

## **FOCUS ON THE BALL NOT ON THE DRIBBLER!**

**Today's Text: 2 Cor. 11:1-33**

### **Extracts:**

***But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted- you may well put up with it! ...For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works [2 Cor. 11: 3-4, 13-15].***

*In his professional career (2003-date), Lionel Messi, the 26-year old Argentine forward for the top Spanish football (soccer) club, FC Barcelona, has scored 351 goals in 442 appearances.<sup>1</sup> For four years in a row, 2009-2012, he won the Ballon d'Or/FIFA Player of the Year award. In the UEFA Champions League, he holds the record for the most hat tricks (3 goals in one match). Therefore, he is one player that opposing teams dread. But in the 2012/2013 UEFA Champions semi-final on Tuesday, 23 April 2013, Bayern Munich beat Barcelona 4-0! In the return match on Barcelona's home ground, Camp Nou, Bayern won again, 3-0. In both matches, Barcelona dominated play but Bayern scored all the seven goals. Mesmerising Messi was there but he could not score. The German club knew exactly what to do: they focussed on the ball, not on the dribbler!*

*There is a big lesson there for us believers in our spiritual battles with Satan and his wicked forces. We could be diverted to pursue shadows or mirages and miss our focus on truth and salvation. That is the matter that Paul was drawing to the attention of believers in the Corinthian church. The issue is quite germane to our circumstances today. How do you know whether that leader, family or friend that you trust so much represents Christ and not Satan? Let us find out from this week's challenging study.*

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<sup>1</sup> Story is based on the following sources: "Lionel Messi," From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, <http://www.uefa.com/uefachampionsleague/season=2013/matches/round=2000350/match=2009610/postmatch/report/index.html#bayern+complete+barca> ; Andy James, "Bayern turn on the style to blow Barcelona away," Tues 23 Apr 2013, <http://www.uefa.com/uefachampionsleague/season=2013/matches/round=2000350/match=2009609/postmatch/report/index.html> ; and Graham Hunter, "Clinical Bayern complete Barcelona conquest," Wed 1 May 2013, <http://www.uefa.com/uefachampionsleague/season=2013/matches/round=2000350/match=2009610/postmatch/report/index.html#bayern+complete+barca>

## 1. Background: The dribbler tries to hide the ball from you!

Paul was on his third missionary journey. At Ephesus, where he went on to spend two years, God worked unusual miracles by his hands “so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them” [Acts 19: 10-12]. In fact, many people who used to practise magic brought out their books and burnt them in the public place. The value of property so destroyed “totalled fifty thousand pieces of silver” [v. 19]. That was a major threat to one local silversmith called Demetrius.

He and his guild made a fortune out of fabricating the silver shrines of the goddess Diana. If their customers were to give up the worship of idols and accept Jesus as their Lord and Saviour as Paul was preaching and demonstrating, that would be bad news for their trade. Demetrius was determined to stop Paul but he was going to do it in *a diversionary way*. At a secret meeting with the guild members, he told them that their trade was in danger of falling into disrepute. However, his “main” concern was that the temple of the “great goddess Diana” that “all Asia and the world” worshipped might be despised and her magnificence destroyed [vv. 23-27]!

As the guild people came outside and chanted “Great is Diana of the Ephesians!” the whole city became filled with *confusion*! The crowds swelled up, crying one thing or another but largely confused because “*most of them did not know why they had come together*” [vv. 28-32]. They seized Paul’s travelling companions. It took the city clerk to quiet the people down and to remind Demetrius and his guild to adhere to the rule of law by going to court if they had any legitimate claims against the missionaries from Jerusalem. The uproar ceased; the crowds disappeared and the accused went away unharmed [vv. 33-41]!

Can you imagine what could have happened to those innocent missionaries if the city clerk had not intervened, had not focussed on the ball, so to speak? It is not the target of every dribbler that can get away like that. For example, Potiphar’s wife diverted people’s attention away from her lewd behaviour by using Joseph’s garment in her hands as proof that he had tried to seduce her! For that, Joseph was unjustly thrown into jail [Gen. 39: 1-20]. *Deception and diversion are the trademarks of dribblers. Their aim is to hide the ball, get it past the defender and score. Satan and his angels use similar tactics to defeat the children of light. Are you not then interested in how to successfully defend yourself against his wiles?* That is where Paul has come to our aid this week.

In the football (soccer) game, the dribblers are among the front five out of the eleven players on each team. Their aim is to attack the opposing team and score goals. The team with more goals at the end of the 90-minute play time wins the game. Therefore, the aim of the defenders on either side is to prevent the attackers from scoring. Satan and his wicked angels/human agents play the attacking role in spiritual “games.” Their aim is to steal, kill or destroy the work of the Good

Shepherd, Jesus Christ, who is desirous to give us life in a most abundant way [**Jn 10; 10, 14**]. In his second letter to the church at Corinth, Paul warned them to be wary of Satan and his angels because they will come into their midst, transforming themselves into angels of light and ministers of righteousness [**2 Cor. 11: 13-15**]. Like the dribbler in soccer, they will attack by using tactics that can easily take our eyes off the ball so that they can score cheap goals of falsehood, deception and defeat against us. ***For how long are you going to allow yourself to be misled at home, school, office, politics or church by people you trust only to discover when it is too late that you have been had? Paul has come to our rescue by opening our eyes to the tactics of dribblers so that we can stay on course.***

Paul has enjoined us to pay attention to the following ways in which dribblers, posing as our spiritual and secular mentors and ministers/leaders or advisers, can divert our attention from the truth that leads to success or salvation:

a) *Which Jesus do they preach?*

Paul warned them against some false teachers who came to preach “another Jesus whom we have not preached” [v. 4]. They brought *human wisdom into the church* by seeing themselves as followers of Paul or of Apollos or of Cephas (Peter) or of Christ. Yet, Christ is not divided; none of His followers died on the cross for us; nobody has ever been baptized in the name of His followers [**1 Cor. 1: 12-13**]. Paul reminded the Corinthians that he came to preach to them Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks, but “the power of God and the wisdom of God” [vv. 23-24].

*Today, there is a congregation for every persuasion among believers. There seems to be competition to make the house of God as user-friendly as possible instead of being God-fearing.* You can pray in any posture you like, with your eyes open or closed, standing, sitting or kneeling. In some parts of the world, they now even have ordained gay ministers for gay congregations. So, which Jesus do they preach in your place of worship?<sup>2</sup> Paul told the Corinthians, “I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified” [**1 Cor. 2: 2**]. Don’t you share that truth?

b) *Which spirit are they using?*

Paul also questioned the spirit that false teachers were urging the Corinthian church to receive, contrary to the Spirit of God that they had received through him and his companions [**2 Cor. 11: 4**]. Most believers are hungry for the prophetic word without caring where it is coming from.

<sup>2</sup> “Which Jesus do you know?” *Weekly Bible Study Series*, Vol. 12 No 16: 5 June 2011; [http://www.bibleresourcecentre.com/Volume\\_12/WhichJesusdoyouknow.pdf](http://www.bibleresourcecentre.com/Volume_12/WhichJesusdoyouknow.pdf)

***The Spirit of God can only come by inspiration through the Holy Spirit [Acts 2: 1-6] while the word from other sources comes only by divination [Ex. 8:6-7].*** For example, the slave girl who followed Paul and his companions in Macedonia cried out saying, “These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation.” But she was “possessed with a spirit of divination [with which she] brought her masters much money by fortune-telling” [Acts 16; 16-17]. Paul commanded the evil spirit, in the name of Jesus, to get out of her and it so happened [v. 18]. ***That is why Jesus has warned true believers to focus on the fruits, not the spiritual gifts of others. They may come at you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly they are ravening wolves [Matt. 7: 15-23].***

c) *Which gospel do they emphasise?*

Another important point of your focus is the type of gospel that they are preaching to you [2 Cor. 11; 4]. ***Prosperity gospel has displaced salvation gospel in many congregations.*** You will hear them praising material blessings because “money answers everything” [Eccl. 10: 19]; “the rich rules over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender” [Prov. 22: 7]. What they will not add is that “the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” [1 Tim. 6: 10]. Why should we gain the whole world and lose our souls [Mk 8: 36]?

***In sum, Paul is warning us to be wary of the people we look up to and follow as our Joneses. They may be in front of us but they may have missed their way. We may seem to be going in the same direction but we may not be going to the same destination. Therefore, unless we focus on the ball, the dribbler can divert our attention and take it away from us.*** Can you afford that?

## **2. Your best defence is to find the ball and focus on it!**

Dribblers only know how to attack, not how to defend. Therefore, they cannot beat you if you put them on the defensive. That is why the word of God says, “Resist the devil and he will flee from you” [Jam. 4: 7]. ***The only way to put the dribbler on the defensive is to wrest the ball from him/her.*** You can do so by trying out some or all of the following:

a) *Know the truth of God’s word for yourself*

Paul wrote, “As the truth of Christ is in me, no one shall stop me from this boasting in the regions of Achaia... that I may cut off the opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the things of which they boast” [2 Cor. 11: 10-12]. In other words, you must strive to know the word of God for yourself instead of depending mainly or only on the baked bread fed you by your pastor or denomination. The

Psalms says, “Let Your mercies come also to me, O LORD- *Your salvation according to Your word. So shall I have an answer for him who reproaches me, for I trust in Your word*” [Ps. 119; 41-42].

No matter how vividly your friend or family has described a supermarket to you, it cannot be better than seeing it for yourself, especially as they keep moving goods from shelf to shelf every now and then. Unless you familiarize yourself with the layout and display of goods, it may take you much longer to get and buy what you want. The Bible is like that. The Holy Spirit is its keeper and He can quicken your spirit for different purposes even from the same verse. Unless you visit the shelves (books and verses) as often as possible, how can you defend yourself on the day Satan and his angels strike? That is why God Himself taught Joshua, “This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall *meditate in it day and night*, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For *then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success*” [Josh. 1; 8].

b) *Focus on the dribbler’s fruits not his/her gifts*

Satan and his angels will pose as “apostles of Christ” or angels of light or “ministers of righteousness” but their end will be “according to their works” [2 Cor. 11: 13-15]. In other words, it is only by their fruits that you can know them. They will mesmerize you with visions and miracles that can hold you spell bound. Recall that when he tempted Jesus, Satan “showed Him all the kingdoms of the world *in a moment in time*” [Lk 4: 5]. Was that not in a vision? But Jesus was not deceived. He said to the devil, “Get behind Me, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve’” [v. 8]. The word of God is the sword of the Spirit [Eph. 6: 17].

The dribbler will dazzle you with any of the nine gifts of the Holy Spirit, namely, wisdom, knowledge, faith, healings, miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, tongues and interpretation of tongues [1 Cor. 12: 7-10]. However, you should focus on his/her fruits. Does s(he) manifest love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness or self-control [Gal. 5: 22-23]? If s(he) does not, you are likely to discover underneath the cloak a proud look, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that are swift in running to evil, a false witness who speaks lies and one who sows discord among brethren [Prov. 6: 16-19]. You had better stop him/her before s(he) scores disaster against you!

c) *Focus on your needs not on your greed!*

Paul wrote, “If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity” [2 Cor. 11: 30]. In other words, he would rather focus on his needs than on his greed. His greed had led him to unwillingly boast of the pains and sufferings that he had borne for Christ [vv. 16-29]. In like manner, we are sometimes driven by a sense of entitlement to believe that we ought to be blessed by virtue of how much time and effort we have put into the work of God or even righteous living. Satanic forces play on such greed to make us vulnerable to seduction. For example, you can imagine how many times Eve had come to lust after the fruit of the tree in the Garden of Eden? Satan only pushed her a little for she all along “saw that the tree was *good for food*, that it was *pleasant to the eyes*, and a tree *desirable to make one wise*” [Gen. 3; 1-6]. Is that not the definition of greed?

So, if you learn to focus on your needs –which God already knows about [Matt. 6: 32]- you can take the ball from dribblers and defeat their wicked plans against you. You need food, not choice ribs! You need transportation, not a Rolls Royce! You need shelter, not a mansion!

The ball is in your court, as they say in lawn tennis. *It is not enough to stop the dribblers who are trying to stop your progress in different fronts, especially salvation. You must yourself play out the ball in the direction of growth, progress and success as you are Spirit-led. It is then and only then that you can beat your chest and say, “I have won!” That is what Paul has taught us from this week’s study.*

### 3. Conclusion: Look up to Jesus your Ball!

We have come a long way along Salvation Avenue. We are still trying to fight off the snares of sin and Satan. However, we must continue to run with endurance the salvation race that is set before us, “looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” [Heb. 12: 1-2]. *Through Him, we now have access by one Spirit to the Father* [Eph. 2: 18].

*Satan will never give up his dribbling runs because he never accepts defeat. His ministers are also like that. Happily, you can make Jesus your salvation Ball. As long as you focus on Him, who can ever divert, derail or defeat you? NOBODY!*

Focus on the ball, not on the dribbler.