

Party-ism

“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. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas, and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were ye baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius; lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name,” I Cor. 1:10-15.

Obviously, the church at Corinth, like nearly all churches everywhere, had problems. However, her problems were acute by reason of their nature. You see, partyism had disgraced this church. Some claimed to be “*of Paul*,” some “*of Apollos*,” others “*of Cephas*,” and “*of Christ*” — a four-way division. Of course, the conditions existing at Corinth were not brought about by reason of the efforts of those mentioned, but rather by reason of the actions of those who chose to be “*of*” this faction, or “*of*” that faction.

The language of Paul very evidently condemns Denominationalism with its multitude of divisions, but keep in mind, however, that Paul was not addressing various denominational bodies (such did not exist at that point in time); rather he addressed this epistle to “*the church of God... at Corinth*,” v. 2, a single local church. I do not know all the causes that produced party-ism in the church at Corinth, but I do know that the partyism produced was sinful. Different groups within the church appeared ready to enlist under different banners, even if it meant setting Christ and certain of His apostles at variance, thereby making them rivals and competitors!

Today we use slightly different terminology, but the meaning is the same. Instead of saying “*of Paul*,” we would probably say “Paul’s side.” Choosing up “sides,” or “cliques” within the congregation is all too common among many churches which claim to be “*of Christ*.” Many find it much easier to line up and side up than to stand up, especially where close ties either of family or friendship are concerned. Paul and Cephas and Apollos were all good men, but it was bad for good men to be placed by the choosing of others (in spite of their own desires to the contrary) as the heads of factions within the church.

So bad was party-ism at Corinth that Paul was thankful that he had knowingly baptized none, “*but Crispus and Gaius*,” and “*the household of Stephanas*.” Normally a gospel preacher is happy to baptize as many as he can, but in the case at Corinth, Paul was thankful that others had done the baptizing lest, said he, “*any should say I had baptized in mine own name*.” We should all be favorably impressed by Paul’s language and refuse to ever be a part of anyone’s “side,” but rather pursue the will of Christ, in Whose Name we were baptized, always choosing to be “*of Christ*,” and never being “of man” — any man, regardless of how good he may have been in the past, or how capable he may be at present. The church is composed of blood-bought souls whose desire should be to go to heaven; certainly not to run for ecclesiastical favors. For this reason, the church is the wrong place to play politics or to engage in political infighting. In brief, partyism is sin, and partyists are sinners!

**** Bobby Witherington