

25<sup>th</sup> June 2024

## Divisions

**“I urge you, brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them.”**

*Bible, Romans 16:17*

I was watching an English FA Cup semi-final football match on TV a while back, between a Premier League side – Manchester City – and a team from the league beneath that, the English Championship – Coventry City. In the Cup, a lower league side did well to get to the semi-final, for ordinarily these clubs would never play against each other. But in the league system it's different. Clubs compete against each other in their own Division.

I don't know how many times the commentator mentioned “the magic of the Cup”, “the romance of competition”, and similar well-rehearsed epithets. But I was also struck by the regular reference to divisions: “lower division”, “second tier”, “down the league”. Because, unlike this Cup Tie, week by week you play against teams of similar ability. If you do well over a season, you are promoted – “go up a division” – and if you do badly, you're relegated – “drop down a division”. Clearly, divisions matter in football, or the whole system would fall apart.

We're familiar with the concept of divisions in other ways too. We know it from the armed forces, for example – an airborne division, a tank division, and the like. We learn “long division” at an early age in school. “Set theory” is based on dividing things into groups which have something in common. Divisions are familiar, and divisions are useful.

But when St Paul was writing to the fledging Christian Church in Rome, he had different divisions in mind, divisions that were destructive, which created obstacles to unity, “against the teaching” the people should be following. It would take several pages to outline what these divisions were. But I don't think I need to do that. You will know well enough the kind of divisions Paul was referring to. Because if we know when divisions are useful, then we also know when they can do damage.

So, let's listen to Paul, and watch for those who cause destructive divisions – and not be part of their divisiveness ourselves.

### **A prayer for today**

*There are no divisions in God's love for us.  
Everyone is at an equal level. Amazing! Amen*