

**The Case of Carnal Comparisons (by Ern Baxter, from June 1951 'Voice of Healing' magazine**

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

1 Corinthians 3:4; *"For while one saith, I am of Paul, and another of Apollos, are ye not carnal?"*

We thank God for such visitations of His power and blessing as are being experienced throughout the world at the present time. Entire cities are being stirred by great revival efforts and in some instances require the erection of special buildings to contain the crowds. The Gospel is the world's only hope and we pray that these great Gospel efforts will continue to enlarge in power and influence until the whole world feels the influence of the Spirit of God. Such moves as we refer to are, in most cases, spearheaded by certain men, obviously God-blessed and God-ordained for the task. It is our duty to pray for such men, that they will be sustained in spirit, soul and body that they might be at their best constantly in this greatest of all battles.

There is, however a great danger in such mighty movements where individuals are catapulted into places of prominence as leaders. Instead of humbly recognising the hand of God in the whole and the grace of God in equipping men for leadership and thus giving all the glory to God, there is a tendency to humanly evaluate leaders, and compare and pick and choose favourites. Such an attitude indicates a limited vision. This robs God of His glory, is unfair to the leader and contributes to the party spirit among Christians which God so evidently deplores as indicated in His Word.

***Each of these leaders, indeed every minister in the Church of God has some distinctive features which makes him to differ from every other minister and unless the great principle of ministerial oneness is recognised, there exists the constant danger of dividing God's people into as many groups as there are ministers to give them leadership.***

"There is no new thing under the sun" and this seems especially true when considered in terms of error and defection among Christians. We can think of no modern system of error or trend of defection in the realm of professed Christian religion that had not appeared at least in germ form in the days of the apostles, and which was not given apostolic treatment in the sacred writings of the New Testament. The subject with which we are dealing received extensive attention from the Apostle Paul in the Corinthian epistles, as well as being referred to in the other epistles. Although the directions given in the Corinthian epistles are intended primarily to meet the local conditions, they nevertheless are applicable on a body-wide scale.

The apostle declares the condition that exists in the Corinthian church by saying, "It hath been declared unto me of you my brethren by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are conventions among you. Now this I say, that everyone of you saith, I am of Paul and I of Apollos and I of Cephas and I of Christ" (1 Corinthians 1;11, 12). There certainly had been a good deal of carnal comparison indulged here. Paul mentions himself first, for a group in the Corinthian church had chosen him as their preferred preacher, quite evidently without any encouragement from him. Paul indicates his sincerity in deploring and attempting to correct this party spirit by placing his name first on the list, and thus being the first to be demoted as a sectarian leader. No doubt the Gentile believers clung to Paul as their leader as against those Jews which preferred Peter with his background.

Then there were those who were followers of Apollos described in the Scriptures as "an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures" (Acts 18:24). Apollos was an Alexandrian Jew, distinguished for literary culture and eloquence and it is probable that the more highly educated among the Corinthian Christians were his peculiar followers. Then there were the Cephasites, the followers of Cephas or Peter. He of course had an apparent priority over the others, being one of the first followers of Jesus. His apostleship was well established, there being no argument as in the case of Paul. He was a "senior minister" and there were those who felt he deserved a superior place and so were quite prepared to battle for his leadership.

Finally Paul mentions the Christ party. This may at first seem strange for we should all be "of Christ". It has been suggested however that "this sect of Christ probably rejected the apostles, and professed to be admirers and followers of the traditional sayings of Jesus. They approved His ethics but rejected the doctrines outlined in the epistles. Possibly the apostle had this group in mind when he wrote; "Henceforth know we no man after the flesh' yea though we have known Christ after the flesh yet now henceforth know we Him no more" (2 Corinthians 5:16).

The apostle counters this condition with three pertinent questions, the first one being; "Is Christ divided?". Of course the answer to this is an emphatic "No!". The body of Christ is one and knows but one head, the risen and glorified Lord Jesus Christ! The one head governs the body, instructing the various members concerning their duty and appointing the various tasks for the individual parts of the body setting up an independent centre of government and control, they must at all times adhere to the authority of the head. The structure of the human body contains the various functions of the body. It has the advantage as the highest part of the body seeing the farthest and thus from its high place being able to intelligently instruct and direct the action of those members which live on a lower plane and are depending upon the head for direction.

If the body is to function normally, the authority of the head must constantly be recognised. This is true of every member of the body and especially true of those who are ministers in the body. Such ministers may be likened to those parts of the body such as the hands and feet which are

most active, and play such a prominent part in the functioning of the body in its varied activities.

***Such members are tempted to think that they are indispensable and thus can set up a new centre of authority. This of course produces confusion.***

True ministry gifts are those men ordained by God to minister to His people, are the gifts of the risen Head to the body for it is written; "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive and gave gifts unto men ... He gave some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists and some pastors and teachers" (Ephesians 4:8, 11). Such men are God-gifted and appointed. They are not placed in the body to further some division or sect and use their God-give abilities to enlarge a segment of the whole but they are placed in the body for the "perfecting of the saints, for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:12).

***Their interest is body-wide, they are affectionately disposed towards all God's people, and are obliged by reason of the nature of their calling to seek to build up the whole body of Christ.***

No, Christ is not divided! His body is one. There is but one head of the body and that is the risen Christ. Thus, every attempt to promote a group of God's people as a segregated section as opposed to all the rest of the people of God is to work at cross purposes with the divine programme. "Was Paul crucified for you?" is the second question. Who deserves our first loyalty? All our fellow humans, much as we esteem and love them must never come between our undivided loyalty to Christ and His Word.

***Many of those who would divide and rend the body of Christ are certainly not prepared to die for anybody and before we take a hand in promoting some injurious division let us remember that those who we are influencing are the purchase of Jesus' blood.***

The final question of the trio is "Were ye baptised in the name of Paul?" If these party leaders were so important as to create a division among God's people, then why did they take in public confession at their baptism, a place of identification with the Lord Jesus? The argument is overwhelming.

***There is no place for the exaltation of human leaders and much harm is done all around when such exaltation is promoted.***

The divine ideal is beautiful and we dare not despise it by saying, "It will not work". Let us listen to it humbly as God's pronounced desire for His people - "Now I beseech you brethren by the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ that ye all speak the same thing, and there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgement".