

The Spoilers of the Church
II Corinthians 12:11-21

INTRODUCTION

Churches are destroyed from within. Unless the enemy can find some member of the body through which he can work, he is powerless to thwart the work of the church. Unfortunately he does not have much difficulty in finding those who will cooperate with him. However, many times they are not aware that they are being used by the enemy to spoil the church.

As Paul draws this letter to the Corinthians to a close, he bares his soul to them. He again acknowledges that this boasting has been the work of a fool. "I am become a fool in glorying". Such behavior had been made necessary though by the situation of the Corinthians. They were turning their backs upon their father in the faith to follow some self-proclaimed "super apostles". It became necessary, for their sake, for Paul to remind them that he was a true apostle of Jesus Christ and their father in the faith. Again he points them to the true "signs" of an apostle which have been so evident in his ministry.

Like a true shepherd, Paul's concern was with their welfare - not his own. He reminds them that "I seek not yours, but you." He had never received monetary support from them, and was not going to begin it now. All he wanted from them was the privilege of presenting them to the Lord to be His own possession. Every move on his part had been for their good. "But we do all things, dearly beloved, for your edifying."

Evidently, he felt that he was being wrongly identified as the problem of the Corinthian church. The church was not willing to face up to the true spoilers of the church. They wanted to lay the blame upon their former pastor, and founder. This was not the last church to blame a pastor or staff member for problems that they themselves were responsible for. Sometimes a pastor is a problem, but more often the problem is in the carnal attitudes and actions of the members of the body.

As Paul speaks of his anticipated visit with the church, he writes, "For I fear, lest when I come, I shall not find you such as I would, and that I shall be found unto you such as ye would not; lest there be debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults; and lest when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and that I shall bewail many which have sinned already, and have not repented of the uncleanness and fornication and lasciviousness which they have committed." In these verses the apostle lists nine deadly spoilers of the church. They spoil the fellowship of the church and thereby make it useless in the work of the Lord. Since they might still be spoiling churches, let us consider them one by one.

I. QUARRELING IS A SPOILER OF THE CHURCH

This word could be translated contention, strife, or wrangling. It is the word Paul used in the first letter to the church to point out their carnality and immaturity. It

is the kind of contentious behavior that one would expect among the unredeemed, but it comes as a surprise when you find it among those who have the Spirit of peace in their hearts. Yet it is often found in the fellowship of the church.

It becomes obvious when you have two or more members of the church who become contentious over their disagreements. They have not learned in the Lord how to disagree without being disagreeable. They feel rejected unless their point of view is Accepted by everyone. They become quarrelsome about it. They begin to allow their disagreements to affect their relationship with others. Evidently the Corinthian church had a good bit. of variety in their fellowship. Being a major sea port city, the population was rather diverse. They were much like us at this point. As our city grows, we will continue to find diversity in the fellowship of First Baptist Church. This will put our spiritual maturity to the test! Are we big enough in the Lord to love and accept those with whom we may disagree on some things, or will we become quarrelsome? The quarrelsome spirit is a spoiler of the church and must be treated as sin.

II. JEALOUSLY IS A SPOILER OF THE CHURCH

Paul also listed this word as a sign of carnality in the first letter to the Corinthians. It is an attitude that begrudges the good of others. William Barclay says, "It is characteristic of a mean and little mind." Paul declares that true Christian love, "envies not." Whenever you find jealousy, you can know that true love, the ultimate mark of spiritual maturity is missing.

This attitude shows up in the church in a number of ways. It will be seen in the person who is always sucking the prominent place for themselves in the church and who becomes slighted when the place is given to someone else. . This will often cause them to threaten to withdraw from the church or to seek some kind of revenge against the person who got what they thought should have been theirs. It is that attitude which prompts a person to attack another person simply because they have something that is desired. This will be camouflaged under something else, but when it is stripped down to the bare truth, all that you will have is jealousy. When the truth is known about our actions in eternity, it will be revealed that jealousy has been behind many of our unkind words and actions toward others. We acted as we did because we loved the things or position that they had more than we loved them. This is a terrible spoiler of the church.

III. ANGER IS A SPOILER OF THE CHURCH

This word does not refer to those grudges or settled anger that a person carries with them for an extended period of time. Rather it refers to those outbursts of anger, those temper fits, that are seen from time to time. They have been seen in the fellowship of the church. They are usually attended by unkind words being expressed in anger and by accusations being lodged that would under different circumstances, not have been uttered. Such anger is surely an outburst of the old sinful nature with which each of us must struggle day by day. It should be avoided at all cost because it is so destructive to the fellowship of the church.

Most of us have witnessed this kind of behavior somewhere along the way. We are not too surprised when we see Billy Martin acting this way in his encounters with an umpire, but it is devastating when this kind of behavior is meekness, which is a fruit of the Spirit. Uncontrolled anger can do more to tear down a church in fifteen minutes than five years of prayerful ministry can repair. Beware of uncontrolled outbursts of anger.

IV. FACTIONS ARE A SPOILER OF THE CHURCH

This word comes from the same foot as the word for strife. It is that "utterly selfish and self-centered ambition which has no idea of service and which is in everything for what it can get out of it for itself". (Barclay) It is a party spirit. It manifested itself in the Corinthian church when they began to divide themselves up into factions. There was group with loyalty to Paul, a group with loyalty to Peter. They were not nearly as concerned about the wealth and good of the church as they were their own interests.

This is often seen in the church today. In a church like ours, it will be seen in those people who commit their loyalty to a particular program in the church or a personality, rather than the total work of God through the church. When they look at a proposed budget of the church, they will evaluate the whole thing on the basis of what it did for their favorite program. If they are of the music party, they are for it if it gives generous help to the music. If they are of the youth party, they want to know what it is going to do for the youth. If they are of the university party, they will evaluate everything on this basis. If they are of the single adult party, the same will be true. Such an attitude is a dangerous spoiler of the fellowship of the church and is a sure sign of the lack of spiritual love and maturity.

V. THE TONGUE CAN BE A SPOILER OF THE CHURCH

Paul presents two ways in which the tongue can be used to spoil the church. "Slander" or "backbiting" refers to those open, "loud-mouthed attacks that one would make on another with which they disagreed. This would be that person who openly questions the motives of another person unjustly. While this is a very destructive use of the tongue, the second is even more destructive. At least a man has some defense against the open attack.

There is really no defense against "gossip" or whispering. This refers to those behind the back, "don't use my name" kind of attacks. It is that slanderous story that you have heard or imagined that you pass on to the hurt of another person. I have literally seen people destroyed by this type of action, this ungodly use of the tongue. Love does not even think any evil of another person, not to mention speaking no evil. We need to keep watch on our tongues. You have the potential in your tongue to destroy the effectiveness of any leader in the church. All you must do is to begin a gossiping campaign against them. You can take a half-truth or even a lie and literally spoil them as a leader. In the process you will have also destroyed the fellowship of the church. The tongue can surely be a spoiler.

VI. ARROGANCE IS A SPOILER OF THE CHURCH

Literally this word means to be "puffed up". The idea in the word is to be puffed up with conceit or pride. This is the person who is living with a false sense of worth to the fellowship of the church. He allows his attempts to magnify himself over to override his concern for the welfare of the church. He cannot be used to help others or to minister to others or to receive ministry from others because of this conceit that has him inflated. Just a few of this type can spoil the fellowship of any church. They have not allowed the disciplines of the Lord to work true humility into their hearts.

VII. DISORDER IS A SPOILER OF THE CHURCH

This is a danger to every church that seeks to practice the democratic principles of the New Testament church. This is really associated with the arrogance just mentioned. For two people to work together in harmony and order, humility must be present. Human pride and conceit can make working together impossible. The result will be disorder, tumults, disturbances. The work of the church goes forward only when harmony and order prevail.

VIII. IMMORALITY IS A SPOILER OF THE CHURCH

Corinth was one of the most immoral cities in the world. It was famous for its moral compromise. It was difficult to keep the spirit of the city out of the church, just as it is difficult to keep the sexual revolution of our day from tearing down the moral convictions of the church. But Paul identifies this as something he must deal with when he comes to Corinth. If there is known immoral behavior in the Church, the effectiveness of the church will be spoiled. I have seen great churches destroyed by the immoral behavior of their leaders and members. Purity must be maintained at all cost.

Conclusion

Have you noticed any of these things in any way in your own heart? It is a time to examine your own life in the light of the Word of God. If there is any inclination in this direction, such a tendency must be dealt with at once. This is something that needs to be put to death by the power of the Holy Spirit and the Spirit must be allowed to produce the fruit of the Spirit to replace that negative action. His fruit in the life of a church will do just the opposite. May God help us to rid ourselves of all the spoilers of the church.