

Causes of Division

1 Corinthians 3:1-11

INTRODUCTION:

- A. Lesson text: **1 Corinthians 3:1-11**
- B. The growth of any congregation depends upon the spirit of the members.
1. In the Old Testament, for example, we read the story of Nehemiah and the people in their effort to rebuild the walls around the city of Jerusalem.
Nehemiah 4:6 – “So we built the wall, and the entire wall was joined together up to half its height, for the people had a mind to work.”
 2. When people have a common purpose, and a common goal, a great deal can be accomplished, provided of course that there is nothing to derail that effort.
 3. It was the prophet Amos that asking the thought provoking question: “Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” (**Amos 3:3**).
 4. A great deal can indeed be accomplished, provided of course that a spirit of unity prevails in the congregation.
 5. The beauty of such a unity is emphasized by the Psalmist: “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!” (**Psalm 133:1**).
- C. This congregation is truly blessed with a wonderful spirit of unity and cooperation; but be warned, it is a target of the evil one. **1 Peter 5:8** – “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. ”
- D. In our text from **1 Corinthians 3**, there are a number of things mentioned which prompt divisions.

I. IMMATURITY.

1 Corinthians 3:1-2 - “And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able.”

- A. Caring for a new born baby underscores the importance proper care.
1. When children are born they live on the milk of their mothers.
 2. We don’t give them anything more because at that stage of development, they would choke.
- B. When a person decides to put their Lord on in baptism (Galatians 3:26-27), they begin their life anew.
1. Jesus used the reference of being *born again* (John 3:1-5).
 2. Having been baptized, Paul speaks of coming up out of that water, raised “to walk in newness of life” (**Romans 6:4**).

3. He later states: “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17).
- C. Being a new creature or having been *born again* Peter admonishes: *As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby* (1 Peter 2:2).
1. Generally, in looking at this verse we note that newborn Christians should seek out the *milk* of the word of God.
 2. However, what we fail to emphasize is the latter portion of the verse: *that ye may grow thereby*.
- D. Unfortunately, there are Christians who have received the milk of the word, but they haven’t grown out of it; that is, have not grown sufficiently to be able to receive the meat of the word (Hebrews 5:12-14).
1. It is this latter problem, one gospel preacher describes in his writings as *spiritual dwarfism* that has led to division in the church.
 2. Paul makes us aware that the situation at Corinth was such that they were not ready for strong food.
- E. To help us understand the problem better, at Corinth we learn that they had a problem with division in the congregation.
1. This had been reported to Paul by the house of Chloe (1 Corinthians 1:11).
 2. The church had strife and discord because of favoritism for the various preachers, which we refer to as *preacheritis*.
 3. Some in the church preferred to follow Apollos, for others Cephas or Peter, and with others Paul, and for others our Lord.
- F. What we are made aware of here is that part of the reason for this division was *Childishness . . . Spiritual immaturity . . .* These brethren had not grown up.
1. If they had they would have known that it is wrong to be a disciple of anyone but Christ.
 2. Paul was so frustrated with them that he said:
1 Corinthians 1:14-15 - “I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius; Lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name.”
- G. Churches suffer when brethren don’t grow in Christ.
1. They look for petty things to bicker about and find something to condemn and criticize.
 2. The childishness that can rear its head is a detriment to any effort to seek and save the lost.

II. CARNALITY.

1 Corinthians 3:3-4 – “For you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? For when one says, ‘I am of Paul,’ and another, ‘I am of Apollos,’ are you not carnal?”

- A. *Carnal* - that which is fleshly which appeals to the human appetite and desires.
1. Note the things that are involved in carnality; envy, strife, division.
 2. These are all things that are perpetuated by personal desires and ambitions.
- B. This actually is an outgrowth of immaturity, for they are still wanting to fulfill their own lusts and desires instead of yielding their lives to Christ.
1. With carnality, self is still in the forefront, and Christ is in the background.
 2. Christ must come first in everything and must be the foremost figure in our lives, above everyone and everything that exists.
 3. **Matthew 16:24** – “Then Jesus said to His disciples, ‘If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.’”
 4. **Galatians 2:20** – “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”
- C. When we become Christians, Paul tells us that we should leave that old man of sin behind. **Romans 6:5-6** - “For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.”
- D. Carnality in the church is an indication that some have not been truly converted to Christ.
1. They have not put to death of crucified the old man of sin.
 2. The desires of the flesh and the will of God do not work hand in hand, even Though the Bible reiterates that truth again and again.
 3. **James 4:4** - *Friendship with the world is enmity with God.*
- E. It may be that we don't like the way that something is done; or we think that we could do it better.
1. We should be supportive of the eldership, and to respect the task before them.
 2. To fight against them and to seek to change the way something is done, or should be done, is carnality, which will only serve to harm the church.

III. DISLOYALTY.

1 Corinthians 3:5-6 – “Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.”

- A. The word *minister* is a term which simply refers to an attendant or servant.
1. Despite man's efforts to elevate himself, servants are not to be exalted to a higher rank.
 2. When man does this they insult the Master, and perpetuate division in the church.

B. Perhaps it would do us good to realize that we don't have the great value that we may think we possess.

1. **Luke 17:10** – “So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.’”
2. **Romans 12:3** – “For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.”
3. It is this over-inflated opinion that can lead men to encourage followers after themselves and in so doing be disloyal to Christ.
4. Our interest is not in creating an allegiance to men . . . But to God.
Galatians 1:10 – “For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.”

C. Now this is not to suggest that we can't have respect and admiration for those in the church that we feel are more mature in the faith.

1. I have the utmost respect for a number of Gospel preachers, but I do not have an allegiance to them.
2. I am not interested in jumping on the bandwagon in any crusade they may undertake to bring something revolutionary to the brotherhood.
3. A Christian's first and foremost interest is in exalting, worshiping, and serving the living God.

IV. INGRATITUDE.

1 Corinthians 3:7 – “So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase.”

A. Too often we seem to want to credit ourselves for anything that is accomplished.

1. “I was able to convert bro. Smith,” “It was my ability and words that led to his conversion.”
2. But Paul knocks the pedestal out from under those who exalt themselves.

B. The person who plants, is the one who initially plants the seed.

1. In the parable of the sower, Jesus reveals that the **seed** is the Word of God (Luke 8:11).
2. When that seed is planted in a good and honest heart, He said it would bear fruit.
3. It is through the preaching of the Word that souls are led to be *born again* (1 Peter 1:22-25).
4. **Romans 10:17** – “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”

C. The person who waters is a reference to those who continue to teach the truth And help to bring more Scriptural concepts to light.

D. We note that the credit for the increase is not with any individual, but strictly

with God.

1. Failing to honor and give due credit to the living God leads men to harbor the spirit of ingratitude.
2. There is no humility; and God is not seen as the giver of “every good and perfect gift” (**James 1:17**).
3. Failure to give God the glory and the credit that is due, leads one to again develop an over inflated opinion of himself, or herself.
4. And that self-perceived supremacy in the church not only robs God, but also leads to division.

V. IRREVERENCE.

1 Corinthians 3:9 –“ For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building.”

- A. God’s fellow workers are discouraged. God’s field is rendered unfruitful. God’s building is laid waste.”
- B. When men are caught up in strife, they are not thinking of the harm they are doing to the Lord’s work.
 1. They are not thinking of the damage that is being done to cheapen the cause of Christ.
 2. The selfishness and pride that advances divisiveness leads to ungodliness.
- C. Gossip, slander, and maliciousness become tools of the devil to propagate their evil.
 1. We want to say that such would not be found among Christians, however, pride, arrogance, and selfishness causes it to happen even among the best of Christians.
2. When we speak of irreverence, we forget the fear of the Lord
 - a. **Proverbs 8:13** – “The fear of the Lord is to hate evil; Pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverse mouth I hate.”
 - b. **Proverbs 13:10** – “By pride comes only contention . . .”
- D. It is ironic that divisions occur, but those who promote them think that they are still pleasing to God.
 1. Of the seven things which Scripture tells us that God hates is, “he that sows discord among brethren” (**Proverbs. 6:19**).
 2. How can we be responsible for that which God hates, and live with the delusion that “we are the only ones right with God?”
- E. Now granted, there are times when congregations begin to leave truth, and perpetuate false doctrine.
 1. In an effort to do what is pleasing to God, in such cases we cannot support error.
 2. But in far too many instances, divisions occur not over error, but over opinions and petty bickering.

CONCLUSION:

- A. From 1 Corinthians 3:1-11, we have observed five things that can cause division within a local congregation.
1. **Immaturity**
 2. **Carnality**
 3. **Disloyalty**
 4. **Ingratitude**
 5. **Irreverence**
- B. Please remember, that no matter how good things are with any given congregation, somebody is waiting in the wings looking for a monkey wrench to throw into the works to derail it.
1. And with a congregation that is continuing to have growth, there are more opportunities for Satan to use to accomplish his purposes.
 2. As individual Christians, we must strive to the best of our ability to work for harmony.
 - a. To seek **maturity** instead of **immaturity**.
 - b. To seek **godliness** instead of **carnality**.
 - c. To seek **loyalty** instead of **disloyalty**.
 - d. To seek **gratitude** instead of **ingratitude**.
 - e. To seek **reverence** instead of **irreverence**.
- C. What might help us in this endeavor, is to recognize that any one of us can be the catalyst that can divide a church. Never allow yourself to become Satan's instrument for division!
1. We need to recognize that we can cause such to happen by our attitude and with our words.
 2. All of us must strive to check our attitudes, and be careful and watchful of what we say. Jesus said in **Matthew 12:37** – “For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”
- D. Division is a frightful thing, and the consequences are nothing short of devastating.
- E. And since it stems from one's spiritual condition (not being what one should be) it is always appropriate to ask, “*Is your heart right with God?*”
- F. **God's Plan for Man's Salvation**