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Two Kinds of Wisdom

Do you believe that divisions are against God's will?

Of course you do. The Bible is very clear on that. And if they are against God's will, they are sin. Why don't we deal with the sin of disunity as we deal with other sins?

In many of our churches you can hear people say, "This brother is a heretic. If he doesn't leave, we'll have to throw him out." They insist that everyone should believe as they do.

But those who live in disunity—who do nothing to put an end to it—are the ones who should be ousted. Paul and the other New Testament authors are stronger in their denunciation of those who cause divisions than they are against any other form of sin.

We are very serious about the sins of the flesh. But when it comes to the divisions in the church, people say to me, "Brother Ortiz, you are off here. You are way out. You are too idealistic. Stop dreaming. Come back to reality. We have been divided all our lives, and you ask us to change now?"

We have become so used to divisions that we don't see them as a serious problem.

In the books of heaven they don't write the name of your denomination, they just write the names of people.

There isn't a separate book for the Baptists and another for the Methodists. I am sorry to have to tell you that they mix everyone up there.. .and you might be quite alarmed if you

knew whose name appears next to yours! God could put Catholics and Pentecostals next to each other, and Baptists next to Methodists! I would like to see that book to discover whose name yours is written next to. The names are just by order of when you came into the church, not by denomination. Who knows whom you are next to?

The trouble is, we are so centered in doctrines that we cannot see beyond them. If Jesus were at the heart of our churches, we would be centered in life. Instead, we are centered in concepts.

So we excuse divisions by saying, "But there has to be a line somewhere."

In love, there is no fear. When we love, we do not have to be afraid of doctrinal differences because our emphasis is not on doctrine.

"God so loved the world." Not the Baptist doctrines, or the Presbyterian doctrines. "The world," with all of its erroneous concepts and terrible sins. Not when it was "right," but when it was in a lost condition. He came to a divided, confused, sinful world, and He loved it.

Many people are convinced that they have the right doctrines, but they are either naive or dishonest. How can you possibly be so sure that you have the right doctrines if you haven't been to the seminaries of the other denominations?

Let's say you are a Presbyterian. How can you be sure you have the right doctrine if you haven't been to the hundreds of other church seminaries?

In order to say that your doctrines are the right ones, you should go to them all and examine them carefully. It's not good enough to hear what they teach secondhand. You have to go to their seminaries and study them thoroughly before you can be so sure.

You have to go to the Catholics, the Lutherans, the Assemblies of God, the Seventh Day Adventists, the Baptists, the Methodists, the Nazarenes...and when you have finished stu-

dying all of them, if you haven't gone crazy you can decide which is the right one, or start a new one.

Without doing that, it is the height of arrogance to believe that you have all the right doctrines—and arrogance leads to divisions.

Actually, our seminaries do not teach the Bible as we claim they do. I was a professor in our seminary, and I have had to admit that we taught the doctrine of our denomination, and used the Bible to "prove" it.

If you go to a Pentecostal Bible school, they will teach you the Pentecostal doctrine and they will use the Bible to do so. If you go to a Seventh Day Adventist Bible school, what are they going to teach you? The Seventh Day Adventist doctrine! And what are they going to use to "prove" it? They will use the Bible. If you go to a Presbyterian seminary, you will find the same thing.

We can learn a tremendous lesson from the primitive church.

There were two churches—the church which was centered in Antioch, and the church which was centered in Jerusalem. They had different doctrines, because the church in Jerusalem consisted of Jews and the church at Antioch was made up largely of Gentiles.

The Jerusalem church believed in circumcision, keeping the law of Moses, worshiping in the temple, observing all the feasts of Israel, and living according to the customs and traditions of the Israelite law and culture. They even offered sacrifices in the temple! Actually, you remember that when Paul visited Jerusalem he shaved his head and sacrificed in the temple like any other Jew.

The only difference between the Jews in the church and all the other Jews was that the apostles and their disciples believed in Jesus Christ. And that was what saved them. They were correct Jews, plus they also believed in Christ. They were just like the other Jews except for the change in their attitude toward Christ. They said, "He is more than a prophet, He is the Son of God."

Now the church at Antioch was a very different church. Because they were Gentiles, they had no idea who Moses was. They knew nothing about the law or circumcision. Paul brought them to know Christ, not the Jewish religion.

Paul went into the wilderness following his conversion. He didn't begin to preach his Gospel to the Gentiles the day he was converted. He testified for a short time to Jews that Jesus is the Christ, but then went apart into a solitary place.

There were many years of darkness in his life when we don't know what happened to him. He was alone, perhaps ten years. During this time, God was at work on his mind. When he reappeared, he came with the understanding that the Gentiles could be wholly saved without accepting the Jewish system.

So he went to them and preached Christ crucified. That's all! They were Gentiles, fully saved, simply because they believed in Christ as their Savior and their life.

Christ is the reason they were saved, not Christ plus circumcision or any part of the law. Just Christ.

Problems came when some Jews went to visit the Gentile churches. The Jewish brethren believed that if these Gentile people had really received the Spirit, surely they would be circumcised and obedient to the law. They took it for granted that Paul had taught them all about the customs of Moses.

Consider what difficulties would have resulted if Paul had gone to the Gentile world and made them all first become Jews before they could receive Christ. What a task! That would have meant resting on entirely different days, eating different foods—living like Jews.

When a group arrived in Antioch to visit the church there, the Spirit was the same. There was the same love, joy, peace—the life was identical. They received the visitors from Jerusalem and held a great service of praise. They praised the Lord and sang in the Spirit, prophesied, and spoke in tongues. It was wonderful for Jews and Gentiles to worship

together!

After the service the pastor said, "We can't let these brothers from Jerusalem stay in the Holiday Inn when we have lovely homes they could stay in."

So the Jewish believers were taken to the homes of the Gentile believers. Next morning the Gentiles said to their Jewish guests, "Listen, brothers. What would you like to eat? Would you like ham and eggs?"

"What?"

"Or perhaps you would prefer bacon?"

"What???"

"I said, 'Ham and eggs, or bacon and eggs?' "

"But that's unclean!"

"No, we are clean people. Come to the kitchen and see for yourself "

"No, no. I mean that ham is something Moses prohibited us from eating. He told us not to eat pork, ham or bacon. They are unclean."

"Moses? Who is Moses? He's never been to our church. We don't know that preacher."

"How ignorant! Don't tell me you don't know who Moses is? Why, surely you have been circumcised?"

"Circumcised? What is that?"

"Circumcision! Don't you know what circumcision is?"

"We never heard about circumcision. But if you want it for breakfast we can go to the supermarket to see if they have some."

"No, no. Circumcision isn't a breakfast food!"

"Circumcision is what Abraham taught us to do. He circumcised Isaac his son, and Moses made it a central point of the law."

"Abraham? You are lucky in Jerusalem; you have all the preachers! Abraham has never been here."

What confusion! There was so much confusion that they had to have a general council in Jerusalem to settle the issue. Paul and several others had to journey all the way back to

Jerusalem from Asia to sort the problem out.

But we have a similar problem today. Some people say to me, "Is it true that Catholics have received the Holy Spirit?"

"Yes," I tell them, "many of them have become open to the Spirit."

"Wonderful. So they don't believe in the Virgin Mary or in the Pope any more?"

"Many of them believe in the Virgin as always, and in the Pope also."

"Oh, then it cannot be the Holy Spirit!"

"God knows their hearts—not you or I."

There are things which are essential and things which are not. The Christians from Jerusalem thought that because the Gentiles had received the Holy Spirit, they were now Jews. But Paul had learned what counts, and he had taught only Christ to the Gentiles.

We need to cleanse our message of salvation, freeing it from our doctrinal biases, if we ever are going to win the world. How can we convince people when the message we preach is different from church to church?

In one church you have to accept Christ plus the pipe organ, the hymn book, the liturgy, and the church board. If you go to a different church, you have to accept a set of doctrines, a different rite of baptism, and a different type of government.

If you are saved in a Baptist church, you have to accept democracy. If you are saved in an Episcopal church, you have to accept the bishop. If you are saved in a discipleship group, you have to accept submission and authority. Depending on the group, you have to accept Christ plus a system.

I believe that the essential is Christ in us. He is the One who is important. He in us is our only hope of glory.

Now, you and I cannot get all the churches together in unity, but we can bring an increasing consciousness of the hor-

rendous situation in which we find ourselves.

I would like to suggest two things which every one of us can do to help end our divisions.

First, read what James says in the third chapter of his letter, verse 14.

"But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace."

There are two kinds of wisdom.

There is the wisdom that is earthly, unspiritual, demonic—the wisdom that appears so "right," but which causes strife and division.

Then there is the wisdom which comes from heaven—pure, loving, peacemaking, considerate, submissive, full of mercy, impartial and sincere.

Which is the wisdom you have? The one which causes divisions, or the one which produces peace?

So I suggest, first of all, that we never speak against any other group again. Never again! Say, "Lord, I will not open this mouth of mine to speak against any other church." If we cannot have an active part in bringing about unity, we can certainly play a passive role by shutting our mouths. This will foster peace.

Second, let us love those who do not think as we do. We know that they love Christ—and it is not a question of whether they love us, but of whether they love Christ. I do not travel around the world to try to get people to love me, but to get them to love the Lord. So if you love Him, you are my brother. We are one in Christ.

Let us consider our different religious denominations as if they did not exist. Go to the Baptist convention, or to the Assemblies convention, if you have opportunity, as if there were no differences. Go to your own fellowship and be faithful to it, but ignore the divisive elements. For you and me, they are not there. They are there for those who practice the false wisdom, but not for us; so we can ignore them.

Once I was taken to a beautiful Baptist church. They didn't say "praise the Lord" there, but I was able to enjoy their wonderful building.

When I hear that the Catholics are building a new building I say, "Wonderful, praise the Lord! *We* have another building."

Paul said that the whole world is ours. Whether it is Paul, Peter, Apollos—all are ours. If you choose Paul, you have only the one person. If you don't choose one, you have all of them. Do you understand? If you choose, you have only the Presbyterians or the Baptists. If you don't choose, they are all yours. You can learn from the rich heritage in each of them ignoring the divisions.

But you say, "How can I accept someone when I believe that his doctrines are completely wrong?"

Our problem is that our basis for acceptance is wrong. It is the same basis the world has, whereas it ought to be the same basis that God has for accepting us.

Does God accept us because we are nice, because we have good character, or because we are extroverted? Does He accept us because we have what we believe are the right doctrines? Does He accept us because we do all kinds of good works?

No, He accepts us because of the blood of Christ.

When we get to heaven the song will not be, "We are up here because we believe in the millennium, and we have the right theology on the Trinity." It is going to be, "We are here because of the blood of the Lamb." He is going to be the One we will glory in, not the theology which defined the doctrines.

We are going to spend eternity with God because of the blood of Jesus, not because of the theology of Luther, Calvin, or Wesley; not because of what was taught in Princeton, Dallas, or Pasadena.

If God accepts me because of the blood of Jesus, who are you to look at me on another basis, in the manner the world does? If you love those who love you, and whom you agree with, are you any different from the world?

God loves me because my sins, my mistakes, my errors, my failings have all been forgiven through the blood of Jesus. So I love you because your sins and faults have been forgiven also.

I once heard a tremendous sermon on how the righteousness of God covers us like a new coat. But I wonder how it can be that God sees us in that coat, yet we cannot see each other in it? If the coat is good enough for God, how come it is not good enough for us?

I see you dressed in the righteousness of God. Now, put that coat over the dress of your denomination. Put God's uniform on. Because at the marriage supper of the Lamb, He provides the wedding garments—we don't bring our own. And He isn't going to ask, "How many are from this denomination, and how many are from that denomination?" He isn't interested in our denominational dress, just in the dress He gives us.

In the parable Jesus told about a king who made a great feast for the wedding of his son, those who were invited wouldn't come. So the king became angry and said, "Kill them all!" Then he said, "The feast is ready. The meat is all succulently roasted. The Coca Cola is chilled. Go and invite everybody—the sick, the lame, the beggars, anyone who will come."

So the servants went out and they saw a beggar. "Hey, you, the king has invited you to the wedding of his son."

"The king? Invited me? You're crazy."

"Yes, you. You are invited."

Everybody was invited. They couldn't believe it, but they

decided to come anyway. One young man was different.

"Has the king invited me?"

"Yes, you too."

"Ah, I always believed I was somebody," he said to himself. So he went to his house and found the best suit he had, ironed it, combed his hair, and doused himself with Brute. But when he arrived at the wedding and was about to enter they said, "Wait a minute. Where are you going?"

"I'm going to the wedding."

"But you have to go to that room over there to receive the dress the king has provided you with for the wedding."

"I don't need any dress. I have my own suit on."

"I am sorry, but this kind of wedding you have to have the garment prepared by the king."

"These are my very best clothes, and they are better than anyone else's. I'll wear what I am wearing now."

So he went in, and he saw that everyone was dressed in fine linen, and beautiful brocade. His clothes looked like filthy rags by comparison. He felt a mess.

"This is horrible! What shall I do?"

He tried to hide himself, but that was impossible. He stood out like a sore thumb, and you know, he was thrown out.

Which dress do you have on?

Be careful—you had better take the dress the king provides. It is the righteousness of Jesus Christ that counts, not your doctrines or the name of your denomination. We are righteous not because of ourselves, not because we belong to a particular denomination, but solely because of the blood of Jesus.

"Forgive us our trespasses," we pray, "as we forgive those who trespass against us."

We are forgiven on the same basis that we are to forgive. And what is that basis? The blood of the Lamb. We are forgiven because of Jesus' shed blood. And we forgive others because they also are under the blood.

The Father accepts me because of the blood of Jesus, through grace.

It has nothing to do with what I do or what I think. He has forgiven me because of Jesus. And you have to accept me for the same reason. This means that you forgive me all my wrong doctrines, and I forgive you. I forgive you if you are an Episcopalian, a Baptist, or a Lutheran. You are forgiven, as I am!

When Jesus comes to church—when He is the focus of our attention—we cannot help but love each other and accept each other.

Division and disunity are the result of adding something to just simply faith in Jesus. But when He is the center of our lives, we will be one church as He intended. And the world will see, by our love for one another, that Jesus really is alive today.