

"Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other" 1 Corinthians 4:6.

Corinth Was Guilty

One of the many problems in the church at Corinth was their penchant of *following after men* who pretended that they were something or somebody. Some followed "Paul," "Apollos," or "Cephas" -- names substituted for the real trouble-makers.

The inspired reasoning Paul gave was quite simple: *"For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?"* (v. 7). No matter which spiritual teacher one chose, that teacher learned what he knew from another! I have met some preachers and teachers who *seemed to suggest* that all their material was original with them! God says that such is impossible.

"For who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has become His counselor? Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him?" (Rom. 11:34-35). Only God is the Original Thinker!

But that doesn't seem to stop some people. I have observed that some are *most impressed* with the **most arrogant** among us. Those who seem to be something, when they are nothing (Gal. 6:3), try to become leaders of a group, whether small or large. And those who need to be close to *greatness(?)* are eager to follow. Unfortunately, the results can often be disastrous. Read the story of Jotham in response to learning that the men of Shechem chose Abimelech to be king over them, Judges 9. He called Abimelech a *"bramble bush"* among the trees! Some men try to become leaders when in reality they have no appreciable ability to do so.

In The Church

God warned the Ephesian elders through Paul that a future apostasy would take place from within the eldership: *"...from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves"* (Acts 20:30). Ah, the bramble bush effect strikes again.

In studying church history recently, I came across this statement:

"It was not long, however, until the warning given through the Holy Spirit against departure through the exaltation of men became a reality. The Apostle John referred to Diotrephes who loved to have the preeminence among the brethren and said that he worked with such high handed methods that he would not even receive the Apostle John (3 Jno. 3).

"The student of church history is immediately impressed with the growth of heresy during the second century. ..." [F.W. Mattox, *The Eternal Kingdom*, p. 55].

This seems to be a recurring problem down through religious history. A bramble bush arises, speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after him. Or worse yet, an otherwise well-intentioned reformer gains a following while denouncing the very following!

Galatians 5

Among the works of the flesh that contribute to trouble in the church are *"hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies"* (Gal. 5:20). You see, brethren can begin to hate one another, become contentious and jealous, and burst forth in anger leading to division within a congregation. Those who are selfishly ambitious create divisions based upon pretentious differences (heresies), and lead a group off after themselves. It has happened over and over again. **May it not be so with us!** Remember, brethren, there are no *guiltless* church dividers! God hates division and those who contribute to it. The denominational landscape is testimony to the divisions and strifes caused in the past by just such behavior.

The lesson? Follow God by asking for Book, Chapter, and Verse for everything taught (Acts 17:11).