

480 The Dangled Carrot - March 2022 - (Practical Discipleship)

Due to current dangers all around us these days, in our two previous Weekly Reflections we have first considered Paul's heartfelt prayer for the Ephesian church (Ephesians 3.14-19): that God the Father would mightily strengthen them, that Christ would indwell their hearts, and that they would continue to grow in both love and spiritual understanding of the Lord God and of all His blessings.

Then we saw Paul's instructions to the Thessalonian Christians, (from I Thessalonians 5.4-22). Paul urged them to be people of light rather than of dark; to be watchful and sober; to be clad in solid spiritual armour; to be cheerful, prayerful and thankful; and to "hold fast to the good" as they lived lives above reproach.

Now we can come down to Corinth, a third, large, cosmopolitan, idolatrous city renowned across the Roman Empire for its immorality. Once again, a Christian community came into being through God's blessing (Acts Chapter 18), whose members, once again, were drawn from Jewish and Gentile backgrounds. This meant that each of these two "camps" had their own ideas as to what this newly-entered Christian life was to involve day by day.

Putting it briefly, some new Christians of Gentile stock thought that "they had never had it so good"! They understood the basics about putting their faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour: Jesus' sacrificial death on their behalf meant that God the Father willingly granted His forgiveness of sins to anyone "in Christ" who sought His forgiveness.

So far, so good! But then, in view of this instant, constant forgiveness, based on faith in Christ, those Gentile Christians who were fresh from the "fleshpots" of Corinth saw no reason why those fleshpots should not remain part of their lives. So their version of the Christian lifestyle was – "do as you please" night and day; then say your "sorrys" to God the Father through Christ; receive God's fresh forgiveness; and then get back to those fleshpots tomorrow! "Wot's not to like?" as the saying goes. After all, God is love, God forgives, God understands, so what is the problem? - those stuffy Jewish Christians with all their tiresome rules were simply missing out on all the "fun".

The Holy Spirit's response via Paul to these mistaken folk got straight to the point! In I Corinthians Chapter 10, Paul explained how all the Israelites partook of God's many blessings after the Exodus from Egypt, "but with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were

overthrown in the wilderness” (10.5, KJV). The message from this example was simple: God’s people are to live holy lives. There is no place in the Christian life for “lusting after evil things”, for idolatry, for immorality, for “tempting Christ”, (that is wrongly relying on God’s forgiveness while the sins “carry on regardless”), or for “murmuring” (from vv.6-10).

All those Israelites initially were blessed, but later on many of them were destroyed because of their sinful unbelief. Just so with the Christian life, in which the genuineness of a Christian profession of faith in “Jesus Christ as Lord” is to be demonstrated by the living of a godly life (egs., John 15.1-8 / I Corinthians 15.58 / Galatians 6.9 / Ephesians 2.10).

This principle, so obvious to all of us today, must have come as a nasty shock to those “still-living-it-up” Gentile Christians! But powerful words of encouragement came for them (I Corinthians 10.13). First, the “fleshpot temptations” they were still going to encounter as they allowed the Holy Spirit to reset their lives, were and are “common to man”. Second, “God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which ye are able”. And third, God “will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it”.

Here are vital encouragements for us as well. Being tempted is not sinful in itself – it is a normal part of Christian experience with the devil trying to trip us up; sin only enters the scene when we succumb to temptation’s “dangled carrot”, which promises so much but which always leads to trouble (eg., Romans 6.23a / James 1.12-15). When we do fall, with repentance we ask for God’s forgiveness through Christ, and with resolve we seek to avoid going into areas of personal weakness again.

As we face temptation, 4 Rs can help: Recognise it for what it is (Eve didn’t, Genesis 3.1-6 / Resist it, as Jesus did by quoting Scripture at the devil (Matthew 4.1-11) / Retreat from the situation to do something else (if only King David had done that, in II Samuel Chapter 11, but he lingered and gazed, and caused immense misery as a result) / and Resolve, to keep clear from such temptations in the future as far as we can.

To sum up, neither dangled-carrot temptations, “nor anything else in all creation, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (from Romans 8.39).

“Praise ye the Lord – the Lord’s Name be praised!”

© March 2022 Faithful Sheep Ministries – www.fsmins.org