

Masters of Disguise

2 Corinthians 11:13–15

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Introduction

Have you ever thought about the devolution of language in our society? the way that fewer and fewer people say what they mean anymore? and how we invent phrases to smooth out the rough edges of straightforward speech? Those are called euphemisms. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines *euphemism* as “the substitution of an agreeable or inoffensive expression for one that may offend or suggest something unpleasant.” And in our society, which is at the same time dominated both by slavish devotion to political correctness and by a culture of perpetual offendedness, such expressions seem to be indispensable to postmodern sensibilities.

Have you ever noticed this? People don’t drive used cars anymore; they drive “pre-owned vehicles.” They’re not unemployed; they’re “between jobs.” Nobody ever gets fired; people are “downsized,” “force adjusted,” or “let go.” We don’t have prisons anymore; we have “correctional facilities.” And people don’t even die anymore; they just “pass away.”

And this kind of euphemizing doesn’t remain in the realm of the humorous and the harmless. No category of words suffers more at the hands of postmodern euphemizing than sins. As our culture has pushed further and further toward secularism, violations of God’s law have been rebranded so as not to be regarded as damning and destructive as they actually are. And so pornography is called “adult entertainment”—a misnomer if there ever was one. Adultery is called “having an affair.” Homosexuality is called being “gay;” a word that used to speak of lightheartedness and happiness, now used of a pattern of sin that brings one to utter spiritual misery and ruin. And perhaps at the top of the list, the murder of children in the womb is euphemized as “abortion,” or “terminating a pregnancy,” or—worst of all—“reproductive freedom.” The hope seems to be that if you can sanitize the language, the wickedness of the act would be pushed further and further from consciousness, until eventually it becomes accepted uncritically.

And that is how sin works, because it’s how Satan works. Satan never comes to us dressed in red, horns showing, and carrying a pitchfork. He doesn’t ever present sin to us in its naked vileness and misery. He dresses it up. He euphemizes it. The great Puritan Thomas Brooks, in his book, *Precious Remedies against Satan’s Devices*, famously wrote that Satan’s strategy in temptation is “to present the bait and hide the hook; to present the golden cup, and hide the poison; to present the sweet, the pleasure, and the profit that may flow in upon the soul by yielding to sin, and by hiding from the soul the wrath and misery what will certainly follow the

committing of sin. . . . He promises the soul honor, pleasure, profit, but pays the soul with the greatest contempt, shame, and loss that can be” (29–30).

Satan is a master deceiver. And false teachers—those professing Christian preachers who claim to speak for Jesus and preach the Gospel, but who so pervert the sound doctrine set forth in Scripture that they *undermine* Jesus and *corrupt* the Gospel—they are nothing more than the servants of Satan. And so they are themselves deceivers. They come as wolves in sheep’s clothing, Matthew 7:15. They secretly introduce destructive heresies, 2 Peter 2:1. And they arise from within the church, Acts 20:30.

And as I’ve said before, that is always what makes false teachers—and false teaching—so deadly: 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. Error infiltrates the church in the name of truth.

I mentioned these quotes in my most recent sermon, but I think they bear repeating. 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). Satan is the archdeceiver, and his servants are masters of disguise. And as we’ve been going through this section of 2 Corinthians, we’ve learned how essential it is for the church to be equipped to discern between truth and error, and between genuine teachers of biblical truth and false teachers who peddle error and even heresy *dressed* as truth.

And this is what the Apostle Paul is dealing with in Corinth, as false teachers from Jerusalem had invaded the church in Corinth, preaching a heretical mix of Judaizing legalism and fleshly triumphalism. And because their error came masquerading in the name of the truth, the Corinthians had been deceived by it. And so Paul has written 2 Corinthians—and especially chapters 10 to 13—to confront this false teaching head-on.

Because these false teachers were claiming to be apostles, and because they were claiming that Paul himself was a false apostle, a large part of Paul’s argument has been to contrast himself with them. In chapter 2 verse 17, Paul subtly intimates that the false apostles are duplicitous peddlers of the Word of God, whereas he speaks from sincerity, from God, in Christ, and in the sight of God. In chapter 4 verse 2 he implies something very similar. He says, “We have renounced the things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God, but by the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.” And the implication is: these intruders from Jerusalem *haven’t* renounced

hidden things, that they do walk in craftiness and adulterate the word of God. In chapter 6 verse 14 to chapter 7 verse 1, he gives that great admonition for the Corinthians not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers, which again implies that the interlopers are not genuine believers in Christ.

Then in chapter 10 he gets a bit more direct. In verse 12, he says these men only compare themselves with themselves. They measure their spirituality by setting their own conduct up as a man-made standard, and they commend themselves rather than being commended by the Lord. In verses 13 to 15, he says that these men are so driven by fleshly ambition that they tried to take credit for the spiritual fruit that came as a result of Paul's ministry. They worry about padding their numbers rather than the growth of the kingdom of God. In verses 17 and 18, he says that these false teachers boast in themselves and their fleshly methods and worldly accomplishments. But genuine servants of Christ boast only in the Lord.

And in the opening verses of chapter 11, Paul turns up the heat, as in verse 3 he compares the false teachers to Satan's deception of Eve, and in verse 4 says that these men have come preaching *another* Jesus, a *different* spirit, and a *different gospel* which they had not accepted. In verse 5, he mockingly calls them "super apostles," to expose the folly of their fleshly boasting. In verse 6, he exposes how they care about style rather than substance, as they focus on Paul's rhetorical failures rather than giving attention to the content of his message. And in verses 7 to 12, he castigates them for aiming to exalt themselves at the Corinthians' expense rather than humbling themselves for the Corinthians' benefit.

But now, in verses 13 to 15, Paul dispenses with the subtle intimations, he dispenses with the damning comparisons, and he even dispenses with the biting sarcasm, and he as it were walks up to these men, rips off their masks, and exposes them for the Satanic phonies that they are, in the plainest and harshest language he can summon. Let's read the text together. 2 Corinthians 11, verses 13 to 15: "For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. ¹⁴No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. ¹⁵Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds."

This is a passage in which we learn much concerning the nature of false teachers and false teaching. And Paul accomplishes this unmasking in **three components**. And that's how we'll examine it. First, **a scathing indictment**. Second, **an unsurprising explanation**. And third, **a terrifying condemnation**.

I. A Scathing Indictment (v. 13)

First, let's look at Paul's **scathing indictment** of these false teachers. Verse 13: "For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ."

And I don't want you to miss the significance of that little word "For" that begins the verse. "For" links this **scathing indictment** to the previous verse, where Paul says, "I'm going to continue to refuse financial support from you, Corinthians, because I'm not going to give these impostors an opportunity to legitimize their taking advantage of you by saying, 'See, Paul takes money too!'" He says, "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." "I'm going to do everything I can to make sure these men have no opportunity to be regarded as genuine apostles!" Why, Paul? Verse 13: "*For* such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ."

They are false apostles. In the original, the word is *pseudapostoloi*. They are pseudo-apostles. Those who boast so proudly in their fleshly attainments—their large followings, their financial success, their rhetorical eloquence—they who style themselves *super*-apostles, verse 5, are nothing more than *pseudo*-apostles. False apostles.

The New Testament speaks often of false *prophets*. We've referred often to Jesus' statement in Matthew 7:15. He says, "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves." We've also mentioned 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." Scripture also speaks of false *teachers*, as analogous to false prophets. 2 Peter 2:1: "But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies." There are even false *Christs*. Jesus promises in Mark 13:32 that before the end comes, "False Christs and false prophets will arise, and will show signs and wonders, in order to lead astray, if possible, the elect." And in one another text besides here in 2 Corinthians 11—in Revelation chapter 2 verse 2—Scripture speaks of false *apostles*. Revelation 2:2. Jesus commends the church at Ephesus and says, "I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false."

False prophets are those who claim to be true prophets, but they prophesy falsely and so are no true prophets at all. False teachers are those who claim to be sound teachers, but who teach damning doctrine, and so in no sense are biblical teachers, but false teachers. False Christs are those who claim to be the Messiah—to be the return of Jesus Himself—and the true Christ promises that the false Christs will actually be marginally successful. They'll do miracles to deceive people into following them. But they are not the genuine Messiah. They are false Christs. And in the same way, there are false apostles—people who claim to be genuine

messengers sent from Jesus, who speak of Jesus, who preach what they call “Gospel,” in the name of the Holy Spirit, who know nothing of Jesus, who have never believed the Gospel, and who blaspheme the Holy Spirit.

He also calls them deceitful workers. “Such men are false apostles, deceitful workers.” The New Testament often uses the term “worker” to refer to those who serve in Gospel ministry. Paul calls Timothy his fellow worker in Romans 16:21; he says the same of Epaphroditus in Philippians 2:25, and of Philemon in Philemon 1:1. And these false apostles, they were workers all right. They infiltrated the Corinthian church—invaded Paul’s field of ministry to reap what they hadn’t sown, they started sowing their seeds of discord and deception, and with their smooth talk and plausible arguments, they were actually able to incite a mutiny against Paul—the very man who had brought the Corinthians the Gospel in the first place! Like the Pharisees, these Judaizers traveled around on sea and land to make a proselyte (Matt 23:15). But when they made one, they’d make him twice as much a son of hell as themselves, because their doctrine of human achievement undermined the Gospel of the sufficient work of Christ and the free grace of God.

And so they are workers. But they are *deceitful* workers. Pretending to serve the church, they do nothing but, as 2 Corinthians 11:20 says, enslave the people, devour the people, take advantage of the people and as it were smack them in the face. They destroy the church in the name of serving the church, and they draw attention away from Christ and the sufficiency of His cross, and steal His glory by glorying in fleshly externals—and teaching others to do the same. And so all of their labors are *evil* labors. They are workers, but they are *deceitful* workers.

And all false teachers must traffic in deceit. 2 Timothy 3:13 says, “Evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.” That’s what these men are: impostors. And impostors deceive. Titus 1:10 says, “For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision,” that is, especially the Judaizers, which is what the false apostles in Corinth were. And Romans 16:18 says, “For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they *deceive* the hearts of the unsuspecting.”

And what does their deception consist in? Well, look at verse 13 again. We’ve said it before: “Such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.” They *disguise* themselves. *Metaschematizo*. *Meta-*, to change. *Schematizo*, from which we get “schema” or “schematic.” It means “to change the schema,” “to change the outward form.” “Disguise” is a good translation. So also is the NIV’s rendering: *masquerading* as apostles of Christ. They wear the mask of apostles; they don the costume of apostles; but they are only hypocritical poseurs. Philip Hughes writes, “They pose as something which they are not and in doing so they deceive those who through gullibility or inexperience are more ready to give

credence to plausible impostors than to remember the sound teaching and the warnings of him who is their true apostle” (393).

Paul says: “This is who these men are! They have not been commissioned from Christ! They peddle the Word of God! They rely on cunning and craftiness and cleverness, rather than the Spirit of God alone! They trespass on other men’s territory! They dominate others and exalt themselves! They rob the cross of Christ of its glory by boasting in and commending themselves! And they preach another Jesus, a different Gospel, by a different Spirit! They’re not what they claim to be! They are impostors! Phonies! Frauds! Fakes! Charlatans! Pretenders! Masqueraders!” They are *false* apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. As D. A. Carson says, they “actively work against the gospel in the name of the gospel, seduce the people to another Jesus in the name of Jesus, and in the name of greater Christian maturity instill a deadly triumphalism that renders impossible ‘sincere and pure devotion to Christ’” (100).

This is a **scathing indictment**. It is, as I said, some of the harshest and most plain-spoken language in all of Paul’s writings. One commentator calls this “blunt and confrontational terms” (Guthrie, 526). Another calls it a plain denunciation (Hughes, 392). Paul doesn’t mince his words here. He doesn’t tie himself up in a pretzel of hand-wringing angst about having to **indict** the character of other professing Christians! He’s not mollified by the feckless perversion of Christian charity that our world calls “tolerance”! He uses a serrated edge when it’s necessary—when the truth is at stake, when people’s souls are at stake, threatened by the damning errors of false teaching.

As Phil has said recently, we don’t sacrifice the truth for a substanceless unity. And so the notion that it’s always uncharitable to sternly rebuke false doctrine, or that there’s never an appropriate time to as it were rip off the masks of phony teachers, masquerading as servants of Christ—that notion stands squarely at odds with the practice of the Apostle Paul and the precept of Scripture itself. One commentator put it well when he said, “The warmer a father’s affection for his son, the deeper will be his distress when that son’s life is being persistently threatened by shrewd enemies, and the more earnest will be his warnings” (Hendriksen, *Philippians*, 149–50). And so we warn you with the severity and the urgency that we do—along with the Apostle Paul we issue these **scathing indictments**—because the integrity of the *Gospel* is at stake! because the salvation of your *soul* is at stake!

II. An Unsurprising Explanation (vv. 14–15a)

Well, after this scathing indictment, we have, secondly, what I’m calling **an unsurprising explanation**. And we see this in verses 14 and 15, but let’s read again from verse 13 to get the flow of thought. “For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as

apostles of Christ. No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness.”

It’s as if Paul anticipates the Corinthians saying, “Now, Paul. Come on! I can understand if you *disagree* with these guys on some things. I mean, truth be told, they’re not your biggest fans either. But how can you accuse of them of deceitfully masquerading as genuine believers? Again, I get that you disagree about some matters concerning the Mosaic Law, and yes, you definitely do have very different ministry styles, but think about all the things you both have in common! These men come in the name of Christ! They believe that Jesus is virgin born, fully God and fully man! They believe in substitutionary atonement and the bodily resurrection! They believe in the inerrancy of Scripture! There’s so much that these men get right! Do you really think they could be *pretending* to be Christians? I mean, is that even possible?” And Paul says, “Not only is it possible, it should come as no surprise to you at all.” And you see that emphasis at the beginning of both verse 14 and verse 15. Verse 14: “No wonder.” Verse 15: “Therefore it is not surprising.” And so the **explanation** he’s about to give is an ***unsurprising explanation***.

And the explanation is an argument from the greater to the lesser. The deceptive masquerading of the ‘false apostles’ should come as no surprise because Satan, who is their master, whose servants they are, himself deceptively masquerades as an angel of light in his dealings with mankind. And if Satan, who is the most wicked and vile of all beings—the father and head of all unbelievers—if Satan deceives by disguises, it should be no surprise that his servants do so as well.

And Satan certainly does deceive by disguises. And it is so important that we camp on this for a while and meditate on what Scripture reveals concerning Satan’s strategies of deception. Back in 2 Corinthians 2, as Paul speaks about the protocols for biblical church discipline and restoration, he says that the purpose for biblically dealing with sin in the church is, 2 Corinthians 2:11, “so that no advantage would be taken of us by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his schemes.” Paul says that the reason Satan would not take advantage of the church is because the church is not ignorant of his schemes.

You see, Satan, who is our great enemy and adversary, is a master strategist. And he is so absolutely consumed with inflicting as much misery and discord on the people of God that he has an entire arsenal of carefully-planned strategies—or schemes—for weakening and neutralizing the church. And the only way we’re going to stand against the schemes of the devil, such that we not be taken advantage of by such an experienced and well-studied enemy, is if we are not ignorant of those schemes. We need to apprise ourselves of Satan’s schemes, and study diligently to defend against them.

And perhaps the chief among those stratagems is *deception*. Satan is the arch-deceiver. In John chapter 8 verse 44, Jesus tells the preeminent false teachers of His day, the Pharisees, that they are of their father the devil. (So once again, we see this intimate connection between false teachers and Satan. False teaching isn't merely wrong; it's Satanic. False doctrines are, as 1 Timothy 4:1 says, the doctrines of *demons*.) But as Jesus goes on speaking about Satan, He says, "Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies." Satan is characterized by the speaking of falsehood. He is the father of lies—the originator of all deception.

And here Paul represents that deception by saying that "Satan disguises himself as an angel of light." Scripture often uses the image of *light* to represent purity, truth, and the dominion of God. 1 John 1:5: "This is the message that we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all." Jesus said in John 8:12, "I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life." When we experience the miracle of regeneration—the birth of new spiritual life in our souls—Scripture describes that as being given eyes to see "the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ," 2 Corinthians 4:6, so that—Ephesians 5:8—we are now called "Light in the Lord" and exhorted to "walk as children of Light."

On the other hand, Scripture uses the image of *darkness* to represent impurity, falsehood, and the dominion of sin and Satan. After Satan entered into Judas, and Judas returned to the Garden of Gethsemane with the chief priests and the temple officers to arrest Jesus, Jesus says to them, "This hour and the power of darkness are yours." Betrayal is linked to the power of darkness, which was Satan's power operative through Judas. In Ephesians 6:12, we're told that we fight a spiritual battle, "not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places." When God saves us, Colossians 1:13 says He rescues us "from the domain of darkness, and transfer[s] us to the kingdom of His beloved Son." 1 Peter 2:9 says God "called [us] out of darkness into His marvelous light." And as Paul is on trial before Agrippa, he says in Acts 26:18 that God has sent him to the Gentiles "to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God." God is the ruler of the realm of light, the epitome of all purity and holiness, the source of all Truth, and the Father of blessing. Satan is the ruler of the realm of darkness, the epitome of all vileness and wretchedness, the source of all lies, and the father of misery.

But when Satan comes to assail the church, to pervert the Scriptures, to tempt believers, he does not come dressed in the colors of his kingdom! He does not come bearing the crest of *darkness*! As one commentator said, "When Satan is at work we never smell sulfur or glance down at a cloven hoof!" (R.K. Hughes, 199). No, Satan disguises himself as an angel of light! He comes in the name of holiness, of purity, of truth, of blessing—even in the name of God! John Calvin

wrote of this verse, “We have experience of both every day, for when Satan tempts us to evil, he does not profess to be what he really is. For he would lose his object, if we were made aware of his being a mortal enemy, and opposer of our salvation. Hence he always makes use of some cloak for the purpose of insnaring us, and does not immediately show his horns (as the common expression is), but rather makes it his endeavor to appear as an angel. Even when he tempts us to gross crimes, he makes use, nevertheless, of some pretext that he may draw us, when we are off our guard, into his nets.” And then the sentence that I quoted earlier: “What then, if he attacks us under the appearance of *good*, nay, under the very title of *God*? . . . It is a well known saying as to Babylon, that she gives poison to drink in a golden cup (Jer 51:7). Hence we must be on our guard against masks” (Calvin, 351).

I quoted earlier from *Precious Remedies against Satan’s Devices* by Thomas Brooks, and I want to do so again, as Brooks comments on the subject of our text. He describes one of Satan’s stratagems for deception in temptation as, “Painting sin with virtue’s colors.” He writes, “Satan knows that if he should present sin in its own nature and dress, the soul would rather fly from it than yield to it; and therefore he presents it unto us, not in its own proper colors, but painted and gilded over with the name and show of virtue, that we may the more easily be overcome by it, and take the more pleasure in committing of it. Pride, he presents to the soul under the name and notion of neatness and cleanliness, and covetousness (which the apostle condemns for idolatry) to be but good [stewardship]; and drunkenness to be good fellowship, and riotousness under the name and notion of liberality, and wantonness as a trick of youth” (34). Satan paints sin with virtue’s colors. Though he intends to corrupt unto darkness, he comes as an angel of light. And friends, if we are to have any hope of standing against such temptations, we have to *know* that he comes as an angel of light, and we have to be prepared to do battle with sin that’s painted over as virtue.

How do we do that? Well, I’ve just found Brooks so helpful that I want to quote generously from three of the “remedies” that he gives for this “device” of Satan’s. First, he says, “Consider, that sin is never a whit the less filthy, vile, and abominable, by its being colored and painted with virtue’s colors. A poisonous pill is never a whit the less poisonous because it is gilded over with gold; nor a wolf is never a whit the less a wolf because he hath put on a sheep’s skin; nor the devil is never a whit the less a devil because he appears sometimes like an angel of light. So neither is sin any whit the less filthy and abominable by its being painted over with virtue’s colors” (34–35). And here there is the implicit admonition to discern things as they actually are, and not as they appear to be. Don’t regard mere externals, but be such students of the Scriptures—be so bathed in the mind of the Holy Spirit through His Word—that you are able to discern the substance of things regardless of their form, by testing everything against the Word of God.

Second, Brooks warns us that the severer and more treacherous the sin, the prettier dress Satan will try to clothe it in. He says, “The most dangerous vermin is too often to be found under the fairest and sweetest flowers, the fairest glove is often drawn upon the foulest hand, and the richest robes are often put upon the filthiest bodies. So are the fairest and sweetest names upon the greatest and the most horrible vices and errors that be in the world” (35). And this is so true. It brings us right back to the euphemizing of sin. Promiscuous fornication is called “sexual freedom”! Gratifying the lust of the eyes can be done at places called “*Gentlemen’s Clubs*”! Drunkenness is peddled under the name of Christian liberty! Homosexuality and the perversion of marriage is marketed as *love*! Men, women, and children who identify as “transgender” are encouraged to mutilate themselves in the name of tolerance! And the most despicable of them all is that defenseless children are brutally murdered—literally torn limb from limb!—under the banner of being “pro-choice,” celebrated as “women’s reproductive rights.” Oh, be sure of it! Satan comes as an angel of light.

But lest we get too comfortable, thinking about the sins of the world rather than the sins of our own heart, ask yourselves: how does Satan sell you on *your* pet sins? You’re not arrogant and impatient; you’re concerned for the truth! You’re not lazy and slothful; you’ve had a long week and you just need some rest! You’re not neglecting the duties of fellowship; you’re in a busy season of life and taking care of other responsibilities right now! And ten thousand other ways. Friends, do the heart work. Spend some time meditating on how Satan gets you to fold by dressing your pet sins in enticing colors.

And then, to battle that temptation, Brooks exhorts us to think of sin not how Satan presents it, but the way we’ll *eventually* see it. He says, “Look on sin with that eye with which within a few hours we shall see it. Ah, souls! when you shall lie upon a dying bed, and stand before a judgment-seat, sin shall be unmasked, and its dress and robes shall then be taken off, and then it shall appear more vile, filthy, and terrible than hell itself; then, that which formerly appeared most sweet will appear most bitter, and that which appeared most beautiful will appear most ugly, and that which appeared most delightful will then appear most dreadful to the soul. Ah, the shame, the pain, the gall, the bitterness, the horror, the hell that the sight of sin, when its dress is taken off, will raise in poor souls!” (35). He goes on: “O souls! the day is at hand when the devil will pull off the paint and garnish that he hath put upon sin, and present that monster, sin, in such a monstrous shape to your souls, that will cause your thoughts to be troubled, your countenance to be changed, the joints of your loins to be loosed, and your knees to be dashed one against another, and your hearts to be so terrified, that you will be ready, with Ahithophel and Judas, to strangle and hang your bodies on the earth, and your souls in hell, if the Lord hath not more mercy on you than he had on them. Oh! therefore, look upon sin now as you must look upon it to all eternity, and as God, conscience, and Satan will present it to you another day!” (36). Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. This is how he operates. And we need to be ready for it, as we do battle with sin in our own souls.

But Satan doesn't do battle only by attempting to deceive us with respect to our own personal sins. He also aims to deceive God's people by infiltrating churches. And that's exactly what he was doing in Corinth. Look again at verse 15: "Therefore it is not surprising if his *servants* also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness." Here Paul shows that these Judaizing triumphalists that have invaded Corinth are not only false apostles, as serious a charge as that is. They are servants, not of righteousness, and still less of Christ, but they are servants of *Satan*. Charles Hodge says, "If a bad angel can assume the appearance of a good angel, a bad man may put on the semblance of a good man" (640).

And that is exactly what we have going on today. Wicked men, who claim to be teachers and preachers and servants of Christ—ministers of the Gospel, servants of righteousness—who because of false doctrine or wayward living expose themselves to be nothing more than servants of Satan masquerading as servants of righteousness. And you know something? Satan makes really good costumes for his servants. And so his servants join the church, and they sound *really* good. Again, they speak of believing in and worshiping Jesus! They claim to be *Gospel-driven*! They speak much of "the Spirit"! But they inject these *biblical* words with *heterodox* meanings, so that Paul says they preach a *different* Jesus, a *different* gospel, and a *different* spirit (2 Cor 11:4).

They come in and reason with you. They say, "Listen, Jesus is a conqueror! He is the victor over sin and death, and He has ascended to the right hand of the Father where He rules this world as King! And you are sons and daughters of the King! And so you should be conquerors! Victors! Jesus wants you conquering and victorious like He is! In your finances, in your education, in your personal relationships, in your health, in your possessions: Jesus wants to make you wealthy, if only you'll have enough faith to send *me* your money!"

They say, "Listen, the reason your spiritual life is languid and powerless isn't because of sin; it's not because you don't attend to the means of grace; it's not because you don't read Scripture or pray or faithfully participate in the local church. It's because you don't 'earnestly desire that you may prophesy!' You have to open yourself up to the supernatural! to the prophetic! You need to release the anointing of the Holy Spirit! Because God speaks to me! And not just in the Scriptures; God speaks to me directly! And that has totally reinvigorated my spiritual life! My relationship with God used to be stale like you say yours is, and now it's alive and fresh and renewed!"

People who try to convince me of the continuation of prophecy for today often tell stories of people getting direct messages from God that can't possibly be explained by anything else. They say that God told them something was going to happen ahead of time, and it happened. And when you say, "Well, friend, since Scripture says the Bible is sufficient revelation from God and

that all such revelation has ceased once the Bible was fully revealed, are you at all concerned that that might be demonic?” And they say, “Demonic?! Why would demons do something that only makes me love and trust and serve Christ more?” And I say, “Oh, friend. Don’t forget that Satan comes as an angel of light! He would love nothing more than to undermine your full confidence in the perfect sufficiency of Scripture by enticing you seek divine revelation from other sources! And so if he has to sacrifice a battle to win the war, he won’t think twice about it!”

So many of these teachers afflict the church by coming as wolves in sheep’s clothing. We’ve mentioned the prosperity preachers and the Charismatics, like Joel Osteen, T. D. Jakes, Steven Furtick, and Judah Smith. We could add to that the disguised servants of Satan who sneak in their man-centeredness and false doctrine through what they call worship music—groups like Hillsong and Jesus Culture. We could add the so called “Christian academics”—apologists, philosophers, and so-called scholars who undermine the inerrancy and authority of Scripture in the name of “biblical criticism,” and who undo historic Christian orthodoxy for the sake of remaining “compellingly intellectual” or “academically respectable” to skeptics and unbelievers. We could add the postmodernists hawking doubt in God’s Word as *humility*, the antinomians peddling licentiousness as trust in God’s *grace*, and the legalists pushing self-righteousness in the name of *holiness*.

And we must not fail to name the power-hungry ministers, usually young, who are motivated most fundamentally by making a name for themselves—who want to become evangelical celebrities, and who are willing to step on the people of God as a platform to build their “brand.” Dear people: *beware* of these masqueraders! Be on your guard, for Satan comes as an angel of light, and so it’s not surprising that his servants disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Test everything by Scripture. Be ruthlessly and relentlessly biblical. If you’re not sure about the soundness of a particular teaching or teacher, ask a trusted friend, or a Bible study shepherd, or a pastor or elder, “Hey, I’ve really gotten into so-and-so, but he’s said some things that I’ve been unsure about. Do you know if he’s a sound teacher?”

Because if you don’t, you will find yourself in the same situation as in Corinth: duped and deceived into doubting the faithfulness of God’s true ministers, doubting the truth of the true Gospel, and before you know it you’re worshiping another Jesus.

III. A Terrifying Condemnation (v. 15b)

Well, we’ve seen the scathing indictment, and then the unsurprising explanation. Finally, we come, number three, to a **terrifying condemnation**. {Repeat} Look again at verse 15: “Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, *whose end will be according to their deeds*.”

Paul has outlined the charges against these intruders. Now he makes mention of the sentence of divine judgment that will break upon them. And he does it in such an ominous way, like he shudders even to think of it: their end will be according to their deeds. The Judge of all the earth will recompense them as they deserve.

And Paul has spoken similar **terrifying condemnations** concerning the destructive end of false teachers. In Romans 3:8, he reports the slanderous charges of false teachers against himself. He says, “And why not say (as we are slanderously reported and as some claim that we say), ‘Let us do evil that good may come’? Their condemnation is just.” In Philippians 3:19, he speaks of the libertines who have thrown off the pursuit of holiness in the name of celebrating liberty and grace—those whose god is their appetite, whose glory is in their shame, and who set their minds on earthly things. And he says, Philippians 3:19, “their end is destruction.” And in 2 Timothy 4:14, he speaks of Alexander the coppersmith who did him much harm, and simply says, “The Lord will repay him according to his deeds.”

You see, there is coming a day when every unbeliever will stand before the Great White Throne of God’s judgment. And that day is the day of the Great Unmasking. 1 Corinthians 4:5 speaks of it as the time when “the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things *hidden in the darkness* and [will] *disclose* the motives of men’s hearts.” All things will be open and laid bare. Every façade will be stripped away, every hypocrisy exposed, every secret divulged, every mask torn off. Each one will stand before the Lord for what they *are*—not for what they have *presented* themselves to be, but for what they actually have done! And what have they actually done? They have labored for the ruin of Christ’s church, for the destruction of the very temple of God! And what does Paul say about those who aim to destroy the temple of God? 1 Corinthians 3:16–17: “Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy.”

Charles Hodge writes, “God’s judgments are according to the truth. He does not pass sentence on the *schema*, the external fashion which we assume, but on our real character; not on the mask, but on the man. The end, [that is], the recompense of every man, shall not be according to his professions, not according to his own convictions or judgment of his character or conduct, not according to appearances or the estimate of men, but according to his works” (641).

Conclusion

And friends, that is a judgment that each one of us will have to face. “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.” And the key question that each one

of us must answer is: On the basis of *whose works* do you want to stand before the judgment seat of God?

Dear friend, the answer to that question *cannot* be your own works! Do not think that in that day of the Great Unmasking—when all things are laid bare, when what was done in the dark will be brought to the light, when the motives of men’s hearts are disclosed—do not think that you will be able to stand before the blazing fire of God’s holiness in the filthy rags of your own righteousness! The prophet Isaiah tells us that “all our *righteous deeds* are like a filthy garment”! The *best* of our good works don’t even approach the standard of God’s perfect righteousness!

And the blessed Good News of the Gospel is: you do not have to stand before the seat of God’s judgment on the basis of your own works! You can stand before the Judge of all the earth on the basis of *Jesus’* works! Rather than the filthy rags of your own righteousness, you can be wrapped in the robe of *Christ’s* righteousness! The Lord Jesus has lived the life of perfect obedience that has satisfied God’s justice! And He has died the death that God’s wrath required of all those who have sinned against Him! And He has risen again in victory over sin and death! So that if you trust in Him alone for righteousness, on the Day of Judgment, all the wickedness and wretchedness and vileness of your own deeds will be nowhere to be found! and God will look upon you and see only the works of His beloved Son, in whom He is well-pleased! Dear sinner, turn from your sins! Abandon all confidence in your own righteousness to pass muster in the courtroom of God! Repent and trust in Christ, and be saved!

And dear brothers and sisters, be consoled by the fact that those emissaries of Satan who trouble your souls by teaching false doctrine *will* face the judgment of God for their deeds. But until that day, be on your guard against these masters of disguise by examining everything carefully—testing the spirits by the rule of Scripture—by holding fast to what is good, and by abstaining from every form of evil (1 Thess 5:21–22; 1 John 4:1).