

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

Sundays @ 10:00 a.m. Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtminc.org Today's Date: August 1, 2010

Individual Differences in Team Ministry

by Dan Trygg

“Now I urge you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all say the same thing, that there be no divisions among you, and that you be united with the same understanding and the same conviction.” I Corinthians 1:10

“I have applied all these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brothers, that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another.” I Corinthians 4:6

The Body of Christ is an amazing conglomeration of diverse people, a patchwork quilt of many pieces sewn together by a common thread. We are all from different backgrounds, with different personalities and temperaments, in varying stages of spiritual development, and with a diversity of spiritual gifts, yet we are somehow to embrace a common calling and become a team together. Diversity and unity. Uniqueness and commonality. Individual interests and group concerns. Personal experiences and universal truths. **There are two very real and important principles of life experience and growth at work here**, individuation and cooperation. *Individuation deals with personal development, while cooperation addresses our ability to work with others.* These two principles are both important, yet they seem to be in tension with one another, at least at times.

In Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, one of the main issues he addresses concerned divisions or schisms in the church. These had begun to pop up for a variety of reasons. **There were personality loyalties and affiliations** (1:10-13). Some identified with Peter, some with Apollos, some with Paul, while others said, *“I am of Christ.”* Paul shot that kind of thinking down quickly, *“Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Paul?”* Our loyalty is to be to *Jesus*. *He* is the one who died for us. We identified with *Him* in baptism, not some preacher who may have been instrumental in helping us along the way. It is appropriate to value and appreciate those who have spiritually helped us, but let us not lose focus. **Our faith and commitment are to be to Jesus, not any human being.** *Jesus* is Lord, ...not my pastor, ...not any prophet or radio preacher. It is *Jesus*. The rest are just fellow workers, servants through whom we believed or have been helped, as *God* worked through them. He was the one who enabled them to bless us, even giving them the opportunity to do so (3:5-7).

The second basis for the development of a faction had to do with an attitude of superiority in wealth, class, and social status (4:6-21). Apparently some of the Corinthians were fairly well off, and interpreted their relative prosperity as a sign of spiritual maturity. They boasted over others who were not so well off. They thought of themselves as superior, much like the Laodicean church in Revelations 3:14-22. Jesus Himself would confront them, calling them “lukewarm”. Their deeds, their exploits for the Kingdom of God, were not all that commendable, neither cold nor hot. Jesus wanted to vomit them out of His mouth! His comment to them was, *“Because you say, ‘I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’, and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.”* Just as Jesus' love for them motivated Him to reprove and confront them, in the same way Paul confronts the Corinthians. He reminds them that **everything they had was a gift they received from God**. If it was a *gift*, why do they boast as if it was something *they* earned? Or why do they think *they* are special? **They should be praising God, the giver, for His unusual favor, not patting themselves on the back!** Like the Laodiceans, they thought they were satisfied, content, filled. They had become like kings! Notice the irony Paul uses to expose their foolish thinking. *“You have become kings without us; ...and I wish indeed that had become kings so that we might share in the reign with you!”* Then **Paul contrasts their self-perception and chosen lifestyle with the lot of God's most spiritual examples, the apostles, and how the world perceived them.** In light of their good fortune and self-importance, it seemed as if God had made the apostles to be the very last and least of all. They were like men condemned to death, paraded as a spectacle before men and angels. The apostles were considered to be fools for Christ, but the Corinthians prided themselves in being sensible people in Christ. Apostles were without worldly power, but the Corinthians had become powerful. They were distinguished and honored, but the apostles were dishonored by the world. Then Paul described the life circumstances of God's *true* spiritual elite, *“To this present hour we hunger and thirst, we are poorly dressed and buffeted and homeless, and we labor, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we entreat. We have become, and are still, like the scum of the world, the refuse of all things.”* **The next statement is very telling, “Not shaming you do I write these things, but as my beloved children I bring these things to mind.” They needed a reality check to deflate their inflated self-importance.** After all this comparison, Paul challenges them to become imitators of him, a challenge to set aside some of their comfort and self-importance, and be willing to follow Jesus in more complete and extreme obedience. (Poverty, humility and severe treatment of the body can also become a way of exalting oneself above others by a false humility. – e.g., Col. 2:16-23.)

Another area of divisiveness and spiritual pride had to do with *spiritual gifts*. Paul devotes three chapters to dealing with this subject (12-14). There are varieties of gifts and operations of the Holy Spirit, given as *God* desires. We all have a spiritual gift or gifts, and these gifts are given for the common good. **We are like parts of a body, every part with its unique function. All parts are valuable and important.** No part can be rejected as unimportant, nor should any function be honored out of all perspective. **There is no gift that is a badge of spirituality, nor is there any gift that is “available” to everyone.** Paul makes a point to list off a number of gifts rhetorically, saying that *everyone* does not function in *any* of these gifts (12:29,30). (He specifically mentions that not all “speak with tongues”. Tongues are *not* a “sign” or a “gift” that *everyone* will experience. It is divisive, and disrespectful, to insist upon this as “being for everyone”.) Chapter 13, the “love chapter” is inserted between Paul’s two expositions on spiritual gifts, not as an aside, but as a corrective counterbalance to the mania that can often accompany talk about spiritual gifts. Love is the supreme goal, the “more excellent way”. **It does not matter what spiritual gifts I may possess. If I do not use them in love, then I am nothing, and my actions will bring no benefit to me.** Paul admonishes us to put away immature thinking. Spiritual gifts will come to an end, but love will endure forever. We should “pursue, run after, strive for and seek after” love as *most* important, while still desiring spiritual gifts, especially that of prophesying. **Paul then compares prophesying with speaking in a tongue.** Prophesying is more valuable to the Body, ...unless there is interpretation of the tongue..., because people can understand what is being said. Apparently there was an over-emphasis on speaking in tongues in Corinth, just as there is in some circles today. **Paul lays down some guidelines for meetings so that all may have a chance to participate, and so that no specific kind of spiritual gift would dominate** (14:16-33)

These are only three examples of issues at Corinth. **There have been countless other issues people have divided over throughout church history.** Factions have developed over politics, church organization, music, even ministry vision and methodology. Paul said that we could expect factions. **People will disagree and debate, so that eventually the truth might be made apparent through the discussion, or through the fruit of what people do.**

What are some principles we could follow to help us avoid foolish and destructive division in the church?

(1.) **“Major on the majors.”** In I Cor. 1:10, Paul encourages us to “agree”. The Greek is literally “y’all might say the same thing”. How do we do that? By limiting ourselves to those areas that are clear and undeniable. We get into trouble when we talk about things that are speculative, questionable, or are personal experiences. In 4:6, Paul encouraged the Corinthians, **“do not go beyond what is written**, so that one might not be puffed up over against another.” It is not the *Scriptures themselves* that we have a problem with; it is *our interpretations* of those Scriptures. This is especially true if we are not careful about our methods of interpretation. We need to acquire the skill of “rightly dividing the Word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15) so that we arrive at the same understanding, i.e., what God originally intended.

(2.) **Listen to, respect and “make room” for one another.** Most factions come from an unwillingness to listen to understand one another. If we truly believed what Paul wrote about the diversity in the Body of Christ, we would not be so quick to dismiss others who differ from us. We would *want* to hear them out, and give them room to operate in their gifts. A “my way, or the highway” mentality is very destructive to the Body of Christ, and keeps us from receiving the benefits that would come from other giftings and personalities in the family of God. Furthermore, if the question is a matter of preference or methodology that is not clearly dealt with by the Scriptures, we ought to be willing to try the suggestions of others out, in order to see what works best (cf. Rom. 12:2; Phil. 1:9-11).

(3.) **Avoid factions – Do not limit yourself to fellowshiping with like-minded, similar-gifted people.** The Body is *meant* to be diverse. It is a safeguard for us. When we hang out with others like ourselves, we often reinforce our misbeliefs and our preferences, instead of benefiting from the perception, gifts and experiences of others.

(4.) **Appreciate, affirm and encourage diversity.** God has encapsulated His grace and truth in a multitude of different personalities, giftings and life experiences in the Body of Christ. Look to receive insights, growth and blessing from one another. You can’t receive *from* one another if you do not receive *one another*. You must listen and observe in order to learn. The diversity is important for ministry, too. Diverse people can reach a wider variety of folks than a group that is made up of only similar people.

(5.) **Develop a team of specialists.** If we truly do recognize, and embrace one another as uniquely gifted individuals that God has called out (*ekklesia*) for a purpose, then we will be open to **learn how to work together as a team**. Each gift is important for building up the Body of Christ, and we can all employ our gifts in serving one another as stewards of God’s grace (I Pet. 4:10). **This is a “learning by experience” process, but a team of specialists is invaluable in Kingdom ministry.**