

“WHO CAN SPLIT UP CHRIST?” 9 / 20 / 20

INTRODUCTION — Four year old DANNY was fascinated with a dead fish floating in the river. After studying it for an hour, he asked his mother, “Will the fish go to heaven?” Knowing she was out of her THEOLOGICAL LEAGUE, Mom said, “We’ll ask Pastor Dave when we get to church.” DANNY: “Does he know lots about fish?” I don’t know if PASTOR DAVE knew a lot about FISH, but he may have known a lot about “IMPERFECT CHURCHES,” if he ever studied the Apostle Paul’s Letters to the Corinthian Christians. We want to spend a few weeks looking into FIRST CORINTHIANS — and I BELIEVE WE WILL SEE what a TROUBLED CHURCH THIS WAS, and that is WAS LIKE MANY CHURCHES TODAY — and WE WILL LEARN WHAT PAUL TAUGHT TO CORRECT THESE TROUBLES

I. UNIFIED in JESUS CHRIST!! 1: 1— 4

1. *“To the church of God in Corinth, to those SANCTIFIED in Christ Jesus and called to be HOLY”*

2. What does it mean to be “SANCTIFIED” ?? What does it mean “Called to be HOLY” ??

3. We all have heard the NEGATIVE versions of those terms: “Sanctimonious” people who have their nose stuck up high in the air, and “HOLIER—than—THOU” people who think they BETTER than everyone else !!

4. BUT — the BIBLE’S meanings for BOTH words are similar: to be “SET APART” from the WAYS of the WORLD around us.

5. What are the “WAYS of the WORLD” around us?? Just watch T.V. any evening: Turn on any “C.S.I.” or “LAW & ORDER” episode, and you will see MURDERS and ROBBERIES, husbands cheating on their wives and Vice Versa. OR WATCH any of the evening “SOAP OPERAS” — “DESPERATE HOUSEWIVES” or the new “90210” or whatever — WE ARE

REMINDED of the SELFISH, SELF-CENTERED, SINFUL WAYS of this FALLEN world every time we turn on the T.V.

6. BUT— as CHRISTIANS, WE ARE NOT ONLY “SET APART” from the SINFUL PRACTICES of the world, we are “SET APART” for God’s USE and WILL. That’s why the APOSTLE PETER in his 1st LETTER described Christians as: “*A CHOSEN PEOPLE, a ROYAL PRIESTHOOD, a HOLY NATION, a PEOPLE BELONGING to GOD, that you may DECLARE the PRAISES of HIM who CALLED YOU OUT of darkness into His wonderful light.*” (I Pet. 2:9, NIV)

7. WE are CALLED to TELL OTHERS about HIM; to PRAISE HIM and LET the WORLD KNOW about GOD’S LOVE !!

8. SO — IF we are UNIFIED in JESUS CHRIST to DO GOD’S WILL, HOW CAN there be DIVISIONS among Christians??

II. NO DIVISIONS IN CHRIST ! v. 10— 12 There was a PROBLEM in Corinth— Christians were “CHOOSING UP SIDES” as to who the best “spiritual leader” was— perhaps who the “BEST PREACHER” was.

1. FIRST, there was the “PAUL” GROUP. These were likely to be “CHARTER MEMBERS” of the Christian Church in Corinth. THEY HAD FOND MEMORIES of their FIRST PASTOR, WHO REALLY BROUGHT LOOSELY CONNECTED BELIEVERS TOGETHER, REMEMBERING HIS FAITHFULNESS to them & HIS STYLE of PREACHING. THEY WISHED THINGS COULD “BE MORE LIKE THEY WERE WHEN OUR FOUNDING PASTOR WAS HERE— THINGS HAVE CHANGED SO MUCH in the LAST FEW YEARS. PAUL WOULDN’T HAVE LET THESE CHANGES COME ABOUT.”

2. SECOND, there was the “APOLLOS” GROUP. You may remember APOLLOS from ACTS

18:24ff. He was a JEWISH person, raised in ALEXANDRIA, a port city on the northern coast of EGYPT, known for its HIGHLY EDUCATED PEOPLE & BRILLIANT SPEAKERS. ALEXANDRIA was the home of the GREATEST LIBRARY in the ancient world, which would BE the EQUAL of any library in the MODERN WORLD, EVEN THE AMERICAN LIBRARY OF CONGRESS in Washington, D.C. SO, COMING from this MOST FAMOUS CITY, APOLLOS is described in ACTS 18 as “a learned man,” MEANING LEARNED in the BIBLE. “He spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of JOHN.” (Acts 18:25) THIS PROBABLY MEANT that APOLLOS ORIGINALLY DID NOT KNOW ABOUT the DEATH & RESURRECTION of JESUS— but Paul’s friends & COMPANIONS, PRISCILLA & AQUILA (the FIRST husband-wife ministry team), set APOLLOS straight. Then THEY WENT to CORINTH, & the people there (being GREEKS, & GREEK people in those days LOVED to hear GREAT SPEAKERS) — the CORINTHIAN CHRISTIANS LOVED to hear the “ELOQUENT & DYNAMIC” Apollos speak! AFTER A TIME, THERE MAY HAVE DEVELOPED a RIFT between the “CHARTER MEMBERS” who loved PAUL, & the “newer group” who thought APOLLOS had hung the MOON.

3. THEN there was the “PETER” GROUP. These were PROBABLY EARLY CONVERTS, many of whom may have been Jewish-Christians, who YEARNED FOR THE WAY OF SIMPLE, PALESTINIAN DISCIPLESHIP— “O, to just follow JESUS as PETER did.” They may have wanted a SIMPLER, MORE SINCERE type of CHRISTIAN LIFESTYLE.

4. FINALLY, there was the “SUPER— SPIRITUAL GROUP” — “WE FOLLOW ONLY JESUS HIMSELF.”

5. PAUL WAS NOT HAPPY ABOUT ANY OF THESE GROUPS!! Later, Paul compares the CHURCH to the “spiritual” BODY of CHRIST— NOW HE ASKS: “CAN CHRIST BE DIVIDED??” Will you TEAR the ARM, or a LEG of Christ as not being WORTHY? PAUL’S TEACHING HERE ALWAYS MAKES ME WONDER ABOUT:

6. DENOMINATIONS of TODAY ??? 1:11-12

— “I’m a follower of JOHN CALVIN....” (A Presby., or a Baptist, maybe...)

— “No, I’m a follower of JOHN WESLEY....” (A Methodist, or a Wesleyan, or a PENTECOSTAL, perhaps)

— “Well, I & my church are followers of MARTIN LUTHER....” (LUTHERAN, or perhaps UNITED CHURCH of CHRIST)

— “MY CHURCH STANDS in the SHOES of the FISHERMAN” (which means PETER— that is the claim of the ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH)

— DENOMINATIONS ARE “O.K.” if they are created simply out of respect for a GREAT CHRISTIAN LEADER in the past & his or her CONTRIBUTION to the WORK of CHRIST. The SPREAD of CHRISTIAN DENOMINATIONS allows believers to have DIFFERENT opinions about HOW to BAPTIZE, and to have DIFFERENT forms of CHURCH LEADERSHIP, and so forth— within a BASIC CORE of BELIEFS: the APOSTLES CREED, the NICENE CREED

— BUT THERE SHALL BE NO DENOMINATIONAL CORNERS IN HEAVEN!! There won’t be “Baptists over there, Methodists in this corner, Presbyterians near the punch bowl, Episcopalians near the Communion wine, and PENTECOSTALS out in the garden ! !”

7. NO, IT WON’T BE THAT WAY AT ALL. Everyone will just be “JESUS PEOPLE” ! ! ! !
AFTER ALL, Paul said, IN WHOSE NAME WERE WE BAPTIZED ? ? PAUL’S ? ?
APOLLOS’ ? ?

8. NO ! ! WE WERE ALL BAPTIZED in the NAME and in the GRACE of OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST ! !

9. AND CHRIST should NEVER be divided ! ! ! GOD PUTS UP with the DIFFERENT DENOMINATIONS — Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, Christian Church, Wesleyans, Pentecostals, etc. — Because God knows that HUMANS are NEVER going to agree on EVERYTHING ! !

10. PAUL was encouraging the BELIEVERS to strive for INWARD HOLINESS— PURITY of HEART, SOUL, and MIND, & not just seeking for “The better preacher.”

CONCLUSION—

IN TWO WEEKS, WE WILL SHARE the LORD’S SUPPER on a SUNDAY WHEN CHRISTIANS AROUND the WORLD, of ALL KINDS of CHURCHES and DENOMINATIONS, WILL BE SHARING the LORD’S SUPPER — WORLD COMMUNION SUNDAY. IF WE THINK “WHAT CAN CHRISTIANS ACCOMPLISH BY UNITY??” REMEMBER SOMETHING: Have you ever looked at a single snowflake?? Snowflakes are one of nature’s most fragile things, but just look at what they can do when they stick together.