

## True or False?

### How to Discern between False Teachers and Genuine Servants, Pt 3

2 Corinthians 11:5–12

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#### Introduction

Well, at long last, we return today to our study of 2 Corinthians, so turn with me in your Bibles to 2 Corinthians chapter 11. We're in a section of Paul's letter to the Church at Corinth where he is dealing directly with the threat of false teaching and false teachers within the church. And if you were to listen to the respected thought-leaders of many within evangelicalism today, you might be tempted to be wearied by another sermon related to the threat of false teachers. "Why do we always have to be calling out somebody else? Why can't we focus on the positive? We should be known for what we're *for*, not what we're *against*!" And while I do think there are some people who get so preoccupied with the muckraking that they lose sight of the beauty of Jesus, it's too easily forgotten that the genuine servant of Christ is to give himself to protecting the flock from false teachers precisely because false doctrine obscures the beauty of Jesus. It is only as we *know* Christ as He has revealed Himself in the Scriptures that we can *worship* Christ for who He is, and not as we have imagined Him to be.

Because of that, the Apostle Paul devotes himself to safeguarding the church from the disastrous effects of false doctrine. He writes about it a lot, and especially in chapters 10 to 13 of 2 Corinthians. And because we are content to simply preach what the Bible says, as often as the Bible says it, as we make our way through these chapters we have had and will continue to have much to say about the nature of false teaching and how to be on guard against it.

And Paul is not alone. In Matthew 7:15, Jesus warned His disciples to "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves." In 2 Peter 2:1, Peter warns that there will be false teachers among the church "who will secretly introduce destructive heresies." The Apostle John counseled the churches of Asia not to believe everyone who comes claiming to speak for God, but to test the spirits, "because many false prophets have gone out into the world." And in Acts 20:29–30, Paul himself said, "I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them." The New Testament is riddled with warnings to the church against false teachers.

And the key theme in all of those verses I just read is that these false teachers come from *within* the church. Jesus says they come in *sheep's* clothing. Peter says they'll *secretly* introduce

destructive heresies. Paul says savage wolves will arise *from among your own selves*. But how can that be? How could the sound believers and even leaders in those churches let that happen? Well, the answer is, our Enemy is a master of deception. As Paul says in chapter 11 verse 3, the serpent deceives by his craftiness. He says in verse 14 that Satan disguises himself as an angel of light, and so his servants disguise themselves as servants of righteousness.

What makes false teaching so deadly is that it is poison that comes in the name of the remedy. It is venom peddled as medicine. False teachers undermine the gospel *in the name* of the gospel. They seduce people to another Jesus *in the name* of Jesus (Carson, 100). Antichrist comes *in the name* of Christ. And professing Christians who are ignorant of the Word of God are incapable of discerning between the true and the false. Because it sounds so good! They use words like “tolerant,” and “affirming,” and “inclusive,” and “relevant,” and “missional,” and “broad-minded” and “social justice.” Who wants to be against those things?! Who wants to be *intolerant*, contrary, elitist, irrelevant, or narrow minded? Who wants to be for social *injustice*? The problem is, all kinds of unbiblical meanings get smuggled into those fine-sounding words. But if you control the language you control the argument. Error infiltrates the church *in the name* of truth.

Pastor John has said, “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” (371). John Calvin says, Satan “attacks us under the appearance of good, nay, under the very title of God” (351). If there is one task for which the church must be equipped, it is to be able to discern truth from error—to discern between genuine teachers of biblical truth and false teachers who peddle error and even heresy dressed as truth.

Well, the Apostle Paul continues to equip us for that very task in 2 Corinthians chapter 11. The Corinthians had been bewitched by a band of false teachers from Jerusalem claiming to be apostles. They were peddling a mix of Judaizing legalism and fleshly triumphalism. They taught that faith in Christ was necessary for salvation, but it was not sufficient. You had to add your own works to faith in Christ’s work for salvation. And they also taught that the victory Christ achieved meant that His people should never experience any suffering in this life. And as a result, they measured success in ministry by fleshly externals—by a weighty personal presence, by rhetorical eloquence, by commanding significant speaking fees, by growing large followings, and by having ecstatic, mystical spiritual experiences.

And the Corinthians had been deceived by their fine-sounding arguments. They embraced this error because it came masquerading in the name of truth. And that meant that they were questioning the purity of Paul’s Gospel and the legitimacy of his apostleship. But through Paul’s severe letter and Titus’s visit, the majority of the church repented. But a significant minority of the church remained enamored with this prosperity-laced legalism, and remained suspicious of Paul.

And so Paul writes chapters 10 to 13 aiming to rescue this unrepentant minority from the threat of apostasy, by addressing the accusations of these false apostles head-on, and exposing them as phonies and impostors. And in our text this morning, Paul responds to two particular accusations against *his* apostleship—namely that he is a deficient public speaker, and that he hasn't accepted any financial compensation from the Corinthians. As he responds to these two accusations, he once again provides a clear *contrast* between himself, as a faithful servant of the truth, and these false apostles, who are speaking perverse things, seeking to draw away the disciples after him. Let's read 2 Corinthians 11, verses 5 to 12. "For I consider myself not in the least inferior to the most eminent apostles. But even if I am unskilled in speech, yet I am not so in knowledge; in fact, in every way we have made this evident to you in all things. Or did I commit a sin in humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you without charge? I robbed other churches by taking wages from them to serve you; and when I was present with you and was in need, I was not a burden to anyone; for when the brethren came from Macedonia they fully supplied my need, and in everything I kept myself from being a burden to you, and will continue to do so. As the truth of Christ is in me, this boasting of mine will not be stopped in the regions of Achaia. Why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do! But what I am doing I will continue to do, so that I may cut off opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the matter about which they are boasting."

In this passage, Paul provides us with **two key points of contrast** between true and false teachers—between genuine ministers of the Gospel and the phony impostors who undermine the Gospel in the name of the Gospel. And if we're going to exercise discernment—if we're going to beware of false prophets, as Jesus says, if we are to be on guard for ourselves and for all the flock, as Paul says, if we're going to test the spirits, as John says—we need to recognize these **two contrasts**.

### **I. Substance over Style (vv. 5–6)**

We'll call that **first contrast**, number one, **substance over style**. False teachers tend to prize style over substance, while genuine servants of Christ prize **substance over style**. And we see that in verses 5 and 6. Paul writes, "For I consider myself not in the least inferior to the most eminent apostles. But even if I am unskilled in speech, yet I am not so in knowledge; in fact, in every way we have made this evident to you in all things."

"I'm not the least inferior to the most eminent apostles." And that's one way to translate the original there. The Greek text has *tōn huperlian apostolōn*, which can also be translated, "the super apostles." And interpreters and commentators differ on whether this phrase is speaking of the original twelve apostles, whom Paul calls "most eminent" as a matter of respect, or if he's sarcastically and sardonically calling the false apostles "the super apostles," because of their

fleshly triumphalism. If he was speaking of the twelve genuine apostles, he'd be saying, "You bear with these false apostles beautifully," as verse 4 says, "but you don't bear with me, who, despite these deceivers' claims that I'm merely a Johnny-come-lately apostle, am no less an authentic apostle than Peter, James, and John!"

But I think it's better to understand this as a reference to the intruding false teachers, whom Paul mocks by calling them "super apostles." In the first place, in verse 6 Paul concedes that, in comparison to these apostles, he is unskilled in speech. Paul could make that concession in a sarcastic fashion with respect to the false apostles, but he could not have intended it literally with respect to the original *twelve* apostles. They were uneducated, untrained fishermen whose first language was Aramaic, not Greek (cf. Acts 4:13), while Paul was the most promising student of Jewish and rabbinic theology in Israel, familiar with Hellenistic culture as a native of Tarsus, and well-versed enough with classical literature to quote Greek poets off the top of his head.

Secondly, a sarcastic use of the term "super apostles" fits well with the satirical tone of the entire passage. In verse 1 he asks them to bear with him in a little *foolishness*. In verse 7 he asks if he's *sinned* against them by humbling himself to exalt them? In verse 8 he says, tongue-in-cheek, that he *robbed* churches to serve the Corinthians. In verse 21 he asks their forgiveness for the "shame" of not taking advantage of them like the false apostles had. This entire passage is dripping with sardonic irony, which makes "super apostles" more likely than "most eminent apostles" here.

And finally, the flow of thought very much favors a reference to the false apostles. Verses 3 and 4 speak of the deceivers leading the Corinthians' astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ—preachers of another Jesus, a different spirit, and a different gospel. It would be too abrupt of a shift from the false apostles in verses 3 and 4 to the genuine apostles in verse 5, and then back to comparing himself with the false apostles in verse 7. Paul's saying, "You bear with those preaching a different Jesus because you're being duped by their claims of personal success, of large followings, of lucrative honorariums, of flowery speech, and of worldly prestige. You're being enticed by these triumphalists, but you reject me, your spiritual father. Well, let me tell you something: I don't consider myself to be in the *least* inferior to these 'super-apostles'!"

And he goes on to make that concession, "But even if I am unskilled in speech." We know the false apostles have made it a habit to take shots at Paul's speaking abilities. Back in chapter 10 verse 10, Paul reported one of their accusations. 2 Corinthians 10:10: "For they say, 'His letters are weighty and strong, but his personal presence is unimpressive and his speech contemptible.'" "He's a contemptible speaker! Not eloquent at all! You can tell he's an inferior rhetorician!"

And the word “unskilled” here in verse 6 is very interesting. It’s the Greek word *idiōtēs*, and yes, it’s where we get our English word *idiot*. But it doesn’t quite have the same connotation in Greek. Paul was not some bumbling, stuttering fool. Even this very letter demonstrates his ability to turn a phrase. No, an *idiōtēs* was “a person who [was] relatively unskilled or inexperienced in some activity or field of knowledge” (BDAG). It referred to the layman as opposed to the specialist, the amateur as opposed to the trained expert.

And so commentator Philip Hughes writes, “Paul... is prepared to concede, doubtless with a suspicion of irony, that he is unversed in the refinements of the rhetorical art. He cannot offer the professional polish and verbal virtuosity of those who have passed through the schools of rhetoric” (381). Another commentator says, “He is a layman when it comes to rhetorical flourishes and comes off as amateurish to the Corinthians” (Garland, 469). He concedes that he’s not a trained speaker like these super-apostles. He has underscored to them before, in 1 Corinthians 2:1–5, “And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.” Now why in the world would Paul intentionally, self-consciously avoid the very ministry methodology that would gain you a hearing in first-century Corinth? 1 Corinthians 2:5: “...so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.” Paul cared for **substance over style**, for content over form. And he didn’t want any fleshly concern for **style** to take away from the **substance** of his message.

And so he goes on, “But even if I am unskilled in speech, yet I am not so in knowledge; in fact, in every way we have made this evident to you in all things.” He might be an untrained amateur in rhetoric and oratory, but when it came to his knowledge—to his understanding and insight into the truth of divine revelation—he was no novice. He had been taught the Gospel by divine revelation from Christ Himself, Galatians 1:11–12. In Ephesians 3, verses 2 to 4, he speaks of this as “the stewardship of God’s grace which was given to me for you; that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ.” In 1 Corinthians 4:1, he says, “Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.” Paul may not have been a polished rhetorician, but he wasn’t an amateur in the knowledge of divine truth.

And for Paul, *that’s* what mattered. **Substance over style**. Matter over manner. Truth over technique. Evangelism over eloquence. And the false apostles—falling right in line with the secular culture of their day—prized just the opposite. For them, the message was not so nearly as important as the method by which they proclaimed that message. Form was valued over content.

It didn't really matter all that much what you said, so long as you said it eloquently and with skill and flowery polish. For them, the content of the message could vary, so long as the artfulness of the style remained constant. But for Paul it was precisely the opposite. The methodology could vary; the packaging was incidental. But the **substance** of the message was absolutely paramount. Everything else could flex, but the content of the Gospel message was the fixed constant.

It was a little over six weeks ago that we celebrated John and Olivia's first birthday. And we had a few people over for a small birthday party. Now, we had gotten them a few things, and the grandparents sent presents, so they had some gifts to open. And as they were opening them, they did what a lot of one-year-olds do. They unwrap the box, or they take the gift out of the gift bag, and they put the toy aside and play with the wrapping paper! with the tissue paper from the gift bags! They don't know any better, and so they focus more on the packaging than the gift.

And Paul is rebuking the Corinthians for doing the exact same thing—for being enamored with the external packaging of the form, the style, the presentation of the message, to the neglect of the content—the **substance**—of the message itself. And he's showing the Corinthians that false teachers prize style over substance, but faithful servants to Christ always prioritize **substance over style**. Genuine servants of God are preoccupied with spiritual benefit. And so they renounce all fleshly gimmickry that would call attention to themselves, because they desire that absolutely nothing compete with the message of the cross. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:17 he doesn't preach the Gospel "in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void"—so that the cross of Christ would not be emptied of its power.

And so faithful teachers sent from Christ aren't showmen who make an exhibition of their own talents. They're stewards of the mysteries of God who cry out, "He must increase, and I must decrease!" They don't want the success of their ministry to depend upon their winsomeness or charm—on the wisdom of men—but on the power of Almighty God who transforms the heart through the miracle of regeneration. They don't dress up their sermons in the flowery, artificial adornments of academic rhetoric. They speak plainly, simply, and clearly, so as to accurately communicate divine truth, which alone has the power to subdue sin and create faith in the heart.

GraceLife, don't be duped by shiny wrapping paper. When it comes to assessing the soundness of a particular teacher or ministry, have the discernment to penetrate beneath the surface—to prize **substance over style**. Even here at Grace! Don't say things like, "Well, I like Austin Duncan's preaching because he's funny." Or "I like Paul Twiss's preaching because I love that British accent." Or "I like Mike Riccardi's preaching because he gets loud and passionate." Or "I like Phil Johnson's preaching because he *doesn't* get too loud and is pretty even keel." No! Don't train yourselves to evaluate even sound teachers on the basis of fleshly externals. Are we accurately expositing the Scriptures? Are we rightly dividing the Word of Truth? Are we faithfully magnifying and holding out to you the glory of Jesus? **Substance over style**.

## II. Humility over Exaltation (vv. 7–12)

We see a **second contrast** in verses 7 to 12. And that is, number two, that false teachers prefer to be exalted rather than humbled, while genuine servants of Christ prefer **humility over exaltation**. Paul says, “Or did I commit a sin in humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you without charge? I robbed other churches by taking wages from them to serve you; and when I was present with you and was in need, I was not a burden to anyone; for when the brethren came from Macedonia they fully supplied my need, and in everything I kept myself from being a burden to you, and will continue to do so.” And we’ll stop there for now.

Whereas the previous contrast was brought into bold relief through the accusation of his amateurish speech, this contrast is underscored as a result of another accusation, namely, that Paul’s refusal to receive financial support from the Corinthians—indeed, his humbling himself to work as a manual laborer rather than take money from them—demonstrated (1) that he wasn’t a genuine apostle, and (2) he didn’t love the Corinthians. You say, “What kind of sense does that make?” Well, it’ll take some explanation of the cultural context of first-century Achaia, but we’ll get there.

The charge was that Paul was an unskilled amateur, obviously not an educated rhetorician. Well, in that day, a trained orators, philosophers, and other peripatetic teachers were considered professionals. And as professionals, they were expected to make their living by their craft—if their teaching, wisdom, and rhetoric were really worth anything. If they were ever to engage in their artful speech free of charge, they would effectively be saying that their teaching was worthless—that they were no better than an amateur, posing as a professional.

In what’s regarded as a famous interaction in classical literature, Antiphon tells the philosopher Socrates, who magnanimously hadn’t been charging people for his conversations with them, said, “If you set any value on your own society, you would insist on getting the price for that too. It may well be that you are a just man because you do not cheat people through avarice; but wise you cannot be since your knowledge is not worth anything” (Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, 1.6.12). And so, much like today, in the academic or political lecture circuit, a speaker’s status was a function of the size of the fees he could command. Because Paul refused to charge the Corinthians for his ministry among them, the false apostles accused his teaching of being amateurish and worth nothing—not fit for a genuine, “professional” apostle.

And he says to them, “Is this a sin?” “Did I commit a sin in humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you without charge?” He speaks, here, of his voluntary self-humiliation. And he’s referring to the fact that he engaged in physical, manual

labor to support himself so he wouldn't require support from the people he was serving. And *that* is interesting considering the cultural background as well. The history books tell us that "a philosopher or teacher of the Hellenistic age could gain his financial support in five ways" (Harris, 754). The first we've spoken about: he could charge fees for his instruction, which was the most respected form of support. A second respected way to earn a living was to be hired by a patron, to live in his house, and to teach his children. Third, he could accept voluntary contributions from his followers, which Paul refused to do. Fourth, he could beg, and, fifth, he could earn money by physical labor.

Begging and manual labor were especially looked down upon by the cultural elite. Cicero, the great Roman orator, writes this of manual labor. He says, "Also vulgar and unsuitable for gentlemen are the occupations of all hired workmen whom we pay for their labor, not for their artistic skills; for these men, their pay is itself a recompense for *slavery*" (*An Essay about Duties*, 1.42). Manual labor is unsuitable for gentlemen, and is a form of slavery. And yet this is precisely what Paul had undertaken for himself. Acts 18 records Paul's first visit to Corinth. And Luke says, in Acts 18:2–3, that Paul found Aquila and Priscilla, "and because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and they were working, for by trade they were tent-makers." When he spoke to the Ephesian elders at Miletus, in Acts 20:34 he said, "Your yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me." In 1 Corinthians 4:12 he says, "We toil, working with our own hands."

This, he says, was humbling himself. As one commentator said, He accepted "the status of a common artisan, because he sustained himself by his own manual labor rather than afford even a semblance of truth to those who would like to suggest that in preaching the gospel he was impelled by mercenary motives" (Hughes, 384). In 1 Corinthians 9, he explains that, as an apostle, he had a right to be financially supported by those to whom he ministered. 1 Corinthians 9:14: "So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel." But he voluntarily refused it. In verse 18 he says, "What then is my reward? That, when I preach the gospel, I may offer the gospel without charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel." He says in 2 Thessalonians 3:8–9, "Nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with labor and hardship we kept working night and day so that we would not be a burden to any of you; not because we do not have the right to this, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, so that you would follow our example."

Then, he says, not only did he support himself by his manual labor, but, verse 8, "I robbed other churches by taking wages from them to serve you." And of course this doesn't mean that he actually stole their money without their knowledge! He received support from churches after he had left them, and, because those churches were so poor, there was a sense in which he regarded their abundant generosity as his "robbing" them. The churches he's referring to are most likely the churches of Macedonia, one of which was Philippi. And he'd written to them in Philippians

4:15 that “at the first preaching of the gospel, after I left Macedonia”—which is where Philippi was located—“no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone.” And in the opening verses of 2 Corinthians 8, Paul describes the churches of Macedonia as giving generously in the midst of great affliction and deep poverty. The Corinthians were fat cats compared to the Macedonians! And yet it was the Macedonians who were meeting Paul’s needs as he ministered in Corinth,

And then he says, verse 9, “And when I was present with you and was in need, I was not a burden to anyone; for when the brethren came from Macedonia they fully supplied my need, and in everything I kept myself from being a burden to you.” Apparently, while Paul was in Corinth, the resources he had received from Philippi and elsewhere in Macedonia had run out. He became “in need,” the text says. While the wages from his tentmaking job usually provided for the necessities of life, apparently there was a time when they didn’t suffice. Perhaps business was bad; perhaps he was devoting more time to evangelism than to work; who knows.

But even then he didn’t burden the Corinthians by imposing on them for financial help! His needs were supplied, Acts 18:5 tells us, “when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia,” such that Paul no longer had to work but “began devoting himself completely to the word.” The brethren fully supplied his need, so that he wasn’t a burden to anyone, so that no stumbling blocks could be put in the way of the Gospel taking a hold of the Corinthians’ hearts, so that no one could accuse him of being in ministry for the money. The Gospel was free! Freely he received, freely he would give. And he says he’s not changing his policy. At the end of verse 9, he says, “in everything I kept myself from being a burden to you, and will *continue* to do so.” Verse 10, “As the truth of Christ is in me, this boasting of mine *will not be stopped* in the regions of Achaia.” “What I’ve been doing, I will continue to do!”

And then, in verses 11 and 12, he explains why he’s going to continue to refuse financial support from the Corinthians. In verse 11 he tells us what that reason isn’t, and in verse 12 he tells us what that reason is. Verse 11 says, “Why? Because I do not love you?” As I mentioned earlier, apparently the accusation had not only been that Paul’s refusal to accept payment meant that his message was worthless and so he couldn’t be a genuine apostle, but also that, because he received support from the Macedonians but not the Corinthians, he didn’t love the Corinthians the way he loved the Macedonians. He didn’t feel the same fellowship and partnership in the Gospel from them that he experienced with the Philippians.

One of the commentators observes that in the ancient world “the refusal of gifts and services was a refusal of friendship and dishonored the donor” (Marshall). Monetary support like this was a clear indicator of friendship; it forged a binding relationship between the beneficiary and the benefactor. And so the false apostles seized this opportunity to tell the Corinthians that Paul was cold-hearted and indifferent toward them. “He asks you for a collection for the saints in

Jerusalem, but he won't receive the kind of personal gifts that might obligate him to you. You can bet that he's skimming off the top from the 'collection.' This way he can have your money with none of the strings attached." It was just a fleshly, worldly, even, as we'll see, a demonic way of thinking.

And so what is his response? Verse 11: Do I refuse money from you "because I do not love you? God knows I do!" Chapter 6, verses 11 to 13: "Our mouth has spoken freely to you, O Corinthians, our heart is opened wide. You are not restrained by us, but you are restrained in your own affections. Now in a like exchange—I speak as to children—open wide to us also." It's not my love that's restrained! It's yours! Chapter 7 verse 3: "I do not speak to condemn you, for I have said before that you are in our hearts to die together and to live together!" In chapter 12 verse 15, he says it is precisely his love that compels him to refuse taking their money. 12:15: "If I love you more, am I to be loved less?" "If I love you so much as to labor with my own hands so I can be sure not to put any obstacle between you and the Gospel, should you love me less for that? I don't love you?! *God knows!*" There's just nothing more to say to such a hurtful accusation so far from the truth. He simply appeals to the omniscience of God who searches the heart. His proud confidence is the testimony of his conscience.

Ok, Paul. So if you're not refusing their money because you don't love them, why *are* you refusing it? Verse 12: "But what I am doing I will continue to do, so that I may cut off opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the matter about which they are boasting." In other words, the false apostles' goal was always to be regarded just as Paul is in the matter about which they are boasting. And what is that matter? It is the matter of apostleship. These impostors have made it their aim to have the Corinthians regard them as genuine apostles, just as they had regarded Paul as a genuine apostle. And one of the ways they attempted this deception was to point to the fact that apostles had the right to receive support for their ministry. They had received such support from the Corinthians. But Paul refused that support. Therefore, they must be genuine apostles, and Paul must be the fraud.

But anyone who thinks about that for a few consecutive minutes realizes that it's nonsense. The false apostles weren't "receiving support" from the Corinthians. They were, as verse 20 says, enslaving them, devouring them, taking advantage of them, exalting themselves while effectively slapping the Corinthians in the face. And they knew it! And they were put to shame by Paul's selflessness in his refusal to receive support—by his willingness to labor with his own hands so as not to become a burden to them, his willing to humble himself so that the Corinthians might be exalted, not humbling the Corinthians so that he might be exalted. They recognized this. And so their goal was to get Paul to accept support from them. This way, what was an obviously embarrassing difference between them would be eliminated.

But Paul's onto their schemes. And he's determined to keep as much manifest distance between him and these mercenaries as he possibly can. And if that means working with his own hands—if it means receiving support from others who are even poorer than the Corinthians—then Paul is willing to endure that hardship for the sake of demonstrating his sincere goodwill to his dear spiritual children in Corinth. What he is doing he will continue to do, so that he might cut off opportunity from the false apostles who desire the opportunity to be regarded as genuine apostles—like Paul actually is.

But the key to all of this is back in verse 7. The false apostles humble the Corinthians in order to exalt themselves. For the false teachers, it was **exaltation over humility**. But for Paul, the genuine servant, it was **humility over exaltation**. He says, "I humbled myself in this way in order to exalt you! I labored this way so as not to become a burden on any of you, so that I would not put any stumbling block in the way of your receiving the Gospel! And you, having received that Gospel, borne out of my labors, have been exalted from darkness to light, raised out of death to life, transferred from the rule of Satan to the kingdom of Christ! How could I have sinned against you by humbling myself to poverty, so that you could be enriched with divine blessing?"

And does that sound familiar at all? "Humbling myself to poverty, so that you would be enriched with divine blessing?" 2 Corinthians 8:9: "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich." If it's wrong to humble yourself—to not make full use of your own rights—so that you can exalt and bring blessing to others, what will these mercenary, triumphalistic phonies do with Jesus? What will they do with the Gospel? What will they do with a salvation that was won by self-imposed poverty?

You see, this fleshly, triumphalistic, well-to-do, perfectly-polished, superstar, showman, victorious, health-and-wealth approach to ministry, is fundamentally antithetical to the Gospel itself! Genuine servants of Christ cannot preach a Gospel of Christ's humble, self-sacrificing self-abasement while exalting themselves! while drawing attention to their resume, and their conference invitations, and their book deals, and their curriculum vitae, and their salary! Dear friends, that is not the way of the cross! And it is the cross that the genuine minister takes not only for the message on his lips, but for the model of his life.

The contrast is clear. False teachers exploit those they claim to be serving, so that they can exalt themselves. True teachers humble themselves, so that those whom they're serving might genuinely be exalted to enjoy true, spiritual riches. They choose **humility over exaltation**.

And so GraceLife, I exhort you, when you evaluate men and ministries, beware of the man who is impressed with himself, who's proud of his accomplishments, and who's bothered by the fact that you're not impressed with him. Beware of the teacher who exalts himself, who consistently

reminds you of the distance that exists between his seminary degrees or his years of ministry experience and your laymen's understanding of Scripture. Beware of the so-called shepherd whom you don't know, who doesn't live among you, who only comes around when he needs something from you, who's hesitant to get under you and serve you, so that you might enjoy God's richest blessings in Christ.

And remember, dear friends, that we are all called to ministry—that you are not merely those who are ministered to, but that you yourselves are ministers of the New Covenant, called to humbly serve one another in the body of Christ. As you engage in your ministry to Christ's Church, be this kind of minister who chooses **humility over exaltation**. Have the attitude that says, "I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls!" Humble yourselves, that your brothers and sisters might be exalted.

### Conclusion

And if you're here this morning and you remain outside of Christ—if you have not come to Him in repentance and faith and surrendered your life to His Lordship—I invite you to come. Look upon the glory of this Gospel of self-imposed poverty, where He who was rich for your sakes became poor, so that you, through His poverty, might become rich.

Though Jesus Christ was rich with divine blessing—though He was God the Son from all eternity, worthy of receiving the highest and most transcendent worship of the saints and angels in heaven, exalted above fallen human creation, nevertheless He entered fallen human creation by taking on flesh, impoverished Himself by assuming the nature of a mere man, and humbled Himself to death, even death on a cross, so that He could bear the wrath of His Father against the sins of His people. And by standing in the place of sinners, by extinguishing the Father's righteous anger against sin, He now comes and freely offers to you the riches of divine blessing: forgiveness of sins, freedom from punishment, a cleansed conscience, the perfect righteousness of Christ Himself, adoption into the family of God, the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit, communion with the Triune God Himself, and the promise of eternal life free from all sin and suffering in the presence of Christ forever.

Dear sinner, come to Christ this morning! Confess your sins and your worthiness only of divine judgment. Disclaim all hope for salvation by your own works, and put all your hope, all your faith, all your trust, in the works of Jesus! in the doing and the dying of your Substitute, the God-Man, who though rich became poor so that you might be enriched. Trust in Christ alone for righteousness. Come to Him and live!

And dear brothers and sisters—you who have trusted in Christ alone for righteousness—remember these **two key points of contrast** between false teachers and genuine teachers. Satan

comes not with horns bared, but disguising himself as an angel of light. **Substance over style.**  
**Humility over exaltation.** Be able to tell the difference.