

Pastor Bill's Ramblings

2 Corinthians 5:16-20

So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.



GRACE and peace in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ!

A couple of months ago I pointed out: "For the church to be effective we have to discern if we are following God through Jesus Christ or if we are playing church." Unfortunately, when we put too much emphasis on worldly things power, prestige, money, etc. we begin to make them our gods (notice the little g). If we do not put emphasis on things that matter, such as our own spiritual well being, our relationship to God through Jesus and God's will for our lives, we can become like the soils found in Luke 8:4-15. If you will recall from verse 11, in Jesus' words: "*The seed is the word of God.*" The Word of God, the Bible, as 2 Timothy 3:16 states: "*All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness...*" This seed is scattered but it falls on different kinds of soil. Some falls on the hard path and we find those are the hearts that do "*not believe and* (therefore they are not) *saved.*" Some falls amongst the rocks, Jesus says: "... *they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away.*" Next Jesus talks about The Word that falls among weeds: "*as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life ...*" All of these soils, these people are "done in" by the fact that they place more emphasis on the world and the rulers of this world than they do on God, Jesus and God's Word. Unfortunately, for many years, churches built themselves up on the middle two soils. People who have heard the Word of God, and received it with joy, but have allowed the world to take that joy and

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peace from them. When worldly people begin to run churches we become like the world. When worldly ways and standards become the norm in how we evaluate our churches, when we worry more about membership, attendance and giving then we do about saving lost souls, we will no longer be relevant for God.

Listen to what Jesus said to churches as found in the Book of Revelation: "*I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first...do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place* " "*I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up, and **strengthen what remains and is about to die...**I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot...So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.*" By the way, the idea of branches that do not bear fruit pertains to churches as well as to people. Likewise the idea of pruning pertains to churches as well as to people. By the way, pruning can be painful!

John 15:2 ESV
Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.

On the other hand, we see what Jesus says to churches who keep and do His Word: "*I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet **you have kept my word and have not denied my name.***" Churches who are obedient to God's Word, churches who are about God's Kingdom work will be blessed. Yes they may be pruned from time to time, but that is only to make them healthier, able to bear more fruit, and to be about God's Kingdom work.

This is not just a Grace UMC problem it is a church problem as a whole. Listen to these quotes. "The Southern Baptist Convention may be the nation's largest Protestant denomination, but it is on the decline. For the ninth straight year, the Southern Baptist Convention has had a decline in membership." "The decline of the Presbyterian Church (USA) accelerated in 2014 as total membership dropped below 1.7 million." "Episcopalians Continue Bleeding Members, Attendance at Alarming Rate." We could look at similar statements concerning the United Methodist Church and the largest two Lutheran denominations.

The true churches and followers of Jesus are those who seek God's will, are about God's Kingdom work of being reconciled to God, reconciling others to God and His will, and are unified in the Gospel of Jesus, the Gospel of salvation.

Your Servant in Christ,

Pastor Bill