

The status of the Corinthians

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[0 : 00] then to Acts chapter 2, beginning to read at verse 37 to the end. Acts 2, verse 37.

Now, when they heard this, that's Peter's sermon, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, brothers, what shall we do? And Peter said to them, repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins. And you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are afar off, every one whom the Lord our God calls to him. And he testified with many other words and exalted them, saying, save yourselves from this crooked generation. So those who received his word were baptized, and they were added that day about 3,000 souls. And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to them all as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the number day by day, those who were being saved.

And then finally to 1 Corinthians chapter 3, beginning at verse 16. 1 Corinthians chapter 3, verse 16.

1 Corinthians chapter 3, verse 16.

1 Corinthians chapter 3, verse 17.

[3 : 12] For all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future.

All are yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's. Amen. The Lord bless to us that reading from its own word may it be to his praise and to his glory.

Amen. Before coming into the service and prayer meeting at the rear, I was thanking Ian and the worship team for their assistance over the last 12 weeks.

Twelve weeks we've been doing this, and I want to thank you also for your encouragement, your toleration, your praise of what God is doing, and above all, your listening here. I'm very grateful.

Turning to where we are in 1 Corinthians, the last few weeks I've been concentrating and pointing out how the apostle returns to the main theme of division and quarreling in the church.

[4 : 26] And he did that, first of all, by asking the Corinthians to consider what sort of people they were. Were they unspiritual? Were they spiritual people?

And he concluded that the problem was that they were carnal people, meaning they weren't under the control of the Spirit of God. Then he went on and said, I want you now to consider what we are, Apollos and myself.

The work of the servants of the Lord. And then he goes on in the next section to consider him as the expert master builder and what he's done and what he intends that they should do.

And you'll find more about that, actually. He returns to the theme again in all of chapter 4, which, God willing, we'll consider on a future occasion. But for now, he actually returns to the beginning.

Because in the beginning, what he was talking about was what the Corinthians are in God.

[5 : 36] So think with me, if you will, please, of the status of the Corinthians. Verses 16 and 17. Do you not know that you are God's temple and God's Spirit dwells in you?

If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy and that temple you are.

So what he's doing now is to say, this is the strategy he used in the very first four verses of chapter 1, which is to say, this is what you are.

And if you will take a note of what you are in God, you will have a different estimation of what you can achieve.

In verses 2 and 3, he says this. Chapter 1. This is what they are.

[6 : 57] It is also what we are. So he's saying to the people in Corinth, you are, despite your quarreling and divisions and problems and all the rest of it, you are the church of God in Corinth.

You are separated and sacred to God for his special service. That's the meaning of sanctification. You are called to be different people, special people, different from everyone else.

And you are exercising this healthy prayer ministry. Then, in the next verse, verses 4 to 6, he adds a bit more.

Because of the grace of God, which was given you in Christ Jesus, that in every way you were enriched in him with all speech and knowledge, so you were not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ.

When we dealt with that verse, I made the point that often in Paul's epistles, he will, in the first few verses, give you a hint of what's coming afterwards.

[8 : 18] And in these words, speech and knowledge, he's referring to two of the gifts of the Spirit, which we find in 1 Corinthians 12, verses 8 following.

And what these gifts are, they are preaching gifts, are designed to defeat the heresy of Gnosticism. So the Holy Spirit and his ministry is very evident among them.

Now, he amplifies this idea of the Holy Spirit being in the midst by saying in verse 16, Do you not know that you are God's temple, God's shrine, and God's Spirit dwells in you?

Is that not a marvelous thing to say to the people at Corinth? Is it not a marvelous thing for us to realize we individually and collectively are the temple of God?

So if we want to understand this, we ask the further question, How is it that this transaction has taken place? Corinth was a seaport.

[9 : 39] It attracted all the ills and sins of the known world. And he refers to all of this in 1 Corinthians 6, verses 9 and 11.

He says this, Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived.

Neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers, will inherit the kingdom of God?

And such were some of you. This indeed is what they were. But you see, something's happened.

Something's taken place. And he says in verse 11, But you were washed. You were sanctified.

[10 : 41] You were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God. So this has happened to them, because they've received the grace of God.

Amazing grace, says John Neaton. How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. Christ is the Redeemer, the one that sets us free.

But this is also taking place by the Spirit of our God. And he says this in Romans chapter 8, verse 2. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and of death.

And that's the meaning of the word redemption. It is a liberation, a setting free. And it's taken place in the lives of these Corinthians at the moment they heard of the grace of God.

All their former practices of sin that we refer to in 1 Corinthians 6, 9-11, they're gone. And instead of that, they are now the temple of God.

[12 : 10] Do you not know that you are God's temple and God's Spirit dwells in you? When I considered this verse a few weeks ago, I made the point that there are, in fact, two Greek words which describe the word temple.

The first of them is the word heron, and heron refers to the temple and, in particular, its outer courts. But that's not the word that's used here.

The word that's used here is neos. And neos applies to that bit of the tabernacle and the temple which we know to be described as the holiest of all.

Only the high priest can go there. Do you not know that you are God's temple? In this shrine, you have the ability to do what the high priest of ancient times could only do once a year, i.e., enter in to the very presence of God.

Isn't that a wonderful thought? And he goes on and talks about it later. He speaks of the work of the Spirit like this. For by one Spirit, we were all baptized into one body, Jews or Greeks, slaves or free, and were all made to drink of the one Spirit.

[13 : 36] This is what they are. They are the temple of God. They are the body of Christ and members of it in particular.

So we move on to our second thought. The insight of the Corinthians, verses 18 and 19. Let no one deceive himself.

If anyone amongst you thinks he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is a folly with God.

Now, when we look at these two verses, I'm saying that they state the insight of the Corinthians. But when you read what he says, it would seem that they're actually stating the reverse, that they don't have any insight at all.

And what is happening in these two verses is that the apostle is now directing his attention to those in Corinth who placed great store on the wisdom of this world.

[14 : 52] Do you remember the wisdom of this world was represented by the philosophers of the age or past ages like Aristotle or Plato? And you might think to yourself, what's that got to do with me?

Because after all, they've been dead hundreds of years. The wisdom of this world is still with us. If you want a practical example of it, you will find it in a book written by Richard Dawkins called The God Delusion, a book that is full of half-truths.

For example, he says of believers, they do not believe. They claim to know. But that's not what the apostle Paul says.

In 2 Timothy 1.12, he says, I know in whom I have believed. So belief and knowledge of God, contrary to Richard Dawkins, go together.

The wisdom of the world is still with us. Let no one deceive himself. If anyone amongst you think he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise.

[16 : 07] For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. We've seen already in thinking in chapter 1 and in chapter 2 that the natural wisdom of this world is at enmity against God and that in the cross God has nullified that wisdom.

Chapter 1, verse 19. It is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and the intelligence of the intelligent I will thwart.

And he's using again Old Testament Scripture and the Old Testament Scripture he uses is Isaiah 29, verse 14. In that Scripture he is showing that the ministry of the cross has nullified the wisdom of this world.

Now we might want to ask, why is it necessary to set aside the wisdom of this world? And the answer the apostle would give is that such wisdom proceeds from the dictates of a mind, such as Richard Dawkins, that is hostile to the things of God.

So the apostle said in Romans 8, verses 7 to 8, the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, indeed it cannot.

[17 : 45] And those who are in the flesh cannot please God. What this means, as we've seen already, is that the accepted channels of worldly wisdom are of no use to us if we want to find out what the revelation of God is for us.

And we saw in that verse in 1 Corinthians 1, 20, he says, Where is the wise man? Where is the expert in Jewish law? Where is the skillful debater of the age?

Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? So if it is the case that your wisdom, as far as they were concerned, from Aristotle and Plato, is of no use, then the question is, what is of use?

And what is of use is the ministry of the Spirit of God. And we looked at chapter 2 and we read this verse. Now we have received not the Spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God.

So the Holy Spirit is the agent of revelation. And he speaks through the inspired word.

[19 : 19] He speaks to your heart and mine. So natural wisdom is of no use in revealing the divine truth.

So what does the apostle do about this? In Ephesians 1, verses 16 to 18, we have a prayer recorded which he prays for the Ephesians in this regard.

I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which He has called you.

So the Plato's and the Aristotle's of this world are useless as far as divine truth is concerned. What is of use is the Spirit of God speaking through the divine word.

all Scripture is inspired of God. That word inspired, I shared this at an earlier stage, is theonouustos, which literally means God breathed.

[20 : 55] It's the only place in the whole of the Greek language, classical and New Testament, that that word occurs. It's very special. And how we evaluate God's word is determined on the fact that it's God breathed.

The Spirit of wisdom and revelation, they come to give the believers a knowledge of their hope, of their calling in the gospel. What are the riches of their inheritance in God?

what is the immeasurable greatness of His power to us who believe? This is the job of the Spirit of God. And it's the Spirit of God that opens our understanding.

So let's go on thirdly and finally to the strength of the Corinthians verses 21 to 23. So let no one boast of men, for all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future, all are yours and you are Christ's and Christ is God's.

Now where are we in this great discussion? As you've probably seen from what's been said over 12 weeks, following the Apostle through his arguments in the letters is not an easy task.

[22 : 35] One commentator has come to our age and he says this, the discussion of wisdom and folly which has proceeded intermittently from chapter 1 and verse 18 now moves to a close.

At the same time Paul brings to our head the discussion of the Corinthian party spirit which is proceeded concurrently with that of wisdom and he shows the ultimate absurdity on which this conflict rests and he does it in the phrase let no one boast of men.

True wisdom has not proceeded from men such as Paul or Apollos or anyone else but God has revealed it to us by means of the spirit of God.

When we looked at the second chapter he made this very clear. Chapter 2 verse 7 but we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God which God decreed before the ages for our glorification.

So in other words by dint of his teaching ministry this true wisdom this true insight into the plan of God is now being revealed to those who listen to his preached word.

[24 : 11] yet this wisdom was hidden from the rulers of the age. Verse 8 none of the rulers of this age had understood this for if they had they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

So the intelligentsia of the age didn't understand what was going on in the cross. The world did not know so if we class ourselves as lesser mortals in the intelligency of the age clearly God has made provision for us by providing the spirit of revelation.

Going back to chapter 2 verse 10 God has revealed it to us through the spirit. Verse 12 now we have received not the spirit which is of the world but the spirit which is from God that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God.

So it's very clear in the teaching of the apostle he's saying the spirit of God is here to reveal the insight the insightful plan of God.

Verse 9 of chapter 2 but as it is written what no eye has seen nor ear heard nor the heart of man conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.

[25 : 48] Now there's a conclusion to this. If this is so there is no need for anyone to boast in men who happen to be the ministers of the word.

And the reason for that is that the same spirit of revelation that is working in them is also by God's grace working in us.

So let no one boast of men. Verses 21 to 23 for all things are yours whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future all are yours and you are Christ's and Christ is God.

So this is the status you see of the Corinthians. All things are yours.

You are Christ's and Christ is God's. God's and God's spirit dwells in you.

[27 : 07] And from there he is now saying because of what God has made you in Christ he's made you equal to Paul or Apollos or Cephas meaning Peter so that boasting in men is a misdirection and a waste of time.

All things are yours whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future all are yours.

Everything belongs to you Corinthians. You are Christ's and Christ's is God. So they are rich beyond measure.

And you see this is important because what it does it points out to the Corinthians the problems that they've got in their mind.

How shall we conduct a proper witness here in Corinth? all things are yours and Christ and you are Christ's and Christ is God.

[28 : 30] What's the point of saying that? He's saying that all the resources of heaven are available for your witness, your testimony, your life, your challenge in this world and the one that's to come.

all of these resources are yours. And if only he can get them to realize this, they will see that they are rich beyond measure as far as the inheritance of the saints in the light.

And if they will do this, every evidence of party spirit will disappear and the church will have an effective witness. There we are about the middle of the A.D.

50s. We are now in 2016. But what I've been saying about the Corinthians and how it applied to them applies to us.

Every challenge we have, we have the resources of heaven available to us. Because what is being said here to us tonight, all things are yours.

[30 : 00] You are Christ's and Christ is God. Christ belongs to God. So this is the challenge.

What do we do with the resources of heaven? We receive them. We implement them.

We take them into our stock and our planning. And we move forward like a mighty army facing the next challenge, knowing that the resources of heaven arose.

Amen.