

## “Disguised as Angels of Light”

- 2 Corinthians 11, *Part 2* -

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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.

**11: 5-15 NLT** But I don't consider myself inferior in any way to these "super apostles" who teach such things. 6 I may be unskilled as a speaker, but I'm not lacking in knowledge. We have made this clear to you in every possible way. 7 Was I wrong when I humbled myself and honored you by preaching God's Good News to you without expecting anything in return. 8 I "robbed" other churches by accepting their contributions so I could serve you at no cost. 9 And when I was with you and didn't have enough to live on, I did not become a financial burden to anyone. For the brothers who came from Macedonia brought me all that I needed. I have never been a burden to you, and I never will be. 10 As surely as the truth of Christ is in me, no one in all of Greece will ever stop me from boasting about this. 11 Why? Because I don't love you? God knows that I do. 12 But I will continue doing what I have always done. This will undercut those who are looking for an opportunity to boast that their work is just like ours. 13 These people are false apostles. They are deceitful workers who disguise themselves as apostles of Christ. 14 But I am not surprised! Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. 15 So it is no wonder that his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. In the end they will get the punishment their wicked deeds deserve.

11:5-6

Paul clearly did not see himself as a giant of the faith. There was no braggadocio in Paul nor did he walk with a swag...an air of clergy elitism. However, he also wasn't too good at stepping aside for those who had come into the church and were messing with the believers heads either. Those folks who weren't just bringing in *false* doctrine, but a *complicated living*, which had the effective consequences of "muddying the pool" of their calling, the manifest destiny of their lives, whether intended or not. Simple relational living with their God was lost in the ritual and legalism of endless religious "addendums."

Today these attempts to confuse and muddle the simple message of the gospel continue in varying degrees; not just the gospel that redeems, but the gospel we live out each day as believers. Paul was planting his feet, and was refusing to move. He was basing his position...the "proof text" *if you will*, on one thing: *the results of his ministry*. He was calling the Corinthian believers to *step back*. To look at the results of his work with them.

All of his teaching and all of his preaching had been always "on the table." His doctrine was fully explained and moreover fully manifested amongst them. There was no secret truths and hidden precepts. All that Paul taught was more than just some nice ideas preached from the pulpit. The *simply* gospel had been proven to be *the* gospel. The bottom line was that he had the witness of his ministry as his proof. The *people* were the "smoking gun."

Had Paul offended some of the folks in Corinth? Most certainly. Had some left the Corinth church because of Paul's letter, because of Paul's position on these matters? No doubt. And yet Paul was clearly refusing to compromise. He was unmovable in his calling...a calling to protect the sheep; to stand for God, as well as for His faithful, *His church*.

As I mentioned last week, there will always be those who find no problem in doing whatever is necessary to usurp all authority in their lives. This includes parents, pastors, the secular laws and yes, ultimately even God. They write books and magazine articles. They go on speaking tours, show up on TV and radio, and they will even go to church.

It has always been hard when people amongst us walk away, but it's even harder when we witness them turning on their brothers and sisters and biting the hand that feeds them and protects them. But it has always been and will always be this way. We should stop in these situations and with a simple heart ask ourselves; *is the fruit of God being manifested in my church, my leadership, my pastor?* If the answer is yes, then get on board. If it is no, you should find another church.

Referring to the one who is departing: is there the peace of God, the fruit of the Spirit in them? Do we see their backside as they are leading into the Promised Land? If not, maybe I shouldn't be following them! Anyone can lead others around and around in circles in the wilderness! The trust must be given according to where the individual is leading us.

Scripture tells us that God is jealous for us. He...just like we are to, proved it by the very sacrifices he endured...and He is God thus He was not caught in the circumstances of life like we are, but puts Himself purposely in the realm of sacrifice and pain. His "jealousy" calls us to Him in a level of commitment that He exercises toward us. The truth is that many many folks are really in this thing conditionally. We give ourselves an "escape clause" just in case things don't really work out like we want them to. Most of the time it works that way with the church too. It's strange how we want to be connected to Christ as long as we don't have to when it comes to his "bride" as scripture refers to us as a community.

Instead of destroying all mankind, He gave the supreme sacrifice, even for those who would not love Him. He gave even for those who would never acknowledge His creation, His salvation, or His fatherhood. Paul had that same heart for the believers under his care there in Corinth.

11:7-8

Satan, *from the inception of mankind upon this earth*, has quite successfully attempted to entice us toward a mindset of self-sufficiency. This means being independent of God and community, self-sufficient in thought and living. Of course this runs contrary to the inherent makeup of God's church, the design of the "body" of Christ, not to mention our very Lord Jesus who came as a sold-out servant of all.

Paul, continuing in the defense of his ministry among them, asks them a simple, yet poignant question: "Where is my sin?" They might accuse Paul of a long list of shortcomings, but an overt act of sin was not among them. Paul asks if it was somehow a sin for him to take the low road of humility before them. Was he wrong in sacrificing his life for theirs? Had he erred in his commitment to them and the preaching of the truth of the gospel to them, and doing so without putting a price on it?

Please understand that Paul didn't *literally* "hold up" the other churches to steal their finances. But these other churches had essentially financed the ministry in Corinth, and asked for nothing in return! Corinth had benefited from the work Paul had put forth on their behalf. Yet they were evidently haughty about their position and their standing, despite the fact that it had cost them nothing. It had cost them nothing in finances, participation, servanthood, or time. They knew nothing about first fruits, unity, or church body life.

Some within the Corinthian church, like many of us to-day, were apparently comfortable with letting everyone else carry them, their church, and their faith. They were comfortable letting someone else finance the church, keep the lights and heat on, keep the building clean, etc, and never sacrifice the comforts of the world, their outside relationships, or their hobbies in order to bless the community outside of themselves. I may not be robbing other churches today to minister to you, but I may be robbing the people beside you who are fully participating in the kingdom to minister to you.

Many people once understood the love and acceptance they received from this fellowship, often when no one else would give it to them. But that love and sacrifice was often never fully reciprocated. Instead of being humbled by such love, we can grow expectant and see this community as a place to *get* and never a place to *give*. Usually such folks will eventually find the door once the "fountain" is curtailed in some manner.

Paul was not okay with this, and of course, *neither am I*. Paul sought for these believers a sanctified life, one set apart with Christ as the supreme value and manifestation of their lives. I don't read anger in Paul's writings here; he's not mad at them. Some may read in his words, or in mine, a sense of rancor or a hostility toward them. But do not mistake a passion and urgent fervency for exasperation, or an irritation against the flock. He loved them, as I love you. But as pastors, we love the flock too much to stand idly by and watch our spiritual children flounder in this life and endanger their eternity.

11:9

Paul not only had not financially received anything from this church, but in this case he now seemed adamant not to. Why would he, if he felt a pastor should be supported by the flock which he served? He clearly writes in the first letter to Corinth, as well as in 1 Timothy, that a flock should care for their pastor's physical and financial well-being. The key here, though, was whether the flock actually considered Paul a pastor, and furthermore whether they saw him as their responsibility. If that was not assured, then Paul did not want to compel them to support him.

There had to be some growth, humility, and maturity for such thinking to find its priority. Until then, Paul would keep teaching and discipling these young believers, even while they did not see themselves as such. Paul's practice here is a common and healthy practice when a church is being planted. However, a sign of maturity and health in a church body is the desire and follow-through to support their church as well as their pastor, who, no doubt, will move more and more into full-time service for them as time passes.

11:10-12

Paul was stuck between the proverbial ‘rock and a hard place.’ If he had taken money from the Corinth church at this point, his critics would have accused him of just being in it for the money. By not taking money, though, those same critics would accuse him (and no doubt some were doing so) of not being a real apostle and not really loving them enough to acknowledge his unity with them.

Paul obviously chose the latter, being that the first option was too dangerous, an opportunity for damage to his ministry as well as to the kingdom of God in general. So Paul focused on the ministry and not on the pay, even though the false teachers were not operating under such self-imposed restrictions. He wanted to be proud of Corinth as well as the integrity of his own ministry. Thus, he was reassuring the flock there that even though he was not taking money from them, he still loved them.

Yet at this point in the battle, he needed to defend them and his ministry. Despite the false teachers’ accusations, they would ultimately be put to shame. This would happen because they could not claim the integrity and faithfulness Paul manifested. By his actions, Paul took them down from their place of pride.

11:13-15

Finally Paul lays out his cards. He says that the men among them that had been causing so much trouble were not the genuine article at all. They were “false apostles.” They were “deceitful workers” who had transformed themselves into “apostles of Christ.” This is a very common practice even today. We have known those who “rolled the grenade into the room” while slipping out the back, and went on to some church position somewhere else, which made it quite clear what they were after here.

There will always be those who will gather a few wayward followers around them and anoint themselves as pastor. These people have no accountability to anyone, generally are not ordained (at least not by any reputable organization), and work diligently to hold onto their power and position. They will argue with the same repetitive lines, saying they only need God’s call and not man’s. However that is not the New Testament model where the disciples, and following them the pastors/teachers/elders, were sent out by men of proven track record, history, and time-tested character.

**Gal 2:1-3a (Paul said)** *Then fourteen years later I went back to Jerusalem again, this time with Barnabas; and Titus came along, too. I went there because God revealed to me that I should go. While I was there I met privately with those considered to be leaders of the church and shared with them the message I had been preaching to the Gentiles. I wanted to make sure that we were in agreement, for fear that all my efforts had been wasted and I was running the race for nothing. And they supported me...*

**1Jo 4:1** *“Dear friends, do not believe everyone who claims to speak by the Spirit. You must test them to see if the spirit they have comes from God. For there are many false prophets in the world.”*

**Tit 1:6** *“An elder must be well thought of for his good life...”*

**Tit 1:7** *“An elder must live a blameless life because he is God’s minister...”*

**1Ti 3:2** *“For an elder must be a man whose life cannot be spoken against...He must exhibit self-control, live wisely, and have a good reputation...”*

These people to whom Paul refers were never called by God. They had assumed position *on* their own, and *for* their own. Yet these people are not always immediately recognized. At times they can seem so genuine and so “right on” and we can *want* to give them the benefit of the doubt. But you see, there should be no doubt in such cases.

What about their lives? Are God’s directives held up as the rule of their lives and ministry? How are their marriages and parenting? Are their children hellions? Are they living according to the parameters laid out in the book of Timothy for leaders (1 Tim 3:4)? Do they seek peace as instructed in Hebrews 12:14? Do they violate the Word by causing church divisions (Rom 16:17)? Do they “build on another man’s foundation” (Rom 15:20)? The list goes on extensively.

We, as believers, must *know* the scriptures in order to *see* these issues and hold each other accountable. We should do this not as “big brother,” but as *a brother*. It should not be an attempt to “*lord it over others*,” but an attempt to direct them *to the Lord*. Yet we are warned about such areas being so very dangerous. 2 Pet 3:17 “...*watch out and (do) not be carried away by the errors of these wicked people. I don’t want you to lose your own secure footing.*”

Paul says with confidence that these people are false prophets. How does he know that? Isn’t he judging them as scripture directs us not to? Firstly, the passage to not judge, means to “judge to condemnation.” Meaning to declare that they are “not a Christian” at all. That means we are not to (because we in reality *cannot*) make that call. Only our heavenly Father makes that call. Only He knows the answer to that question for every man.

But the Bible is full of charges to make judgment calls on the fruit, the *manifestations* in the lives of those who call themselves children of God. Certainly that practice can be and is sometimes abused, and is often used to position oneself in the false authority it was designed to prevent. This can be avoided if we only make those judgments, *and allow those judgments*, according to the parameters laid out in scripture.

The danger of incorrect and unscriptural handling of this has caused many in the greater body of Christ to abandon all such practice, which is no doubt exactly what Satan wants us to do! Our failure to adhere to God’s directions in this area has essentially left the door wide open to these “false apostles.” J. N. Darby once stated that “Satan is never more satanic than when he carries a Bible.” We must not be fooled! Just because it is a church building doesn’t mean its safe inside!

Therefore we must acknowledge today that things are not always what they seem. There are many instances throughout history where Satan has transformed himself into “an angel of light.” This means that what is evil deceitfully presents itself as godly and beautiful. How do we avoid such a trap? We need to be obedient to scripture and hold to the criteria of position that God laid out in His Word.

The alternative is to wait until the end when their works will manifest themselves in full light. By that time, there is often insurmountable and untold damage done to the lives of the people we love. These were the people that Paul loved, thus he was not going to stand by and avoid his calling.