

A Church Divided

1 Corinthians 1:10-17

INTRODUCTION

- A. It is said that when the British and French were fighting in Canada in the 1750s, Admiral Phipps, commander of the British fleet, was told to anchor outside Quebec.
 - 1. He was given orders to wait for the British land forces to arrive, then support them when they attacked the city.
 - 2. Phipps' navy arrived early.
 - a. As the admiral waited, he became annoyed by the statues of the saints that adorned the towers of a nearby cathedral, so he commanded his men to shoot at them with the ships' cannons.
 - b. No one knows how many rounds were fired or how many statues were knocked out, but when the land forces arrived and the signal was given to attack, the admiral was of no help. He had used up all his ammunition shooting at the "saints."
- B. Is that not a sad commentary on many congregations of the church today?
 - 1. They spend so much time fighting and bickering with one another that they have no time or energy left to combat the church's true enemy, Satan.
 - 2. They bicker so often that they don't have the desire to fellowship, for who wants to be with someone whom you absolutely hate?
 - 3. They can't stand behind and support the elders or the preacher, for who can support men who are on opposing sides in a church war?
- C. The Corinthian congregation had many of those problems.
 - 1. They were bickering and fighting over things which did not matter.
 - 2. As we see in later passages, their divisions largely over their social standing, but here the division is over which preacher they liked best.
 - a. Because Paul mentions his gratefulness that he did not baptize many in the Corinthian church, this division may have been over who baptized whom.
 - b. Therefore, most scholars believe the mention that some followed Jesus to be a hypothetical, for we know that Jesus baptized no one (Jn 4:1-2).
- D. We in the churches of Christ have often applied this text to denominationalism and the need for all believers to be united rather than divided.
 - 1. There can be no doubt that what we find in these verses of First Corinthians constitutes denominationalism.
 - a. The disciples in Corinth were following men rather than Jesus.
 - b. The segregating into factions following men rather than Jesus is wrong whether it occurs in AD 55 (when First Corinthians was written) or whether it occurs in 2007.
 - 2. However, I don't want us to focus on denominationalism this morning. Instead, I want us to look at division within the local congregation.
 - a. That's the context of these words—these Christians weren't worshiping separately, but the different groups claims superiority over each other.
 - b. Another reason I think it's wiser for us to examine these words in light of congregational fights is that there's not much we can do about denominationalism.
 - 1) I hate denominationalism with every fiber of my being—my family has been divided by it, and I know many of your families have likewise been affected. But, the sad reality is that I can't do much about these various denominations, except to call people to abandon such loyalties and to focus on Jesus.

- 2) However, I can decide how I'm going to act in a church fight.
 - a) Am I going to be arrogant and egotistical and insist that I'm right and everyone else is wrong?
 - b) Or, am I going to act in humility and seek to honor Jesus and keep the unity of the church?
- E. Paul divides his words to the Corinthians into two sections: THE REALITY & THE IDEAL. We'll look at those two truths this morning.

THE REALITY, vv 11-12

- A. These individuals from Chloe's household are undoubtedly slaves or freedmen who worked in the household—Remember, we mentioned last Sunday night that had these been her children, they were have been identified with their father's household, even if he were deceased.
 - 1. We know that Paul wrote this epistle from Ephesus (16:8), and so these individuals from Chloe caught up with Paul somehow at Corinth.
 - 2. There is going to be a mention later in the epistle that the Corinthians had written a letter to Paul asking for some direction on some matters (e.g., 7:1—"Now for the matters you wrote about").
 - a. It is quite likely that these members of Chloe's household were Christians in the Corinthian church, and the congregation chose them to take a letter to Paul.
 - b. When these Christians met up with Paul, they said, "Brother Paul, here's the letter they wanted delivered. But, have we ever got some problems they don't mention" and go on to discuss the problems in Corinth.
 - 3. However these brethren informed Paul of the problems at Corinth, they informed the apostle that there were quarrels among the brethren.
- B. The word quarrel in this passage ("contentions" in the KJV) means far more than a simple dispute and disagreement.
 - 1. The word references that point where our tempers so inflamed that we just lose control and we don't know what we're doing.
 - 2. These brethren were so angry at one another that very heated disagreements were likely erupting in the congregation that were absolutely destroying any unity that might have been there.
 - 3. Haven't we all witnessed such disputes in congregations?
 - a. Is that not the apex of egotistical thinking—to believe that I'm right and everyone else is wrong?
 - b. I'm not talking about taking a stand about doctrinal matters when it's time to stand up and say, "That's not going to happen here, for Scripture says"
 - 1) Doctrinal issues were not the problem at Corinth.
 - 2) The problem at Corinth was: "I like this preacher better than the other. I have more money than you, so I'm better than you."
 - 4. Jesus called upon us to be humble as little children (Mt. 18:2-4). Humility is not thinking that I have all the answers, but humility is recognizing that when it comes to opinions yours is just as valid as mine.
- C. Paul writes: "What I mean is this: One of you says, 'I follow Paul'; another, 'I follow Apollos': another, 'I follow Cephas'; still another, 'I follow Christ,'" v. 12.
 - 1. The Greek actually reads, "I am of Paul" or "I am of Apollos."
 - a. What's so interesting about that more literal reading is that political parties in the ancient world weren't called Republicans or Democrats.
 - 1) The political parties were named after leading proponents of that view.
 - 2) It would be like Republicans saying, "I am of Lincoln," the first Republican President, or Democrats saying, "I am of Jackson," the first Democratic President.

- b. The Corinthians were pledging allegiance to these men as if they were politicians.
- 2. Just as this nation has become quite polarized politically in the past few years, the Corinthian church was polarized around different men.
 - a. That's really the point—they were becoming polarized because they were pledging allegiance to men.
 - b. Let us never pledge allegiance to men! Let us remember that this is the church of the Lord, and it is to him, and him alone, to whom we shall pledge our allegiance!

THE IDEA, vv 10-13-16

- A. Some of our brethren have mocked us in the past few years for the idea of restoring the New Testament church.
 - 1. They will often ask the question, "Which congregation in the first century do you wish to restore? Do you want to restore the church at Corinth with all their problems?"
 - 2. People who say that, with all due respect, miss the boat completely, and I think this passage, in particular, illustrates that.
 - a. Paul sets forth the hosts of problems in Corinth, but then he says, here's how to overcome those problems, here's how to become what God wants.
 - b. Should that not be our aim as Christians, to recognize our sinfulness and to aim to become more and more what God desires?
- B. Paul appealed to the brethren in Corinth in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to agree with one another and to be perfectly united in mind and thought, v. 10.
 - 1. Paul made his appeal in the name of Jesus Christ.
 - a. Remember that the phrase "in the name of means "by the authority of."
 - b. Paul appealed to the authority of Christ, for that was the only authority to which he could appeal for these brethren to overcome their differences. He could never have appealed to his own authority, for some in Corinth were following him and others doubted his authority (ch. 9).
 - 2. Paul appealed to them to agree with one another (KJV—"ye all speak the same thing").
 - a. That phrase in the ancient world was used to refer to warring political factions coming together, but interestingly, the phrase was also used on tombstones to refer to the harmonious life of husbands and wives.
 - b. Is that not a good picture of the church in fellowship?
 - 1) When you're married, you're not going to agree on everything—what color to paint the walls, what type of car to buy, and many other things.
 - 2) But, you're going to agree on the essentials—that you love each other and that you're going to treat each other right.
 - c. As a church, we need to come to the same realizations—that we love each other, that we're going to treat each other right, and above everything else, we're going to follow Jesus and call on each other to do the same.
- C. These Christians were to be united in mind and thought.
 - 1. The term for mind refers to the thinking ability and the word for thought refers to the opinion judgments we make based on our thinking ability—thus, the Corinthians were to think alike and see agreements based on judgments.
 - 2. How can that ever be possible in a congregations?
 - a. The only basis for our thoughts as a church must be the words of Scripture—"If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God" (1 Pt 4:11).
 - b. But, how are we to come to agreement on judgment calls?
 - 1) That seems a little trickier doesn't it?
 - 2) It seems there are two ways we can do that: not think that we individually have the right

answer and communicate openly and kindly with one another.

- a) Isn't that the way we often overcome differences in our marriages?
- b) Often when Tammy and I are discussing something, I'm sure of the way we need to handle it, but then she'll say, "Honey, have you thought about it this way?" Then, I realize she has a good suggestions, and we come to agreement. Or vice versa.

D. Paul asks some serious questions to the Corinthians: "Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul?" v. 13.

1. Most translations take the first sentence of this verse as a question: "Is Christ divided?"
 - a. However, it is possible it's a statement of fact: "Christ is divided."
 - b. If Paul intended that as a statement of fact, what on earth does he mean? How on earth is Christ divided?
 - 1) Here's how: It was by the actions of the Corinthians—they had divided the body of Christ and had thus divided him.
 - 2) However, we understand this sentence—as a statement or as a question—the idea is the same: Christ cannot be divided, and because Christ cannot be divided, his body cannot be divided.
2. Paul then takes on those who were pledging allegiance to him in Corinth. He says, "Did I die for your sins? Were you baptized by into fellowship with me?"
 - a. Since obviously Paul never died for the Corinthians and weren't baptized into fellowship with him, they had no right to follow him.
 - b. Too often congregations, like what was happening in Corinth, follow the preacher rather than Jesus.
 - c. Brethren, our allegiance must never be a man! Our allegiance must always be to the God who became man: Jesus Christ!

E. Paul was grateful that he did not baptize many in Corinth, lest they could claim they were baptized by his authority, w. 14-16—the parenthetical mention of Stephanas' household likely comes from the fact that Stephanas was baptized in Achaia, not Corinth (16:15).

F. Christ did not send Paul to baptize, but to preach the gospel, v. 17.

1. Several individuals point to this text to say baptism isn't essential; if it were, wouldn't Christ have sent Paul to baptize?
2. That misses the point terribly.
 - a. Baptism is essential to salvation.
 - 1) "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins" (Acts 2:38).
 - 2) "This water [the water of the flood] symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Pt 3:21).
 - b. What does Paul mean, then, that Christ sent him to preach, not baptize?
 - 1) Baptism is ineffective without preaching.
 - 2) It would do not good to baptize someone who doesn't believe and who hasn't repented of sins. Thus, Paul says that he was sent to preach and the response to that preaching would be baptism.
 - c. Do you need to respond to the Gospel this morning?