

Some ambitious would-be leaders were still actively causing divisions among the Corinthians. Since Paul's first letter they have come out more into the open and were still engaged in estranging hearts of the saints from the apostle. Paul addresses that in chapters 2 - 6, and now resumes in chapters 10-12. While we are not told the outcome of Paul's second letter to Corinth, we need but look around today to see that others, if not the Corinthians themselves, have subsequently ignored the ministry of Paul. Later in Scripture we see the danger most vividly manifested in faithful warnings and examples. Look for these particularly in 2Timothy, 2Peter, 3John, Jude, and some of the seven letters in Revelation 2 & 3. But Revelation 17 & 18 show us the ultimate outcome of the assembly as left in man's hands to keep and observe. While God faithfully established the Church on the confession of Jesus Christ as Son of the Living God, Matthew 16, He delivered it into the hands of the believers to hold and live by. The departure and disorder in the visible church today should be obvious to any observer within or without. Yet many are so blinded by well established systematic (but unscriptural) traditions of men they do not see it for what it is and revel in it rather than mourn.

Paul has the extremely delicate task of defending his God given apostleship and authority without resorting to fleshly contesting and word battles. His enemies were very suave and insinuating in their attack, weaseling their way into the confidence of their fellow Corinthians, deriding Paul and his outward appearance at every opportunity. Doesn't this remind us of politics during the campaign nearing election time? These men were religious politicians not unlike the religious leaders of Jesus' day who collaborated with the Roman occupation to their personal advantage. Paul refuses to lower himself and play into their hands by attempting to defend himself from their attacks using their methods and on their "turf." The assembly is God's "turf," so to speak, and they were usurpers of His prerogatives to govern His own.

The Spirit reveals the full result of such ambitions when allowed to ripen in an assembly. The story is told in the short third epistle of John, written just about a generation following Paul's to the Corinthians. Although the outcome of the confrontation between John and Diotrephes in that assembly is not revealed, the existence of such a rebellion, so soon after Paul's martyrdom and while John was still alive, is sobering. The outcome, although certainly known to those who included that

epistle in the canon of scripture, was not so important as the example given on how to deal with such things when they arise.

Paul next exposes the foolish arrogance of those who established eminence among their peers, peers who were themselves busy about establishing their own eminence.

10:12 For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.

In the world, whole societies of eminent men are commonly built upon mutual recognition. God's approval or disapproval is not a factor. For instance professional or trade societies exist in just about every field of man's endeavor imaginable. These are established to attract recognition of their specialty from the world. Reputations are built by human efforts in discovery, invention, performance, or workmanship and reviewed and acclaimed by their peers. Too often eminence is decided by the popularity of their theories among their peers, and not the revealed truth of scripture. Sadly, the clergy-laity system, so prominent in religious circles, is no exception.. We see the roots of this in the attitudes of those grouped together and opposing Paul, despite the fact he was an apostle of Jesus Christ. These are very human (scripture calls them fleshly) tendencies. The Spirit has given us this epistle to alert us to beware, since we have the flesh in us we can still fall into this kind of attitude.

Paul refuses to respond in-kind.

13 But we will not boast of things without our measure,...

15 Not boasting of things without our measure, that is, of other men's labours; ...

16 ...not to boast in another man's line of things made ready to our hand.

17 But he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.

Paul points up three things that those competing with him had apparently done. THEY were boasting of power they hadn't received from God. But Paul was an apostle. THEY were establishing personal prominence that wasn't based upon work they had done. Not only that, THEY were using the freely provided work of others (Paul) to elevate themselves above others. Paul himself had brought the gospel to Corinth and lived among them 18 months, Acts 18:11, establishing the assembly there. But THEY were seeking to build a power base merely within the assembly, apparently with no thought of expanding the work of the gospel onward to unreached lands and peoples. Yet that is how the word had reached them

originally. In his first letter to them Paul admonishes them regarding their independence of the instruction he had given them originally.

1Corinthians 14:36 What? came the word of God out from you? or came it unto you only? 37 If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord. 38 But if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant.

How did the word reach us years ago at Trott Brook? What are we doing to keep it in its simplicity and power? Has it become to some mere tradition to be passed down from generation to generation, as past offences are passed down? Search the scriptures and make the truth in them ours personally. Search together and encourage one another daily refreshing our hearts in them, and so much the more as we see the day approaching.

And what are we doing to send it onward to others? What are the frontiers of the gospel today? Perhaps not far from home at all. Paul solicits their support in moving the gospel onward. It is a genuine request, but a searching one, aimed at awakening them

to their foolish, self-centered attitude. All that is required is increased faith on their part. They were boasting yet really had little faith for the godly endeavors. They were glorying. Apparently not in the Lord but in themselves and their own fancied prowess. Their mutual admiration society was quite humanly gratifying but of no worth to God or others needing the gospel and the faithful word.

18 For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth

We must avoid commanding ourselves for the truth we have been given to keep and practice. We rightly value the truths of the gospel, of salvation by grace through faith, and of the assembly, which very few hold and seek to practice in this day and age. We glorify God by humbly seeking to live in the light of what He has entrusted to us, and not giving it up because it is so difficult or unpopular. The Lord commendation is worth it, not to mention the blessing that it brings us.

By Ron Canner August 18, 2004