

“The Kingdom of God is in Power”

By

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A Beloved Church but Intractable!

The Church in Corinth was a church on which Paul expended much time and effort. He laboured hard and long to establish it and to nurture it. We know, for instance that, spurred on by a revelation from the Lord that He had “much people” in the city, he spent a whopping 18 months just laying the foundation of the church—making converts and getting it off the ground (Acts 18:1-11).

The church in Corinth was dear to the heart of the apostle Paul, and he looked upon them as his own beloved children whom he had begotten in Christ through the gospel (1 Cor. 4:15). But it was also a church that brought him continual headache. He complained that despite all the efforts he had made to feed them the Word, they remained spiritually stunted unable to mature in Christ. They remained carnal – unregenerate, and this was the reason why they manifested such carnal tendencies as envy, quarrels, and divisions (1 Cor. 3:1-4), in addition to backbiting, gossiping and engaging in all sorts of uncleanness and sexual immorality (2 Cor. 12:19-21).

The church in Corinth was a beloved church but problematic at the same time with many rough edges. It hurt, but the apostle came to the conclusion that it was time to crack the whip! After all, the Kingdom of God was not some effete bureaucracy bereft of power and authority, but a kingdom in power!

The Kingdom is in Power, but Rod or Love?

Not a few in the church had grown arrogant and were overstepping their bounds. Many, out of sinful pride, thought themselves equal, if not superior, to Paul, and took to trumpeting their spiritual prowess. Not enthused by this naked show of spiritual arrogance, the apostle felt it was time to pinpoint the real source of his authority so those arrogant guys would know their true place:

¹⁸ Now some are puffed up, as though I would not come to you.

¹⁹ But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord will, and will know, not the speech of them which are puffed up, but the power.

²⁰ For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power.

²¹ What will ye? shall I come unto you with a rod, or in love, and in the spirit of meekness? (1 Cor. 4:18-21).

The arrogant sought to match Paul in words and indeed did. But Paul countered that the crux of the matter was not talk but the demonstration of divine power. That was the bottom line, and that was what underpinned his apostolic credentials (2 Cor. 12:12). His preaching, he wrote, “was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God” (1 Cor. 2:4-5).

This was the Kingdom Paul represented and served as a minister of Christ. It consisted not in mere words but in the manifest power of the Holy Spirit. In 1 Thess. 1:5, he similarly wrote:

... our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake.

In Romans 15:18-19, he again emphasized:

¹⁸ For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ hath not wrought by me, to make the Gentiles obedient, by word and deed,

¹⁹ Through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God; so that from Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum, I have fully preached the gospel of Christ (Rom. 15:18-19).

His was a Spirit-driven ministry driving home the truth that the Kingdom is in power. He belonged to the era and class of the Spirit-empowered early Christian pioneers who were said to have “turned the world upside down” (Acts 17:6) wherever they went with the power-driven gospel of Christ. Their detractors could not stand the power and truth of their preaching.

In the Greek city of Lystra, while Paul preached, “there sat a certain man ... impotent in his feet, being a cripple from his mother's womb, who never had walked: ⁹ The same heard Paul speak: who stedfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed, ¹⁰ Said with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet. And he leaped and walked. ¹¹ And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, *The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men.* ¹² And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker” (Acts 14:6-12).

The power was in action wherever Christ, the Son of God, the Risen Lord, was proclaimed. In the city of Samaria it was on when evangelist Philip took the gospel there:

Acts 8:5-8

⁵ Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them.

⁶ And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did.

⁷ For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed.

⁸ And there was great joy in that city.

The early believers were living exactly the words Christ spoke to the seventy disciples who reported back to Him on returning from their evangelistic tour, “Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name” (Luke 10:17). In reply, Christ said to them inter alia:

Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you (v. 19).

The Kingdom of God is in power “over all the power of the enemy”, and he’s powerless to fight back! This means power to undo all his evil works – the bondage of sin, diseases, and demonic oppression.

But this also means disobedience is not left un-censured or unpunished, especially when we come to realize – as Paul acutely understood – that open disobedience and rebellion against the revealed knowledge of God is also a spiritual weapon by used by the devil against God’s Church (2 Cor. 10:1-6). When we read 2 Cor. 10 – “though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh” - we often picture ugly demons with pitchforks lunging at us, yet the plain sense of the text shows that the devil wields no ‘fearsome’ weapon here than an unseen spiritual weapon he uses to build “strongholds” in our minds:

2 Cor. 10:1-6

¹ Now I Paul myself beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ, who in presence am base among you, but being absent am bold toward you:

² But I beseech you, that I may not be bold when I am present with that confidence, wherewith I think to be bold against some, which think of us as if we walked according to the flesh.

³ For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh:

⁴(For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;)

⁵ Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;

⁶ And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience [of the incorrigible], when your obedience is fulfilled.

Paul was hesitant to use the rod of discipline but said it was a spiritual weapon made powerful by God to demolish satanic “strongholds”, being arguments and human reasoning employed in an attempt to refute divine knowledge. It is a weapon designed to make all Satan-inspired thoughts submit to the obedience of Christ, a weapon wielded in readiness to “revenge all disobedience”.

It's another way of demonstrating God's power to enforce and to instill discipline. Sin is not tolerated but rebuked and discouraged: "Them that sin rebuke before all", the same Apostle Paul instructed Timothy, "that others also may fear" (1 Tim. 5:20).

So then, the rebuking of sin ought to feature regularly in the minister's message (2 Tim. 4:2). And if the circumstances demand it, the heavier disciplinary rod of expulsion should be applied to enforce church discipline and the fear of God as Paul asked the church in Corinth to carry out against a brother who had sexual relations with his father's wife (1 Cor. 5).

The Kingdom of God is in power, and indiscipline has no place therein! And it does have a connection with the demonstration of God's power in supernatural deeds. Where discipline and obedience prevails, the right atmosphere is created for God to manifest His great power among His obedient people. He works mightily in us when we show a spirit of obedience and reverence:

¹² Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

¹³ For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure (Phil. 2:12-13). Amen!