

What Will Destroy a Congregation

Sermon by Andy Sochor

Text: 2 Corinthians 12:20-21

When Paul wrote the first letter to the Corinthians, there were many problems he needed to address. When he wrote the second letter, they had definitely made some improvements. However, there were still issues that threatened the health of the church. Toward the end of the second letter, he described some things that would destroy a congregation. It is important that we consider these, even if we are not currently experiencing these problems. If they ever do arise, we want to be able to address them as quickly as possible.

Destroying Unity

- Paul mentioned eight things that would destroy the unity of a congregation (2 Corinthians 12:20)
 - Strife – discord (NIV); contentions, debates; “quarrels” (1 Corinthians 1:11)
 - Jealousy – envyings (KJV); word sometimes used in a positive sense (“zeal,” 2 Corinthians 9:2), but this was misdirected; they were defending the wrong thing
 - Angry tempers – fits of rage (NIV); anger boiling up quickly; not reasonable; no self-control
 - Disputes – selfish ambition (NIV); hostility (ESV); partisanship; creating factions (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:19)
 - Slanders – backbiting (KJV); speaking evil of others; we must put this aside (1 Peter 2:1)
 - Gossip – whisperings (KJV); causes contention (Proverbs 26:20), whether true or not
 - Arrogance – conceit (ESV); thinking of themselves too highly (Romans 12:3)
 - Disturbances – disorder (NIV/ESV); confusion; not of God (1 Corinthians 14:33)
- Why is destroying unity such a problem? – Jesus’ prayer was for the unity of His people (John 17:20-21)
- We gain strength and encouragement from one another (Ephesians 4:16; cf. Ecclesiastes 4:12)
- When we are cut off from one another, we are more vulnerable (cf. 1 Peter 5:8)
- We must be “diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3)

Destroying Purity

- Paul then mentioned three things that would destroy the purity of a congregation (2 Corinthians 12:21)
 - Impurity – uncleanness (KJV); moral uncleanness; opposite of what God has called us to be (1 Thessalonians 4:7)

- Immorality – sexual sin (NIV), fornication (KJV); addressed in first letter (1 Corinthians 5:1; 6:18)
- Sensuality – lasciviousness (KJV), debauchery (NIV); shamelessness; like Sodom (2 Peter 2:7)
- Why is destroying purity such a problem? – Jesus wants the church to be spotless (Ephesians 5:27)
- When sin is accepted, it spreads like leaven (1 Corinthians 5:6)
- We are to accept one another [previous point] – but not by welcoming sin (1 Corinthians 5:11)
- We are to encourage one another to do good (Hebrews 10:24-25) – turn back those in sin (Galatians 6:1)

Refusing Help

- In reality, every congregation will have problems from time to time – there is no “perfect church”; every congregation is made up of fallible human beings; division and immorality will destroy a church, but refusing to accept help when facing trouble will too
- Paul was trying to help these brethren (2 Corinthians 1:23-24; 7:2-3) – but some were trying to turn the brethren against Paul (2 Corinthians 11:12-15; 12:15-16)
- Yet Paul, as an apostle, was speaking for Christ (1 Corinthians 14:37; 2 Corinthians 10:8; 12:11-12; 13:10)
- When we need help (correction, guidance, encouragement, etc.), we need the word of God
 - It builds us up (Acts 20:32)
 - It makes us complete (2 Timothy 3:16-17)
 - It is the basis for unity (Ephesians 4:3)
 - It keeps us from sin (Psalm 119:9)
- This means we need to be open to the teaching of God’s word (1 Thessalonians 2:13) – not to blindly accept any teaching we hear (Ephesians 4:14); test, verify, then accept it (1 Thessalonians 5:21-22; Acts 17:11)

Conclusion

- A congregation cannot survive if it is not united
- A congregation cannot continue in the Lord’s favor if it does not remain pure
- A congregation has no hope if they ignore the teachings of God’s word