

Sermon Notes

The Gospel Divided & Defended

1 Corinthians 1:10-17

January 25, 2015

Introduction & Review

We are still “getting to know” First Corinthians, and it is clear that Paul, who helped plant the Church, and who wrote this letter with Sosthenes (1:1), is rather concerned about some problems that are now coming to the surface (1:10-11). They have been squabbling with each other. Squabbling? Is that all!? Paul is concerned about where this comes from and where it is going. We all know something about—having heard or experienced—severe disagreements or divisions; factions, schism, & even separations. This happens in more places than the church. Right out of the chute, Paul addresses the church in Corinth (and the Lord speaks to the Church today) about contentions and divisions.

Paul addresses this issue straight on...early on! The inevitability of offenses is understood, partly (Luke 17:1); sinners do sin, but adding to this by promoting an “us vs. them” approach *within the congregation* deserves an immediate, “Stop it.” When this happens, it is because pride has seeped in, love has grown cold, and eyes are removed from Christ.

“...but the ‘strife’ emerges because personal relationships are not good. When the love of God is truly controlling such relationships within a church, areas of disagreement find their proper perspective and do not necessitate ‘strife’, let alone ‘schism’” (David Pryor, *The Bible Speaks Today: First Corinthians*).

Paul also has the authority to address this in this way. He had the right to know and the need to know, and so Chloe’s household gave him a report.

The Division of the Gospel/Can the Gospel be Divided? (1:10-12)

Just as the Word of God cannot be imprisoned, the answer is, ultimately, no. However, as we are a manifestation of the Gospel, and when we are squabbling and contending, we are showing the Gospel in this way; so, in this sense, the Gospel is divided. This is seen in the practice of the church. Later on, the Corinthian Church is referred to as “epistles of Christ” (2 Cor. 3:3); what’s the content of the epistle? What’s the message when read? The “divided” Gospel is seen in the grouping which was occurring when some were staking out their territory according to teachers.

I am of Paul.

I am of Apollos.

I am of Cephas (Peter).

I am of Christ.

Whether it is a longing for the ‘good ‘ol days,’ or some kind of clamor for one’s favorite intellectual, or someone else...or even the discarding of those (servants of Christ) for Christ, this is, sadly, still present. Paul will have none of it. It is tragic to note that pride will even pit the servants of Christ against Christ. Paul calls for unity, not uniformity, and he recognizes that there are different servants, different ministers, with different gifts. The problems arise when the gifts of the Lord are turned against the Lord, and when these servants are played off against each other and against Christ.

Side Note: The “Purity” of the Early Church

Was the early church a time of undiluted discipleship, raw faithfulness, and purity?

“People sometimes talk as if first-generation Christianity enjoyed a pure, untroubled honeymoon period, after which things became more difficult; but there’s no evidence for this in the New Testament. Right from the start, Paul found himself not only announcing the gospel of Jesus but struggling to hold together in a single family those who had obeyed its summons” (N. T. Wright).

The Defense of the Gospel (1:13-17)

Ultimately Paul is going to call the Church to look to Christ. He will ask them three questions which include elements of the silly and the profound. These are precise questions that get right to the point; they are designed to get to the root of the problem of the fragmentation which is fermenting.

Is Christ divided?

Was Paul crucified for you?

Were you baptized in the name of Paul?

A note on Baptism: Baptism identifies each of us as belonging to Christ. Paul is insistent: In your baptism you became “of Christ.” You were not baptized into me, Apollos, or Peter! Paul is careful to point out that baptism is not into his name (1:15), and this is because baptism is not made more significant due to who did the baptizing. The most seasoned and battle-hardened saint and the most recently baptized infant are members of Christ’s body.

Unity as a fearful threat.

Unity as an attraction.

