1 Corinthians 9:19-22 (C.O. A.) 95266

All Things to All Men, "All Things to All Men" (9:19-22)

I have noticed of late what I am forced to consider a misuse of 1 Cor. 9.19-22, which, although perhaps not very new, is none the less important. The argument is, "If Paul became as a Jew to the Jews, we ought to become as Wesleyans to the Wesleyans, &c. I think a careful perusal of the passage will show the fallacy of this deduction. Such a statement contradicts the apostle's teaching concerning the church of God. The mistake consists in this, that those who profess the name of the Lord are put in the same category with those who may deny Him. Surely to belong to a kingdom and to join in divisions within it is not the same as to have always belonged to the ranks of the enemy! There is a sophism too: that if Paul went to open enemies, much more should we to these bodies of friends; whereas the truth is that faithless friends are worse than open enemies. Have not "sects," or "heresies," put a taunt into the mouth of the scoffer? Hear the Lord's prayer, "That they all may be one...that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me" (John 17:21). All the severest judgments come upon those who in the place of nearness are really unfaithful (1 Pet. 4:17; Ezek. 9:6; Amos 3:1, 2).

On referring to the passage, we find the apostle's object was to save (ver. 22), but he builds them, being saved, upon the one foundation, Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 3:10); gathers them to one name (1 Cor. 5.4); teaches them they have one Lord (1 Cor. 8:6); and that they are one body, by the baptism of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12). This body he writes to at Corinth as the church of God. But now quite another thing occurs—they begin to divide first IN, then FROM, the church, as followers of different teachers. Does Paul say he will become as a follower of Apollos or Cephas? Surely not, any more than he would allow them to become followers of Paul.

The apostle is indignant at such a thought. "Was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?" (1 Cor. 1.13.) But he asks, "Is Christ divided?" They were united to the one Christ in the unity of the one Spirit. It was carnality! Would Paul become as "carnal"? Certainly not. All things were theirs, and they were Christ's (1 Cor. 3.22, 23). Could he say this to those to whom he was made all things, that he might by all means save some? They could not be a testimony to a divided Christ: were they truly his, or did they hold up his name? There were divisions among them (1 Cor. 1.10): Paul said there would be "heresies" (sects) (1 Cor. 11.19). Divisions were sects in the bud; have they improved by becoming full-blown? Have they ceased to be the false testimony, that Christ is divided? You cannot reform a sect: its very existence contradicts the unity of the body. (It should be clearly understood, that I am not speaking of the condition of individuals, but of the testimony of their association.)

I remember a pamphlet headed—"Why do we meet separate from other christians?" There is a fallacy in the question. We do NOT separate from christians, known to us as such, and not guilty of any sin requiring discipline; but we do separate from sects, which is a very different thing. How could we be unsectarian if we did not? We should be careful not to allow toward others in our hearts any sectarian feelings under the fairest show; for we know there were those who said, "I of Christ" (1 Cor. 1:12) in opposition to those who said "I of Paul, and I of Apollos." Some say sectarianism began at Corinth; but it is more correct to say it began in the heart (Gal. 5:20, Matt. 15:19). Every godly-walking one of the children of God should attract us; while the party to which he belongs may rightly repel. Not all those who say they are unsectarian are really so. It is very easy for a body of christians, in a carnal state, to drift into a sect; yet I believe there is some special warning, where this departure takes place, some act, which constitutes them such, and makes the fact clear to those who really wish to do His will (John 7.17), and look into the matter believingly for that purpose. Further, we know that the Lord generally allows false doctrines &c. to enter in such cases; because He permits sects, "that they which are approved may be made manifest among you" (1 Cor. 11.19). That the blessed Lord may keep us, not only unsectarian but devoted to His name and glory in this difficult time, is the prayer of Yours affectionately in Him, C. O. A.

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