

Title: Wise Corinthians, Foolish Paul

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 11, 12

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The church at Corinth was being seduced by false preachers. These immature brethren were much impressed by what they perceived in false prophets as gifts of God. In 2 Corinthians 11, Paul does something unusual. He glories in his own flesh.

**2 Corinthians 11: 1: Would to God ye could bear with me a little in *my* folly: and indeed bear with me. 2: For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present *you* as a chaste virgin to Christ.**

Those who have been called by God's grace in Christ Jesus have been espoused to one Husband. Is Christ Jesus the full provision of everything you need spiritually? Are you persuaded that he is able to provide everything you need temporally? Are we waiting as a bride adorned for her husband, that we might be found a chaste virgin when Christ returns?

What would we think of a bride all adorned in white who walks the aisle flirting—batting her eyes toward some fellow along the way? Would you do that? Whether the other fellow be our own wisdom, our own works, or some water-downed gospel? Would we ever think of playing the harlot with some false friend who wants to introduce us to a false bridegroom? Paul says:

**2 Corinthians 11: 3: But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.**

In the garden, God commanded Adam and Eve to do one thing—believe him. God assured Adam that in the day he stopped believing him they would surely die. Adam would remain in perfection, with everything provided by God, with the joy of full communion with God, by simply trusting God.

The first bride, Eve, was seduced into adultery in her heart by the most appealing, sincere, sweet words that could be uttered. The serpent and his message made that which God forbid to be “pleasant to the eye.” The serpent's message made that which God forbid to be “a tree to be desired to make one wise.” So she ate, and gave to Adam and he did eat. Thus all mankind was corrupted from the simplicity--the singleness--of full, sufficient, all sustaining, communion with God.

Paul was fearful that the same subtlety was being used to fool these babes at Corinth. How so?

**2 Corinthians 11: 4: For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or *if* ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with *him*.**

## Wise or Carnal?

The brethren at Corinth considered themselves wise. They felt sure they could discern between the truth and a lie. False prophets pick up on that. They flatter such carnality. They appeal to everything the flesh loves. These false prophets were beguiling the Corinthians into thinking that they had grown beyond what Paul could teach them. Yet, the Corinthians did not know that they were but babes.

It does not take much to impress a baby. Their false gospel fed the flesh of the Corinthians so that without even realizing it, their old nature was being strengthened. The old man warred against the new man, and for now, was prevailing. These brethren were being allured, beguiled, and taken advantage of, by false prophets because they were not being fed the Bread from heaven.

Brethren, we are apt to think far too much of ourselves?

1 Corinthians 3:18: Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise.

1 Corinthians 8:2: And if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know.

Learning is good if it exalts Christ and abases us. But even the best learning is of little use until God brings us to experience the power of his grace through trial. Until then it is all just a doctrine.

**Illustration:** Brother Jaime's book learning compared to what he knows by experience.

Without even knowing what they were doing, they were flirting with strangers and it was an offense toward Christ their Spouse who of loved them and gave himself for them. It was a slight toward Paul who espoused them to Christ.

Yet, Christ loved them. Paul loved them. Be sure to read I and II Corinthians, first taking note of all the carnal problems in the church. But then read these letters taking note of how often Paul declares them to be sanctified, justified, the possessors of all things in Christ Jesus.

For that reason, Paul made it his business to expose the cunning craftiness of the false prophets, to expose their cunningly devised fables, and their traditions of men, to show these beloved brethren that they were being tricked.

Since his brethren were glorying in the flesh, Paul decides the best way to wake them up is to meet them are, in the flesh, by reminding them of his own ways among them.

## **I. CONCERNING PAUL'S GOSPEL**

**2 Corinthians 11: 5: For I suppose I was not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles. 6: But though I be rude in speech, yet not in knowledge; but we have been throughly made manifest among you in all things.**

The brethren at Corinth, perhaps the false prophets as well, said of Paul, “his letters are *weighty and powerful*.”

They were saying that Paul was bold when he wrote. But it also has a reference to how they regarded what he wrote. You realize that in the two letters we have in the inspired Word, Paul primarily writes to correct carnal things. He is dealing with the very first, elementary principles of repentance from dead works, from glorying in men, from trusting the arm of their flesh, from fornication, incest, taking brethren to law, abusing the Lord’s Table, from glorying in gifts rather than in the Giver?

Those things these immature brethren called “*weighty and powerful*.” The flesh delights to hear of what we should and should not do. If we can focus on those things, we can always be babies. The old nature does not want us to move on to the strong meat.

### Strong Meat.

The strong meat of the gospel is the glorious attributes of our God, the glorious person of Christ Jesus the Lord. His holiness, immutability, his longsuffering, how he reserves mercy for thousands, how he will have mercy on whom he will, and all the intricate details of his eternal purpose of grace.

Strong meat is in the glorious mystery of his power in using a physical nation to reveal his eternal grace toward the nation of his elect whom he calls out of every people on earth.

Strong meat is learning more of the person of Christ Jesus—God manifest in the flesh, all God and all Man in one person, the satisfaction of God the Father that all fullness should dwell in his Son, God in Christ reconciling the world of his elect unto himself.

Strong meat has to do with redemption accomplished—how God can be just and the justifier, how Christ manifest the righteousness of God, how by his own faithfulness he established the law, magnified it and made it honorable, how God made him to be sin, who knew no sin, that his elect might be made the righteousness of God in him, how his children have fulfilled all that God requires by faith in his well-beloved Son.

Strong meat is how God gives his children what they want in the inner man, by refusing to give them what they ask for according to the flesh.

We never grow weary of reaching into this treasure chest and admiring these unsearchable riches!

False religion regards the doctrine of Christ and him crucified as the elementary things and esteems those very basic principles as the strong meat. Those at Corinth said, “his letters are *weighty and powerful*.”

Yet, when Paul was present in Corinth, they said his bodily presence was weak and his speech contemptible.

This does have reference to how Paul abased himself when he was with them. But was made his speech the most contemptible to the false prophets and these brethren who were looking to their flesh, was that he preached Christ and him crucified.

I Corinthians 2: 1: And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. [not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect.] 2: For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.

They regarded his letters as *weighty and powerful*, but when he preached Christ and him crucified to them, they said, his *bodily presence is weak, ad his speech contemptible*.

I Corinthians 3: 1: And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, *even* as unto babes in Christ. 2: I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able *to bear it*, neither yet now are ye able.

This tells us plainly that it was not that those false prophets were not using the name of Christ, but they came promoting touch not, taste not, handle not. We will see that more in a moment. Paul says:

**II Corinthians 11: 6: But though *I be* rude in speech, yet not in knowledge;**

Illustration: “He doesn’t care who he offends, he is very rude in what he says!”

## **II. CONCERNING PAUL’S MANNER.**

**II Corinthians 11: 6:...but we have been thoroughly made manifest among you in all things. 7: Have I committed an offence in abasing myself that ye might be exalted, because I have preached to you the gospel of God freely?**

Paul made himself unnoticeable.

He was so much constrained by Christ, so much trusting in Christ the Power and Wisdom of God to accomplish their salvation, that he made it a point to make his own qualifications invisible to them.

John Calvin--"He had of his own accord made a surrender of his own greatness, that they might become great through his abasement."

Concerning financial support Paul dealt very wisely

**II Corinthians 11: 8: I robbed other churches, taking wages of them, to do you service. 9: And when I was present with you, and wanted, I was chargeable to no man: for that which was lacking to me the brethren which came from Macedonia supplied: and in all things I have kept myself from being burdensome unto you, and so will I keep myself. 10: As the truth of Christ is in me, no man shall stop me of this boasting in the regions of Achaia.**

Corinth was a wealthy city. Yet, those in Macedonia paid the wages which the Corinthian's carnal flesh prevented them from paying, so that Paul could minister to them freely. Do we ever see Christ in that! Because of the sin of his elect--our sin--we could not pay our sin-debt. Yet, Christ came and paid so that that salvation might come to us freely.

Paul knew that the false prophets would even charge him for not taking wages of them. They would level the charge against him that he did not take their gifts because he did not love them. Paul adds:

**II Corinthians 11: 11: Wherefore? because I love you not? God knoweth. 12: But what I do, that I will do, that I may cut off occasion from them which desire occasion; that wherein they glory, they may be found even as we.**

The false prophets desired that Paul would take wages, because they did. Paul excelled them in this respect. If Paul would take wages of the Corinthians then the false prophets could use Paul as an example so that they could EXTORT more money from the Corinthians.

So to cut off occasion for this, the apostle resolved to take nothing from the Corinthians. Now, if the false prophets wanted to boast that they were equal with Paul, Paul says let them stop robbing you.

Try the spirits, brethren. God's preachers desire you, not yours. The primary reason those false prophets flattered the Corinthians was for filthy lucre, selfish gain.

**II Corinthians 11: 13: For such *are* false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. 14: And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. 15: Therefore *it is* no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.**

God's messengers do not want you to glory in them but in Christ.

**II Corinthians 11: 16: I say again, Let no man think me a fool; if otherwise, yet as a fool receive me, that I may boast myself a little. 17: That which I speak, I speak *it* not after the Lord, but as it were foolishly, in this confidence of boasting.**

Paul is after the Lord in his faithful correction of these brethren. But it is his laying out to them the ways in which he has done things—this is not his usual custom.

God's messengers do not spend time speaking of their works; they spend time speaking of God the Father's work, of Christ's work, of the Holy Spirit's work. But for the time being, Paul says that in order to show them the superiority of the grace which God works in his people over those of false prophets he had to plainly tell them of his ways.

**II Corinthians 11: 18: Seeing that many glory after the flesh, I will glory also.**

### **III. THE WISDOM OF THIS WORLD IS FOOLISHNESS WITH GOD.**

**II Corinthians 11: 19: For ye suffer fools gladly, seeing ye *yourselves* are wise.**

Next, Paul says what the fleshly reasoning of men considers wisdom.

**II Corinthians 11: 20: For ye suffer, if a man bring you into bondage,**

False prophets taught them to cut away the filth of their flesh by the observance of the law—that is equal with morality preaching in our day. They bound them to abstain from meats and drinks, to observe days, months, times and years. Furthermore, the false prophets taught their own human doctrines, traditions, tenets, laws, and rules.

**II Corinthians 11: 20: For ye suffer ...if a man devour *you*, if a man take *of you*, if a man exalt himself, if a man smite you on the face.**

They were not literally smiting them, but continually uncovering their sin, bringing up their shortcomings, exalting themselves over these brethren, slapping them as it were with reproach. Not for the purpose of teaching them that there is no good thing in them, but to exalt their flesh into thinking there is some good thing in them and that the sinner can fix it.

Also, the false prophets belittled God's true messengers

**II Corinthians 11: 21: I speak as concerning reproach, as though we had been weak.**

The false prophets accused the apostles of not being practical enough, of not using a firm hand, of spending too much time preaching the doctrine of Christ and not enough time exercising authority over the saints. Paul was not bringing them into bondage, but declaring they are no longer under the rule of law but under the rule of Christ Jesus. Paul wrote and gave them time to think on these things rather than coming to them with a rod and treating them shamefully. For preaching Christ in their presence and not exercising a rod, the false prophets considered Paul inferior to them, and not worthy to be mentioned with them.

**II Corinthians 11: 21:...**Howbeit whereinsoever any is bold, (I speak foolishly,) I am bold also. **22:** Are they Hebrews? so *am* I. Are they Israelites? so *am* I. Are they the seed of Abraham? so *am* I. **23:** Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I *am* more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. **24:** Of the Jews five times received I forty *stripes* save one. **25:** Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; **26:** *In* journeyings often, *in* perils of waters, *in* perils of robbers, *in* perils by *mine own* countrymen, *in* perils by the heathen, *in* perils in the city, *in* perils in the wilderness, *in* perils in the sea, *in* perils among false brethren; **27:** In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. **28:** Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches. **29:** Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not? **30:** If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities. **31:** The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is blessed for evermore, knoweth that I lie not. **32:** In Damascus the governor under Aretas the king kept the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desirous to apprehend me: **33:** And through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall, and escaped his hands...**12: 1:** It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord. **2:** I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven. **3:** And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) **4:** How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. **5:** Of such an one will I glory: yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities. **6:** For though I would desire to glory, I shall not be a fool; for I will say the truth: but *now* I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he seeth me *to be*, or *that* he heareth of me.

### THEN AND NOW

**THEN** we see what Paul endured as he proclaimed that the whole council of God is the person and finished work of Christ, we see that those who opposed Christ could get away with inflicting bodily harm on God's saints, even killing them.

**NOW**, in a nation with freedom of religion, the worst we will get is a tongue-lashing, someone withdrawing from the church, taking away their support, maybe a little slander.

If God's messengers were given strength to suffer in the face of such opposition, you can be sure, in these easy times, you will have not have to wonder when you hear one of Christ's true ambassadors. The last message he preached, to whatever audience he preached or lectured, will sound forth with clairy...that all men are depraved; that only the Holy Spirit can quicken and bring us willingly to trust Christ. It is because God sovereignly elected his people in Christ, Christ effectually redeemed a particular people for himself, and every one of them shall be saved.

From the first message, God's messenger preaches by grace, to the one he preached yesterday, he will preach the same gospel; he will call sinners to repentance and faith, believer's to obedience, to an honorable walk, to perseverance while shutting them up to cast their care on God who alone can work it in them.

I urge you, brethren, try the spirits.

1 John 4:1: Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.

Turn not from Christ Jesus. The whole council of God is in Christ Jesus his Beloved Son. The Father's will and testament is in Christ Jesus, his predestinating of his people is in Christ Jesus, our full complete perfection and acceptance with God is Christ Jesus, every word of daily instruction is to turn us from things below to set our affection on Christ reigning on his throne of power. We are kept by the power God. All fruits of righteousness are by Jesus Christ. All things to come that are freely given to us of God are by and in Christ Jesus. Heavens glory will be the eternal glorification of Christ Jesus the Son of God.

**II Corinthians 11: 2: I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present *you as* a chaste virgin to Christ.**