TRUTH FOR TODAY

CHURCH TROUBLE

Trouble: (verb) "to disturb the mental calm and contentment of; worry; distress; agitate;

to annoy, vex, or bother."

(noun) "difficulty, annoyance, or harassment..."

(<u>The Random House College Dictionary</u>, 1982, p. 1409).

Trouble - who wants it?   No sane person does, yet adversity can be found in every facet of life.   Problems arise on a large-scale basis - between countries, for instance.   Perhaps the first thought that comes to mind when one mentions the Middle East is "trouble." Seemingly insurmountable obstacles exist between Arab and Jew; between China and Taiwan; between the left and the moderate and the right.

Troubles are not limited to foreign people on distant soil, however.   Tension and conflict exist in our own country - in every state, county, and city.   The prevailing political divide in our nation seems to grow wider by the moment, breeding mounting suspicion, caustic remarks, ridicule, and other childish acts in grown people who ought to know better!   Whatever happened to giving people the benefit of the doubt?   Of treating one another with civility? Of "do unto others"?

Serious difficulties can separate friend from friend, neighbor from neighbor, and family from family.   Some are even perplexed and perturbed at themselves!

Truly, where there are people, there are problems. As Thomas Kempis said, *"All men desire peace, but very few desire those things that make for peace."*[1]

Even the blood-bought institution of Christ is not immune from difficulties - understandably from without - unfortunately from within.   Regrettably, it seems that every congregation of God's people that has ever existed has had its own peculiar internal problems. Certainly, it is not God's desire that such be the case!

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! (Psalm 133:1).

Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me (John 17:20-21).

Ideally, peace should exist between God's people in every congregation, but there is often a vast difference between the ideal and the real!   Consider, for instance, the first century church at Corinth - it was plagued by a number of problems.   In Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, he enumerates some of them:

1.   Division and carnality (1 - 4).

2.   Immorality and incest (5).

3.   Lawsuits before unbelievers (6).

4.   Questions concerning marriage (7).

5.   Problem of eating meat offered to idols (8 - 10).

6.   Problems in worship: the veiling of women and the Lord's Supper (11).

7.   Problems concerning spiritual gifts (12 - 14).

8.   False teaching regarding the resurrection (15).

To say that there was unrest at Corinth is to put it mildly!   One would be hard pressed to find a congregation of God's people today who face as many serious difficulties as did the Corinthian church.

What would we have done in regards to these problems had we been members of this distressed and divided body of believers?   What do so many do today whenever problems in the

church arise?

SOME QUIT ALTOGETHER

Some are simply looking for an excuse to become unfaithful, and to them, trouble provides that excuse. These are the smug and self-righteous who proclaim a hypocritical humility; these are extremely sensitive people who dangle their feelings on a string and whenever they are hurt in the least, decide it is time to stay at home. However, as the saying goes, "Quitters never win, and winners never quit." Such is true in Christianity. Paul knew that in spite of the numerous problems at Corinth, quitting was not the answer! He said by inspiration:

> *Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in*
> *the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the*
> *Lord (1 Corinthians 15:58).*

And, we should also keep in mind something else Paul said whenever troubles arise in the church:

> *For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions*
> *among you; and I partly believe it. For there must also be heresies [factions -*
> *ASV] among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you*
> *(1 Corinthians 11:18-19).*

Paul does not imply that it is God's desire for divisions, factions, and heresies to exist among His people, but he is affirming that on occasion these problems can serve a useful purpose: *"that they which are approved may be made manifest among you."* The word *"approved"* is used to refer to metals which have been proven to be genuine. The Christian who remains steadfast in spite of any adversity that arises is thus genuine; he has "passed the test." Therefore, church problems, deplorable as they are, can actually serve a useful purpose in demonstrating who is truly

faithful.

"Quitting the church" is not an answer to solving church problems. The pathway to hell is paved with quitters.

Others, whenever conflict arises in the church:

RUN FROM PROBLEMS

These are those who migrate to another congregation. Perhaps such individuals are looking for that "perfect" church; if so, their efforts are futile, for no such congregation has existed, even in first century times!

Does running from a problem ever solve a problem? If you have a flat on your car, will running from it air it up? Generally, those who run from problems in one congregation will run into more problems in another. One could spend a lifetime [unfortunately, some do] going from congregation to congregation, trying to find that faultless one.

Some migrate to other congregations whenever their feelings are hurt or whenever they cannot have their own way. Theirs is the infantile "I'll take my marbles and go play somewhere else" attitude. Paul admonished the Corinthians to *"act like men" (1 Corinthians 16:13)* instead of like children. We would do well to do likewise.

Indeed, suppose that every child of God took this "migrating" position every time a disturbance arose in their respective places of worship. The church would be in utter chaos! What could possibly be accomplished? The work of the church would suffer; spiritual growth would be nil. The body of Christ would be both a reproach and a laughingstock in the eyes of the world - all because of this "up and run" attitude. Also, let us not desire to grow as a congregation by swelling due to serving as a safe haven to those who run from church problems, realizing that a migrating membership can be a detrimental problem in and of itself - especially in the long run.

What were Paul's words for the disrupted and divided brethren at Corinth? Did he advise leaving and going to another congregation up the Grecian coast? One can read all the chapters and verses in first and second Corinthians combined and never find the slightest hint for the Christians at Corinth to run from their problems! One will find Paul warning and rebuking them for their transgressions; he will also find Paul pleading for unity, oneness, and not division or migration.

Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment (1 Corinthians 1:10). Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you (2 Corinthians 13:11).

[continued next month]

Wayne Cox

ENDNOTES

1.   Thomas a Kempis, <u>The Encyclopedia of Religious Quotations</u> Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1965 p. 327.

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LADIES DAY

September 8, 2018

Cindy Rodgers, speaker

VERONA CHURCH OF CHRIST

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AREA-WIDE YOUTH MEETING

September 9, 2018

6:30 p.m.

VERONA CHURCH OF CHRIST

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GOSPEL MEETING

June 28 - 30, 2019

Mel Futrell, speaker

VERONA CHURCH OF CHRIST

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