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WHAT WENT WRONG IN CORINTH?

1 Corinthians 1-4

Intro: Paul's first letter to the Corinthians was prompted by problems -- all kinds of problems:

Divisions
Immorality
Believers and lawsuits
Separation
Marriage
Personal attacks on Paul
The Lord's Table
Spiritual gifts -- lack of love -- tongues
Doctrinal problems -- resurrection
Etc.

It sounds like a list that could have been written for the Church in America in the 20th century!

How did it all get started?

Also -- where should Paul begin in dealing with them?

We know what he did:

- 1) First -- those problems which were reported to him by the house of Chloe (1:11).
- 2) Second -- those things which they had written to Paul about (7:1).

But why did he not reverse the order -- dealing with the correspondence first?

Does not the very order of the Epistle give us Paul's priorities -- from the causes on to the results? And does not even the space devoted to the first part indicate that which was the main problem? There are 4 chapters -- 1 through 4!

There seems to be little doubt but that Paul is dealing with the root and then the fruit. Note Paul statement to the Galatians as he concludes his Epistle to them: Gal. 6:7-9,

"Be not deceived . . . And let us not be weary in well doing, for . . ."

I. THE BASIC PROBLEM: DIVISIONS CAUSED BY CARNALITY.

See 1:10 and 3:1-3.

Carnality is set in opposition to spirituality. A carnal man is a believer, but he lives like an unregenerate man. A spiritual man walks in the Spirit, and this means that he walks according to the Word of God. This is why Paul says what he does about the Word in 3:1, 2.

Disunity is the result of a wrong relationship with the Lord

and with the Word -- whether it relates to a Church, or to the Body of Christ generally.

This leads to a second main point:

II. WHAT WERE THE IMMEDIATE EVIDENCES OF THEIR CARNALITY -- WHICH, IN TURN, LED TO THE OTHER PROBLEMS MENTIONED IN 1 CORINTHIANS?

A. They became followers of men. Cf. 1:12-17.

This made the men the attraction -- not his message, and not his Lord!

And so it became a matter of not, were you baptized, but who baptized you? See 3:4-8.

What does this do?

- 1) It puts the emphasis on men and what they do, not on God and what He does. See 3:6, 7.
- 2) It makes competitors out of the Lord's servants -- not fellow-workers, teammates (3:8a).

And so in following men, we rob God of the glory that belongs to Him!

B. There was a watering-down of the Gospel (1:18-25).

What is the Gospel? Is out object to make people happy, or holy? Often -- very little of Christ!

A watered-down Gospel has more of an appeal to the natural man -- mixed up (as it is) with human wisdom, with man at the center, not God!

Closely related is this third point:

C. There was a rejection of the doctrine of human depravity -- or why did Paul write 1:26-31?

There seems little doubt but that the church in Corinth had been taken in by teachings about self-worth and self-love. They were attracted to a Gospel which would not leave man completely destitute of hope -- one in which he could at least be a part of his own salvation!

This is just where we are today -- and the one who speaks out against these things is held in disrepute!

D. There was more of an interest in the method of preaching than in the message. See 2:1-5; 3:9-15.

This is what happens when we turn from pleasing God to pleasing men!

- E. There was a minimizing of the work of the Holy Spirit in seeking to know the Word of God. Cf. 2:6-16.

Illus: George Whitefield's letter on p. 95 -- not just read Romans and Galatians, but read and pray over them.

Did you ever pray your way through a book of the Bible?

Have we substituted education through schools or the teaching of certain men for the simple ministry of the Spirit of God to every believer -- not as an option, BUT AS AN ABSOLUTE NECESSITY FOR ALL OF US!

How we need to get back to this!

Illus: Dr. Chafer's lecture every year at the beginning of the school year on Dallas Seminary -- With A Faculty of ONE: The Holy Spirit.

This did not mean that he believed that all of the teaching was perfect, but this was the direction that he wanted us to be heading.

- F. Finally, there was a rejection of authority -- the apostolic authority of Paul -- and this would immediately throw question marks over his teaching.

In a day when the Scriptures were not completed, and when Paul was one used by the Spirit of God to give us 13 or 14 books of the NT, this was equal to doubting the full, infallible, inerrant inspiration of Scripture!

If Paul were not an Apostle, then you should throw out Acts and everything from Romans to Hebrews (just to be sure)!

I am not aware of any such move among evangelicals today, but there are plenty who are doubting the inerrancy of the Word.

This was all going on in Corinth. Can we fail to see the Corinthian error in our tendency to decide what is the Word of God, and what is not?

Concl: My proof that we have the same situation in the professing church today is in the fact that we have the other problems Paul mentions as the fruit of the first -- a breakdown of moral standards (in the church), divorce, doctrinal corruption and disputes, an over-emphasis on money, etc.

What is the remedy?

- 1) A return to the Word in our preaching and in our teaching and in our living. Read it. Believe it. Obey it.

- 2) A return to prayer and to dependence upon the Holy Spirit to teach us the Word, and then to use us in reaching others with the Gospel.

When a carnal church is transformed into a spiritual church, divisions go and holiness is restored.

Look at them once again:

- 1) An emphasis on human leaders.
- 2) A watered-down Gospel, little emphasis on Christ.
- 3) A rejection of depravity.
- 4) An emphasis on methods.
- 5) A minimizing the work of the Holy Spirit
- 6) A questioning of the authority of Scripture.