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GENUINE SPIRITUALITY: A STUDY OF 1 CORINTHIANS

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THAT THERE BE NO DIVISIONS AMONG YOU 1 CORINTHIANS 1:10-17

INTRODUCTION

In John 17:22-23, Jesus prayed for His Church and He asked this from His Father, *The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me.* Jesus asked His Father to perfect our unity. Unity among the Church is an essential part of God's purpose to glorify Himself in the world. Satan knows this and he constantly attacks the unity of the local church. Most of Paul's letters to New Testament churches appeal for unity within these churches because most of the churches he founded experienced division at some point. Satan's most common strategy to destroy the corporate witness of the church is to divide and conquer local congregations. Why is division so deadly to a church? Division is deadly because it denies the heart of the gospel; reconciliation with God and one another [See Colossians 3:12-15]. The church at Corinth was no exception to the problem of disunity. In fact, this was the first problem reported to Paul according to 1 Corinthians 1:11, *For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's people, that there are quarrels among you.* Actually, everything Paul writes about in 1 Corinthians 1:10-6:20 is a response to this report from Chloe's people. A significant portion of 1:10-6:60 pertains directly to divisions in the church, 1:10-4:20. We're not sure who Chloe was, but Gordon Fee believes she was not a member of the Corinthian church, but that she was, *a wealthy Asian...whose business interests caused her agents to travel between Ephesus and Corinth.* Perhaps while in Corinth, she and some of her people visited the church there and were so shocked by its current troubles that upon returning to Ephesus, they reported to Paul concerning the trouble. 1 Corinthians 1:10-17 is Paul's initial response to the report.

1. PAUL PLEADS FOR DOCTRINAL UNITY (1:10)

In the name of Jesus, Paul appeals to the Corinthians *that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment.* There were members of the church who were in disagreement with Paul's teachings and because members of the church had somewhat aligned themselves with other teachers, they held differing beliefs that led to deep divisions within the congregation. Paul knows that this is a dangerous situation, so he appeals for complete doctrinal unity. In other words, he appeals to the church to unify around the truth that comes from Jesus Christ. Paul realizes that the Holy Spirit must bring such unity into existence as believers are instructed by godly teachers. Complete doctrinal unity is a lofty goal, but one that will be realized when we are glorified. Until then, we should hold this appeal before us and seriously pursue it as we partner with one another in this local congregation. Where doctrinal disagreements exist in a local church, unity must be sought for the sake of the gospel.

How may local churches work toward fulfilling this command for doctrinal agreement? (1) We can have a clear confession of faith and be up-front about the fact that we really believe these things and govern our church according to these doctrines. (2) We can wisely recognize that individuals are at varying stages of Christian growth and understanding, therefore we are patient with anyone who expresses a sincere and humble desire to be taught. (3) We must effectively distinguish between essential doctrines [the Trinity, the full deity and humanity of Jesus Christ, justification by faith alone, and the authority of Scripture], secondary doctrines which are doctrines with which believing Christians may disagree, though this disagreement will create significant boundaries between believers [baptism, election, perseverance of the saints, church government] and thirdly, disputable matters. These are beliefs over which Christians may disagree and remain in close fellowship, even within local congregations [the doctrine of last things, how we educate our children, our beliefs about social issues such as attending movies, preferences for dress and drinking alcohol]. Doctrines are important, but we must honestly admit that some are more foundational than others. (4) The leadership of the church must patiently and gently correct those who become prideful and hostile to the teachings of this church. Paul writes, *Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them (Romans 16:17)*. (5) Both leaders and members of local congregations must commit to endure the hardships that come with attempting to fulfill Paul's command, *that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment*.

2. **PAUL ACKNOWLEDGES THE CAUSE OF THEIR ARGUMENTS (1:11-12)**

There were many doctrines which the Corinthians misunderstood and these may have been symptoms of their disunity. For instance, they misunderstood: marriage, idol worship, paying their pastors, women's roles in the church, the Lord's Supper, spiritual gifts and the resurrection body. But verse 12 indicates that their disunity also involved aligning themselves behind various leaders of the church. Paul founded the church and then remained there for 18 months. Then Apollos came to pastor the church. Apollos was a gifted preacher who no doubt impressed the Corinthians who so highly valued orators. By some means, Peter had influenced at least a few members of the Corinthian church. At some point, the Corinthians began to disagree with Paul and many contentions developed over the issues I mentioned earlier, which are the same issues Paul addresses in the letter. So the church is at odds with Paul and they are at odds with one another. Each is exalting his own false wisdom and few are willing to receive Paul's correction. It even seems that some proudly and simply declared themselves to be followers of Christ, even though they refused to listen to Christ's apostle. It is not that these teachers disagreed with one another, yet that did not stop the Corinthians from attempting to identify themselves with one teacher or another to substantiate their ideas.

At the heart of every sinful conflict is the same root, pride. *Proverbs 13:10, Through insolence comes nothing but strife, But wisdom is with those who receive counsel. James 4:1-2a, 1What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? 2You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. These kinds of quarrels come from those controlled by their flesh and not the wisdom of the Spirit. In contrast, listen as James describes wisdom from the Spirit, 13Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. 14But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth.15This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. 16For*

where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. 17But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. 18And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace (James 3:13-18).

3. PAUL OFFERS A CURE FOR THEIR DISUNITY (1:13-17)

In verses 13-16, Paul points out the foolishness of anyone aligning himself with him or any other leader in a way that foolishly divides the body of Christ. He wants to distance himself from this kind of behavior; so much so that he is glad he did not baptize the people who are causing such division.

In verse 17, Paul reminds them of his mission and the cure for their foolish arguments, the preaching of the gospel. Their wisdom, which was no true wisdom at all, demanded that each one's opinion be correct and they were willing to fight to be proven correct. Paul reminds them of the gospel's priority over all such opinions. What mattered most was the gospel and its pervasive effects in reconciling sinners to God and creating a new community where Christ reigns over a unified people.

Paul was not sent to Corinth to start a cult following of his own. He was not sent there to divide the true believers. Instead, he was sent by Christ to declare a way of becoming reconciled to God and to one another. If Paul had tried to be clever and witty so that he naturally attracted a crowd who was loyal to him, then he makes the cross void of its power to unify persons who would otherwise have no agreement at all.

CONCLUSION

Division among God's people robs the Church of its power to speak about reconciliation to God and to one another through the cross. Or to put it positively, the power of the cross is clearly demonstrated by reconciling us to God and to one another. Therefore, when we maintain difficult relationships for the sake of the gospel, the power of the cross is clearly demonstrated. This is why Paul writes, *12So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; 13bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. 14Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. 15Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful (Colossians 3:12-15).*