

THE DOCTRINAL CAUSES OF DIVISION IN OUR CHURCHES¹

D. A. Carson

The subject assigned me is unpleasant. I would much prefer to join Paul in Romans 8 and magnify with him the triumphs of Jesus Christ, than to join him with tears in Acts 20 and warn the elders about savage wolves who will not spare the flock, men who will 'arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them'. But though unpleasant, the subject is of particular concern to the Lord Jesus and his apostles. Jesus himself promised, 'I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it' [Matt 16.18]. We are justified in deducing that whatever contributes to divisiveness and dissension in his blood-bought church is of great moment to him; for he spent not a little of his private ministry to his disciples warning them of various divisive and oppressive forces. The value of unity is presupposed by Paul when in Ephesians 4 he insists that Christ has poured out on the church gifts to 'prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fulness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, even Christ'. Elsewhere, Paul instructs Titus, 'But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless. Warn a divisive person once, and then have nothing to do with him. You may be sure that such a man is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned' [Titus 3.9-11]. From such passages as these it is evident that the continued unity of the church is of immense importance to the writers of the New Testament, and that one of the causes of division which concerned them was doctrinal deviation.

My brief in this address is to consider doctrinal causes of division in our churches; but I must hasten to add that I am far from suggesting these are the *only* causes of division. To our shame, divisions often spring from petty rivalries, ministerial jealousy, rigid traditionalism no longer shaped by Scripture, innovative cleverness under the control of a

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charismatic authority figure, prayerlessness, pride, and much more. In any particular case, many contributing factors may be offered. But the doctrinal causes are sufficiently distinctive that they are worthy of separate treatment, as long as it is remembered that in practice they seldom occur by themselves.

As the subject is unpleasant, so also is it complex; and it is the more difficult because of three factors:

(1) We who are gathered here are a very diverse group. We represent several continents, thirteen countries and numerous denominational affiliations. Our experiences of the causes of doctrinal divisions which have troubled churches vary enormously; and therefore the biblical passages most pertinent to our individual situations may not be as immediately relevant in other situations. Some of us have witnessed or experienced divisions over the so-called charismatic movement, others over baptism, others over church polity, others over eschatological structures, still others over the formulation of the relationship between law and gospel. The latter topic is currently taking on a multiplicity of forms. It embraces not only the older competing systems – covenant theology versus dispensationalism – but also theonomy, and, in Reformed circles, it is now raising the question of the relationship between Sabbath and Sunday. At the risk of over simplification, some put the question thus: Do we follow the continental reformers, or the Westminster divines?

Truth is doubtless one; but lies are many. From God's perspective, orthodoxy is certainly one; but heterodoxies are many. Even among believers, the formulation of orthodoxy has on occasion developed along slightly divergent lines. Our perceptions of the most pressing doctrinal dangers will correspondingly vary according to our assigned place in God's vineyard.

(2) In the title of this address, it is not entirely clear how far the words 'our churches' extend. We might, for instance, limit ourselves to considering only the local churches over which the Lord has made us overseers. But many of us have faced the problem of division from an angle other than the pastoral, viz. whether we ourselves should withdraw from local churches where the gospel was seldom if ever heard, or where the doctrines of grace were never heard. Again, whether as pastors or not, some of us have had to make decisions about whether to withdraw our local church from the denomination to which it had traditionally belonged. In such cases, the shoe is on the other foot: instead of attempting to prevent division in our churches, or instead of healing it, we ourselves may be causing it, indeed justifying it.

The chief reason why such differences in perspective make the topic

so difficult is that the Scriptures present us with double ideals on this matter, and we sometimes find it hard to achieve this double fidelity simultaneously. On the one hand, the Bible repeatedly insists on the uncompromising and non-negotiable nature of truth; and on the other hand, it greatly emphasizes the unity of the church. In this fallen and twisted world, at what point are we justified in damaging the one by insisting on the other?

(3) History teaches us humility in these matters, along three fronts:

(a) Some differences of doctrinal conviction among true believers run very deep, and are unlikely to be changed by one brief address! It is unlikely, for instance, that those among us of baptistic persuasion are likely to recognize their putative failure to grasp the full implications of the unity of the covenant and become paedobaptists overnight; and it is equally unlikely that the paedobaptists among us will suddenly become convinced that their reformation did not go far enough, and rush out to their baptistic brothers and ask to be immersed. The theological structures and historical intricacies are too complex to admit such easy answers. But at least we may learn to walk softly when we approach this difficult question of the doctrinal causes of division in our churches.

(b) In the same vein, some doctrinal allegiances are functions of peculiar historical circumstances which in their own day were serious enough to prompt division (justified or otherwise), but which today are judged to be of peripheral importance. In our own historical setting, the areas of crucial theological engagement have moved to some new front; issues which once sparked massive division now seem relatively less problematic. We need look no further than this Banner of Truth Conference. In *our* setting, the defence and promulgation of the doctrines of grace have brought together men whose views on baptism and church polity would not have permitted them, in *another* age, to assemble together. This does not necessarily mean that we have abandoned the doctrinal distinctives over which our spiritual forefathers divided. Rather, it means that the division thus effected has been in some measure overcome by the felt need to draw strength from one another in the face of new theological threats. But at very least, such changing historical circumstances warn us to proceed cautiously when considering what the Scriptures teach regarding doctrine-inspired division in our churches.

(c) Some, but not all, doctrinal differences immediately affect *either* the heart of the gospel (that without which there is no salvation) *or* church polity. In either case, thinking Christians cannot treat the divergence indifferently – in the one case, because to do so would be tantamount to a denial of the Lord, and in the other, because to do so

immediately affects the practicalities of organization and assigned responsibility. But there are borderline cases; and in any case, a little historical distance helps us to make a deeper assessment of the causes and status of any particular divergence.

Baptism is a particularly complex case in point. It has been regarded as having three quite different levels of doctrinal significance. Some Baptists have considered *some* forms of paedobaptism to be deficient *even in respect to what is necessary to salvation*, in particular when baptism is treated as effecting regeneration *ex opere operato*. Within the Reformed camp, Baptists and paedobaptists alike treat their distinctive hues as doctrinal constituents inextricably bound up not only with covenant, election, and ecclesiology, but also with the *practicalities of church order and discipline*. But at a third level, some evangelicals – e.g. certain FIEC churches in Great Britain and the Evangelical Free Church of America – have actually devised organizational structures to accommodate *both* a baptistic *and* a paedobaptistic view of the ordinance/sacrament within a given local church. How this has been accomplished cannot be discussed here; and whether the long range effect will be continued peaceful doctrinal plurality, the swamping of one view by the other, or tacit disparaging of an important biblical mandate in order to maintain peace at any price, probably cannot yet be determined. In any case, the complexity of the matter ought at least to foster humility in approaching the assigned topic.

In recognition of such difficulties, and in order to hew a path as close to Scripture as possible, I shall restrict myself in two ways: *first* I shall limit myself largely, if not quite exclusively, to 1 Corinthians, the New Testament epistle which deals with the most divided church in apostolic times; and *second*, I shall deal primarily with divisions within the local churches over which the Lord has set us as overseers, though broader implications will occasionally be suggested.

A. *Characteristics of Various Division-Causing Doctrinal Errors at Corinth.*

(1) Some of the Corinthian errors were prompted by the prevailing climate of opinion. The denial of the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15, for example, appears to have been based, not in exegetical perversity, but in an unwitting adoption of a kind of dualism which affirmed the goodness of what is spiritual and the badness of what is material. Within that framework, a *physical* resurrection seemed inconceivable. Again, whether or not to eat food that had been offered to idols, and the divergent responses to this question taken by various members of the congregation, depended on the peculiar forms of first century pagan

worship (cf. 1 Corinthians 8 and 10).

It therefore follows that the church in every generation must discern what elements in the prevailing climate of opinion may be fundamentally antithetical to biblical truth. The more universally accepted such elements are, the more difficult to detect they will be. Changes in public opinion are not necessarily bad; but because the church constitutes part of that public, it may unwittingly adopt positions which a former generation would not have conceived possible. In our own day, syncretism is on the rise, and it is becoming less and less fashionable to consider that *any* truth has the right to be exclusivistic. Again, honest concern for social justice in a world where uncounted millions go to bed hungry and where the rich become richer and the poor become poorer is easily confused with evangelism *per se*, so that the biblical mission which could not be destroyed by classic liberal theology may, if we are not careful, succumb either to a dilution of evangelistic zeal or to a reactionary harshness which exhibits no practical compassion for the needs of the whole man. It would be comforting to think that any form of Christianity which bases itself upon the New Testament has enough vitality to discern truth from error on fundamental matters; but both Scripture and history tell us otherwise. Apart from the restraining grace of God, there is no limit to the depth of error and even moral perversity to which churches may sink. It is now common knowledge that certain congregations in North America, congregations which might properly be labelled “evangelical” (that is, they believe men are justified by grace through faith and hold to a high view of Scripture) have become homosexual bulwarks, by the simple expedient of interpreting all passages of Scripture which seem to forbid homosexuality as referring only to homosexuality which is practised outside homosexual marriage. This would have been inconceivable a mere ten years ago; and it is a sign of the ease with which many congregations reflect current opinion that such travesty of biblical truth has come about.

(2) Some Corinthian errors festered because of failure to see the *broader* implications of the view espoused. Careful reading of 1 Corinthians 15.12ff. suggests that the Corinthian believers were not denying *Christ's* resurrection, but were saying that there is no resurrection at the end, that perhaps no such thing as resurrection existed in principle. Paul therefore points out that in the Christian understanding, *Christ's* resurrection is the first fruits of the final resurrection; and therefore to deny the possibility of the latter is to call in question the reality of the former. But that leads on to terrifying conclusions: if *Christ* has not been raised, the Christian gospel is at best a farce and at worst fraudulent.

Of course, we must be very careful about reading alleged 'implications' into someone else's stated views. We may be guilty of distorting the other person's belief by drawing out 'implications' which in fact are false. For instance, it would not be just to accuse the continental Reformers of antimonianism because of their view of the Sabbath. Misrepresentation of another person's perspective is, after all, a form of lying. Yet after all care has been exercised, it remains sadly true that many doctrinal deviations which might in some ways be dismissed as minor have substantial implications for the gospel itself. Some of us in this room can recall Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones forcing his interlocutors to think through the implications of what they were saying by his frequently repeated question, 'Am I to understand that . . . ?'

(3) Some divisive, doctrinal error in Corinth proceeded out of imbalance. This imbalance arose either by ignoring the correlative truth, or by ignoring the appropriate Christian application of some truth. The first is well illustrated in 1 Corinthians 4, where the Corinthian grasp of realized eschatology made members in the congregation believe they were 'kings'. In one sense, of course, they were right; but they had so much realized eschatology in their system that they failed to perceive the correlative truth which characterizes this age: we must expect persecution, hardship, opposition, and suffering for the sake of Christ until the kingdom comes in its fulness. Again, it was right and good, of course, not to 'touch' a woman (the idiom refers not to marriage, despite what NIV says, but to sexual relationships outside marriage) but the correlative truth must be equally emphasized, viz. that God has ordained sexual relations within marriage for the mutual satisfaction of both husband and wife. Even a statement which at a certain level is demonstrably true can be distorted by applying it falsely. 'Everything is permissible' [1 Cor 10.23] – but it does not follow that there are no restraints on Christian behaviour.

By the same token, not a few divisive issues today spring from comparable imbalances. Emphasis on love at the expense of truth can breed indifference to truth; emphasis on truth at the expense of love can breed harsh bigotry. To stress the unconditioned sovereignty of God without laying on men the responsibility for their actions engenders fatalism; emphasis on personal responsibility without insisting on God's sovereignty easily degenerates to a notion of free will which makes God contingent. Even at the most practical level, concern for reverence and sobriety in worship without correlative emphasis on warmth and fellowship may breed sterility and formalism; constant stress on fellowship, warmth, joy and spontaneous exuberance easily strips worship of reverence and reduces God to the status of an

indulgent, chuckling grandfather.

(4) Some divisive Corinthian error was spawned by a party spirit. 'What I mean is this: One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas"; still another, "I follow Christ".' In other words, we cannot ignore the fact that what were essentially *doctrinal* differences of opinion attracted labels which further polarized opinion. Men become proud of their labels, and defend them with increasing heat and decreasing light. This is not a surreptitious plea to ban all labels: labels are an essential part of communication, and can be used with great profit as a kind of shorthand, whenever all the participants understand the label in the same way. But they can also be a contributing factor in *hardening* divisions into concrete factions.

(5) Some divisive Corinthian error was supported by spiritual one-upmanship, based in part on an over-realized eschatology. I have already alluded to problems in Corinthian eschatology, but they bear further scrutiny. Perhaps the dominant reason for the division in the Corinthian church on the matter of 'tongues' and other *charismata* was the feeling of many that they had been so endowed with the Spirit, and were so fully participating in the triumph of Christ, that they did not need any authoritative teaching nor any humble reliance on the grace gifts of others. Spiritual one-upmanship triumphed. In one sense, of course, I am infringing on the area to be discussed by a later paper: spiritual one-upmanship is not itself a *doctrinal* cause of division. However, in this case the one-upmanship was grounded in a fundamentally *doctrinal* structure. Arrogance in spiritual matters is repulsive at the best of times; but it is extraordinarily difficult to break when it is justified by certain erroneous beliefs tenaciously held.

However one assesses the modern charismatic movement, a good case can be made for the view that the most serious damage has been done not by disputes over tongues and healings *per se*, but by the spiritual one-upmanship that is a necessary part of classic pentecostalism. This is not to say that there are no humble pentecostalists. Rather, it is to point out that the very structure of the classic Pentecostal belief system, which makes 'tongues' the criterion of a specified spiritual attainment, must inevitably afflict some who practise tongues with an overweening arrogance in the face of other Christians who do not have the gift. Sadly, almost by way of a defensive reaction, some 'anticharismatics' may develop a similar arrogance of spirit in their zeal for correcting error. But the charismatic movement is not the only example of a distinctive doctrine which may foster spiritual one-upmanship. It is merely a superlative example of such a structure where an *eschatological*

framework has been adopted, perhaps unwittingly, and with tragic results. The same thing may be detected in some modern positions on healing. We may all agree with the old slogan that ‘there is healing in the atonement’; but then again, there is also a resurrection body in the atonement in exactly the same sense. The further question has to be asked, When will all the blessings of the atonement accrue to the believer? And under what conditions? That God *must* heal all who come to him in this age betrays a failure to grasp biblical eschatology; and not a few churches have been rent asunder over this issue.

B. *Forms of Apostolic Response*

I shall limit myself to some of the more obvious ways in which Paul responds to the divisions rampant at Corinth, but make occasional allusion to other New Testament passages.

(1) If the truth in question is concerned with something essential to salvation, Paul minces no words. In some matters, as we shall see, Paul is capable of demonstrating extraordinarily sensitive tact; but where he perceives that the heart of the gospel stands in jeopardy, his argumentation, his logic, and his clarity are almost brutal. Perhaps the clearest example in 1 Corinthians is the fifteenth chapter; but this is not an isolated instance in the Pauline corpus. Elsewhere, he can write, ‘But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!’ [*Gal* 1.8, 9].

(2) Paul is equally ruthless where division in the church is prompted by a lack of concern for the outworking of a doctrine, such that believers are wounded. One of the most telling examples of this is found in 1 Corinthians 11.17ff., concerning the Lord’s Supper. ‘In the following directives’, Paul writes, ‘I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good’. He then demonstrates that because of a faulty understanding both of the significance of the Lord’s Supper, and of the corporate nature of the body of Christ, the rich are humiliating those who have nothing, and divisions are corroding the unity of the church. ‘What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you for this? Certainly not!’ [11.22].

(3) Paul is not afraid to exercise church discipline. In this epistle, the only unambiguous instance concerns not a doctrinal matter but a case of gross sexual immorality [1 *Cor* 5.1ff.]. But a close reading of other Pauline epistles, such as Galatians and the Pastorals, reveals that the apostle did not hesitate to apply stern discipline in instances of serious

doctrinal deviation as well. Historically, Reformed theology has considered church discipline to be the third mark of the church. The first is the right preaching of the gospel; the second is the right exercise of the sacraments/ordinances; and the third is church discipline. This is merely realistic. The Church is not a social club to which all may belong, regardless of belief or conduct. Far from it! It is a covenant community, bound together by a common allegiance to confessed truth and by joint submission to the Lordship of Christ. Those who would like to belong to the church, but who do not share these perspectives, cannot be permitted to remain; for otherwise it soon becomes impossible to distinguish church from world.

(4) If a doctrinal opinion has dark implications for central Christian truths, Paul draws them out. He may do this in a straightforward and forceful manner [1 *Cor* 15.12ff.], in a fashion steeped in irony [1 *Cor* 4.8ff.], or in an antithetical style [1 *Cor* 6.12ff.]. But easy slogans and the unwitting adoption of perspectives dangerous to Christianity Paul rigorously exposes.

(5) Paul aims to win people as much as arguments. This is winsomely displayed both in specific passages, and in the structure of many parts of his argument. For example, in 1 Corinthians 4, the thoughtful reader senses how Paul is in an anguish of desire to express himself in the most winning way possible. He uses protestation, irony, even sarcasm, tender reminder, exhortation, rebuke – and then he concludes, ‘What do you prefer? Shall I come to you with a whip, or in love and with a gentle spirit?’ [*v* 21]. One is reminded of the same deep, pastoral concern when reading Galatians 4.19f.: ‘My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you, how I wish I could be with you now and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you!’

The very pattern of Paul’s argumentation reveals his deep concern to win his readers, not simply an argument with them. It is obvious that the Corinthian church included extreme libertarians and equally extreme legalists. On almost every issue, there were competing parties. Some Corinthian believers were ascetics, and others bordered on raw anti-nomianism. In this tense situation, Paul does not respond with mere denunciation and correction, but with what we may designate a ‘yes/but’ argument. For instance, in 1 Corinthians 6.12ff., he can agree with his readers that ‘Everything is permissible’; *but* not everything, he insists, is beneficial. In the next chapter, he is quite prepared to agree with one faction that ‘It is good for a man not to marry’ (i.e., not to engage in premarital or extramarital sex). *But* this does not mean that all sexual relationships are wrong, and that rigorous asceticism is right, but

rather that 'each man should have his own wife'. In chapter 8, Paul readily concurs that an idol is nothing at all in the world, and therefore, eating food sacrificed to idols cannot be *intrinsically* wrong. 'But not everyone knows this'. In chapter 9, he demonstrates that as an apostle he, too, has the right to exercise enormous freedoms. 'But we did not use this right' [v 12]. Doubtless Paul spoke in tongues more than all of his readers. 'But in the church [he] would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than 10,000 words in a tongue' [14.19]. Only rarely in this epistle does Paul come down hard, and without using this 'yes/but' form of argument; and few things more clearly reveal Paul's deep desire to win his readers to his perspective than this sensitive form of argumentation.

(6) Paul maintains eschatological balance. On the one hand, he can insist that what is even now going on in the church is the fulfilment of what has been hidden in previous ages, but which now is revealed to us by the Spirit [1 Cor 2.8-10]. At the same time, he labours under the certain knowledge that 'the Day' will bring all Christian work to the ultimate test [1 Cor 3.11-15]. In a separate message, it would be worth working out in detail how these twin perspectives assist Paul in sorting out the marital problems with which he deals in 1 Corinthians 7; but in any case it is clear that Paul is never pushed to an uncritical or unbalanced view of his place in salvation history. The new age has dawned, and the kingdom has come; and with it has come the Holy Spirit as the downpayment of the promised inheritance, and a new freedom from the old covenant; but this does not mean that there is no final judgment, no consummation at the end of the age, no need for watchful expectation of the Lord's return, or no disciplined suffering in this inter-advent period.

(7) In one crucial passage, Paul *appeals to the Old Testament* to warn against the *concomitants* of divisiveness. In 1 Corinthians 10.16ff, Paul quickly reviews the tragic decline in Israel's history, faithfully recording the judgment that befell them; and then he adds: 'These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfilment of the ages has come.' In other words, Paul resorts to close, Scriptural application of Old Testament passages to the present people of God in order to warn them against the dangers of their current behaviour.

(8) Paul *teaches* love, as a crucial commitment and as the surpassing mark of a Christian. It is not accidental that the famous 'love chapter' is found in an epistle addressed to the most divisive church in the New Testament. Too often we have taught Christians *doctrine* and too seldom have we taught them *to love*. What this presupposes, of course,

is that God's people are responsible not only for what they say and do, but also for their deepest thoughts and emotional commitments. The first epistle of John lays out not *two* necessary marks of true Christians, but *three*: Christians must not only hold to right doctrine, and obey the commands of Christ, but they must love one another. I am not digressing into a non-doctrinal area, precisely because the point I am making is that Paul *teaches* his people to love. We must never degenerate into thinking that, if we preach the central truths of the gospel and reiterate the doctrines of grace, love will be the automatic overflow. Doubtless it should be so; but we may profit from the apostle's example and move to detailed practical application and specific instruction in the matter of loving one another.

C. *Further Applications to Modern Problems*

To deal adequately with the doctrinal causes of division in our churches would require at least a book, not one brief study; but perhaps some of the lessons gleaned from 1 Corinthians will be better earthed in our hard experience if we conclude with a number of reflections and applications of broadly-based biblical truth:

(1) We must plead with God for wisdom to discern the *kind* of doctrinal deviations with which we are dealing. Some doctrinal opinions testify that a man is not a believer. From others, no such sweeping conclusions may legitimately be drawn; but the deviation may do a great deal of personal damage nonetheless. Still other theological opinions we may judge to be in error, even though we would not want to exercise any discipline on those who hold them, or, alternatively, if such people belong to other communions, we may decide that the differences of theological opinion will not in the slightest hinder deepest fellowship and prayer and shared witness. I dare say all of us hold theological opinions which eternity will prove false. We must therefore be alert to our own theological shortcomings and ignorance, and recognize that if all doctrinal deviations are dealt with in the same rigorous fashion, each of us will end up in a category of one.

(2) We must ask God for grace to disassociate our self esteem from the debate in hand. How frequently have we confused defence of the truth with defence of our self-image! We may begin by feeling an honest concern for truth; but precisely because *we* are the ones who are defending some particular truth, concern for our own credibility begins to distort the purity of our motives. There is a great chasm between contending for the faith and being contentious about the faith. Those with pastoral hearts will want to be as winsome as possible. They will care less about winning arguments, and more about winning men. Their

words may at the time be strong, but their motives will reflect demonstrable and sacrificial love.

(3) We must thoroughly understand our opponent's point of view; and if there is a shred of truth in it, we must capitalize on it. That is the unambiguous lesson to be learned from Paul's 'yes/but' theological argumentation. By failing to deal thoroughly with the small element of truth which an opposing view may have, we may needlessly polarise and offend the opponent. Only rarely will doctrinally based divisiveness be best corrected by straightforward and absolute antithesis.

(4) Especially in doctrines which involve high mysteries, we must limit ourselves to the *functions* of the complementary truths as found in Scripture. However mature and accurate our formulation of the incarnation, for instance, there are deep mysteries involved. Even if we have taken care to avoid formulations which entail logical contradictions, we must also take care to avoid ascribing *functions* to Christ's deity, or to his humanity, which may compromise the biblical balance. For instance, we must not deduce from Christ's deity that he could not be tempted, nor from his humanity that he was capable of sin. Similarly, we must not deduce from God's absolute sovereignty that man is a mere puppet, or that God stands behind good and evil in precisely the same ways; nor, conversely, may we deduce from man's moral responsibility that God is in reality contingent. *The more disputed the area, the more important it is to restrict our theological conclusions to the kinds of conclusions which Scripture itself draws.* Care in this matter will moderate some of the hottest disputes.

(5) We must *expect* divisive heresies, yet recognize how disgusting they are. In other words, there are two opposite failures to avoid. On the one hand, we must not be surprised by the rise of the latest doctrinal deviation. The Scriptures promise us that such phenomena will remain with us to the very end of the age. Part of our responsibility in pastoral oversight is to cope with such developments in a wise and biblical fashion. On the other hand, we must not become so casual in our expectations of doctrinal divisions that genuine error no longer disturbs us and upsets us. We may draw an analogy with the believer's attitude toward sin, as outlined in 1 John. On the one hand, we must not deceive ourselves into thinking that we have attained sinless perfection; and on the other, we must never become complacent about our sin, but always be repentant, even disgusted, when faced with our own moral perversity. There is a sense, then, in which, as pastors, we must never be taken by surprise by some new doctrinal error; and there is another sense in which zeal for the truth and moral outrage must not in any case be diminished.

We may summarize in the words of Samuel J. Stone, who says of the Church:

Though with a scornful wonder
Men see her sore oppressed,
By schisms rent asunder,
By heresies distressed;
Yet saints their watch are keeping,
Their cry goes up, How long?
And soon the night of weeping
Shall be the morn of song.
'Mid toil and tribulation
And tumult of her war,
She waits the consummation
Of peace forevermore;
Till with the vision glorious
Her longing eyes are blessed;
And the great church victorious
Shall be the church at rest.