

Alarm to Carnal Christianity 2

In our last issue, we began a series focusing on the principal issue addressed in the First Corinthian Letter, rampant carnality . . . a stubborn bent of the Corinthians to think and act according to natural, unspiritual men. We have elected to highlight this carnality by using Paul's phrase used (almost exclusively) in this letter, "know ye not". This phrase is a literary device employed, not to inform, but to remind them of something the readers already know, in an alarming and incredulous way. It is intended to shock them with the absurdity of this behaviour in light of such knowledge.

Paul first reminds them that they, the church, are the "temple of God" (1 Corinthians 3:6), and that whoever corrupts the temple of God will likewise be corrupted or ruined by God. That was the subject of the last Gatepost. We are now ready for the second reminder.

"Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?" (1 Corinthians 5:6). These people were glorying, not in God, Christ, the Cross, the gospel, their infirmities, but in their "spiritual superiority", their imagined excellent knowledge. Puffed up spiritual men? What a contradiction! As Leonard Ravenhill says, "We may as well speak of honest thieves and pure harlots!"

True spirituality precipitates humility, brokenness over sin, purity in lifestyle, self-denial and adoration of God for His saving grace. But this bunch is glorying in its "Christian liberty". It sees itself so effectively removed from "legalism" that it can tolerate open incest among its members and still fellowship the fornicator. Paul chides them: *"Such fornication is not even tolerated among the Gentiles" (1 Corinthians 5:1).*

It is thought that such infractions can be overlooked for the sake of harmony and unity in the church. The boat does not need to be rocked. We should not risk making an issue of this lest it draw attention to us in an embarrassing way. Best to let it slide, sweep it under the carpet, ignore it and hope it will go away after awhile. After all, only one man is doing it. The rest of the church is in pretty good shape. No need to get the whole body up in arms over one man's sin.

Not so! A little leaven leavens the whole lump. You know that! Have you taken leave of your senses? Just as certain as the smallest amount of yeast is introduced into a lump of dough, the whole lump will be infected. Purge it out! You, the church, are unleavened (1 Corinthians 5:7).

Now, that is an astounding statement. Since leaven, if not elsewhere, is here unmistakably a symbol of sin, and the church is said to be unleavened, then the church is declared to be sinless. We may properly understand in the absolute sense that this sinlessness is an imputed sinlessness through the imputed life and sacrifice of Jesus Christ (verse 7). But we cannot dismiss our responsibility for sinlessness there. Indeed, it begins there. "Purge out the old leaven . . . as ye are unleavened." John's writings agree: *"Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him and he cannot sin, because he is born of God" (1 John 3:9).* Our nature demands that we live consistently with what we have been made in Christ Jesus. Christian liberty does not extend to sin. It is liberty from sin, liberty to live purely and righteously.

The church is enjoined to either get the sin out of the sinner, or get the sinner out of the church. The leaven must go. We have no alternative if we are to remain an unleavened lump. Either the church is going to be conformed to Christ, or conformed to the world.

Now, we have here the potential of another dangerous error: sinless perfectionism. If all sin must be purged from the church, then are we not saying that the church must be sinlessly perfect in thought, word and deed? No, we are not, and neither is the scripture. If every person who commits even a *little* sin (a *little* leaven), is to be put out of the church, then there will be none of us left. There is enough of Adam left in us to give us all plenty of unwanted sin to grieve and repent over daily. Otherwise, how could we pray, "forgive us our trespasses"? No, it is not conditioned upon sinless character. *"Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin" (Romans 4:8).* We are justified because God, for Christ's sake, will not lay our sins to our account.

The object of church discipline is the preservation of the church. The person to be excluded is one who is consistently practicing open, known sin. If such sin is tolerated, accepted, excused, embraced and unjudged, it will not be long before it infects the whole church. All will be doing it. The flesh and its desire to sin is troublesome enough to keep mortified, without being encouraged by the church's tacit endorsement or indulgence. Make no mistake about it: Let one member practice his sin without reproof, and very soon every other member will be doing the same thing. It will change the very character of the whole church. That is why you see so many churches shot through with one particular sin.

But that is not all. The flesh is a corrupt whole. It does not stand independent in any of its rebellious parts. *"Where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work" (James 3:16).* When flesh gets its head in the tent, the whole camel will follow. If God's holy law is allowed to be flaunted on one point, the whole of its precepts will be impeached and despised. A host of other sins will follow.

Most people would be shocked beyond measure to know just how leavened the contemporary church is today. In the last twenty years of traveling and counseling with troubled preachers and church members, my ears have been subjected to a torrent of sewerage from this thing called the church. Lying, stealing, extortion, fraud, fornication, adultery, incest, sodomy, bestiality, hatred, grudging bitterness, idolatry, witchcraft (among church leaders), are but a few of the things that go on in these cursed religious holes. Of course, most all of this is covered by a very thin veneer or hypocritical piety; but in some cases it lies open and exposed for anyone with enough spiritual discernment to see.

And it all begins with tolerating just a little sin. Don't you know that just *a little sin*, embraced and excused, will soon corrupt the whole church? Get it out, and do it as quickly as possible!

Get it out? Put away from yourselves that wicked person? Judge a fellow church member? Horrors! Would not that be unkind and unloving? Is it not gross arrogance for the members of the church to assume their qualification to judge those among them? This prevailing attitude of contemporary Christendom is a good indicator of how much distance it has put between itself and the Bible. It is a carnal mentality that takes its cue from fleshy men of the world, not Christian charity.

Third and Fourth Reminders: "*Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world?*" (1 Corinthians 6:2). "*Know ye not that we shall judge angels?*" (1 Corinthians 6:3). The principal truth embraced here is, the saints shall judge.

This is a truth which is nowhere else in the Bible set forth as explicitly as it is here. It was evidently, however, a truth familiar to the church at that time. We are, therefore, bound to receive it in its fullest force. The church does now judge the world in a limited sense. "*He that is spiritual judgeth all things*" (1 Corinthians 2:15). The church discerns light from darkness, separates right from wrong, evil from good. It possesses the keys of the kingdom, is the custodian of the knowledge of God, the Law, the Gospel, without which none can be saved. It wields the instruments of salvation in faith, prayer, fasting and spiritual gifts. It works under the authority of the Name of Jesus, having by virtue of its union with Him, all power in heaven and earth. But all of this is now, and limited to the scope of the salvation and works of the elect. Our text speaks of an absolute judgment of the world in the future. Exactly what this might entail is not known. But we do know that it will be in connection with our reign with Christ.

We are also reminded that we shall judge angels. As in the judgment of the world, we do now judge angels in the limited sense. Through the word of God, through faith in Christ, through prayers and authoritative proclamation of the judgments written, we break the chains of hell upon God's redeemed people, we limit the powers of darkness in their evil designs, we cast out demons and bind them in the Name above every name. But there is a time in the future when we shall sit in the heavenly tribunal, and with our reigning King, pass judgment on fallen angels and heavenly powers.

The point of all this, however, is not to exult in what we may experience in the future, but to awaken us to what God has qualified us for now. If we are to judge the world and angels in the future, and we are already the sons of God, possessors of the life of Christ in all His purity and wisdom, then we are certainly qualified to judge in things that pertain to this life now. Nor are we to assume that the elite, the elders, the wisest of them, may be selected to do such judging. No, this Christian ability is so common, that we may choose the least esteemed of the redeemed and set them as judges between brethren who have disputes of worldly concern.

Does that sound so outrageous and unreasonable? If so, it is for two reasons. First, we have filled our churches with people without the least of Christian graces. The prospect of setting the poorest of that crowd as civil judges is indeed frightening. The second reason is that we have adopted carnal thinking as to the qualification of judges. Lawyers and judges, the world has taught us, have to be in possession of extremely keen minds, with intensive education, in order to know all the fine points of legal (and illegal) maneuvering. They must be clever politicians and able to use the law to achieve desired ends. In short, the practice of law in this world is the skill of using legal process to achieve desired ends, irrespective of truth and justice.

But to judge truly and justly, only three requirements need be met. 1) A knowledge and understanding of the law, what it says, and what it means. 2) True information, on the controversy at hand. 3) A sincere desire for justice, for what is right. In the world these requirements are frustrated by many factors: Vain philosophies of men that pervert the facts and truth of the law, personal prejudice, political pressures, corruption of men, person interests, lying and deception, legal maneuvers and delays.

In the church, o such obstacles exist. It is expected that true testimony will prevail; justice, right and equity will be sought; and grace and mercy shall reign. The "least esteemed" Christian will know God's law and be aware of what it means.

The saints shall judge. The saints are now qualified to judge. This means that Christians shall settle *all* controversies among themselves. It means that they will be willing to bring their deeds to the light in unvarnished truth. It means that they will be willing to judge their peers. And it means that they will subject themselves to the judgment of their peers.

Try pouring a little of *that* wind in your current wineskin and see what happens. If it explodes, maybe you ought to try for a better bottle.

- C. M.