

Paul's Defense of His Foolish Boasting
2 Corinthians 11:13-15
Part Three

Many years ago, according to a publication known as "The Wesleyan Advocate," a number of government officials in The Hague, who were more fashionable than religious, invited Van Courtonne, a famous court preacher of Paris, to preach in their State Church chapel. But because he considered their interest more social than spiritual, more a curiosity than a zeal for truth, he declined to come. When the invitation was repeated several times, he agreed to accept, on the condition that all the government officials would be present. They agreed.

And so he came and preached on "**The Ethiopian**" from **Acts 8**. His sermon had four points. **(1)** A government official who read his Bible was rare. **(2)** A government official who acknowledged his ignorance was even more rare. **(3)** A government official who asked a lesser person for instruction was extremely rare. **(4)** A government official who was converted was the rarest of all! And then the article concluded with the following statement: He never received a second invitation.

This obviously was tough talk from what we would have to assume was a tough preacher. But his toughness was not without precedent, even apostolic precedent, for the Apostle Paul was also a tough man who was willing to say tough things when compelled to do so. And this is exactly what we will see this morning, as we come to the conclusion of our study of **2 Corinthians 11:1-15** where we will see Paul denouncing his opponents in the Corinthian church in the strongest possible terms.

So, what is our context for this study? Paul in **2 Corinthians 10:12-18** had contrasted the improper boasting of the false apostles within the church of Corinth with his own proper boasting. Or in other words, Paul in **2 Corinthians 10:12-18** had made it clear that, unlike his opponents who boasted in their credentials and accomplishments, he had chosen to boast only "**in the Lord,**" or in other words within the measure of the sphere of ministry that had been granted to him by God and made possible through the abundant outpouring of God's grace upon him and through him. This, unlike his opponents, is what he had chosen to boast in.

So why did Paul make this contrast between the improper boasting of his opponents and his proper boasting? He did this in the hope that this contrast would expose his opponents as frauds, or in other words as false apostles who were in fact preaching a false gospel. But even though this was his hope. He still apparently felt that it was not enough. So Paul, pulling out all the stops, reluctantly decided that in order to protect the Corinthian church from these false apostles, he would have to engage in the same kind of boasting as his opponents.

But before he did this Paul felt that that he had to prepare his readers. So Paul in **2 Corinthians 11:1-15** decided to lay out before his readers a defense for what he was about to do, which now brings us to the question that we have been seeking to answer. And what is that question? How did Paul defend his willingness to engage in what he considered foolish boasting in 2 Corinthians 11:2-15?

First of all, we learned that Paul defended his willingness to engage in what he considered to be foolish boasting by highlighting his godly jealousy for the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 11:2-6).

So let me read for you **2 Corinthians 11:2-6** and see if this is not so. **“For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin. (3) But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. (4) For if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you bear this beautifully. (5) For I consider myself not in the least inferior to the most eminent apostles. (6) 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.”** So based on these verses did Paul defend his willingness to engage in what he considered to be foolish boasting by highlighting his godly jealousy for the Corinthians? And the answer I believe would have to be yes. So how else did Paul defend his willingness to engage in what he considered to be foolish boasting?

He defended his willingness to engage in what he considered to be foolish boasting by highlighting his no-charge policy and its implications (2

Corinthians 11:7-12). So now let me read for you **2 Corinthians 11:7-12** and see if this is not so.

“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? (8) I robbed other churches by taking wages from them to serve you; (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, and will continue to do so. (10) As the truth of Christ is in me, this boasting of mine will not be stopped in the regions of Achaia. (11) Why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do! (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.”

So based on these verses did Paul defend his willingness to engage in what he considered to be foolish boasting by highlighting his no-charge policy? And the answer, I believe, would have to be yes!

But we are not done. Paul will now go on to defend his willingness to engage in what he considered to be foolish boasting in yet another way. So, what was that?

Paul defended his willingness to engage in what he considered to be foolish boasting by highlighting the true identify of his opponents while denouncing them in the strongest possible terms (2 Corinthians 11:3-5).

So now let us read **2 Corinthians 11:13-15** and see if this is not so. **“For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. (14) No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. (15) Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds.”** So based on these verses, could we say that Paul defended his willingness to engage in what he considered to be foolish boasting by highlighting the true identify of his opponents while denouncing them in the strongest possible terms? And I believe that the answer again would have to be yes! This is exactly what he was doing.

So, what is my hope for this message as we examine these verses more carefully? My hope is that as we come to the conclusion of our study of **2 Corinthians 11:1-15** and as we consider how Paul highlighted the true identify of his opponents in Corinth while denouncing them in the strongest possible terms that we ourselves might be given the same grace to speak out just as strongly and forcefully when we believe someone we care about is being threatened by messengers of a false gospel.

This is my hope for this message. So with this hope in mind let us now begin our examination of this passage. We will begin by taking a look at how Paul described his opponents in the Corinthian church in **verse 13**. And what we will clearly see is that Paul in his description did not pull any punches. So how did Paul describe his opponents in **verse 13**?

First of all, Paul described his opponents as **“false apostles.”** What does the verse say? **“For such men [referring to his opponents within the Corinthian church] are false apostles.”** This is the first time in this epistle where Paul specifically calls out his opponents in this way. So clearly Paul is already throwing punches that he, up to this point, had not thrown.

The term “false apostles” (PSEUDAPOSTOLOS) appears nowhere else in the New Testament and was most likely coined by Paul himself. So why did Paul call his opponents false apostles?

They were false not only because they had not been sent by God to Corinth as Paul had been sent, but they were also false because the **“Jesus”** they preached, and the **“spirit”** and the **“gospel”** that they offered were wholly “pseudo,” or in other words false. This is clear based on **2 Corinthians 11:4** when Paul in alluding to his opponents in Corinth said, **“For if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you bear this beautifully.”** And why was he able to say this to the Corinthian believers? He was able to say this because this is exactly what had happened in Corinth among the professing believers. These deceivers, these false apostles, though offering a different “Jesus,” a different “spirit,” and a different “gospel” than Paul, were welcomed by many of the Corinthians. So could this same kind of thing happen in the church today? Absolutely!

Deceivers, such as these in Corinth, have plagued God's people throughout redemptive history. Let me read for you the words of God through His prophet Jeremiah in **Jeremiah 14:14**. **"The prophets are prophesying falsehood in My name. I have neither sent them nor commanded them nor spoken to them; they are prophesying to you a false vision, divination, futility and the deception of their own minds."** In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warned in **Matthew 7:15**, **"Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves."** And in the Olivet Discourse the Lord noted that they would be especially active in the end times. What did Jesus say in **Matthew 24:24**? He said this, **"For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect."** And has this come about just as Jesus had prophesied? Absolutely! Listen to the words of the Apostle John in **1 John 4:1**. **"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world."** So should we in light of these words commit ourselves to "test the spirits?" Absolutely!

So who are these "spirits" that we are to test? These are the demonic spirits working behind the scenes to produce **"false apostles," "false prophets"** and **"false teachers."** These are the spirits we are to test. And how do we test these "spirits?" We test them by comparing what these so-called apostles or prophets or teachers are saying with what has already been revealed to us in the Scriptures concerning Christ and His gospel.

So should we expect that the church would continue to be threatened by such deceivers? Absolutely! This is exactly what we should expect. And this is certainly what happened in Corinth as these deceivers that Paul described as **"false apostles"** entered into their church. The Corinthians should have tested them by comparing what they said to what Paul had told them but they didn't do this and therefore many of them were swept away by them. But why didn't they test the spirits? Why didn't they exercise greater caution?

Let us continue on with Paul's description of his opponents and I believe we will understand why. **"For such men [referring to his opponents within the Corinthian church] are false apostles, deceitful workers."** The Corinthians didn't test the spirits nor exercise greater caution to some degree because

these false apostles were “**deceitful workers.**” So is Paul once again denouncing his opponents? Absolutely!

The word “deceitful” (DOLIOI) comes from a Greek noun that means, “bait.” Paul in essence was describing his opponents as workers who through their false teaching were baiting traps. These very clever deceitful traps worked and that is why the Corinthians were so easily swept away by these false apostles. And to drive this point home even further let us continue on with Paul’s description of his opponents. So what else did he say? “**For such men (referring to his opponents within the Corinthians Church) are false apostles, deceitful workers [and then what does it say?], ... disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.**”

The word “disguising” (METASCHEMATIZOMENOI) refers to a change of outward appearance only. Since most people (like the Corinthians) seldom look below the surface of an individual’s religious trappings to the substance of their teaching, these particular people can be easily deceived by those who appear to be spiritual but who really are religious exploiters. And this again is what happened in Corinth.

So should such tactics by religious exploiters surprise us? No! This is exactly what we should expect in light of the demonic influences that surround false apostles, false prophets and false teachers. And this is a point that Paul wants to make sure that these Corinthians understand.

Let us now read **verse 14** and see if this is not so. “**No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.**”

Paul at this point is now pounding away on his opponents using the most extreme terms in order to help the Corinthians to see the threat these false apostles pose.

The world likes to portray Satan as a menacing, red in color, horned, cloven hoofed, individual with a pointed tail. But this mythological portrayal of Satan by the world is totally inaccurate and in no way would help us to identify Satan if we he were to appear before us. For what does **2 Corinthians 11:14** tell us? It tells us, “**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 found in the Old Testament in **Isaiah 14:12-15**.

And because Satan disguises himself as an angel of light, if we look only at the trappings of religiosity or spirituality of an individual we can very easily be snared. And this point is driven home again in **verse 15**.

So what does **verse 15** say? **“Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness.”**

The point is that Satan is the arch deceiver. Jesus said of him in **John 8:44**, **“Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”** 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, through his lies, has control.

Therefore how are we going to be able to identify false apostles, false prophets and false teachers? It is by what they teach!

If someone comes along and seeks to persuade us or someone else that we love that Jesus is not the Christ, or that He did not come in the flesh, or that He is not the Son of God, or in other words God the Son then we should conclude that the person who is speaking is speaking falsehood and is a threat to the true gospel, for these kind of teachings do not line up with the true gospel.

If someone comes along and seeks to persuade us or someone else that we love, that Christ’s death was not sufficient to atone for all sin for all time, or that we in order to receive the benefit of Christ’s atoning death have to do something in addition to what Christ did for us at the cross other than exercising faith in person and work of Christ as revealed in the Scriptures then we should conclude that person who is speaking is speaking falsehood and is a threat to the true gospel for these kind of teachings do not line up with the true gospel.

If someone comes along and seeks to persuade us or someone else that we love that we can exercise saving faith in Christ, as He is revealed in the scripture, and receive the benefits of His atoning death on the cross of Calvary without bowing before Him as Lord, or in other words without

taking His yoke upon us then we should conclude that he is speaking falsehood and is therefore a threat to the true gospel for these kind of teachings do not line up with the true gospel.

Identifying these various contradictions with the true gospel is how we test the spirits as taught by Apostle John in **1 John 4:1** and the means by which we are able to expose any false apostle, prophet or teacher who would threaten the church.

And will those who threaten the church escape judgment? No! There **“end”** will be according to their deeds. What does it say at the end of **2 Corinthians 11:15**? **“Whose end will be according to their deeds.”**

The “end” that Paul alluded to in 2 Corinthians 11:15 and that awaited his opponents in Corinth was the “Lake of Fire” described in Revelation 20:11-15.

Van Courtonne, the famous court preacher of Paris, was certainly a bold preacher who was willing to confront. But I believe his confrontation of the spiritually indifferent government pales in comparison to Paul’s denunciation of the false apostles in Corinth who he believe were an active threat to the gospel of Christ and those we was seeking to protect in the church of Corinth.

May we by the grace of God be willing to powerfully denounce any false teacher who we believe has begun to threaten the spiritual welfare of those that we love and care about.