

Issachar Prophetic Teaching newsletter for February 2006

Identifying the Absalom spirit

(NOTE: In this teaching the “Absalom” is referred to as “he” for convenience sake. The spirit of Absalom may of course also work through a female.)

One of the most insidious attacks against the Body of Christ comes from those who are “disaffected”. This refers to those who feel they are not appreciated, recognised in their calling, or simply have a rebellious attitude towards eldership.

This attitude has plagued the Body of Christ from its earthly inception, and was even at work in Old Testament times in one of King David’s sons, hence the term. We shall look briefly at the Biblical account as it highlights some important principles for us.

- Absalom was David’s third son. We read how his sister Tamar was raped by her brother Amnon (2 Sam. 13: 8-14), and when Absalom perceived this all he said was “*Hold your peace my sister...do not take this thing to heart*” (2 Sam. 13: 20).
- Such was the heart of Absalom. He was grossly insensitive and acted unjustly. To Amnon his brother he “*spoke neither good nor bad*” (2 Sam. 13: 22). The consequence of this incest brought forth “foolishness” and “hatred” in Amnon (verses 13-15), which then resulted in “anger” and “hatred” within the family (verses 21-22).
- Festering guilt mixed with anger led Absalom to plan his brother’s death, after which he fled the scene and hid for three years. (chapter 13). Eventually upon returning to Jerusalem he was banned from approaching his father David (2 Sam. 14: 24).
- When, by another act of treachery, Absalom does get to see his father again (14: 28-33) he immediately sets about to draw attention to himself by “**providing for himself chariots and fifty men to run before him**” (15: 1).

The working out of this mind-set causes Absalom to not only draw attention to himself, but also to draw people to himself (15: 2-6). This of course is the basic pattern of “the Absalom spirit”.

There is a definite “plan” to all this. Note the sequence of how it is enacted:

1. Absalom chooses to rise early (2 Sam. 15: 2)
2. He deliberately stands at the gate to the City, where much traffic passes by.
3. He focuses in on issues the people have (in Heb. lit =*controversies*).
4. He also seemingly “approves” of their dissatisfaction (15: 3), thus cunningly aligning himself to their concern, and vice versa.
5. Then he sows seeds of discontent by declaring that only he has the ability to make wise decisions (15: 4).
6. The result is that people are duped and pay him homage when they should be going to their God-appointed leader, in this case, King David (15: 5-6).
7. Absalom then uses a “religious ploy” to prepare the next stage of the deceit (15: 7-8).
8. This brings about an uprising against the legitimate God-appointed leadership (15: 10) by drawing others into the web to act deceitfully (the “spies” of verse 10a).
9. The final working out of all this is the setting up of a competitive seat of power (15: 10b).

So, we see the treachery that is acted out by one close to leadership. Sadly, this pattern still runs its course today and we find churches and fellowships undermined by this very same “spirit”.

Based on this Biblical account, what then are some of the factors to watch for?

THOSE WITH AN INDEPENDENT SPIRIT

- Clearly we are to look for those who have an attitude that betrays an independent spirit. Such a person no longer wants to serve the Body but seeks recognition and reputation for itself. It may well have been that the person initially did serve others, but often this is only short-lived.

THOSE WHO SUBTLY SEEK SELF-PROMOTION

- The next step is when such a person begins to manoeuvre to receive the praise of others. We have already seen in 2 Samuel chapter 15 how Absalom stood by the gate of the city and “*stole the hearts of the people*”.

SPIRITUAL PRIDE RISES UP

- It's usually those who lack clear discernment who give accolades and praise to the Absalom-type among them. As this takes root in the heart of the perpetrator he begins to believe that he's more spiritual than others, and certainly wiser than the current leadership. He becomes unteachable.

AN OFFENDED SPIRIT COMES TO THE FORE

- The spiritual pride that resides deep in the heart of the Absalom-type turns into Offence. Almost anything begins to cause offence because his “spiritual insight” isn't appreciated. All the time he works to have his ideas, doctrines and plans promoted. When it's clear his suggestions are not being accepted, he is greatly offended and seeks out others to back him - and to get them to agree with him about the great offence caused. Disaffected people can so easily seek after others of like spirits, who in turn are drawn to him.

A CRITICAL SPIRIT BEGINS TO OPERATE OPENLY

- Once the pattern gets this far it's not too long before a critical attitude toward leadership begins to operate openly. This will soon result in nearly every decision, major and minor, being questioned by the disaffected ones.
- About the same time that this begins to operate openly, the Absalom-type feels he can no longer receive any spiritual input or guidance from leadership. He begins to distance himself from leadership, and complains that they're the ones who are causing all this. He is reinforced in his thinking that only he has the wisdom to carry the group further spiritually. Because there's no balance in his thinking he “hears” only those voices that approve of him, and he can even begin to find Biblical texts in support of this. He has entered very dangerous territory at this stage.

A SPIRIT OF COMPETITION ENTERS THE FRAY

- What now emerges is a direct confrontation, which will ultimately lead to more and more confusion. The Absalom-type will set himself up in competition to the leadership by deliberately throwing innuendo and doubt into even casual conversation with the disaffected ones. Because they too feel unloved they will readily nod their agreement. All the while their conscience tries to alert them to the fact that something's not quite true - yet they ignore this alarm bell and continue in aligning themselves to one of like-spirit.
- Later the Absalom will begin to distort some of the teaching given by leadership, and misrepresent certain facts and decisions they make. Thus it moves from a sense of emotional hurt and lack of appreciation, to challenging doctrine. By this stage there's now occurred a major crisis in the pattern of this problem.

THE DELIBERATE SOWING OF STRIFE INCREASES

- Now Absalom begins to take the strife to a wider plane, often contacting other individuals in the church to spread the dissatisfaction; always of course making sure the hearer understands that this isn't gossip, but truth that needs airing!
- When it's something that occurs through a chance meeting with another disaffected person, it's one thing; but when it becomes more "organised" it's quite another. By the use of phone calls, invitations to a cuppa or a meal, and even through clandestine gatherings such as home fellowships, the strife spreads like a cancer. Absalom is keen to seemingly promote God, the teachings of the Bible, etc, to validate the reason for speaking against leadership.
- Invitations to attend a cuppa, a meal or gathering are given out to selected ones, who Absalom knows will readily accept. At the outset of such gatherings Absalom makes sure that the attention isn't drawn to him - it is "God" who is our focus, he readily announces! This soon changes however, and gradually the gathering turns into a meeting of bruised souls expressing their sense of hurt.

ACCUSATIONS FLY

- The greatest accusation any believer will have to face is "You don't love me enough!" We all know in our hearts we fail at this point, and the poisoned arrow of accusation can go deep. This becomes the one great area of faultfinding, especially directed at leadership. Usually it's not Biblical love that's the issue here, but "emotional love".
- While the disaffected ones are giving voice to their hurt, Absalom waits (somewhat impatiently) for an opportunity to turn it in a certain direction. He isn't really interested at all in their grievances; he wants to air his own feelings.
- A Bible text is usually flung about, as if to legitimise the gossip. It doesn't take too long before Absalom speaks forthrightly against faults that he's noticed in the leadership. Topping the list will be "lack of love", followed by an accusation that the current leaders are "grieving the Holy Spirit".
- Close behind these accusations will often come a "comforter". In the Bible Absalom was keen to evidence loyalty to both God and David (2 Sam. 15: 7-9), yet his actions showed otherwise. This use of Biblical quotes or principles, especially "that we should still love the leaders whom we've left" brings a kind of "comfort" to the disaffected. They feel they're not really attacking God's leaders at all, because they, at least, still "love" them!
- Attacks are often related to the spiritual qualifications required of leadership as set down in the Bible, and how the current leaders fail to measure up to them. Even minor failures in this regard will be made to be seen as major flaws.

OPEN DISLOYALTY FOLLOWED BY DIVISION

- Once this has reached a certain point, it's not too long before open division rears its head. Absalom doesn't necessarily need a large group to implement his next move; even a small band of followers will be sufficient. He knows he has them, he has "*stolen their hearts*" (2 Sam. 15: 6) and they have unwittingly given themselves over to him. They have come under bondage (see 2 Pet. 2: 19).
- Soon the disloyalty is shown by the making some sort of declaration (2 Sam. 15: 10), either in public or in private. It's remarkable how often those who seek to break away, declare their intention by any means rather than a face-to-face meeting! A hurried phone call or a short letter announces their intent; it is curt, to the point and there is no entering into further dialogue. A final parting dart is flung at leadership when it's announced, "others feel the same way I do!" (compare 2 Sam. 15: 10-13).
- Perhaps it's only at this point that the leadership actually becomes aware of the division. How necessary it is then that leadership should pay attention to God's warnings via prophetic words and dreams!
- Now the awful truth has come into the open: and the people must make a choice between their current leaders and the Absalom who has deceived them all by treachery. Usually the larger group are not swayed by the Absalom-type, but he has caused enough division to foster doubt in the remainder of the congregation. A un-ease now hovers over the people.

A CONGREGATION TORN APART

- Amongst those whom Absalom has beguiled are the naïve ones (2 Sam. 15: 11). These are those who “only wanted the best of church life”, those who wanted to “move into something greater”, those who truly did desire “the deeper things”, and who wanted “the freedom of the Spirit”. Sadly these ones don’t see the truth until much later, and they become confused, and some ultimately leave fellowship altogether.
- Both sides are now in a flurry to re-establish and establish their respective groups. At this point the leadership may try to encourage the remnant through all sorts of ways, in an attempt to stabilise them. Sadly there’s often a great over-reaction in this and the people sense the leaders are “trying too hard” to keep them. This can actually cause further unease.
- Absalom however will begin to gloat, all the time making certain this isn’t seen publicly. But the signs will be there, and sooner or later, what’s in his heart will overflow in his words and actions.
- One thing the Absalom-type cannot fail to do is to speak *against* what he’s left behind. He will actively seek out “teachings” that will seemingly “approve” of his actions.
- Those who align themselves with him will find some “comfort” in these teachings, as it seems to validate their choice. However the instruction they receive from him will be un-balanced and its source is often other “Absaloms”. He has now set himself up as a “wise one”, subtly imposing upon his group the view that he can lead them into something more “spiritual”, unlike the previous leadership.
- When the Absalom sees something go wrong in the church, he’s quick to say that God’s judgement has fallen upon the leadership. Sadly, even insignificant events will be seen as “signs” that God has approved of the split. Spiritual discernment cannot possibly function in the breakaway group because of the bitterness and pride that’s taken hold there.

THE JUDGMENT THAT WILL SURELY FOLLOW

- There’s a Biblical principle that states: If the root is evil then the fruit shall also be evil. This simply means that a group birthed from the workings of an “Absalom” will suffer the same fate in due time. Disloyalty, gossip, and eventually rebellion will follow as sure as night follows day.
- Note that in Scripture, Absalom died in a most revealing way; his head got caught in trees and he was left dangling until he was executed. Caught by the head! In Biblical typology the “head” stands for authority and leadership.
- Absalom set himself up as head and by his head he was judged! (2 Sam. 18: 9-18).

May the Lord and His teaching Spirit guide us into ALL of His wondrous ways and increasingly deliver us from the spirit of Absalom : may MATURITY be the hall-mark of today’s church!

Blessings and grace to you,

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