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# 2 Corinthians

**And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light.**

2 Corinthians 11:14

In the previous verse, Paul spoke of the "false apostles" as those who would transform themselves into apostles of Christ. Now he says, "And no wonder!" This then shows why they do this. It is because they are just like their leader, Satan, who "transforms himself into an angel of light." The verb is in the present tense and so this is not speaking of any specific incident found in Scripture. Rather, it is speaking of his customary way of working at all times.

He is an enemy of all that is good, and the titles used to describe him in the New Testament show that his very nature is evil. And yet, he presents himself as a shining example of what is proper and correct. The term "angel of light" indicates purity and holiness. However, if he supposedly "transforms himself" into this, then it is a false representation of who he is. It is not his true nature, but a cunning disguise which is intended to lure the unsuspecting away from the truth.

This then is the explanation of the false apostles' conduct of the preceding verse. They follow in form and style with their leader, Satan. This transformation is found in the message that is presented, in the twisting of the truth, in the perversion of Scripture, in attributing the works of wickedness to that which is of God, etc.

It is incumbent on all people to study the word in order to show themselves approved when a false teacher, or even the devil himself, comes with a false message. But how impossible that is without knowing the word! And so the world

is filled with cults, heresies, and those who follow after anyone with a crazy vision or a supposed "word from the Lord" which is no word at all. Satan uses all of these avenues, and ten thousand more, to lure away precious souls from the grace of Christ the Lord to another gospel, which is no gospel at all.

Paul carefully warns us of such deception in Galatians 1 -

"I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, <sup>7</sup> which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. <sup>8</sup> But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. <sup>9</sup> As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed." Galatians 1:6-9

Life application: To avoid being deceived by the devil, know your Bible.

**Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.**

2 Corinthians 11:15

The train of thought thus far is that the false apostles Paul has been speaking of are actually deceitful workers who transform themselves into apostles of Christ. And this is actually unsurprising because Satan himself has to transform himself into an angel of light to hide his true nature. Because their father, the devil, does this "it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness."

In other words, just as Satan's true nature is hidden behind a false show of light, so it is with these false apostles in that their true nature is hidden behind a false display of righteousness. In fact, they certainly claim a greater righteousness than Christ because they insert works of the law and other external displays of

righteousness to their theology. In doing this, they say that what Christ did, and the righteousness He imputes to His followers, is insufficient for their salvation.

It is a subtle but direct attack against the work of Christ. The gospel says that the Lord is our righteousness. We are saved by faith in His work. In turn for having our sin nailed to the cross, He bestows upon us His righteousness. Therefore, anyone who says that we must add to salvation by grace through faith alone is claiming a greater righteousness than that of Christ. As this is impossible, it is a self-condemning act. For this, their "end will be according to their works."

What this means is that because their works are false, because their works pervert the gospel, and because their works are what they stand on, then they will be judged by their works and not by the imputed righteousness of Christ.

Imagine the horror they will feel when they see how filthy their supposed righteousness truly is when they stand before pure and undefiled righteousness!

Life application: In what do you trust for your salvation? If you say anything other than, "The shed blood of Christ" you have missed the mark. Nothing can wash away the defilement of man except His cross. And nothing can grant us the righteousness we need to stand before God except His work, imputed to us.

**I say again, let no one think me a fool. If otherwise, at least receive me as a fool, that I also may boast a little. 2 Corinthians 11:16**

Paul has already diverted into a need for boasting on several occasions. He did so in 2 Corinthians 10:8, and he again did so in verse 1 of this chapter, of which this statement is a general repeat of that thought, hence the words "I say again." In verse 1, he said -

"Oh, that you would bear with me in a little folly—and indeed you do bear with me."

The words, "I say again, let no one think me a fool" are given concerning his boasting. Even if he commends himself, it should not be thought of as a fool's boasting, but as a necessary part of his defense against the false apostles. Continuing on, his words add in sarcasm. He says, "If otherwise, at least receive me as a fool." In other words, "If boasting makes me a fool, then receive me as a fool, so "that I also may boast a little."

The words "a little" show that he is asking for their tolerance in his minimal boasting, and in things that are true about himself. This is to be taken as sarcastically contrasting a great and untruthful boasting of the false apostles. In essence, "You have put up with a lot of foolish and false boasting by those 'extra-super apostles,' and so please put up with just a dab of truthful boasting from me."

He is not claiming that he is a fool for boasting, but if that is how he is perceived in order to defend his apostleship, then so be it.

Life application: Paul goes to great lengths to defend the truth of the gospel. It is a good lesson for us to follow through with as well. And yet, there is a time when we have to step back, shake the dust off our feet, and move on. Be patient, be kind, and be firm. Speak the truth in season and out.

**What I speak, I speak not according to the Lord, but as it were, foolishly, in this confidence of boasting. 2 Corinthians 11:17**

This verse is one which calls out for a deep analysis of it concerning the inspiration of Scripture. The Bible is believed to be the full and complete revelation of God to humanity. It is of Divine origin, and yet it is also of human origin. Man, under inspiration of God, penned what he was led to pen. However, at the same time,

man's thoughts, his style, his heart – all of this is included in the books of the Bible.

In this verse, Paul says, "What I speak, I speak not according to the Lord." And so the question is, "Are these words inspired by God or not?" Albert Barnes gives two options concerning the matter –

"The phrase here may mean either, I do not speak this by inspiration or claiming to be inspired by the Lord; or more probably it may mean, I do not speak this imitating the example of the Lord Jesus or strictly as becomes his follower."

To say that the first is true means that this portion of the Bible is not inspired. From this springboard, men could begin to slice and dice; to pick and choose; and to disregard and neglect any portion of the Bible that they personally felt lacked inspiration. Such happens all the time among liberal scholars and it turns the Bible into a book of personal theology rather than God-directed theology.

Rather, Paul's writings are inspired, even verses such as this one. The Lord allowed him to speak his heart and show that his words were not according to an imitation of the Lord, and yet his words are a necessary part of the interaction between him and the Corinthians for us to properly understand God-directed theology. Instead of emulating how the Lord would handle this matter, being the perfect God, Paul says that he speaks "not according to the Lord, but as it were, foolishly, in this confidence of boasting."

Being fallen beings and filled with imperfections, we necessarily handle God-directed matters within those limitations. Paul was doing just that. Unlike Jesus who had no such limitations, he did. And so, in order to make an example for those at Corinth to understand, he used his limitations (this confidence of boasting), to show them where they were wrong in their thinking.

His admission that his example was not in accordance with a perfect emulation of the Lord was carefully chosen and built upon to inform the Corinthians (and thus us!) that their own boasting was a much larger diversion from proper emulation of the Lord. In other words, Paul is saying, "I am giving you an example of myself by diverting from what the Lord would do in order to show you that what you are doing is the same, but on a much larger scale."

This is Paul's way of correcting their deficiency. At the same time, it is a Spirit-led example. God is using Paul's deficiency, just as He used those of all of his prophets and apostles in the writing of His book. Moses' failings are carefully recorded, from his time at the burning bush in Exodus 3 even unto his striking the Rock at Meribah in Numbers 20. As one reads the Bible, such deficiencies are seen permeating its pages. Think of Jonah! The Pulpit Commentary beautifully describes Paul's human frailty which is still used in the inspired word of God –

"'Boasting,' or what might be stigmatized as such, may become a sort of painful necessity, necessitated by human baseness; but in itself it cannot be 'after the Lord.' There is nothing Christ-like in it. It is human, not Divine; an earthly necessity, not a heavenly example; a sword of the giant Philistine, which yet David may be forced to use."

Life application: The human frailties of the authors of the Bible in no way diminish the inspiration of it. In fact, they are necessary elements of inspiration in order for us to understand how far we actually depart from God. Don't let any liberal teaching mislead you away from the truth that all Scripture is divinely inspired. It is. Cling to this truth as you see your own failings represented in the failings of its human authors. And then understand that God can and will use you just as you are as you pursue Him.

## **Seeing that many boast according to the flesh, I also will boast.**

2 Corinthians 11:18

Paul is showing the irony of the situation. In verse 12, he noted the boasting of the false apostles. Those at Corinth had been swayed by them in this boasting; a boasting of the flesh. Now Paul says that if the flesh is what impresses them, he too has the ability to impress based on the flesh, and so he will boast in it.

Before he does, he will give a few more notes of irony concerning their relationship with the false apostles, and he will show how he is contrasted to them. After that, he will provide a detailed and hearty list of his qualifications and his efforts on behalf of the gospel. If boasting in the flesh is what impresses them, then he would give them what they desired.

Paul's boasting in the flesh provides us with an exacting description of who he is and the things he had done. From this list we have a record to refer to in order to know him on a much more intimate level. His coming words have become a most important aspect of Christian theology and doctrine. From this mere "boasting" of Paul we can find out how to conduct our own lives and where to turn in our own distresses.

What seems uninspired on the surface is actually a most important part of learning to deal with life and our relationship with the Lord. The hand of God's inspiration is all over it.

Life application: The Lord reveals things to us in the most marvelous of ways. As you read the Bible and come to some passage which is seemingly irrelevant, stop and reconsider it. In the end, if it is from God, it must be of great importance. The Bible is a book about the same size as many others, and yet it took centuries to write as God methodically chose real moments in time and in human experience to reveal His heart to us.

**For you put up with fools gladly, since you *yourselves* are wise!**

2 Corinthians 11:19

The words of this verse are parallel to those of 2 Corinthians 4:10 -

"We *are* fools for Christ's sake, but you *are* wise in Christ!"

However, the words here contain far more irony, ranking as the epitome of Paul's sarcastic attempts to instill reason into the Corinthians. "For you put up with fools gladly" is Paul's way of calling himself a fool. This is based on the previous verse. Taken together, they read, "Seeing that many boast according to the flesh, I also will boast. For you put up with fools gladly."

In essence, he is saying that his boasting is a foolish attempt to get them to recognize his status according to a fleshly nature. If that is what impresses them, then he will break down his fleshly achievements, proving that he is the cream of the crop in worldly attainments. In so doing this, they will have to put up with great foolishness!

In contrast to this are his scathingly sarcastic words, "...since you *yourselves* are wise!" This shows that their "wisdom" is to bear with foolishness. It is a contradiction that he is openly highlighting to show how silly it is that they would put up with the boasting of the false apostles. In his words here and to follow, it is Paul's intent to show them that the flesh and the ways of the world mean nothing. Instead, all that matters is Christ and His gospel.

Life application: As soon as we elevate a teacher, a preacher, or a TV evangelist to any level of importance, we actually tread into dangerous waters. Who is it that we are following, a person or the message? If the message, then the person should not be elevated. If he is, then the message, either sound or false, becomes a secondary issue.



**For you put up with it if one brings you into bondage, if one devours *you*, if one takes *from you*, if one exalts himself, if one strikes you on the face.**

2 Corinthians 11:20

Paul had just mentioned that the Corinthians were "wise" because they "put up with fools." To show them their level of wisdom, he ironically shows them their dullness. His words here are reflective of the attitude of the Pharisees towards those around them in Israel, a concept with which Paul was eminently familiar, having come from their ranks.

First he says to them that "you put up with it if one brings you into bondage." This is what the Lord said the Pharisees did to the Israelites -

"For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay *them* on men's shoulders; but they *themselves* will not move them with one of their fingers." Matthew 23:4

They brought them into bondage, as if they were oxen required to carry their heavy burdens of legalism. The false teachers were there at Corinth, doing exactly the same thing. They were adding to the simplicity of the gospel. Paul continues with, "...if one devours you." Jesus told the Pharisees they were doing just this -

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. Therefore you will receive greater condemnation." Matthew 23:14

In their greed for power and money, the supposedly pious class of Pharisees devoured those around them, robbing from them even the homes they lived in. The false teachers were no different. They came in with piety and consumed like lions. Continuing on, he says, "...if one takes *from you*." Jesus noted the same trait among the Pharisees -

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence." Matthew 23:25

The Pharisees extorted from those around them in order to feed their own self-indulgence. The false apostles were obviously doing the same thing to the Corinthians. Titus had been there and had certainly reported to Paul all that he saw going on. Adding on to the charges against them, he next says, "...if one exalts himself." Jesus noted the same trait in the Pharisees -

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead *men's* bones and all uncleanness. <sup>28</sup> Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness." Matthew 23:27, 28

The Pharisees exalted themselves in outward beauty and in outward righteousness. But it was a mere facade. The same was true with the false apostles who came to Corinth. They looked marvelous, but they were full of corruption. To finish the verse, Paul says, "...if one strikes you on the face." This is exactly what Jesus' accusers did in Luke 22:64 and what happened to Paul in Acts 23:2. Likewise, the false apostles came in and had wielded such strong authority over the Corinthians that they had either literally or figuratively done the same to them.

Life application: Legalism always leads to the demeaning of those who are brought into its strong hold. Knowing your Bible is the only way to avoid being trapped by its heavy bonds.

**To our shame I say that we were too weak for that! But in whatever anyone is bold—I speak foolishly—I am bold also.** 2 Corinthians 11:21

In the preceding verses, Paul noted that the Corinthians had put up with fools who brought them into bondage, devoured them, stolen from them, exalted themselves above them, and even struck them in the face. Paul now says that, “To *our* shame I say that we were too weak for that!” The “we” is emphatic and is intended with the greatest of irony. In essence, “They treated you shamefully, but we were too weak to be able to treat you in that same way.”

The irony is that no one should ever treat one they love that way and so his “weakness” was that he treated them with respect and love. And yet, the Corinthians were turning their hearts to the ones who shamefully treated them and away from their loving father in the faith.

However, to show that he really isn’t weak, but that his conduct was appropriate, he continues on with the words, “But in whatever anyone is bold—I speak foolishly—I am bold also.” The word “bold” is translated various ways – daring, courageous, to presume, to boast. The idea is a type of boasting in his many achievements, some of which were more than daring. This will be seen in the explanation that follows.

In his foolish speaking, he will describe his qualifications to show that he is not only comparable to them in their boasting, but that he is eminently qualified. Starting in the next verse, and going on through verse 10 of the next chapter, he will list those qualifications. It is a foolish endeavor, yes, but it is one which has been necessitated by the attitude of the Corinthians towards the false teachers. If they need to have someone to follow who can boast about his qualifications, then they will get a mouthful from Paul!

Life application: It is right to be humble and not bragging about one’s own achievements, but Paul shows that there is a time when it becomes necessary to show past achievements in order to establish a baseline for others to understand the quality of the man. This doesn’t mean unnecessary boasting, but rather it may be as simple as providing proof that you can empathize with the plight of others because you have been in the same place as they are. When necessary, be ready to use your past to help others properly evaluate the world around them.