

20. Learning How to Recognize False Teachers

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our children learn to glory in what the Lord has done in their lives. We saw that Paul did not even want to compare himself with any person especially with a person that was a false teacher. Paul knew that some of the people in Corinth were being influenced by false teachers. As a result, he wanted to help them learn how to recognize those who were false teachers so that they could avoid them and not be influenced by their false teaching. We also want to help our children learn how to recognize false teachers and avoid them.

In 2 Corinthians 11:1-4, Paul write, “Oh, that you would bear with me in a little folly--and indeed you do bear with me. For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present *you as* a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or *if* you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted--you may well put up with it!” Here, we see that Paul had a great concern for the Christians in Corinth.

He said that he was jealous with a godly jealousy. Here, we see that there are two kinds of jealousy. Worldly jealousy is described in 1 Corinthians 3:3, where we read, “For you are still carnal. For where *there are* envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like *mere men?*” Worldly jealousy produces envy, strife and divisions. In contrast, Paul said that he had a godly jealousy. Godly jealousy is a zeal for the things that are right in the sight of God. This is the word that is used for Christ when he cleansed the temple in Jerusalem. John 2:16-17 says, “And He said to those who sold doves, ‘Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!’ Then His disciples remembered that it was written, ‘Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up.’” Christ was holy and could not look at sin with approval.

Paul said that He had betrothed them as a pure virgin to Christ. The word “betrothed” means *to join together or to betroth a daughter to a man*. Paul had led the Corinthians to Christ and had joined them to Christ. Now, he was concerned, because their minds were being deceived by false teachers who were corrupting their minds just as Satan corrupted the mind of Eve. The word that is translated “corrupted” means here *to lead away a church from the truth in Christ*. 1 Corinthians 15:33-34 says, “Do not be deceived: ‘Evil company corrupts good habits.’ Awake to righteousness, and do not sin; for some do not have the knowledge of God. I speak *this* to your shame.” Paul was telling the Christians in Corinth that false teachers also destroy the simplicity that is in Christ.

Paul warned that false teachers may come preaching about a different Jesus. They may depend on a different spirit (a demonic spirit as we will see in verses 13-15). They may preach a different Gospel. Paul realized that at least some of the Corinthian Christians might accept the lies of these false teachers. Today, we live in a day when we have many false teachers about whom these same things are true. We want to help our children learn to recognize why they are false so that it will both protect them and help them to protect others from their false teachings.

Paul went on to write in 2 Corinthians 11:5-12, “For I consider that I am not at all inferior to the most eminent apostles. Even though *I am* untrained in speech, yet *I am* not in knowledge. But we have been thoroughly manifested among you in all things. Did I commit sin in humbling myself that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you free of charge? I robbed other churches, taking wages *from them* to minister to you. And when I was present with you, and in need, I was a burden to no one, for what I lacked the brethren who came from Macedonia supplied. And in everything I kept myself from being burdensome to you, and so I will keep *myself*. As the truth of Christ is in me, no one shall stop me from this boasting in the regions of Achaia. Why? Because I do not love you? God knows! But what I do, I will also continue to do, that I may cut off the opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the things of which they boast.” Paul did not consider his message or the way he delivered that message inferior to false apostles who depended on eloquent speaking.

Paul recognized that he had not been trained in the Greek way of speaking that was very important to the Greeks. He said that in spite of his lack of training in eloquent speaking, he did not lack in knowledge of the Gospel. Galatians 1:12 says, “For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught *it*; but *it came* through the revelation of Jesus Christ.” Paul had received his knowledge of the Gospel directly from Christ. The ministry of Paul had become well-known during the time he was in Corinth. Then, Paul asked the question, “Did I commit sin in humbling myself that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you free of charge?” The Greeks thought that the importance of a speaker was determined by how much money he charged to speak to them. Paul had worked to support himself in Corinth and did not change anything.

Paul had also received gifts from churches in other areas so that he would not need to depend on the people in Corinth to support him as he shared the Gospel. In particular, Paul had received gifts from the very poor churches in Macedonia while he preached the Gospel in the rich city of Corinth. Paul did not tell the Corinthians when he lacked money because he did not want to be a burden. Instead, when he had lacked, the Lord had led the churches in Macedonia to send a gift to help Paul in his ministry in Corinth. Paul had seen how God had supplied his needs through the church at Philippi and the other churches of Macedonia. That is why he later wrote them in Philippians 4:19, “And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” Paul knew the Lord would supply their needs just as the Lord had used them to supply his needs.

Paul said that he had never been a burden to the rich Christians in Corinth. In fact, he did not plan to ever become a burden to them in the future by charging them when he shared the Word of God with them. He did not want to let the Christians in Corinth or the whole region of Achaia have any excuse to condemn him for being a burden to any of them. Paul said that such refusal did not show that he did not love them. Instead, his refusal to accept money from the churches in Corinth and the region of Achaia was to make it impossible for the false teachers to have an opportunity to say that Paul was only teaching them to gain riches for himself which was what the false teachers were doing.

Paul went on to describe the false teachers that were making such false accusations against him.

2 Corinthians 11:13-15 says, “For such *are* false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore *it is* no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.” Here, we see that Paul now gives a summary of the way to recognize when a person who claims to be an apostle or teacher is false.

First, we see that false teachers are deceitful workers. In Galatians 1:8-9, Paul said that all who teach a false Gospel are deceitful workers. Those verses say, “But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.” Paul said that if he changed the Gospel, it would mean that even he was a false teacher.

Second, we see that false apostles or teachers transform themselves into the apostles of Christ. The word that is translated “transform themselves” means *to change or transform*. In Philippians 3:20-21, we read, “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.” We must be transformed by Christ working in our lives. That is why Paul said false apostles and teachers try to transform themselves by their own efforts. That is evidence that they are not true apostles or teachers.

Third, they follow the example of Satan who transforms himself as an angel of light. Here, we see that a characteristic of Satan is that he works to deceive people by transforming himself so that he appears to be an angel of light. In John 10:10, Christ said, “The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have *it* more abundantly.” Here, we see that the true character of Satan is always to steal, kill and destroy and he is not light.

Fourth, false teachers transform themselves and claim to be ministers of righteousness. Here, we see that false apostles and teachers claim to be ministers of righteousness. “Righteousness” means *that which is acceptable to God*. Isaiah 64:6 says, “But we are all like an unclean *thing*, and all our righteousnesses *are* like filthy rags; we all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.” False teachers claim to serve God but their works and lives are not acceptable to Him.

Fifth, their works do not agree with their words and they will be judged according to their works. Revelation 20:12 says, “And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is *the Book of Life*. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.” Here, we see that all unbelievers will be judged according to their works and face eternal judgment. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your physical and spiritual children learn to recognize false teachers.