

# The Compass

Week 32

OT Readings: Ezra 3:1 – Nehemiah 5:13

NT Readings: 1 Cor. 2:6 – 7:40

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## Things to Watch for in Your Readings this Week

### Old Testament

- Remember that you are reading about the return from exile. Ezra 1-6 tells of the initial return (~ BC 539), the remainder of Ezra and Nehemiah the events after BC 458.<sup>1</sup>
- Take note of the hearts of both Ezra and Nehemiah. There is tenderness toward God, a sensitivity to sin and unwavering confidence that if they are faithful God will do His part.<sup>2</sup>
- With Nehemiah's leadership, they begin the important task of rebuilding the walls around Jerusalem. They trust God and persevere in a very daunting, seemingly impossible job.<sup>3</sup>

### New Testament

- In 1 Cor. 2:6-3:4 Paul further counters the Corinthian pride in "wisdom" by showing that the Spirit gives God's true wisdom to His people.<sup>4</sup>
- 7:1 introduces Paul's responses to the "things about which you wrote."
- Remember several things when reading Paul's "answers" to the various issues being raised:
  - Paul is not writing to us (though it becomes for us). We must first understand the Corinthian historical/cultural situation to understand the issues and Paul's responses.
  - We are hearing only one side of a two-sided and complex conversation.
  - Direct application to our situation without first understanding Paul's meaning in its Corinthian context will lead to misapplication of what Paul means.<sup>5</sup>
- You can sense Paul's frustration in this corrective letter. While they are convinced that they have "arrived," Paul sees their "super-spirituality" as incredibly lacking. (4:6-21)

## Highlight of the Week: Who is God?

**1 Cor. 2:6-3:1.** (See Gordon Fee's translation in footnote 4 below along with the NLT) Paul is adamant, God does make things real to us and known to us *by the Spirit*. The Spirit searches even the depths of God so He can reveal to us the amazing, wonderful things God has in His heart for us (2:6-10). In this passage, Paul divides people into two categories – those who belong to God and those who do not ("Spirit-people" over against "fleshy, worldly"). For those who are committed to Jesus, the Spirit is theirs and explains to them "Spirit" things. Paul's prays specifically in other places in the NT that the Holy Spirit would give us the revelation of wisdom, knowledge and insight so that we might know God and be enabled by it to walk in His ways (Eph. 1:15-23. Col. 1:9-14). It is true that we must learn how to hear God and that sometimes our expectations about *how* God reveals things to us can be an obstacle to actually receiving God's revelation. We must create the environment, the space, in our life so that the Spirit and the Spirit things can be heard and received.<sup>6</sup> God is not hiding, He wants us to know Him and is seeking us to make Himself real to us. So we must ask, Do we long to know Him? Are we seeking with urgency? Are we hungry and thirsty for more of God?

## Application: "What about me? How does this apply?"

Ezra and Nehemiah. The lives of Ezra and Nehemiah are instructive. They are men with a consuming passion for God and God's people, yet keenly aware of the cultural (pagan) situation in which they live. With hearts bowed to God, they instinctively feel as He does over the plight of His people and sensing His very heartbeat, they take action. They are aware of the moment, the intersection of God's desire to act and the historical situation. They seize it, grip it with a tenaciousness and resolve that simply will not accept anything less than what believe to be God's purpose. All of this combines in their lives to bring about the will of God in their generation (Acts 13:36).

Where are these kinds of men and women in our time, in our nation, in our city? Who will be gripped with the passions of God and act with the depth of conviction that will reverse the moral and spiritual decay which faces us as God's people? Will it be you?

### Difficult Question of the Week

#### 1 Cor. 5:1-5. Q. "What does it mean to 'turn someone over to Satan' and why would Paul do this?"

The larger context (5:1-13) sets the stage for Paul's statement. Paul has heard that a man is sexually involved with his father's wife and that the Corinthian church has let it pass. Paul is infuriated. Paul insists that the person be removed from the church.

What about turning him over to Satan? Likely, Paul means something like this, "Expel him from the church, put him outside the circle of God's people and back into the sphere or territory of Satan." In the same way that a person moves from the kingdom of darkness and into the sphere/kingdom of God at conversion,<sup>7</sup> so now Paul calls for the reverse – send him back into the sphere of the enemy by separating him from God's presence and people. What is the reason for this? Paul's purpose and hope is that once outside of the church this person will come to their senses and repent, his "spirit may be saved." Paul's intent is redemptive, not judicial or bent upon the person's destruction.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ezra 4:6-23 is a digression referring to opposition of a later time period; the narrator's point being that opposition to the return was ongoing. The Persian ruler's names and time periods are a little difficult to sort out. Consult an OT Introduction or History for help here. 7:1, "many years later" begins the accounting of the Ezra-Nehemiah time period, about 70 years after the initial return.

<sup>2</sup> While we might take issue with the breakup of families (Ezra 10), for the returning exiles this intermixing with their pagan neighbors was compromise of the worst kind; note Ezra's reaction and prayer when he hears (Ezra 9).

<sup>3</sup> Rebuilding the wall was more than addressing the practical need of protection. The wall gave "definition" to the city and represented the re-defining of their identity as a people.

<sup>4</sup> Gordon Fee translates 2:10-3:1 this way: "*For to us God has revealed it by the Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among humans knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of the person that resides within? In the same way also no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now the Spirit we received was not of the world but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand the things that God has freely given us. What things also we speak are not with words taught us by human wisdom but with words taught by the Spirit, explaining the things of the Spirit by the Spirit's means. But ordinarily human does not receive the things that come from the Spirit of God, but considers them foolishness and cannot understand them, because they are discerned by means of the Spirit. But Spirit people discern all things, but are not themselves subject to anybody else's discernment: 'For who has known the mind of the Lord; Who shall instruct him?' But we have the mind of Christ and I, brothers and sisters, was not able to speak to you as to Spirit people, but as to those still in the flesh, as to mere infants in Christ.*" Fee's argument is that the Corinthians considered themselves to be "Spirit-people" and yet they were behaving like they did before they came to Jesus ("in the flesh").

<sup>5</sup> These guidelines are "Biblical Interpretation 101." Much misapplication of Scripture comes from violating some very fundamental principles of Biblical interpretation. There are several good books to help you do a better job with accurate interpretation. Check out: J. Robert McQuilkin, *Understanding and Applying the Bible* (Moody Press, revised edition, 1992) and Gordon Fee and Douglas Stewart, *How To Read the Bible For All Its Worth* (Zondervan, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, 2003).

<sup>6</sup> Dallas Willard's book *Hearing God* is very helpful in learning about how God speaks to us. Also, *Is That Really You, God?* by Loren Cunningham. Also, see my article "Hungering for God?" at \_\_\_\_\_

<sup>7</sup> Acts 26:12-20. Col. 1:13-14.

<sup>8</sup> How would his sinful nature be "destroyed?" Paul does not say, but it seems that the separation from God's people and the living presence of God with them would leave this person without the support and power of God in his life. Perhaps the idea is that receiving the negative consequences of his sin would bring him to his senses and a desire to return to God and to God's people. For more details see Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT, 209-214.