

# Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

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## *God's Word to a Hesitating Church*

Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God. (7:1)

### *"The Snake in God's Garden"*

February 22, 2015

**Sermon Text:** 2 Cor 11-15

**Scripture Reading:** Jer 23:16-40

#### **Introduction-**

Paul ended the tenth chapter with these words:

2 Corinthians 10:15-18 We do not boast beyond limit in the labors of others. But our hope is that as your faith increases, our area of

influence among you may be greatly enlarged, (16) so that we may preach the gospel in lands beyond you, without boasting of work already done in another's area of influence. (17) "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." (18) For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.

These interloping trespassing parasites who followed along after Paul and sucked up glory for themselves, commended themselves. They were self-appointed, not sent by the Lord, just as was the case in Jeremiah's day and in every age of church history, including ours. They necessarily boasted *in themselves*, not in the Lord.

In the end, it is not whether we are commended by ourselves or by others – the issue is, does the Lord approve of us?

1 Corinthians 3:11-13 For no one can lay a foundation other than

that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. (12) Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw-- (13) each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done.

These parasites will *hate* Christ's real servants, just as these at Corinth hated Paul and worked to undermine his ministry there. The same thing happens over and over again today.

In the next chapter, Paul shows us who is behind it all. Actually he has already mentioned the culprit:

2 Corinthians 4:3-4 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. (4) In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

And –

2 Corinthians 2:11 so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs.

The god of this world. Satan. Follow along as I read:

2 Corinthians 11:1-15 I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness. Do bear with me! (2) For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. (3) But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

(4) For 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.

(5) Indeed, I consider that I am not in the least inferior to these super-apostles. (6) Even if I am unskilled in speaking, I am not so in knowledge; indeed, in every way we have made this plain to you in all things. (7) Or 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? (8) I robbed other churches by accepting support from them in order to serve you. (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.

(10) As the truth of Christ is in me, this boasting of mine will not be silenced in the regions of Achaia.

(11) And why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do! (12) And what I do 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.

(13) For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. (14) And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. (15) So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.

From the very start of the revelation of God's Word, Satan has come on the scene to oppose it. Paul refers to that beginning of this war here:

*"I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve..."*

Notice also that *deception* is the enemy's favorite and chief tactic.

These Corinthians had been deceived and the false teachers who had crept in among them were *deceivers*.

There is no glory in God's truth *for anyone but God*. Satan and his servants crave this glory and praise for themselves, so they hate His truth. Their goal is always to extinguish the light, to destroy God's kingdom, to murder life, to enslave where Christ has brought freedom. Because in the light and life and truth and freedom of Christ, there is no glory to be had for these evil ones. Anyone who represents Christ, who speaks and heeds His truth...will be hated by these enemies and made targets. Thus the need for the armor of the Lord as described in Ephesians 6.

So our ministry here in this church and in this community is no game, it is not some social club setting for social niceties. It is the body of Christ, the church, the army of the Lord, always under attack from without and from within, yet enduring.

### **Paul's "Foolishness"**

Here then again is how Paul opens this chapter –

2 Corinthians 11:1-4 I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness. Do bear with me! (2)

For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. (3) But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. (4) For 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.

Whenever Paul speaks of himself, he often uses this “fool” or “foolishness” or “boasting” terminology. You will see more of it in the latter part of this chapter (vss 16-21) and again in 12:1ff. He wants to be sure that his readers know he is NOT boasting and that any effort of a person who claims to serve the Lord and yet strives to gain praise for themselves is in reality *a fool*. So here in verse 1, Paul is about to talk to them about himself – about his own feelings toward them:

*“For I feel a divine jealousy for you...”*

Here these false suitors had come in, working to draw Christ’s people away from Him, alienating them to Paul, and Paul is rightly (divinely) jealous. In

rejecting Paul, they were rejecting Christ, and putting their affections on another:

- Another Jesus
- A different spirit
- A different gospel

The origin of these counterfeits was Satan, as Paul makes evident in verse 3. Notice some of the terms we have here that describe Satan’s methods:

- Deceived
- Cunning
- Led astray from Christ
- Proclaims another Jesus
- These “super apostles”
- False apostles (vs 13)
- Deceitful workmen
- Disguising themselves as apostles of Christ
- Disguising themselves as servants of righteousness

One of the most consistent qualities of evil is that it does not appear to be evil. It has the ability to fog a person’s thinking so that they resist any thoughts that evil is really what it is – *evil*. Talk to people who have been enslaved to an evil person for decades and have come out of that enslavement. They will tell you – *I just couldn’t believe that anyone could truly be so wicked. I always told myself there must be some other explanation.*

I suppose this is one reason that sin is often likened to *darkness* in Scripture. Evil is *blinding*.

Paul fears for these Corinthians, as well as feeling this divine and right jealousy about them. And this is what he is afraid of:

***That the devil, through his lies and crafty cunning, might lead them astray. Specifically, astray from what Paul calls a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.***

This of course hearkens our thoughts back to Eden –

Genesis 3:1-5 Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" (2) And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, (3) but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" (4) But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. (5) For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

Where God's Word is given, the serpent always shows up. He really uses the same tactics:

- Plants questions/doubts in our minds....did we understand God correctly?
- Exaggerates God's "no"
- Flatly denies the truth of God's Word
- Maligns God's loving motives toward us
- Promotes the pride of man, working to usurp the very place of God

Notice "the serpent was more crafty..." and here in 2 Cor, "as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning." Paul is saying "the very same thing is happening to you, Corinthians, as happened in Eden. It is the same foe, the same diabolic trickery, and the same danger is lurking – death."

A sincere and pure devotion to Christ. Undiluted, un-corrupted by anything added to or taken away from the gospel as it has been delivered to us.

***"The enemy will always, always, always work his deceptions with the goal of leading us away from Christ and the good news and freedom of His gospel."***

Matthew 11:28-30 Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. (29) Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. (30) For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

This is the thing the enemy hates. Freedom. Rest. Here is one of the clearest statements in Scripture about this freedom:

Colossians 2:13-23 And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, (14) by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. (15) **He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.** (16) Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. (17) These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. (18) Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up

without reason by his sensuous mind, (19) and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God. (20) If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations-- (21) "Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch" (22) (referring to things that all perish as they are used)--according to human precepts and teachings? (23) These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.

Satan hates these truths. He doesn't want us to know that he has been disarmed and shamed by Christ. He always works to bring us back into the realm of false religion:

- Do not handle
- Do not taste
- Do not touch
- Severe treatment of the body

When these kinds of things are introduced among us, we can be sure that we are seeing a false Jesus, a false

gospel, and that all of it is animated by a false spirit.

Let's try to really see this clearly. I understand, I think, how "another gospel" is introduced by false teachers among us:

Galatians 1:6-9 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel-- (7) not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. (8) But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. (9) As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.

Adding to or taking away from the Word of God produces a false gospel that cannot save.

And then the idea of "another Jesus." When the gospel is distorted, Christ is distorted. Down through the history of the church, the Person as well as the work of Christ has been attacked and distorted. Arianism, Socinianism, Docetism – the earliest heresies in fact

were Christological heresies – false teachings about the Person of Christ. Think like –

- Christ wasn't really man in flesh, he only seemed to be
- Jesus was just a man upon whom God's Spirit came
- Heresies about the relation of the divine nature and human nature and Personhood of Christ

All of these things and more present "another Jesus" who cannot save.

But what is perhaps more difficult to understand is Paul's mention of "*a different spirit from the one you received.*" The Corinthians had, with Paul's preaching of the gospel, received the Holy Spirit, at least in the sense that it was the Spirit of God who empowered Paul's faithful preaching of the gospel among them. They received the gospel by faith, they acknowledged the Word of the Spirit of God.

Now, in "putting up with" the false teachers and their false gospel and false Jesus, Paul says they are tolerating *a false spirit*. And that necessarily means:

- There was some "spirit" behind the false teaching and false teachers

This is why John commands us and warns us:

1 John 4:1 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.

Now, there are only two possibilities when it comes to this “spirit” –

- The Spirit of God, or
- The spirit of evil – Satan

Paul was absolutely frustrated with these Corinthians then who:

- “put up with it readily enough
- “gladly bear with fools”
- “bear it if someone makes slaves of you”

How many professing Christians and even entire local churches, long ago, deserted Christ for a different gospel, a different Jesus, and another spirit? Kistemaker says:

“Not only for the Christians in Corinth, but for every believer, the watchword is alertness. The attacks of the evil one occur relentlessly to the end of time. Philip Hughes notes, ‘The enmity between the seed of the serpent and the

Seed of the woman continues unremittingly until the day of judgment...”. [New Testament Commentary]

Kistemaker also says:

The “someone” [vs 4] is the representative of a group of meddlers, as is evident from the preceding chapter.... This person presents another Jesus to the members of the Corinthian church. Because Paul seldom uses only the single name *Jesus* instead of Christ Jesus or Jesus Christ, we assume that he [here] is calling attention to the [false teachers’] ministry of Jesus without preaching him as crucified Lord. The intruding Judaizers would refrain from depicting Jesus as the Christ, even if they called themselves ‘servants of Christ.’

Paul’s opponents came to Corinth with self-commendations, presented themselves on their own authority, and had never suffered for the sake of Jesus and his gospel. Refusing to listen obediently to the Scriptures, these people avoided the inevitability of enduring hardship for Christ. Instead, they probably talked about a victorious Jesus who performed miracles, preached good news, and inspired multitudes. But they failed to mention Jesus’ suffering, humiliation, and death on a cruel cross. They



proclaimed a Jesus who was entirely different from the one Paul had taught the Corinthians.

‘Or you receive a spirit different from the one you received.’ Should the word *spirit* be capitalized, referring to the Holy Spirit? No, because the spirit that the intruders propose is not the Spirit of God but a human spirit. When the Corinthians accepted Christ, God gave them his Holy Spirit.... The interlopers wanted to give the Corinthians a worldly spirit in place of the Holy Spirit. But a worldly spirit enslaves people and fills their hearts with fear. Such a spirit is devoid of power, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

When another Jesus is preached, not according to the gospel, the biblical teaching of atonement, reconciliation, removal of the curse, and adoption is eliminated. If Jesus is merely a man whom we must use as a model, ‘we are to be pitied more than all men’ (1 Cor 15:19). However, on the basis of Scripture we joyfully confess with the church of all ages,

- the forgiveness of sins
- the resurrection of the body
- and the life everlasting

Satan want us to serve him. He always works to lead us away from Christ. And what we KNOW he will do in any local church or in each one of our lives is send his evil emissaries our way who creep in among us in disguise as wonderful Christians, and who then begin to sow their false Jesus, false gospel, animated by their false spirit. This will ALWAYS happen.

It is evident that many, many churches today who profess to believe God’s Word, are in fact enslaved to the enemy. How do we know? Simply look for the elements Kistemaker just described:

- Devoid of the fruits of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, etc)
- Fear
- Guilt
- Condemnation
- Jealousy
- Pride
- Works righteousness (legalism) or libertinism (anti-nomianism)

These things are not merely the work of sinful, evil human beings. As we will see in more detail as we move through this chapter, Paul identifies their origin very plainly –

2 Corinthians 11:13-15 For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as

apostles of Christ. (14) And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. (15) So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.

I have no doubt that such people have come among us in this church over the years. They deceived many and they pushed a false, legalistic gospel among us. They would, by their cunning, lead us astray from “a sincere and pure devotion to Christ” and the freedom such a devotion brings. But the Lord has preserved us and opened our eyes to their false Jesus, false gospel and false spirit.

And again, as we will see later in this chapter, for some reason we often “readily put up with” the abuse and enslavement these kind bring upon us. Why? Naivete to the tactics and nature of evil? Not wanting to confront or offend others? Whatever the reason, we must learn to identify these servants of Satan early on and not be deceived by them. We must know Christ more and more intimately so that when someone presents us with a counterfeit, we will know it. And I think as well that we all need to learn to sense the Holy Spirit working in us and leading us. If someone is a genuine child of God, then you should

feel loved by them and comfortable in their presence. You should not feel intimidated or fearful or anxious or inferior. If you sense those kinds of feelings around someone, then be on guard. Listen carefully to what they are saying about Jesus. Or about your relationship to God in Christ. Watch how they relate to others. Do you see Christ’s humility and kindness and love and truth in them? Or do you see-

- Making slaves of people
- Devouring people
- Taking advantage of you
- Putting on airs (self-glory)
- Striking others (usually with words)

That is not Christ. That is not the Holy Spirit. That is not the freedom of the gospel. Heed Paul’s words carefully –

Galatians 5:1 For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

