

I wonder how you are feeling this morning? Are you fit and well? Sorry that is not an excuse for you to tell the person next to you about your latest aches and pains or trip to the doctors.

Health is a big issue and I could add big business today.

How does one stay fit and healthy? Well there are millions of books DVD's websites and so which will tell you and they will all say something different.

But if I am asking how are you spiritually, then I wonder how you would answer.

We all have a desire to be healthy even if we are not sure what advice to take to get us healthy.

But what about our spiritual lives? Are happy simply just to muddle along or even to listen to the latest quick fix idea?

The title of this series looking at 2 Corinthians is 'Towards a healthy church' because this is Paul's concern and not just in 2 Cor but in all his letters, the spiritual well being of the Christians to whom he was writing.

What makes a healthy church? If we want the answer in short we need to go outside 2 Cor and go to Eph 2:19-20, "God's household built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone."

In this letter Paul, as an apostle, is seeking to build this church in Corinth on that foundation and with that cornerstone but doing it against a tide of those who, if we look at v4 were preaching a different Jesus and a different gospel.

So the question in Corinth was who should they listen to, who should they follow?

Paul was writing to encourage them to listen to him and follow his teaching not because he was concerned for himself and his own reputation but out of his desire to see a healthy church with healthy Christians.

As I say when it comes to health it is hard to know who to listen to isn't it? Do I need five a day or seven? Does red wine help or not? Can I take statins or not. Different people will say different things who do you listen to, whose words to you follow?

Then at the gym your personal trainer will give you your exercises but is he or she independent? Is your well being their highest concern? Would they ever suggest short cuts to build your body and health?

In every area of life there is the question of who do we listen to? Paul knew that was the case here in Corinth as it had been in Galatia as we saw when we did Galatians and it was in Ephesus when he wrote to Timothy and said, "to suit their own desires they will gather round them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear." 2 Tim 4:3

Don't we do that in many ways and not least in our spiritual life so that if there is something in the Bible that we find hard we will be tempted to listen to those who can argue that point away or even argue that the Bible is not God's word.

This was Paul's great concern for these Christians in Corinth and through them for us that we grow as healthy Christians and that means being based on the foundation of the apostles, the word of God. A healthy Christian life and a healthy church involve listening to the word of God and obeying that word, "everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is a like a wise man..." Matt 7:24

So in these verses today we see Paul's concern that they were a healthy church.

### **1. I am jealous v1-2**

Paul expressed his concern in a very strong word – jealous! He was jealous because of what had gone on in the past.

"I promised you...to Christ". That was why he was jealous because through the preaching of the gospel he had seen then come to faith in Christ. He was in a sense the father of the bride who had given them to Christ. In fact more he was the matchmaker who had brought Christ and his bride together. No wonder he wanted the marriage to work and nothing come between Jesus and the church. So it is in the light of that we can see why what he goes on to say is so important.

Many are the parents who have watched a child's marriage fail and felt the sadness and pain. How much greater the concern of Paul who was used by God to draw these Christians to Jesus as he senses them being drawn away from Jesus.

That concern is expressed in fear

### **2. I am afraid v3-11**

This was Paul's present state of mind. He was afraid because he saw them being led astray and, as we see at the end of v3, their devotion to Christ being undermined.

I don't know really how it happened with my brothers. I remember so many times being with them at Kettering Town matches and now well now they never go and the interest just doesn't seem to be there. They have lost the faith. It is not that they have been drawn away by other teams, who else could you watch after following Kettering but their devotion has been undermined and really well they are pretty cold towards the boys in red.

Now that is trivial, however, as a pastor I have had the sadness of watching Christians drift away from their faith. I have seen people who were involved in service slowly withdraw from that service, then become irregular on a Sunday and eventually seeming to live as if they had no faith at all.

This was Paul's concern that these Christians would no longer put their trust for their salvation wholly in Jesus but in something else which these "super-apostles" mentioned there in v5 were

peddling and that was most probably in the law and their own works. As such their very salvation was at stake.

It was this that caused him to write. It was this which set his heart and mind in turmoil. As we look at his defence of himself in this letter and in these verses especially where in v5 he claims even though he wasn't trained as a speaker not to be inferior to these others who claimed to be apostles we might think he was concerned for himself, but no. What was being said in Corinth about him, his looks, his speech, his writing, his unwillingness to take money from them was not what worried Paul and caused him to say "I am afraid". What concerned him was the way these attacks undermined their view of him as an apostle and therefore their willingness to listen and take on board what he was saying.

The foundation of the apostles and prophets was being undermined and that alarmed Paul.

In case you hadn't noticed it the title of our sermon today under the series title of towards a healthy church is 'the overriding aim'. Paul's aim was to see these Christians continue in the way of Christ, rooted and built up in him because he knew as Jesus had said, "I am the way, the truth and the life no one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6)

This was Paul's task and Paul was able to do it because as he says in v6 "I do have knowledge". Now I know that seems like a boast and throughout these chapters this whole thing of boasting is mentioned because the pattern of these 'super-apostles' was to make great claims about their teaching and preaching ability so as to get people to follow them.

Paul simply says "I do have knowledge". Not that he had more degrees than others but he had the true knowledge of the true gospel given to him on the road to Damascus and endorsed by those apostles who had been with Jesus. This is what we saw in Gal 1:11-12, "I want you to know, brothers that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ" and 2:8-9 "For God, who was at work in the ministry of Peter as an apostle to the Jews, was also at work in my ministry as an apostle to the Gentiles. James, Peter and John, those reputed to be pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me."

God had set his word and truth in Paul as in the apostles who had been with Jesus. It was a unique revelation of God on which the church then and now is built and on which Paul wanted to see the church in Corinth built and growing.

It was his fear that they were being drawn away and v11 his love for them which caused him to write as strongly as he did. It was a fear for them and a love for them which caused him to write not a concern for his own reputation.

### **3. I will keep on v12-15**

Paul wrote “I will keep on doing what I am doing”. Certainly he kept on writing but the point is that he was not prepared to give up on these Christians so he says I will – future – keep on, teaching writing and encouraging them in the truth. Because it is that truth which will show up these others to be what he describes them as in v13-14 “false apostles” and servants of Satan. These are strong words but then much was at stake. If you see someone walking towards a disaster you don’t say “Oh I say do be careful there”. No you scream “look out”.

Paul’s fears for them that they might be “led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ” (v3) and so risk their spiritual growth and eternal life caused him to shout in the strongest terms.

#### **4. Paul’s words to us**

As we listen to what Paul said to those Corinthians we may well ask so what does this mean for me? I want just to pick up two points briefly.

The first is teach carefully. These words would have been heard by those teachers who Paul called ‘false apostles’. In this I think it speaks to all of us who teach in the church, be it adults, teens or children. If we are teachers it is a sharp reminder that the aim is not self-glorification but to strengthen people in their walk with Jesus and to do that we need to submit to the word of God and teach the word of God. It is a responsible task, no wonder James warned “Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because we know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.” (James 3:1). Teaching must be on the foundation of the apostles and prophets.

But most of us are not teachers, however, we are those who listen and so the question is what will we listen to? Paul’s message to us is to listen carefully.

As we said earlier, “God’s household built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.” This is the way to a healthy church and as such it speaks to all of us and encourages us to listen to those who will take us back to the Bible, those who will open the Bible with us and teach us from it as best they can.

I recognise that God’s word is not always what we want to hear but this Bible is God’s word to us objective and true and God speaks to us through it for our good and uses it to shape our lives. We can always find someone who will tell us what we want to hear whether it be about our physical diet, about how we can keep physically fit or about our spiritual diet and how we can grow as God’s people but ultimately it has to be to God’s word that we come and to God’s word that we submit and so build our lives on “the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.”