

“Disguised as Angels of Light”

- 2 Corinthians 11, Part 1 -

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2 Corinthians 11 - 1 Oh, that you would bear with me in a little folly—and indeed you do bear with me. **2** For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. **3** But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. **4** For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it! **5** For I consider that I am not at all inferior to the most eminent apostles. **6** Even though I am untrained in speech, yet I am not in knowledge. But we have been thoroughly manifested among you in all things. **7** Did I commit sin in humbling myself that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you free of charge? **8** I robbed other churches, taking wages from them to minister to you. **9** And when I was present with you, and in need, I was a burden to no one, for what I lacked the brethren who came from Macedonia supplied. And in everything I kept myself from being burdensome to you, and so I will keep myself. **10** As the truth of Christ is in me, no one shall stop me from this boasting in the regions of Achaia. **11** Why? Because I do not love you? God knows! **12** But what I do, I will also continue to do, that I may cut off the opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the things of which they boast. **13** For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. **14** And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. **15** Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works. **16** 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. **17** What I speak, I speak not according to the Lord, but as it were, foolishly, in this confidence of boasting. **18** Seeing that many boast according to the flesh, I also will boast. **19** For you put up with fools gladly, since you yourselves are wise! **20** 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. **21** 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. **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: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. **24** From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. **25** Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; **26** in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; **27** in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness— **28** besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches. **29** Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation? **30** If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity. **31** The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. **32** In Damascus the governor, under Aretas the king, was guarding the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desiring to arrest me; **33** but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped from his hands.

2 Corinthians 11:1-4 NLT

- 1 I hope you will put up with a little more of my foolishness. Please bear with me.
- 2 For I am jealous for you with the jealousy of God himself. I promised you as a pure bride to one husband — Christ.
- 3 But I fear that somehow your pure and undivided devotion to Christ will be corrupted, just as Eve was deceived by the cunning ways of the serpent.
- 4 You happily put up with whatever anyone tells you, even if they preach a different Jesus than the one we preach, or a different kind of Spirit than the one you received, or a different kind of gospel than the one you believed.

Paul, a couple of chapters back, had opened this segment of his letter to the church in Corinth in what seemed to be a rather defensive posture. It is quite clear that he is more than just a little uncomfortable with such an approach, however he also clearly felt that without the absolute support and unity of the body of believers the church would ultimately become weak and falter. He wasn't just acting to guard his street cred and church rep,

but was compelled to speak out on these matters before us as a warning of great danger. His ultimate goal, as always, was the benefit and blessing of the church, both local and universal. He understood, *as I do*, that the local church is to be the proverbial “line of demarcation.” The defensive line against the subtle slide toward compromise, acquiesce, and ultimately heresy.

We may not know Paul intimately these many years later, but he clearly was a “no nonsense” kind of guy and was undoubtedly driven by a desire to move believers out of a religion of mere head knowledge and theory, and into a practical application of faith played out in the real world. He was compelled to *lead*. To stand in defense of the gospel, *as Jesus Himself presented it*, not according to the prevailing culture and the ever shifting winds of current social paradigm. He was determined...through his life or his death, to move them away from the standing of mere marginal church attenders and into the position of a disciple...which is in truth the only real Christianity that exists and the only real eternal standing before Christ. We must acknowledge that this letter...these words Paul speaks...is directed not to the secular streets of the world in an evangelistic outreach, but to the church of God. To us here today. To those who are surrendering the high ground. Those who are compromising with the world in hopes of acquiring greater acceptability and a more palatable social standing.

In Paul’s first letter, he told the Corinthian believers, “*You have ten thousand instructors, but not many fathers*” (1 Cor 4:15). That was Paul’s way of claiming not *ownership* of them, but *responsibility* for them and moreover a fatherly love toward them. It was not an issue that he took lightly, and he did not want them to either! As we covered previously, there were clearly those within the church who were seeking to usurp Paul’s position of authority, and thereby hinder any real affect he might have on them. Such passive rebellion was not because it was *Pastor Paul* necessarily, but simply because there was an authority over them ...an authority in *any* form. It is a scenario that has been repeated over and over in the many years that have followed Paul’s work. That “bridge” crossing is almost guaranteed to come for us all, a “right of passing” for any and every church fellowship. Just how each church body...*and in truth each individual that makes it up*, fares in this battle will determine the path of his or her future, and whether he or she even has a future!

This all begins with pride, but it ends in seduction, deception, and lies. This road of sin is not static...it will eventually metastasize into full blown rebellion and destruction. Thus the time to fight this battle is when the issue is in its birth, its conception. When the war is simply between fleshly pride and godly humility. Once it gets too far, it is almost always spiritually terminal.

Paul’s aim here is to stop the sin of pride in its infancy. Just as it is today, for some within that church, it was no doubt too late. Their sin would be fatal. They would have to go. Paul had already dealt with the much debated issue of church discipline, and it is a practice painful for everyone involved. But there were lives at stake here. Paul knew that this was ultimately a ‘*winner takes all*’ situation, and so he was not going to back down. In this chapter too he approaches these issue with boldness because he knows the eternal consequences of losing...

11:1-2

Paul’s words were all aimed at lifting up these believers into a truly disciplined life. Such a life is one that departs from idealistic theory and mere head knowledge, and moves into the life of daily, practical, and dynamic living through Christ. It’s a crossroads for each of us and one similar to that of the children of Israel as they came to the River Jordan and the Promised Land. The people had plenty of religious truth and understanding, but they were still *wandering*: just going around and around in circles, lives void of direction and purpose. *They* had to choose...just as *we* do, whether that kind of life was enough, or whether they wanted the blessings *and yes the battles* of a life where faith is truly lived out and is no longer merely an idealistic goal or a utopian concept!

We need to acknowledge the truth. We must know that with the “milk and honey” of the Promised Land comes “giants and war.” There is no middle ground in this. There is no halfway! Paul knew, just as I know, that unless they spiritually “crossed over,” they were doomed to walk around and around in circles for the rest of their lives. We know that in fact many of them *didn’t* cross, and they lived in the desert of compromise and tepid commitment for the rest of their lives. These were “old wine skins” Jesus spoke of in the gospels. They

couldn't...*they wouldn't*, move on to what they were ultimately called to do. And what followed? What do we see? The account tells us of lives of grumbling and discontent, void of purpose and meaning. Eventually they *died* ...still grumbling, still discontent, still empty! What a sad life and a sadder end!

Did Israel know they were going around in circles? How do we know where we are? Well, are you grumbling and discontent? Are you divisive and rebellious? Or are you busy warring against the enemy, marching around the strongholds of Satan, and conquering giants in a strange land? One must actually stop ...*what is for many of us*, simply perpetual life motion and look around at one's true life and living. Paul was asking that they give him their attention and to hear him out! His desire for them was only the best. He wanted them to be able to stand before God *and man* as the reflection of God in them...a reflection of holiness.

All of this was not because of some rule or regulation! This was not because someone told them to do it or to be some way or another. The wandering Jews in the desert wilderness knew the rules too, so it has to be more than just that! Paul indeed wanted them to respond, but to respond not out of duty or obligation, but rather out of love. He wanted them to be driven by the passion of a first love: an *only* love. For scripture tells us that our God is a jealous God. He is unwilling to compete with another lord in our life, no matter how that stance may seem righteous to us or to the world at large. If He is to be Lord *at all*, He must be Lord *of all*.

Recently I saw a TV commercial that rapidly moved between cameo shots of the world's greats...the Olympic gymnast, the tech superstar, the medical and scientific renowned. And it occurred to us that the reason those included in the commercial were so successful and esteemed was because they were not a mile wide and an inch deep...they focused on *one thing*. They gave their lives to achieving *one goal*. And yet I look out at the world around me and see a generation of young adults that have so many choices and near unlimited options and are paralyzed at the crossroads of indecision. Consumed by fear of making an error in the "life blending" of all the multiplicity of opportunities, passions, wants and comforts, while avoiding all the dangers, risks, and potential errors that await them around every corner. The results are levels of anxiety, fear, and neurosis that has never been seen before in any generation. The answer is a dedicated *focus*. A commitment to simplicity and priority. Deciding what is really important and giving themselves to that ideal. This is why Christianity is not working for so many in this generation because they are seeking only to *add* Christ to the life cocktail of their own artistic design. They have not "died to self." They want all the world has to offer, and Jesus too. But scripture clearly presents an "all or nothing" scenario. Christianity...*real Christianity*...is Jesus first, **Jesus everything**.

11:3

Simplicity? But what aspect of God and faith is simple? Is there even one singular aspect of life today which encompasses any form of simplicity? Yes indeed, for we hear the echo of those simply words from Luke 10: "*You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind, and Love your neighbor as yourself.*" Jesus then said "*Do this and you will live...*" There is nothing ambiguous or complicated in that.

Certainly we are immediately cynical and suspicious of anything and anyone that tries to sell us something that is innately "simple to understand and operate." Thus, those who wish to complicate the simple message of God have a ready audience in our modern church.

Deception by Satan is not a new phenomenon. He has always taken advantage of people's lack of knowledge and exploited their desires and their sense of self entitlement. He has consistently and successfully utilized slight-of-hand, misdirection, misinformation and often outright lies. These aspects of his work go all the way back to the beginning, and he has been deceiving people this way ever since. He uses the same methods he did in the garden because they are still so successful today.

Such methods are not overtly obvious, though they are out in the open. It is actually the practice of what we know of as "hiding in plain sight." Generally subtle and utilizing the "long con" Satan will be the dripping

faucet of temptation and misdirection, slowly exploiting a person's emotions, and distracting them with shiny objects, and overwhelming the "still small voice" with loud and constant indoctrination.

Our spiritual warfare is not fought on the grounds of the intellect, the knowledge and learning found in America's pews. All of that is certainly important, but the real battle is not there. It is in the actual *living out* of the simplicity in Christ. Oh, how we complicate our faith! We complicate our lives. We can easily read this verse and expect the enemy to come out in the open and fight us on the grounds of intellect and scriptural knowledge like a high school debate team.

That's where we in this church can find ourselves in trouble. In many ways, we rank amongst the best scripturally trained and knowledgeable people around. We know the right answers and can dutifully verbalize them when called upon. But actually living out those truths? We are probably averaging with C-grades. Rarely is the areas of knowledge and intellect the real fields of battle in which the enemy meets us. Certainly not because Satan and His friends are unable to conjure up a good twisting of scripture and a professional torturing of the text. But rather because he just simply finds greater success in these other areas. I have seen a lot of folks fall away over the years, and I would be hard-pressed to sight even one time where the issue was doctrine and scriptural stance. It was inevitably wounded emotions, personal desire and subsequent self permission out of self entitlement, and the need to have the world and moreover to be accepted by it.

The "doctrinal dance" is hard to do in this church, so I see Satan's attempts to sneak into our church body in other ways. In fact, it is effectively the same way he seemed to be moving in on the church in Corinth. Both then and now, Satan was doing what he does best: corrupting the faithful from the actual living simplicity that is in Christ. The word simplicity in its original form means "devotion, loyalty, and commitment." Thus to distract, to deceive people in this way, would not be nearly as hard as debating scriptural content. Over the years, I have been accused of just about everything you can imagine at some point, but failing to adhere to scripture was not one of them.

Much of Satan's work in this area can be handled by merely leaving all of us to the tendencies of our flesh. It is our natural leaning to begin to complicate the living out of the faith. The movement becomes a machine, and eventually a mere monument to what it once was; a memory of better days. This is more than just a sad, natural progression of humanity. Let us note the word "corruption." Corruption is not a natural development, it is a "decay, a rotting, a breakdown." Like Eve, we have been "deceived." The very nature of deception is that the one being deceived is not aware of it.

How do we know if we are the unwitting pawns of such a delusion? Well, the obvious answer would be, "have things become not so-simple anymore?" Paul acknowledges the Genesis account of Satan's deception of Eve was true and accurate. He did it with an appeal to her mind ...not her knowledge or intellect but rather the seat of her passions and reason. Her intellect was not confused and corrupted, her faithfulness and structural integrity was. Do you know what is a universal solvent? Water. Simple dripping water. It takes nothing more complicated. Oh, it will take time! But drip drip drip...sooner or later the structure will corrupt and collapse. I've seen it. It took years, but they eventually collapsed under the weight of it all. The weight of an ever increasing complicated, burdensome, and ultimately *corrupted* life.

11:4

There will always be those who will come and attempt to bring you another "gospel," another "spirit," which Paul says is, in fact, *another Jesus*. Once again, the debate today seems not be what the scripture actually *says* but rather how we should interpret, *or better*, "**put into practice**" the scriptural mandates as they are given. So for example, what we see today in our culture is not so much the rejection of scripture but altering its trajectory and impact. Grievous sins and disastrous consequences are altered and softened so as effectively make dynamite into just a firecracker. The *plague* into a *head cold*.

Paul also says these believers were apparently willing not just to endure such a farce, but even to embrace this alternate path! This different spirit, this different gospel was obviously not offensive to their ears or their minds or they would have recoiled out of sheer fleshly disgust. No, we can safely assume that what they were hearing was, as were the words to Eve, “pleasing to the flesh.”

Today we have a lot of new teaching being embraced by the greater church. All of it sounds so good and so reasonable. But does it sound *simple*? Does it “simply” involve us coming to the Lord as children?

Matthew 18:3 *“Then he said, I assure you, unless you turn from your sins and become as little children, you will never get into the Kingdom of Heaven.”*

We as a generation have decided that we are much too smart, too intellectual, too sophisticated and independent to accept that kind of gospel.

Christian Science – Jesus is the human man and Christ is the divine idea.

Jehovah’s Witnesses – Jesus is not God, rather He was the first son that Jehovah God brought forth.

Michael the archangel is none other than the only begotten son of God – Jesus Christ!

Mormonism – “Among the spirit children of Elohim, the firstborn was and is Jehovah or Jesus Christ, to whom all others are juniors.”

Word Faith Teachers – Jesus was rich and as His follower, so should you be!

All of these are not just other interpretations or simply alternative understandings. They are “another Jesus.” But what about us here in the land of evangelistic Christianity? We are not innocent of this compromise as we desire to hold up the latest social evolution as the sieve in which Christianity is filtered. The buck stops at the cultural mandate, and Jesus is expected to acquiesce...to “fit in.” Thus we begin the slicing and dicing of scripture, cutting away those events and directives we find socially offensive and culturally distasteful. In our attempts to merge the two paradigms, all the power and peace that is found in true Christianity fades away until just the shadow remains and a generation of lukewarm believers are left wondering why life is not working according to the promises on the package. It is because it is not the real thing. It is a knock-off. A facsimile. An imitation. Many of us have simply been sold a “bill of goods.”

Scripture tells us that in the last days we will see a “great falling away.” John 16:2 tells us that “... *you will be expelled from the synagogues, and the time is coming when those who kill you will think they are doing a holy service for God.*” Today...like a stark epiphany, we are faced with the cold reality of Jesus’ words in Matthew 7:14, “...*the gateway to life is very narrow and the road is difficult, and only a few ever find it.*” The question today is: “Have you... *found it?*”