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THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH: DISTORTED AND DEFORMED

CHAPTER SEVEN

DIVISIONS AND THE INSTITUTIONAL CHURCH

Paul wrote *"to the church (ecclesia) of God which is at Corinth..."* (1 Corinthians 1:2). The word *"ecclesia"* has no limitation in and of itself. So to identify that specific part of God's people to whom he is writing, Paul added the limiting phrase, *"which is at Corinth."* Isn't that simple and clear?

It is this same way in every case in the New Testament. Paul was NOT writing to an institution, organization, or body corporate. He was NOT writing to an independent, autonomous functioning unit, such as *"the local church"* of today. There was no such thing then! When Paul wrote *"to the church of God which is at Corinth,"* he wrote to God's people at Corinth; all of them as individuals! He wrote to those individuals at Corinth who were *"called to be saints."*

Paul's letter to the saints, *"the church of God in Corinth,"* dealt in a large measure with the divisions and schisms among God's people there. In the first chapter he deals with

this problem directly. (I Corinth. 1:10-16). He told them that there should be *"no divisions among you."* The word "you" is used in an individual sense, referring to each and every saint.

In verse 12, Paul describes the kind of divisions he means: *"...each one of you says, I am of Paul,' or ' I am of Apollos, or I am of Cephas, or I am of Christ."* Paul asked, *"Is Christ divided?"* The answer is an emphatic "NO!" Christ is not divided. You are His Body, and His Body is one . Therefore, you should not be divided and separated one from another.

But what is the teaching of institutional churches today? Each *"local church"* has its own membership list of those who belong exclusively to that formal organization. Many also claim that God has charged Christians everywhere to form themselves into *"local churches"* with certain duties that only it can do. In fact, they also claim that disciples cannot do these *"certain duties"* except through the *"local church."*

Supposedly, the church has one program of work to do and the Christians have another. Do you read anything like this in your Bible? No you don't! You never read anywhere in the New Testament about anyone even being a *"member of the church,"* let alone forming one!

The disciples were NOT *"members of the church."* They were the church!

The current teaching today is that every Christian is required by God to "join or become a part of" some institutional church unit. Today we often hear of those who move from one church institution to another by doing what is called *"transferring their membership"* or *"identifying themselves with"* a new institutional body. Again, we read nothing in the New Testament about such action!

Between the groups represented above, there is no real relationship or ties between these institutional units. Each one acts and does its own thing as if it was the only church institution in the world.

There is also a definite competitive spirit between and among these *"local church institutions."* Although it will never be admitted, this can easily be detected once you have been around one for a number of years.

Is this kind of division from God or man? What is the real difference, if any, between what we have in our separate, independent divisions called *"local churches"* and what Paul condemned in Corinth? Both are *"divisions"* of God's people!

Paul said to the saints at Corinth that he could not speak to them as *"spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ...for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? For when one says, 'I am of Paul,' and another, 'I am of Apollos,' are you not carnal?"*

(I Corinthians 3:1-4).

Paul, in no uncertain terms, calls their divisions carnality, or stemming from the flesh, not from God.

Division among God's people is carnality; and carnality is sinful. Correct? Is this true of all divisions among us?

To paraphrase Paul:

"For you are...carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal? For where one says, "I am a member of the First Baptist Church"(division?) and another says, "I go to the Covenant Reformed Church (another division?), and another says, "I'm a member of Pastor Jones' Church, (division) are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?"

There is nothing said in the Scriptures for dividing God's people, His Ecclesia, into independent, autonomous, institutions such as we have today that we have named "*the local church.*" There is no requirement from God for such. If so, where? Are we following God or the ways of men?

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