

The gift of discernment.

Bees.

In the past few years, we have had wasps finding an inlet under our tiles and setting up their home in our loft, resulting in wasps coming down the chimney and flying around the home. So, I was a little apprehensive about seeing an unusual gathering of bees encircling our home in the early Spring. Fortunately, according to knowledgeable sources, they are friendly masonry bees who rarely use their sting.

Their choice of habitation was under the eaves, so were unlikely to enter the house via the loft. We do not have any flower beds at the front of the bungalow, which is block paved for wheelchair access. However, I have a few potted plants displayed, including a couple of hanging baskets. This year I invested in a fairly expensive basket of flowers containing a profusion of different plant varieties ideal, one would have thought, for masonry bees.

On the windowsill inside the home stands a vase containing artificial flowers, bright yellow, which compliments the lack of colour in the lounge. Sitting in my lounge chair, I have recently noticed bees hovering outside the window and occasionally colliding with the windowpane. Now why would they do that, I wondered? Then it dawned on me that they were trying to get access to the artificial flower. Oh, dear! How silly of these deluded bees. Here we have a hanging basket full of pollen and one or two of the bees giving themselves a headache trying to reach a bit of plastic.

Discernment.

Christians can be like that sometimes. The local biblical church is God's means of feeding and nurturing the flock of God. God has blessed the church with pastors and teachers to shepherd and care for his people, and it is by this means that Christians are sanctified and made mature in their most holy faith. Unfortunately, some Christians are drawn away from the local church and God's under-shepherds by the arch-enemy of the church, Satan, who dangles the artificial and attractive alternative which looks right but ends up giving you much more than a headache. Indeed, Satan's ultimate aim is to make shipwreck of the faith of the deluded, but he also seeks to bring discouragement and disharmony to the whole fellowship.

Many years ago, a man visited our church meeting, claiming to have a special gift of discernment. He was under the impression that discernment was limited to a few who had been given the gift by God, probably through a misguided understanding of 1 Corinthians 12:10 *discerning of spirits*. In the

apostolic age, many pretenders claimed to be divinely inspired, and it was important that the church was able to recognise that which was from God and that which was false. This is pointed out in 1 John 4:1 *Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.* The completion of the canon of scripture made any special gift of discernment redundant.

All mature Christians who have been instructed in the scriptures have the ability to discern what is good and evil, what is spurious and what is real seen in the book of Hebrews 5:14: *But solid food belongs to those of a full age, that is, those by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern good from evil.*

Our visitor, by the way, didn't hang around long. His idea of belonging to a local church didn't marry up to his special gift.

Discerning the false from the true.

The apostle Paul recognised the many pitfalls that Christians might fall into in paying heed to self-seeking false teachers in and outside the church of Christ, as seen in his epistle to the Romans:

Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple. Romans 16:17,18.

The real test on whether to heed any teacher in the church is to consider the fruits of their teaching. Does it lead to godliness, or does it lead to strife and division?

Teach and exhort these things. If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, useless wrangling of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself. 1 Timothy 6: 2-5.

For those whom Satan has deceived by false brethren through whatever circumstances, it is the elder's responsibility to seek to lovingly restore them back into the fellowship.

But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they gender strife. And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will

grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will. 2 Timothy 2: 23-26.

Elders.

Elders are particularly open to the attacks of Satan sometimes through self-seeking Christians. If the eldership can be undermined, then Satan is well on the way to destroying the local church. In another context, Jesus said: *How can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man?* Matthew 12:29. Satan is an expert in this field. If he can bind up the eldership, he will have no problem plundering the rest of the fellowship.

The integrity of the eldership must be maintained at all costs if the local church is going to survive. They are not lords but servants placed in those positions by the Lord of the church. The responsibility and important role of the elders is made clear in the book of Hebrews.

Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief. For that would be unprofitable for you. Hebrews 13: 17.

Immediately following the previous verse, we have: *Pray for us.* The elders need our prayers. Pray for their protection from Satan. Pray that they may have wisdom in caring for the flock. Pray that they may remain humble but always courageous. Pray that God will bless their ministry and preaching. Pray for their family. Pray for good health. Pray that God will be glorified in all that they seek to do for their Master. Pray that they may be a bulwark against the mischievous and the deceivers.

Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which he purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears. Acts 20:28-31.

For all those who lack discernment, pay heed to those who have proven record and a faithful testimony in the things of Christ. Let us not stray away from the profusion of flowers God has provided in exchange for a vase containing plastic imitation.

