

CHAPTER FOUR

THE TRAGIC TRUTH

God's desire, and the **PRIORITY** on the heart of Jesus, is that He will have a people whose love for one another and attitude of servanthood will be such a witness to this world that men and women will be crying out to know our Lord. They will want to know the secret of our peace, our joy and our harmony. They will watch our marriages, our homes, our children and our work places, not to criticise but to know our secret.

Having urged his readers to be *filled with the Spirit*, and expressing one evidence of being so filled, as being *subject to one another in the fear of Christ*, Paul gives examples of how this should be in our relationships.

Christian marriage (Ephesians 5:22-33)

If Christian marriages were what they are supposed to be, with both parties Spirit filled and submitted to one another, honouring and preferring the other, they would be *the mystery revealed* to a watching world. Men would see the relationship that Jesus has with His bride, the church, and would be drawn to know Him as the foundation for their marriage also. There would be a steady path of seekers coming to our home, or church door, rather than rushing, as they now do, to the divorce courts! Women would want to honour their own husband above all other men, because of the love they receive - and men would want to

love their wives, because of the honour they receive. Rather than a vicious circle of abuse and retaliation so common in the world, there would be a *delicious circle* of blessing one another in Christ.

How tragic that divorce is so common among Christian believers. What kind of witness is that?

The Christian home (Ephesians 6: 1-4)

Where parents are in right relationship with the Lord and with one another, their children mature in a secure, loving home. Most of the counseling I do as a pastor has to do with *wounds* received by children growing up in a rather different situation, though often “Christian”. Fathers fail to disciple (or discipline) their children and, instead, *provoke them to anger*. Christian counselors today, speak of dysfunctional families where the child’s “love tank” is not filled with the love it was created to receive - because the dysfunctional parents are incapable of providing that love. The child does not experience the love whose fruit is security, identity, self esteem, acceptance and encouragement. Instead of growing up, emotionally and spiritually healthy, they become just like their parents, dysfunctional. They never learn to *walk tall in a world of bowed shoulders and broken hearts*. The empty space in their love tank is filled with one thing - **ANGER** - producing a life in rebellion to God’s purposes.

Such children never learn to obey their parents in the Lord.

“Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger.”

How tragic it is that so many badly behaved children are the product of “Christian” homes. What kind of witness is that?

The workplace (Ephesians 6: 5-9)

The Spirit-filled believer is called to be a witness in his workplace by displaying the attitude of a servant before his co-workers and employers.

He should be trustworthy to do his work well. I am familiar with a teacher whose school was to be amalgamated with two others in a major reorganisation. All the teachers from the three schools gathered together to form a Staff Association to speak on the teachers' behalf to the School Governors, concerning their desires for the design of the new school buildings and their terms of employment. One man was nominated and seconded for the position of President for this new association. Another was nominated and seconded. Then, much to his surprise, my friend was nominated. Immediately, the two others who had been nominated, withdrew their names in order to second my friend's nomination. No other names were presented and he was elected unanimously to represent all the staff. As he left the room he expressed amazement to a colleague. "Just wait till I tell my wife," he said. "She'll never believe me!" "Why not?" replied the colleague. "We all know you're the only one we can trust to always speak the truth!"

My friend was the only Christian on the senior staff of those schools.

Sadly, I am often told by business men (Christians among them) that the worst people with whom to do business are Christian believers. They want the most out of you for the least payment. They are the poorest at giving tips and often the last in settling debts! Of course, it may well be that we are judged more harshly by the world than non-believers are, but that is to be expected! We are called to have the attitude of servants. We should be living at a higher level of commitment and workmanship than the world! Sadly, we all know of Christian employers and workers who do not display a Spirit-filled work ethic or relationship with their colleagues. What kind of witness is that?

Worker Attrition

Most relevant research reveals that the number one reason for missionaries to leave *the field* is poor interpersonal relationships! They have studied for many years in Bible Schools and language seminaries, have interned in home churches, have invested a large portion of their lives in preparation and, after one term overseas, have returned home, bitter, disillusioned, embarrassed and hurt. This ought not to be!

In North America, the average tenure for a pastor in a local church is fewer than five years. The first year is honeymoon, the second, familiarity. In the third year, disillusionment sets in with rumblings of discontent. Both the pastor and the church members have unfulfilled expectations of one another. The fourth year sees the discontent come to the surface, often with acrimony and accusations. People take sides, a lot of heat is generated and the pastor leaves, usually saying, "I don't have to put up with this!" What kind of witness is that?

Church fights

Have you ever been involved in a church fight? It is not a pleasant thing! I know of one church, once over three hundred people, now non-existent. Everyone in that town seems to know some aspect of the story, and there are many people, once faithful in attendance, who say that they will *never attend a church again!* The wounds are as real as the fighting was bitter. The *gunshots* as believers assassinated one another, reverberated all around the town. Satan gloated - and the Lord wept!

Of course, most of our fighting is kept indoors or is more subtle. I read an interesting newspaper article a short while ago where it told of a group of ministers establishing support groups for pastors who had grievances against their church or church organisation. It told of ministers in one denomination, who

were “suing for big money” and then added that churches are a lot more brutal to their pastors than businesses are to their employees. The most vicious are in the evangelical tradition.¹

Look at the Saturday evening church ads in your local newspaper to see how we compete with one another in the arena of winning more people to *our* church - usually from some other church! It is well documented that most church growth is *transfer* growth, not *conversion* growth. Personal anecdotes are not to be commended but I once had an interesting experience worth recounting. It was early in the University year and all local pastors were invited to meet the students to tell them about our churches. We were given two minutes each to make our pitch. I listened as, one after the other, pastors extolled the virtues of their churches. “We have a wonderful College & Career group and can send our bus to pick you up.” “You’ll really enjoy our music - it’s up-beat, just as young people like it!” “Most of your fellow students attend *our* church as we are located near the campus.” I was about number 30 in the line-up and was, at the time, pastoring a small, struggling work. When I stood, I told the students that we were a small work with no special programs. We had nothing to offer them, except work if they wanted to help us reach our neighbourhood for Christ. I sat down - and the students broke into applause! As the church grew, a substantial number of our congregation were University students. Why do we compete with one another for the sheep when we all serve the same Great Shepherd? What kind of witness is that?

Why do we find it so difficult to honour one another, to love and serve one another? Is it simply ego (a nice word for pride) getting in the way while, at the same time, we speak about being filled with the Spirit? Or are we just ignorant of the fact that we are in a battle, and that the enemy is very cunning?

Be very sure of this! If it is the Lord’s priority to have a people in right relationship to one another in obedience to His Word, it certainly is Satan’s priority to mar such relationships!

Divide and conquer might well be his motto.

¹ Christian Week (Canada), June 21, 94