

Sunday, August 13, 2017—I Corinthians 11:17-19 The Anatomy of Heresy

Introduction

- Two weeks ago, we finished our consideration of I Corinthians 11:1-16, by looking at verses 13 through 16. In doing so we arrived at the following conclusions:
 - The head covering view as well as the temple prostitution view are both incorrect.
 - Paul appeals to nature for the purpose of arguing that men and woman should look, act, and function according to their given sex.
 - I Corinthians 6:9—prior to their salvation some of the Corinthians used to be living an “effeminate” lifestyle.
 - In the context, failing to do so would create problems within the local church in terms of the headships identified in verse 3.
 - II Timothy 2:24-26—we need to follow Paul’s example in terms of who to deal with people who might be involved in this lifestyle.
- This morning I want to move through the chapter by considering verses 17 through 19 and the topic of heresy.

I Corinthians 11:17

- **Now in this that I declare *unto you* I praise *you not*, that ye come together not for the better, but for the worse.**
- The first thing to note about verse 17 is that it marks the beginning of a new paragraph that runs through the end of verse 22.
- *Now in this that I declare unto you I praise you not*—the verbs “declare” and “praise” found in first part of verse 17 are in the present tense and the active voice. This means that Paul is in the process of declaring something unto the Corinthians for which he **is not** praising them. In other words, Paul is declaring unto the Corinthians that he is not pleased with their conduct.
- *that ye come together not for the better, but for the worse*—Paul’s declaration is that when the Corinthians were “come together” it was “not for the better, but for the worse.” Put another way, their conduct was so bad that it possibly would have been better if they hadn’t come together at all.

- I Corinthians 11:1-2—this follows for the context we have studied thus far. Paul can't praise the Corinthians in verse 17 because they hadn't been following the "ordinances" as Paul delivered them back in verse 2.

I Corinthians 11:18

- **For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it.**
- The phrase "when ye come together in the church" makes it clear that Paul is talking about their coming together in the local church in verse 17. When they were "come together in the church" it was "not for the better but for the worse."
- The first problem was that there were division among them. Recall from previous studies that Paul began the book by talking about the divisive spirit.
 - I Corinthians 1:10-12—the bulk of chapters 1 through 4 deals with the divisive nature and conduct of the Corinthians.

I Corinthians 11:19

- **For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.**
- A second problem that Paul identifies is the issue of heresies among the Corinthians. It should come as no surprise that if there are "divisions" among the Corinthians that there would also be "heresies" because heresy causes division.
- Paul seems to be going a step further in verse 19. He says that "there must be heresies among you." Why must there be "heresies" among the Corinthians. For the purpose and intent ("that") of manifesting those who are "approved" in the local church.
- Paul is saying therefore that heresy is not an uncommon thing. Not only is it not an uncommon thing it is a useful thing in manifesting who is approved and who is not.
- Because this verse challenges the way that most of us naturally think about heresy it is important that we take some time to study the concept. We need to gain a Biblical understanding of the nature of heresy.
- This morning we want to consider the following aspects of what I am going to call The Anatomy of Heresy.

- Biblical definition of heresy
- Heresy as a work of the flesh
- Why must there be heresy among us?

Biblical Definition of Heresy

- Titus 3:10—according to *Strong's Concordance*, a heretic is defined as one who is schismatic, factious, or a follower of a false doctrine.
- *Webster's 1828 Dictionary* defines someone who is factious as being:
 - Given to faction; addicted to form parties and raise dissensions, in opposition to government; turbulent; prone to clamor against public measures of men. No state is free from factious citizens.
 - Pertaining to faction; proceeding from faction; as factious tumults; factious quarrels.
- There are fundamentally two issues here the warrant further investigation: 1) heretics follow and believe false doctrines, 2) they seek to create factions around their false beliefs.
- Galatians 5:19-21—the scary reality regarding heresy is that all heresies stem from the work of the flesh.
- *Strong's Concordance* offers the following definition of the Greek word translated heresies in Galatians 5:20: “a body of men following their own tenets, or dissensions arising from diversity of opinions and aims.”
- The Greek word “*hairesis*” is found nine times in nine verses in the King James Bible, of which five times it is rendered “sect” in English:
 - Acts 5:17—“sect of the Sadducees”
 - Acts 15:5—“sect of the Pharisees”
 - Acts 24:5—“sect of the Nazarenes”
 - Acts 26:5—“sect of our religion”
 - Acts 28:22—“concerning this sect”
- The word “sect,” according to *Webster's 1828 Dictionary*, carries the following meaning:
 - A body or number of persons united in tenets, chiefly in philosophy or religion, but constituting a distinct party by holding sentiments different from those of other men. Most *sects* have originated in a particular purloin, who taught and propagated some peculiar notions in philosophy or religion, and who is considered to have been its founder. Among the Jews, the principal *sects* were the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes. In Greece were the Cynic *sect*, founded by Antisthenes;

and the Academic *sect*, by Plato. The Academic *sect* gave birth to the Peripatetic, and a Cynic to the Stoic.

- In addition, to its usage in Galatians 5:21, the remaining three occurrences of the Greek word “*haireisis*” are translated as heresies or heresy by the King James translators:
 - Acts 24:14—“heresy”
 - I Corinthians 11:19—“heresies”
 - II Peter 2:1—“heresies”
- Heresy, according to *Webster’s 1828 Dictionary*, is “a fundamental error in religion, or an error of opinion respecting some fundamental doctrine of religion.”
- Consequently, according to the Bible, fundamental errors in religious thought or belief (heresies) lead to the establishment of sects which are characterized by shared tenants of false doctrine. As a result, it seems to follow that heresies are the intellectual foundation for sects.
- The sect of the Sadducees identified in Acts 5:17 stands out as a clear Biblical example of the connection between heresies and sects. It has often been said that the Sadducees were “sad you see” because they denied the resurrection of the dead.
 - Luke 20:27
- The heretical beliefs of the Sadducees centered on their denial of resurrection. This constitutes their fundamental error in religious belief and doctrine. Unfortunately, this error was widespread as there was an entire faction or sect within Israel’s leadership that held this heretical view.

Heresy: The Work of the Flesh

- Galatians 5:20—since all heresies are the work of the flesh according to Paul, it is imperative to realize that pride or the possibility of self-advancement motivates those who hold spurious doctrines to promote their views in an attempt to draw away disciples unto themselves, thereby forming sects.
- Acts 20:28-30—this pattern mirrors Paul’s warning to the Ephesian elders.
 - Verse 29—Paul warns of outsiders seeking to enter into their midst with the objective of sowing discord and confusion amongst the brethren, i.e., the Judaizers.
 - Verse 30—he warns about men from within their own assembly that would arise speaking untruth in an attempt to create their own personal following.
- Galatians 4:17—it seems that the fleshly desire for disciples is one of the main motivators for those who would teach heresy.

- So, what makes someone a heretic?
 - First, they hold some doctrinal belief or position that is contrary to the clear teachings of God’s Word rightly divided.
 - Second, they actively promote their false beliefs with the goal of establishing followers.

Why Must There Be Heresies Among Us?

- Having its root in our natural flesh programming, heresy has the potential to be just as common as hatred, strife, wrath, or envy in the believer’s life. Consequently, heresy is not something that we should view as a rarity. In contrast, we should acknowledge heresy as an ever-present threat to any community of believers.
- I Corinthians 11:19—not only does Paul speak to the common frequency of heresies within their assembly, he also teaches that their very presence would be an opportunity for the Corinthians to see who was approved and who was not. We learn two things from this verse.
 - First, heresy, as a work of the flesh, would be both common and necessary.
 - Second, the reason heresies are necessary is because without them it is difficult for believers to know who is approved and who is not.
- Moreover, it is interesting to connect the word “approved” in I Corinthians 11:19 with the word “approved” in II Timothy 2:15. This connection between heresy and who the approved of God are must not be overlooked.
- By comparing I Corinthians 11:19 with II Timothy 2:15, a third conclusion about the anatomy of heresy emerges.
 - The approved of God are those who rightly divide the Word of truth and are thereby able to answer the heretical teaching. Therefore, heresy in Paul’s view is any doctrine that is contrary to the Word rightly divided.
- II Timothy 2:16-18—contains all the components of heresy we have been discussing:
 - Verse 16—Timothy is given the same instructions that the Ephesians elders were in Acts 20, namely, not to listen to those speaking profane, vain, or perverse things.
 - Verse 17—Paul identifies Hymenaeus and Philetus as the source of these profane and vain babblings and compares the effect of their teaching to that of a canker, i.e., a virulent, corroding ulcer; or anything that corrodes, corrupts or destroys.

- Verse 18—these men were teaching that “the resurrection is past already.” Herein we see the first component of heresy according to our working definition, the false belief that the resurrection had already occurred. Furthermore, it is clear that these men fulfill the second part of our definition by seeking to draw away disciples after themselves. This is obvious because they publicly promoted their error to the extent that they overthrew the faith of some.
- How does one combat destructive doctrinal errors of this nature? The answer is clear, by rightly dividing the Word of truth. Who rightly divides the Word of truth? Approved workmen who need not to be ashamed. Why must there be heresies according to I Corinthians 11:19? So that “they who are approved might be made manifest”. Once again, Paul’s definition of heresy is any doctrine that subverts the Word of God rightly divided.