Envy, Strife, and Division

“…for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?” 1 Corinthians 3:3 (NKJV)

The Corinthian church must have been exciting in its day! They were founded by Paul and he even stayed and helped establish the church. Apollos, who took over from Paul, was a gifted preacher renowned in his time. First Corinthians 1:6 says, “…the testimony of Christ was confirmed…” in them. (NKJV) Also, they had all the gifts of the Spirit—they didn’t lack any gifts and they used them all. Plus, they were eagerly waiting for the glorious return of the Lord Jesus Christ. And to top that off, they knew that Christ would confirm them to the end so they “…may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Corinthians 1:8, NKJV) What more could this church need or want?

But Paul says they had a problem. He couldn’t talk to them as mature Christians. They still needed milk, like babies. The problem was they were still “carnal.” The Corinthians had three areas that concerned Paul: envy, strife, and division. There were people who were envious of one another’s spiritual gifts. For instance, imagine someone had the gift of helps, but instead they wanted to be a pastor-teacher. Perhaps they wanted to be seen and heard by everyone. The division in the church was also obvious. The people were divided on which leader they followed. “Now I say this, that each of you says, ‘I am of Paul,’ or ‘I am of Apollos,’ or ‘I am of Cephas,’ or ‘I am of Christ.’” (1 Corinthians 1:12, NKJV) It was this division which caused the strife that Paul mentioned.

When we fight or do the things listed in First Corinthians, we fall short of the blessings that God has for us. God knows who can preach and teach, and He knows the ones who can help. God, in His wisdom, knows what gifts fit us best. God knows who should lead and who should follow. All the gifts are equally important. If we didn’t have people to do the gifts of helps, healing, and knowledge, but we only had pastors instead, everyone would be talking, no one would be listening, and nothing else would get done! Strife comes from fat sheep that do nothing but eat.

We all have pastors we like and follow. Who doesn’t like Chuck Smith? God has given us individual men that speak to each of our hearts, but we can’t play them off against each other. God has given us all gifts. Let’s rely on God’s Spirit and serve with those gifts to bring Him glory! We don’t want to be a church of “mere men” living our lives in envy, strife, and division. We want to be a church that goes gloriously into the kingdom of God.