

Hinde Street Methodist Church

Sunday 23rd June 2019 11am All Age Service

Rev. Peter Cornick

A letter to Paul in response to his letter to the Colossians, based on 2:16-3:17

Dear Paul,

I bring you greetings from the church at Hinde Street, in London. The church has spread over twenty-one centuries, across the world now, from its roots in what we now call Israel, Turkey and Greece. The Spirit, which came at Pentecost, has indeed enabled people of many languages, to speak of God through Jesus. In fact, at Hinde Street, there are Christians who have come to London, from Africa, South and North America, Sri Lanka, Asia, Australia to name a few. Some have come to work, others fleeing problems in their own land; all of them as you say, are 'in Christ', and can testify to the work of God in their lives.

Now about eating and drinking. In your letter, you are concerned that we might be observing rituals and festivals that are unnecessary for belief in Christ. I had thought you might be talking about the Jewish laws for purity; the instructions about what they can and can't eat. Perhaps, in order to make a clear distinction between the Christians and the Jews in the early days of the church, you were wanting Christians to think only of Christ and not worry about these rules. But reading your letter more carefully, it seems that your concern is for a whole host of other rituals and rules which might be influencing us – in fact, as you say, condemning and disqualifying us from our Baptism in Christ. I think you are really concerned about how we create a false religion, far from Christ's teaching.

We have tried to create a church that includes everyone, because that is how we see Jesus' teaching. So, whatever people's ethnic background, they are welcome; if people have a disability, they are welcome; however people express their sexuality or gender, they are welcome. Now, we have not always succeeded. People have still felt left out. We can only hope to keep listening to Jesus' teaching. But we know that the risk of false religion is only round the corner. We all like to think the church belongs to us and people like us – so inevitably, we will tend to exclude others. We pray that we might not be, as you say, 'puffed up without cause by a human way of thinking.'

You asked, why we submit to regulations; these human commands, with no value in 'checking self-indulgence.' I'm not sure precisely what you mean and which regulations. I do, myself, get very tired of so many regulations. But I've come to see recently, that some of these regulations do have a very pastoral heart and do check self-indulgence.

Take for instance, the new laws on data protection. I've spent hours, Paul, deciding with the church, how to store and handle addresses, letters, emails and such like. I wish I'd spent the same amount of time in prayer! But, perhaps it is a prayer. Praying that we keep people's information safe and secure. I've visited those who have had their identity stolen and fraudulently used. I also remember a man who became seriously disturbed by the endless requests for money he received from a charity to whom he once gave a small donation. So, we do have to take seriously these regulations, to control our self-indulgent use of people's private information.

By the way Paul, could I have your permission to publish your letter in our church magazine, and do I have your consent to put your address on our database?

I've been thinking about your call to us to 'put to death' – like Christ was put to death – those things which ruin our relationships with others; our impurity, our greed. I was reading an article the other day about 'Love Island' – you know, the reality TV show. Have you seen it? I haven't watched it myself – well, truth to tell, it was on in a bar the other day and I couldn't avoid watching. I'm beginning to see what you mean about casual sex (fornication), passion and evil desire! The article was saying how the competitors on this TV programme, are not actually after 'love' at all, but fame. So, their 'relationships' are a means to an end. Their relationships become 'objects'. Our greed for celebrity makes objects of others as we watch. Still, I don't suppose making objects of people and creating a celebrity culture applies to more highbrow reality TV like 'Strictly' – you must watch that Paul, it's ever so good.

I think what you're saying is, these are the ways we once followed before knowing Christ. Now we are living that life, there is a different way. And as Christians, we must 'get rid of all such things—anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language.' Being in Christ must make a difference, otherwise, we have not been put to death with him or raised to a new life. I suppose, when we make objects of earthly things and desire them, we forget the heavenly things, and forget to desire only God.

Brother Paul, we are concerned for you in prison. It seems so unjust that you, preaching Christ, have been so persecuted. In truth, we suffer little for our faith here. Some of the people we have tried to help have insulted us. In truth, they are some of the most distressed members of our community with many problems. Usually, indifference from the public is the greatest suffering. But your troubles remind us of the sufferings of others. When we go to share with our local synagogue, they are protected by police and security. Muslims have been attacked on account of a few violent people claiming to represent their faith. Muslims used our church recently to demonstrate how much they deplored violence and wanted to live in peace with their neighbours.

Your words to us about bearing with one another, forgiving one another and clothing ourselves in 'perfect harmony' ring true for our age as for yours. Perhaps clothing ourselves, not just as Christians, but as people of faith, with 'compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience' is a contribution we can make to a society concerned with earthly things. This would certainly be the word of Christ, dwelling in us richly.

Paul, we at Hinde Street, will continue to try to live, in word and deed, doing everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, and giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Everyone here joins me in praying for your release. Please give our Christian love to Timothy.