

2 Corinthians 11 • True Servants of the Church

Introduction

Chapters 10-13 of 2 Corinthians presents Paul's vindication of his apostleship in which he answers the accusations raised by his enemies at Corinth. Within his reply we discover the lies they were telling about Paul: that he was not a true apostle since he lacked the credentials of the Jerusalem church, that his motives were insincere, that his physical presence was weak and therefore he deserved no respect, that his letters were bold but he would never back them up in person, and that his promises could not be depended on. Paul is not so much defending himself in these chapters as his apostolic office and the message he preached, and in reality he was answering Satan himself! (See 11:13-15) There is a holy irony in Paul's turning his enemies' accusations on themselves, but also a deeper teaching for each of us concerning the character traits of a true leader and teacher of the Gospel. How well are these traits reflected in our own ministry?

¹I wish that you would bear with me in a little foolishness; but indeed you are bearing with me. ²For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin. ³But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. ⁴For if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you bear this beautifully. ⁵For I consider myself not in the least inferior to the most eminent apostles. ⁶But even if I am unskilled in speech, yet I am not so in knowledge; in fact, in every way we have made this evident to you in all things.

[Read v.1-6]

Q: Paul states that he is jealous. What's the difference between jealousy and envy?

A: Envy is of the flesh and is completely selfish; biblical jealousy is based on love and seeks the welfare of others. The biblical definition of jealousy is taking every measure possible to ensure one's exclusive devotion and faithfulness to God as in the example of a husband jealous to protect his wife's exclusive devotion to him alone.

Q: So what is the goal of Paul's jealousy for the church, the bride of Christ?

1. Keep the church faithful – "...betrothed...to one husband..." (v.2)
2. Keep the church pure – "...present you as a pure virgin." (v.2)
3. Keep the church free from false doctrine – not "deceived...led astray..." (v.3)
4. Keep the church from worldly living – "...the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ." (v.3)

Point: These are examples of healthy, biblical jealousy in action.

Q: How can an individual or even an entire local church be seduced away from Christ?

A: According to v.3-4 (and again in v.13-15), by following Satan's false teachers.

Q: What is Satan's model of deception which his false teachers follow?

A: The deception put forth in the Garden of Eden wherein he got Eve to question and, by her actions, reject God's Word. (Note: The "serpent" in Scripture always represents Satan using deception, the "dragon" his using persecution.)

Q: How do we see this strategy proved out by his minions?

A: The false teacher "preaches another Jesus" or "a different spirit" or "a different gospel". (v.4)

Q: So what is the only defense against spiritual adultery?

A: Faithfulness to the Word of God, not just in knowing it, but putting it into practice.

Point: A true leader is characterized by his jealousy over the church.

Application: Why is it important to identify and publicly denounce false teachers? Why is it important to hold others spiritually accountable? Why is it important to measure all things against the Word of God?

⁷Or did I commit a sin in humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you without charge? ⁸I robbed other churches by taking wages from them to serve you; ⁹and when I was present with you and was in need, I was not a burden to anyone; for when the brethren came from Macedonia they fully supplied my need, and in everything I kept myself from being a burden to you, and will continue to do so. ¹⁰As the truth of Christ is in me, this boasting of mine will not be stopped in the regions of Achaia. ¹¹Why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do!

¹²But what I am doing I will continue to do, so that I may cut off opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the matter about which they are boasting. ¹³For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. ¹⁴No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. ¹⁵Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds.

¹⁶Again I say, let no one think me foolish; but if you do, receive me even as foolish, so that I also may boast a little. ¹⁷What I am saying, I am not saying as the Lord would, but as in foolishness, in this confidence of boasting. ¹⁸Since many boast according to the flesh, I will boast also. ¹⁹For you, being so wise, tolerate the foolish gladly. ²⁰For you tolerate it if anyone enslaves you, anyone devours you, anyone takes advantage of you, anyone exalts himself, anyone hits you in the face. ²¹To my shame I must say that we have been weak by comparison.

[Read v.7-21a]

Q: What is the bizarre charge that was apparently being made against Paul by the false teachers?

A: They claimed that one of the proofs that Paul was **NOT** an authentic apostle was because he would not accept money for his services.

Q: Why do you suppose false teachers would want to attack something as seemingly untouchable as Paul's refusal to accept payment for ministry?

A: Money and power are always the root causes of the motives for false teachers themselves, so they would want to create a justification for their own greed. But it also betrays their tactic of misrepresenting a true teacher's motives so as to discredit them, especially the most pure and honest motives.

Q: What is ironic about Paul's TRUE motives for not accepting payment for his services?

A: He did it to "cut off opportunity" (v.12) for those very false teachers who were engaging in these exact activities Paul is now defending against! Knowing the false teachers' true motives, Paul proactively refused compensation in order to later show the false teachers for who they really are.

Q: What is the true identity of false apostles/prophets/teachers?

A: They are Satan's servants.

Q: What is another of their main tactics?

A: Imitation – "...disguising themselves as apostles of Christ...as servants of righteousness..." (v.14-15).

Q: How was it possible for the Corinthians to discern that these were servants of Satan in disguise?

A: They should have known since the lives and ministries of these imitators manifested nothing of the spirit of Christ. Verse 20 is a description of their carnal ministry bringing people into bondage instead of liberty, selfishly devouring the flock for one's self, and exalting the leader personally instead of the person of Christ.

Point: A true leader is characterized by his generosity to the church.

Application: What is there about the flesh that enjoys bondage, honors, and human schemes instead of the simple love and grace of Christ? Why is it important to measure the lives and messages of leaders against the Word of God? Why is it important to hold even leaders spiritually accountable?

But in whatever respect anyone else is bold—I speak in foolishness—I am just as bold myself. ²²Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I. ²³Are they servants of Christ?—I speak as if insane—I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. ²⁴Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. ²⁵Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. ²⁶I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; ²⁷I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. ²⁸Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches. ²⁹Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern? ³⁰If I have to boast, I will boast of what pertains to my weakness. ³¹The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, He who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. ³²In Damascus the ethnarch under Aretas the king was guarding the city of the Damascenes in order to seize me, ³³and I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and so escaped his hands.

[Read v.21b-33]

Q: So what are Paul's chief credentials confirming his apostolic ministry?

A: The wounds on his body that he received in the course of serving Christ.

From now on let no one cause trouble for me, for I bear on my body the brand-marks of Jesus.

Galatians 6:17

Q: How is Paul's boasting probably a stark contrast to that of a false apostle?

A: Whereas false apostles boast of receiving the praise of men, true apostles boast about their weakness and suffering in Christ.

Point: *One is trying to show they really don't need Christ, the other that he can't possibly function without Christ.*

Q: Most of these things aren't even mentioned in the book of Acts. What seems to be the heavier burden Paul bears than these hardships that have befallen him at various times?

A: His greater burden is "concern for all the churches" (v.28) even to the point of his concern for individual sin.

Point: *The spiritual priorities of his office outweigh even the individual burdens of his personal walk. It goes back to the beginning of this chapter where he explains that his first and foremost concern is delivering the church as a faithful and pure bride, living not according to the ways of this world but according to God's Word alone.*

Q: Given the context of comparing and contrasting himself to the false teachers in general, what might be interesting about the way he closes out this section with what happened in Damascus?

A: False teachers would have never humiliated themselves in such a way but would have made the necessary compromises to walk out the front gate. The true leader possesses an integrity false leaders never display.

Point: *A true leader is characterized by his sufferings for the church.*

Overall Application

The attitudes which Paul had towards the church ought to be in the heart of every pastor and church member today. We should be biblically jealous over our churches and beware lest even a single satanic lie infiltrate the church and lure anyone away from true devotion to Christ. Unless Christians exercise a holy jealousy over the church, it will drift away into sin and deception. This begins by rejecting the attitude "How much can I get?" in favor of "How much can I give?" How much are you willing to sacrifice so that the church might grow for the glory of God?