

# Divisions

by Chuck Smith

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of standing firm against false teaching and doctrine, and the need for unity in the body of Christ.*

**Duration:** 41:17

**Scripture:** Proverbs 6:16, 1 Corinthians 1:10, Galatians 2:5

**Topics:** "Divisions"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares an anecdote about encountering a group of individuals who were causing division within a gathering of young people. He emphasizes the danger and displeasure that God has towards those who sow discord among brethren. Quoting from Proverbs 6:16-19, the speaker highlights the seven things that the Lord hates, including those who sow discord. The sermon concludes with a call for unity among believers and a warning against those who bring division into the body of Christ.

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## Transcript

Let's turn now to the 15th chapter of the Book of Acts. In our last lesson, we saw how that certain of the Judaizers, and that was the name that was given to the Jews who had embraced Jesus Christ as their Savior, but were still holding on to their Jewish roots, still holding on to the Jewish traditions, still holding on to the belief that in order to be saved, you had to become a Jew, that salvation was for the Jews only. And they had come to the church in Antioch, which was a mixed church.

It had Gentile believers worshiping together with Jewish believers, but it had become a predominantly Gentile church. Paul was one of the teachers of this church in Antioch, and Paul's ministry was to the Gentiles. And God had given to Paul the wonderful truth of salvation through faith and of the grace of God.

And so, there were certain of these men who were from the church in Jerusalem that were Judaizers, who believed that you had to become a Jew in order to be saved. And they heard about the church in Antioch, and of the many Gentile believers there. And so, they came up, Paul said privately to spy out the liberty that they had in Christ Jesus.

And they began to teach them that in order for the Gentiles to be saved, they had to keep the law of Moses and be circumcised. They were trying to put the Gentile believers under the Jewish traditions, a tendency to put them back under the law. And to make them feel that somehow it was important for them

to keep kosher in order to be saved.

And the belief that those who would keep kosher were actually more spiritual than those that did not keep kosher. As far as their dietary habits and so forth, they were teaching that you had to follow the Mosaic law. And so, they were creating really a division in the body of Christ there in Antioch.

Paul wrote to the Romans in chapter 16, verse 17, Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses that are contrary to the doctrine which you have learned, and avoid them. Those that come in with strange doctrines. Those who believe that they have the truth and it is important that they share that truth with you in order that you might be saved.

Jesus said it's impossible to avoid offenses, but woe unto that one through whom the offenses come. And so, those that would cause division in the body of Christ, we are told to mark them. It would seem like Satan is constantly trying to bring division.

And history shows that he's been pretty successful at it. The church has been fractured into so many different segments. And it doesn't take much to get another splinter group that breaks off.

And so, Paul is warning against those that would cause division. They should be marked. Jesus is saying woe to them.

Writing to the Corinthians, Paul said, Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. Now, there will always, I'm certain, be differences in the way we look at a particular scripture. I don't expect you to agree with me in everything that I teach.

I would encourage you to be like the Bereans. If something is said and you find it rather questionable, then go and search the scriptures to see if these things be so. There are certain issues that you cannot, however, compromise on.

And that is where the big mistake has come, in the compromise on some of the basic foundational issues of doctrine. And there can be no compromise there. On the person and the work of Jesus Christ, you cannot compromise.

And, but yet, there is, I think, a disagreeing agreeably. In other words, if you want to take a different view of a particular scripture, fine. I can accept that.

There are many passages of scripture that are open to interpretation, and sometimes you can find two or three different interpretations for that particular scripture. And as I read the various commentators, and I get from the commentators sometimes two or three different views of the scripture, and each one is promoting his own view and sort of putting down the other view. Sometimes I can see the merit of the argument of all of the views, and I can see difficulties with all of the views.

And so you ask me, well, what do I believe? Well, I don't know. I can see the merit of one. For instance, the age of the earth.

How old is the earth? Is it a young earth? And there are many who do teach and believe that the Bible teaches a young earth. And yet there are others who are just as certain that the Bible teaches that the

earth is perhaps millions of years old, or billions of years old as the case of some. There are some who see that there is a gap of time between verses one and two in Genesis, and thus they see the opening for a old universe rather than just a young universe.

And I can see the arguments on both sides. I can understand that when God created Adam, that Adam wasn't just an infant, but he was no doubt a full-grown man. He had teeth, he had muscles and so forth as a full-grown man.

So God created him with what you might say age-dating factors. Looking at Adam, you might say, well, he must be about 30 years old, but yet he was just a day old. God created him with age-dating factors.

So the argument goes, God created the earth with age-dating factors. Could be, I don't know. I wasn't there.

And so it could be that it is just a young earth. On the other hand, I have difficulty with that because Adam could not have been in the garden very long before Satan came and tempted Eve to eat of the forbidden fruit. And it does seem that Satan existed for quite some time before God created the earth for man's habitation, so that Satan had already fallen.

So surely he was created back before the earth. And the scripture that they use so often as a proof scripture for the young earth, for in six days God created the heavens and the earth and all that was in them. That would include the angels.

But it would seem that angels have pre-existed longer than that. So I see problems there. And I see problems with the old earth.

So I'm not really, well, what do you believe? Well, I don't know. I just can see both sides and it really doesn't matter to me. It isn't an issue to split over and say, well, all of those in the young earth, follow me.

And you that believe in the old earth, follow them. It's one of those things that issues like that where it is an open thing. I don't think that it's necessary to have a complete unanimity of belief.

Paul, in writing to the Ephesians in chapter four, spoke about the unity of the faith. Well, he talked in the early part, he talks about the unity of the spirit. And that's the most important thing.

And then further down, he talks about the unity of the faith. But having a unity of the spirit is more important than the unity of the faith. Except, as I say, in the major doctrinal issues that involve Jesus Christ, His deity, His death on the cross to atone for our sins, His virgin birth, His resurrection, these are non-negotiables.

Because upon these is our salvation dependent. So Paul said to the Corinthians, For it has been declared unto me of you, my brethren, and by them which are of the house of Cloy, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you are saying, I'm of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Peter, and I of Christ.

Paul asks, Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? And he told them that these kinds of divisions were a sign of their carnality. And so in chapter 3, verse 3, For you are yet carnal, whereas there is among you envying, strife, divisions. Are you not carnal and walking as men? So these who had come from Jerusalem were striking at some of the basic issues as far as

righteousness is concerned.

Do I have a righteous standing before God because of my keeping the law? Or is my righteous standing before God predicated upon my faith in Jesus Christ? Was the work of Jesus Christ on my behalf complete? Is my salvation complete in Him? Or must I also, beside believing in Jesus Christ, keep the Mosaic Law? These that had come from Jerusalem were actually preaching a gospel of works, that it was necessary to be circumcised and to keep the Mosaic Law to be saved. Writing to the Galatians, Paul said, I marvel that you are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ to another gospel, which he says is not another. That is, it isn't good news.

But there are some that trouble you and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we or an angel of heaven preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.

And so Paul is actually asking those that would come and create division and preach another gospel, a gospel that is dependent upon works rather than the faith in Jesus Christ. Paul said, let them be accursed. So we read here that when therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and the certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and the elders about this question.

Can't just let this thing go by. This is an important issue. It needs to be settled for the church once and for all.

Let's go to Jerusalem. Let's meet with the apostles. Let's call a church council and we will determine then the relationship that the Gentile believer should have to the law of Moses.

Now Paul wrote to the Galatians about this trip that we read about here in chapter 15. He has told them in chapter 1 concerning his first visit to Jerusalem after his conversion and how he was there just a short time, met with Peter and with James, but didn't really meet the others. But then 14 years later after his first visit to the church, he said, I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas and we took Titus with us also.

Now Titus is the one that Paul wrote the book of Titus to. And he said, I went up by revelation and I communicated to them the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles. Paul was sharing with them that gospel that he preached, which was the gospel of God's grace and salvation through faith in Jesus Christ apart from the works of the law.

Lest, he said, by any means I should run or had run in vain. But Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was not compelled to be circumcised. And he declares the reason that he went up to Jerusalem was because false brethren who had come in unaware to privately spy out our liberty, which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage.

Now it is interesting as we get down in chapter 15, just a little ways, as Peter is speaking in favor of Paul and the gospel that Paul was preaching, that is to not put the Gentiles under the Mosaic law. Peter told of how God had called him to the Gentiles. And Peter said, why should we put them under a yoke of bondage, referring to the Mosaic law, that neither we nor our fathers were able to bear? So here Paul speaks of these men who sought to bring them into bondage.

And Paul said, to whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you. Here were men bringing division into the body of Christ. It's a dangerous thing to bring division to the body of Christ.

God hates the man who does. In Proverbs 6, 16, we read six things the Lord hates. Yes, seven are an abomination unto him, a proud look, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked imaginations, feet that are swift in running to mischief, a false witness that speaks lies, and he that sows discord among brethren.

God hates the person who sows discord among brethren. Paul had much to say about these individuals. To the Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians 3, 6, he said, now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw yourself from every brother that walks disorderly, and not after the tradition that you have received from us.

And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he might be ashamed. And yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother. To Timothy, Paul wrote, if any man teaches otherwise, and consents not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the doctrine which is according to godliness, he is proud, he knows nothing, but he's doting about questions and striving over words.

From this comes envy, strife, railings, and evil surmisings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, who are destitute of the truth, teaching that gain is a sign of godliness, from such withdraw thyself. And in his second letter to Timothy said, for though they have a form of godliness, they deny the power, and from such turn away. Paul told Timothy, to avoid foolish and unlearned questions, knowing that they only gender strife.

There are many times when a person comes up, and they ask a question, not because they are looking for an answer, but because they are looking for an argument. And thus, I call them dishonest questions. Because they are not really wanting an answer, they want to dispute the answer that you give to them.

And so, often, people come up and say, why don't you baptize people immediately upon their receiving Jesus Christ? Now they don't really want an answer to that. They want an argument, because they believe that you're not really saved until you're baptized, in baptismal regeneration. And so, they want you to give some reason to them, so that they can argue with you over that reason.

And thus, Paul says to Timothy, just avoid these questions, knowing that they are only asked for the purpose of gendering strife. To Titus, who was with Paul on this journey, avoid foolish questions and genealogies and contentions and strivings about the law, for they are unprofitable and vain. Really, no profit in arguing over these things.

So, interesting here, we read that Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them. In other words, they had a big argument, a big Donnybrook with these guys. The early church, we have a tendency to sort of romanticize and fantasize, and think that everything was just so wonderful and just, you know, God's presence and power and things were always just so, so perfect, you know.

Oh, if we could only be like the church in Acts. Just so perfect. But in reality, there were problems.

Quite a few problems. And here's a big dispute. Here are these fellows who come from Jerusalem, supposedly with the authority of the church in Jerusalem, saying, now look, you fellows have to be

circumcised and you've got to keep the law of Moses if you're going to be saved.

You're not really saved because you're not circumcised. You're not really saved because you are not keeping the Mosaic law. So, Paul and Barnabas got into a big dispute with them.

Back in the days when there were so many hippies that were coming and being converted every week, just babes in Christ, it was amazing how many people came around with their false teachings to try to take advantage of these young people who were not yet schooled in the Word of God. And to sort of point them off in their directions. You could easily spot them after the services.

They would gather a group of young people around them and they'd be talking a mile a minute. And of course, these beautiful hippies, they would, you know, if a person was saying, praise the Lord and bless God, hallelujah, you know, they were listening to them. And I can remember one night where I saw about three fellows and there was a pretty good sized group of young people around them.

And these guys were just really going at it. And so, I went up and I said, where are you guys from? And they said, oh, bless God, hallelujah, brother. God bless you, hallelujah, bless God.

I said, no, no, where are you from? And they gave me the old bless God bit again. And I said, no, where are you from? What are you trying to tell these kids? And of course, I finally forced it out of them. They were out of the local church.

And they were telling the kids that there was only one true church in every city. And that was the local church. And that if you weren't in the local church, you were in Babylon.

And they had a local church over in Anaheim with Witness Lee. And they were saying, this is the true church, you know. And so then as I got to talking to them, I said, well, now look, there isn't a local church in Santa Ana.

You can be the, I said, wait a minute. Then I would have to say that all of the other churches in Santa Ana are, are Babylon and I'm the only true church. I said, come on, I can't believe that.

There are many wonderful churches in Santa Ana. And we're just a part of the Lord's ministry here. And I ordered them off and not to come back again.

And it was, but it was that way. It was happening a lot. I remember one night there was this older fellow and, and he had a group of kids around him.

And so I was curious. I walked up and I heard him saying, how were you baptized? And the kid said, well, we were baptized at Coronado Mar in the water. No, no, no.

What did they say when they baptized you? And I said, wait a minute. What are you trying to teach these kids? Why are you here? Well, it turned out that he was one of these Jesus only guys. And he was telling them, unless you were baptized in the name of Jesus only, it wasn't a valid baptism.

You have to go be baptized again in the name of Jesus only. I grabbed the guy, and I forcibly pushed him off of the church grounds. And I said, if you ever come back here again, I won't be so kind in getting rid of you the next time.

I felt like a shepherd protecting the little lambs who were about to be devoured by a wolf. God hates this kind of thing. People who will come and seek to bring division within the body of Christ.

Those that would so discord among the brethren. I'm certain that that's exactly how Paul and Barnabas felt when they heard what these guys were preaching. That you Gentiles cannot be saved by just believing in Jesus Christ.

You've got to be circumcised. You've got to start keeping the Mosaic law. The early church was not free from problems.

They had their arguments and their disputes. And even further on in this chapter, we'll find Paul and Barnabas getting into a dispute. And Barnabas, as they decided to go out on a second missionary journey, determined to take with them John Mark, his nephew.

But Paul thought it was not a good idea to take him with them, since he had departed from them in Pamphylia in the first trip. And continued not with them in the work. And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder from one another.

So Barnabas took Mark and he sailed to Cyprus. So it wasn't free from arguments, from disputings, from contention. And Paul, again in his letter to the Galatians, told about a problem he had with Peter.

But when Peter was come to Antioch, Paul said, I withstood him to the face, because he was at fault. For before certain brethren came from James, in the church in Jerusalem, he was eating with the Gentiles. But when they came down, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision.

And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him, insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw that they were not walking uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before them all, if you're a Jew and you're living after the manner of the Gentiles and not as do the Jews, why do you compel the Gentiles to live like the Jews? And we read down in verse 7 of this chapter, and when there had been much disputing, that is they came to Jerusalem with the issue, and there was a big dispute over it. And then we begin to see the resolution of that dispute, how the Holy Spirit interceded, and so should be the case.

Disputes will arise, but then seeking the help and the guidance of the Lord and really submitting to Jesus Christ, these disputes can be resolved. So there was this no small dissension, or there was this big dissension, however you want to put it. And they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question.

It was an important issue. It would determine the direction the church will take in the future. And the outcome of this council was to be very important to the future of the church.

Will the church become just a Jewish sect, or will it become an instrument to the whole world to bring to the world the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And these are the issues that are being settled. This is an important issue.

Had they determined that you had to keep the law and to live under the Mosaic law in order to be saved, we probably would not be here tonight. It would have died as just a Jewish sect. But because of the decisions that were made at this council, and it was determined that we Gentiles are not bound to the Mosaic law for righteousness, but that our righteousness is through our faith in Jesus Christ and God

accounts our faith for righteousness, so the church does exist today.

And we preach the same gospel that Paul preached, the gospel of the grace of God and salvation through faith by grace. And so it was an important vital issue that needed to be settled. And Paul and Barnabas with others from the church in Antioch brought these fellows back to the church in Jerusalem that they might settle this issue once and for all for the church.

And how thankful we are for the way that the Holy Spirit guided the decisions that were made. And it was determined that the Gentiles could be saved without becoming Jews, that salvation through faith would stand. Father, we thank you for the glorious gospel that we have of the finished work of Jesus Christ on our behalf, and that he is our peace, and that our righteousness, Lord, is not of works, lest we should boast, but it is through our faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ.

And Lord, we thank you that we have received the glorious message, and that it is so simple that even a child can receive and understand and be saved. Lord, we do pray for the church. We thank you for what you have done and what you are doing, for the blessedness, Lord, that has been upon us.

And Lord, we realize that because of all that you've done, that we are a prime target for the enemy, but how we thank you for the protection that you've given us, that you are, Lord, our first line of defense, and you've done such a marvelous job. And we thank you, Lord, for the unity of the faith and the unity of the Spirit that we experience here. And Father, we would pray that those who are just seeking to create confusion, those who are trying to draw people after themselves, or some weird concept that they have developed concerning the scriptures, that you would keep the church free from such persons.

And Lord, that we might continue in the wonderful unity that you have given to us. As we walk after the Spirit and are led by the Spirit. Thank you, Lord, for your blessings and for your goodness.

Continue, Lord, your work in our lives and in your church. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Let's stand. The pastors are down here at the front tonight to pray for your needs. As after every service, you have an opportunity to come and to receive prayer for whatever need that you might have tonight.

God is able and our God is sufficient to meet every need. So as soon as we're dismissed, we would encourage you to come forward tonight and if you're in need of prayer, they're here for that very purpose. Lay hands on you.

Pray for you that you might receive the power of the Holy Spirit. Pray for you that you might receive deliverance from some besetting sin. Pray for you that you might experience the riches of God's resources for your needs.

Pray for you for family situations that may be very troubling at this particular point. The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man, we are told, avails much. And so if there are any needs in your life, do come forward and let them pray for you as we're dismissed.

The Lord bless thee and keep thee. The Lord make his face to shine upon thee and be gracious unto thee and be gracious unto thee. The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee and give thee peace.

God bless you.

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