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BIBLE ADVENTURES SCRIPT:

A1750 ~ In Ephesus and Corinth.

Welcome to Bible Adventures. Help for today. Hope for tomorrow. Jesus is Lord of all.

After Paul had left Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus, a man named Apollos from Alexandria in Egypt, came to Ephesus and started preaching in the synagogue. He was a learned Jew who was very familiar with the Old Testament Scriptures. Although he preached John the Baptist's message of repentance and a coming Messiah, he hadn't heard anything about Jesus of Nazareth being the Messiah. By then Jesus had come to earth, was killed, raised from death and was by then back in heaven. Aquila took Apollos to the side and told him the truth about the good news of Jesus.

Even though Apollos was already a famous preacher, he humbly accepted this correction that the Messiah had already come. So the believers at Ephesus encouraged Apollos to become the leader of the church at Corinth. He went there and being a Jew like Paul, Apollos was able to argue effectively with the Jews from their own Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah. Thus he greatly benefited the church in Corinth.

Let us learn from this story about Aquila and Apollos. All of us have some lack or defect in us. Let us correct each other privately and with humility and gentleness. And like Apollos, may we humbly accept correction too.

Through this instruction and learning, all Christians can grow up to be mature and effective servants of Jesus Christ.

In 52 AD, Paul set out again on a 3rd missionary journey. He went overland again from Antioch in Syria to visit the churches in Galatia and Phrygia, which were in central present-day Turkey. In Acts, Chapter 19, there's no comment given about how the churches there were getting along. However, Paul next travelled to the city of Ephesus on the west coast. Ephesus was a great city in New Testament times but today, there's nothing left of it but a pile of ruins.

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For three months, Paul taught every Saturday in the Jewish synagogue in Ephesus. Due to increased opposition from the Jewish people, Paul and his disciples moved to a lecture hall, where Paul continued teaching for the next two years. This worked well for everyone, as the Gentiles could come and hear Paul preach every day of the week. By the end of this time, all the people living in the province of Asia had heard the Gospel of Christ.

During this same period of time, Paul's disciples went out and established churches at Colosse and Laodicea in southern present-day Turkey. Through His Holy Spirit's power, God did amazing miracles through Paul in Ephesus. Many people were healed by simply believing and touching Paul's aprons or handkerchiefs that were brought to them after touching his body. Evil spirits were also driven out in the same way.

While Paul was in Ephesus, a controversy arose in the Corinthian church about who was the greatest leader. Was it Paul or Apollos or Peter? The church was starting to fall into divisions through worldly values. Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthians to correct some of the errors creeping into the church there.

Paul's prayer for the Corinthian believers was to be perfectly united in Christ. Did this mean they had to agree on every little matter? No, but they did need to agree on being unified in Christ on all the major matters; things like: Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the Bible is authorised by God as His Word and message, which we must obey, and salvation comes through faith in Jesus Christ alone. Believers must seek to overcome divisions between themselves and be united in faith, love and obedience to Christ through the power and correction of the Holy Spirit.

Paul taught them that their loyalty was always to Christ first; never a man. One group did say they followed Christ and not a Christian leader, but they did so in an attitude of superiority and pride, which continued to support divisions. By doing this, they too brought dishonour on Christ, because in claiming Christ was the Lord of their own little group, they were in effect denying that Christ was the Lord of the whole church, which He was.

There is only one cure for pride: all members must humble themselves and look to Christ instead of themselves so they can forgive, care for and pray for others who seem to be causing offense. Church leaders must concentrate on raising high the name of Jesus alone. In the days of the early church, most churches typically came under persecution from the outside and as a result, these churches became stronger and zealous in making the Gospel known. However, in these last days, Satan is working to destroy churches from the inside as well. One of Satan's major targets is undermining the truth of God's Word and causing Christians to doubt its power and God-inspired genuineness.

Churches are also often infiltrated by people who aren't believers in Christ and who have no intention of becoming followers of the Lord Jesus. To protect its integrity, the church must take responsibility in discerning between true and false believers. We need to know how a counterfeit Christian differs from a genuine believer.

Genuine Christians have been called by the Holy Spirit to believe in and become like Christ, as salvation begins with God. In 1 Peter, Chapter 2, the apostle reminds us that we are "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvellous light."

True believers are 'beloved' by God their heavenly Father. Although God loves all people, only genuine Christians are His especially loved people.

Those who have been washed in Jesus' blood have been set apart for God Himself. God guards and watches over His beloved, so when a believer stumbles, they have the assurance that God will keep them from falling.

True believers are given three important gifts: mercy, peace and love. These are by-products of our progressive spiritual growth of being transformed into Christ's nature. Such attributes are very important when evangelising to those who have never heard of a Saviour from sin.

A counterfeit Christian is someone who claims Christ is the Saviour but doesn't possess Christ as their very own personal Saviour. Their nature hasn't been changed from their old ways of sinfulness. They've never placed Christ as the ruler in their life or really sought to follow His ways. As a result, the Holy Spirit doesn't know or operate within such people. Although these people may appear spiritually gifted or appointed by God to certain positions within the church, the surface presentation of their 'godliness' of such people is actually a mask of a hidden intention to serve themselves rather than God.

After some time, a counterfeit Christian's real nature of pride and self-serving actions becomes evident, as their teaching, preaching, and their way of life shows them out of step with the true teachings of the gospel of Christ.

Pretend Christians promote disunity and discord in the church. But pastors who desire love and unity among their fellowship of believers know that these are a most important factor in church growth. People are seldom keen to stay in churches that don't show everyone there a sweet fragrance of fellowship and kindness. After all, who wants to be part of a group that always seems to be fighting among themselves?

The basic problem with false Christians is that they're spiritually dead, so they cannot bear any spiritual fruit. In time, they expose themselves by a lack of purity in such areas as: A strong love of money and not being truthful in small matters, shifting doctrine away from Bible teaching and taking on an attitude of self-importance. They may also be deceitful, fall into immoral behaviour and show they have no respect for God.

What can be done to counter the destructive work in churches that is caused by pretend Christians? God's people need to be motivated to "contend earnestly for the faith," as listed in the book of Jude, the 2nd last book of the New Testament. Contenders for the Gospel are those Christians who walk daily with Christ. To contend effectively, Christians must have a good knowledge and understanding of the Bible. It takes time and study to do this, and to learn to be led by God's Holy Spirit in explaining what the Bible means.

Contenders should defend the deity of Christ, also Jesus' salvation by grace through faith and the truthfulness of Scripture. Yet not everyone will like us for doing so. We must not display a counterfeit spirit of superiority or judgment for those weaker in their faith, but speak the truth of God in kindness and in love. We live our faith by being Christlike in what we say, think and do.

It's clear that Satan has not succeeded in destroying the church by persecution from outside the church. But a warning remains: Satan has not stopped trying to destroy the Christian churches from within. One of his favourite attacks is to tempt preachers and congregations to weaken their stance in fully believing in the Bible. He also tempts believers to do good works to gain other people's favour, pursue security in this world and turn away from our first love, Jesus Christ.

In Matthew, Chapter 28, Jesus said: "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth." If Jesus has all authority, then Satan has none. The only authority Satan has over a believer's life is what we allow him to have. In Jude, Verse 20, it says: "But you, my friends, keep on building yourselves up in your most sacred faith. Pray in the power of the Holy Spirit, and keep yourselves in the love of God, as you wait for our Lord Jesus Christ in His mercy to give you eternal life."

The drama is from The Bible In Living Sound.

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