

THE AUTHORITY OF THE MINISTRY  
2 Corinthians 11:1-33

Can you appreciate the damage done by false teachers? Paul was so concerned about the growing influence of the false teachers in Corinth, his opponents, that he reveals his emotions in this part of the letter.

1. PAUL'S JEALOUSY

1-6

Those who recommend themselves are foolish, yet the Corinthians were accepting them. So Paul says that he will be foolish also, to make his point. He is "boasting" because of godly jealousy.

I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness. Do bear with me! <sup>2</sup> I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> I consider that I am not in the least inferior to these super-apostles. <sup>6</sup> 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.

ESV

Paul begins this passage by asking the Corinthians to put up with him in a little foolishness. He uses the analogy of marriage. He cared about the relationship of the church at Corinth and her "Groom," Jesus Christ.

Paul looks forward to the greatest wedding that will ever be, when the church is united with Christ for eternity.

Revelation 19:6-8

<sup>6</sup> Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out,

"Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns.

<sup>7</sup> Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready;

<sup>8</sup> it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure"—  
for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

In what way is this “foolish?” Paul opened his First letter to Corinth with the apparent “foolishness” of trusting in the death of a “criminal” for salvation.

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

<sup>18</sup> For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. <sup>19</sup> For it is written,

"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,  
and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart."

<sup>20</sup> Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? <sup>21</sup> For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. <sup>22</sup> For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, <sup>23</sup> but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, <sup>24</sup> but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. <sup>25</sup> For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. ESV

Now in 2 Corinthians the apostle characterized as “foolishness” his approach to leadership, which was in the spirit of Christ, as a servant. Paul boasted in the Lord and not in himself. Paul employs sarcasm to show the power of his approach. Is it not foolish to insist that spiritual knowledge is more important than oratorical skills [5-6]?

How foolish is it to minister without financial support [7-9]?

How foolish, in the mind of his detractors, to offer his sufferings as his credentials [23-33]?

So Paul opens his defense of his apostleship with, “I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness. Do bear with me!”

## **Godly Jealousy**

**11:2**

Paul is in the role of “father of the bride.”

Jealousy can be sinful and it can be a proper emotion.

Paul had “divine jealousy.”

The Greek word is *zelos*, from a root word that means to boil or to be hot.

In the negative sense it means envy, malice, indignation, or wrath.

In the positive sense it indicates an ardent affection of someone or something.

So Paul explains his feelings towards the Corinthians as a father who promised a bride to her husband.

In the Hebrew culture, Paul takes the role of the father of the bride. The Jews had two ceremonies separated by one year: the betrothal and the wedding. During the interval the woman remained a virgin. The betrothal could only be broken by a divorce or death.

This custom is seen in the case of Joseph and Mary.

Matthew 1:18-25

<sup>18</sup> Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. <sup>19</sup> And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. <sup>20</sup> But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup> She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." <sup>22</sup> All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

<sup>23</sup> "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel"

(which means, God with us). <sup>24</sup> When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, <sup>25</sup> but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

The Church is betrothed to Christ; waiting for the Wedding Day [Rev 19:1-6].

**Someone Else is there**

**11:3**

The Serpent, or Satan, deceived Eve, and the Corinthians were in danger of being led astray in their thinking from a sincere devotion to Christ.

Genesis 3:1-7

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?'" <sup>2</sup> And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, <sup>3</sup> 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.'"

<sup>4</sup> But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. <sup>5</sup> For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

<sup>6</sup> So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.  
<sup>7</sup> Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

You will never understand the Gospel until you grasp what happened in the Garden of Eden!

Adultery, whether physical or spiritual, begins in the thought process, be it an individual or the local church.

The false apostles were corrupting the thinking of the believers. [Vs. 3, 13-15] Their false teaching was the “serpent’s cunning.” They were servants of Satan pretending to be servants of Christ.

### **Another Jesus**

**11:4**

The real issue at Corinth was not the criticism of Paul, the self-commendation of the false apostles, or even their profiteering from the Gospel [2:17; 10:10, 12].

The vital issue that identifies false teachers- then and today – is error and confusion about Jesus: Who is Jesus, What did He do, and Why did He do it?

If someone is in error about Jesus they will be in error about the Person and work of the Holy Spirit, and they will preach a false gospel.

### **Super Apostles**

**11:5-6**

There was a sense in which Paul was criticized by comparing him with “super apostles,” perhaps Peter, James, and John. Here it is clear that the “super apostles” are those false apostles who made claims for themselves.

So in any case, Paul says that while he is not a skilled speaker, he is not behind them in knowledge. The truth of the message is what is important, not the vessel in which it is carried [2Cor 4:7].

## **Paul's "Robbery"**

**11:7-10**

Paul was accused of not being a true apostle because he refused to take their money. He uses irony; did I rob the other churches to serve you without charge? If he had taken their money they probably would have found fault with that too. He took money from the churches where he had been in order to avoid taking money from the church he was currently serving.

When Paul arrived in Corinth, he joined Aquila and Pricilla in tent-making to provide for his support [Acts 18]. When he was devoted to preaching, his needs were met by other churches, e.g. Philippi.

When Paul was in Philippi, he and his team stayed with Lydia [Acts 16:5], but there is no record of his receiving support while he was there. It appears that Paul's method was to not take money from the church while he was with them, but gladly receive help from them after he moved on to another place.

In 1 Corinthians 9:14 he defended the right of Gospel ministers to receive support from the people they served. In Corinth he forfeited that right.

## **Love has a Cost**

**11:11**

Some of the Corinthians were annoyed by Paul's policy of financial independence and his enemies used it against him. The Greeks considered it degrading for a philosopher to do menial labor. His opponents would argue that if he didn't take support it was because his teaching wasn't worth anything.

The most hurtful accusation was that his refusal to accept support proved that he did not love the Corinthians. His answer: "God knows I do."

## **Who are these men?**

**11:12-15**

Paul says that he will continue to minister the Gospel free of charge in order to undermine the claim of those who wanted to be considered equal in the things they boast about. This exposes the greedy motivations of the false apostles who were trying to usurp Paul's authority in the church.

These men were deceitful workers, servants of Satan, pretending to be servants of righteousness, and were doomed men

This is Paul's second reference to Satan; does he believe the Genesis account?

Does Paul believe in the personality of the devil?

## **A Fool's Credentials**

**11:16-23**

There is more sarcasm as Paul compares his credentials with what they expected in a leader. Paul plays their shallow game of one-upmanship. But even here he shows that he is a true apostle. Before he states the true signs of apostleship he shows that even on their standards his authority is superior.

The false apostles claimed authority on the basis of four things which Paul answers with four rhetorical questions.

"Are they Hebrews?" That is, are they ethnic Jews who speak Hebrew and were raised in Palestine? Paul was raised in Jerusalem and spoke fluent Hebrew.

Acts 21:40-22:2

<sup>40</sup> And when he had given him permission, Paul, standing on the steps, motioned with his hand to the people. And when there was a great hush, he addressed them in<sup>v</sup> the Hebrew language, saying:

"Brothers and fathers, hear the defense that I now make before you."

<sup>2</sup> And when they heard that he was addressing them in the Hebrew language, they became even more quiet.

“Are they Israelites?” This means do they trace their lineage to Jacob {Israel} and follow the Jewish traditions.

“Are they descendants of Abraham?” Do they share in the promises of God to Abraham?

Each question Paul’s answers, “So am I.”

Then Paul asks, “Are they servants of Christ?”

Paul says “I am speaking as a madman; I am out of my mind.”

### **The Suffering Servant-Leader**

**11:23-33**

Paul answers “Are they servants of Christ?”

“I am a better one.”

If anyone wants to claim that Paul is not genuine they will have to explain why anyone would go through what Paul did without promise of pay or fame.

Paul lists his frailties, infirmities, and failures as proof of his apostleship.

He worked harder [23].

He had been in prison more [23].

He had been beaten more severely [23].

Five times he received the infamous “39 lashes” [24].

Three times he had been beaten with rods [25; Acts 16:23].

He suffered the humiliation and agony of being stoned [25; Acts 14:19].

He was shipwrecked three times [25; Acts 27:41-44].

He was almost always away from home [26].

He was in danger of the elements [26].

He had been in threatened by robbers [26].

His own countrymen hated him [26]; to them he was a traitor [Acts 21:27-36].

The Gentiles attacked him [26].

Even church people {false brothers} hated him [26; 1 Tim 1:20; 2 Tim 4:14].

He had trouble in every place he went [26].

There were signs of weakness [27].

Besides all this he constantly felt the pressure of concern for all the churches [28-29].

Could anything be more humiliating for a proud pharisee than to go to Damascus with official documents authorizing him to arrest Christians, then to leave the city in a basket?

<sup>30</sup> If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. <sup>31</sup> The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, he who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. <sup>32</sup> At Damascus, the governor under King Aretas was guarding the city of Damascus in order to seize me, <sup>33</sup> but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped his hands.