

“How to Avoid Church Splits!”

1 Corinthians 3:1-17

Intro. – The 2nd chapter of 1 Corinthians has a section on two kinds of wisdom. In this section of Scripture we’re reminded that God alone understands life. Through the process of inspiration, God has revealed these insights. We have, in the Bible, God’s wisdom. It is on this wisdom we ought to base the sum total of life (marriage, families, business, church etc.). All of life needs to be rooted in God’s Word!

But the church of Corinth had adopted the wisdom of the world. As a result, rather than the church *invading the world* the world had *invaded the church*. One key area where this is evident is in their view of authority. The Corinthian Christians were ready to “spotlight” individuals, and play one off/against the other. Their view/practice of responsibility in the church was purely pagan. If they continued this present course, the church was destined to splinter and eventually split.

Under the inspiration of God, Paul writes to correct this worldly wisdom that had crept into the church. Three metaphors/illus. (child, field, and a building) are used to develop three basic yet, most neglected principles that inform local churches how to avoid splits.

So what...? Hardly a week goes by where I don’t hear, see or read about local churches splintering and dividing. Why? Aren’t there ways to prevent this? Can it happen here? Indeed it can! This is why our text is so relevant to each of us.

Purpose: to look at three Biblical principles that tell us how to avoid church splits

- In this text we are instructed to be “fruit inspectors.” We are called upon to know the fruit in 3 areas:

I Know the Fruit of the WORLD’S WISDOM (vv 1-4)

- note: Paul is speaking to Christians and saying, “To adhere to world’s wisdom expect following:

A. The Fruit of Immaturity

1. Vv 1-2, Paul is addressing the matter of the beginning stages of Christian life.
2. In starting this church, he gave them “milk” or nourishment suited for their life (babes in Christ)
 - a. Illus. – some peoples’ ideas of babies misinformed sometimes – e.g. Mother wanting to learn French because she and husband about to adopt a baby from France...
 - b. Illus. – remember our kids received formula UNTIL they got solid food... O happy day!
3. Key phrase is *even now you are not yet able*
 - a. it had been at least 5 yrs – Paul now writes “should have outgrown the baby stage by now...”
 - b. nothing wrong with being babes in Christ..., but becomes wrong if unduly prolonged – i.e. it is unnatural to be a baby all the days of your life...
 - c. some just never grow up – Illus. – proud new parents were taking their baby out for a stroll. Grandmotherly type walks up, “Oh, he’s so adorable. What a cutie! How old?” The dad/husband spoke right up, “Why thank you. I just turned 25!”
4. Immaturity is a major factor in any church split!

B. The Fruit of Being Worldly

1. No, this is not a reference to being overweight, but does refer being worldly like (KJV = carnal; NASB = fleshly) – “spiritually dull or governed by worldly principles rather than Godly ones.”
2. Note the distinction in words:
 - a. v 1 σαρκινος (sarkinos) = “fleshy” in the way they think and act
 - b. v 3 sarkikos (sarkikos) = “no longer beginners... ought to obey spiritual directives; instead, obeying the directives of the world.”
3. Proof of this is given as being 2 fold:
 - a. *jealousy* or ζεω (zeo) = “boil over, to envy” = masters at lowering others to exalt one’s self...
 - 1) jealousy wide spread in this church (Corinth) – little love and lot of competition...
 - 2) lack of appreciation/thanks for different blessing of Christ thru people like Paul, Apollos..
 - 3) such is widespread today – people become jealous how God uses others – long attention..

- 4) jealousy Cain's sin... -- always leads to destruction/bitterness/distrust in church family.
- b. *strife* ἐρις (eris) = verbal squabbles – 1:10 already ran into this word = contentions, disputes
 - strife is simply the outward result of jealousy = “fleshly” or “worldly”

C. The Fruit of Walking Like Mere Men

1. Lit. = “*walking according to men*” i.e. think, act, motivated like the world.
2. Proof of this = “party lines” in the church (e.g. I’m of Paul or I’m of Apollos) = politics...
3. To be a part of any “party lines” is not of Christ; instead, it is of the world.
4. Such is none better than the world = moved and motivated like the world = bear worldly fruit!
 - Illus. – Mom saying to us – “If you can’t get along, how expect world be an different?”

Want to avoid church splits – know the fruit of the world’s wisdom!

II Know the Fruit of GOD’S WISDOM (vv 5-8)

A. The Fruit of Humility

1. Nowhere in the N.T. is one man in control of local church – such practice is condemned 3 John 1:9 – Diotrephes “*who loved to have the preeminence.*”
 - Bible clearly teaches local church led by “team” of men under the Headship of Christ!...
2. Note: Paul asked, “*what*” not “*who*” is Paul etc. – i.e. what position do Apollos/Paul hold over which the Corinthians Christians should divide?
3. Paul planted, Apollos watered (note: both human activities) BUT, God & only God gave increase!
 - a. point: he who plants/waters in comparison to God Who gives the increase is nothing!
 - b. we are but “vessels” – apart from Him we can do nothing (John 15:5)

B. The Fruit of Cooperation

1. What’s more important – soul winning or Bible teaching?... neither, both = EVANGELISM...
2. He who “plants” and he who “waters” are ONE = cooperative spirit must prevail!
 - a. not a competition – in doing EVANGELISM we are working together and serving each other
 - b. application is this ministries must not “vie for attention”
 - c. must never be threatened by each other – Illus. – preacher threatened by associate...
 - d. our greatest joy ought to be to see how well we can work together toward the same goal rather than being threats to each other. We ought to be “thrills” for each other!
3. God’s criteria for “accomplishments” = “Well done good and *successful* or FAITHFUL servant!?”

God’s wisdom – realizing the binding power of working and resting in the wisdom of God!

III Know the Fruit of BIBLICAL LEADERS (vv 9-17)

- Illus. – getting right view of leadership in local church reminded of following: Man called a church, “Tell me, who is the head hog of the trough there?” Secretary was taken back... feeling a little indignant she said, “We don’t refer to our preacher that way.” “I don’t care what you call him, I have \$50,000 check to give to the church there and I want to know who is the head hog of the trough there.” “Sir, you’re in luck, that big pig just stepped out of his office.”
- so many churches today have the “monolithic” approach – (Pastor/CEO/ Head Honcho)... Note: not suggesting preacher is nothing... simply saying he isn’t everything... Biblical leadership essential!

A. Fruit of a Solid Foundation (vv 9-11)

1. Term “God” is emphatic v 9 = God’s fellow workers, field, building etc.
2. “*Let each man be careful how he builds*” = addressed to leadership of local church...
3. “*No man can lay a foundation other than on which is laid, Jesus Christ!*” (v 11)
 - a. wording emphasizes the foundation has already been laid – rest assured!
 - b. if God’s building is going to be raised, must be raised on this One foundation!
 - c. to build on any other foundation = fruitless effort!

B. The Fruit of Superior Building Materials (vv 12-15)

1. The point is clear = inferior materials must be exposed and exposed constantly...

2. Each leader's work will be tested by fire = fire will purify gold, silver and other precious metals BUT fire will also burn up wood, straw, hay (i.e. weak, unbiblical efforts)...
3. Christ has given divine blueprints that must be carefully/meticulously followed... leaders must teach and emulate this divine plan!

C. The Fruit of Faithfulness

1. "*Each man's work will become evident.*" (v 13) i.e. "time will tell"...
2. Earlier we noted God's criteria is not success but faithfulness – we can give numerous examples who by outward appearances are successful but by God's standards fail miserably...
3. Word *destroys* (v 17) = "corrupts and mars" = what corrupts/mars more than splits over trivial matters which concern the world and not God...
4. Truth which is taught and emulated in love will result in FRUIT!

Conclusion: Student couldn't pronounce his R's. Teacher gave him a sentence to practice: *Robert gave Richard a rap in the ribs for roasting the rabbit so rare.* When the student was asked of the teacher if he had mastered the sentence. He confidently affirmed that he had and proceeded to prove it: *Bob gave Dick a poke in the side for not cooking the bunny enough.*

If only the Christians in Corinth, if only we, would do it God's way and not "rearrange" God's priorities, purpose and message then church splits would be a thing of the past.

Know the fruit of the world's wisdom, rehearse the fruit of God's wisdom, and develop the fruit of Biblical leaders!