

IS YOUR WORK BEING TRIED BY FIRE?

by Carter Conlon

Do you feel like you are in the midst of a fire with an internal battle raging, even though externally everything seems to be in place? You don't understand why this is happening; however, God knows and He has given me a message for you that I know is from His heart.

The apostle Paul says, "*All this newness of life is from God, who brought us back to himself through what Christ did. And God has given us the task of reconciling people to him*" (2 Corinthians 5:18). Verse 20 says, "*We are Christ's ambassadors, and God is using us to speak to you. We urge you, as though Christ himself were here pleading with you, 'Be reconciled to God!'*" It is important that we understand what Paul was saying to this particular church. They had been given a ministry to bring about reconciliation on every level, the primary level being between God and man. Likewise, we are called to bring men and women into a living relationship with God. Before God can use us, we must be reconciled with Him and with one another; He needs ambassadors who are walking in truth, having embraced the kingdom they are representing.

■ CARNALITY SHUTS DOWN OUR HEARING

Paul came as a nurturing father to the Corinthian church. He was moved upon by the Holy Spirit to bring them a word. Because of the carnality among them, however, they could not hear what God wanted to say. Paul said, "*for you are still controlled by your own sinful*

desires. You are jealous of one another and quarrel with each other. Doesn't that prove you are controlled by your own desires? You are acting like people who don't belong to the Lord" (1 Corinthians 3:1–3). The fruit of their carnality produced envy, strife and division, and even more fearful than this, Paul said, were ears that were closed to the truth. Are your ears closed to God's truth?

The problem in the Corinthian church began as a very subtle thing. The people were divided along the lines of preferred preaching styles of godly men. Some were saying, "I'm of Paul; I'm of Apollos; I'm of Peter; and I'm of Christ." In order to build one man up, it is necessary, even subtly, to cast another down; there is no other way to do it. I can see the people saying, "Well, I love Peter because Paul preaches too long. Remember when he preached so long that a young man fell out of a window and died? And I like Peter because he goes straight to the heart of the issue."

Then the Paul camp says, "I would like Peter because he's passionate, but he preaches too loud. And then, of course, there's Apollos, a deep man, but he doesn't speak my language." This division, which seemed holy, was actually creating carnality among the people. They failed to understand that Peter, Paul and Apollos represented valid ministries in the body of Christ. Each one of these ministries had a function and a purpose in the kingdom of God. So Paul challenged the Corinthians

saying, "Is Christ divided? Was I crucified for you?"

Paul continues to deal with this carnality in 1 Corinthians 2:12, "*And God has actually given us his Spirit (not the world's spirit) so we can know the wonderful things God has freely given us.*" He was implying that the spirit of the world still had a place in their thinking. If left unchecked, it would open them to listening to ungodly men who would use them for personal advantage. This is still happening in the church today.

When backsliding begins to take place in the house of the Lord the people's focus turns to men of charisma and personality.

Along with many other Old Testament prophets, Jeremiah spoke of this same spiritual condition. "*Among my people are wicked men who lie in wait for victims like a hunter hiding in a blind. They are continually setting traps for other people. Like a cage filled with birds, their homes are filled with evil plots. And the result? Now they are great and rich. They are well fed and well groomed, and there is no limit to their wicked deeds. They refuse justice to orphans and deny the rights of the poor*" (Jeremiah 5:26–28). Jeremiah was giving a warning: When backsliding begins to take place in the house of the Lord the

people's focus turns to men of charisma and personality. They do not realize their hearts had become open to the exaltation of flesh and ungodly men who considered themselves to be God's "man of the hour." These personalities were wicked men and their houses were filled with deceit. They shine, Jeremiah says, and in the Hebrew text this means they are sleek, glossy and polished. They move theologically according to their own fallen nature, and those who agree with them become just like them.

■ POSSESSING THE MIND OF CHRIST

Instead of being lured by these men, we need to have the mind of Christ. Paul said, *"And God has actually given us his Spirit (not the world's spirit) so we can know the wonderful things God has freely given us. When we tell you this, we do not use words of human wisdom. We speak words given to us by the Spirit, using the Spirit's words to explain spiritual truths. But people who aren't Christians can't understand these truths from God's Spirit. It all sounds foolish to them because only those who have the Spirit can understand what the Spirit means. We who have the Spirit understand these things, but others can't understand us at all. How could they? For, 'Who can know what the Lord is thinking? Who can give him counsel?' But we can understand these things, for we have the mind of Christ"* (1 Corinthians 2:12–16).

We have a new mind. We no longer think like fallen man thinks. We should not view success as getting the biggest crowd, the nicest car, the biggest bank account or holding the highest position on the corporate ladder. There are myriads of theologies and a plethora of teachings leading people away from being like Christ. Their view of success is coming from a worldly perspective, not from God's perspective. God's

view of success is how much of Jesus Christ is manifest in my life. How kind and loving am I to people who need to experience kindness and love? How much am I willing to stand for truth in the face of adversity? How much of the virtue of Christ, the truth of Christ, the life of Christ, is being formed in me? We can only have the mind of Christ if our objective is to be truly like him.

Paul talks about having *this mind in Philippians 2:5–7: "Your attitude should be the same that Christ Jesus had. Though he was God, he did not demand and cling to his rights as God. He made himself nothing; he took the humble position of a slave and appeared in human form."* Christ made Himself of no reputation even though He was equal to God. He had the right to do anything He wanted. He created the whole universe by the word of His mouth; yet He took upon Himself the form of a servant, not of a lord or a king. He was made in the likeness of man. In other words, He didn't try to pretend He was something different from those to whom He was speaking. He was tempted in all ways as those around Him were, yet He did not sin. Being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even death upon a cross. There are few people who are willing to walk humbly before God and be obedient unto death—dying to themselves, their reputations, and the image of who they think they are. How many people serve God for reputation today? How many people get in a knot because nobody has recognized them and the so-called selfless service they have been performing in God's name?

■ BUILDING ON THE FOUNDATION OF CHRIST

Paul reminded the Corinthian church to be careful how they built on the foundation he had laid, knowing that

if they did not build according to the mind of Christ, it was not going to last. It would never prosper. *"Now anyone who builds on that foundation may use gold, silver, jewels, wood, hay, or straw. But there is going to come a time of testing at the judgment day to see what kind of work each builder has done. Everyone's work will be put through the fire to see whether or not it keeps its value"* (1 Corinthians 3:12–13).

Unfortunately, there are men and women today who are building on this foundation thinking that because they are using gold, silver, and precious stones, their work will stand. They have gold dust, gold teeth, gold cars, gold hair, gold everything. They have silver as highly shined as mirrors reflecting themselves instead of Christ, and precious stones that can represent those who have become proud and possessive of their gifting. Then there are those using wood to carve things so they can glory in the work of their own hands, "Look what my hands have done. I am the best Sunday school teacher in this whole church. Six children were baptized in the Holy Ghost under my ministry." In the end, beloved, it is all just hay and stubble that will burn up.

Therefore, if you are proud and not walking according to the Word of God, or if you are engaged in strife or division, you are building a worthless thing on the foundation of Jesus Christ. I am always concerned when I hear people talk about the pastor, the pastor, the pastor. They should be saying, "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus." If leaders are leading you to themselves, then they have failed you. They are producing in you carnality and division. There should be a deepening inner desire to be like Christ, to walk with him, to yield to him, and to be conformed to His image.

■ WORK TRIED BY FIRE

So how does God deal with this carnality? Paul says every man's work shall be made manifest. In other words, fire will reveal what sort it is. Most of us think this is referring strictly to a future context; we think that when we get to heaven everything we have done, the whole wagonload, is going to be taken and put on the altar of God. Everything that was birthed in God and honored him will stand, and we will be rewarded accordingly. Everything that isn't of God is going to burn, and there will be loss. There will be no reward. But in the original text, this verse is translated by some commentators this way: It is being revealed *in* fire. It is written in the continuous present tense. A better way this could have been translated would be: "The day shall declare it because it is and will be revealed by fire." God says, "I will show you the quality of your work by bringing you into the fire."

Now if that physical temple had been capable of emotion, it would have felt this inward turmoil.

What is this fire that will try my work? Is it difficult circumstances? Is it being unable to pay my bills? Is it being short a loaf of bread this week? In Matthew 3:11 and 12, John the Baptist said, *"I baptize with water those who turn from their sins and turn to God. But someone is coming soon who is far greater than I am—so much greater that I am not even worthy to be his slave. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. He is ready to separate the chaff from the grain with his winnowing fork. Then he will clean up the threshing area, storing the grain in his barn but burning the chaff with never-ending fire."* The Holy Ghost gives you

power to live the Christian life, fulfilling the promises that have become yours through Jesus Christ. When He came into your life, He came in with a godly jealousy and unquenchable fire. The word fire used by John is the same word used by Paul in Corinthians. This fire is an inner passion, born of the Holy Ghost within us. It's a fire that is always consuming the things that do not conform to the image of Christ. It is a fire constantly working inside of us, purging, changing, and challenging us so the glory of His life is revealed through us to the world.

In John chapter 2, we are given an example of this fire when Jesus went up to Jerusalem at the time of the Jewish Passover. Jesus walked into the temple area and found moneychangers and those who sold oxen, sheep and doves. People didn't see anything wrong with this practice until the Redeemer came in with His fire. After He had made a scourge of small cords, He drove them all out of the temple and overthrew their tables.

■ CLEANSING OF THE TEMPLE

Now if that physical temple had been capable of emotion, it would have felt this inward turmoil. Think of yourself as the Old Testament temple for a moment. Everything seemingly is in order: the doves are over here, the goats are over there and the moneychangers are present at the entrance of the gate. You are completely satisfied in this way of worshiping God. All of a sudden, the fire of the Holy Spirit comes inside of you and there is an upheaval going on. Goats are running in this direction. Sheep are going in that direction. Doves are flying everywhere. Tables are being overturned. You feel sick to your stomach and you ask, "What is going on?" As far as you were concerned, everything was fine. Suddenly, you feel stirred, restless

and troubled. It is this same Jesus who walked into the physical temple one day, who now comes into your life to bring about change. Paul said it this way: *"But if the work is burned up, the builder will suffer great loss. The builders themselves will be saved, but like someone escaping through a wall of flames. Don't you realize that all of you together are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God lives in you?"* God will bring ruin upon anyone who ruins this temple. *For God's temple is holy, and you Christians are that temple*" (1 Corinthians 3:15–17).

The most wonderful thing that God could do for you and me if we are not building on a foundation of truth is to tear it all down. To expose it for what it is lest we end up going to the throne of God and hearing these words, "I never asked you to do what you were doing; it didn't bring any glory to My name."

■ THE REWARD

1 Corinthians 3:14 says, *"If the work survives the fire, that builder will receive a reward."* Now this is very interesting; if you are willing to build upon truth and on the image of Christ, Paul said that you will receive a reward from God. It is an incredible reward if you have an ear to hear truth. In 1 Corinthians 2:7, you see what it is: *"But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory."* Paul was saying we have something from God—it remains a mystery to those who walk according to the natural mind. But to those who are truly building a life in God, there is a wisdom you cannot learn from any book. It is a hidden wisdom that God ordained before the world for our glory. In other words, God would give wisdom that would change us into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord. What an incredible gift.

IS YOUR WORK BEING TRIED BY FIRE?

Thank you, Jesus! God gives it—it's a hidden wisdom—it's the wisdom of God that brings a man out of weakness and into the strength of Almighty God through Jesus Christ.

God gives us knowledge, instruction, and power. He gives direction, protection and the most incredible victories. God gives a clearness of mind, freedom to walk out of every prison situation and a word that possesses weighted authority. God gives us the power to call a fallen world into reconciliation with him and with one another. You will never find it in a success and prosperity seminar because it is not there. It's a hidden wisdom; *"But the rulers of this world have not understood it; if they had, they would never have crucified our glorious Lord. That is what the Scriptures mean when they say, 'No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him' But we know these things because God has revealed them to us by his Spirit, and his Spirit searches out everything and shows us even God's deep secrets"* (1 Corinthians 2:8–10).

God has given it all to us—what an incredible life, with the power that sees success not in the measure of how man sees it, but how God views it. Verses 11–13: *"No one can know what anyone else is really thinking except that person alone, and no one can know God's thoughts except God's own Spirit. And God has actually given us his Spirit (not the world's spirit) so we can know the wonderful things God has freely given us. When we tell you this, we do not use words of human wisdom. We*

speak words given to us by the Spirit, using the Spirit's words to explain spiritual truths."

Remember, Paul started with the Corinthians by saying he wanted to give them this meat of the Word, but they were unable to hear it because of the divisions in the church. But those of you who are being tried by fire right now, know that it's simply because God loves you. He is not angry with you—He passionately loves you. You invited him in, and He came in with the Holy Ghost and with fire. He constantly pursues you, constantly cleanses the temple, and He has so much more for you. All He says is, "Turn away from the reasoning and thinking of man, and continue to walk in agreement with me."

This is the reward: a mind, a heart, a spirit that is open to the life of Christ. And God says, "If you call out to me in truth, I will come in; I will sit down with you and will fellowship with you. I will open to you a banquet of truth that will enable and strengthen you; and you will be called reconcilers in this generation. Not just trudging through this life trying to make it until the day of the Lord's return. No! You will be more than conquerors, victorious warriors for the name of Jesus Christ."

Carter Conlon
October 22, 2006
©2006 Times Square Church

CARTER CONLON

Carter Conlon is senior pastor of Times Square Church, where he has been on the pastoral staff since 1994.

TIMES SQUARE CHURCH

Times Square Church was founded in 1987 by Pastor David Wilkerson, author of "The Cross and the Switchblade." It is an interdenominational church located in the heart of New York City.

Founding Pastor

David Wilkerson

Senior Pastor

Carter Conlon

Tel:

212-541-6300

Fax:

212-541-6415

Church Location:

237 West 51st Street,
Between Broadway & Eighth Avenue

Mailing Address:

1657 Broadway, 4th Flr.
New York, NY 10019

e-mail:

info@timessquarechurch.org

WEEKLY SCHEDULE OF SERVICES

Sunday	10:00AM	3:00PM	6:00PM
Tuesday	7:00PM	Church Service	
Thursday	7:00PM	Prayer Meeting	
Friday	7:00PM	Church Service	

This message is an edited version of a sermon given in the sanctuary of Times Square Church in New York City. Other sermons are available by visiting our website www.tscnyc.org or calling 1-800-488-0854. You can also write to: Times Square Church, Tape Ministry, 1657 Broadway, New York, NY 10019. You are welcome to make additional copies of this sermon for free distribution to friends. However, for all other forms of reproduction or electronic transmission existing copyright laws apply. This sermon cannot be posted on any website or webpage without written permission from Times Square Church.

www.tscnyc.org