



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of
the Southern United States

The Monthly Message
to the Fathers, the Priests

May 2022

Teachings within the Church (2)

"I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. 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. For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ. But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it

came through the revelation of Jesus Christ" (Galatians 1:6-12).

Introduction

In these few verses from the Epistle to the Galatians, St. Paul emphasizes three basic elements: the authenticity of teachings, the importance of teachings, and the exclusivity of teachings.

1. The Authenticity of the Church Teachings

"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" (Galatians 1:8). By this verse, St. Paul expresses the genuineness and legitimacy of the gospel of Jesus Christ. He and all the other apostles received the teachings from Jesus Christ first hand, unmediated by anyone or any means. Therefore, even if supposedly St. Paul or any of the apostles or even an angel from heaven attempts to preach the gospel differently, he will be cursed. Thus, St. Paul is affirming the legal originality of the teachings, making them a unique, unequivocal reference that accepts no changes whatsoever. This concern about the trustworthiness of the teachings led St. Paul to admonish St. Timothy saying, *"But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have*

known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:14-15).

Concerning the essential, unquestionable truth and fervent necessity of the Eucharist, St. Paul also wrote to the Corinthians *"For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.' In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes" (1 Corinthians 11:23-26).*

All these basic Christ teachings pertaining to the Christian faith and dogma do not accept any changes or any so-called improvements unlike administrative rules and orders which will not be dealt with in this article.

2. The Importance of the Church Teachings

"...or an angel from heaven..." (Galatians 1:8). By these words, St. Paul stresses the priority of the teachings over that of the person delivering the teachings even if that subject is an angel from heaven. This very important

principle of watching over the purity of the teachings has been practiced in the church throughout the centuries and practically manifested in the excommunication of the priest Arius and the patriarch Nestor for their unacceptable heresies. This principal puts on the church the big responsibility of knowing the true, unaltered, unmitigated teachings before presenting and explaining them to the church members helping them to accept and live by those principles.

Nowadays, and sadly enough, people are drawn by eloquence rather than by truth. An eloquent priest or preacher can pull people away from the authentic teachings of Jesus Christ. This is very dangerous because it will cost people the loss of eternal life. St. John, though named the beloved and beloved he truly was, showed no tolerance towards such wrong teachings to the extent that he asked that such teachers propagating wrong teachers about the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ be excluded, and not to be admitted in the believers' homes or even greeted.

At the time of St. John, such a problem was to some extent controllable, unlike in the present age, wherein the internet has made available all kinds of teachings from all so-deemed great preachers whom we do respect but whose teachings do not conform to our Church's. Moreover, St. Paul's words regarding the unmovable

authentic teachings of Jesus Christ warn us against putting people before the word of God. History also cautions us against falling in the trap of misconceptions becoming enslaved to thoughts and ideas disregarding the need for studiousness and enlightenment in the truth. It is undeniable that the great church fathers differed somehow in their interpretations of some incidents i.e. whether Judah the Iscariot received Holy Communion (disregarding and ignoring the basic Christ principles). All these things should emphasize the need for inspection in order to acquire the true knowledge that fortify us against slavery to certain fanatic mindsets and bigotry.

3. The Exclusivity of the Church Teachings

"...For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ" (Galatians 1:10). By these words, St. Paul has put Jesus Christ and His teachings above anyone else and anything else regardless of diverse circumstances. Nowadays, a so-called successful church is measured by the number of attendees; the-more-the-better type of mindset. However, such attitude admits submissiveness that befits people's moods, desires and tempers ignoring submission to the authentic teachings, thus annulling the exclusiveness of the church teachings to the inclusiveness of any beliefs just for the sake of growing in number and flourishing in appearance. This is not new. It happened in the first churches specifically the one in Pergamos known

as the 'compromising church' and the church in Thyatira known as the 'corrupt church'. To both churches, the Lord Jesus Christ issued His menacing verdicts.

"And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, 'These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword: 'I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth. 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it.'" (Revelation 2:12-17).

"And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write, 'These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass: 'I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works,

the last are more than the first. Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works. 'Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, I will put on you no other burden. But hold fast what you have till I come. And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations—'" (Revelation 2:18-26).

Applying these words to our churches would have been a far-fetched idea. However nowadays, this does not seem at all unlikely or unthinkable. Nowadays pleasing the people has become the goal in some of our churches. There are those who do not believe in the Holy Eucharist as the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. Are they to be equally accepted along with the true believers? What about the homosexuals and those who support their

rights? Are they to be welcomed among the congregation just for the sake of making their parents happy and thus adding some more members to the church membership?

Listen to the Lord's words to the church in Sardis.

"Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you. You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'" (Revelation 3:3-6).

The root of the problem lies in the fact that church members are treated as customers. Consequently any customer has the right to be pleased in order to remain as a regular customer. This approach is feasible if the church is a business. However, this is not the case because the Church is "*the pillar and ground of the truth*" (1 Timothy 3:15). As St. Paul has written to Timothy, "*These things I write to you, though I hope to come to you shortly; but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is*

the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up in glory" (1 Timothy 3:14-16).

Therefore, it is through expressing and emphasizing the Truth in love and not in submissiveness that we should treat such members without antagonizing or persecuting them.

Attending church just for the sake of being present in the building does not please God's heart. What satisfies His heart is the presence of repentant and truth-knowledgeable hearts inside the church.

Listen to Jesus Christ's reply to the Jews' complaint about Him.

"The Jews then [a]complained about Him, because He said, 'I am the bread which came down from heaven.' And they said, 'Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How is it then that He says, 'I have come down from heaven'?" Jesus therefore answered and said to them, 'Do not murmur among yourselves. No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught

by God.' Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me. Not that anyone has seen the Father, except He who is from God; He has seen the Father. Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.'" (John 6:41-51).

The Lord's words confirm the need for steadfast standing against offering watered-down, thinned down teachings for the sake of pleasing people and retaining their presence in the church.

The Lord is capable of granting us the Holy Spirit assisted teachings of our early church fathers. We are so grateful to Him for our Coptic Orthodox Church founded by St. Mark, the Apostle and Evangelist, who is a firsthand witness of the sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ. May the Lord protect our church and her teachings till the end of the ages and anchor us in the true faith to our last breath.

To Him is all the glory and praise.