesus. It's been my fate as well.

Pride was the key fault that the Lord found with the church at Laodicea (Revelation 3:14-22). He didn't criticize the church for teaching errant theology or for the acceptance of immorality in its midst. No, the Lord chastised this group of Christians for their pride. Their smugness at what they had accomplished caused the Lord to severely warn them with these words, "I will spit you out of my mouth" (Rev. 3:16). They had achieved much visible success as a church and credited themselves for their amazing achievements.

Why did Jesus respond in such a harsh way to their arrogance? I believe it was because such spiritual superiority makes it impossible for the atmosphere that Paul described in Colossians 3:12-14 to exist: "Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony."

The body life that Paul describes in the above verses absolutely cannot coexist with the pride that the Lord warned would mark humanity during the last days, the time in which we now live.

Arrogance. It's often displayed via a self-righteous spirit that causes great harm to the body of Christ because it leads to some of the other ways that the apostle describes people, even Christians, during the last days (2 Timothy 3:1-5):

1. Heartless
2. Slandorous
3. Brutal
4. Treacherous

When the above qualities manifest themselves inside the walls of a church, and they do, they create a hostile and unsafe atmosphere. Mercy flies out the window, body life dies, and the words of Colossians 3:12-14 become merely matters of verbal assent but fail to change anyone's behavior toward his or her fellow saint.

For many, today's church has become a place of pain rather than a safe haven of acceptance that nurtures spiritual growth.

Many Bible-believing churches today resemble the Laodicean church rather than the church at Philadelphia (Revelation 3:7-13), whose qualities now define but a remnant of New Testament saints.

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In his book, *New Morning Mercies*, Paul David Tripp wrote the following about "mercy forgetfulness." I have read these words many, many times during the past month as a needed reminder of what's important as I await Jesus' soon appearing:

Mercy forgetfulness is dangerous because it shapes the way you think about yourself and others. When you remember mercy, you also remember that you simply did nothing whatsoever to

earn that with which mercy has blessed you. When you remember mercy, you are humble, thankful, and tender. . . When you forget mercy, you take credit for what only mercy could produce. When you remember mercy, you name yourself as righteous and deserving, and you live an entitled and demanding life.

When you remember mercy and think you are deserving, you find it all too easy not to extend mercy to others. Proudly, you think that you're getting what you deserve and that they are, too. Your proud heart is not tender, so it is not easily moved by the sorry plight of others. You forget that you are more like than unlike your needy brother, failing to acknowledge that neither of you stands before God as deserving. Humility is the soil in which mercy for others grows. Gratitude for mercy given is what motivates mercy extended. Paul says, "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ forgave you" (Eph. 4:32).

When we forget God's merciful dealings with us, we open the door for Paul's descriptors of perilous times to affect our dealings with others.

There's no room for an attitude of superiority in the body of Christ. We are all equal in terms of how we initially came to saving faith in Jesus as well as in our need for the mercy and grace that daily sustains us in our walk with the Lord.

This article was originally posted on Harbinger's Daily, and is reposted with permission.

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