

## Seditions

Some diseases announce their presence in unmistakable language. Measles, Chicken Pox, Mumps, reveal themselves prominently in the most visible place on a person's body, the face. Other maladies, sometimes much more serious, such as high blood pressure, heart disease and lung cancer, are not detected as quickly, and sometimes do irreparable damage before their victims realize it.

Likewise, some spiritual sicknesses of the church are quickly spotted by the casual observer, and others slip by undetected, or even pass themselves as innovative blessings. In the latter case, such a disease may be admired as having built up and strengthened the church, when in reality it is utterly destructive.

A deadly divisive philosophy has been insinuated into the thinking of churchmen for so long now that it has become a part of the life and function of practically every church in existence. And those who do not think according to this seditious lie are constantly being pressured to do so.

I have chosen to use the word "seditions" found in Galatians 5:20 rather than "divisions" or "schisms", because of its sinister connotations and the root meaning of the Greek *dichostasia* from which it is translated. It literally means "a standing apart", a separation from the whole. This best describes the curse which I wish to address; and "seditions" identifies with the overthrow of the Christian church, which is its effective end.

This word occurs only three times in the Bible, each time identifying a particular means of dividing the people of God who are declared to be one.

The first is in Romans 16:17. "*Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.*" Notice that it is not divisive doctrine in view. Division over doctrine is imminently valid. We are not to hold communion with false prophets and false teachers. It is men who are causing divisions. This is sedition through *egotistical teachers*, men who would gather a following by inventing new and exotic teachings. We are all familiar with that sort of thing. Schisms caused this way are seldom subtle. They are evident from the outset.

The second is in 1 Corinthians 3:3-4. "*For whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal and walk as men? For while one saith I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal?*" This is sedition through personalities, and it is caused by *childish* believers. Paul said that he was forced to speak to them as babes. These are factions caused by childishly immature believers who will hear nothing if it does not come from the lips of their favorite teacher. Again, we are all familiar with this. And there is nothing subtle about it. Happily, most true Christians grow out of it, so it is not all that much of a threat to the church. There are always enough adults to offset the bad behaviour of the kids.

The third, and the one we wish to address in this paper, is in Galatians 5:19-20. "*Now the works of the flesh are manifest which are these . . . seditions . . . and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.*" I have spared the reader the long list of works of the flesh in which "seditions" appears. You should read the passage yourself. The main distinction between the schisms and factions caused here and the two foregoing ones, is that those who engage in this one are said to be unregenerate. This is a list of flesh works' and the seditions it produces is caused by the activity of the natural man, flesh. It is not a pollution of spiritual activity at all. It is one hundred percent pure flesh. These are divisions based solely on *natural fleshy considerations*.

The context in which this condemnation of fleshy divisions is made is Galatians 2, in which Paul blasts the practice of some Jewish Christians, including Peter, of separating themselves from Gentile Christians on the basis of social, cultural, and traditional differences. The central point of truth about which the whole book revolves is Galatians 3:27-28. "*For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.*" Many evils may be laid at the feet of fleshy activity, carnal thinking, the life of the Old Man; but the issue here is its attack on the oneness of the Christian church.

This problem of Jewish believers separating themselves from their Gentile counterparts was not a new one. Peter was accosted about it as soon as it was learned that he had made a visit to Cornelius. Paul purposes to settle it once and for all by destroying the Law-Grace tension set forth by the Judaizers, showing that a fellowship built around law-keeping is a fellowship in the flesh. The fruits of such will always be evil and divisive.

We have left Judaism far behind, but we will have war with flesh until the Lord comes. The same wicked, divisive flesh that divided the early church around legalistic law-keeping still divides the church today around equally carnal considerations.

Here is the lie: "People of a particular section of society must be ministered to by those who are also in that particular section. To be effective, the church must supply special social therapy separately to each particular cultural and social category of people." That is the explicit lie.

Implicit in that is the lie that Christianity is not ageless, classless, cultureless. It must be adapted and modified to be meaningful to people of varying social status. The Gospel alone is not the power of God unto salvation. It must be accommodated in group social therapy, a different therapy for each group. There can be no homogenous church. There can only be an array of factions, all fellowshiping in the flesh, who come together on occasions (for the most part, strangers) for an exhibition of common loyalty to Jesus Christ, whoever and whatever He might be to each group.

Do we not have white churches for white people and black churches for black people? Of course! How do we justify it? Their cultures are different. That may not be an altogether fair examples, since it has its roots in the evils and prejudices of slavery.

Take another example of ethnic divisions. Although the early Christian church was certainly made up of a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds, they seem to have no difficulty whatever, with the one Jewish exception which was resolved before the close of the New Testament. Yet we somehow have not been able to cope with the problem of Latin, Asian, and even some European converts. We subject them as “missions” with Anglo pastors; and that doesn’t work. We subsidize them financially with “native” pastors, and that does not work, either. Why don’t we teach them our language and absorb them into our churches? Because we have believed the seditious lie that their culture demands their separation.

But we are going to get closer home than this. Such above situations are a comparatively small part of the whole Christian church. Consider the young married couple who is looking for a church that has some couples “in our same age group that we can relate to”, or the family with pre-school children who are looking for a church “with kids the same age as our kids”, or the harried middle-age parents with teenagers looking for a church “with a good youth group and a good program for young people”. Then there is the older couple who are not comfortable unless they are in a church with a good number of senior citizens. More recently, older unmarrieds and divorced men and women are looking for a church with some “singles” so that they can also enjoy Christianity.

Add to that list of church shoppers the snobs that are looking for a church with “some cultured people”, the egg-heads that must have a fellowship of “educated people”, the simple people who will not be satisfied if a church has anything other than “just plain folks”, the go-getters who want a church made up of wealthy people, the underprivileged who will only associate with “poor people”, and the status-seeker who just wants a church “with a lot of people”>

Absurd, isn’t it? Ugly, too. But it is the truth; and the fellow who is minded to attract these church shoppers to fill his pews is going to fish with the bait they hanker for.

We are a success-oriented generation; and success in the church world is spelled out in “get the people”. Do whatever is necessary to get them. The gospel is abandoned. Everything revolves around making people comfortable in a social setting tailored to their tastes. The church ceases to be a salvation station. It is a social club catering to particular cultural patterns, with some religious overtones.

It should not be difficult to perceive the mischief this sort of mentality generates. Pastors are under tremendous pressure to make their churches attractive. If he has prospects that include teen-age youngsters, he must either come up with a social program to attract them, or they will go to the church that has it, and the rest of the teenagers in the community will go where the big gang is. If he would “win” unmarried adults, he has to come up with some sort of “singles” program so they will not “feel shut out” of a church made up mostly of families. If he intends to make inroads to the cultured community, he must offer some cultural activities and try to introduce a bit of religion into them. In all of this, the social therapy becomes the central consideration (since after all, *that* is what draws the people), and the gospel comes in late, a poor second, altogether subservient to other considerations.

A profile of the most prominent “going” church in any given community now emerges. It is meticulously departmentalized, graded and segmented so as to give every fleshy division of humanity precisely what it wants. It will have so cleverly clothed the Christian ministry in the garb of this world that it could hardly be distinguished from any lodge or fraternal order, except for some lip-service given to the Bible. Everyone feels comfortable and secure in his own fleshy communion, unintimidated by anyone walking in the Spirit.

People attract people, growth stimulates growth. This malignant tumor on the body of Christ, like a wart on the nose, becomes the most visible church in the community. Any prospects will likely make their first stop there and be quickly sucked in. Like a body-depleting cancer, this big “thing” siphons off leadership from all the smaller surrounding churches, such proselytized leaders feeling that they will have a bigger audience and a corresponding better hearing for their ministries.

If this church were the spiritual giant it claims to be, then it would be well enough that it so overshadowed all the others until they shriveled and died. But the very opposite is true. It usually has the least *spiritually* to offer, by simple virtue of the fact that it has the most to offer in the *carnal* realm. These two elements are in dead opposition to each other. One cannot be fed without starving the other. This fleshy, bloated hybrid becomes the chief “image” of Christianity in the area, and it is an utterly false one! The church that dares set forth a true ministry will then be branded as the “odd”, the “heretic”, the “cult”.

Then consider the prospects that were drawn in by the social net of this church. If they have indeed been converted to Christ in spite of a watered-down gospel, they are doomed to a stunted or at least distorted Christian growth. It is that much more difficult to get to these starving sheep with the true bread of life.

Yet another product of fleshy seditions is the proliferation of churches themselves whose fellowship exists in a peculiar carnal realm. Thus we have churches made up only of older people. Young people and young adults avoid it like the plague, regardless of the spiritual level of its ministry. Here is another church populated by the young with a young ministry. More mature people feel “out of place in it”. Thus we have churches made up of wealthy people only, those made up of poor only, those made of the cultured and educated, those made up of the coarse and ignorant. All this makes the flesh feel comfortable and at home, but it is a seditious lie that rends, starves and stunts the true body of Christ where all are members one of another, each part making up what the other parts lack.

Perhaps the most painful of these seditions caused by the flesh is what happens to the spiritual fellowship in one particular local church. Members of said church segregate themselves into little groups of like carnal interests, excluding everyone else from the whole of their lives with no more than a brief handshake, tight smile and how-do-you-do on Sunday morning.

When we become joined to a local body of believers, we inadvertently find ourselves grouped with people whom we would not have deliberately chosen for our friends. Do we thereby have the Christian right to shun and avoid them, selecting those whose company is more pleasing to our flesh? If the Christian church exists for the pleasure and social convenience of its members, yes. But if it exists to build up the saints and glorify God in the work of the ministry, God forbid! How did such a horrible idea find roots

among the people who bear the Name of the Man Who loved and died for those whose repulsiveness can only be figured in the unclean, socially outcast leper?

The Bible declares that we are the members of Christ *and* the members of one another: That we are interdependent spiritually upon one another, that there is no member so insignificant and unimportant that he is not needed by every other member. That being the case, then I can regard another member of the local body of which I am a part in only one of two ways: 1) He is not a Christian and does not belong to my fellowship. Therefore, I not only can, but am commanded, to shun him. 2) He is a genuine blood-bought child of God. In such a case, I intensely need him and must not neglect to fellowship him. To do so would be to drastically hinder both of us in spiritual development.

Who said practicing Christianity was fun? Easy? Without effort? How are you going to exercise the fruits of Christian love in longsuffering, forbearing, patience, endurance, and mercy, if you spend all your time with those who never “rub you the wrong way”, who can scratch your back when it itches, and who make no demands that only the life and love of Jesus Christ in you can rise to?

Perhaps the real reason so many church members can fellowship with only certain others is that there is nothing but flesh for them to fellowship in. They know nothing of true spiritual fellowship in Christ Jesus. These imposters in the Christian community do not belong in the church at all. They will only fellowship other unconverted church members. And if they cannot find any of them in the church, they will fellowship only with those outside the church. Think about it, my friend. Can you identify with the deacon who complained that he had better fellowship with his lodge brothers than he did with his Christian brothers? He had no idea that he was confessing his bankrupt spiritual state. The truth of the matter is, if he could fellowship at all with his lodge brothers, he had no basis of communion at all with true believers in Jesus Christ. (1 John 1:3-6)

This, of course, is not to say that we are to have no contact with unbelievers. Light must shine in darkness. The salt must be sprinkled upon the whole of humanity. We are not isolationists. But if we *prefer* the company of unbelievers who align with us socially, culturally and according to our sensual tastes, rather than that of spiritually minded people who have nothing else in common with us other than Christ, then we are most certainly living in the flesh, the Old Man. Romans 8:9 tells us that believers are not “in” the flesh but in the Spirit. It is in the Spirit that they live. The tenth verse goes on to say that the body is dead because of sin and the Spirit is life because of righteousness.

Nor do we deny that God has especially gifted some to minister the gospel to particular groups. This will be readily by the more abundant fruit they bear among such groups for which they are spiritually fitted. But these are rare exceptions to the rule. We are not here considering a particular man’s unique and peculiar ministry. We are talking about the whole of the church edifying itself and growing up by receiving that which every joint and member supplies. Let us rid ourselves once and for all of that lie that fleshy considerations qualify us for spiritual tasks.

The Christian church is truly a mystery and a wonder. There is a communion, a language (not unknown tongues), a rapport, a sixth sense between believers that transcend all natural means of social intercourse. By it a little boy is perfectly content to sit quietly and drink from the deep spiritual wisdom of an old man. A little girl warms her heart in the sweet fellowship of a middle-aged matron who shares her Christ. Middle-class “straight” citizens find themselves perfectly comfortable with ex-hippies who prior to their conversion had nothing in common with them other than they inhabited the same earth and breathed the same air. In the Christian church, the intellectual sits and learns at the feet of the day laborer who has knowledge that passes human understanding. The banker is enriched by the testimony of an ex-barmaid; and the liberal and the Republican help one another to a Christian view of common and special grace.

Such is the power and mystery and wonder of God’s work by the Spirit who makes *all* His elect one in Christ. It is too high and holy for us to touch with our fleshy hands. Let us yield to the work of the Spirit and apply ourselves diligently to building up the household of faith by spiritual communion, not splintering it asunder by fleshy division.

- C. M.