

Wings

*“Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles.”
Isaiah 40:31*



March 27, 2011

What Brings a Church Down

There are some sins that are so common among God's people, we have no choice but to address them frequently.

“For I fear lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I wish, and that I shall be found by you such as you do not wish; lest there be contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, backbitings, whisperings, conceits, tumults; lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and I shall mourn for many who have sinned before and have not repented of the uncleanness, fornication, and lewdness which they have practiced” (2 Cor. 12:20-21).

The church at Corinth was a dysfunctional congregation. Paul wrote two letters to this group, trying to help them overcome the sins that were tearing them apart. This list of sins, found near the end of his second epistle, pretty well summarizes everything that was wrong with the congregation.

Unfortunately, these sins were not unique to Corinth. An almost identical list is found in Paul's famous “works of the flesh” warning to the churches of Galatia (Gal. 5:19-21). There seems to be a pattern here that we would do well to study. If these sins were a common

problem among first century churches, it's a safe bet we can expect to encounter them often in churches today.

A detailed study of each word in the list would be helpful, but let's start with a bird's eye view of the problems. The Corinthian list clearly separates the sins into two broad categories: *relationship busters* and *sexual looseness*. These categories provide a good framework for approaching the subject.

The *relationship busters* include those attitudes and behaviors that drive wedges between people (jealousy, selfish ambitions, backbitings, whisperings, conceits); as well as the conflicts that result from those wedges (contentions, outbursts of wrath, tumults). These sins often take the form of personality clashes or cliques within a church. Ironically, these sins can also enter a church through misguided efforts to defend the faith against perceived threats. Brethren can be their ugliest when, in the name of God, they set out to cleanse the church of impurity. No doubt, there are issues that must be addressed from time to time. But too often these “truth cru-

sades” become vehicles for ugly attitudes and carnal tactics, overshadowing the issues themselves. Whatever the outcome of the issues being debated, the only winner is Satan, who has succeeded once again in destroying unity among God's people.

Sexual looseness (uncleanness, fornication, lewdness) is a reflection of the world among which we live. Sexual license is more or less common in every society, and many people who commit to following Christ continue to struggle with sexual temptations following their conversion. So it is not surprising to see these sins crop up within a church. Nevertheless, the Lord has called us to a higher standard of sexual purity, and we must strive to honor that standard.

Relationship busters and sexual looseness brought many churches down in the first century, and they are still bringing churches down today. Like Paul, preachers and elders must make these topics a standard part of their teaching and preaching. A failure to do so exposes a church to influences that will sooner or later destroy it.

– David King