

Threshold of Greatness

by Gene McCoy

The church at Corinth was positioned for greatness. In the opening lines of his first letter to this church, Paul thanks God for the grace He bestowed upon them (v. 4). Paul goes on to enumerate those gifts of grace (v. 5-7), noting that they were not lacking in any. But then he launches into a litany of complaints relating to their response to this grace.

When understood, grace produces humility. Too often, however, recipients of grace become puffed up — proud. Unless alert, those graced by God with His wonderful gifts today could become puffed up, as well.

A congregation may be most vulnerable to Satan's tactics when everything seems to be going so well. It is during such seasons when we realize God's blessings most that the warning must be given to be alert for Satan's attack.

This is not a scare tactic we employ, but rather a word of caution based upon experience with the Enemy. We are in perfect position for an attack.

By God's grace the congregation is enjoying unprecedented harmony, goodwill, cooperation, participation and peace. We are in a healthy financial position. An optimistic air permeates our fellowship. Our reputation in the community has never been more positive and strong. Staff relations are solid and

several ministry teams are fulfilling the work assigned to them. The stage is set for something very good or something very bad to occur. It all depends upon your response to the grace of God that has blessed us with every gift we need. A response of humility will result in continued dependence upon God, resulting in harmony. Pride, however, will destroy unity, as it did in the church at Corinth.

Our leaders are proposing challenging and exciting advances. This is Satan's cue to kick it up to a higher level. Be assured he is paying attention and will exploit our situation to his advantage. But he cannot do it apart from our permission and participation.

We need not be alarmed by the prospects of Satan's attack as long as we are alert to the possibility and remain diligent in deflecting his strategy. He often uses two tactics to ruin harmony in a congregation.

The first tactic we need to avoid is complacency. That we are "sittin' pretty" in all the areas listed above makes it easy for us to relax in satisfaction. We are comfortable and don't want to be disturbed by new challenges. I can't say this was the problem at Corinth that required Paul to urge them to finish the collection

for the needy brothers in Judea, but I can say that many congregations that get too comfortable need someone or something to get them off dead center.

The other tactic Satan is likely to employ as we accept new challenges is conflict. There was division in the church at Corinth due to

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party loyalty. If Satan can't keep us from launching out into deep waters, he will make sure the

waters in which we sail are tempestuous. A favorite way to create waves in a happy and harmonious congregation is to get individuals engaged in conflict.

Differences of opinion and personal preferences are common obstacles Satan uses to stir the waters.

Selfishness displayed by pride is at the root of both of these tactics. When everything is going our way is when selfishness and pride can easily infiltrate and infect the body. I remind you that "I" is at the center of "sIn."

Many think our congregation is on the threshold of greatness. The threshold is a critical place. What we do here and now will have a big impact upon the future of this congregation. May God give us grace that we may learn the lessons from Corinth and not fall victim to selfish pride.