

“Playing The Fool”
2 Corinthians 11:16-23a

Introduction:

1. Jesus Once Said:
 - “Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. / Ye shall know them by their fruits!” (Matthew 7:15-16)
 - Ever Since Jesus Made This Prophetic Statement:
 - His Church Has Been Continuously Harassed And Attacked By:
 - “Wolves” Who Have Worn Many Different Kinds Of Masks & Disguises:
 - In Order To Deceive & To Defeat, If It Were Possible, His People!
2. This Is As True Today:
 - As It Was In The Early Church:
 - When The Apostle Paul Had To Confront:
 - Some Of Those “Wolves” Who Had Infiltrated:
 - The Corinthian Church!
 - And In 2 Corinthians 11:
 - Paul Pulls Of Their “Sheep” Disguise:
 - To Show Us Their “Teeth”:
 - And Who They Really Are!
 - So Let’s Head Back This Morning:
 - To 2 Corinthians 11 - Where In 11:13:
 - Paul Tells Us - “For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ!”
 - This Is Who Those Wolves Really Are!
 - And This Is Why We Need To:
 - “Beware & Prepare” For Them:
 - As We Learned Last Week!
3. But - It’s One Thing:
 - For The Wolves To Try To Get In To The Sheep-Fold Themselves!
 - Because That Is To Be Expected!
 - It’s Their Nature! It’s In Their Blood!
 - But It’s Entirely Different:
 - When Someone Lets Those Wolves In:
 - Through The Gate!
 - And This Is What The Apostle Paul:
 - Is Now Dealing With:
 - Beginning With 2 Corinthians 11:16!
 - The Corinthian Church Itself Was Partially Responsible For Allowing Those “Wolves” To Come Right On In!
4. And Since The Corinthians:
 - Seemed To Be Impressed With The Claims & Credentials:
 - Of Those False Apostles:
 - In The Verses We Come To This Morning:
 - Paul Uses A Bit Of Irony & Sarcasm:
 - To Get Them To Hear What He Has To Say!
 - And So We Read Paul’s Words:
 - 11:16-23a - “I say again, Let no man think me a fool; if otherwise, yet as a fool receive me, that I may boast myself a little. / 17 That which I speak, I speak it not after the Lord, but as it were foolishly, in this confidence of boasting. / 18 Seeing that many glory after the flesh, I will glory also. / 19 For ye suffer fools gladly, seeing ye yourselves are wise. / 20 For ye suffer, if a man bring you into bondage, if a man devour you, if a man take of you, if a man exalt himself, if a man smite you on the face. / 21 I speak as concerning reproach, as though we had been weak. Howbeit whereinsoever any is bold, (I speak foolishly,) I am bold also. / 22 Are they Hebrews? so am I. Are they Israelites? so am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? so am I. / 23 Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more!”
 - Now - The Way Paul Is Writing To The Corinthians Here:
 - Is Not Something We Are Used To:
 - When It Comes To Spiritual Things!

- Even Though Sarcasm Is Something We All Use & Abuse Quite Regularly!
- But By Paul? In The Bible?

5. I Think It Is Clear That Even Though Paul:

- Does Use Sarcasm Here - He Too Is Not Quite Comfortable Using It When Dealing With Spiritual Matters!
 - Because Over & Over Again He Qualifies:
 - His Remarks - By Saying:
 - In 11:17 - "That Which I Speak, I Speak It Not After The Lord!"
 - And In 11:21 - "I Speak Foolishly!"
 - As Well As In 11:23 - "I Speak As A Fool!"
 - The Problem Was Not With Paul:
 - It Was With The Church!
 - And Since They Were Not Thinking:
 - In Christian Terms - For A While At Least:
 - He Was Not Going To Speak To Them In Christian Terms!
 - And So - All Throughout These Verses:
 - Need To Keep In Mind That Paul Is Speaking As A Natural Man:
 - To Their Natural Minds:
 - To Prove His Point!

6. And That Point Was:

- The Stinging Indictment - That He Makes:
 - Back In 11:19 - "For Ye Suffer Fools Gladly!"
 - That Is - They Didn't Just Forget To Close & Bolt The Gate To Keep The Wolves Out:
 - They Opened The Gate Up & Let Them Come Right On In!
 - And Why Would They Do Such A Thing?
 - 11:19 - "Seeing Ye Yourselves Are Wise!"
 - Their Pride Led Them To A Fall!
 - "Relying On Their Own Wisdom, The People In Corinth Have Made Fools Of Themselves!" (Kistemaker)
- So - How Can We:
 - Prevent Such A Thing From Happening:
 - In Our Own Lives:
 - And In Our Own Church?
 - How Can We Keep The Wolves Out & The Sheep Safely In?

7. Paul Wants Us To Guard Ourselves:

- Against False Leaders - But Be Open To:
 - The True & Faithful Ministers Of The Gospel!
- And So - Through Paul's Remarks:
 - We Find At Least 4 Things:
 - That We Need To Seriously Consider:
 - About Ourselves!

* First - We Need To Consider:

1. What Kind Of Ministry Is Appropriate?

- In The Beginning Of 11:16:
 - Paul Writes - "I Say Again, Let No Man Think Me A Fool!"
 - Paul Wants Them To Seriously Think About:
 - And Consider Him & His Ministry!
 - Paul's Ministry Was:
 - A Transparent Ministry!
 - When Paul Calls On The To "Think" About Him:
 - He Knew That The Only Thing That Would Come To Mind Is:
 - His Faithful Love & Service For The Lord & For Them!
 - In 1 Thessalonians 2:10 - He Describes His Ministry - And "How Holily And Justly And Unblameably We Behaved Ourselves Among You That Believe!"
 - He Did Not Wear Any Kind Of Mask Or Disguise:
 - Like The False Apostles!
 - His Life & Ministry Was An Open Book!
 - But Paul's Ministry Was Also:

- A Truthful Ministry!
 - He Encouraged The Corinthians:
 - To Come To The Conclusion:
 - That He Is Not A “Fool” - Or Someone Who Is Without Understanding:
 - Someone Who Does Not Know What He Is Talking About!
 - Because All That He Taught:
 - Was The Truth!
 - And Even Though His Message - The Message Of The Gospel:
 - Seemed **Simple** - Which It Is! Because:
 - To Be Saved From Your Sin - You Simply Need To Turn From Yourself & Turn To Jesus Christ - Trusting That He Is All You Need For The Forgiveness Of Your Sin!
 - He Lived For You! He Died For You! He Rose Again For You! And He Is Coming Again For You!
 - It Seems So Simple - Because It Is! Even A Child Can “Believe On The Lord Jesus Christ” And “Be Saved!”
 - Have You Responded To This Simple Message?
 - But Just Because The Message Of The Gospel Seems So Simple:
 - It Does Not Mean That The Messengers Of The Gospel:
 - Are **Simpletons!** Or Ignorant, Unintelligent, Fools!
 - Because The Gospel Of Christ Is:
 - Both The Power & The Wisdom Of God!
- But - This Is The **Right Kind** Of Gospel Ministry!
 - One That Is Transparent:
 - And Faithfully Proclaims The Truth!
 - This Is The Best Way To Keep:
 - The Wolves Out Of The Fold!

* Second - We Need To Consider:

2. **What Kind Of Ministry Is Appealing?**

- Unfortunately - After Paul Called On The Church:
 - To Appreciate The Transparent & Truthful Ministry:
 - Of The Gospel - He Goes On To Address:
 - Their Responses To Both Himself, As A True Apostle, And The False Apostles!
 - 11:16b-18 - “If otherwise, yet as a fool receive me, that I may boast myself a little. / 17 That which I speak, I speak it not after the Lord, but as it were foolishly, in this confidence of boasting. / 18 Seeing that many glory after the flesh, I will glory also!”
 - The Key Word In These 3 Verses Is:
 - “Boasting” - Which Is Found 4 Times!
 - And This Is Where His Sarcasm Begins!
 - In 11:16 - Paul Essentially Says:
 - If You **Think** I’m A Fool:
 - Then **Receive** Me As A Fool!
 - So That I Can **Act** Like A Fool:
 - And “Boast” About Myself A Little!
 - Here - Paul Is Calling Those False Apostles:
 - Who Make All Kinds Of Boastful Claims For Themselves:
 - **The Real Fools!**
 - Those Who Really Don’t Know What They Are Talking About!
 - And Yet - Their Ministry:
 - Is What Was Appealing & Attractive:
 - To The Corinthian Church!
 - It Was A Ministry Of:
- **Foolish** Boasting!
 - Remember Back In 10:12? Paul Explained That:
 - “They measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise!”
 - But For Some Reason:
 - This Kind Of Boasting Appealed To The Corinthians!

- It Could Have Been Very Familiar To Them!
- But Since They Were Not:
 - At This Point - Thinking In Christian Terms:
 - For A While - Paul Will Not Speak To Them In Christian Terms!
 - He Is Speaking To Them:
 - As A Natural Man:
 - To Their Natural Minds!
 - This Is What He Means:
 - When He Says - 11:17 - “That which I speak, I speak it not after the Lord, but as it were foolishly!”
- For Just A Little While:
 - Paul Is Going To **“Play The Fool”** And Tell Them **What** They Want To Hear:
 - And **How** They Want To Hear It:
 - To Get Their Attention!
 - Because It Was Also A Ministry Of:
- **Fleshly** Boasting!
 - 11:18 - “Seeing that many glory after the flesh, I will glory also!”
 - If You Remember Back In 10:7 As Well - Paul Asked:
 - “Do ye look on things after the outward appearance?”
 - **They Were!**
 - And So - Since The:
 - Outward Appearance:
 - Was All That They Perceived:
 - The Outward Appearance:
 - Was All That They Pursued!
 - **IE:** Isn’t This What The World Perceives & Pursues? All About The “Latest & Greatest!” Just Look At The Black Friday Ads!
 - And Yet - The Outward Appearance:
 - With All Of Its Natural & Physical Appeal:
 - Was In Truth - Completely **Empty!**
 - But - Since This Seemed To Be All The Corinthians Cared About:
 - Paul Decided To “Play That Game” Too For A While:
 - In Order To Prove To Them:
 - The Emptiness Of This Kind Of Boasting!
 - But Don’t We Have The Same Temptation:
 - Today? Aren’t We Attracted By:
 - Things That In Truth:
 - Are Empty & Vain?
 - Things That Appeal To Our Senses!
 - It Looks Good To Us!
 - It Sounds Good To Us!
 - It Feels Good To Us!
 - What Kind Of Ministry:
 - Is Most Appealing To You?
 - One That Appeals To The Flesh:
 - And Is Foolish?
 - Or One That Appeals To The Heart:
 - Because It Is Faithful!

* Third - We Also Need To Consider:

3. **What Kind Of Ministry Is Acceptable?**

- Another Problem That The Corinthian Church Experienced:
 - Was The Improper Toleration:
 - Of Those False Apostles & Leaders!
 - And In 11:19-21a - Paul Calls Them Out:
 - For Tolerating Some Very Intolerable Things!
 - “For ye suffer fools gladly, seeing ye yourselves are wise. / 20 For ye suffer, if a man bring you into bondage, if a man devour you, if a man take of you, if a man exalt himself,

if a man smite you on the face. / 21 I speak as concerning reproach, as though we had been weak!”

- Here - Paul Explains:

- Who They Were Tolerating!

- Those Same “Fools!”

- Those False Apostles & Teachers:

- Who Were Ignorant Of The Truth Of The Gospel!

- And With A Foolish & Sarcastic Voice, Paul Wonders:

- You Tolerate & Listen To Them, But You Won’t Tolerate & Listen To Me?

- But He Also Explains:

- How They Were Tolerating!

- “Gladly!”

- This Word Describes A Carnal Delight!

- Something That Is Pleasing To:

- Your Senses!

- The Corinthians Liked:

- What They Saw:

- And What They Heard:

- And How They Felt:

- When Those False Apostles Came To Them!

- And Instead Of Being Like Those Bereans:

- In Acts 17:11 - Who - “Searched The Scriptures Daily [To See] Whether Those Things Were So!”

- They Opened Up The Gate To The Sheep-Fold - And Said - Come On In!

- But Then - Look At:

- What They Were Tolerating:

- In 11:20 - “For ye suffer, if a man bring you into bondage, if a man devour you, if a man take of you, if a man exalt himself, if a man smite you on the face!”

- These 5 Statements Seem To Be:

- Actual Examples Of The Humiliation & Spiritual Abuse The Corinthians Experienced At The Hands Of Those False Apostles!

- And Yet They Accepted Them & Tolerated Them! They Tolerated:

- Their Error!

- “If A Man Bring You Into Bondage!”

- Back Into Spiritual Bondage To Legal Requirements For Salvation - Like Circumcision / Baptism!

- Paul Dealt With This Also In:

- Galatians 2:4 - “And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage!” - They Tolerated:

- Their Exploitation!

- They Exploited Their Property:

- “If A Man Devour You!”

- To Require Support - Not Giving Cheerfully But In A Compulsory Way! Even To The Point Of Losing Everything!

- **IE:** Like The Woman With The Issue Of Blood In Luke 8 - Who “Had Spent All Her Living Upon Physicians, [But] Neither Could Be Healed Of Any!” (Luke 8:43)

- They Exploited Their Persons:

- “If A Man Take Of You!”

- To Require Exclusive Allegiance & Service! - They Tolerated:

- Their Exaltation!

- “If A Man Exalt Himself!”

- With Their On Claims & Teachings!

- In Reality - They Had No Authority & No Accountability!

- They Tolerated:

- Even Their Extremes!

- “If A Man Smite You On The Face!”

- The Spiritual Abuse Even Took The Form Of Physical Abuse!
- And Because Of Their So-Called Wisdom & Pride:
 - This Kind Of Abusive Ministry:
 - Was Acceptable & Even Tolerated:
 - By The Corinthian Church!
 - And Yet - They Would Hardly Accept & Tolerate Paul!
- And This Is The True Danger:
 - Of Error! It Can Lead To All Kinds:
 - Of Extremes & Excesses:
 - Justified By Those Who Are Involved!
- And So - With The Same Sarcastic Tone:
 - Paul Adds In 11:21 - "I Speak Concerning Reproach, As Though We Had Been Weak!"
 - That Is - Maybe *He* Should Have Been Stronger & Bolder Like The False Apostles Had Been!
 - But Of Course - He Had Absolutely No Regrets That He Came To Them "By The Meekness & Gentleness Of Christ!" (10:1)
- But - What Kinds Of Things:
 - Are You Willing To Tolerate:
 - And Accept - In Order To Be Considered:
 - Wise Or Relevant Or Successful:
 - As A Christian Or As A Church?
 - Unfortunately - This Is Still:
 - A Very Common Temptation:
 - And Is An Easy Way For "Wolves" To Get Into Our Fold!

* Fourth - We Also Need To Consider:

4. ***What Kind Of Ministry Is Awe-Inspiring?***

- In 11:21b-23 - Paul Begins A List Of Things:
 - That The False Apostles Boasted & Bragged About!
 - And Yet - They Were All Something He Too:
 - Could Claim!
 - Even Though - They Really Meant Very Little For The Cause Of Christ!
 - 11:21b-23 - "Howbeit whereinsoever any is bold, (I speak foolishly,) I am bold also. / 22 Are they Hebrews? so am I. Are they Israelites? so am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? so am I. / 23 Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more?"
 - There Were Certain Things That:
 - The False Apostles Boasted About:
 - To Enhance Their Reputation & Their Influence!
 - And Apparently:
 - The Corinthians Were:
 - Impressed By & Inspired By Them - And Especially Their Heritage! Things Like:
 - Their National Heritage!
 - When They Would Claim That:
 - They Were "Hebrews!" (11:22)
 - They Weren't Like Other Jews - Who Were Born & Grew Up In Gentile Countries - But They Were From The Land Of Israel & Knew The Language Of Israel!
 - Their Pedigree Was Pure & So Was Their Message!
 - They Also Boasted In:
 - Their Spiritual Heritage!
 - When They Would Claim That:
 - They Were "Israelites!" (11:22)
 - They Had The Same, Close Relationship With God As Their Father Jacob - Who Was Given The Name "Israel" - Which Means "Prince Of God!"
 - This Might Have Been Particularly Impressive To The Gentile Population In The Church!
 - They Boasted About:
 - Their Natural Heritage!

- When They Would Claim That:
 - They Were “The Seed Of Abraham!” (11:22)
 - **IE**: Didn’t Need A DNA Kit To Prove It! They Could Trace It Through Their Genealogical Records!
 - And Therefore - They Were The Exclusive Heirs:
 - Of God’s Covenant & Promises To Him - So The Corinthians Should Listen To Them!
- And Even If All Of These Things Were Technically True:
 - They Even Dared To Boast About:
- Their Christian Heritage!
 - When They Would Claim That:
 - They Were The “Ministers Of Christ!” (11:23)
 - When, In Truth, They Served Nothing Like Christ!
- The False Apostles Claimed That:
 - Their Heritage:
 - Qualified Them To Lead The Corinthians:
 - And The Corinthians **Fell** For It!
 - They Were **Impressed!**
 - But - Paul Could Play:
 - That Foolish Game As Well!
 - He Could Make Those Same Claims!
 - I Too Am A Hebrew, He Says!
 - I Too Am An Israelite!
 - I Too Am The Seed Of Abraham!
 - But Is Heritage & Race:
 - Really What Matters:
 - For Believers In Jesus Christ?
 - The Truth Is - It’s Not What You Were, But Who You Are Now That Matters!
 - This Is Why Paul Wrote These Words:
 - In Philippians 3:4-8 - “Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: / Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; / Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. / But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. / Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ!”
- For Paul - Only Christ Impressed & Inspired Him!
 - And So - When He Heard Their **Claims** To Be:
 - “Ministers Of Christ” - He Could Truthfully Say:
 - “I Am More!” (11;23)
 - Because True Ministers / Servants Of Jesus Christ Will Come To Look Like Christ – The More They Live For Christ!
 - And This Is The Kind Of Ministry Is What Really Matters!
 - This Is The Kind Of Ministry:
 - That Should Impress & Inspire You!
 - One That Stirs You Up To Live For Christ!

Conclusion:

1. Would Paul Need To Write This Way:
 - To You This Morning?
 - To Get Your Attention?
 - Well - What Kind Of Ministry:
 - Are You Attracted By?
2. We Need To Consider:
 - What Kind Of Ministries:
 - Appeal To Us!
 - Is Acceptable To Us!
 - And Is Awe-Inspiring To Us!
 - And Then:

- We Need To Guard Ourselves:
 - From The “Wolves” Around Us:
 - By Paying Attention To:
 - Faithfulness Instead Of Foolishness!

*Grace Baptist Church
Stephen Elmer, Pastor
4245 North 200 West
Greenfield, Indiana 46140
317-326-2362
www.sermonaudio.com/wordofgrace
www.growatgrace.org
pastor-elmer@hotmail.com*