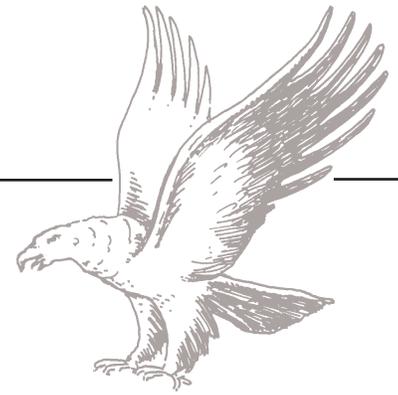


# Wings

*“Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;  
they shall mount up with wings like eagles.”  
Isaiah 40:31*



November 16, 2014

## There Must Be Factions

As tragic as division may be among God's people, there is one thing that is worse: remaining united in the embrace of flagrant evil. We must train ourselves to know the difference.

*“For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it. For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you” (1 Cor. 11:18-19).*



The church in Corinth was Paul's problem child. The unique blend of pagan excess and Jewish scruples that formed the background of this group created a toxic environment for the gospel to grow in. Paul had to spend an inordinate amount of time with this church just to keep them from tearing themselves apart.

*Division* is a major theme in Paul's epistles to this church. They were idolizing preachers—Paul, Apollos, Peter, Jesus—whom they perceived (incorrectly) to be in competition against each other (ch. 1-4). There were conflicts about marriage (ch. 7), the Lord's Supper (ch. 11), the proper use of spiritual gifts (ch. 14), and the resurrection (ch. 15). They were even taking each other to courts of law over personal

offenses (ch. 6). The church at Corinth was a train wreck that tarnished the gospel they claimed to represent.

Paul's challenge, of course, was to get all these people on the same page. They had to learn how to “speak the same thing” (1:10). Consequently, much of what he wrote in this epistle (and in Second Corinthians) was intended to straighten out their thinking on these and other issues.

Paul was not demanding that they march in lockstep on every detail. His approach to the question of meats sacrificed to idols (ch. 8-10), for example, allowed for some diversity in matters of private conscience. But even there, unity was predicated on a common understanding of some key principles of truth.

If the Corinthians could embrace Paul's instructions on these matters, they could be a united people. But this is not a perfect world, and Paul realized that some would never come around. So in verse 19 of our text, he acknowledged an unfortunate reality: “There must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among

you.” Not everyone would accept Paul's teaching; those who persisted in their defiance would widen the gulf between themselves and the faithful; in time, a complete rupture would be the unavoidable outcome.

In fact, Paul specifically invoked that solution in one outrageous case: the man who took his father's wife (ch. 5). It was a moral outrage that scandalized even the Gentiles. If the Corinthians wished to maintain their identity as the people of God, they had no choice: they had to remove the evil person from their midst (v. 11-13); they *had* to divide. There was no other way for “those who are approved” to be recognized as the people of God, upholding a high standard of conduct.

In our quest for unity today, this principle bears repeating: God desires that we be united, but never at the expense of righteousness. Unity merely for unity's sake is ultimately meaningless. It stands for nothing and allows everything, rendering us irrelevant in God's mission to bring the human race to a better place.

— David King