

STUDIES IN THE BOOK OF 1ST CORINTHIANS

Examining the Household of Faith

A Divided Church

1 Corinthians 1:10-17

It is no news or strange phenomenon that strong ministries are personality driven. To some extent this is expected. Jesus clearly said, "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." John 12:32. If there are leaders who are intentional about lifting up the name of Jesus Christ, we should not think it strange that men are drawn to their churches and ministries. Where men fail is remembering they are but reflected light of Jesus' love. None of us can brag or boast in what we do. Left to ourselves we would have absolutely no glory to speak. But we also must remember that God is not in the glory sharing business. He deserves and expects all glory to be deferred to Him.

Some Christians claimed to belong to Paul.

That's why Paul's actions are so very important in the first chapter of first Corinthians. He makes sure not to accept credit for anything that he knows God is the only party responsible. The people in Corinthians were attaching and aligning themselves with strong preaching personalities within the church. And instead of them walking and working together it was causing schisms and unhealthy competition in the church. You had the Pauline Disciples versus the Disciples of Apollos versus the Petrine Disciples, persons who followed Peter.

There should be some sense of pride in one's pastor and church, but we must never forget whom all honor and glory are due. There is only one body of Christ. As Christians we are either a part of that body or not. It doesn't matter the name or make of any other movements out there. Either Jesus Christ is lifted up or He's not. Either Jesus Christ is Lord or he's not. Either Jesus Christ is worshipped or he's not. There's not even a second or third option, because Jesus Christ has his own category, King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He is creator, redeemer, savior, and liberator. There was none before him. There is none beside him and there is none like Him.

Other Christians claimed allegiance to Apollos.

Where Apollos lacked the wisdom and education of Paul, he made it up in his excellent and exuberant elocution. Apollos was given a very special speaking gift by God and he had started drawing a church crowd. He was the pastor of the church of what's happening now. People craved and were connected to his charisma. Apollos in short, had it going on in a major way. However, he was very careful not to allow his success go to his head. As a matter of fact we learn that he was humble enough to allow Priscilla and Aquila to "school" him on baptism in Jesus name, because Apollos was only preaching the baptism of John. It is no wonder that people flocked to be around Apollos and catered to his teaching and preaching ability. He had the personal character to go along with his preaching credentials.

Any individual who decides to partake in God's glory or somehow make himself equal to God or his son Jesus Christ will one day have to answer to God for his delusional and divisive ministry. Pastors are only under-shepherds of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the great shepherd of the sheep and he declares that his sheep know his voice. Again, we as church leaders must be careful not to manipulate people and teach them to follow men rather than God. We must not put ourselves upon a pedestal neither should we allow those who come behind us to lift us up above where we belong. God must always take center stage. He must always be the headliner.

Still others claimed loyalty to Cephas.

Who can forget Cephas, aka, Peter? Do you Remember Peter? Our first memories of Peter are not the kind of attributes that attract crowds, at least not Christian crowds. When we first meet Peter in Scripture, he and his brother Andrew are commercial fishermen. However, Jesus promises to make them fishers of men. Peter was known for speaking and sometimes even acting rashly, before thinking. It would have been wise for Peter to invest in Peppermint sandals, because he was always putting his foot in his mouth. He was a swearing, switch-blade carrying, short-fused disciple. He called himself a sinful man. Jesus called him Satan. However, it was Peter, "after he had been converted," who comes to strengthen his brethren. Some kind of way, Peter is catapulted to the leadership position of the apostles. He preaches his initial sermon and three thousand people are added to the church. Certainly some of those individuals are the ones that are listed among those who claimed to be his followers.

Another form of division amongst Christians is denominational affinity. Not only do we indulge in the worship of individuals other than Jesus Christ, we are just as guilty for wearing our labels in the form of doctrine and denomination. We love being a part of a particular convention, association, or denomination, more than we emphasize membership in the body of Christ. We boast of the size of our conventions, the number of healthy churches, the amount of money that is raised, saved, or sent for missions, and none of this is bad, but we fail to keep our focus on the main thing, because all other things are vain things. We have to keep in mind the age old creed of the church: "One Lord, One Faith, and One Baptism."

One of the reasons that there continues to be so many unchurched people in the world, especially in cities where there are high visible ministries, is the aspect that many of these ministries fail to cooperate or collaborate with any other ministries. Paul argues that all Christians belong to Christ and that ministers are to help equip them for service to the Lord. Paul in this chapter lifts up the power and example of Christians co-laboring together for the good of the body of Christ. Remember this is not a competition. We are all putting the Lord on display! We all have a part to play and no one's part is any more important than the next persons. Listen to Paul preach this paradigm of partnership. "One waters, the other plants, but it is God who gives the increase". Is that not a wonderful model for ministry; Brothers and sisters working hand in hand and side by side, not trying to outshine each other, but shining their lights for the Lord and depending on God to honor their efforts with the fruit of lost souls coming to Christ. This is the power of the unified church of Jesus Christ!