

16. Creativity and Problem Solving

Romans 1:21-23 shows what happened to mankind as a result of sin. Those verses say, “Because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.” These verses summarize the fact that sin destroyed much of the creativity of mankind, and what creativity remained, was used to find creative new ways to sin. These verses show us that:

- mankind no longer glorified God
- mankind was no longer thankful to God – and often no longer thankful to others
- mankind had their thoughts become futile (foolish or empty)
- mankind had their understanding darkened
- mankind exchanged godly wisdom for worldly wisdom and foolishness
- mankind changed the image of God into the image of man or other things (people try to create gods like themselves or try to satisfy themselves)

The combination of having foolish or empty thinking, having their understanding darkened, and having the turn from godly wisdom to worldly wisdom and foolishness, meant that any creativity man had left was now used to satisfy self, rather than bringing glory to God. That is the condition of every person before they become a Christian. This means that all those who are not Christians, as well as all Christians who depend on worldly wisdom, will handle problems in a worldly way. That is illustrated so well by the way Adam handled his sin.

In Genesis 3:8, we see that Adam handled his sin by trying to hide from God. When God kept calling, Adam described what he was feeling in Genesis 3:10, where we read: “‘I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself.’” Adam was experiencing fear – “I was afraid”. Adam was experiencing shame – “I was naked”. Adam was experiencing guilt – “I hid myself”. These three things are still the things people feel when they face problems in a worldly way.

However, the next response of Adam shows how people try to deal with problems when they are depending on their own strength. God asked Adam if he had committed the one sin that he could commit. Genesis 3:11 says, “And He said, ‘Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?’” Prior to this event, the only sin Adam could commit was to eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:16-17). Adam could have admitted his sin. Instead, Adam chose to handle his problem in a very different way. Genesis 3:12 says, “Then the man said, ‘The **WOMAN** whom **YOU** gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate.’”

Adam gave us an example of the way people have tried to solve problems ever since that time. The most common way people try to solve problems, when they depend on worldly wisdom, is not to solve the problems at all. Instead, they choose to try to blame someone or something else for the problem. First, Adam chose to blame Eve for his sin. Second, Adam was actually blaming

God for his sin, because he blamed God for giving him the **WOMAN**. In the case of Adam, he did not even identify the problem, because the problem was his own disobedience to God.

Today, people still handle problems the same way. Problems are not always the result of sin. There may be problems for many other reasons. However, instead of trying to solve problems, most people, including many Christians, try to deal with problems by blaming others. Instead, God calls us to solve problems, not blame others. To solve problems, we must choose to yield ourselves to the Holy Spirit. Then, we let Him teach us the Biblical principles that apply. We then pray that He will give us godly wisdom to know how to apply the Biblical principles. That makes it possible for us to carry out the work of God by doing the will of God.

This is illustrated by the way the apostles solved the first recorded problem in the early church. That problem is defined in Acts 6:1, where we read: “Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution.” This was a problem that was caused by the rapid growth of the church, not by any intentional sin. The first thing we notice is that the apostles did not try to determine who to blame for the problem. Instead, they recognized that there was a problem, and they immediately began to seek a solution.

First, since Acts chapters 2 through 5 show that the apostles were continually giving themselves to prayer, we learn that the apostles were choosing to yield to the Holy Spirit daily. Second, we see that the apostles chose to involve the whole church in seeking a solution by calling the church together to explain the problem. Third, they defined what their own Biblical priorities should be as apostles. Fourth, they offered a creative solution to the problem and looked for qualified men to take this responsibility. Fifth, they got the people involved in reaching a solution by having them select the men to take this responsibility. Sixth, the people recommended the seven men. Seventh, the apostles took the recommended men and prayed for them. Eighth, the apostles laid their hands on the seven men to show their approval of those men.

Acts 6:7-8 tell us the results of finding a creative solution to the problem. Those verses say, “Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith. And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people.” The creative solution allowed the Word of God to continue to spread. It made it possible for the number of disciples to multiply greatly. It caused many priests to become obedient to the faith. It developed a new leadership team among the Hellenists. Those things made it possible for the Gospel to spread to other cultures in Acts 8. Then, the Gospel continued to spread further. In Acts 9:31, we see that the Gospel had spread to Judea, Galilee, and Samaria. Then, in Acts 10, the Gospel spread to the Gentiles, and, in Acts 11:19-26, to other geographical regions.

In Acts 15, we see another problem arose in the church. Acts 15:1 says, “And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, ‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.’” Here, we see that certain Jews began to try to create problems among the Gentiles who were turning to the Lord. Instead of continuing to spend time arguing

with those men, or trying to blame someone for the problem, the church in Antioch developed a plan of action to solve the problem. Acts 15:2 says, “Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question.” The church at Antioch chose to solve the problem by sending leaders to meet with the apostles and elders at Jerusalem so they could define the Biblical principles involved and find a solution together.

Acts 15:7-29 describes that meeting and the solution that resulted. Acts 15:7-11 says, “And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up and said to them: ‘Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they.’” Here, we see that Peter summarized the Biblical principles that had guided him when he first went to the Gentiles.

Acts 15:12 told what was happening among the Gentiles. That verse says, “Then all the multitude kept silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul declaring how many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles.” James then gave the summary in Acts 15:19-21. We read, “Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood. For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath.” The apostles and elders had spent time in discussion, and prayer, and had defined the Biblical principles that were involved. As a result, they were now ready to apply those principles to the problem.

Acts 15:22-23 says, “Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, namely, Judas who was also named Barsabas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren. They wrote this letter by them: The apostles, the elders, and the brethren, To the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia.” Acts 15:25 adds one other thing about this decision. That verse says, “It seemed good to us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul.” In this verse, we see that the leaders, after discussing, praying, and studying the Biblical principles involved, were now in one accord about how to apply those Biblical principles to the Gentiles everywhere.

God does not call us to follow the worldly pattern by trying to find someone to blame for a problem. Instead, God calls us to study and apply Biblical principles to find creative solutions to problems. May the Lord richly bless you as you help developing leaders learn how to find, and apply, Biblical principles to problems, so they can lead others to Biblical solutions rather than trying to blame someone else for those problems.