

TOO HOT TO HANDLE

7 Another Example

Scripture Reading

1 Corinthians 1:1 – 9

Recap

What do you do when the Lord's people differ in their opinions and doctrines? That is the question we have been concerned about these past week. Last week we observed some of the principles we have gleaned so far from God's Word them in action. We looked at an example where the apostle Paul directed the believers in Rome to deal with an issue on which there was a difference of opinion in their church. We saw from his teaching that disputes over doubtful things are to be avoided. Instead you must open your heart with warmth, kindness and genuine love to those who are not so well taught or who do not see things the way you do. You must respect their opinions and not look down on them. By all means exercise your responsibility to warn and instruct others but beyond that, if they belong to the Lord He will see to them: leave it to Him. As for you, you must be fully convinced in your own mind that the view you hold is based on a thorough study and accurate understanding of God's Word. You must make sure your conscience is clear before God and you must have regard to your brothers and sisters so as not to let your view put a hindrance or snare in his way.

Another Example

This week we are going to look at another example but before we come to that, a question to consider.

Discussion: What are the hot issues that commonly cause tension and division in churches today?

Imagine A Church Like This...

Imagine a church where the people have divided into factions. Different groups are competing with one another. Each has its own leader and each thinks it is better than the rest.

There are some pretty sordid things going on within that church. I mean gross immorality and everybody knows about it but nobody is prepared to do anything. And that is not all. Some within the fellowship have been taking others in the fellowship to court to sue them. It is bad enough that they are doing that but of more concern, they think they have reason to do it — which shows you the level to which some relationships in the church have sunk.

Some are using their Christian freedom as an excuse to do whatever they please. Some are confused over divorce and remarriage. There are tensions over what kind of food a Christian should eat. It is possible that some are being tempted to get involved in idolatry. And if that is not enough, the women did not know their place: some of them were even coming to church without their hats on.

This church's celebration of the Lord's Supper is some kind of a free-for-all with people greedily stuffing their faces and some getting drunk. And as far as the gifts are concerned? Well that is totally out of hand too. People are talking one another down in the services and generally indulging themselves when the church comes together for worship.

As you can imagine, things are not good doctrinally either. The latest thing is that there is teaching going around to the effect that the dead did not rise.

Would You Join It?

Now what would you think of a church like that? It is hard to imagine anything else going wrong there. They seem to have most of the problems we mentioned covered in one way or another. Would you want to join it?

What if it was just up the road and I said that our church really should get involved with these people and work with them?

Well that was the church in Corinth. Let's look at what Paul has to say about them before we look at what he has to say to them on some of these various issues

A Church

In his opening greeting Paul acknowledges that this is a church (verse 2). I suspect that there are some around today who would have disagreed but it is a gathering of God's people in a particular place and therefore it is a church. In fact he describes the members of this church as sanctified — set apart — holy. Every genuine believer is sanctified, by God it is just that these believers, at this point in time, are not living like it.

They are also, according to the apostle:

“...called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours.”

1 Corinthians 1:2

Paul affirmed their position in the church of Christ: they are among those who are being made into saints by the Lord, they share the same calling, they follow and belong to the same Lord.

But how can Paul be so sure they are called to be saints when it does not look much like it?

Thank God For Them

In verse 4 Paul thanks God for the grace of God that was given to them. There had been tangible evidence of God's blessing in their lives. He gives thanks for the gifts and knowledge the Lord has given them.

“...you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge.”

1 Corinthians 1:5

Their whole lives have been changed. There has been a transformation (keep in mind that these guys had come from a pretty sordid background of idolatry and immorality) and they have been blessed with good teaching. The testimony of Christ — the gospel — has been confirmed in them (verse 6): it has been shown to be true and powerful by what has happened to them.

In spite of all the problems Paul was able to observe the members of this church in Corinth and see evidence of the hand of God at work on them. That is how he was able to be sure that they were sanctified and called to be saints. That is how he knew they belonged to the Lord.

God Is Faithful

But Paul had something more than just the signs that the Lord had been at work in the lives of these people to give him confidence in them. He added to the evidence he saw in them his knowledge of God.

“God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”

1 Corinthians 1:9

God is faithful, that is God's nature and when God starts something He finishes it. Having seen evidence that God had started to work in the lives of the Corinthian church members Paul was able to say

“[God] will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

1 Corinthians 1:8

What Are We Learning?

So what are we learning here? When we are deciding who to help, who to have fellowship with or who to work with the key questions are not how does he behave or what does he believe. The key question is, does he belong to the Lord?

How do we answer that one? We do not answer it by looking at his faults, failings or weaknesses. I fear that is where we often go wrong. We look at something someone is doing and we say, well he can't be a believer if he does the like of that. Instead we ought to look for positive evidence that Christ has been working in him and if that is there we can have enough confidence to recognise him as a brother, with all that entails, not because we are confident in him but because we are confident in a God who is faithful.

Now that does not mean we turn a blind eye to sin. Paul does not do that He goes on in this letter to deal strongly with all the issues we listed. We have a responsibility to teach, to warn and to exercise discipline in regard to our fellow believers but in doing all those things, if they are believers, we have great confidence in a good outcome. Our respect is not diminished because of apparent shortcomings and neither is our gratitude to God for them nor our fellowship with them.