**Servants of Satan** 8/4/22 dkm

Read: Matthew 7, 2Corinthians 11

Text: 2Corinthians 11:7-15

Psalms: 1, 56:1-8, 16:1-8, 72old

The culture in India is very different to that here in Australia; indeed the culture in England is also very different. These cultures are marked by class structures, while ours is marked by egalitarianism. When I took my students to the field for practical work, I rolled up my sleeves and joined them in transplanting rice. Only later did I realise that teachers did not do this in India; teachers stood in the shade and gave orders. I still remember one student, from a high caste family, actually bringing a servant to the field to dig his plot for him! Did I adjust to the culture and stop joining my students in planting rice? No. Why? Because Jesus washed the feet of his disciples as an example for us! All cultures are different, and all have features that don’t conform to the culture taught in the Bible.

When the apostle Paul came to Corinth he made a decision not to accept any fee for his preaching. He was entitled to payment, and had accepted payment in other places, but not here in Corinth. We suggest that this had something to do with the culture of this city. Even when his opponents used this decision of the apostle as ammunition against him, Paul did not change his practice. His opponents in the church at Corinth had already criticised Paul for his ‘contemptible speech’ and ‘weak bodily presence’ (11:10).

As the newcomers to the church compared themselves to Paul, they pointed to their letters of commendation, when Paul had none. They followed up with criticism about him not receiving payment for his preaching, which was the practice in this culture. I have never heard of a preacher being criticised for refusing payment for his ministry, but Paul was! Our first subheading is, ‘Free of charge’ our second, ‘False apostles’, and our third, ‘Followers of Satan’.

**1. Free of charge**

When Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthians just over twelve months previously, he explained that although he had the right to be paid for his ministry, he chose not to receive any payment from them (1Cor 9:9-15). It is not clear why he made this choice when he accepted help from the Macedonian churches (11:9, Acts 18:5). In fact, he chose to work as a tentmaker when he first arrived in Corinth, alone (Acts 18:3, 5).

Some ministers or missionaries do not like to accept support from new converts lest they think he is peddling the gospel, or preaching for profit- which was the case with the false teachers in Corinth (2:17). Money can easily mess with the clear preaching of the gospel. On the other hand, it is good for a church to be taught tithing and giving from the very beginning; some mission-planted churches never become self-supporting.

Corinth was a cosmopolitan city with many rich people. Some rich people became patrons of philosophers and public speakers. Their support came with a degree of control or power over the speaker. ‘The truth is, that in our pride we do not like to be put in debt to others but rather put them in debt to us’ writes Grogan. If this was the culture of this city, as seems to be the case, Paul was anxious to avoid any such patronage. He was preacher of the truth, not a politician speaking what itching ears wanted to hear.

What Paul did in not accepting ‘patronage’ was not a sin. As he argued in 1Corinthians 9, it was his right as an apostle and preacher to receive remuneration from his hearers and from the church, but also his right not to receive such support. He refers to the other apostles receiving support, but he chose not to (1Cor 9:12). Moreover, he did not want to burden these people, so preached free of charge. Further still, he did not want to be seen as preaching for profit like other roving public speakers and philosophers in this region.

The false teachers who came to the church at Corinth picked up on this aspect of Paul’s ministry; they may have felt guilty about their own peddling of the gospel. They could not deny the effectiveness of his ministry in terms of the church established by Paul. So they made a big deal out of his preaching free of charge, suggesting that it pointed to him not being a true apostle. To make matters worse, Paul worked with his own hands, a real ‘No, No’ within the Corinthian culture. Educated men did not do dirty work. In doing manual work in the paddy field in India, I embarrassed some class conscious colleagues, but they dismissed me as a strange foreigner! But others understood and learned from my example.

While Paul did not accept support from the Corinthians, at least not for himself, he did get support from other churches, namely those in Macedonia; he did not actually rob them! (11:8). Was this decision of the apostle seen within the context of some regional rivalry between Macedonia and Achaia? Did Paul love the Macedonians more than the Corinthians? Money matters can get very complicated, especially when misunderstood or deliberately twisted by one’s opponents-just ask for financial support for your church!

‘Did I commit sin?’ asks Paul, in a rhetorical question (11:7). Such was the depth of animosity stirred up against Paul, that preaching free of charge should be called a sin! The gospel of Jesus Christ does not call humility a sin. Paul explains his humility, and indeed his suffering, as coming from a love for them, and a desire that they be ‘exalted’ or lifted up in Christ. When he came to their city they were living in darkness; Paul wanted the light of the gospel to shine into their hearts to give ‘the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ’ (4:6). He did not want money or anything else hindering his presentation of the life-saving truth of the gospel.

Paul was not the least embarrassed or ashamed of his preaching free of charge, and nor should they be. He would continue to do so, and to boast of doing so, despite what was being said about him doing this in the regions of Achaia (11:9-10). To suggest that he did not love the believers in Corinth was ludicrous; it was outright slander. God of course, knows the truth, and knows Paul’s heart, as well as theirs. This is Paul’s last word on the matter (11:11).

**2. False apostles**

Out of love, the apostle Paul did not burden the believers in Corinth by asking for a preaching or ministry fee. To have this loving act turned into a weapon to undermine his apostolic credentials was very disappointing and disturbing. He knew who was behind this deceitful behaviour, this malicious attack upon his credibility within this church. The newcomers who were ‘peddling the word of God’ (2:17) must have been embarrassed about the high fees they were accepting as false apostles. To justify their conduct, they had to undermine the apostle Paul, who had planted this church. They were comparing themselves to Paul, but he was reluctant to compare himself to them, knowing and declaring them to be deceitful men and indeed false teachers (11:13).

In his most blistering attack yet upon these intruders in the church at Corinth, Paul calls them ‘false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ’ (11:13). The word ‘apostle’ simply means ‘sent one’. In what sense was Paul using this term for these intruders? They certainly did not have the status of the apostle Paul and the other eleven apostles of Christ. He probably uses this title because they called themselves apostles, even superior apostles. But the truth was, they were masquerading as apostles of Christ.

Deception marked the ministry of these men, as it does all false teachers. They make themselves out to more important than they are- with letters of commendation. They slander honest and humble ministers of the gospel like the apostle Paul. They promise things that cannot deliver in terms of salvation from sin and the gift of the Holy Spirit (11:4). To the extent that they looked like apostles of Christ it was all an outward show, a mask-wearing exercise or masquerade. Paul saw through this masquerade, and he urged the believers in Corinth to do the same. Paul saw the truth about these intruders, and he wanted the church to see the same.

**3. Servants of Satan**

The disturbing truth about these false teachers was that they were actually servants of Satan. ‘And no wonder!’ exclaims Paul (11:14, 15). Just as Satan transforms himself into an angel of light, so these men were ‘transforming themselves into ministers of righteousness’. While there are Jewish traditions about Satan adopting the role of an angel, there is no clear reference to his portraying himself as an angel of light. Satan’s deceptive ways are clearly seen in his behaviour in the Garden of Eden, of course (cf. 11:3). ‘Satan does not come to us as Satan; neither does sin present itself to us as sin, but in the guise of virtue; and the teachers of error set themselves forth as special advocates of truth’ writes Hodge.

These false teachers were not simply followers of Christ who lacked a full understanding of the gospel. They were not just spreading misinformation but propagating disinformation. As agents of Satan, they were preaching lies. Did not Jesus say, ‘Whoever is not with me is against me’? (Luke 11:23). Jesus also called the Jews who claimed Abraham as their father but rejected Jesus as God’s Son, children of the devil (John 8:44). Paul was doing exactly what Jesus would have done. These men were liars and deceivers, just like their father, the devil.

Jesus saw into the heart of the matter with the Jews who rejected him; Paul did the same with the false teachers in the church at Corinth. We would do well to imitate Jesus and Paul, and be discerning of those preaching the gospel today. I wrote an essay about a missionary who was, in fact, a liberal theologian. When I concluded that this man was not a believer or born-again Christian, I was criticised by the examiner. We must be careful in making judgments, but when someone denies the bodily resurrection of Jesus or the centrality of the cross, we must question their claim to be a true Christian. It will not do to ignore such preaching, or to practice tolerance at the cost of the truth.

The intruders at Corinth were preaching another Jesus, a different gospel, and offering the blessing of a different spirit (11:4). Paul concluded that such men were false apostles and servants of Satan. Why should we think that such men or women are not masquerading in the church today? Satan, through his agents, seeks to divide the church, seeks to keep the true gospel hidden from us, and seeks to sever us from Christ with false teaching. We must resist Satan and make sure he has no place in our life or in our church (1Peter 5:9).

Paul has a final word for such men, and for anyone listening to such men: ‘Whose end will be according to their works’ (11:15). Just as God knew Paul’s heart and his love for the Corinthians, so he knew the hearts of these false teachers. And as a true apostle, Paul knew that God will judge all people according to what he sees in their hearts. What is in our hearts is revealed in our conduct of course, but some are good at hiding what is in their hearts. Some even portray themselves as followers of Christ when they do not even know Christ. But again, God knows our hearts.

When God judges according to works, it is not works as we or the world see them, but as God sees them. Do not forget the solemn words of Jesus in Matthew 7: “Many will say to me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you; away from me you evil doers’” (Mat 7:22, 23 NIV).