**Do not listen to false teachers** 3/4/22 dkm

Read: 2Corinthians 11:1-21, Galatians 1

Text: 2Corinthians 11:1-6

Psalms: 130, 103:8-22, 119:145-152, 72old

The media in our city recently reported the sacking of a popular pastor and leader of a mega-church. He was sacked for drunkenly entering the hotel room of a woman. Such conduct beings shame to the name of Christ, as shown in the gloating of the hypocritical press. The apostle Paul persisted with the church at Corinth until they removed the man guilty of sexual immorality. He goes on in these closing chapters of his second letter to insist that the church also deal with false teachers in their midst. We pray that any false teachers in this mega-church referred to, or in any other church, might be sacked just like this moral offender.

The church that the apostle Paul planted at Corinth was listening to false teachers who had come for far away to preach another gospel. They had come with letters of commendation, and they were good speakers. If not Judaizers, they were like them, preaching Moses and the law as the way of salvation (4:6-7). In the verse before us, Paul clearly explains that what these men were preaching was not the gospel, and not the Jesus that he and the other true apostles preached. The Corinthians were being led astray by these clever speakers, these ‘wolves in sheep’s clothing’, as Jesus would say. Part of their rhetoric was criticism of the apostle Paul. They reasoned that by destroying the credibility of the messenger they would destroy his message.

Paul saw that Satan was attacking this church through these false teachers (2:11, 11:14). We continue to see Satan attacking the church in the same way, which is why we must be careful who we listen to, and must test what they say against Scripture. Paul urged Timothy to, ‘Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you’ (1Tim 4:16).

Reluctantly, Paul continues ‘boasting’ about his credentials and his relationship with the church at Corinth. He asks them to hear him a bit longer as he tells them that he is jealous for them with godly jealousy, as he explains that there is only one Jesus, and as he urges them to judge on the basis of knowledge not just fancy talk.

**1. Jealous for the ‘bride of Christ’**

We teach our children not to be jealous of others when they have things we want. But not all jealousy is wrong. Our God is a jealous God; he is jealous for exclusive worship from us (Exod 20:5). It is right for a husband to be jealous for his wife- not of his wife but for his wife, and for her faithfulness (Prov 6:34). Paul was not the husband of the church at Corinth but Christ was, and he was jealous for them on Christ’s behalf. Actually, he speaks of being like a jealous father, a father who has betrothed his daughter to one husband (11:2).

Paul saw the church he planted, and which he loved and cared for, as being betrothed to Christ. The church is often spoken of as being the bride of Christ (Eph 5:25-27). The marriage, according to this metaphor, will be consummated when Christ returns. Nevertheless, until that time the bride must remain ‘a chaste virgin’ and refrain from entertaining other suiters. Betrothal in those days was akin to marriage, such that breaking a betrothal or engagement was regarded as divorce. Today, even after marriage, some women are seduced into leaving their lawfully wedded husband.

Paul knew that the false teachers were seducing the believers at Corinth. He had betrothed them to Christ and was jealous for them, but these intruders wanted to betroth them to someone else. They were like Satan in the Garden of Eden, whispering lies about God into Eve’s ear. God made Adam and Eve, he made them in his image and wanted the best for them. He wanted them to enjoy the garden and to worship him, to worship God alone. But Satan sowed seeds of doubt about the goodness of God, and Eve listened to Satan.

Paul was the spiritual father of the believers at Corinth and he wanted what was best for them. The false teachers were like Satan in sowing seeds of doubt concerning the apostle Paul and the message he preached. If the Corinthians listened to them they would end up like Eve. Christ does not accept ‘spoiled goods’; he demands a church without spot or blemish. He has cleansed his church with his own blood and will not accept any unfaithful behaviour. Listening to lies leads to corrupted thinking, and corrupted minds lead to corrupt behaviour.

The gospel the Corinthians heard from Paul, and which they believed, was ‘sincere’ or ‘simple’, meaning that it was without duplicity. It was not opened to various interpretations. Paul preached Jesus Christ and Him crucified (1Cor 2:1). He preached the cross and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, nothing more and nothing less. These false teachers were probably downplaying the cross because it was foolishness to the Greeks and offensive to the Jews. Churches today do the same thing as they focus on the power of God displayed in miracles. There are of course, churches that deny miracles to focus on social welfare and climate action. The only power they see is that of street marches and politics.

Remember, God is a jealous God who demands undivided worship from you and me. Jesus demands priority and loyalty; he must rank above everything in your life, even family: ‘Whoever does not forsake all that he has cannot be my disciple’ (Luke 14:33). Does Christ have this place, first place, in your life?

**2. Only one Jesus**

In writing to the Galatian churches some years before writing this letter to the Corinthians, Paul began by condemning false teachers in no uncertain terms. The false teachers there were Judaizers, Jewish Christians demanding Gentile believers keep the law and the rituals of the old covenant, especially circumcision. Paul saw this demand for works as undermining the gospel of grace. His words are ‘perverting’ and ‘another gospel’ (Gal 1:6.7). He calls down a curse or ‘anathema’ upon this preaching a different gospel. We might ask how many are preaching a perverted gospel today because any element of works righteousness is condemned and cursed by the apostle Paul. We must be careful not to be making demands upon Christians by way of beliefs or conduct which go beyond Scripture.

False teachers followed Paul to Corinth with a similarly perverted gospel, although he does not specifically mention circumcision (cf. 3:6f). He speaks of them bringing a ‘different gospel’ just as he did with the Galatians (11:4, Gal 1:6). Paul does not condemn the false teachers directly as he did in Galatians; rather he criticises the Corinthian church for listening to these men: ‘You may well put up with it!’ (11:4). His plea is that they put up with these men, so let them put up with Paul as he refutes their claims (11:1, 4).

Paul points to three errors in the eloquently delivered messages of these false teachers. Firstly, they preached ‘another Jesus’. Years ago I listened to talk about Jesus visiting Kashmir and dying there after being crucified. A Muslim sect called ‘Ahmadiyya’, which has a temple or mosque not far from here, believe this. People believe all sorts of things about Jesus and his resurrection, but there is only one truth and only one Jesus Christ, ‘Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified, whom God raised from the dead‘ (Acts 4:10).

There is only one Jesus Christ, who came from Nazareth, went through towns and villages in Palestine, was crucified outside Jerusalem, and was raised by God on the third day. Even Christians make up their own Jesus; social activists preach Jesus the politician, feminists preach a feminist Jesus, homosexuals preach another Jesus, and so it goes on. The Corinthians were not the first, nor were they the last, to listen to another Jesus being preached. Paul preached Jesus Christ and him crucified, and we must do the same.

Secondly, Paul spoke of a ‘different spirit’ being given out by these intruders at Corinth. When the Corinthians believed, they received the Holy Spirit from God. The false teachers seem to have boasted of signs and wonders and visions. These were not done through the Holy Spirit but through a ‘different spirit’. We might similarly question what spirit is behind some ‘signs and wonders’ ministries today. In parts of Africa, the gospel has not replaced pagan religions but has been mixed with them in horrific ways. Some think the false teachers at Corinth were reviving pagan ways in the church. They seem to have sided with sexually immoral people in the church.

Thirdly, they were listening to a ‘different gospel’ to what Paul preached, and that they accepted when they believed. They heard and accepted the gospel of grace: ‘For by grace you have been saved through faith, that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works lest anyone should boast’ (Eph 2:8-9). Any preaching of works righteousness, or grace plus works righteousness, is not in accordance with the gospel preached by the true apostles (Rom 4:6, Titus 3:5). How sad to hear preaching in which works or sacraments are made the basis of salvation.

**3. Judge on knowledge not fancy speaking**

Our third and final section is signalled by another, ‘For I’ (11:5, cf. 11:2, 4). ‘For I consider I am not at all inferior to the most eminent apostles’ (11:5). Paul is again being sarcastic in calling them ‘eminent’ or ‘super’ apostles (‘*hyper*’ in Greek). He is not referring to the apostles chosen by Jesus. These men who came to Corinth appointed themselves apostles. They made a lot of Paul’s ‘weak bodily presence’ and ‘contemptible speech’ (10:10). They were probably present when Paul made his ‘painful visit’, five years after his first visit. Paul admitted to being ‘untrained in speech’ compared to these intruders, although a sarcastic tone continues. Some Greeks made a career in public speaking and for this they got training in rhetoric; Paul had no such training. Some preachers do the same today, although there are naturally gifted speakers.

Every preacher should be able to speak with clarity and conviction, but it is disturbing when Christians flock to a church just to hear a good speaker. An evangelist came to our town in India and people flocked to hear him, but I was later told that most of the crowd were traveling the country with him. People are attracted by a crowd, and all secular activities get measured by the size of the crowd. But true Christians are not crowd followers, any more than they are followers of a dynamic speaker. The internet has made such behaviour common among many Christians, to the extent that some no longer attend their local church; they just sit at home surfing the web for a dynamic preacher.

Paul was not focused on being trained in speaking. His focus was on knowledge, knowledge of the truth of Jesus Christ, and he would not have anyone challenging him on this basis. Paul obtained his knowledge through the revelation of Jesus Christ (Gal 1:12). It was not second-hand knowledge, and certainly not ‘dreamt -up’ knowledge. The gospel that Paul preached to the Corinthians was pure, received from Christ himself.

Paul preached the whole truth and nothing but the truth. He did not hold anything back as being only for the ‘initiated’. He did not add to what he received from Christ. What he received was in full accord with the Scriptures he had been taught, but totally misunderstood until the day he met Jesus Christ. The false teachers were still in the darkness experienced by Paul before, ‘God shone into our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ’ (4:6).