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What I am writing is not to criticise brethren, nor an attempt at self-justification or proclaiming self-righteousness, (far be the thought) but to state the truth, over against the lies which have been and continue to be circulated.

The position my wife and I have reluctantly taken is that we have withdrawn from Mr Bruce D Hales and his party supporters. We have nothing against the truth held by brethren as it has been brought to us by leaders raised up distinctively by the Lord, J.N. Darby, F.E. Raven, J. Taylor, J. Taylor Jnr, and J.H. Symington and J.S. Hales.

What is at issue is the position of the one sovereignly chosen by the Lord to serve His people being quickly seized by a person who shows by his conduct that he is not morally qualified for such an office.

Those referred to who have led in the recovery of the truth have exhibited the spirit of Christ, in humility, self-judgement, lowliness, moral uprightness, free from preference and prejudice or respect of persons. They each had enemies who attacked them personally and opposed the truth which they expressed not only in word, but practically in their way of life.

It is a well known and often used tactic in the world that attack is the best form of defense, especially when one knows he is guilty of wrongdoing, but too proud to admit it. Sadly this has also been my own experience with Bruce D. Hales.

With nothing personal in mind at all, I have had reason to express to him genuine concern regarding certain of his own activities, and the conduct of some members of his household and that of his brother Stephen, for whom he acts as protector. These matters have not just been isolated occurrences which could be borne with, or overlooked, but are inconsistent with standard of the fellowship and the maintenance of right brotherly relations.

On every occasion, he has not only flatly rejected my exercises, but sought to discredit me by spreading untrue reports, which brethren accept because of the place he has and the overpowering influence of his personality.

To divert attention from his own matters, he has concentrated his attacks on the theme that I was rival, and opposed to Mr Hales. Nothing could be further from the truth. He even goes so far as to claim that a word I gave in the ministry meeting in Sydney on 19th October 1999 was an attack on Mr. Hales.

When challenged on one of their visits, the “priests” could not provide one shred of evidence that the word was an attack on anyone, specially Mr. Hales. They then said the word caused other brethren to be critical of Mr Hales and Bruce, but they couldn’t explain how this could be the result, nor could they give any facts to support their claim that I was rival to Mr Hales.

We sometimes puzzle how brethren could swallow such falsehood, when only a few short years earlier I was instrumental in looking into the wrongs done to Mr. Hales and having those wicked charges rejected and withdrawn. Could a rival to Mr Hales be the author of the summary published in ministry in October 1987? A copy is enclosed.

As to the accusation that I changed his ministry, I freely own that at Mr Hales request, I reviewed the transcripts of his Sydney meetings and suggested some minor changes be made for readability. These were all in pencil and returned to Mr Hales for his approval before being sent to the Depot. At no time was I regarded as editor. When the matter was first raised with me, copies of the transcripts were given me, not the originals on which the changes were made. So many changes were attributed to me that I knew I did not make, so I asked to be shown the originals for checking however they were not made available. I also suggested that they could go over with Mr Hales to test the truth of what I told them but was given the curt reply “He has forgotten”. Could you really believe this?

Just an example of my changes - in a reading on 18th March 1995 Mr Hales said “the foe is so deceitful, he is so trained in deceit” etc. I suggested the word “trained” be changed to “experienced”, as “trained” seemed to suggest outside influence.

On many occasions I sat down with Mr Hales in his house to go over the notes and asked him at least twice whether what I was doing was what he wanted done and was acceptable. He expressed no difficulty. Daniel would never accept that my changes were “suggested”. He claimed that they were not referred to Mr Hales but sent straight from me to the Depot. That is a lie.

Following the word I gave in the ministry meeting, Mr Hales expressed no difficulty, - he actually told Stephen Hales in my presence, and heard by others “There was nothing wrong with it”. However, like Stephen, Bruce was enraged and persuaded his father to have second thoughts. It was only then that Mr Hales phoned me the next morning (with Bruce listening) to suggest that the word “assembly” be changed and that referring to the verses in 1 Corinthians 5 was inappropriate. It was obvious that he did this at Bruce’s direction, however he did not support Bruce’s demand that the word be entirely withdrawn.

On one of the many occasions the “priests” were trying to force me to withdraw the word, I finally said “Mr Hales has spoken to me a number of times regarding this matter, and has never said that the word should be withdrawn, however, if he states that that is now his mind, I will submit to it, - Please ask him”. They came back to me later to say that they decided not to ask Mr Hales and accused me of wanting to run my own case, and despising the priesthood, I think I know why they were afraid to ask Mr Hales.

Without wishing to discredit Mr Hales in any way it was becoming obvious that his deteriorating health and increasing weakness caused him to be dependant on his sons for physical support. Either Bruce or Daniel accompanied him wherever he went and it was unlikely that anyone could talk to him privately without one of them (mostly Bruce) being present. Bruce eventually assumed control of all local administrative functions, finances, meeting arrangements, giving to levites, groups, even, it appears, where 3 day and fellowship meetings were to be held. He seemed to be able to use his powers of persuasion increasingly on his father to get him to think his way on most matters and persons, universally. Thankfully, not completely, but my impression is that Mr Hales was in such a weak condition that he tended to allow Bruce free rein, which of course Bruce was quick to take advantage of... Woe betide any who dared to question what he did.

The brutal way that we, as old brethren have been treated particularly over the last three years by Bruce, Daniel and Ross Hales and the party stalwarts is something I was rather not go into, even to rejecting that we can have communion privately with the Lord. What more could they do to unchristianise a person? I can well understand some persons treated like this becoming bitter. We pray for grace to preserve us from this.

It is not my desire to expose the persons involved, however quite a number of brethren, particularly younger ones attended an organised district festival where there was public entertainment in which some of our young brothers (up to 20 years old) participated, singing and dancing on stage with worldly girls. I was told that one young brother was detained for some time by the police for harassing young women. The extent of what took place was obviously kept from Mr Hales, as after the word, he immediately came over to me to ask what happened.

The fact is Bruce was furious because concern was expressed publicly about the worldly conduct in which his own family had a leading part, and has done his utmost to find or fabricate some reason to get me out of the way. Searching for imagined evil has entered into it and he resorts to bluff to get brethren to believe what he wants them told. Unfortunately many have been so mesmerised that they think he can't possibly do any wrong.

I am convinced that pride and the love of prominence is at the root of his trouble. He once said to me, after Mr Hales matters were put right in the assembly, "The Hales name has been dirt for a number of years, but it is going to be different now". A strange statement to make which I have never forgotten, but it shows his thinking.

We love the truth, and the brethren and are grieved that the brethren, being generally submissive, have many times been forced to accept testimony brought to the assembly which has been untrue and biased - persons being made the issue, not the truth. This has occurred often in this city over the years, springing from strong personal feelings and prejudices, with the readiness to condemn certain persons rather than serve them by love.

What patience the Lord has shown, what boundless grace despite the tendency to allow history to repeat itself in almost every generation.

We pray that we may be kept humble and contrite to provide a basis for the Lord to come in and grant deliverance and recovery to the full level of the truth.

Bob Thorncroft