

The Prodigal Problem Part 2

Reading 1 Corinthians 3

We all probably have those in our family and friends who once made a profession of faith and happily walked in the way, took part in the local fellowship, but as days went by their zeal began to flag, their love grew cold, their commitment became spasmodic, and then their interest fell to zero. In our first study we considered those who appeared to be Christians but really were not. This study looks at the Christian living by the world's standards for a time. What is their condition?

Third know that those who have been truly redeemed, but are estranged from the Lord, are still redeemed.

Corinth was a very evil city in Bible times. To be 'a Corinthian' was a slur inferring that the person was most immoral, capable of the most lurid sin. The Church in Corinth was having difficulty in learning to behave as becomes the gospel. They were still living according to ways of the world around them. In this letter Paul seeks to correct some of these problems. One problem was the deep factions built on leadership personalities that existed. (1 Corinthians 1.10-13)

PAUL'S PROBLEM v1.

Carnal or fleshly, v1 means 'motivated or controlled by the body and its faculties, such as their mind, their choices, likes ambitions, needs and the like;' whereas spiritual here means 'whose spirit is filled with and governed by the Spirit of God as the principal motivator resulting in a life which is in harmony with the heart of God.'

In 1 Corinthians 3 Paul paints four word pictures to illustrate his teaching

THE PICTURE OF THE INFANT v2-4

These people were Christians indeed but they had not developed to spiritual maturity (As in Chapter 2.6). Paul still had to deal with them as new Christians.

He cites as evidence of this their constant political infighting. Their immaturity was evident in many other ways as this letter indicates and it

was destroying the Church and it's witness.

The reason: They were still living by the human methods and resources they used before coming to Christ. They had not taken the milk.

THE PICTURE OF THE GARDENERS v6-9a.

In this picture Paul and his companion were the gardeners. However like all gardeners their work was simply tending the plants. They were on equal footing, and each would receive their appropriate reward at the harvest. But God caused the plants to grow, not Paul or Apollos. The Corinthians are the garden.

THE PICTURE OF THE BUILDERS v9b-14.

As a garden it all happened to them. To become a Christian there is nothing to do but trust in the finished work of the crucified and risen Christ. As a co-builder in the building there was a part to play. They had to learn to live as a Christian, still by faith, still drawing on Christ, but going ever deeper into Him. Stone upon stone, learning to listen to the voice of the Spirit of God within, learning how to respond to a crisis in faith, learning how to share Jesus Christ with others, learning to draw nourishment from God's word, and much more. Corinth was a city of great contrast.

There the very rich with great houses were surrounded by the slums of the very poor, built of what ever was to hand, scrap wood and even straw. About the time that Paul wrote, a great fire swept

through. Amazingly no one was killed. The poor lost everything, but houses built of decorated, durable stone were untouched. Paul used this event, to teach about carnal Christians.

Christians are free to serve the Lord as their heart directs, but need to exercise care about the things they build into their lives. Some things will not endure into eternity. Each must assess this for themselves, in terms of their own opportunities, gifts and calling of the Lord.

The day of fire referred to in v13 is a metaphor only and refers to the day when the Christian stands before the Lord when his service is assessed. Some will be rewarded on that day, but others will lose all that they have done. Even though they themselves will be saved, they will go on into eternity empty handed, nothing to show for their lives which were only lived seeking the things that pleased themselves.

THE PICTURE OF THE TEMPLE v16-17.

This seems a hard verse if it is read in isolation from its context. The body of the individual Christian is spoken of as the temple of the Holy Spirit. See Acts 7.48, 1 Corinthians 6.19,

2 Corinthians 6.16 and in a secondary sense John 2.21. Temple is the word for the inner sanctuary. In v16 'you' or 'ye' is used three times and the grammatical number is significant. This emphasised should read, 'Each individual believer is to see that all of you are God's temple and that the Spirit of God dwells in you all.' The reference here is not to the individual believer's body, but to the body of Christ, the Church.

The destruction then refers to the body of Christ, the believers living at Corinth, and their acts and attitudes, detailed throughout this letter, which were so devastating to the corporate life and health of the Church. The word usually translated destroy has the meaning 'to corrupt.' They were corrupting the church life. The same Greek word is used in relation to the consequences to the offenders, to be brought to 'corruption' under the discipline of God. See for example 1 Corinthians 11.17-34.

PAUL'S CONCLUSION v18-23.

Paul urges them to live not by the wisdom of this age as they did before coming to Christ, but by the one Spirit in the one body. There is no need for competition as each enjoyed the blessings of all.

What can I do about my family and friends who are no longer walking with the Lord. Here are some suggestions of practical things you can do, knowing that they are the ones who are ultimately responsible for their decisions:

I can *watch and pray*, like the prodigal's father. This should go without saying, but we can so easily grow weary with the waiting, so it needs to be restated.

I can *keep our relationships good*. Take time to enjoy their company and where possible share their interests

I can *be ready to provide positive input* when the time is right. Life and its challenges, society and international conditions will provide you with ample opportunity, but be careful to season your input with wisdom which comes from above, and with love. This input should be a firm, gentle restatement of the Gospel in their own terms, together with a call to holy living and the joy of living each day walking in the presence of the Lord.

I can *be positive*, and not critical or pretend to be superior, but humble.

I can *keep my own heart in tune before the Lord*. I can watch my standards and devotion to ensure that I do not let my Lord (and them) down.

Welcome

Glen Park Gospel Church

Lower Road, Eltham North

Sundays 10.30 am

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