

## NT Lesson 33

### “YE ARE THE TEMPLE OF GOD”

(1 COR 1: 1-6)

Someone has called Corinth the *Las Vegas of the Ancient World*. It was a city of 250,000 citizens and another 400,000 or so slaves. It was located just off the Corinthian Isthmus, and was a crossroads for travelers and traders. It was a city of typical Greek culture; its people were interested in Greek philosophy, and placed a great value on wisdom.

We have been told that the city had at least 12 temples, although they may not all have been in use in Paul's day. The most famous of these temples was the temple of Aphrodite, the goddess of love, where worshipers practiced ritual prostitution. The temple was served by more than 1000 pagan priestess-prostitutes. The immorality of Corinth was so widely known that the verb “to Corinthianize” meant “to practice sexual immorality.”

Paul had had some success in this city, and yet he received word while staying at Ephesus that there were great problems among the Corinthian Saints. The letter of 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians was sent to address those problems.

During the summer after my appointment but before I assumed my duties as principal of a seminary in Utah, I received a Sunday morning call from the police telling me that the Seminary had been vandalized. I drove to the building and found the walls covered with spray-painted obscenities directed at the Church, the Mormons, and at Deity. Someone, in the middle of the night when no one was standing guard, came to the structure and attempted to deface it.

We made contact with professionals who came with pressure hoses and appropriate chemicals and cleaned the wall so well and so quickly that I was amazed. What a blessing if we could remove the graffiti from our spirits and souls as easily and proficiently as they did from that building. I suspect that it takes more effort than I saw that morning for most of us to cleanse the filth from our lives and return our spiritual structures to purity and beauty. But

there is no doubt that Lucifer and his associates run around with spray cans of sin, temptation, iniquity, looking for unguarded moments to eradicate our cleanliness.

Paul had received word that many members of the Church in Corinth were in a state of awful filthiness. First Corinthians was his attempt to induce them to become clean once again.

## **I. AVOID CONTENTION AND BE UNIFIED (1 Cor.1:10-13; 3:1-11)**

Note that Paul is writing to “them that are [or should be] sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints . . .” (1:1) This message of repentance is for people who ought to know better, who have been taught better. And the central message of the first chapter is a call to unity.

“Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.” (1 Cor 1:10)

What would happen to your faith, if each time you attended church in a ward or branch different from your own, you heard a different slant on the Gospel. I saw an anti-Mormon quilt in Nauvoo early this month. It reflected the fact that Joseph told the story of the First Vision several times, and emphasized different aspects in the various accounts. The quilt had nine frames, each with a slightly different picture. The caption at the bottom said, “Which version of the First Vision do you believe?” The implication was that Joseph should have presented the experience *exactly the same way* every time. What if you had to make that kind of choice? What if there were really were conflicting accounts? What if the ordinance of the Sacrament of the blessing of babies or the ordinations to priesthood callings were done in significantly different ways in different areas of the Church? I think you must have noticed how carefully the Brethren safeguard the ordinances so that things are done in the same way in every area of the Church. Such management is much easier now than in the days of Paul when distances and time made it impossible for leaders to supervise closely, with the result that churchwide unity became most difficult to maintain.

In Corinth, divisiveness seems to have fractured the fellowship of the Saints. People have divided into factions, apparently based in part on the missionary who baptized them.

11. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you.

12 Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ.

13 Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?

14 ¶ I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius;

15 Lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name.

16 And I baptized also the household of Stephanas: besides, I know not whether I baptized any other.

The evidence of this worldly focus of the Corinthians is found in 1 Cor. 3:3: “For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?”

Paul sends a solemn warning to those in Corinth, and he sends that same warning echoing down the ages to the saints of the latter days. *I have laid the foundation of Jesus Christ for you, but be most careful how you build thereon.* (See 1 Cor. 3:10,11) What kind of edifice would we rear on a foundation of the Rock—of Christ. Would we build with “. . . gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble”?

Imagine building on that divine and sanctified foundation a structure of wood or hay or stubble. C.S. Lewis understood this concept. He knew that when we try to build without divine direction and inspiration, we will never make anything of ourselves as grand as God can make.

"Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that

house. At first, perhaps, you can understand what He is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on: you knew that those jobs needed doing and so you are not surprised. But presently, He starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make sense. What on earth is He up to? The explanation is that He is building quite a different house from the one you thought of—throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards. You thought you were going to be made into a decent little cottage: but He is building a palace." (Mere Christianity [New York: Macmillan, 1960], p. 174.)

This palace is the “temple of God” Paul mentions in 3:16, 17. We defile that temple by the materials with which we build it, and by making it impossible for God to make us of what he wants us to be. And so very often this happens because we depend more on our own intellect than on the manifestations of the Holy Spirit.

## **II. RELY ON THE SPIRIT RATHER THAN ON THE WISDOM OF THE WORLD (I Cor. 1:17-31; 2:1-16)**

The source of the doctrinal divisions in these various groups—they don’t “all speak the same thing” (1:10)—seems to be an effort to understand the complexities of the gospel with man’s wisdom. Notice how many times some form of the word foolish appears in these verses.

For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish **foolishness**; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. (1:18)

For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the **foolishness** of preaching to save them that believe. (1:21)

But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks **foolishness**; (1:23)

Because the **foolishness** of God is wiser than men; and the

weakness of God is stronger than men. (1:25)

The fact is that those who measure life only with the intellect will always find the gospel of Christ ridiculous. The idea of angels and gold plates and revelation and healings and visions and prophets will bring an indulgent smirk to the faces of hard-hearted intellectuals. These are those whom the Lord said in Moses 6:27, “. . . their hearts have waxed hard, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes cannot see afar off.” It was only after Enoch had washed the dirt (the world) out of his eyes (see Moses 6:35) that he was able to see “things which were not visible to the natural eye.” (Moses 6:36)

Those things invisible to the natural eye are the things Paul speaks of in I Cor. 2:9.

But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.

These are the things we can only behold with the eye of faith, by the influence of the Spirit. D&C 76:10 promises

For by my Spirit will I enlighten them, and by my power will I make known unto them the secrets of my will--yea, even those things which eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor yet entered into the heart of man.

The imperative nature of this counsel is emphasized by Paul's declaration that “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor. 2:14). The man who neglects the whisperings of the Comforter will never comprehend the salient truths of the universe. Locked tightly in a world of his own construction, he will reject anything that does not fit the pattern he has created.

One of the great discourses on the importance of the Holy Spirit was given by Wilford Woodruff at the Weber Stake Conference in Ogden, Utah on Oct. 19, 1896. Review the following quotes:

- ' One morning, while we were at Winter Quarters, Brother Brigham Young said to me and the brethren that he had had a visitation the night previous from Joseph Smith. I asked him what he said to him. He replied that Joseph had told him to tell the people to labor to obtain the Spirit of God; that they needed that to sustain them and to give them power to go through their work in the earth. (Collected Discourses, Vol.5, Wilford Woodruff, October 19, 1896)
  
- ' "The night following this Joseph and Hyrum visited me, and the Prophet laid before me a great many things. Among other things, he told me to get the Spirit of God; that all of us needed it." (The night following this Joseph and Hyrum visited me, and the Prophet laid before me a great many things. Among other things, he told me to get the Spirit of God; that all of us needed it.)
  
- ' Brigham Young also visited me after his death. On one occasion he and Brother Heber C. Kimball came in a splendid chariot, with fine white horses, and accompanied me to a conference that I was going to attend. When I got there I asked Brother Brigham if he would take charge of the conference. "No," said he, "I have done my work here. I have come to see what you are doing and what you are teaching the people." And he told me what Joseph Smith had taught him in Winter Quarters, to teach the people to get the Spirit of God. He said, "I want you to teach the people to get the Spirit of God. You cannot build up the Kingdom of God without that."

This what I want to say to the brethren and sisters here today. Every man and woman in this Church should labor to get that Spirit. We are surrounded by these evil spirits that are at war against God and against everything looking to the building up of the kingdom of God; and we need this Holy Spirit to enable us to overcome these influences. (Collected Discourses, Vol.5, Wilford Woodruff, October 19, 1896)

This inclination to intellectualism must be the reason why God has called so many boys and young men into his service. As Paul said, "But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty

. . .” (1 Cor 1:27)

In the Doctrine and Covenants the Lord said it this way: “Wherefore, I call upon the weak things of the world, those who are unlearned and despised, to thrash the nations by the power of my Spirit . . .” (D&C 35:13)

### **III. BE MORALLY CLEAN** (1 Cor 3:16, 17; 5; 6:9-20)

Elder Hugh B. Brown, speaking of the importance of chastity, made the following wonderful comment:

Much self-respect and happiness are lost forever [through immorality]. Dr. Henry A. Bowman, a renowned U. S. expert on courtship and marriage says:

When all is said and done, there is nothing gained from premarital adventure except immediate pleasure and that at tremendous risk and exorbitant cost. No really intelligent person will burn a cathedral to fry an egg, even to satisfy a ravenous appetite. (Hugh B. Brown, *The Abundant Life*, p.67)

What a powerful image! It brings to mind a poem by Shakespeare.

What win I if I gain the thing I seek?  
A dream, a breath, a froth of fleeting joy?  
Who buys a minute's mirth to wail a week  
Or sells eternity to get a toy?  
For one sweet grape, who will the vine destroy?  
Or what fond beggar but to touch the crown  
would with the scepter straight be stricken down?

Indeed! Who would burn a cathedral to fry an egg, no matter how hungry? And yet we see this very thing happening constantly in the media and the world, even in the highest halls of government, and, sadly, among our own people. Paul again sends a warning through the ages to the Twenty-first Century.

Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?

Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Cor 6:9,10)

President Benson recognized the monumental danger to our society of this preoccupation with promiscuity. He said,

Recently, a young man commented that if he quit reading books, watching television, seeing movies, reading newspapers and magazines, and going to school, there was a chance he might live a clean life. This explains, in large part, the extent to which the insidious evil of sexual promiscuity has spread . . .  
(Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson, p.409-410)

I fear sometimes that we invite the sins of Corinth into our own homes. It is all for entertainment, of course. We know it is wrong. But we offer our resources to pay people to persuade us that immorality is acceptable, and that the only standard is a personal one. It seems that many believe what I read in a pamphlet at Fort Benning, Georgia in 1968, "Whatever feels good, is good."

## **CONCLUSION**

Paul's final two verses will suffice:

What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's. (1 Cor. 6:19, 20)

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