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Divisions - and the use God makes of them

"For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you," 1 Corinthians 11:19.

(A message preached at Kilskeery Free Presbyterian weekly prayer meeting, 17th October 2016, by Rev Ivan Foster)

The word 'heresy' is derived from the storming of a city and the taking over of it. Divisions come about when the mind and heart has been taken captive by a falsehood, an error. The word 'division' verse 18, means "a rent or a tear", Matt 9:16.

I. THE PRESENCE OF ALIEN NOTIONS AND CONDUCT ARE DISTRESSING TO BELIEVERS.

1. Remember the reaction of the servants on the discovery of the tares. "The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?" Matthew 13:28.

2. It reminds me of the reaction of Abishai to Shimei cursing David. "Then said Abishai the son of Zeruiah unto the king, Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? let me go over, I pray thee, and take off his head," 2 Samuel 16:9.

3. It is a great vexation to hear things contrary to the Word of God taught among God's people. "There be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ," Gal 1:7. "I would they were even cut off which trouble you," Gal 5:12. "Cut off" equals "amputate".

Paul shows here his vexation at the actions of the troublers.

We must however, learn to bear them. I don't mean become indifferent to them but with patience bear with them and deal with them in accordance with God's Word.

II. IN THE WONDERFUL WISDOM OF GOD EVEN HERESIES SERVE A PURPOSE

"That they which are approved may be made manifest among you."

1. Divisions amongst us of course identify the deceivers. That is obvious. Judas eventually showed himself by siding with the enemies and dividing from Christ and the apostles.

2. But divisions also reveal the genuine believers. The word 'approved' is taken from a word linked with the distinguishing of genuine coinage. "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him," James 1:12. An approved believer is one who has been tested and proved to be genuine. When error arises the genuine believer shall show himself by rejecting it. That is the purpose 'heresies' serve amongst the people of God. This is what John said: "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us," 1 John 2:19.

Even the early church knew such. "Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them." Acts 20:30.

It has to be noted that sometimes even genuine believers are deceived into leaving the people of God because of the error they embraced. John Mark is a case but he was restored back to fellowship. "Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry," 2 Timothy 4:11.

3. We see the pattern for this in the OT. "I also will not henceforth drive out any from before them of the nations which Joshua left when he died: That through them I may prove Israel, whether they will keep the way of the LORD to walk therein, as their fathers did keep it, or not," Judges 2:21-22. The failure of Israel



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and its disobedience was put to use by the Lord to test His people.

III. HERE THEN IS A SOLEMN CALL TO FAITHFULNESS TO GOD AND HIS WORD.

Such divisions are inevitable. Not because God has ordained divisions but because human nature being sinful, rebellion against God is inevitable.

“Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!” Matthew 18:7.

“But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of,” 2 Peter 2:1-2.

Those who cause divisions should be shunned, Rom 16:17. They are not the friends of Christ. Discipline is necessary, even the amputation from the church that Paul speaks of.