

When men set their sights upon the Gospel, then party spirit is dissipated. Paul underscores this by urging:

- a. The proclamation of the Gospel. The true servants of Christ will fulfill their commission to Gospelize and nothing else! Even an ordinance of our Lord is subordinated. Paul does not cast reflections upon baptism, but he wants it made clear that there is only ONE ground for forgiveness - the blood of Christ. The essential function of a minister of the Gospel is NOT baptism, but the Gospel! How much men have moved from the truth!
- b. The simplification of the Gospel. Paul is careful about the mode of presenting the Gospel. A dialectical or oratorical mode may produce an intellectual or aesthetic effect, but it will not transform sinful men. To dress the simple story of the Gospel with specious rhetoric or wrap it in fine-spun theorems is actually to eviscerate it! The power of the Gospel lies in the presentation of its facts and not in the clever presentations of men! To substitute a system of notions for the fact of His death is to confound the situation as one might confuse the issue by considering the theory of gravitation with gravitation itself. The full impact is given: you leave the Gospel with no content!

Conclusion How then does one assembly rid itself of the deadening effect of partisanship? Of internal strife? Simple! Just keep in balance the truths of the Word of God concerning the Person of Christ Himself, the ministers of Christ, His servants, and the truth of the Gospel. Where the Word is kept clearly in view, the inroads of pernicious spiritual anemia cannot come! Amen.

THE BOOK OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

"Internal Strife"
1 Corinthians 1:10-17

Introduction

1. Internal strife has sapped the strength of many local churches. It has deadened the witness of the church universal. In many areas it is utterly impotent because of strife.
2. The presence in Corinth of this sinful malady shows that the early church was in the throes of what the modern church is. One may explain that it will always be this way because: a) sinful humanity and b) Satanic influence. But, there must always be the expectancy of the power of God to assist in divine triumph where humanity cannot possibly gain a victory.
3. How this is possible is given credence by Paul. He lays down suggestions for true unity and witness. They are worthy of serious consideration in this day of need and challenge. Here they are:

NOTE: There were problems at Corinth(1:11). The verb "declared" is strong and notes that unimpeachable testimony had been given about the unrest in the church. Specific persons are named who brought the report. The form of the difficulty is termed "contentions." This word signifies unseemly wranglings as opposed to discussions. It is a sort of gainsaying. This, in turn, led to schisms which are listed among the works of the flesh (Gal.5:19f)

1. Establish the HONOR of Christ. v.10.

Paul's strategy is to lay down a strong appeal. It is through the instrumentality of the Lord Jesus Christ. His honor is at stake. In view of this, he appeals for:-

- a. Same speaking. This phrase is drawn from Classical Greek political life. It has division in mind. These speak of schisms and the word connotes a splinter of wood, but here it is used in the moral sense. God's ideal is no splinters! He yearns for singular formulas amongst His own.
- b. Same thinking. The verb which governs this thought is used in the Word to convey "mending of nets" (Matt.4:21). Galen used it of a surgeon who mends joints and Heroditus of composing factions. There are to be no diverse conceptions amongst the saints. Believers should view things from the same standpoint.
- c. Same deciding. The thought here is of forming the same judgment. This could only be based on the previous item, namely, the same viewpoint. It is, therefore, possible to gain perfect agreement in resolving questions and disputes among the children of God. Anything short of this is the work of carnal flesh and unbelieving hearts. It is the Spirit's work to gain God's ideal in His own. Where He is dominant, it will persist. Hallelujah.

2. Minimize the SERVANTS of Christ. vv. 12-16

Paul does not enjoin disrespect for the servants of God. What he does argue against is the fearful plan of the Evil One to disrupt God's Word by forming platoons of standardbearers. Four parties are mentioned as being prevalent at Corinth: a) Paul b) Peter c) Apollos d) Christ. All were the result of human arrogance or attempts to dominate. F.C.Baur has proposed that it was the result of the ever present conflict between Paul and Peter doctrinally! His theory does not merit the serious consideration of Bible-believers for Paul and Peter joined hands (cf.2 Peter 3:15 & 1 Cor.9:5).

Where do the servants of God fit in? The truth of the matter is that they must compliment and not compete. Paul scores a victory here by asking three pertinent questions:

- a. About the division of Christ. The use of the perfect tense asks: Does Christ stand divided? Is Christ in a position to be torn asunder? Can He be claimed exclusively by one group over another? A divided church claims a Christ who is parcelled out. But His title denies such absurdity. There are some who pose this question as an assertion. They affirm that Paul states the division of Christ by their controversies! The presence of the article with Christ notes that both Head and Body combined refer to the Christ. Party schisms rend the Son of God in pieces.
- b. About the rejection of the cross. How tactful Paul is here. He uses his own name rather than one of the others in question. The Greek grammar demands an emphatic and indignant "no." Christ alone is the One Who bought the Corinthians.(cf.6:20).
- c. About the perversion of baptism. The cross is the ground of personal union with Christ while baptism is its attestation. The Name of Christ is sealed to the believing heart at conversion and baptism and not one of His servant's names. They had been baptized not as Pauline, Apollonian, Petrine or what have you, but as Christians! Paul was absolutely horrified to think of baptizing in any name, but the Name of Christ for His is above all (Phil.2:9). Paul was no sacramentalist. Our Lord avoided a similar controversy earlier (John 4:2).

3. Magnify the GOSPEL of Christ. v. 17.