

The House of God A Spiritual House

Studio Session 167
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I've chosen to approach this episode in our discussion entitled "A Spiritual House" by an opening of the book of 1Corinthians. Now in 1Corinthians chapter 1 Paul says that he was told by the house of Chloe that there were divisions among the brethren. His appeal to them in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ was that they agree with one another and that there be no divisions among them. Then he goes on to ask the question, "Is Christ divided?" Prior to asking that question he says Chloe's household had said that there were quarrels among the believers in Corinth and the essence of these quarrels related to some of them were saying, "I am of Paul," "I am of Apollos," "I am of Peter," and "I am of Christ." And to that he said, "Is Christ divided?" So he begins by saying that he appeals to them in the name of the Lord Jesus that they be all of one mind then he challenges them not to think of themselves as being of Paul, of Apollos, of Cephas (or Peter), or even of Christ, uniquely distinguished from those who were followers of Paul, Apollos and Peter. And then further on in the same book, in the eleventh chapter when he speaks of the Lord's supper, he says to the Corinthians that when they came together in one place it really wasn't for fellowship around the Lord's table because they carried the spirit of division into their meetings.

Well it seems that his appeal is very distinct, that Christ is not divided and they should not see the Body as divided and his conclusion of the matter was, "For this reason (that is, when they failed to discern that the Body was one), for this reason some were weak and sick and some died prematurely." And he made the point even more emphatically when in chapter 12 he speaks of the whole Body as being like the human body that the body was one but there were many members. So one cannot leave the book of 1Corinthians without seeing that it's core emphasis is on the unity of the Body of Christ.

So with that in mind, if you look at chapter 4 it seems that there's a problem because he says in verse 14 chapter 4, in between all of this about not being of Paul, not being of Apollos and so on, he says, "I'm not writing this to shame you but to warn you," he said, "as my dear children. Even though you have ten thousand guardians in Christ you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through this gospel, therefore I urge you to imitate me." How could you on one hand say that and on the other hand

say, "Some of you say, 'I am of Paul'," and you are denouncing that division with great sanctions? "Therefore I urge you to imitate me. For this reason I am sending to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord, he will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church."

And then he goes on to talk like a father to them, he says, "I am your father by this gospel," and, "I'm sending Timothy my son whom I love," and, "he will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus," and then he ends that particular section of the discourse, he ends it by saying, "What do you prefer? Shall I come to you with a whip, or in love and with a gentle spirit?" He's threatening to come to them with a whip. Nobody today would agree, nearly, that anyone in their lives has the authority to threaten them with a whip. They would consider that as the ultimate determination of control, being willing to 'whip you into shape' so to speak. But that's the problem with a lawless generation, isn't it, where everyone is doing what is right in his own eyes and defining everything as pleases them; there are no fathers. Nobody who cares enough about them or is related to them in such a close fashion as to threaten them with a whip.

You know of course, fatherless children with the culture of orphans would immediately resent any notion that somebody, anyone, could come to them with a whip. But Paul is saying, "What do you prefer? I am your father, do you prefer that as your father I come to you with a whip or with a gentle spirit?" It's a rhetorical question, they should of course prefer him to come with a gentle spirit but he's not opposed to coming with a whip. But that's not so much the bigger question, we'll get to this in the next broadcast when I talk about "what is control" and we'll look at the genesis of control and how that is not distinguished in our present view from discipline and that's why the church is undisciplined. And we hope to sort of find our way to maturity without discipline and the truth is no one can come to maturity who has not been disciplined, that's why we have an undisciplined world and a generation of orphans and we have an undisciplined church with the culture of the fatherless running the show.

We are not capable of being that responsible, mature Bride with whom the Spirit will agree that it's time for the Lord to return; not in our present condition. And what I'm speaking about is the evolution to that reality and the necessary step is what we're talking about here; spiritual fathers. How can we have spiritual fathers - and by definition spiritual houses - without that concept devolving into "I am of Paul; I am of Apollos; I am of Cephas" and the resulting division of the Body of Christ which is so roundly criticized and condemned by Paul himself in this very passage? Well let us begin with an even more basic objection, here Paul says, "I became your father," and, "I'm sending to you Timothy my beloved son."

So clearly he believes he's their father and names not just them as his children but Timothy as his son. Now, like Elijah and Elisha of previous reference; they are not natural kin. Elisha is not the natural child of Elijah and yet he cries out as he sees Elijah

being taken into heaven, “My father, my father!” A reference to a spiritual man. In the same way, Timothy is not Paul's Son - Paul is not married, he has no children - nor are the Corinthians his physical offspring. So reference to them and to Timothy is of necessity within the context of being a spiritual father. But I said there was a problem with that because....potentially there's a problem with this because Jesus had said in the book of Matthew, “Call no man on the earth your father because there's one who is your father, namely God.”

Now Jesus says, “Call no man on the earth your father,” Paul says, “I am your father,” albeit, “your spiritual father”? So who is right and is there a problem? Well one thing you should know by now if you've listened to me at all for any period of time is that the answer is simple: they're both right. You should never consent to Scripture against Scripture and a conclusion that one Scripture is right and another is wrong because all that is the case is that the breadth of ones understanding is not broad enough to encompass the dual meaning. There are in fact nine different meanings to the word “father” in the Scriptures. “Progenitor” is used in nine different ways. The “remote progenitor” is that usage that is exclusive, nearly, to God. Which means whenever the reference to being “born” comes up, no one is “born” of Paul. Paul said, “I thank God that I baptized none of you, except Crispus and Gaius and the household of Stephanus, lest anyone should say I baptized in my own name.”

The point being, to actually have a being in this world that originates from heaven, one must be born of holy seed. The word says, “Receive with meekness the ingrafted word that is able to save your soul.” We're born by the seed of God; the seed of God is the word of God. And we're born again from heaven, we're born of spirit, “That which is born of flesh, is flesh; and that which is born of spirit, is spirit.” So when one is born again the Spirit himself comes in, the Holy Spirit comes into you and is deposited in you by God himself who sends us the Holy Spirit and the place in you in which this deposit takes place is within your spirit. So now the mind of your spirit is being informed by the Holy Spirit and your way of being and your way of thinking comes alive, you're literally resurrected as one from the dead. You're born again in this fashion and issued forth from the womb of God, so you're a joint heir with Christ and according to Hebrews 2:11, “The One who makes men holy and the ones who are made holy (that is, Christ and us) are of the same family which is why Jesus is not ashamed to call us brothers,” and the term “brothers” there is the word in the Greek “adelphos” and it means to be born of the same womb.

So when we're born again we're born of Spirit and that Spirit is the Spirit of our Father who is God. So “you did not receive a Spirit that makes you a slave again to fear” Romans says, but you received the Spirit of sonship by Whom you recognize God as your Father, “Father, father.” So how could Paul say, “I am your father”? Well that's because he's using the term “father” in one of it's nine meanings other than “progenitor”. God is the progenitor, that's why we're spiritual beings born of the womb of God and I

just quoted the passage “adelphos”, Hebrews 2:11. But just as we're able to say today, “Henry Ford was the father of the automobile,” and one understands that the term “father” there is a legitimate use of the term but it does not suggest a relationship of equal kind between an automobile (which is an inanimate object) and Henry Ford (who is a man). We understand that he is the originator of the ideas which translated into a piece of machinery known as the automobile and in that sense he's clearly the father of the automobile industry.

So Paul says, “I am the one who brought you Corinthians the good news of how Christ was reconciling the Jew and the Gentile into Himself in one Body.” This is what he said to the Ephesians and spoke of his commission by God to bring the good news to the Gentiles. He was not a remote person in that sense, he actually went to Corinth and he remembers certain ones who are in the Body of Christ in Corinth, he said, “I didn't baptize all of you but I'm the father. I baptized Crispus and Gaius and the household of Stephanus, others baptized the rest of you, but I am the father of the gospel that has been brought to you Corinthians and in which you now live. And as such I bear a continuing responsibility for your maturity, so you are part of my household but my household does not divide the Body. It is merely an issue of who has the responsibility, as a father, to raise you to maturity.”

“When you come to maturity you'll put away childish things” as he said in chapter 13 of the same book. “One of the childish things you will have put away,” he said in chapter 11, “is the notion that you are individuals or you are separate from the rest of the Body.” And in chapter 12 he corrects that assumption by saying to them, “We are just one Body. Whether you came into the Lord through Paul or Apollos or Peter, however you came in, we are one Body. But if you came in through Paul, Paul is saying, “I have a responsibility, a continuing responsibility, to raise you to maturity.” The problem is - in this gospel that focuses upon salvation - the goal has been set as going to heaven and no real consideration is being given in the present gospel to being a mature representation of the Father. Because this gospel is not the gospel about being sons or about the house of God; it's about saving you from going to hell. Now this is the Roman gospel, this is the gospel that originated with the Roman church and of course the Roman church claims to have the ultimate franchise which is keys to the kingdom of heaven. And it perceives the kingdom of heaven as being heaven itself, not the house of God that has come out of heaven into the earth to bring to the earth the culture of heaven's King and to bring the order of God's house as the functional order among human beings.

That being so, going to heaven has come to be the great goal of the Christian faith and even in the reformation, Luther and Calvin did not challenge that assumption, they simply spoke about who was predestined to go to heaven or predestined to go to hell. I'm convinced that God let this remain as it was, untended, until the time when a generation would arise on the earth who needed fathers and this is spoken of in the Scriptures when it says, “In the last days” - as the age concludes, when the spirit of the orphan has now

taken over human society and man is nearly completely lost as a world to the original intent of God in bringing man into the earth as His son, when that time came and because of the desperation of the orphan the desire that will arise in the earth - “the desire I will cause to arise in the hearts of men in the earth, is a desire to return to Father. And until that time I will let this pattern of the gospel go on where the emphasis is on going to heaven but when that is no longer an appealing emphasis because the hearts of men desire so much more than that emphasis, when I have permitted the cup of iniquity to be full and when the ways of the orphan have become so desperate that the need for a father will become the singular cry of the earth, then and in that day I will restore that gospel that I once put in the earth. And I will make known, as the age concludes, I will make known to principalities and powers in the heavenly realms the manifold wisdom of God in choosing man as His heirs because I will arrange My house in the earth in such a way that the earth could see the glory of the culture of heaven because the structure and order of My church in that day will be to present Me, the Father, beckoning and calling back the orphan, redeeming the orphan from the culture of the fallen one. When Adam separated himself from Me,” God says, “and preoccupied his existence with his own provision and protection, clothing himself and hiding himself then when that has run its course and mankind now sees no salvation and no point to being, in merely the acquiring of provision and protection and when they, in that desperation long for something else, then and in that day I will restore My order to the earth; I will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to the fathers.” And that's what God is doing in spiritual houses.

Now how would Paul and Apollos and Peter, how would they remedy the problem of their disciples thinking of themselves as being “of Paul”? How do you get your disciples, if you're Paul, how do you get your disciples to the place of seeing that although they belong to your spiritual family and are entitled to your correction and your discipline in order to come to maturity, how do they also relate to the rest of the Body of Christ in a city? Well what was the original model of the church? When there were divisions and disagreements in the early church, how were the problems solved? The answer was that there was an apostolic counsel, an apostolic counsel. The highest order of the church is an apostolic counsel. Today, when the church neither believes in apostles nor is anyone nearly alive today heard of an apostolic counsel, the problem of unifying the Body becomes astonishingly difficult. But in the early church, every time an issue arose that threatened to divide the Body, it called forth the apostolic counsel. For example, when the Body in Jerusalem began to be divided over Grecian widows and Jewish widows and the care of them, how was the problem solved? The apostles who were in Jerusalem at the time gave orders to solve the problem and so deacons were appointed. When a tremendous problem arose in the New Testament church that threatened its very existence: the matter of the admission of Gentiles into the church, how was the issue settled? The issue was settled by an apostolic counsel in Acts 15 where the matter was resolved. Early apostolic councils like the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D. continued the

tradition of recognizing that there were apostles who could solve the problem; they had the authority to unify the Body.

So when men began to say, "I am of Paul, I am of Apollos, I am of Cephas, I am of Christ," how would that problem be solved in Corinth? Well Paul, Apollos, Cephas and whoever else were apostles would meet together and they would discuss the issue. Paul had already preempted the field by laying out the truth that it was but one Body. So spiritual houses are typically headed by apostolic fathers, who in turn bring order to the household of which they are members and of which they themselves are fathers. Now, a simple example. When my wife and I were newly married we were just a small family, then our children came along, we were a household of four. Now my son is of the age where he has a wife, that's now part of my house, his house is part of my house. I am the father of one who is now in charge of a household, of a family. So there are at least two families within my house. Now the way I relate to his wife recognizes that he is the head of his wife but as a young man he's not also capable of being her spiritual father. Who then is her spiritual father? I am, she has chosen me to be her spiritual father. By the time he married, the end my influence upon his life in terms of a fleshly influence had come about; he should leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife. But that doesn't mean he has no further need for a father, he just doesn't have a need for a natural father; he now has a need for a spiritual father. So if a conflict arises between him and his wife, how is the problem solved? That is my role as the spiritual father, I hear their appeal and we discuss the issue and resolve the problem because they belong to my spiritual house. I hear the conflict between two spiritual sons and resolve an issue in my spiritual house.

Everyone should belong to a spiritual house where there is a father who is capable of bringing discipline to them, showing the Father, the Heavenly Father through the earthly father, "My father, my father".

I'm Sam Soleyn and we'll pursue this matter in greater detail at another time. God bless you, see you then, bye bye.