

You'd Better Open Your Eyes

1 Cor 12:1-3

I. INTRODUCTION.

- A. Some people need to do a better job of watching where they're going.
 - 1. Take T'Chacka Mshinda Thorpe, for example. He was arrested in Lynchburg, Virginia, and charged with possession of drugs. Police caught up with him after he tripped on his low-riding baggy pants, fell and broke his leg.
 - 2. Charles Haggard didn't do much better.
 - a. He decided to rob a giant Lowe's store.
 - b. Alert police caught him in the act and started to chase him.
 - c. As Haggard ran, he saw a door. He opened it and ran through. Then he saw another door, which he opened and ran through, then another door....
 - d. In all, Haggard ran through eleven fake doors before running into a brick wall and knocking himself out.
- B. In this morning's text, as Paul begins the discussion of spiritual gifts, he tells the Corinthians to watch where they're going.
 - 1. From what Paul writes, it seems as though some folks were claiming to have spiritual gifts but were not prophesying appropriately. He says at verse 3, "I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says 'Jesus is accursed!' and no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except in the Holy Spirit."
 - a. There is much discussion in the literature as to where and how this false prophesying was taking place.
 - 1) There are some scholars who believe that Jesus was being cursed in so-called mystery religions.

- a) Mystery religions were quite like our secret societies of today where people made secret pledges and underwent secret initiations.
 - b) The problem in seeing that as Paul's point of reference here is that because they were so secret we know basically nothing about them.
 - 2) There are a few who believe that when Paul mentions someone's declaring Jesus to be cursed he refers to his life prior to his conversion. The problem with that view is that Paul, in context, is speaking about paganism, something of which Paul himself was never guilty.
 - 3) The view which seems most likely is that this was prophecy taking place in the worship pagan temples.
 - a) Paul mentions that at least some of the Corinthians had in the past been led astray to mute idols.
 - b) Therefore, he doesn't want them led astray now.
- b. Wherever the false prophesying was taking place, it's obvious that some in Corinth were in danger of being led astray by these false prophets.
- 2. The apostle, therefore, writes to the Corinthians to inform them of the danger posed by false prophets.
 - a. The situation is somewhat different today—while we have some, we don't have that many people claiming to be inspired prophets from God—yet, there is much which applies in this age.
 - b. This morning, we want to come to this text to see the dangers of following false prophets. As we do so, we see STUPIDITY, STEERING, & SIGNS.

II. STUPIDITY, v 1.

- A. "Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed."
- B. Can you imagine being in Corinth and reading that?!
 - 1. The Corinthians, as you probably already know, greatly prided themselves on their spiritual gifts.
 - a. It seems that they believed those who spoke in tongues were superior to those who could not.
 - 1) Thus, in most of this chapter, Paul writes about the church as a body, with each part indispensable to the others.
 - 2) That is also likely the reason that Paul tells the Corinthians their spiritual gifts are coming to an end.
 - a) "Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away" (13:8).
 - b) If my and your gifts are both coming to an end, how can I claim superiority?
 - b. Paul specifically deals with the supposed superiority of tongue speaking in 14:6-12.

2. Poor Corinthians! They thought they knew all there was to know about spiritual gifts, but Paul writes and says, "I don't want you to be uninformed about spiritual gifts."
 3. Are we not a lot like those Corinthians many times?
 - a. We know the pagans were: "Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things" (Rom 1:22-23).
 - b. How many of you dads put a toy together on Christmas morning without reading the instructions because you knew how to put that toy together, only to have the toy not look or function as it was intended to?
 - c. How many of us have children who try to stop us when we're telling them something because they already know it?
 - d. Don't we have a tendency to do that very thing when it comes to the things of God?
 - 1) Maybe we don't come to Bible study on Wednesday night, because "We've been over that book so much I know it."
 - 2) Maybe we don't carefully examine what the preacher says, because we know he knows what he's talking about.
 4. Do we, like the Corinthians, think we know all there is to know?
- C. Here's what we need to understand about this text: the Corinthians were in danger of being led astray through ignorance.
1. There are great dangers in ignorance:
 - a. "Being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, [the Jews] did not submit to God's righteousness" (Rm 10:3). Ignorance, therefore, causes people not to submit to the Law of God.
 - b. To the Ephesians, Paul writes, "You must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart" (Eph 4:17-18).
 2. What does all this have to do with our text?
 - a. The Corinthians, in their previous ignorance, had been led astray to lifeless idols. It's apparent that they were in danger of being led back to that by false tongue-speaking.
 - b. Perhaps some of the Corinthians really did believe that Jesus was condemned because someone speaking in a tongue said it.
 3. What does this have to do with us? We need to be careful that we don't believe everything we hear!
 - a. There is no preacher alive who merits unconditional belief!
 - 1) About the Jews in Berea, Luke records, "Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so" (Acts 17:11).

- 2) I don't want to use this text so much that we lose sight of its significance, BUT notice that the Apostle Paul's words were checked by the Scriptures.
- 3) If the Bereans checked an inspired man's words, shouldn't we doubly check—even triply check—an uninspired man's words?
- b. That has been part of my fear with the PowerPoint.
 - 1) It's an absolutely wonderful tool for teaching—really it's just a modern version of the bed sheet charts so many of us knew from our youth.
 - 2) Yet, people learn so much more rapidly visually than orally, and there is a danger that we'll just go with what's on the screen and not examine it carefully.
 - 3) Let us never be those who would not examine the Words of Scripture!
4. "Ma" Ferguson was the first female governor of Texas, and there is a rather interesting legend about her.
 - a. There was an intense debate raging in Texas as to whether Spanish should be used in the public schools to teach children who had just moved from Mexico.
 - b. Governor Ferguson adamantly opposed the use of Spanish in the schools and held up her Bible and said, "If English was good enough for Jesus Christ, it's good enough for Texans!"
5. How ignorant are we when it comes to the words of God and the words of error?

III. STEERING, v 2.

- A. Paul here talks to the Corinthians about being steered to error: "You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led."
- B. There are two different words for "led" in the Greek.
 1. Both words mean to lead to carry someone or something from one place to another.
 2. The fact that both terms are passive likely indicates someone else was doing the leading and these readers were doing the following.
- C. The idols to which the Corinthians were carried away were mute.
 1. It's interesting that Paul mentions these idols were mute.
 - a. Mute idols were a common theme in the OT: e.g., "Their idols are like scarecrows in a cucumber field, and they cannot speak" (Jer 10:5).
 - b. If as seems most likely, tongue-speaking was taking place in the context of pagan worship, Paul is saying, "The so-called prophet speaks, but it's not the speech isn't coming from the idol—the idol cannot talk."
 2. One of the most well-known occurrences of tongue-speaking in the ancient world was at the Oracle of Delphi.

- a. The oracle had largely faded by Paul's day, but Delphi was only about 30 miles from Corinth, the oracle was connected with Apollo, and Apollo had a large shrine in Corinth.
 - b. Coming from such a background, many of these Christians likely believed that whatever was uttered in an unknown tongue was true.
 - c. At the Oracle of Delphi,
 - 1) A female high priestess—called Pythia—would hold laurel leaves and gaze into a cauldron of water.
 - 2) Worshipers would come and ask questions. The Pythia would then answer in ecstatic, unintelligible speech and male priests would interpret.
 - d. It's possible that one of these Corinthians had asked the oracle about Jesus and the response was, as we read in the text verse, "Jesus is cursed."
- D. Whether the Oracle of Delphi stands as the background of this text or not, the most important thing to notice is that Corinthians were led to these idols.
1. People can easily be swayed by both physical "evidence" and persuasive speech.
 - a. Think about how easily people can be swayed by their eyes.
 - 1) John writes about the second beast: "It performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people, and by the signs that it is allowed to work in the presence of the beast it deceives those who dwell on the earth, telling them to make an image for the beast that was wounded by the sword and yet lived" (Rv 13:13-14).
 - 2) How many folks in this world have been duped into error by the performing of various so-called miracles—healings, appearances of angels or the Virgin Mary, and the like? Personally, I think that sometimes demonic forces, seeking to lead people astray, are at work in those miracles.
 - b. Think about how easily people can be swayed through good oratory.
 - 1) The inspired writers were well aware of the power of oratory.
 - a) To the Ephesians elders, Paul said, "From among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them" (Acts 20:30).
 - b) "The time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths" (2 Tm 4:3-4).
 - 2) Adolf Hitler was able to gain control of Germany and begin his campaign of domination through his powerful oratory.
 2. People today are being led to hell because of persuasive oratory.
 - a. Flip on the TV on a Sunday morning and listen as preacher after preacher teaches falsehood after falsehood but with such commanding oratory people believe every word.

- 1) Could you find a better orator in the field of religion than Billy Graham? He's powerful—I enjoy listening to him myself.
- 2) But, think of all the people he has led into error through his vigorous oratory.
- b. Therefore, we need to take care who is in the driver seat of our souls.
3. Where are we being led?
 - a. Do we believe any and everything we hear?
 - b. Or, do we examine any and everything we hear to make sure it matches what God teaches?
 - c. Who is steering us?

IV. SIGNS, v 3.

- A. Paul here provides the Corinthians with signs to know if a speaker is inspired: "I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says 'Jesus is accursed!' and no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except in the Holy Spirit."
- B. Notice the "therefore" in v. 3. It is because the Corinthians had been led to mute idols that Paul wants them to understand the sign for non-inspiration and the sign for inspiration.
- C. The sign for non-inspired speakers: No one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says "Jesus is accursed!"
 1. It is quite unlikely that someone declared that Jesus is accursed in a Christian assembly.
 - a. This is almost certainly ecstatic speech from a pagan service—whether it was at the Oracle of Delphi or some other service is totally irrelevant.
 - b. This was likely an attempt to keep adherents of these idols from converting to Christianity.
 - 1) In Paul's day, people did much to attempt to halt Christianity's spread.
 - a) In Antioch of Pisidia, Paul and Barnabas were teaching many in the synagogues, and we read: "When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him" (Acts 13:45).
 - b) Demetrius caused a riot in Ephesus because he was afraid of losing money if Christianity spread (Acts 19:23-27).
 - 2) In those two examples from Acts, you see both Jews and pagans concerned with hindering Christianity.
 - 3) I'm confident that same thing is taking place in our text.
 - a) Some priest or priestess was greatly concerned about losing power, prestige, and profit.
 - b) Therefore, he or she said Jesus is accursed to keep people in the pagan temple.
 2. Without getting into detail about the Gr term, "accursed" here basically means that someone is eternally condemned.

- a. Paul uses the term to speak of his willingness to be lost for the sake of Israel: "I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh" (Rm 9:3).
 - b. Therefore, someone was saying that Jesus is condemned to eternal torment.
 - 3. The point for the Corinthians—and for us—is that no one can speak by inspiration what is false about Jesus.
- D. The sign for inspired speakers: "No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except in the Holy Spirit."
 - 1. This obviously does not mean that one utter the words "Jesus is Lord" unless he is inspired of the Spirit.
 - a. Did not all of us in Christ utter those words prior to our baptism?
 - b. The point is to provide the Corinthians guidelines to mark the inspiration of tongue speakers: Those who denied Jesus' deity weren't speaking from God & those who affirmed his deity were speaking from God.
 - 2. Yet, there is a very real sense in which not even we can say "Jesus is Lord" except through inspiration.
 - a. Would we ever know that Jesus is Lord were it not for the inspired witness of Scripture?
 - b. After Peter confessed his faith in Jesus as the Messiah, Jesus said:
 - 1) "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven" (Mt 16:17).
 - 2) Personally, I tend to think that "revealed by my Father" does not mean that Peter had a level of inspiration the other disciples lacked, but that Peter was attentive to the testimony the Father was giving concerning Jesus through his miracles and teaching.
 - 3) We would never know that Jesus is Lord except by inspiration, the inspiration we now have only in Scripture!
- E. What should we learn from this passage?
 - 1. Lest I sound like a broken record, we carefully need to examine what we hear.
 - a. A classic example from history was "Operation Fortitude."
 - 1) In Operation Fortitude, British intelligence services were able to convince the Germans that a large invasion was about to leave Kent, England to head to France.
 - 2) In reality, of course, the Allies were going to attack Normandy.
 - a) The Germans were reluctant to send troops to Normandy, because they wanted to counterattack the troops coming from Kent.
 - b) The rest, they say, is history.
 - b. Of course, disinformation occurs every day in the area of religion.
 - 2. Paul here provides a way to measure the validity of information we hear in religion.
 - a. Does that information accord with what we know inspiration says?

- b. The Corinthians were to disregard tongue speaking that did not accord with inspiration.
- c. Likewise, we need to disregard any speech that does not accord with inspiration. Will you disregard such speech?