

## Signs of the Times within the Church

In his book "Studies in the Gospels" Bro Harry Whittaker made the comment that "The Lord's faithful remnant have eagerly strained their spiritual sight, peering into outer darkness for signs that He is near, when one of the best signs is within their own community."

Bro Harry made these comments in the context of the unfaithful steward parable in Matthew 24.

"But if that wicked servant says to himself, "My master is delayed, and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with the drunkards, the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

The word "beat" in this parable means to thump by repeated blows.

It is a very sad thing when we do this to our own brethren as Jesus warned would happen.

Perhaps one of the most worrying trends in these last days is to use the bread and wine... the symbols of our fellowship.. and participation in Christ's death, as a weapon against our brothers and sisters with which we beat them. This is never what Jesus intended. Even though it was the night he was betrayed by his brother, Jesus still broke bread and washed his feet.

The parable in Matthew also talks of another worrying trend, those who do the beating or their fellow servants are caught up in a group it describes as the drunkards. There is quite a theme running through scripture of the drunkards... and its not talking of literal drunkards but spiritual. They are the ones who get together in groups and become intoxicated, but the wine is symbolic, they are drunk with their own wisdom and call evil good and good evil as in Is 5 v 20-23

"Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight. Woe to those who are heroes at drinking wine and champions at mixing drinks, who acquit the guilty for a bribe, but deny justice to the innocent"

In scripture, spiritual drunkards and hypocrites seem to go hand in hand as in these verses in Isaiah and Matthew 24.

The same word that is used in Matt. for beating our fellow servants is used in Acts 23 v 2-3 when Paul was struck by the high priest, and Paul also connected the beating that he was getting with the hypocrisy of the one doing it.

"At this the high priest Ananias ordered those standing near Paul to strike him on the mouth. Then Paul said to him, "God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! You sit there to judge me according to the law, yet you yourself violate the law by commanding that I be struck!"

Paul was showing that the one doing the beating was a hypocrite. Those in the parable in Matt. who beat their fellow servants, and were caught up with their brethren in an intoxicating spirit, were also condemned as hypocrites.

Matt. 15 v 8-15 also talks of the hypocrites... those who worship God in vain and teach as doctrine the precepts of men.

"You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you "these people honor me with their lips but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain, their teaching are but rules taught by men."

In the parable in Matt. 24 the beating of the fellow servants is interrupted by the return of the Master... they “begin” to beat their fellow servants and then the Master returns unexpectedly. I wonder how long before God will say “enough” and send His Son back. As I see the continuation of disfellowships and defamatory things said on Christadelphian websites and in chat rooms I wonder if Brother Whittaker is right and the clearest sign of Christ’s return is the behaviour from within our own community.