

“PAUL AND THE FALSE APOSTLES”

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. (2 Corinthians 11:13-14 NKJV)

I was in a Walmart in Little Rock this week. As I came in the door I saw a man and woman standing together directly in front of me. The woman was well into middle age. Her attire completely flabbergasted me. She was wearing a black, short sleeve clergy shirt with a clerical collar, a black, narrow skirt which was slit to above her knee, and black high heels.

This woman's garments are a caricature of the contemporary church. She and it do not know whether they want to be fish or fowl. Did she want to be seen as sexy or holy? On the one hand, the churches sing hymns with Biblical and sound theological lyrics. In the liturgy, they use prayers whose language recalls an age in which godly men read and believed the Bible, zealously taught its message to their families and neighbors, and called upon the Lord to lead and guide them in their daily life. They expected their minister to preach the full counsel of God and to believe it.

However, these same churches are "...tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting," (Ephesians 4:14 NKJV) In one generation we have seen churches turn from condemning divorce to accepting it and holding workshops for divorcees to adjust to their new status. The church has dropped its advocacy for the unborn and adopted the position that it is the woman's choice. Homosexuality has been so accepted that gays and lesbians can be ordained as deacons, elders, pastors, and even as bishops. There is more religion on television than in many pulpits.

1.) 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! 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. (2 Corinthians 11:1-6 NKJV)

The Corinthians were Paul's spiritual children in Christ. They were not like the Ephesians who had some knowledge of Christ before Paul came to them. Paul brought the Gospel to the Corinthians when their only knowledge of God was of various gods and goddesses. They even had an altar to the Unknown God. Paul called this their time of ignorance. He brought them the gospel of Jesus Christ and by it they were born again. Like a proud father, Paul betrothed them to their eternal Husband in heaven, Jesus Christ. Paul desired to present them as chaste virgins. Now he was afraid that they were being seduced and corrupted by false teachers.

These false teachers were preaching another Jesus. They wanted the Corinthian believers to receive a different spirit and a different gospel. Paul was nonplussed that they were putting up with this heresy, accepting these false apostles as though one gospel or one Jesus or one spirit was as good as the other. They were backsliding to having many gods - where they were before they were born again.

Paul protests that although he was not trained in eloquent speech, he was well trained in knowledge. He says that the Corinthians, more than any people, should know of Paul's knowledge of the true Gospel, the only Savior Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit.

2.) 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.

(2 Corinthians 11:7-12 NKJV)

The false prophets have boasted of the eloquence of their speech. They have mocked Paul's meekness. They have taken large sums as their rightful compensation for preaching and teaching. Paul now does some boasting of his own. He reminds the Corinthians that he preached the gospel of God to them free of charge. He says that he robbed other churches by taking wages from them to minister to the Corinthians. The Corinthians looked down on Macedonians because it was an impoverished region and totally lacking in culture. Paul says that what he lacked the believers in Macedonia sent to him to support his ministry in Corinth.

Paul boasts that in everything he kept from being a burden to the Corinthians and he intends to keep it that way. No one can stop him from boasting of this all over the region of Achaia where Corinth was located. Was he doing this to embarrass the Corinthians? No. His reason was to stop the false apostles from boasting that they were equal in every way to the Apostle Paul except that they were more educated and qualified than he was as evidenced by his lack of eloquence. Maybe one of the reasons that Paul took no money from the Corinthians was so that he could be free to condemn the sins of the church members and leaders. The false apostles turned a blind eye to these sins and were rewarded for their complicity.

3.) 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. I say again, let no one think me a fool. If otherwise, at least receive me as a fool, that I also may boast a little. (2 Corinthians 11:13-16 NKJV)

How do false apostles and deceitful workers transform themselves into apostles of Christ? How do the ministers of Satan transform themselves into ministers of righteousness? How does Satan himself transform himself into an angel of light?

If we go back to the Garden of Eden we see that Satan appeared as a serpent, at that time the most beautiful of all the creatures. For Satan to be accepted by Eve, she had to accept his lie that what God told her and Adam was not true. She had to accept his slanderous accusation that God didn't want Adam and Eve to be equal with God.

In the Old Testament an angel went out from God and put a lying spirit in the mouths of all the false prophets so that the king of Israel would go out to battle at Ramoth-Gilead and be killed.

How have so many churches and ministers turned away from preaching and teaching the full counsel of God and become places where the latest fads in politics and psychology are the topics of sermons and Sunday school class discussions?

Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. (2 Timothy 4:2-4 NKJV)

The members of the Corinthian church bear responsibility for allowing these false apostles, these deceitful ministers to continue as ministers in their church. In the old days of the Presbyterian church, the elders approved of each sermon by shaking the preacher's hand.