

XIV. Paul vs. the Angel of Light

March 31 & April 1/2, 2015

2 Corinthians 11:1-15

Aim: To recognize that false teachers and bad teaching often appear orthodox, because Satan and his followers masquerade as angels of light.

Up to this point, Paul has been fairly gentle with his opponents at Corinth, but now he becomes extremely frank and open and designates them as servants of Satan, serving the interests of the Evil One, not those of the kingdom of God. The gospel they proclaim is not just slightly unusual or different on some minor point from the way Paul preached. It is a counterfeit and a most sinister one at that.

Paul had just completed a hard hitting defense of his apostolic authority in which he contrasted the *improper* boasting of the false apostles with *proper* apostolic boasting, which he then capped with the defining quotation from Jeremiah 9:23-24 (10:17). Fleshly, man-centered boasting was anathema to Paul. Paul loathed human boasting, especially among professed believers. However, now (unthinkably to Paul) he realizes that he must engage in the boasting he so abominates. The reason that Paul must indulge in boasting is that his opponents' boasting has made such deep inroads in the Corinthian church that their deadly teaching has gained a hearing. Thus Paul will be compelled to boast 'as a fool' – 'like a madman' as he will describe it (11:21-23). But first he must prepare his readers for his stooping to such distasteful foolishness. So in verses 1-15 Paul lays out the justification for his participation in boasting.

A. The Super-Apostles (2 Corinthians 11:1-6)

1. Paul Is Foolish (11:1)

¹I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness. Do bear with me!

Beginning in chapter 11, Paul confronted the false apostles. Reluctantly, he compared himself to them so the Corinthians could distinguish a true messenger of God from false ones. As he began to confront the false apostles, Paul revealed that his motive for doing so was to call the Corinthians back to loyalty. He was about to answer fools as their folly deserved (cp. Prov. 26:5). In reality, he would have preferred not to write this section, but the Corinthians' folly left him no choice. The apostle softened his blow by acknowledging that they were indeed bearing with him, an affirmation of their positive response to his prior correction of them (2 Cor. 2:1-4; 7:6-11). Paul asked for the same favorable response as he defended himself against the false teachers' attacks and the Corinthians' own foolish disloyalty.

Paul's reticence is obvious in his opening request. 'Bear with me as I play the fool so I can expose the foolishness of my opponents.'

Paul is obviously somewhat embarrassed by the particular line of argument he is forced to employ here. Self-praise is unpalatable for the Christian. Sometimes, however, we have to do what we find difficult and to do it in the interests of the kingdom of God. At times a servant of Christ has to defend his ministry, because he dare not allow it to be dismissed with contempt. This defense is not for his sake but for Christ's sake.

Paul has made some reference to the jibes of his critics that he is 'worldly' and 'timid' (10:1-4). Now he takes up another, that he is a 'fool' (vv. 1, 16, 21, literally a mind-less person).

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Evidently his critics have mockingly commended the Corinthians for ‘putting up with that fool Paul.’

2. Paul Is Jealous (11:2)

²For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ.

Earlier Paul had depicted himself as the slave of a conquering general (2:14), as the ‘aroma of Christ’ (2:13), as the ‘postman’ of Christ (3:3), as an ‘ambassador’ of Christ (5:20), and as a fortress-conqueror (10:4-5). Now he depicts himself as a ‘matchmaker’ who has introduced the Corinthians to Christ as His fiancée. As the good friend of the groom-to-be, he is keeping watch over the bride-to-be until the groom comes to consummate the marriage. This is a profound allegory of the church, the Lord, and the Christian evangelist. The bride-to-be is the church; the husband, soon to come, is the heavenly Lord; the matchmaker who is concerned for the bride’s fidelity is the evangelist.

Is there just a touch of playfulness in verse 1? Possibly. Some commentators think so. In verse 2, however, he becomes deadly serious. As God reveals Himself to us in the Old Testament, we find many qualities in His perfect character. One that some readers find difficult to understand is His ‘jealousy,’ referred to in passages like Joshua 24:19, Ezekiel 16:38, and Exodus 20:5. Following in God’s footsteps, Paul says here that he is jealous; he is not jealous for himself, but for God. As a servant of Christ, whom God has used to bring many to Himself and, in fact to establish the church at Corinth, Paul wants to see that church ‘married’ to Christ. He casts himself in the role of the bride’s father.

The thought of the Corinthians’ being seduced into error by the false apostles was heartbreaking to Paul. Thus, what may have seemed to the Corinthians to be boasting on his part was actually extreme concern, prompted by ‘godly jealousy’ (literally, ‘the jealousy of God.’). Paul’s jealousy on God’s behalf manifested itself in righteous indignation at the possibility of the Corinthians’ detection. Paul expressed his concern over the Corinthians’ disloyalty to Christ using the analogy of betrothal and marriage. During the betrothal period, it was the father’s responsibility to ensure that his daughter remained faithful to her pledged husband. He would then present her to him at the wedding ceremony as a pure virgin. When Paul preached the gospel to them, he betrothed the Corinthians to one husband. As their spiritual father (1 Cor. 4:15), Paul was determined to present them ‘as a pure virgin to Christ.’

Paul asks for the Corinthians’ forbearance because he has a fatherly jealousy for them. At their conversion the Corinthians were betrothed to Christ, and at their glorification they will be presented to Christ as His bride. Thus Paul pictures himself as the father of the bride whose ultimate purpose was to present her as a virgin to the Bridegroom at His appearance (cp. 4:14; Eph. 5:27). And Paul was properly jealous about this.

Verse 2 describes Paul’s motivation in writing to the Corinthians. God is jealous for His people. He is zealous in His pursuit of what is for their good. This is a truth already revealed in the Old Testament (cp. Ex. 20:5; 34:14; Dt. 4:24; 5:9; 6:15; Jos. 24:19). His jealousy springs from the unique sensitivity of His love. Paul was jealous over the Corinthians with God’s own jealousy. Some might have thought Paul’s concern ‘foolishness’ (v. 1), but it reflected God’s concern for His people’s love for His Son.

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3. Paul Is Afraid (11:3-4)

a) *The Example in Eden (11:3a)*

³*But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning...*

The phrase, ‘I am afraid,’ expresses the heart of Paul’s concern, both in this passage and in the entire epistle. His defense of his integrity and his ministry, his appeals for the Corinthians’ loyalty, and his confrontation of the false teachers all were motivated by fear. The apostle’s true concern was justified, because the Corinthians had demonstrated an alarming susceptibility to being seduced, welcoming those who preached another Jesus and a different gospel (11:4). It is every pastor’s fear that some of his sheep might go astray.

As the ‘serpent’ lured Eve away from God (Gen. 3:1-6), so, by inference, these teachers of a false gospel are enticing the bride-to-be away from a ‘sincere and pure devotion to Christ.’ The ‘cunning’ of these teachers was their alternative but false gospel and their charismatic power. It is clear from this passage that the pure gospel alone joins us to, and keeps us in a right relationship with, Christ.

For ‘serpent’ we may read ‘Satan.’ It is sadly possible to live as if Satan were a myth and to be totally unaware of his unceasing activity and amazing subtlety. Satan endeavors to draw men and women away from the love of truth and to embrace instead error. He takes them captive ‘by philosophy and empty deceit.’ He encourages attention and loyalty to human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than to our Lord Jesus Christ (Col. 2:8).

Paul’s intense paternal zeal was fed by the true and present danger that the Corinthians might be led astray, and the bridal image just mentioned quite naturally brought to his mind the first human bride and how she was led astray by her deceiver. This is the first of two mentions of Eve in the New Testament, and it is utterly intentional. Eve was completely deceived by Satan’s cunning (cp. 1 Tim. 2:14). When Eve fell, it was not because she was beaten into submission by Satan, but by his encircling her soul with sequential coils of deception as he promised Eve things he could not deliver.

b) *The Concern for Corinth (11:3b)*

...your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

So it was with the betrothed Corinthian community as they were susceptible to Satan’s cunning as he led them away from Christ into the promise of a more triumphant, victorious, prosperous Christianity—a Christianity that was dismissive of taking up the cross and weakness and suffering. A sincere devotion to Christ is possible only where the true and authentic gospel of Christ is taught and heard.

As the ‘father’ of this church at Corinth, Paul’s mind is troubled at the thought that the converts he loves so much may be diverted and defiled by some who were acting for Satan. This thought, certainly implied here, is spelled out explicitly later on, in verses 13-15.

Paul feared that Satan’s emissaries, using the same ‘craftiness’ (cp. vv. 13-15) by which their evil master deceived Eve, would lead the Corinthians’ ‘minds’ (the Greek word could also be translated ‘thoughts’) ‘astray,’ thus corrupting or ruining them (the Greek term also has those connotations).

From the time of the Fall to the present day, men and women have frequently succumbed to the deceptive devices of the devil. Christians are especially open to the kind of cunning deceit that

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combines the language of faith and religion with the content of self-interest and flattery. We like to be told how special we are, how wise, how blessed. We like to have our Christianity shaped less by the cross than by triumphalism or rules or charismatic leaders or subjective experience. And if this shaping can be coated with assurances of orthodoxy, complete with cliché, we may not detect the presence of the arch-deceiver, nor see that we are being weaned away from ‘sincere and pure devotion to Christ’ to a ‘different gospel.’ The wolves in the church that devour sheep do not howl and bare their teeth. They come in sheep’s clothing, smiling, reciting Scripture, full of understanding, promising something more than Christ.

c) The ‘Apostles’ of Achaia (11:4)

4For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough.

‘If’ could be better translated ‘since,’ because Paul was not writing about a hypothetical situation. False teachers had already come to Corinth. Paul did not dignify the false teachers’ heresy by giving a detailed explanation of it. But here he summarized it under three general headings.

The word ‘if’ introduces a conditional clause, but the grammatical form Paul uses here strongly suggests he is writing, not simply about a possibility, but an actual occurrence. Here then is the work of the serpent in the false apostles at Corinth. The three phrases, ‘a Jesus other than,’ ‘a different spirit,’ and ‘a different gospel,’ build up a very disturbing picture of preaching that was at least off-center and possibly seriously heretical. These three phrases employ two different words both of which are sometimes translated ‘another.’ The first phrase uses the milder word *allos* but the other two the stronger word *heteros*, which means, not simply another to be added to the first, but another to be distinguished from the first, different rather than additional, and so in no sense a proper alternative. He uses the same two words about the gospel in Galatians 1:6-7, and in that passage is most emphatic that there can be no acceptable alternative to the gospel he preached in Galatia. Paul seems to be strengthening the thought of the whole sentence by his change of word. It is as if he is saying, ‘an additional – no, let’s rather say a counterfeit!’

Paul feared that through satanic deception the Corinthians would fall to three delusions: ‘another Jesus,’ ‘a different spirit,’ and ‘a different gospel.’ The triplet of Jesus, spirit (the Holy Spirit), and gospel all suffered distortion at the hands of the false apostles who conflated the Judaizers’ demands that Gentiles keep the old covenant with a promise of more of the Spirit and the health and wealth ecstasies of the heaven now of over-realized eschatology. Thus Paul’s enemies were preaching another Jesus and a false understanding of the work of the Spirit—which means a different gospel.

(1) A Different Jesus

First, the false apostles preached ‘another Jesus,’ not the true Lord Jesus Christ whom Paul preached. An aberrant Christology has always been a hallmark of false religions and cults. Instead of viewing Him as the eternal second person of the Trinity, who became a man and died as an atoning sacrifice for sin, they see Him as a prophet, guru, avatar, social or political revolutionary, Michael the archangel, a spirit child of God, an emanation from God—anything but the true God in the flesh.

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In what way then was their Jesus different from Paul's? It seems very likely that they had minimized the element of humility and suffering in Christ, who, as Lord of all, was the supreme Leader. So, if this was the concept of Jesus they presented, the expression 'a different gospel' is easy to understand, for the type of Jesus we believe in determines the kind of gospel we believe, and Paul's gospel undoubtedly placed great emphasis on the cross.

Paul sensed that through Satan's deceptive activity, the Corinthians were in danger of wandering from Christ (v. 3). Significantly, the main way in which Paul feared this might happen was by someone coming to them and preaching a Jesus other than the Jesus whom he and his associates had preached. This danger is always present, and in subtle ways. When people propagate ideas for which they want religious or Christian support, they may sometimes try to suggest that they obtain their views from Jesus and his teaching. This tendency shows itself in all sorts of emphases, thoughts, and notions.

(2) A Different Spirit

Second, the false apostles came in the power of 'a different spirit,' a demonic spirit, not the Holy Spirit whom the Corinthians had received at salvation. All false teaching ultimately derives from Satan and his demon hosts.

Paul refers to the possibility of the Corinthians receiving 'a different spirit from the one you received.' The Holy Spirit always focuses our attention upon our Lord Jesus Christ and what He has done for us. He intends us to give the Lord Jesus the pre-eminence and supremacy in everything. He wants us to maintain right views and understanding of our Savior. If our attention wanders from the Lord Jesus, or we begin to foster false ideas about His work and teaching, then that distraction comes from another spirit, a spirit doing the work of Satan.

The qualities these men were extolling and promoting were so different from those imparted by God's Spirit. He is the Spirit who indwelt the holy, loving, patient, and humble Jesus, and His concern is to reproduce these qualities in Christian people. A proud, arrogant demeanor is hardly evidence of the presence of the Spirit of God within the heart.

(3) A Different Gospel

The logical consequence of proclaiming a different Jesus in the power of a different spirit was that the false apostles preached 'a different gospel.' They did not preach the true gospel that the Corinthians had accepted when Paul first preached it to them. Paul did not define this false gospel. It undoubtedly denied that salvation is by grace through faith alone, and it added human works.

The gospel of the glory and grace of God is the church's treasure. Some despise the gospel on account of its simplicity. Many at Corinth would seem to have done the same (1 Cor. 18, 23). Some of Paul's detractors may have criticized the simplicity of his approach, while they themselves made the gospel seem complicated to understand, perhaps in order to appear erudite. The gospel is not advice, but power. It is amazing how easily we may lose sight of the priority of the gospel and its simplicity. As churches we can become caught up with all kinds of programs that in the end obscure our primary function to obey our Savior's last commission.

The error being promoted at Corinth may not have been one that would show up in a theological Creed or Confession, a brief statement of faith. It is possible to appear perfectly orthodox in

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making such a statement, and yet, even in preaching, to be promoting a type of lifestyle quite at variance with the way Christ is presented in the New Testament.

(4) A Diffident Congregation

Incredibly, instead of rejecting this damning heresy, the Corinthians bore it ‘beautifully;’ they tolerated it, thus justifying Paul’s fear for their purity.

Paul sensed that the Corinthians lacked caution and watchfulness. They ‘put up with it readily enough’ when someone preached a different Jesus and gospel, with a different spirit. They may have prided themselves on their tolerance of different views. Instead of looking for the preaching of Jesus Christ and Him crucified, as they had been taught to do, the Corinthians accepted teaching that did not have these fundamentals at its center.

Many in Corinth were really beginning to follow Jesus and a spirit and a gospel that did not exist. And that is still the real danger today. The mantra-like use of the name Jesus is used today by false apostles as well as by true. The question is, is this the Jesus of the Bible or the Jesus of another gospel?

Here in our passage, the intensity of Paul’s fearful feelings, his jealousy to keep the church pure, to protect his people from Satan’s cunning to keep them following the real Jesus and Spirit and gospel—all of these things were why Paul would condescend to boast in his ministry and why the Corinthians were asked to put up with such foolishness.

4. Paul Is Not Inferior (11:5-6)

a) The ‘Super-Apostles’ (11:5)

⁵*Indeed, I consider that I am not in the least inferior to these super-apostles.*

Some commentators argue that the phrase ‘most eminent apostles’ refers here and in 12:11 to the Twelve. But though it is true that Paul was fully equal to the Twelve (12:12; cp. Gal. 2:6-9), several considerations make it unlikely that he had them in mind here. First, Paul would not have referred to the Twelve with a sarcastic term like ‘super apostles.’ Second, the false apostles clearly are in view in 11:4, since Paul would never have accused the Twelve of preaching another Jesus or a different gospel. To abruptly shift to a discussion of the Twelve in verse 5 would be confusing and make no sense. Thus the context argues that the same group is in view in verses 4 and 5. Third, Paul admits in verse 6 to being unskilled in speech compared to the self-proclaimed ‘super apostles.’ But that would not be true if he were comparing himself to the Twelve, who were ‘uneducated and untrained men’ (Acts 4:13). Finally, Paul would not implied that he had spiritual knowledge that the Twelve lacked (11:6).

Who were these ‘super-apostles’ who ‘preach a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached’? Paul cannot be referring to *the* apostles, since he himself had already stated that he and they preach the same gospel focused on the death, burial, resurrection, and appearances of Christ (1 Cor. 15:11). Rather, he is referring to those recently arrived ‘apostles’ who claim superiority over Paul on the basis of the greater distances they have traveled (10:12-13) and on the ‘abundance of revelations’ they have experienced (12:1, 7). He concedes no superiority to these ministers.

To whom is Paul referring when he uses the phrase ‘super-apostles’? It makes very good sense to interpret the phrase in the light of verse 13, and so to see this as a reference to the false

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apostles. In this case, Paul's claim not to be inferior to them was deep irony. Of course he could not be inferior to them, for how could truth be inferior to falsehood?

'Super-apostles' on Paul's lips drips with sarcasm. His opponents called themselves 'apostles, but Paul contemptuously called them 'super-apostles' because they arrogated themselves over him, the Apostle to the Gentiles. In verse 13 Paul describes them in the original Greek as 'pseudo-apostles.' Super-apostles were unashamed of selling themselves and their services, copying the world's frequent pattern. They viewed themselves as superior to Paul and the other apostles. This in itself should have made the Corinthian believers suspicious.

Paul has chosen (or invented) his word 'superlative' (*hyperlian*) with care. The word 'super-' or 'superlative' (*hyperlian*) occurs in the New Testament only here and at 12:11. In fact the word cannot be found elsewhere until medieval times. It is conceivable that Paul coined the word, which is made up of *hyper*, 'above', and *lian*, 'very much.' The word is ironic and means something like 'very superior.'

Within chapters 10-13, where he particularly interacts with his opponents, there are a number of compound words formed of *hyper*, 'above,' 'beyond.' Paul writes of their missionary imperialism 'going to far,' as 'overextending' themselves (10:14; *hyperkteinein* into 'regions beyond'; 10:16; *ta hyperkeina*). They boast of 'surpassingly great revelations' (12:17; *tē hyperbolē tōn apocalypseōn*) and the resultant 'super-elation' or 'conceit' (*hyperairesthai*). To expose their boastfulness Paul boasts of being 'more' a servant of Christ (11:23; *hyper*), by which he means one who has suffered greater ignominy. Truly, Paul's opponents are hyper-men, aptly described as 'very superior,' *hyperlian*. It was their belief, apparently, that God's power would come upon their power, making them men of hyper-power.

b) *The 'Super' Apostle (11:6)*

(1) Unskilled in Speaking (11:6a)

⁶Even if I am unskilled in speaking...

The false apostles scorned Paul for being 'unskilled in speech' (cp. 10:10). *Idiōtēs* ('unskilled') has a contemptuous ring to it, reflecting the false apostles' view that Paul was a crude, amateurish, unrefined speaker. The apostle acknowledged that he was not interested in the rhetorical and oratorical skills that so impressed the Greeks, because he was not concerned with technique, but with the truth. He was not interested in theatrics or in manipulating his audience. Therefore, his message was the gospel, clear and simple. Paul knew that human eloquence draws people to the preacher, not to the cross; faithful preaching, on the other hand, results not in people admiring the preacher but the Christ he proclaims. Nonetheless, Paul was not an ineffective speaker; on the contrary, he spoke with tremendous power and impact. But he was not interested in flowery oratory or being culturally relevant.

His admission that he is 'not...a trained speaker' probably relates back to the unnamed Corinthian critic of the previous chapter and his jibe about Paul's 'weak' physical presence and 'contemptible' speech. It should not be inferred that the 'super-apostles' were eloquent orators. At that time educated people in major Hellenistic cities such as Corinth were greatly taken by those who were impressive public speakers. We note the great interest shown by the Corinthians in Apollos' oratory. While Paul's letters reflect considerable rhetorical skill, he was, for some reason, unimpressive as a speaker, what he calls (literally), a 'layman in speech.'

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(2) Skilled in Knowledge (11:6b)

...I am not so in knowledge; indeed, in every way we have made this plain to you in all things.

Though Paul granted that he was ‘unskilled in speaking’ (according to the artificial, stylized standards of Greco-Roman rhetoric), he really conceded nothing because he defined the criteria for preaching, namely, *knowledge*. Likely, Paul was a power, persuasive preacher who refused the synthetic style of the rhetorician. And that was obvious to the Corinthians.

Paul has just denied any inferiority to the ‘super-apostles;’ why does he now concede deficiency in public speech? It is so that he can lay claim the more strongly to be in no way deficient or inferior in ‘knowledge.’ This is not, of course, a claim to superior education or to intellectual distinction as such, but to the true knowledge of the true gospel given to Paul on the Damascus Road and confirmed subsequently by the Jerusalem apostles (cp. Gal. 1:18-19; 2:7-9).

Although his communication skills might have been deficient by the false apostles’ standards, Paul was not lacking in knowledge. Paul did not keep his knowledge secret, but ‘in every way, he made it evident to the Corinthians in all things. Yet despite the solid doctrinal foundation Paul had given them, the Corinthians were in grave danger of being seduced. The risk of wandering from the truth and becoming confused and disloyal is a constant threat to the church of Jesus Christ.

His opponents seem to have won their way to recognition by the Corinthians by dint of their verbal eloquence, for training in rhetoric was highly regarded in the Greek world of the day. Paul had apparently never been educated in formal rhetoric [?? DSB]. What he did have, however, was far more important. It was knowledge and understanding of the gospel facts. His speaking may not have been brilliant but it was squarely founded on truth. Training in communication skills, in such subjects as homiletics and voice production, is important for the Christian preacher, but they are no substitute for deep acquaintance with and wholehearted commitment to Biblical truth.

B. The True Apostle (2 Corinthians 11:7-11)

1. Paul Is Humble (11:7-9)

a) No Support from the Corinthians (11:7)

⁷Or did I commit a sin in humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached God's gospel to you free of charge?

Traveling speakers and professional philosophers in Paul’s day were accorded status by the fees they charged. In fact, a cheap fee was thought to imply that the message wasn’t important. Therefore, Paul’s refusal to accept money for his ministry in Corinth was negatively interpreted to mean either: 1) an admission that his teaching was of low caliber; 2) that his message wasn’t worth much; 3) that he gave the gospel away because nobody would pay for it; or 4) that he was not really an apostle. Add to this the fact that the ‘super-apostles’ charged for their renditions of the gospel and you have the picture.

It is evident from these words that the Corinthians were at that time deeply offended that he had not accepted payment from them for his earlier ministry among them. Possibly this old wound had been opened by the presence of the new ministers in Corinth, who were evidently receiving

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money for their ministry (cp. 11:20; 2:17). His question ‘Was it a sin?’ indicates the depth of bitterness in this matter.

The implication of the apostle’s question is that they were as much as calling his humility a sin. The false apostles put a perverse spin on Paul’s humble refusal to accept money from the Corinthians. In Greek culture, a skilled orator was considered a professional, one who made his living from the fees he charged. By ministering free of charge, they maintained, the apostle labeled himself an amateur who lacked their credentials and hence was not qualified to be heard by the Corinthians. Further, they insinuated, how could what Paul had to say be of any value if he did not charge for it? Amazingly, many of the Corinthians fell for that outrageous lie.

The Corinthians’ gullibility on this issue was inexcusable. In his first inspired letter to them, Paul had explained at length why he did not take any money from them (1 Cor. 9:3-18). Though he had every right to ‘reap material things’ from the Corinthians. He chose to forgo that privilege. It was Paul’s practice not to be supported by new churches he founded, for two important reasons. First, he wanted to distance himself from deceivers, who were in the ministry for money. Second, he worked to provide an example for new believers (cp. 2 Th. 3:8-9). Though Paul did not take money from churches while he was establishing them, he did accept support from those churches after he left. They were thus able to share in his church-planting ministry.

It seems clear that these men despised Paul for taking no fee for his gospel preaching. If they had themselves been trained in rhetoric (cp. v. 6), they probably insisted on being paid the ‘going rate’ for public speakers. Paul had already written to the Corinthians on this subject in 1 Corinthians 9:6-14, where he had made it clear that apostles had a right to remuneration, but that they also had the privilege of refusing it for the gospel’s sake. It was this latter course Paul had taken at Corinth.

Paul says that he lowered himself. This was probably what his opponents found so objectionable. He had given a model of Christian leadership so different from their own that it was a challenge to their genuineness, and one that all could see. It was of course modeled on that of Christ (cp. Phil. 2:5-8). The only course open to his opponents was to draw attention to Paul’s lowering of himself but to put on it their own interpretation. If he charged no fee, they said, it was clearly because he knew he was not an apostle and so did not have an apostle’s rights.

A possible further fact was that Paul had so blatantly disregarded social convention. At that time it was customary for the wealthy to put other people under obligation by gifts and favors. The practice of patronage was deeply embedded in Greco-Roman society. In declining the Corinthians’ gifts, Paul was, from their viewpoint, in serious breach of social convention. Paul’s ‘sin’ was that while he had specifically sought to include the wealthy in his ministry, he had not only declined their money, but worse, he had actually done manual labor to support himself. By ‘lowering himself’ in physical labor, which the Greeks traditionally despised, Paul evangelized them, thus ‘elevating’ them or lifting them out of the morass of their former evil lifestyle.

Paul’s purpose ‘in humbling’ himself was that the Corinthians ‘might be exalted.’ Paul’s free preaching of the gospel had elevated them from damnation to glory; where was the sin in that?

The gospel had in fact elevated the Corinthians. It always does, for it is the image of God in people that imparts true dignity to them, and to preach the gospel is to be the means to that

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through the working of the Holy Spirit with the Word of God, whereby sinners are recreated after the image of Christ.

b) Support from the Macedonians (11:8-9)

(1) 'Robbery' (11:8)

⁸*I robbed other churches by accepting support from them in order to serve you.*

The super-apostles suggested it was demeaning to work in such a manner and not to expect payment for preaching. Paul explains that, in effect, he 'robbed' other churches by receiving money from them to support his work in Corinth. Even when in financial straits in Corinth, he had never been a charge upon their resources. Rather, Christians who came from Macedonia supplied what he needed.

The fact is that while Paul would not presently take any support from the Corinthian church, he did accept support from other churches. In his first letter to the Corinthians he defended his right as an apostle to receive support from the churches (1 Cor. 9:15-17). However, in Corinth, due to charges launched against his integrity, he refused any money from the prosperous church. Instead, so as not to burden the Corinthians, he 'robbed' churches that were in abject poverty!

Verse 8 shows that Paul had received money or goods for his gospel-preaching, but not from those to whom the gospel was addressed, but from churches already established and which shared his evangelistic passion for those who did not know Christ. It is obvious that 'robbed' was not intended literally, but rather reflected Paul's knowledge as to how sacrificial the Macedonian Christians had been in their support of him, for they were so poor (8:2).

Sulaō ('robbed') is a strong term, generally used in a military context to speak of pillaging, or of stripping a dead soldier of his armor. 'Wages' ('support') translates *opsōnion*, which is used in Luke 3:14 to speak of soldiers' pay or rations (cp. its similar use in 1 Cor. 9:7). Obviously, Paul was speaking metaphorically and with irony; he did not actually rob or defraud any church. But the gifts he received from poor churches made them still poorer, and Paul's humility made that seem to him as if he were plundering them. Specifically, the apostle had in mind the impoverished churches of Macedonia (Philippi, Berea, and Thessalonica).

(1) 'Burden' (11:9)

⁹*And when I was with you and was in need, I did not burden anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied my need. So I refrained and will refrain from burdening you in any way.*

Even when Paul was present with them and was in need, he 'was not a burden to anyone.' He had plied his trade as a tent maker (or leather-worker) while in Corinth (Acts 18:3). He refused to be a 'burden' (the Greek verb literally means 'to grow numb,' and hence to be a dead weight) to the Corinthians. Eventually, Silas and Timothy arrived with the Macedonian churches' gifts, alleviating Paul's needs and allowing him to devote himself full-time to ministry (Acts 18:5). Just as Paul had kept himself from being a burden to the Corinthians in the past, so he would continue to do so on his upcoming visit (12:14).

In this context, the word 'burden' means 'financial burden.' Verse 9, although part of Paul's defense of himself against criticism, is also valuable as throwing light on God's providential

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dealings with him. Financial support came as the need arose. Clearly he was trusting God to supply his need and was not let down.

When he had worked among them six years earlier he had been prepared to accept support from the Macedonians but not from the Corinthians. In their minds this could only mean that he loved the Macedonians but did not love the Corinthians (cp. v. 11), that he preferred people from the province of Macedonia to the province of Achaia.

The Corinthians were meant to get the point of this ironic hyperbole—and they certainly did. Paul’s rejection of pay called into question their motivation and integrity. And more, Paul’s practice was in accord with that of Christ Himself (8:9). Obviously, Paul’s raising the subject of money put his opponents back on their heels. They knew that Paul’s example made them look shabby; they knew they were a burden to the Corinthians and he was not.

2. Paul Is Boastful (11:10-11)

a) Paul Loves the Corinthians (11:10-11)

¹⁰As the truth of Christ is in me, this boasting of mine will not be silenced in the regions of Achaia. ¹¹And why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do!

Paul seals his commitment to take no money with two brief back-to-back oaths. The first oath is in verse 10. The ‘super-apostles’ saw his refusal to take money as an indication of his disqualification. But Paul sees it for what it is—as objective evidence that he is following Christ. So he boasts in it. Paul would rather die than let anyone deprive him of the boast of giving up his apostolic rights to financial supply (cp. 1 Cor. 9:15).

Paul could justly affirm that ‘the truth of Christ’ was in him. He not only proclaimed the truth, but also lived it out in absolute integrity. Paul’s ‘boasting’ would not be stopped because he was not going to change his policy. He would continue to minister free of charge, both at Corinth and throughout the surrounding ‘regions of Achaia.’ That there were other churches in that province is clear from Paul’s references to ‘all the saints who are throughout Achaia’ (1:1), and to Phoebe, a member of the church at the nearby port city of Cenchreae (Rom. 16:1). That Paul included the surrounding region suggests that the false apostles’ influence was not confined to Corinth.

Paul’s reference to ‘the regions of Achaia’ may suggest his opponents had an influence that went beyond Corinth, the provincial capital, into other parts of the province. We know from 1:1 that there were churches elsewhere in the province, and in his letter to the Romans, Paul makes reference to the church in Cenchreae, which was Corinth’s port (Rom. 16:1). Paul’s refusal of aid from the Corinthians had been misinterpreted by them, and Paul felt it important to show what the truth was.

Second, because Paul senses that his refusal to accept honoraria from the Corinthians may be interpreted as spite, he resorts to another oath in verse 11. The Corinthian detractors were so far gone, so perverted in their indicting of Paul, that Paul called God as witness (‘God knows I do!’) to prove that he truly loved them. The Corinthians have missed altogether that Paul was simply following the example of Christ.

Another insidious charge leveled by the false apostles concerned Paul’s humble refusal to take money from the Corinthians. That he did not do so, they argued, showed that he did not really love the Corinthians and wanted no strings to bind them to him. Paul replied to that false

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allegation by asking the Corinthians the rhetorical question, 'Why did I not take money from you? 'Because I do not love you?' That they could seriously entertain the notion that Paul did not love them was absurd in light of his repeated actions and affirmations (cp. 2:4; 12:15; 1 Cor. 4:21; 16:24). Since the Corinthians doubted him, Paul appealed to the highest court, emphatically declaring, 'God knows I do!'

b) Paul Exposes the False Apostles (11:12)

¹²*And what I am doing I will continue to do, in order to undermine the claim of those who would like to claim that in their boasted mission they work on the same terms as we do.*

The false apostles' pride most clearly manifested itself in their greed. Though they desperately wanted to be seen as Paul's equals, Paul's refusal to take money from the Corinthians posed a major problem for them. Since they did take money from the Corinthians, they were caught on the horns of a dilemma. To continue to do so left them in an awkward and embarrassing position in comparison to Paul. On the other hand, for them to refuse to be paid was unthinkable; because they were in it for the money. Paul would not help them out of their dilemma by changing his policy and taking money from the Corinthians. The contrast between his selflessness and the false apostles' greed should have made it clear to the Corinthians who was the genuine man of God.

There was no way that the money-loving 'super-apostles' were on Paul's level. They did not come close to his ethics and, most of all, his love! So he will keep laboring at no cost to undermine their fraudulent claims of equality.

Verse 12 shows that Paul knew full well that his practice was a much stronger argument for his own authenticity than his opponents were prepared to admit, for it reflected his character, and character matters supremely in a Christian worker.

C. The False Apostles (2 Corinthians 11:13-15)

The Corinthians must be under no illusions as to the real character of these men who were opposing his ministry. No matter what they seemed to be under a superficial appraisal, they were in fact evil. It is doubtful whether a writer using the Greek language could make his thought clearer or more emphatic than Paul does here. Gone is the irony. There is no playfulness now. He is now totally literal, totally serious, fiercely emphatic.

These three verses form the heart of this section. Paul denounced the false apostles in strong, forceful language because the truth was at stake. Unlike many today, Paul was not willing to sacrifice truth for unity. Throughout this epistle, he had alluded to the false apostles, referring to them obliquely as the 'many' who were guilty of 'peddling the word of God,' (2:17); as 'some, who regard us as if we walked according to the flesh' (10:2); as 'those who commend themselves' (10:12); as those who preach 'another Jesus' and 'a different gospel' (11:4); and, sarcastically, as 'the most eminent apostles' (11:5). But now the time has come to bluntly and directly expose them.

1. False Apostles (11:13)

¹³*For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.*

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Paul probably coined the term *pseudapostolos* ('false apostles'), which appears nowhere else in the New Testament (cp. Rev. 2:2). Such deceivers have plagued God's people throughout redemptive history. These men plied their trade by 'disguising themselves as apostles of Christ' to deceive the gullible and undiscerning. Though they brashly posed as equals to Paul and the Twelve, the false apostles were in reality 'deceitful workers,' Satan's servants who would 'disguise themselves as servants of righteousness' (v. 15). The Bible reveals that deceit is a hallmark of false teachers.

The term 'false apostles' is given more strength by the fact that Paul does not just use an adjective and a noun, but that he joins them into one Greek word, one noun, in this way implying that their so-called 'apostleship' and their 'falseness' were inseparable. There was no way the two elements could be separated. Their whole ministry was based on a lie. To strengthen this thought still further he says they are 'deceitful workmen,' not making an honest mistake but indulging in a fully culpable deception. Then, both in verses 13 and 14, he employs a word which refers to a change in the appearance of something or somebody. They were clearly pretending to be what they were not, just as Satan pretends to be an angel of light.

So now, using some of his strongest language ever, he further explains why his opponents do not measure up. The deceit of the false apostles was fully volitional; they disguised themselves or masqueraded as apostles of Christ. The term normally means physical transformation (cp. Phil. 3:21)—'to transform, to change the outward appearance of a person or thing, to disguise.' Thus, Paul's opponents may have affected an apostolic dress, perhaps through ornamentation and vestments. Their apostolic chic when compared to unimpressive bodily presence would have fooled many of the culture-bound Corinthians. However, it was the false apostles' deceit that was intentional and thoroughgoing.

2. Angel of Light (11:14)

¹⁴*And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.*

This is the only time that Satan is described as 'an angel of light,' though the idea is certainly in the Old Testament (cp. Is. 14:12-15). The point is that he is the arch-deceiver (cp. Jn. 8:44). When Satan is at work we never smell sulfur or glance down at a cloven hoof; rather he is sweetness and a congenial smiling light—until he has control. Remember Screwtape's diabolical counsel to Wormwood? 'Indeed, the safest road to Hell is the gradual one—the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts.' The devil is the angel of light.

The expression, 'an angel of light,' may derive from the words of Christ in Luke 11:18, 'I saw Satan fall as lightning from heaven.' Some have seen both passages as implied references to the fall from heaven of the 'morning star, son of the dawn' in Isaiah 14:12. If so, then our Lord seems to have seen the king of Babylon, addressed in that passage, as a kind of grim type of which Satan is the antitype. Just as the godly figures of the Old Testament foreshadowed the supremely godly Christ, so the evil characters foreshadowed the supremely ungodly Satan, the ultimate foe of Christ.

These 'false apostles' are Satan's agents and instruments, reflecting the character of their master. 'Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.' Such a description underlines his deceptiveness. Angels are envoys of God, and God Himself is light. When Satan deceives, he gives every impression of bringing divine revelation.

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It is in the guise of an ‘angel of light’ that Satan appears to the church, not the pitchfork, horns, and pointed tail of mythology. Satan is most effective in the church when he comes not as an open enemy, but as a false friend; not when he persecutes the church, but when he joins it; not when he attacks the pulpit, but when he stands in it.

3. Servants of Satan (11:15)

¹⁵*So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.*

Possibly the word ‘righteousness’ is critical here, indicating perhaps a key element in the Judaizing mission to reinstate the law and repair the damage believed to have been done to it by Paul. So far from opposing the law of God, however, Paul upheld it (cp. Rom. 3:31). To him, the law was upheld through the coming of the new covenant in which God imputed ‘righteousness’ to man. Righteousness was not achieved through keeping the law, but through the vicarious death of God’s Son (3:9; 5:21). Paul, the apostle of Christ, is engaged in the ‘ministry that brings righteousness’ (3:9).

The methodology of false apostles is that of servants of righteousness, not unrighteousness. The temptations that come from such teachers are tinted with the artificial light of pseudo-righteousness. Those under their sway rationalize their way into evil by seeing some kind of good in it, or by ignoring its evil. Paul concludes his point ominously. The ‘super-apostles’ were not Christians at all. They were of the devil—and diabolically wrong. And a special wrath awaited them.

To put the matter totally beyond doubt, in verse 15 Paul identifies these men as servants of Satan. His closing words are most somber in their implication of divine judgment for them. Why does Paul speak so strongly about them? Clearly he saw they posed an immense danger. If they had got their way at Corinth and if the type of Christianity they were promoting had spread to other churches, it could ultimately have altered the Christian faith beyond recognition, turning it from a gospel of grace, centered in the atoning work of a Man on a cross, to a prescription for self-projection and self-development, a triumphalism less and less based on the actual story of Christ crucified.

But neither Satan nor his servants will get away with their charade forever. Satan’s ultimate fate will be eternal punishment in the lake of fire (Rev.20:10). The Bible reveals that an equally fearful judgment awaits all false teachers (cp. Mt. 7:21-23). The destiny of false teachers ‘will be according to their deeds.’

Paul has been so hard-hitting, but at the same time gracious. In reality, Paul was making a last run at the false apostles’ souls. His withering dissection of their deceitful hearts could be the beginning of grace. What a fearful indictment! But what grace could follow! Let us beware when some smiling, well-dressed preacher tells us ‘we can have it all now’ without taking up the cross. Let us beware of another Jesus, a different spirit, and another gospel.

For next time: Read 2 Corinthians 11:16-33.