

“There Are Contentions Among You”

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It is hard to imagine the pain felt by the apostle Paul as he penned the words of this title, found in 1 Corinthians 1:11. The church of the Lord and Savior whom but a few years earlier he had persecuted — the church which he now recognized as the precious body of Christ — the church for which Jesus had died — now divided. The very action he now condemned among them he contrasted to walking “honestly” in Romans 13:13. As he spoke to the church at Corinth about the remedy for this tragic situation he encouraged them to be of the same speech, mind and judgment (1:10). One wonders how such could ever be accomplished! Obviously as Paul goes on he emphasized that the means of this is to be as we each speak the wonderful gospel of our Lord (1:17-2:16) ... that word revealed unto the inspired men of the first century by the Spirit of God (2:10). Now if it is that simple, why are there then “contentions”? We have argued for years, and rightly so, that the reason denominationalism exists is that many are not willing to accept and follow the revealed will of God. Are not those who reject the wisdom of God described by Paul as the “natural man” (ie. those following their own wisdom guided by corrupt desires and affections - *Thayer*) in 1 Corinthians 2:14? Again we readily admit such — religious division (denominationalism) feeds on man’s desires and affections being placed as superior to God’s desires and affections as revealed in His Word. But isn’t that the same reason contentions can continue to exist within the body of Christ? If we were all of a mind to “speak the same thing” and be “perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Corinthians 1:10) there would not be division. Isn’t that Paul’s argument in 1 Corinthians 1? But what hinders such a humble attitude of letting God’s will be the answer? Paul goes on to indicate several problems that existed then (and sadly today) which allow the propagation of contention in the Lord’s body.

- **An “I” Problem (1:12).** It seems some wanted preeminence by attaching themselves to certain teachers ... Paul, or Apollos or Cephas. Thankfully some were willing to be “of Christ,” just as some today desire such. But the problem still exists of the pride of “I.” “I” will follow what _____ says.” “I” will follow what _____ university teaches.” “I” don’t care what that says, ‘I think’ In their scramble to justify their alma matter or favorite teacher, or even self it seems many forget to exalt the Lord. It is no wonder then that contentions arise and continue.
- **A demeaning of the Word of God (1:18-29).** The Word in the first century was scorned by some as “foolishness,” (2:20-21). To others it was a “stumblingblock” because they could not comprehend God’s plan and will. Today such still exists as many make sport of the Word by saying it cannot correctly give us an enduring pattern for the church, for daily living, for dealing with error and the like. We hear much about “change” these days. We hear much about the need for a direct action from the Holy Spirit. We hear much about the inability of God’s plan to work by simply studying and following it in our personal relationships. How are we any different from those detractors of the first century if we do such? How do we any less contribute to ungodly contention in the Lord’s body when we hold such ideas?

Brethren, in the first century the church at Corinth was plagued with contention because some had decided to follow and exalt someone besides the Lord, be it self or other teachers. In addition some had given up on the sufficiency of the word to guide them in all that they did. Let’s be sure that we not fall into this trap. Let us each determine to humble ourselves to be “of Christ” and boldly look to His Word as the final standard that we may “speak the same thing” and “be perfectly joined together in the

same mind and in the same judgment.” Let’s follow Paul’s action of beseeching those who cause contention. Do so in a proper way (Ephesians 4:15) with the proper desire (1 Corinthians 1:10). When we do such we will be doing our part to cease the contentions that afflict us. Those who refuse will sadly answer to God.

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Sept 1998