

Life Together

*Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?
If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him.
For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.
(1 Corinthians 3:16-17. ESV)*

*And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same
image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.
(2 Corinthians 3:18. ESV)*

Do Not Be Seduced

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2 Corinthians 11:1-15

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Introduction:

Good morning! Turn with me in your Bibles to 2 Corinthians chapter 11. If my tally is correct, this is sermon number 55 in our Corinthians series. We're reaching the end of these letters, and as Paul concludes his message to the church he reiterates his main points. Our text this morning is an indictment of false apostles who preach a false gospel. Perhaps you're wondering why it is that we are diving into a subject that we have already dealt with extensively over the past year. The short answer is this: Because this is what's next. We're preaching through Paul's letter to the Corinthians and this is the next point he emphasises in the text so we're going to read it apply it.

The longer answer to your question is: Because we need this. False teaching and false gospels are not merely a Corinthian problem. The first false teacher appeared in the Garden of Eden. The serpent convinced Eve that God's command was not good. Throughout the narrative of the Old Testament numerous false prophets arose and they led the Israelites into sin and ruin. And almost every book in the New Testament warns against false doctrine and false teachers. The battle for the mind has been waged since the beginning of time. So why all this talk about false teachers and a false gospel? Because a false gospel and a false Jesus will not save you. This is a salvation issue! I would argue this morning that the devil's most effective and dangerous weapon is this: People who pretend to be followers of Jesus but who actually teach the church to disregard and disobey God's Word. Is there anything more dangerous than that?

So for these reasons: Because this is what's next and because we *need* this, look with me in your Bibles to 2 Corinthians 11:1-15. Hear now the Word of the Lord

I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness. Do bear with me! ² For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. ³ But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. ⁴ For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough. ⁵ Indeed, I consider that I am not in the least inferior to these super-apostles. ⁶ Even if I am unskilled in speaking, I am not so in knowledge; indeed, in every way we have made this plain to you in all things.

⁷ Or did I commit a sin in humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached God's gospel to you free of charge? ⁸ I robbed other churches by accepting support from them in order to serve you. ⁹ And when I was with you and was in need, I did not burden anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied my need. So I refrained and will refrain from burdening you in any way. ¹⁰ As the truth of Christ is in me, this boasting of mine will not be silenced in the regions of Achaia. ¹¹ And why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do!

¹² And what I am doing I will continue to do, in order to undermine the claim of those who would like to claim that in their boasted mission they work on the same terms as we do. ¹³ For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. ¹⁴ And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. ¹⁵ So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God!

In verses 12-15 of our text this morning we find Paul's strongest statement against false teaching in all of his letters. Hear this scathing indictment: They are servants of the devil and their end is destruction. In verse four he warns that these teachers offer a different Jesus, and if you put your trust in this different Jesus than you will receive a different spirit. Hear that. These false teachers are working as agents of Satan and their false gospel will lead to the indwelling of a spirit that is not God's Spirit.

Now, as I mentioned off the top, we're not covering any new ground this morning. Paul is not introducing a new argument – he's emphasising an old one. So here is how we're going to approach the text this morning. First, before we deal with the hard things that Paul says we need to understand his motivation. Then we're going to do a "forest level" observation of today's

passage to discern how it is that a church can be seduced. Finally, we're going to spend the rest of our time answering the question, "How can I make sure that I'm worshipping the real Jesus and trusting in the real gospel?"

Nowhere in any of Paul's letters is he more aggressive against false teaching than in verses 12-15. But before we get there I want to make sure that we see and understand what motivates Paul to be so fiercely jealous for the church.

Paul's Motivation

So what motivates Paul? Is he just an angry man, looking for a fight? Is he driven by pride – merely striving to prove a point and win an argument? If we want to understand the motivation for verses 12-15 we need to spend some time considering verse two. Look there with me. Paul says,

"For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ." (2 Corinthians 11:2 ESV)

If you want to understand Paul than listen to the imagery he uses here. He understands that his job is to – like a father – take the church by the arm and walk her down the aisle to meet her Groom. Paul is driven by a fatherly love for the church. And this love that he has for her is only surpassed by the love he has for Jesus. The Corinthians are his gift for Christ and he is determined to keep the church on the narrow path so that Jesus Christ will receive His prize.

The problem is, there are people who have crept into the church who are trying to steal the bride away. As agents of Satan, these teachers are attempting to seduce the Corinthian church away from the true Jesus. And Paul is jealous for the church because these false apostles have had some success. They lured the church away by manufacturing another groom – a groom that looked more like Corinth and less like the Jesus of the Word.

So Paul tells the church, "My job is to make sure that you walk down the aisle to the Jesus who actually has the power to save you." This is what motivates Paul to write what he does in verses 12-15: His love for Christ and his love for the bride of Christ – the church. That is not the main

point this morning, but there's a good takeaway there for those of us who often find ourselves saying hard things. If we are motivated by anger or pride we are out of line. But if we are driven by a love for Jesus and a love for His church than we can honour God even in the midst of saying things that are hard to hear.

At this point, I want to analyse the rest of the text with a heavy emphasis on application. Here's why. We have already dealt at length with the false teachers in Corinth. We've dealt with the issue of Apostolic authority. So as we come to Paul's concluding arguments I want to spend some time asking some very practical questions that arise from the text. The first is this: How does a church become seduced?

How Does A Church Become Seduced?

These false apostles had a devastating effect on the Corinthian church. The Corinthians were believing in a false Jesus, receiving a false spirit and trusting in a false gospel. How did that happen? Think about it: If the Corinthians – who had the Apostle Paul and Titus and Peter and Apollos – If the Corinthians were in danger of being led away from the true Christ than we need to recognize that we are in danger ourselves. And if you don't think that anyone is trying to lead you to a false Jesus than take a quick visit to the Christian bookstore! Thanks to the internet we have access to every false teacher on the planet! Teachers who open up their Bibles and then proceed to say, "Now, go and do the opposite!" have a larger platform than ever before. So with the dangers that are all around us, how does a church become seduced?

1. By Exchanging A Bible-Shaped Gospel For a Culture-Shaped Lie

The false apostles levied two attacks against Paul and his gospel. They argued that Paul couldn't be an apostle because he was weak and frail and a poor public speaker. Then they argued that Paul couldn't be trusted because he wouldn't enter onto the Corinthian church's payroll. With those two blows they brought the Corinthian church to a halt. Gospel ministry stopped, growth was stunted and relationships were destroyed. Why were those two shots so effective?

The false apostles studied the Corinthian culture and then reinvented what an apostle ought to look like and what the gospel ought to sound like. The Corinthians valued rhetoric. They loved

persuasive, impressive, entertaining speech. So the “super apostles” convinced the church that the power of the message was only as impressive as the power of the messenger. The Corinthians bought that lie, but they were still willing to pay Paul to speak. Paul was determined to distinguish himself from the false apostles in every way. He would not be entered into the church’s payroll with these deceitful workmen. Now, Paul *was* funded, but he was typically funded *by* believing churches to go and spread the gospel in mission. In their pride, the wealthy Corinthians hated that Paul wasn’t willing to be added to their payroll of gifted speakers. It would have been humbling and frustrating for the Corinthian church to read verses 8-9. There Paul writes,

“I robbed other churches by accepting support from them in order to serve you. And when I was with you and was in need, I did not burden anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied my need. So I refrained and will refrain from burdening you in any way.” (2 Cor. 11:8-9 ESV)

If you remember back to the Jerusalem offering in chapter nine, the Macedonians had significantly less wealth than the Corinthians. So when Paul says, “I refuse to accept payment from you, and in fact my ministry to you is being funded by the Macedonians” that is as if we tried to hire a pastor and he responded, “No, I’m actually being funded by my church in Haiti to bring the gospel to your church”! This was a shot at the pride of the Corinthians.

So the false apostles – seeing what the Corinthians valued – entered in with teachers and a message that was tailor-made for the culture of the day. That’s why they were so persuasive. They painted a picture of apostleship that was exactly what the church wanted to see. The Apostle Paul and the gospel he preached simply didn’t fit their “culturally enlightened” mould.

Church, understand that the devil can – and does – use the same strategy today. How will he seduce the church away from the true Jesus? He will use the North American culture that we are so enamoured with and he will find teachers who are willing to take everything out of our Bibles that feels out-dated. And so we see a church culture where so many people are happy to listen to the handsome man on T.V. who tells them that his Jesus will make them healthy and wealthy. Where they listen to Oprah’s gospel of a Jesus who is not exclusive – A Jesus who loves you the way you are and who wants you to stay that way. We see impressive messengers with a message

that promises to satisfy all of our cultures wants and desires.

But the true gospel – the one that says that we are all equally sinners in need of a saviour, and that this Saviour came in the form of Jesus Christ to die for our sin and to purchase our redemption through the cross so that we could be forever with Him in glory – *that* gospel sounds like nonsense to the world. It did in Corinth in the first century, and it does today in Orillia, Ontario. Paul preached a gospel that was powerful to save *in spite* of the messenger. It was in his weakness that the power of the gospel shone through. The things he did and the things he said were offensive to the culture he ministered to. The Corinthians wanted him to fall in line but Paul responds in verses 12-15,

¹²“And what I am doing I will continue to do, in order to undermine the claim of those who would like to claim that in their boasted mission they work on the same terms as we do. ¹³For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. ¹⁴And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. ¹⁵So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.” (2 Corinthians 11:12-15 ESV)

These teachers looked like angels of light... They looked like they were in and the Corinthians assumed that they could be trusted. But Paul comes right out and identifies the false apostles for what they are – servants of Satan. You get in trouble for saying those kinds of things these days.

Church, there are men and women standing in the pulpits of churches across North America who look like they're us but who are preaching a false Jesus who has no power to save. There are books in the Christian bookstore that have Jesus' name in the title but they're teaching a message that is contrary to the gospel. And as we become more and more aware of the plethora of false teachers that are all around us, we need to ask ourselves one very important question: How can I make sure I'm worshipping the real Jesus and trusting in the real gospel?

How Can I Make Sure I'm Worshipping The Real Jesus And Trusting In The Real Gospel?

If false teachers and false gospels are as dangerous and as common as God's Word suggests they are, than we have two options. We can hide ourselves in a basement somewhere and refuse to listen to any preaching or to read any books for fear of being misled. Or, we can work hard to

prepare ourselves to be discerning. The best way to spot a counterfeit is to study the original. So here are two things we can do to make sure we won't worship a false Jesus or trust in a false gospel.

1. Self-Evaluate Cultural Assumptions

First, we need to self-evaluate our cultural assumptions. The devil is always using the same old tricks. Look with me at Genesis 3:6. There we read,

“So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.” (Genesis 3:6 ESV)

The devil didn't offer Eve a stick of celery. He offered her something that was good and delightful and desired. Satan has been studying the human heart since the creation of man. He knows what we desire and he knows what we're inclined to resist. Do you want to anticipate the types of things that the devil might say to lead you into a false gospel? Take a long look at the culture you live in.

We live in a time when homosexuality is celebrated and gender is non-existent. We live in a world where discipline is a swear word and authority is inherently corrupt. Ours is a day when Charles Darwin is our conscience and LeBron James is our idol. With all of that in mind, expect that the devil will introduce a gospel and a Jesus that will embrace homosexuality, dismiss gender roles, disregard discipline, do away with authority, trivialize morality and celebrate worldly riches. That is a Jesus that is easy to sell and you should expect to find him all over the Christian bookshelves. Church, if your gospel doesn't offend the culture you live in, you've got a false gospel.

“For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” (1 Corinthians 1:18 ESV)

2. Immerse Yourself In The Word Of God

Not only do we need to recognize our cultural assumptions, but we also need to immerse

ourselves in the Word of God. The whole Word of God. We need to read it at home and we need to gather together and sit under the teaching of the Word as a church. And as we do that we need to pray because we cannot understand God's Word without God's Spirit in us. We see this in 1 Corinthians 2:14 where Paul writes,

“The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.” (1 Cor. 2:14 ESV)

We need to sit down, prayerfully open God's Word and invite Him to speak. This seems like a no-brainer, right? It should be, but listen to Paul's sarcastic plea in verse one. He says,

“I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness. Do bear with me!” (2 Cor. 11:1 ESV)

He goes on in verse four,

“For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough.” (2 Cor. 11:4 ESV)

The Corinthians have had no problem listening to any and every opinion available. They were willing to receive different variations of the gospel and of Jesus but Paul wonders if they'll spare the time to listen to him – the one who brought them the gospel in the first place! Mark Seifrid notes,

“The Corinthians endure the apostle whom they regard as substandard, incompetent, weak, and suspicious. They are long-suffering with him, bearing with him, despite the deficiencies they find in him.”¹

Doesn't that sound an awful lot like how the North American church often treats the Bible? We have the Word of God! Inspired by the Holy Spirit! And yet, when we are discussing doctrine or morality, we are so quick to cite our favourite theologians and to use our favourite emotional stories but what the Bible actually says is of little consequence. In so many of our churches and in so many “Christian” spheres, the Bible is merely tolerated. It's there, but for appearances sake only.

¹ Mark A. Seifrid, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians (The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Pntc))* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 401.

Church, we need to be saturated in the Word of God. We need to prayerfully read it from cover to cover, year after year. If we do that, we will be properly positioned to recognize when someone is trying to lead us astray. If you're here this morning and you're not consistently reading the Word than I want to warn you: You are playing with fire. Psalm one tells us that there are two types of people in this world.

Blessed is the man
who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners,
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
² but his delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law he meditates day and night.

³ He is like a tree
planted by streams of water
that yields its fruit in its season,
and its leaf does not wither.
In all that he does, he prospers.

⁴ The wicked are not so,
but are like chaff that the wind drives away.

⁵ Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;
⁶ for the LORD knows the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish. (Psalm 1 ESV)

Be righteous. Delight yourself in the law of the Lord. Meditate on His Word and you will be like a tree firmly rooted in His truth. The winds of deception will blow, but you will stand.

If you ever perceive that we have ceased preaching the Bible here, you should rebuke us and you should leave. Luke praised the church in Berea because not only did they listen to sound preaching but they also studied the text to make sure that what was being proclaimed was the truth! He writes in Acts 17,

“The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue. Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.” (Acts 17:10-11 ESV)

Be like the Bereans church! If you are studying along with us on a Sunday morning and you feel

as if we are saying things that don't line up with the text, please tell us! At the end of the day, my opinion of the world and of God has no power to save anyone. If we are not proclaiming the Bible than there is NOTHING of value for you here. Wherever you find yourself, seek out a church that is going to preach the Bible every week. And when you find that church, warm your pew every Sunday.

Here's a quote from the great preacher J.C. Ryle. He was speaking of the flaw in young men but I think this is a good caution for all of us. He laments,

“None attend so badly to the means of grace, - none take so little part in our services, when they are present at them, - use Bibles and Prayer Books so little, - sing so little, - listen to preaching so little. None are so generally absent at prayer meetings, and lectures, and all such week-day helps to the soul.”²

We need to attend to the means of grace, church. We need study the Word of God and to sit under its teaching because until Christ comes, there will be people determined to seduce the church into ruin. The Devil will do what he has always done – he will try once again to convince the people of God that the Word of God cannot be trusted. He will tell us that it's out-dated and insufficient. But he is wrong.

If you want to position yourself to be able to stand firm when the waves of deceit and error crash against you, ask God for His wisdom and then place your elbows on each side of your Bible and read. Then place your family in the pew of a good church where the Word of God is preached and listen. When your North American mind is offended dig deeper. And by His Spirit, through His Word, the same God who chose you before the foundation of the world and who saved you – He will hold you fast. Let's pray.

² J. C. Ryle, *Thoughts for Young Men* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner Of Truth Trust, 2016), 30.