

Signs Of Immaturity

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Date: 15 February 1987

Preacher: Harry Robinson

[0 : 0 0] Our God and Father, as we bow our heads and hearts before you, we ask that we may come under your word and that we may be given understanding of your word and that by that we may become what you command, not by any effort of our own because we are fairly weak and helpless, but by the working of your grace in our midst and in each of our lives.

We ask this in Jesus' name. By a series of circumstances which you will come to understand if you don't calculate, this is the last time I'm going to preach.

And that's the Prince of Sydney, Australia.

When I was in Sydney last year and went to an ordination service and saw 24 men tried and true ordained to the ministry, I was very impressed.

In Canada, we're in some cases saying people can't be ordained because we've got nothing for them to do. 24 men had to go.

[1 : 4 7] College was pretty impressive. And the principal of that college will be preaching here next Sunday. I feel a little sorry for all those that are going off to Harris that they won't be here to meet Peter Jensen.

But then, of course, you will have Michael Green speaking out there. So here's a kind of... And then on the three Sundays following that, I will describe as our own crocodile Dundee, that is Paul Burnett, will be leading us in the mission of the lengthening shadow.

That may have profound meaning for us all.

Can you hear me? The thing I found out recently is a lot of you can't hear me and don't care.

However, I trust that you will hear because I have some things that I think are from the Word of God and for us as a congregation this morning.

[3 : 1 9] And it's from that passage from Corinthians, which was read as the epistle for today. And if you look at it carefully, it talks about... Paul, having talked a good deal about the cross in chapters 1 and 2, now talks about the congregation.

And he says, Brethren, I could not address you as spiritual men, but as men of the flesh, as babes in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, if you were not ready for it.

If you look through the previous verses from chapter 2 and the... ..this morning, then you will see a number of categories into which the people at Corinth fell.

And I want just to work through those categories with you, and you will have to be very clever to find them in the passage. It comes in chapter 2 and verse 14.

Where it says, The unspiritual man. And this is, you know, to be the natural man. I...

[4 : 3 3] What I want to do, you see, is I want to go through all the categories of people that are described here. First there is the natural man, and then there is the brother in Christ, and then there is the men of the flesh.

Nevertheless, they are in Christ. Though the next category is they are babes in Christ. The next category is...

...in Christ. Fellow workers with God. And then the last category refers to us all.

So we have these six categories, and I want you to look at them carefully. The first being... The natural man, in chapter 2 and verse 14, you read, The natural man, or the unspiritual man, does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him.

He is not able to understand them, because they are spiritually discerned, and he is not spiritual. So this is man in nature.

[5 : 49] He is critical, defensive, jealous, and violent when the gospel is mentioned. It's a great delight to know that very few people are apathetic about the gospel, either you believe it, or else you are angry at the claims that it makes.

And I feel the lash of anger fall time and time again through the media and in the various circumstances of my life as Christianity is ridiculed by natural men.

As Paul rightly describes them here as they consider it folly, and they find it completely incomprehensible.

And that's who the natural man is. But then you go to the next category in chapter 3 and verse 1 when Paul refers to the Corinthians as brethren or brothers and sisters, members of a community of love, members of a community of which the people are in relationship to one another.

Something has happened to move them from their natural state into this community of love. Now the confusing thing about these people is that they were, Paul found them somewhat difficult to deal with because, well, he had to distinguish them from the people who were not brothers or sisters, but who were, in fact, outside the church altogether.

[7 : 42] And he found very little distinction. That's very natural, I think, because, as you know, it costs nothing to become a Christian.

It costs everything upon as a Christian. You are entirely welcome. And I'm sure that if St. Paul stood here this morning, his arms would reach out and encompass all of you and say, brothers and sisters in Christ.

Some of you might squeal and run out and say, well, don't include me. Well, that's your problem. And I hope you'll deal with it. But the Christian faith is very comprehensive in including people.

So there are the brothers, the natural man, and then there are the brothers. But among the brothers and sisters are men of the flesh, people who come under the category which is beautifully described in Romans 7.14.

And it would be worth looking at that so that I can read a fairly lengthy portion of it and you can just see what it means to be in the flesh. Romans 7.14 talks about it in this way.

[9 : 04] We know that the law is spiritual, but I'm not, Paul writes. I am carnal, sold under sin. I don't understand my own action.

I do not know what I want. I do the thing I hate. If I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good, so then it is no longer I that do it, but sin dwells within me.

And so the spirit of this world, the reality of sin, is the basis of the person's action. Though he is included as a brother in Christ, he is still following the way of the world.

He thinks the way the world thinks. He sees himself as in need of deliverance. And until that deliverance comes, he remains a man of the flesh, an unspiritual, immature person.

He needs to be delivered. He knows it, but his thinking and his lifestyle and everything about him is still dictated by the world around him.

[10 : 18] And he can't break free of that. He's like Paul describes himself again in another passage in Titus chapter 3 where he says to Titus, we, we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving, divers, lusts, and passions, hateful, and hating one another.

That was the category of the world. And it was out of that category that God has called us into relationship with himself and relationship to one another.

But having come into that relationship, our minds and our hearts are still marked by the way of the world in which we live.

We think that way, we behave that way. And Paul points that out in Corinthians when he says the proof of that is, the proof of your immaturity, the proof of your unspiritual nature is, and he points it out.

He says when one of you says I belong to Paul and another I belong to Apollos, are you not just behaving like natural men? You're thinking the way the world thinks.

[11 : 45] Your life is marked by, not by love, but by jealousy and by strife between the different factions within the church. Now in this church some people play not Paul and Apollos, but Harry and Archie.

Or they might play over the next month Michael and Paul. or they might play Bill and Jim. They're all good games to play for unspiritual people, making comparisons between one and another as though there was some eternal significance to any one of them.

And this was the spirit that was cutting the congregation into pieces was this game of playing one person off against another.

And that's why Paul says that you are unspiritual. You are men of the flesh. You are immature. Now, he's not totally throwing them out of the church.

He's saying still, you are babes in Christ. You are lacking the maturity which belongs to you. Later in Corinthians he says, you are to be babes in evil, but in thinking you are to be mature.

[13 : 10] You are to be ready for solid food. You can't go along eating spiritual pap all your life. You have to come up against the hard issues.

There is a reality of that encounter. I reckon as I live my life and meet the people I meet, that there is nobody I meet who is not at some level of their life in contact with God.

Now, they may argue against it. They may call it folly. They may say, I can't understand it. They may plead ignorance. They may do whatever they want to do. But the reality is that they are up against the person of God at some level in their lives and they're fighting against it.

so often when I call as the minister with my collar on and in the appropriate manner, traditional to all good Anglican ministers, and knock at the door of somebody who hasn't been to church for at least the last ten years, they welcome me and say how glad they are to see me.

And then I get a whole lot of stuff about how religious they really are in spite of the fact that they've never seen me and I've never seen them and I'm in the local church.

[14 : 26] It just comes pouring out. And they don't have to do it, but they think that's the polite way to treat the minister.

And unfortunately the minister gets to think that's the polite way to be treated too. And then the whole thing becomes totally artificial.

But there is no hardcore reality. There is no confrontation. with the solid food of the word of God. So that you recognize that something has got to happen in your life.

You can't go on messing about forever. You've got to make some decisions. You've got to say which way you're going, how you're going to think, what values you're going to hold on, what your faith means to you, whether you're prepared to speak about it boldly before other people.

All those things have to be done. Otherwise, we are simply babes in Christ, immature in our thinking, not ready for spiritual food.

[15 : 43] And then comes the next category. We've had ordinary men, we've had the brothers and sisters, we've had the men of the flesh, we've had the babes in Christ, we have spiritual men now.

And look at chapter 2 and verse 6 and you will see what spiritual men are. These are mature men. Chapter 2, verse 6, 1 Corinthians, among the mature we do impart wisdom, although not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age who are doomed to pass away, but we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God which God declared before the ages for our glorification.

None of the rulers of this age who are natural men understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

Spiritual men are those who have come to recognize that God has made himself known to them in Jesus Christ and that Jesus Christ has made a claim on their life and they are now not responsible to Paul, they're not responsible to Apollos, they're not responsible to the religious establishment, they are responsible to live their lives in relationship to the risen Lord Jesus Christ.

He is their master, he is their teacher, he is their Lord. And that's what maturity in Christ counts for. And that's what these spiritual men are, men who have come to the place where they recognize that.

[17 : 22] The next category, you know I only cough on Sunday mornings, and or mostly, and I know that some of you think it's the signs of the end, but I, it's irritating to me and it's irritating to you, but please forgive me and I will carry on as though it didn't happen and you'd carry on that way too.

I've got an allergy, that's what. And maybe you're it. what I'm, the category I want to look at now is what comes in verse 9 when it says, we are God's fellow workers.

So you go from ordinary man or natural man to a brother in Christ to a man of the flesh who is a Christian but thinks as the men in the world do, to a babe in Christ who lacks the solid food and with that solid food he then becomes a spiritual man or woman and then he becomes a fellow worker with God.

And this is what what Paul is anxious to share with them about himself because they're divided over him and Apollos.

He says, what is Paul? What is Apollos? They're only servants of God? Paul planted, Paul is watered, but it was God that gave the increase.

[19 : 24] It was God that is working in the congregation. It is God that is working in your life. It is God that is bringing you to maturity. It's God that is helping you to understand. It is God that is providing the solid food that you need for your growth and maturity in Christ.

This is all God's work. These men are merely means or servants of God doing his work. but don't lose sight of the fact that it is God that is doing the work.

These people are fellow workers with God, but it is God's work. They will, because they work for a master, he looks after their wages.

They get from him what they require. You realize the enormous damage we do by playing Paul and Apollos. You get Paul trying to win points and Apollos trying to win points, instead of recognizing that their work is to do the work of God.

When you look at this congregation, there is so much evidence of the work of God. It has nothing to do with people, except this one is faithful watering, and this one is faithful planting, and another one is faithfully cultivating.

[20 : 48] I had a really good experience this week, which I would like to share with you. In fact, I had several. But five men who belong to the Alcoholics Anonymous group that meets here every Thursday night in the Trendle Lounge came to see me, because they felt it was time that they talked to the landlord, as they described me.

And I want you to know that you were all the landlords, too. But they came to see me, and they sat down and talked. And most of them are senior businessmen, 55 to 65, who live in this area.

And all of them bear on their faces, I think, the scars of the struggle they've had with alcoholism. And all of them evidence to me, in some respect, the character and depth and strength of men who had struggled and were winning a battle, a really serious battle.

And they said they really loved meeting in the Trendle Lounge. They said it's a sanctuary for us. It's a place where good things happen week after week.

It's a very important place to us. That's where we have coffee in the Sunday morning. That was significant. The other thing they said, is there any possibility you could start a Sunday school for 30 and 40-year-old men?

[22 : 14] Well, I told them about the Lerner's Exchange. And I told them about the Harrison Weekend. And they said this was why they wanted it. And these were older men.

They said when we were children, some of them in this district, we went to church and Sunday school and were confirmed, not as a matter of choice. We had to do it.

And there wasn't any option about it. And when we came to that titanic struggle with alcohol, we came to the first step, which was acknowledging our powerlessness to help ourselves and crying out for help.

that. Suddenly, all we learned in Sunday school and church became meaningful to us again. You see what happened? Children going to Sunday school with impatient Sunday school teachers, who feel tried and torn by the process, had gone on and worked with these kids who, in due course, rebelled and in due course, left the church and in due course, got into business.

And in due course, the stress mounted and in due course, they turned to alcohol and in due course, their lives just went into shambles and ruins through the impact of alcohol and family and business and person and everything else was ruined.

[23 : 40] Suddenly, they remembered what they learned in Sunday school. You see what a tremendous investment it is in working with children. And they're very sorry for men who are younger than them, who lived up and who were brought up in the liberal age when Sunday school wasn't important, confirmation wasn't important, going to church wasn't important, who grew up spiritually and biblically totally illiterate and come to the point of need in their lives and have no one to turn to.

That made me feel how terribly important the work we do is and the frustrations we suffer week by week. Those men were a tremendous encouragement to me.

When I look and see the work that's being done by the fellow workers with God who work with the MCC who have organized this Harrison weekend who are working together for our teaching mission with Paul Barnett, the people who are working on the learner's exchange, there was a Christian ed conference in the hall yesterday, which didn't gather a great many people, but it was a superb quality.

It was beautifully done. It undoubtedly was done by fellow workers with God. Last weekend when Ernie had his mission to the senior, it was beautifully done and a work of God.

So you become very conscious of God's work going on. Not of this person, Paul, or of this person, Apollos, or of Harry, or of Archie, or of Ernie, or of Jim, or of Bill, or of Paul, or of Michael, but a great God who with great faithfulness is at work among us accomplishing those things which are according to the purposes of his kingdom.

[25 : 46] And either we come into contact with that reality or we don't. The passage ends by saying we are God's field, God's building.

It is God that is working among us to make us a fruitful field that he has planted and worked and cultivated and from which he is expecting fruit. It is God who is at work taking us with all our different backgrounds and all our different weaknesses and all our different prejudices and by his grace and in his love building us together into his building for the purpose for the purposes of his kingdom.

That's what he's doing. And in that process we are moving from being ordinary men to being very unspiritual Christians, mere babes in Christ, to coming to maturity in Christ and knowing the God who has revealed himself to us in Jesus Christ.

Becoming fellow workers with God, plantering, watering, serving, being nothing in ourselves but sharing in as instruments and servants in the work that God is doing here among us.

Not responsible to the fan clubs but responsible to God and the work that he's doing among us. Those of us in high profile positions and those in low profile positions are fellow workers with him working in his field and in his building to do his work to his glory.

[27 : 28] Those are the things that 1 Corinthians chapter 3 verses 1 to 9 I think teach us. Amen. Amen.

Service now continues on page 2 of the yellow booklets. Let us confess our faith as we say, we believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that he has seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally be God of the Father. God of the Father, the Lord, the Lord, the Lord, the Lord, the Lord, the true God, the Lord, the Lord, the Lord, the Lord, of one being with the Father.

Through him all things remain. For us and for our salvation, he came down from heaven. By the power of the Holy Spirit, he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary.

He was made man. For our sake, he was crucified. He suffered death and was buried. On the third day, he rose again to record the scriptures.

[28 : 55] He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come and guide him in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father, who is with the Father, the Son, who is worshipped and glorified.

He has spoken through the prophets. We believe in one holy Catholic and apostolic church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world. Amen. A time of intercession. Let us pray. Let us pray. Let us pray for our homes.

Lord Jesus Christ, you shared in the life of your earthly home in Nazareth.

[30 : 05] Bless, we pray, our homes, that we may respect and care for each other, show hospitality and kindness to strangers, and grow more and more in your love.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. Let us pray for our church family, for our pastors, their wives and children, for the newly elected church committee meeting this week, for the Harrison weekend next week, for Michael and Rosemary, for the outpouring of God's spirit, for safe travel to and from, for the mission of the lengthening shadow beginning in two weeks, and for an expanded understanding what it means to be Christian at this time.

Our Heavenly Father, look with mercy on this, your family, for which your Son gave himself, that we may walk worthily of the love with which you have loved us, seeking the growth and the good of our fellow members.

Strengthen, we pray, those who teach us and those who lead us. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Let us pray for the many in this land, young, middle-aged, and older, men and women who do not have work.

[32 : 15] Heavenly Father, we remember before you those who suffer want and anxiety from lack of work. guide the people of this land so to use their wealth and resources that everyone may find suitable and fulfilling employment and receive just payment for their labour.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. Let us pray for our broken and divided world, for the leaders of the nations, for the downtrodden peoples, the hungry and the ill, for peoples oppressed by tyranny, for countries within which there is war and between which there is war.

God of peace, who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, show your love and power, we pray, on the peoples of the world.

give a deep desire for peace in the hearts of all leaders, banish hatred from human hearts, and bring love and compassion that all peoples may live in peace, sharing with equity the fruits of the earth.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. Amen. Now let us observe a time of silence and quiet in which we may bring the special needs to our heavenly Father of those known to us, perhaps folk who are sick at this time.

[34 : 22] May we also at this time bring before God matters which weigh heavily on our own hearts, a time of quiet. Let us reflect on what Harry Robinson said to us this morning from God.

Let that word lodge in our hearts, not be put away, but welcomed and loved and received and acted upon.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. And finally, Almighty God, you have given us grace at this time with one accord to make our common supplications to you.

And you have promised through your well-beloved Son that when two or three are gathered together, you will hear their requests. Fulfill now our desires and petitions as may be best for us, granting us in this world knowledge of your truth and in the age to come eternal life.

For you, Father, are good and loving and we glorify you through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, in the Holy Spirit, now and forever.

[36 : 10] Amen. Dear friends in Christ, God is steadfast in love and infinite in mercy. He welcomes sinners and invites them to his table.

Let us confess our sins confident in God's forgiveness. Together we pray, most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed.

By what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart. We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.

We are truly sorry. We humbly repent. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways to the glory of your name.

Almighty God, have mercy upon you. Pardon and deliver you from all your sins. Confirm and strengthen you in all goodness and keep you in eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

[37 : 31] Please stand. This is our opportunity to express our oneness in Christ, the sort of oneness that was mentioned in this morning's gospel reading.

The peace of the Lord be always with you. Amen. Amen.

Now the children come back to join us and we sing our offertory hymn number 569. magic yes okay CHOIR SINGS

CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS So that the Lord has made

Thank us, Lord, and thank you for the great Thank you, Lord, and thank you We shall be beautiful I will bless you, Lord, and thank you Thank you for bringing No one will wander Lord, us to save you Through the Lord We'll sing the second and third verse again The second and third verses again Mental■nhê God bless you painters

[42 : 03] Touchable Purple We'll be right back.

We'll be right back.

We'll be right back.