

"I spoke to you in your prosperity, but you said, 'I will not hear.'"

It can not be denied that we live in a prosperous time. We are one of the most prosperous countries in the world. This prosperity has allowed us to have lives of unprecedented comfort and luxury. We enjoy things that many in the world can not even dream of. We have truly been blessed beyond our comprehension.

Our physical prosperity, however, has left many with a spiritual deficit. The focus of many has shifted away from God and serving Him to physical interests and pursuing them. This, sadly, can be said not only of those in the world, but of many Christians as well.

For many of us, time that could have been spent studying God's Word is instead spent studying our next home renovation. Efforts that could have been directed toward teaching the lost are directed toward perfecting our game on the golf course. Afternoons that could have been dedicated to visiting the sick are now dedicated to visiting our favorite stores in the mall. Time that could be spent considering where we'll go in eternity is spent considering where we'll go on our next vacation. It appears our prosperity has caused our focus to shift.

Although physically prosperous, we are on the verge of spiritual bankruptcy. We know all about the latest automobiles that being debuted, yet we know surprisingly little about our Bibles. We travel great distances to attend a big sporting event, yet attendance at gospel meetings and regular assemblies is sparse. We are excited about coaching our child's ball team, yet our children's Bible classes have no teachers.

Why are we in this condition? Often our excuse is "I'm just too busy. There's just too much going on right now. There isn't enough time." Yes, we are too busy; too busy with physical things and not busy enough with spiritual things.

In Jeremiah 22:21, God says to Jehoiakim, "I spoke to you in your prosperity, but you said, 'I will not hear.'" Are we guilty of the same thing in our lives? God has told us to put Him first (Matthew 6:33). Has our prosperity kept us from doing this? Have we told God "I will not hear" by the way that we live our lives?

We must continually remind ourselves that the pleasures our prosperity affords are temporal in nature and will soon be gone. II Peter 3:10-12 tells us, "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?" How will you live your life? Will you pursue the pleasures that our prosperity offers at the expense of serving God? Or, will you serve God faithfully and enjoy the pleasures that heaven offers for an eternity?

God has told us to never allow the pleasures of this world to crowd Him out of our lives. He has told us to love Him and put him before anything that this world can offer (Matthew 16:26). He has spoken to us in our prosperity. Will you listen?

- by Jacob Gwin

When the Fire Flickers

Conversations with students and young preachers frequently reveal discouragement with what they find in many churches. "These people couldn't care less-they are not on fire for the Lord's work."

My first thought is "How long have you cared-when did you catch fire?" The newly enthused likely fall into three groups: (1) new converts (perhaps starry-eyed, but we need their freshness as much as they need our experience); (2) new preachers, elders, deacons, teachers, etc., where new responsibility has awakened eyes to see brethren in a different light; and, (3) brethren shaken out of complacency by the influence of the faithful few who plug on regardless of what others do.

The new converts may "burn out" or line up with the majority, as many of them do; the new teacher may quit in frustration, and the young preacher "move on" looking for Utopia. But none will have served his Lord with honor. The cause of Christ depends on those who stay on fire,

lighting others; whose flame is not the flaring rocket of a celebration, but the glow and warmth of the home hearth-feeding the family, welcoming strangers. They make the converts and shake the complacent-and with their help continue the work others quit in disgust.

One can be realistic without being a pessimist: can work with the status quo without accepting it as final. We must recognize our problems in order to work on them. Saying the church consists of imperfect people is another way of saying we have a job to do-on ourselves, and others.

The teacher must not quit because the pupils lack interest. It is his job to create interest in the subject matter. The zealous young preacher, with maturity enough to control himself and put his talents to work, is just what that dead church needs. By example we can teach those new converts that all of us are striving for perfection. There are yet "seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal" (Rom. 11:4); and the Lord is counting on us to find them and join hands with them, to salt and light the world in which we live.

-by Robert F. Turner

Do You Know Your 'Rights'?

You are surely familiar with the Miranda Law which requires police officers to recite certain basic rights to persons they are arresting. The familiar words go like this: "You have the right to remain silent; any statement you make can and will be used against you; you have the right to an attorney . . ."

We think that a set of "rights" could and should be set forth for all Christians in their dealings with one another. Consider these:

- 1) You have the right to the love of your fellow Christians. This is not just an emotional feeling, but a real concern for you that even puts your needs above their own (Jn. 13:35; 1 Jn. 4:21).
- 2) You have a right to the sacrificial service that others can provide when you need it (Jn. 13:12-15); and you have the right to serve your brethren in return when you have the opportunity to do so (Mt. 23:11; Gal. 6:10).
- 3) You have the right to have your convictions respected by others (Rom. 14:21; 1 Cor. 8:10-13).
- 4) You have the right to know that no one will harshly judge you in an unrighteous way or impugn your motives (Mt. 7:1-5; Jn. 7:24).
- 5) You have the right to a confidence that other's will not gossip about you or maliciously slander you (Eph. 4:31).
- 6) You have the right to be the first one to know if others think you have done or said something wrong (Mt. 18:15-17).
- 7) You have the right to expect correction and instruction when you are in error (2 Tim. 4:2)
- 8) You have the right to be restored if you have fallen away into error (Gal. 6:1).
- 9) You have the right to disciplinary action by the whole church if it becomes necessary (2 Thess. 3:6,14,15).
- 10) You have the right to be forgiven when you repent and confess (James 5:16; Lk. 17:3,4).

- by Greg Gwin