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## The Swing of the Pendulum

*by T. Austin-Sparks*

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If a pendulum clock is not true on its base the pendulum will swing too much to one side. This will upset its timekeeping, and those who are guided by it will be misled. There is much that spiritually corresponds to this, and in the Word of God there is a constant effort to keep the Lord's people true on their basis.

The Church is intended to be God's instrument for keeping life true. Too often its pendulum swings too much to one side or the other and its guidance becomes unreliable. This unbalanced condition relates to many things. In different ways and at different times the swing is in some exaggerated or extreme direction and an abnormal condition results.

As we have said, so much of the Word of God is concerned with either guarding against such loss of balance, or restoring it when it has been upset. Here we are going to touch upon one major aspect of this matter. Let us say immediately that anything which goes to extremes and loses its proportion means a serious loss to the Lord, and throws His people into confusion. This has been and is the result of

### **Extremes in Exclusiveness or Inclusiveness**

While it is true that each of these has often been a reaction from, or fear of, the other, such reaction is never a satisfactory solution, or a justifiable expedient. Excess in any direction is wrong, and what is wrong is dangerous.

Let us first look at the evil of exclusiveness when it is carried too far. In the New Testament there is a very clear and strong appeal against this disposition. We see this in at least two connections. It was the incorrigible propensity of the Judaisers. They had their base in Jerusalem and their tentacles reached out to the ends of the earth. Like the arms of an octopus they spread out to strangle the life out of anything that they could fasten upon. Not merely did the Lord and Paul appeal against this life-destroying evil, but they thundered against it, and were never so vehement against anything else as they were against this.

It goes by various names, such as Legalism, Puritanism, Exclusivism, etc., but it is anything that is wholly and invariably negative without a balancing positive. Of course, there are differing degrees and various causes or characteristics, but, whatever the form it takes, it is one of the persistent enemies of life and of the fulness of Christ.

In the case of the Judaisers, exclusivism was a system, not just a tendency. You belonged or you did not belong. You were 'one of us', or you were an outsider and suspect. Prejudice was in the very roots and it instinctively ruled relationship.

But there was, in New Testament times, as there ever has been and is now, another aspect of this malady. It was one of the strongest elements in Corinth. As you know, the Apostle, in his letters, was dealing in the main with the 'natural man', that is, the 'soulical man'. A large element in this 'natural man' complexion was natural selectiveness, preference, partiality, etc.; both in the preference for the type of man and in the kind of ministry. The eye was not on the Lord in the man, or looking for what he had to impart of the Lord, but upon the man himself; his manner, his ability, his personality, his 'line of teaching', and so on.

There were things about the Apostles personally which the Corinthians either preferred or resented and these things resulted in more-or-less-closed parties. It is tragic to note that this kind of thing brought them to the point of losing the values of the ministry of the great Apostle himself. Because of this he made his great and pathetic appeal in the words, "Be ye enlarged".

The classic and incomparable thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians took its rise and had its basis here in this very context. There is nothing larger in all the Bible. That this particular feature of exclusivism marked and marred the Corinthians and threatened both their spiritual fulness and their world-testimony becomes immediately evident by the very way in which the Apostle *opens* his letter, and we do well to ponder his words.

*"With all that call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place, their Lord and ours".*

The range and scope of benediction is "all in every place". Who? What? - Who hold our particular interpretation of truth? Who conduct their meetings as we do? How many such questions could be introduced here. But what *is* the denominator? It is "who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours". The basis of fellowship is thus determined as being the acknowledged, accepted, and declared Lordship of Jesus Christ; Jesus Christ as Lord uniting them and us. Well, so much regarding exclusiveness, for the time being.

What about excessive inclusivism? If it is dangerously possible to make Christ smaller than He really is, it is equally possible to make Him, not greater, but more inclusive than He is. We have only to read that First Letter to the Corinthians to see (if we will so study it), that there are more than a few

things which have no place in Christ. These things, of course, are not just the moral, social, and pagan evils referred to; but are, again, the bringing in of the 'natural man' with his standards of wisdom, power, and success(?). Natural wisdom is particularly ruled out. Indeed, it is the whole system of this world's ways and standards which is vetoed.

If there is one thing that the Bible reveals as being hated by God more than another, it is mixture. There are two irreconcilable spiritual systems in this universe, the very natures of which are positively inimical and hostile to each other, emanating from two utterly contrary sources. The overlapping of these and their admixture, where what is of God is concerned, is Anathema to Him and He hates it.

It is with regard to this that the Apostle says in this letter that "the fire shall try..." The fire of God's wrathful judgment will expose and consume all mixture. Christians, the Church, and all which claims to be of God and for God will do well to examine all things in this light and ask just how much 'conforms to this age' and is according to this world? There is an inclusiveness everywhere which is sapping the very vitals and destroying the very effectiveness of Christianity.

The greatest plague and menace in the physical realm is cancer. What is the effect of cancer? When it gets a hold, it enlarges the organism out of all natural proportions, but as it does so, it destroys its particular and distinctive form so that the organism no longer looks like itself and loses its natural character. This is what has happened very largely to Christianity. There has been an invasion by this world which has enlarged it abnormally and at the same time robbed it of its distinctive character and function. God has always spoken along physical lines concerning spiritual conditions. Distinctiveness is something very vital to, and rightly characteristic of, the Body of Christ, but it should be that of the whole Body. Otherwise the Body will be thrown out of balance. If God has to raise up specific ministries in and to the Body, it is not with a view to making the Body unbalanced and bulgy, but because the Body has become deficient and indefinite. There is a difference between specific ministries *to* the whole Body and abnormal features *in* the Body.

If the whole Body were as God would have it, it would be outstandingly distinctive and pronounced. The fear of distinctiveness and a reaction from the specific may result in a very general, heterogeneous, nondescript, something-or-nothing mixture. This may be very 'happy' and free from conflict, but it has no impact and will not meet need in its deepest demand.

How clear it is that there has never been anything which God has raised up to lift His Church from the 'ordinary', nominal and very general level but that sooner or later a 'down-grade' element has come in which has made that thing quite general, broad, indistinct, and, if it goes on, it is with but a shadow of its original and former glory and effectiveness. There is a bigness which is disastrous to spiritual quality.

In order to recover a true and effective testimony the Lord has more than once had to put into effect His words, "I will leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people and they shall trust in the name of the Lord" (Zeph. 3:12). This was first said in relation to an inclusiveness which had robbed of all distinctiveness.

So, for this present, we close by repeating our conviction that the two great needs of our time are, on the one hand, salvation from man-made fences around our Lord Jesus by which He is made

smaller than He really is: and, on the other hand, the recovery and consolidation of the outstanding distinctiveness and unmistakableness of what is really Christ, without mixture.

Let us seek largeness of heart with proper discrimination: true distinctiveness without hardness, bigotry, superiority and spiritual pride. The Holy Spirit, when in full control, will always adjust contradictions and establish proportion and balance. This can be easily seen if we read our New Testament with the object of noting this feature of His leading and work.

Let us pray that we may really be set level as to our basis, and that our pendulum may swing evenly and equally; resulting in a true and safe testimony to all who are looking in our direction for guidance.