

“Those Who Preach Another Gospel”

2 Corinthians 11:1-15

Pastor Jason Van Bommel

1 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.

- 2 Corinthians 11:1-15, ESV

Have you ever seen someone get really upset about something, and you weren't really sure why? They were incensed and you were confused. What's the big deal? Some people, of course, make a big deal out of everything. They act like Chicken Little, crying out about the sky falling over every little acorn that falls. But then there are others who sleep like Rip Van Winkle, comfortably snoozing through a revolution and then unaware of how the world got to be so different.

Two weeks ago, we looked at Paul's teaching on spiritual warfare in the opening verses of 2 Corinthians 10. There, Paul says, *“the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God and take every thought captive to obey Christ”* (2 Cor 10:4-5, ESV)

And today, we get to a passage that focuses more specifically on the ones bringing in these horrible ideas that were polluting the church. In verse 5, Paul refers to them as “*super-apostles*” and in verse 13, he gets very blunt and calls them “*false apostles*” and “*deceitful workmen*.” Paul is certainly very concerned about these servants of Satan disguised as servants of righteousness, but why? And how can we be discerning enough to recognize their presence and influence today?

Paul’s Divine Jealousy, vv. 1-3

Paul begins by expressing his deep concerns over these false apostles as based in a divine jealousy:

I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness. Do bear with me! For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. 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. – 2 Cor. 11:1-3, ESV

Paul calls what he is doing “*a little foolishness*.” I mentioned last week that he’s being put in a position where he is forced to do something he really doesn’t want to do. In 10:12, he had said, “*Not that we dare to classify or compare ourselves with some of those who are commending themselves.*” But now he asks for the Corinthians to indulge him in “*a little foolishness*” and to bear with him because he is deeply concerned for them. He has “*a divine jealousy*” for them. The word “*jealousy*” can also be translated as “*zeal*” and it’s translated as “*jealousy*” here not because Paul envies the Corinthians, but because they have been pledged to Christ as a bride, and he does not want their hearts drawn astray after another.

Paul probably has in mind here the second commandment, which says: “*You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God*” (Ex. 20:4-5a, ESV) God is not jealous of us, but He is jealous *for* us. He loves us and wants our hearts.

This helps us to see what the real substance behind Paul’s concern over these false apostles was: It was definitely not a matter of personality differences or of rhetorical gifting in and of itself. Paul never viewed ministry as a competition, even when others had less-than-pure motives for preaching. When Paul wrote to the Philippians from prison in Rome several years later, he wrote this:

12 I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, 13 so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. 14 And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word^[2] without fear.

15 Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. 16 The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. 17 The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. 18 What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. – Philippians 1:12-18, ESV

Some people were preaching Christ from very impure motives, out of envy and rivalry, but Paul didn't let this bother him. He rejoices because Christ as being proclaimed, and it didn't matter to him what the motivations of the preachers were, as long as they were preaching Christ. But Paul's divine jealousy is triggered in the case of the Corinthians because he does not want to see them "be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ."

The Corinthians' Welcome of False Teachers

A Different Jesus & A Different Gospel

And the reason why their hearts would be led astray is because these so-called "super-apostles" are really false apostles who are, in fact, preaching a different Gospel and a different Jesus:

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.

What does Paul mean by "another Jesus"? How can there be "another Jesus"? Well, of course, there's only one true Jesus, but throughout church history, people have been proclaiming a Jesus that doesn't really line up with the one true Jesus of the Scriptures.

In the early church, a Greek group known as *docetists* preached that Jesus did not have a true human body. Others preached that Jesus was born a regular man but that He became divine by His obedience to God and was adopted as the Son of God at His baptism, so that when God the Father proclaimed from heaven, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," that was the moment of adoption when Jesus became the Son of God but He

wasn't by nature from eternity God the Son. The real Jesus, according to the Bible, was always God the Son, from eternity He has always been and always will be God. Without ceasing to be God. He became fully and truly human in the womb of the virgin Mary, and having taken on Himself a true human nature, He remains both truly God and truly human. He is true God and true man, two distinct natures, in one person forever. He is the one true mediator between God and man because He is the God-man.

In addition to "another Jesus," Paul refers to receiving a different spirit or a different Gospel. Some people believe in Jesus as the true God and true man Son of God and mediator between God and man and even as the only way of salvation, but they have a very different understanding of salvation.

Judaizers were those in the early church who taught that all believers in Jesus had to be circumcised and keep the Old Testament dietary laws and the special holy days – feast days, festivals, high holy days like Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacles, Day of Atonement, etc. But the Apostles made it clear that Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament Law in Himself in such a way that we are now made holy through Him alone, through His righteousness and sacrifice. Jesus was cut off for us, fulfilling the sign of circumcision in His own death on the cross. Jesus is the once-for-all effectual sacrifice for sins and our Great High Priest. Jesus Himself declared all foods clean, and the Apostles spread this truth to the church, that everything could be eaten if it was received with thanksgiving.

Other mystic professing Christians believed and taught that salvation was found in entering into the spirit-world and receiving secret knowledge into divine mysteries like the names of angels and demons and the special kinds of prayers needed to unlock divine blessings. Some of these people are known as Gnostics and their distorted version of Christianity is Gnosticism. And lest you think Gnosticism is just some ancient-world idea, Dan Brown's *The DaVinci Code* and the *Matrix* movies are both modern-day Gnosticism.

Distorted versions of Jesus and the Gospel abound in our culture and in the church today, and we need discernment to recognize them and understand the dangers behind them. One of the most common distorted Gospels that is actually believed by most professing Christians has been called "moralistic therapeutic deism." This belief system holds that God is good and kind and not really all that involved in the world and our lives. He wants us to be good and to treat others the way we would want to be treated and He also wants us to be happy and well-adjusted. If we follow God's commands – mostly the ones about loving

and not judging others – then we will be good and happy. Jesus was the very best and happiest person who ever lived, and He is our example.

Moralistic therapeutic deism is not Christianity; it is another Gospel. Because it does not take the problem of sin seriously enough, it doesn't really understand the meaning of the cross and the resurrection. Why would Jesus need to die in our place for our sins if we're basically good people capable of being really good on our own? Why would Jesus die and rise again to save us from sin, death, and judgment, if sadness and loneliness are our deepest problems? Why would Jesus be called a man of sorrows acquainted with grief if He was the happiest person who ever lived?

We could talk about other false Jesuses and other false Gospels, but the best way to be protected against the false is to know the truth very well, and the best way to reach others trapped in falsehood is by being well prepared to tell them the truth about Jesus.

The truth is that God is perfectly holy, wise, sovereign, just, and good. We were made in God's image, but since the Fall of Adam and Eve, all people are born with a sinful nature that makes us corrupt and sinful by nature, alienated from God, in bondage to sin, and without hope in the coming judgment. The Bible tells us that "It is appointed for man to die once and after this comes the judgment" and also that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" and that "the wages of sin is death." "The soul that sins shall surely die" and Jesus said, "Unless you believe that I am He, you will die in your sins." This bad news is an absolute necessity for understanding the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Jesus came into the world as a sinless, perfect human being, and He pleased the Father in all that He did His entire life. And then, as 2 Corinthians 5:21 tells us, "*God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us that through Him we might become the righteousness of God.*" Jesus came into this world to offer Himself once-for-all for the sins of all who would trust in Him. And Hebrews says that "*By one sacrifice, He has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.*" Having offered Himself for our sins on the cross, Jesus entered into death and then overthrew death in His resurrection. He then ascended to heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. From there He will come again to judge the living and the dead on the great Day of Resurrection which will also be the great Judgment Day. On that day, those who are His by faith will find their names written in the Lamb's Book of Life, while those whose names are not written in the Book of Life will be judged for their works and their own sins will condemn them forever.

This is the true Gospel. It is taught clearly in the pages of the Bible and has been held by the true and faithful church of Jesus Christ for 2,000 years. We must believe this Gospel, cherish the Savior and His salvation presented in this Gospel, and faithfully proclaim this Gospel to the world.

So, Paul warns against another Jesus and a different gospel, but he also warns against a different spirit. We know the Corinthians were plagued by a spirit of worldliness, of cultural captivity. They valued what their culture valued and not what they had in Christ. Paul had to remind them back in I Corinthians I not to value wisdom as the Greeks defined it or powerful signs the Jewish culture demanded:

For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. – I Corinthians 1:22-25, ESV

The Spirit of the Age is very different from and diametrically opposed to the Holy Spirit, and it has always been this way. So, James says, in James 4:4-5:

You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, “He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us”? (ESV)

And John, in I John 2:15-17, warns us:

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever. (ESV)

Here’s the tricky thing about a spirit of worldliness, though: It’s always easiest to recognize and reject the worldliness that you don’t personally find appealing or that you don’t think is right. So, Greeks seek wisdom, and the Jewish believers could easily rebuke their Greek Christian brethren for being drawn to classical rhetoric and flashy displays of human wisdom. Or those fascinated by the desires of the flesh could mock those drawn to the pride of life. We all have our weaknesses and our blind spots, and we need to be honest and humble enough to see where we are tempted to worldliness so we can guard our hearts.

Think about what matters in our culture, according to our “Spirit of the Age.” We live in an entertainment-driven culture, a deeply politically divided culture, a culture that worships success, as well as a culture that is driven by pleasure and self-indulgence. So, how do these things infect the church? Some churches are entertainment-driven; they’re putting on a show to draw and please crowds. Some churches are politically-driven, preaching politics often in the name of “cultural transformation.” Other churches are concerned to be and appear as successful as possible, in every outward measure of success.

None of this is what the church is called to be or to do. We are called to worship God, to follow Christ, to proclaim the Gospel, to be used by God to advance His kingdom in the world. We are called to worship, discipleship, fellowship, evangelism & missions. We are called to be the Body of Christ, the visible manifestation of the kingdom of God on earth.

The True Nature of False Teachers

Those who want to lead the church away from her Savior, the Good News of her salvation, and the leading of the Holy Spirit are not just misguided or just of a different opinion. They are of a different spirit altogether, and Paul makes it pretty clear which spirit leads them. Listen to 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. 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.

Paul says he is intentionally seeking to undermine the claims of those who say they’re apostles but are not, who say they have the same calling from Christ, when they do not. Why? Because these false apostles are really servants of Satan. They are in disguise as servants of righteousness, but they are ambassadors of Satan to the church, enemy agents. Now, they may not be consciously aware of this, but this is what they are.

Those who preach a different Jesus draw people’s hearts away from the true Jesus, and that is the work of Satan. Those who preach a different Gospel pollute and distort and draw people away from the true Gospel, and that is the work of Satan. And those who are following the spirit of the world are leading the church away from the Holy Spirit’s leading found in Scripture and in the true Gospel. That, too, is the work of Satan.

Paul ends this passage with a bluntly stated truth: *Their end will correspond to their deeds.* These men are working for Satan's interests, and in the end, they will end up with him forever.

Thankfully, God preserves His own true church and His own true children in saving faith in the real Jesus and the proclamation of the true Gospel. The Holy Spirit is more powerful than the Spirit of the Age, and He leads us on in faithfulness as we depend on Him. Jesus has promised to preserve and guide His church all the way home, and He will not fail to do so!