

LeaderLesson 19: Christ, the Great Divider

Vance Havner

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I discovered this message in a book titled, *It Is Time*, written by Vance Havner in 1943. So, seventy years ago, Havner wrote these words, and seventy years later, they are still relevant and applicable to the church and to our culture, maybe even more so today than then. Listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches through this sermon. – Bob Lowman, Jr.

Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it. Matthew 10:34-39 KJV

Jesus does unify those who are in Him. He is the Head of the church and in Him believers may have one accord, the unity of the Spirit. It doesn't always appear that way, considering how the saints differ and split and subdivide. Nevertheless, they should and can have unity of spirit in the Lord.

But there is all the difference in the universe between the relation of Christ to His own and to the world at large. Jesus Christ is the most divisive force in existence. He has caused more division than all other forces since creation. He has divided more hearts, more homes, more churches, more communities, more nations, than all other forces put together. Away with this modern, smooth talk about Jesus! One of the tragedies of our times is that too many people are saying nice things about Jesus and then doing nothing about it. They are patting Him on the back, writing poems about Him, drawing pictures of Him, putting Him in church windows, but while they draw nigh with their mouths and honor Him with their lips, their hearts are far from Him. Professing to know God, in works they deny Him and are abominable and disobedient and unto every good work reprobate. They call Him Lord, Lord, and do not what He says.

Away with such hypocrisy about Jesus! He never stood for that when He was here. He declared, "He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad." He could endure people spitting in His face and crucifying Him better than two-faced individuals neither "fish nor fowl." He prayed for soldiers driving spikes through His quivering flesh, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do;" but of these half-and-half tasteless souls like salt without savor He said, "Because thou art neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth."

God would rather a man be on the wrong side of the fence than to try to sit on it. I am reminded of the man out in Kansas who, during a revival, was asked whether he wanted to go to heaven. He replied, "No." Then he was asked, "Do you want to go to hell?" and he answered, "No." Finally, when asked, "Where do you want to go?" he replied, "I'd just as soon live right on in Kansas!" It is fashionable these days to say nice things about Jesus without personal commitment. But Jesus is not looking for compliments, He is looking for confession, for people who mean business with Him.

Men's hearts are revealed by the attitude they take toward Jesus. Simeon said of the baby Jesus in the temple, "This child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against...that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed" (Luke 2:34-35). You cannot tell who is who in town by the house in which they live, for some saints may live on back streets and some of the crooks on Main. You cannot tell by education, social position, church standing. But there is one test that never fails: Jesus Christ stands in the middle of town with His dividing sword, and splits the town in two, and in the last analysis there are just two kinds of people there. We divide them into rich and poor, black and white, educated and illiterate – all grades, from the down-and-outs to the up-and-outs. But it is not the Blue Book of society or the bank book of finance or the church book of religion that really shows where we belong: it is God's Book that classifies us, and at the last day it won't matter whether we drove a Mercedes or pushed an apple cart through town. What will matter will be: What did we do about Jesus?

Some years ago, when King George V of England was being buried, we listened to the broadcast and heard that old hymn often used at the funeral of the commonest day laborer:

“Swift to its close ebbs out life’s little day;
Earth’s joys grow dim, its glories pass away;
Change and decay in all around I see;
O Thou that changest not, abide with me.”

And, after all, whether it be the king or cobbler, the only thing that matters at the funeral is: On which side of the Great Divider did he stand?

So Christ stands among us today and splits asunder the human race, to the right and to the left. And as I look over congregations, I try to visualize the Unseen Divider who came not to bring peace but a sword. Often the audience looks united enough, but I try to remember, “There is an unseen line that separates us tonight as far apart as East from West, as heaven from hell. ‘He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already’ – there the line runs!” And I have often wondered what would happen if, in the midst of my sermon, He would appear and begin to show us just where that line runs through the congregation. What a zigzag line it would be! Over here husband and wife might be separated, for although they touch each other here tonight, they may be as far apart as eternity. Over there it may be father and son; over yonder the line may run between mother and daughter. What would the crowd look like when He got through? Some people might not look so indifferent and bored, some might wake up if they really saw themselves divided to the right and left. And yet that line is here, whether we see it or not, for we are on one side of Jesus or the other.

Jesus is either a sanctuary or a snare (Isaiah 8:14), and either we become more drawn to Him or more hardened against Him. The sun shines on clay and hardens it, and the sun shines on ice and melts it: so do human hearts respond to Christ as presented in the Gospel. Just as a worker’s hands grow calloused and a barefoot boy’s feet grow tough, so do hearts harden against truth rejected. A child may step on fresh cement and leave an impression; but when it hardens an elephant may tread upon it and leave no mark. Is your heart hardening toward Jesus?

You may fool your wife and children, the church and pastor; you may be thought a person of character and influence, but in the white light of His Presence all sham and camouflage are stripped away. We quickly come down to our right size in His sight. When our Lord was on earth He deflated a lot of human balloons. He was all love and tenderness when some soul in need came to Him honestly and humbly; but when pompous Pharisees showed up, He took the wind out of their sails in short order. And in this day, when we are hearing that “all men are good at heart,” when false prophets are preaching peace when there is no peace, we need to hear our Lord say afresh, “I came not to bring peace but a sword.”

Jesus divides the individual. The moment He enters the heart, a new nature is implanted there, and the Christian discovers a conflict between the old man and the new. He finds himself in the seventh chapter of Romans, and if he lets the Spirit have control, he will move out into the glorious victory of the eighth chapter, but all his life he will remember that he has both the Spirit and the flesh. Oh, I know that some people say they never have conflict, and I am uneasy about them. Maybe they never run into the devil because they are going the same direction he is traveling! You have to head the other way to meet the devil. The best saints of God through the ages realized that when the Great Divider enters the life, He divides the old from the new, and they did not bask in a rocking-chair under a shade tree; they wrestled with God, and watched and prayed, and they were under no illusions as to the fight of faith. For, no matter how you explain the fight of faith, it is still a fight, and we wrestle with powerful adversaries. Dr. Torrey pointed out that those who think they have reached some sublime height of faith and trust because they never know any agony of conflict or prayer have certainly gotten beyond their Lord and all the heroes of faith. The Great Divider brings division and there is victory only in Him.

Jesus divides families. He stated that plainly in our text. Everywhere I go today I see the flash of His dividing sword in the homes of the land. Often I am entertained where I feel the strain of it: some of the family are for Christ and some are against Him, and one can almost see the Great Divider standing in the

midst. Now, of course, when He said that we were to hate our loved ones He meant it relatively: we are not to love our families less, we are to love Him more. Most of us don't love our families enough. Joseph H. Choate was asked, "If you couldn't be yourself, who would you rather be?" He answered, "I'd rather be Mrs. Choate's second husband." We need more of that kind of love, to judge by the divorce records these days. And sometimes Christians take a wrong attitude toward unsaved loved ones by trying to act so good that everybody else is embarrassed by the comparison. We are not to try to force spiritual things on sinners. Wives often wonder why husbands resent being talked to about spiritual things. Of course they resent it, for it is pearls before swine. Now, don't tell him that I called him a hog! The point is, don't force deeper spiritual things on unsaved loved ones; pray for them, live the Christ life before them, and make sure that the division in your home is due to your identification with Christ and not to a Pharisaic holier-than-thou attitude on your part.

But Christ does divide homes, and you need not be surprised, for He plainly said He would. A lot of this trouble could be avoided if Christians married in the Lord, but where one gets saved after marriage and the other does not, there is bound to be conflict. You can expect the dividing sword, for He did not come to smooth things over but to call us to Himself, and if we follow Him we need not be surprised if our foes are those of our own household. But let us pray and live for their salvation and make sure that the conflict is because of Christ and not because of ourselves.

Christ divides the professing church. He stands among the candlesticks today and says, "Repent, or else I will come unto Thee quickly and fight against them with the sword of My mouth" (Revelation 2:16). When I stand before church congregations on Sunday morning, I wonder, "How much of all this can stand the test of the Great Divider?" When the choir sings, He knows whether they are making melody in their hearts to the Lord. When the offering is taken, He knows whether they have first given themselves unto the Lord. When the sermon is preached, He knows whether it is in demonstration of the Spirit and of power or whether it is sounding brass and clanging cymbal. When the congregation sings, He knows whether they mean it or whether they are drawing nigh God with their mouths and honoring Him with their lips while their hearts are far from Him. He divides the professing church into professors and possessors, and the test is not church loyalty but our relationship to Him.

There is a great deal of division among Christians and churches today. Some of it is good and some of it is bad. It depends on what causes the division. There was evil division in the Corinthian church, and Paul warns in Romans, "Mark THEM which cause divisions...and avoid them" (16:17). Some divisions are caused by men, their prejudices and bickerings. But Paul says also, "There must be also heresies [sects] among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you" (1 Corinthians 11:19). Three times we read that "there was a division among the people" on account of Jesus (John 7:43; 9:16; 10:19). There was a division in Iconium on account of the ministry of Paul and Barnabas (Acts 14:4). Schisms caused by men are of the devil, but division caused by Christ is another matter, and the church has grown by such division. Every forward movement of the church has been due to division. The church is the ecclesia, the called-out ones, and whenever the church becomes cold and worldly and conventional and settles down in this world, God raises up a man or movement to call out His faithful people again, and, of course, that causes division. Suppose Martin Luther had said, "Oh, well, I don't believe in the church of Rome, but I'll go along with them and not cause a split." The Reformation would never have come. If Wesley and Whitefield and Fox and Williams and all of their kind had stayed in the rut and gone along with the apostate church of their day in order to avoid offense, Christianity would have died of dry rot long ago.

There is fast forming today an apostate church, and we who believe in the Word of God need never expect to be faithful and avoid division. There may be some question as to when and how we are to separate, but separate we eventually must or be put out or else be compromisers. There are worse things than schism and division. Unity and harmony and catholicity at the price of principle are a thousand times worse. It was catholicity that killed Jesus, a united front that avoided a break with tradition by crucifying the Saviour. There is a united front today that is crucifying Him afresh. True unity is found through the fellowship of those who have come out of that united front to go unto Him without the camp bearing His reproach.

Now, some brethren do not go about this matter in the best way. Some of them spent more time attacking

each other than fighting the enemy. We must be sure that we divide because of our identification with Christ and not just because we enjoy a fight or want to lead a movement. HE must cause the division, otherwise we belong to "them which cause division."

This whole matter of separation should be a question of our identification with Christ, whether it be a matter of church action or individual consecration. There are a lot of so-called "spiritual people" in churches who are not really in love with Christ; they are just in love with their own ideas and their own little clique, and are merely religious snobs. If you do not indulge in the ways of the world just in order to glory in your Pharisaic spiritual superiority, that is not Christian separation; but if you do not engage in such things because you are dead and buried and risen with Christ, then it is His sword that divides. Of course, He divides many churches on such issues, but those who have thus separated unto Him must not develop into a clique; they must love and seek to win those who do not so believe and live.

But let us not be frightened with the idea that all division is of the devil. Christ is the Great Divider, and, the darker the times become, the more distinctly will Christ's own followers stand out. If we are faithful to Him we will be distinct enough. We shall not need to bother trying to appear distinct! However, there will be decisions to make as to fellowship with the ungodly, and religious leaders will make us appear selfish and narrow disturbers of the peace. Never mind. That healthy and wholesome schism that grows out of faithfulness to God and His Word has been the life of Christianity through the ages. Better a thousand times the disturbing vitality of the living than the comfortable uniformity of the dead.

Christ divides all mankind, and He divides for all eternity. As I walk the streets, I try to remember that every man or woman is on one side or the other of this Great Divider. If we really believed this, would we not be more zealous to warn people of judgment and call them to the Lord? We talk politics, business, the weather; but how difficult it is to ask them, "On which side of the Great Divider are you?" Don't ask them about the church, for He divides the church. Don't ask them about doctrines, for He divides doctrines. Ask them about Him! A lot of preaching and personal work gets people to looking at each other and at churches but not to Christ. He is the rock on which men split themselves to the right or left.

And it is an eternal division. He is coming for His saints, who will be caught up to be with Him in the air, and so shall we EVER be with the Lord. At the judgment of the nations He will divide the sheep from the goats. At the judgment of the great white throne those who are not written in the book of life shall be cast into the lake of fire. On that day the only book that will matter will not be the Blue Book nor the bank book nor the church book, but the Lamb's Book!

"Is your name written there?
On its page white and fair;
In the book of His Kingdom,
Is your name written there?"

It is bad to be on the wrong side of anything, but worst of all is to be on the wrong side of Jesus. On which side of the line are you? Come to Him, trust Him, that you may be found in Him, clad in His righteousness alone, faultless to stand before the throne.

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Metrolina Baptist Association
328 West Carson Boulevard, Charlotte, NC 28203
www.metrolina.org / 704.375.1197
Dr. Bob Lowman, Jr., Executive Director

