

Dear Friends,

The loudest voices in our culture today often call for "Open mindedness." Whatever you believe, regardless, even your faith, is nothing more than your personal opinion. Another person's opinion is just as valid as yours, so be open and not so judgmental. Read the first chapter of Galatians. How "Open minded" was Paul to the preaching of another Jesus and another gospel to the Galatians? How receptive was Jude to another belief, not the "faith once delivered to the saints"?

Our study lesson for the week from 2 Corinthians 11, I believe, succinctly captures the heart of Paul's second letter to the Corinthian Church. Despite the church working to correct the problems that Paul rebuked in First Corinthians, the later chapters of Second Corinthians suggest that Paul faced personal opposition among some members in the Corinthian Church, and that some members were already, likely less than two years after he wrote First Corinthians, embracing yet another errant belief system, one so wrong that Paul describes it in our study passage as "another Jesus," "another spirit," and "another gospel."

This church was falling headlong into the unsound faith that Paul most feared for them. Satan doesn't advertise his forked tail (As if that is actually a part of his person) or his unwavering history of deceit, subtlety, and lying, all described in Scripture. Sometimes people teasingly question various professions that have earned a bad reputation with a quip that could rightly be applied to Satan. "How do you know when Satan tells a lie? When he opens his mouth." If we understand this trait in our adversary, why do we listen to him more than to our God in Scripture? Ah, that was Paul's fear for the Corinthian Church. I can't imagine how concerned he might be for contemporary professing Christians.

Paul describes the true gospel that he preached to the Corinthians as "the simplicity that is in Christ Jesus." You could use any number of filters to identify this simplicity against the complexities of error, but consider just one. Ask a believer in a modern church the simple question, "How many ways does God have to save people?" Does He save adult believers who hear the gospel the same way He saves adults in foreign lands who die having never heard the gospel? Does He save intelligent adults the same way he saves infants who die in infancy or the unfortunate people who are born with either genetic handicaps or severe trauma to their brains in birth? Jesus told Nicodemus that God needs, and has only one way to save everyone whom He does save. He needs no alternative methods. (John 3:8 KJV) His one appointed way reaches and effectively saves everyone whom He chose in the beginning. Simplicity? Or complexity? Simplicity is the Bible gospel. Interesting. There is a philosophical concept that mirrors this point, called "Occam's Razor." The idea relates to this New Testament teaching. Generally, the simplest answer is most often the correct answer.

I pray for the Lord's people in our present world of complexity and schism to discover and learn that refreshing truth of "the simplicity that is in Christ Jesus."

Lord bless,
Joe Holder

2 Corinthians

But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with him. (2 Corinthians (11:3-4 KJV 1900)

In many ways, Paul's Second Corinthians letter is a puzzle. Based on 2 Corinthians 7:8-12, we may reasonably conclude that the church accepted Paul's rebuke in First Corinthians and tried to regain her soundness in the faith. However, at times, especially in the later chapters, Paul seems uneasy, if not doubtful, about the church's potential instability. There seems to be a divided mind in the church toward Paul. Some of the members respect him, and some seem hostile toward him. Why? How do we explain this problem?

I suggest that the Corinthian letters provide Biblical example for a difficulty in human conduct, even in church. People who are somewhat gullible often believe the most bizarre ideas with little more than someone's opinion (Spoken or written. Increasingly, people believe anything they read on the internet as if absolute truth, when the internet is, in fact, the most unreliable of sources), but it morphs in their minds into "Facts." Over time they often realize the error of their beliefs and turn away from them. However, they do not confront or turn away from their own Achilles' Heel, their personal gullibility. Next time you talk to them, don't be surprised if they tell you all about their new discovery of yet another bizarre idea, all 100% "Factual." And another. They simply never learn from their past stumbles, so they keep stumbling again and again. Sadly, I've also observed churches that followed much the same example. They seem attracted to fringe preachers (Men who are inclined toward novel ideas more than solid and sound Biblical teaching, and who zealously teach their ideas to any who will listen). They lack stability and depth in sound Biblical faith. The Corinthian Church seems to exemplify this problem. They embraced multiple significant errors which Paul rebuked in First Corinthians, but less than two years later, they embraced yet another significant error, and their fundamental problem continued.

If we accept the 2 Corinthians 7 passage as evidence that the Corinthian Church took Paul's first letter to heart and worked to correct the errors he pointed out in his first letter, how do we account for Paul's fear for this church in our study verses? I believe the following verses provide a solid clue.

Are they Hebrews? so am I. Are they Israelites? so am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? so am I. Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. (2 Corinthians 11:22-23 KJV 2000)

We learn in both Acts 15 and the Book of Galatians that some likely sincere members of Jerusalem Church took on themselves to interject their private Moses-Jesus hybrid ideas into Paul's ministry with their errant belief that he too much abandoned the Old Testament way of thinking and acting. Among other things, they taught that New Testament male believers must be circumcised. They likely also insisted on a kosher diet. It appears from these two verses that they not only followed Paul to the church at Antioch and into the churches he had newly converted and constituted in Galatian, but they also followed

him into the Church in Corinth. And, sadly, at least some of the gullible and poorly established Corinthians listened to their teaching. Consider Paul's reasoning in these verses.

1. **Are they Hebrews?** Apparently, these people boasted that they were Jewish believers from the "Mother Church" in Jerusalem.
2. **Are they Israelites?** "Hebrews" refers primarily to their ancestral identity. "Israelites" more emphasizes their religious credentials.
3. **Are they the seed of Abraham?** As we learn clearly from both Romans and Galatians, Old or New Testament, Abraham shines as a powerful example of godly and strong faith. Some of the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem Church held that one must have human ancestral ties to Abraham to be entitled to his blessings (Galatians chapters 3 and 4). In both Romans and Galatians, Paul emphatically refutes this idea.

There would be no reason for Paul to raise these questions or use this line of reasoning unless his critics in the Corinthian Church had this Jewish, race, culture, and religion mindset, and were using it to undermine Paul and his teaching. These verses, at the least, provide a solid logical explanation for the continuing problems in the Corinthian Church. Remember my point regarding gullible individuals and churches. The oldest extant post-apostolic Christian writing we have is a letter from Clement, a leading preacher and likely pastor of the Church in Rome, to the Corinthians, believed to have been written sometime in the late first or early second century. This unstable church continued its bad habits. A contingent of members became unhappy with their pastor, created tension and schism in the church, and wrote Clement for his counsel. I love this wise letter. He wrote a strong rebuke to these divisive people, urging them to turn from their self-willed divisiveness and strive for unity in the church. No wiser words could be spoken or written to a church with internal strife. Church is not about you or me; it is about Jesus. Whatever doesn't glorify Him in our thoughts, words, and deeds, based on the teachings of New Testament Scripture, should be avoided and rejected.

But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. When we observe a church with tension or a church not prospering, we need to pause and study Scripture thoroughly. The Lord doesn't bless a church at one time and withhold blessings at another time for no reason. And the reason grows out of the conduct of the people in that church. (Isaiah 59:1-2 KJV) Satan uses every means within his reach to beguile, to deceive, believers. He loves few things more than to convince people in church to compromise their faith and the harmony of the church. And he operates with subtle deceit. He will convince you that anything contrary to the teaching of Scripture is better than what Scripture teaches. Jesus (Matthew 18) taught His followers how to deal with personal strife or offense. Satan will convince them that Jesus' teaching simply doesn't work, so they won't even try it. Paul wrote a strong exhortation in Hebrews 10 that believers should be faithful to their church attendance, never to neglect it, but Satan will use his subtle deceit to convince us that it is better for us—and even for the church—if we simply abandon the church and go our own way. He has his battle strategy well planned and at the ready for every godly habit that we learn from the New Testament. Do we follow him or God in Scripture?

Whenever we stray in our faith, Paul warns; our minds are **corrupted** from godly, God-taught and God-glorifying simplicity that is in Christ Jesus.

For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with him. Paul further explains his fear of corrupted simplicity in the Corinthians and in us. However sincere they may have been, those folks who sowed discord and bad teaching against Paul in the Corinthian Church also sowed that same discord against Jesus! While they may have used the name of Jesus, they actually preached “another Jesus” who was more a hybrid, half-Moses and half-Jesus. Study Paul’s words in Galatians 1:6-10. You’ll discover an eerie parallel between that lesson and this verse.

Not only did these people preach a different Jesus, they also preached another spirit and another gospel, a divisive “I’m right, and Paul and the Corinthian Church is wrong” attitude, not the spirit of the gospel. (Philippians 2:1-5 KJV) These teachings, however similar they may have sounded, actually constituted another gospel, a false and destructive gospel, not the gospel of Jesus in Scripture that Paul taught this church, clearly not the gospel of Philippians 2.

*...ye might well bear with him. **This is the heart of what Paul most feared in the Corinthians!*** Instead of rejecting this different Jesus, different spirit, and different gospel, Satan’s subtlety might convince the Corinthians that “There isn’t really anything wrong with...” Or “I don’t see anything wrong with...” as if God consulted our personal opinion for His truth and His gospel. Eugene Nida (A Handbook on Paul’s Second Letter to the Corinthians) paraphrases this clause.

You seem so eager to accept a new person when he comes and tells you about a different Jesus. That is not the Jesus we told you about. And you happily pay attention when you receive a spirit and a message that are not like the Spirit and the message that we brought to you.

This spirit of blind acceptance of a different Jesus and a different gospel, as if it were the pure gospel of Jesus is perhaps the strongest evidence of Satan’s subtle working in a person, or in a church. It represents the diametrical opposite to Jude’s warning.

Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ. (Jude 1:3-4 KJV)

The true faith—and message—of the gospel of Jesus did not evolve to suit our “I don’t see anything wrong with...” Jesus taught it, his apostles taught it, New Testament writers taught it. And the Holy Spirit, in Jude’s words, warns us to “**earnestly contend**” for it, not accept a different Jesus and a different faith.

“...before of old ordained to this condemnation.” Study carefully. God didn’t cause these men to abandon the faith in favor of a counterfeit. But, from the beginning, He has published His rejection of any other teaching and any other “Jesus.” Did God manifest an “Open mind” when the serpent taught another

idea in the Garden of Eden? We almost hear the words from Adam and Eve, “But I don’t see anything wrong with this tree. Didn’t God create it?” Hear God and His warning. He does not approve. He never approved another Jesus, another spirit, or another gospel.

As painful as it is to read, and as disappointing as it is to consider, both Corinthian letters teach us a powerful and needed truth. Will we follow Jude’s inspired words? Or will we follow the siren song of the subtle serpent? Will we reject error that God does not teach in Scripture and hold to “the simplicity that is in Christ Jesus”? Or will we “bear with” that errant teaching? The future of our faith and the future of our local church depend on our answer. Stand fast and firm in the gospel of Jesus and the spirit of Jesus.

Elder Joe Holder