

The Cosmic Sandbox

“When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know even as also I am known” (I Corinthians 13:11,12).

The most crucial problem in the church today is not worldliness or immorality or lack of spirituality—it is division. And it was so in Paul’s day. Paul was very distressed in his letter to the Corinthians about this matter. In I Corinthians 3 he says *“For whereas there is among you envying and strife and division, are you not carnal [fleshly] and walk as men?”* (I Corinthians 3:3). But whence come divisions? They come from dogmas and traditions and ideologies that arise not from the sensitive exposition of scripture, but from fabrications of the fleshly mind. Of course it is tempting to say, immediately—“But we get our interpretations from the Holy Spirit.” Of course, everyone thinks that. But if these interpretations were truly of the Spirit, He should ordinarily be communicating the same thing to everyone. So, obviously, somewhere down the line there is the intrusion of the inadequate fleshly mind.

It makes no sense at all for any one single group to assume that they have the absolute truth as opposed to other groups, since it is thus assumed that the group making the claim is implying that their particular group is more spiritual or more knowledgeable or more open to Christ. In such an assumption there is a willing or unwilling arrogance that slips in. The intensity of such claims is quite unwarranted, given the nature of the human person.

Despite the fact that we are, as believers, filled with the Spirit of Christ, there is still that fleshly instrument to contend with. This was a conviction that Paul stated many times and in many ways throughout his epistles. He had no confidence whatsoever in his own flesh, and saw the ugly evidence of it. An effective antidote to this problem of divisions is the recognition of the universal weakness of all humans on the earth. Paul thoroughly describes this condition in I Corinthians 13 by referring to all of us as children. Some have assumed that Paul is speaking of learning to “grow up” or to mature as Christians on the earth. This is not the case at all, as verse 12 clearly indicates. Though now we are children on the earth, severely limited by our human condition, both in knowledge and understanding, the day will come when we will “shuffle off this mortal coil,” (Shakespeare, Hamlet) and then we shall know as we are known. It is not even going to be necessary for us to go before some tribunal and review our lives. The instant we step across the threshold of eternity we shall be immediately aware of all that ever has been in our earthly sojourn.

But now we are children in the “cosmic sandbox.” We are all children. There are various degrees of maturation taking place, but always within the framework of the “childish.” And we will not put away “childish things” until we cross the threshold where we shall know as we are known. But, while we

are in the “sandbox” we are subject to the “sandbox syndrome.” While some are busily building their sandcastles, others are equally active in knocking them down. And there is the continual “sand throwing” and “water squirting” and “castle kicking.” The problem lies not so much in the childish behavior patterns which are somewhat inevitable, but in the intensity and seriousness with which people hold their own theories as the only true word of God above all others. Most of the things that divide the church today have more to do with traditions and methodologies. The great strains of thought that unite the family of Christ outside the artificial barriers of sectarianism are unmistakably clear in the Scripture. These are the essentials of salvation and our eternal hope. There may be many questions about the content of salvation, but there is little disagreement over the fact of salvation. Whether or not they feel that they measure up to their own standards of salvation, it is understood by all believers that there is no salvation outside of Christ. Further, all who accept the Bible as the ultimate source of truth, hold to the deity of Christ; the virgin birth; the crucifixion as the ultimate instrument of atonement; the resurrection as the guarantee of eternal life; the new birth by the Holy Spirit as the basis of salvation; and eternal abode with Christ as the ultimate end of salvation; and the final judgment of God on the godless. There are, of course, a number of other areas of universal agreement, but these are examples of the mainstream of belief. The things that tend to divide the body are things about which there are no specific guidelines clear enough to end debate. And one cannot simply brand one’s opponents as being obviously less spiritual or less knowledgeable. If the subjects which are regarded as of enough importance to bring division, were that important to God, one would assume that God would have given clear enough instructions in the matter to forestall such divisions. In these divisive matters, one has observed that often a very limited number of “proof-texts” become the basis of entire movements. I call it “proof-text ping-pong.” “You serve up your text and I will counter with mine.” If these ideas are so obscure, they must not be that important to God. I have often said that if you have to find your evidence with a pair of tweezers, forget it.

There would be a good deal more unity in the church if we would recognize the limitations of our present situation. It is not that one is not entitled to certain specific beliefs and convictions, even if they run counter to the mainstream, but rather that these convictions ought to be held in openness to others, with the recognition that absolute truth belongs only to God. What we have is functional truth, that is the capacity to know things to the degree that they are necessary for our well being on the earth. For example, functional truth would include the ideas of electromagnetism that serve extremely useful purposes on the earth, but only God knows the absolute meaning of electromagnetism in the universe. As a matter of fact, all that we can ever know of the universe around us in the space/time continuum is still childish prattle compared to God’s knowledge.

So hold whatever convictions you will, but remember that all human wisdom is but “sandbox sophistry,” and all human claims to special revelations may be but the stuff of one’s personal sandcastle.

David Morsey
January 1989

