

STUDY ON THE BOOK OF CORINTHIANS

Second Corinthians – Chapter 11

Wrong Influence

“Now, please bear with some of my “craziness” for a moment. Yes, please be patient with me.” (v1 TPT)

This is quite an interesting way to start this chapter. Paul is about to make a point to the Corinthians about his pedigree as an apostle and in this instance, Paul is seeking tolerance from this church as he would play the game of boasting like “those influencers” of the church do.

“For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.” (v2)

A passionate jealousy is running within the system of Paul. He said: *“I have pledged your hand in marriage to Christ, your true bridegroom” (TPT)* and Paul continues that *“I’ve also promised that I would present his fiancée to him as a pure virgin bride” (TPT)*

Human jealousy is a vice, but the Lord said, *I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God.* (Exodus 20:5) “God’s jealousy is love in action. He refuses to share the human heart with any rival, not because He is selfish and wants us all for Himself, but because He knows that upon that loyalty to Him depends our very moral life... God is not jealous of us: He is jealous for us.”

It is important that the Corinthian Christians understand and trust Paul’s apostolic credentials because Paul is like the friend of the groom, who watches out for the bride in the period between the betrothal and the wedding. In the Jewish culture of that day, the *friend of the bridegroom* (mentioned also in John 3:29) had an important job. To procure a husband for the virgin, to guard her, and to bear testimony to her corporeal and marital endowments; and it was upon this testimony of this friend that the bridegroom chose his bride. Remember also that the time of betrothal was not taken lightly in Paul’s culture. If someone were unfaithful during the betrothal period, it was considered adultery, and a betrothal could only be broken by divorce.

“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.” (v3)

Paul understood that Satan’s deception of Eve in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:1-5) is a good example of Satan’s deceptive tactics. His lie to Eve (*You will not surely die*) was surrounded by half-truths and enticing deception. The Corinthian Christians were challenged by the deception and it seems they were embracing it.

“A lie that is all of a lie can be met with and fought outright; but a lie that is partly the truth is a harder matter to fight.”- Tennyson

“For you seem to gladly tolerate anyone who comes to you preaching a pseudo-Jesus, not the Jesus we have preached. You have accepted a spirit and gospel that is false, rather than the Spirit and gospel you once embraced. How tolerant you have become of these imposters!” (v4 TPT)

The troublemakers among the Corinthian Christians who stirred up contention against Paul didn’t only attack Paul; they also attacked the true Jesus by preaching **another Jesus**. Who was this “pseudo-Jesus?” Because of the way the Corinthian Christians despised Paul’s image of weakness and unimpressive appearance, the “other Jesus” was probably one who knew no weakness, no persecution, no humiliation, no suffering, or no death.

Paul warned the Galatians against receiving another Jesus. *But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed (Galatians 1:8-9).*

The problem wasn't so much that these false teachers had come among the Christians in Corinth. The problem was that the Corinthian Christians put up with them. The church has the same problem today. It is not surprising that there are false teachers in the church today; the problem is that the church puts up with them and embraces them. Christians of this generation, like Christians of many generations, will have to answer to Jesus for their lack of discernment when it comes to the false teachers and leaders accepted and embraced by the church.

Real Apostle v False Apostles

“Now, I believe that I am not inferior in any way to these special “super-apostles” you are attracted to. For although I may not be a polished or eloquent speaker, I’m certainly not an amateur in revelation knowledge. Indeed, we have demonstrated this to you time and again. (vv5-6 TPT)

We do not know who these “super-apostles” were. They could not have been the Peters and James etc. because these would preach the truth, but they are called “super-apostles” sarcastically by Paul to highlight their influence on the church in Corinth.

Paul, according to the standards of Greek rhetoric, was **untrained in speech**. In Paul's day, the ability to speak in a polished, sophisticated, entertaining way was popular. Others (such as these **super-apostles** the Corinthian Christians loved so much) were able to speak in this manner, but Paul was either unable or unwilling to preach in this way. It did not matter to Paul because he wasn't concerned with meeting people's standards for a “polished” or “entertaining” speaker; he was concerned with faithfully preaching the gospel.

Paul couldn't – or wouldn't – give the Corinthian Christians the polished and entertaining preaching they wanted, but he did give them *himself*. He **thoroughly manifested** himself among the Corinthian Christians **in all things**. He wasn't a polished speaker (according to the standards of his day), but he was an honest and transparent speaker.

Robbing Other Churches

“Did I commit sin in humbling myself that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you free of charge? I robbed other churches, taking wages from them to minister to you. And when I was present with you, and in need, I was a burden to no one, for what I lacked the brethren who came from Macedonia supplied. And in everything I kept myself from being burdensome to you, and so I will keep myself. As the truth of Christ is in me, no one shall stop me from this boasting in the regions of Achaia. Why? Because I do not love you? God knows! But what I do, I will also continue to do, 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.” (vv7-12)

I have noticed that to those to whom you extend more grace are those that are likely to abuse such grace.

The word Paul used for **robbed** is strong. In classical Greek, this word was used for stripping a dead soldier of his armour. Paul refers to the fact that he received support from Christians in other cities during his time in Corinth. He could say he **robbed** those other churches in the sense that by right, the Corinthian Christians should have supported him when he ministered to their spiritual needs (1 Corinthian 9:4-11).

Instead, Paul **was a burden to no one** among the Corinthian Christians. Paul's **boasting** in his weakness and unimpressive image was an embarrassment to the Corinthian Christians. Why did he embarrass them this way? It was only because he loved them and would find a way to bring them back from their worldly thinking.

False Apostles

“But in order to eliminate the opportunity for those “super-apostles” to boast that their ministry is on the same level as ours I will continue this practice. For they are not true apostles but deceitful ministers who masquerade as “special apostles” of the Anointed One. That doesn’t surprise us, for even Satan transforms himself to appear as an angel of light! So, it’s no wonder his servants also go about pretending to be ministers of righteousness. But in the end, they will be exposed and get exactly what they deserve.” (vv12-15 TPT)

Paul wanted to expose these most *super-apostles* as frauds. If it took biting sarcasm or embarrassing the Corinthian Christians to expose them, Paul would use those tools.

False apostles are those who are transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. In fact, no one can transform *themselves* into a true apostle of Jesus; it is only a calling from God. “They were never apostles of Christ, only they put themselves into such a shape and form, that they might have more advantage to deceive.”

Even as Satan may appear as an angel of light, so false apostles may have a “good” appearance. Paul is showing the Corinthian Christians how foolish it is to rely on image and outward appearances. However, Paul is committed to exposing them.

Satan has *three forms* under which he tempts men:

1. The *subtle serpent*.
2. The *roaring lion*.
3. The *angel of light*.

He often, as the *angel of light*, persuades men to do things under the *name of religion*, which are subversive of it. In the form of heathen persecution, like a *lion* he has ravaged the heritage of the Lord. And by means of our *senses and passions*, as the *subtle serpent*, he is frequently deceiving us, so that often the *workings of corrupt nature* are mistaken for the *operations of the Spirit of God*.

Warming Up to Boast Like a Fool

“So, I repeat. Let no one think that I’m a fool. But if you do, at least show me the patience you would show a fool, so that I too may boast a little. Of course, what I’m about to tell you is not with the Lord’s authority, but as a “fool.” For since many love to boast about their worldly achievements, allow me the opportunity to join them. And since you are so smart and so wise to gladly put up with the foolishness of others, now put up with mine. You actually allow these imposters to put you into bondage, take complete advantage of you, and rob you blind! How easily you endure those who, in their arrogance, destroy your dignity or even slap you in the face. I must admit, to our shame that we were too “weak” to relate to you the way they do. But now let me dare to boast like a “fool.”” (vv16-21 TPT)

It is easy to sense both Paul's sarcasm and his hesitancy to promote himself. He would rather talk about Jesus, but that message is hindered by the Corinthians' disregard of Paul's credentials as a true apostle, a true representative of Jesus. Paul speaks **not according to the Lord** in the sense that his defence of his credentials focuses on himself. Paul did not like to talk about himself. He was happy to write *for we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord* (2 Corinthians 4:5).

Those Paul speaks of may indicate that these false apostles were legalists, trying to put people under the bondage of the Law. However, it is just as likely that the bondage Paul refers to is the personal domination and authority the *most super-apostles* held over others. The emphasis on image and outward appearance is often coupled with an authoritarian approach to leadership, and this probably explains the bondage Paul refers to.

Paul's Suffering for Christ

“Are these “super-apostles” of yours Hebrews? I am too. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? Me too! Are they servants of the Anointed One? I’m beside myself when I speak this way, but I am much more of a servant than they. I have worked much harder for God, taken more beatings, and been dragged to more prisons than they. I’ve been flogged excessively, multiple times, even to the point of death. Five times I’ve received thirty-nine lashes from the Jewish leaders. Three times I experienced being beaten with rods. Once they stoned me. Three times I’ve been shipwrecked; for an entire night and a day I was adrift in the open sea. In my difficult travels I’ve faced many dangerous situations: perilous rivers, robbers, foreigners, and even my own people. I’ve survived deadly peril in the city, in the wilderness, with storms at sea, and with spies posing as believers. I’ve toiled to the point of exhaustion and gone through many sleepless nights. I’ve frequently been deprived of food and water, left hungry and shivering out in the cold, lacking proper clothing. And besides these painful circumstances, I have the daily pressure of my responsibility for all the churches, with a deep concern weighing heavily on my heart for their welfare. I am not aloof, for who is desperate and weak and I do not feel their weakness? Who is led astray into sin and I do not burn with zeal to restore him? (vv22-29 TPT)

While we should not compare ourselves with Paul, it still begs the question of what we are willing to suffer for the gospel? Paul said:

- He had been flogged excessively many times, even to the point of death
- Five times, he had received 39 lashes
- Three times, he had been beaten with rods
- One, he was stoned
- Three times, he was shipwrecked

He goes on to say: *“In my difficult travels I’ve faced many dangerous situations: perilous rivers, robbers, foreigners, and even my own people.”*

The perils Paul mentioned were not everyday occurrences, but his deep concern for all the churches never left him. Paul’s burdens were not only physical, but they were also emotional.

Boasting About His Infirmary

“If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. In Damascus the governor, under Aretas the king, was guarding the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desiring to arrest me; but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped from his hands.” (vv30-33)

What is Paul’s boast? What are his credentials as an apostle? Only his scars, the things which concern my infirmity.

The *false apostles*, those *super-apostles*, would never dream of boasting in such things. They thought any infirmity made one look weak and far from God. Despite that, Paul did not care if it looked foolish in the eyes of the world or those in the church who thought like the world. Paul lived with an eternal perspective, not a worldly perspective.

The persecution in Damascus was perhaps the first real peril or hardship Paul faced for Jesus' sake (Acts 9:23-25). He thinks way back to this beginning event, perhaps thinking that his escape from Damascus was his "apprenticeship in persecution." It is as if he says, "This is how my ministry began and this is how it continues."