

“The Problem of Christian Heroes”
(1 Corinthians 1:10-13; 3:1-9)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

We live in an age of celebrities:

Everyone loves their heroes.

People are singled out all the time

For being exceptional at something:

Whether as athletes or actors,

Speakers or singers,

Government or military leaders,

Or even thinkers or teachers.

The same is true in the church:

We have our heroes as well.

We also appreciate those who excel

At things that have to do with the Lord,

Especially, when it's something

That's particularly important to us.

Have you ever noticed how those

Who have a burden for missions,

Tend to talk about the missionaries

Who have most influenced their lives –

Usually those the Lord used in an extraordinary way
To open new territory in foreign lands for the Gospel –
Like Hudson Taylor in China,
Or William Carey in India.

Those interested in evangelism often admire:
The apostle Paul,
And George Whitefield.

In theology, my personal favorites
Are Jonathan Edwards,
And John Gerstner.

Those who love preaching
Often look to Charles Spurgeon;

Those who love holiness –
Who want to be more like Jesus –
Which is something we should all want –
Look to the Puritans –
Who were also, by the way,
The best theologians the Lord
Has given to His church.

B. Preview.

There's nothing wrong
 With having heroes –
 With appreciating those
 Who have been particularly helpful to you
 In the areas you believe are most important.

But we need to be careful –
 Our passage this morning reminds us
 That our appreciation can go too far.

It goes too far:
 When we forget the One to whom we're really indebted –
 The One who is the real source of these blessings –
 When we fail to honor Him
 For the benefits we receive,
 And give it to His servants instead.
 This never bears good fruit.

That's what Paul
 Reminds the Corinthians in our passage.

II. Sermon.

A. The problem.

First, we see one of the problems
 The church at Corinth was faced with –

Paul addresses several throughout his letter,

But he begins with their *division*:

He writes in verse 11, “For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe’s *people*, that there are quarrels among you.”

The reason they were divided

Was because they had begun to identify themselves

With different spiritual leaders:

A party spirit had developed (v. 12).

Paul writes, “Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, ‘I am of Paul,’ and ‘I of Apollos,’ and ‘I of Cephas,’ and ‘I of Christ’” (v. 12).

The four they polarized around were:

Paul –

Who had first brought the Gospel to Corinth –

Apollos –

Whom Luke called an eloquent man,

A powerful speaker,

Someone mighty in the Scriptures -

Who had come to Corinth after Paul

To continue the work he had started –

Cephas or Peter –

Who was one of the original twelve –

It’s possible that the Jewish believers there

Had an easier time identifying with him –

And the Lord Jesus Christ –

Which can mean one of two things:

Paul could either be objecting here by saying:

“But I of Christ;”

“You’re siding with these,

But I’m siding with Christ;”

Which is the point of this sermon.

Or that there was a group

That was merely claiming to side with Christ,

So that they could slight these others.

They were embroiled in a fight

Over which one was better –

The better teacher,

The better preacher,

The godlier example.

Instead of being careful

To preserve the unity

The Spirit had created among them –

Instead of yielding to Him

As He was leading them in that direction –
 They were following their flesh instead,
 And sowing the seeds of division.

B. Second, we see the solution:

1. Paul urged them –

Not on his own authority,
 But on the authority of Jesus Christ,
 Whose body/people they were –

To work towards unity:

To seek to be of one mind.

To learn *to think* the same thing –

So that they might literally *say* the same thing.

He exhorted them to be joined together –

To heal the rift that was between them:

He writes in verse 10, “Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment.”

2. To help them see more clearly

Why they should work this direction,

He asks three questions:

a. “Has Christ been divided?” (v. 13).

Is there more than one Savior?

Does He have more than one body?

Isn't that what we, as His church, are to reflect?

This is how our Lord wants us to view His church –

Not as many, but as one –

And anyone who is part of it

Through faith in His name

As a member of the same body

To which we belong.

Perhaps if we thought along these lines,

It might help heal the divisions

That mar our Lord's church today.

b. Second, he asks

In regard to those who looked to him:

“Paul was not crucified for you, was he?” (v. 13).

“Some of you are claiming me

As your spiritual leader:

But who am I?

I'm not the Savior;

I'm not the one who gave his life

To take away your sins

So that you might live forever.”

c. And along those lines, third,

“Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?” (v. 13).

“You weren’t united to me in baptism.

I didn’t send my spirit

To renew your souls,

Wash away your sins,

And raise you to life.”

d. He’s saying,

“Take a step back

And consider what you’re doing:

This is what you’re saying of all these men

As long as you identify with them

And not with Jesus alone.”

“Is this what the Spirit would lead you to do?

Or is this simply what you want to do?”

He writes in 3:3-4, “For you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? For when one says, ‘I am of Paul,’ and another, ‘I am of Apollos,’ are you not *mere* men?”

3. Finally, he puts everything into perspective –

How they should view their spiritual heroes –

How we should view ours:

We should see them as *servants* –

Servants *the Lord raised up* for our good,

Servants *He sent* to bless us.

We benefited *through their ministry*,

But it was *the Lord who gave the benefit*:

Paul writes in 3:5, “What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave *opportunity* to each one.”

Paul tells them it’s true he planted the seed –

He was the one who brought the Gospel to them

On his second missionary journey.

And yes, Apollos watered that seed –

He came to Corinth after Paul –

And after Aquila and Priscilla

Helped him better to understand the Gospel –

And he continued to build up them up in God’s Word.

But neither Paul nor Apollos

Made that Word effective –

Either to save or to build up –

God did that:

He sent His Spirit

To raise the dead to new life

Under Paul's preaching –

He sent His Spirit

To build them up

Under Apollos' teaching.

Further,

If God hadn't called Paul and Apollos into His kingdom,

If He hadn't gifted them

And called them to be ministers of the Gospel,

If He hadn't sent them to Corinth,

They wouldn't have been there in the first place.

This was all God's doing –

What He provided out of His infinite love.

And so Paul concludes in verse 7,

“So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters *is anything*, but God who causes the growth.”

Both Paul and Apollos will be rewarded

For being faithful to do

What the Lord called them to do,

Each according to their faithfulness:

He writes in verse 8, “Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor.”

But they always had to keep in their own minds –

As well as in the minds of their hearers –

That they were only *workers in the field*,

Only *laborers building the house*:

The field, the house, belonged to God,

And their success/fruitfulness depended completely on Him.

He concludes in verse 9, “For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field,
God’s building” (v. 9).

He is the One who ultimately makes the difference,

And so He receives all the glory.

C. Finally, what should we learn from this?

1. The Lord wants us first to see

That no matter how much

We love and appreciate

Those the Lord has used to minister to us –

Whether those who first brought us the Gospel,

Or those who taught us and built us up in the truth –

Whether they’re still on earth today,

Or have already gone to be with Him in glory –

Whether we’ve benefited

From the example of their commitment,

Or the insights from their teaching –

We need to remember

That they didn't save us –

The Lord did:

He gave us His Son,

He gave us His Spirit,

He gave us life in Him –

We need to remember

That they might have taught us,

But they didn't make us grow –

The Lord did:

He sent His Spirit

To illumine His Word,

That we might become like Jesus.

Two people can hear the same Gospel –

One is saved and the other isn't.

Many people can hear the same teaching –

Some are blessed and grow,

And others don't.

God is the One who makes the difference.

We need to remember who it was
 That raised these people up,
 And equipped them to serve us:
 The Lord did.

We can appreciate what others do for us –
 The servants He sends –
 But we need to credit Him for the benefit –
 They plant, they water,
 But *God causes the growth*.

2. He wants us to see, second,
 That He didn't give us these servants
 To *divide* us, but to *unite* us.

Sometimes our appreciation for someone –
 For their zeal or ability in a particular area,
 Or their insights into God's Word –
 Can make us appreciate them so much,
 That we look down on those
 Who don't see them the same way.

We need to be careful
 That their influence on us
 Is what the Lord intended

When He raised them up
And sent them to His church:
To make us more like Christ –
To make us a uniting influence –
Not more like the people of this world –
A dividing influence.

I heard a minister say once
He didn't like reading the Puritans
Because when he did
All he could see was sin
In everyone around him.

I know what he's talking about
Because they had the same effect on me.

The problem we both had
Was that we used what they said
To examine others,
Rather than ourselves –

When we look at ourselves
Through the searching lens of their teaching,
It has another very helpful effect:
It humbles us

So that we can serve others.

We are never more like Jesus
Than when we are humble –
And we are never more useful
In healing division,
Than when we are first humbled
By our own contributions to it.

3. He wants us to see third:

That when we plant –
When we bring the Gospel to others –

And when we water –
Either by reinforcing the Gospel,
Or discipling those who are His –

There will be some saved,
Some who are built up,
Because He is working through us.

If it was left entirely up to us,
No one would be blessed.
But because He is working,
There will be those who will!

4. Finally, He wants us to see

That when others benefit

Either from our evangelism

Or our discipleship/teaching,

We are not to take the credit for it:

We are to give all the credit/glory to Him.

Paul asks in 1 Corinthians 4:7,

What do we have that we haven't received?

And so how can we boast as though we didn't receive it?

Let's not forget that everything we have

Is only on loan –

We're only stewards

Of these gifts and graces.

That when we use these things

And others are blessed,

It's only because God gave the blessing:

All the glory belongs to Him. Amen.

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