

1 CORINTHIANS: MOVING FROM THE CARNAL TO THE SPIRITUAL STATE

Part XXV: Understanding God's Practical Use Of Carnal Divisions

(1 Corinthians 11:17-19)

I. Introduction

- A. A breakdown in fellowship in the form of divisions in a group of God's people is a product of carnality where believers are living by means of their sinful natures, Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, fn. to 1 Corinthians 1:10.
- B. However, this problem can occur in today's church, and 1 Corinthians 11:17-19 instructs us on how God uses this unhappy circumstance in a practical way for the body's benefit. We study this passage for our edification:

II. Understanding God's Practical Use Of Carnal Divisions, 1 Corinthians 11:17-19.

- A. In 1 Corinthians 11:17, Paul began a section in which he addressed abuses that were occurring in the Church at Corinth regarding the observance of the Lord's Table (1 Corinthians 11:17-34).
- B. To that end, he began by reporting that he had heard how the gathering of the body to observe this ordinance did not edify (1 Cor. 11:17) due to the presence of "divisions," the Greek term for this word being *schisma*, "divisions, dissensions," Arndt & Gingrich, A Grk.-Eng. Lex. of the N. T., 1967, p. 805; 1 Corinthians 11:18a.
- C. Though this claim was a matter of hearsay for Paul, he partly believed it even though it was hearsay (1 Cor. 11:18b) because of a spiritual principle that exists in Christ's oversight of the local church, and Paul explained this principle in 1 Corinthians 11:19 (as follows):
 1. When Paul wrote the word "**must**" (KJV; emphasis ours) in 1 Corinthians 11:19, he used the Greek term *dei* which here referred to "divine destiny," Ibid., p. 171; U. B. S. Grk. N. T., 1966, p. 603; Ibid., Ryrie.
 2. Thus, God had ordained in this case to let "heresies" (KJV) exist among the Corinthians, the Greek term behind "heresies" being *aireseis*, meaning "sects, factions," Ibid., Arndt & Gingrich, p. 23.
 3. The **reason** for this divine permission of such apparently unedifying divisions is given in the latter part of 1 Corinthians 11:19, namely, **that those who were approved might become manifest in their midst.**
 4. This "approved" status refers to those whom **GOD** approved, Ibid., Ryrie.
 5. We clarify this principle, relying on the context of the book of 1 Corinthians for our insight (as follows):
 - a. Paul was writing this epistle to a Church that was "carnal," a state where believers live by means of their sinful natures rather than depending on the Holy Spirit to live righteously, 1 Corinthians 3:1-3.
 - b. Consequently, a lot of the Corinthian believers were stunted in their spiritual growth, still being babes in Christ (1 Cor. 3:1-2) to where they were susceptible to following as credible other carnal believers who were presenting themselves to be "spiritual" in false spirituality where such folk were even opposing the Apostle Paul's godly ministry, cf. 1 Corinthians 9:1-3 with 1:12; Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 508.
 - c. This state of carnal babes following carnal leaders produced a blockage to spiritual growth in the church, so, to correct this state, God in wisdom let believers who operated by their sinful natures function with such unbridled freedom that the ugly schismatic characteristics of their carnal natures would surface before all, exposing them to be carnal before everybody else in the church, even the immature, cf. Gal. 5:19-21.
 - d. With this exposure of true carnality before all, even the immature believers would discern the spiritual vacuum in the self-promoting "spiritual" leaders, so even they would turn from such carnal leaders to heed the truly spiritual who exhibited the fruit of the Holy Spirit seen in their actions exhibiting love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, Galatians 5:22-23 NIV.
- D. This divine work to allow the carnal free reign temporally for the insight and spiritual protection of the weak is of course the exception to the rule, for God much prefers all believers to rely on the Holy Spirit and to grow in the Lord. However, in cases of widespread spiritual weakness and carnality, God at times **allows** for an unrestrained expression of carnal natures to exist to **expose** the carnal as being truly carnal before all for the protection and the edification of even the immature in the local church body.

Lesson: *If we either witness or face divisions in a group of God's people, (1) may we first examine ourselves in light of God's Word to see if WE are out of fellowship with the Lord, and confess our sin to be restored to fellowship with God, 1 John 1:9. (2) If we note that ANOTHER party has become exposed by the Lord as living in his sinful nature, may we lovingly pray for the party's repentance, but take this exposure as a warning from the Lord not to follow that party in our Christian walk, but to heed the examples of others proven to walk with God.*

Application: *Though each believer should rely on the Holy Spirit and fellowship with others, if we see divisions occur in a body, may we realize God is letting them occur to expose spiritual realities that we adjust accordingly.*