

“Disguised as Angels of Light”

- 2 Corinthians 11, *Part 3* -

by Pastor Tim Dodson
at JF Believers Church
in Menomonie, Wis
on April 24, 2022



2 Corinthians 11:12-33 ... *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: 16 - 27 NLT *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. Again I say, don't think that I am a fool to talk like this. But even if you do, listen to me, as you would to a foolish person, while I also boast a little. 17 Such boasting is not from the Lord, but I am acting like a fool. 18 And since others boast about their human achievements, I will, too. 19 After all, you think you are so wise, but you enjoy putting up with fools! 20 You put up with it when someone enslaves you, takes everything you have, takes advantage of you, takes control of everything, and slaps you in the face. 21 I'm ashamed to say that we've been too "weak" to do that! But whatever they dare to boast about — I'm talking like a fool again — I dare to boast about it, too. 22 Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I. 23 Are they servants of Christ? I know I sound like a madman, but I have served him far more! I have worked harder, been put in prison more often, been whipped times without number, and faced death again and again. 24 Five different times the Jewish leaders gave me thirty-nine lashes. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. Once I spent a whole night and a day adrift at sea. 26 I have traveled on many long journeys. I have faced danger from rivers and from robbers. I have faced danger from my own people, the Jews, as well as from the Gentiles. I have faced danger in the cities, in the deserts, and on the seas. And I have faced danger from men who claim to be believers but are not. 27 I have worked hard and long, enduring many sleepless nights. I have been hungry and thirsty and have often gone without food. I have shivered in the cold, without enough clothing to keep me warm. 28 Then, besides all this, I have the daily burden of my concern for all the churches. 29 Who is weak without my feeling that weakness? Who is led astray, and I do not burn with anger? 30 If I must boast, I would rather boast about the things that show how weak I am. 31 God, the Father of our Lord Jesus, who is worthy of eternal praise, knows I am not lying. 32*

When I was in Damascus, the governor under King Aretas kept guards at the city gates to catch me. 33 I had to be lowered in a basket through a window in the city wall to escape from him.

11:16-19

As we mentioned in an earlier message, in the letters to the church in Corinth we find Paul being deeply personal and like nowhere else in his letters do we see him so open and vulnerable. He pours out his passion for these people, defends the ministry, and speaks of his personal participation in his evangelist/pastor calling from God. It would be easy to embrace one side of Paul...*one sadly acquired from reading between the lines of the letters he wrote*, and label him as some sort of a machine without feelings, emotions, or deep compassion. We can tend to place these men of God on the “hot seat” of judgement, one based on current social protocols and cultural norms, instead of focusing on one’s own personal accountability and on our individual walk of faith. It is still a lot easier to point a finger at someone else. Especially one who is no longer alive to defend himself anymore!

In this passage today, Paul is exposing all of his humanity. Not a shameful display of the flesh, but the outpouring of a human heart possessed by the passion for God and His saints. Certainly not out of line, after all, He *was* still just a man like us all. But indeed he was **God’s man**. Not special, but definitely chosen. Not supernatural, just super sold out.

Yet we cannot argue that Paul’s ministry life was rather stellar, wasn’t it? He exerted some passionate effort in attempt to shake these souls from the comfort of their pews. He painted an accurate picture of the ground of battle that the greater church faced *and yet faces*, wherein the fight is often less in evangelistic soul winning, and more in the defense of the true gospel and the “holding the line” on what it means to live out true redemption. In this text before us...and really throughout this chapter, it seems Paul is reaching deep to pull out these words. He felt compelled to defend his work, to defend his ministry. Not for *his* glory, but for the long term welfare of the Corinthian church, as well as for the greater church for years to come.

For sure he was no fool, though if it took that kind of personal self-humbling in order to be heard, then he was clearly willing. Yet it was ultimately never about *him*, but moreover about God, His kingdom, and always about the sheep...those that in 1 Corinthians 4:15 he calls his “children in the faith.” In his letter to the church in Galatia his consistent heart exclaims “*Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I’m going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives.*” (Ga 4:19)

In this text Paul meets them on their own ground. If anyone was going to try to refute his calling and authority, then he would match them ‘tit for tat.’ If they would try to usurp his leadership by claiming high religious training, social position, and a human following (however ragtag they might be)... Paul would face them down with his own credentials. But Paul’s would be more than a diploma. His would be a badge of “testing by fire.” One earned not in a day or a week, but faithfully over a lifetime...

Paul had already told the Corinthian believers that “... *preaching the Good News is not something I can boast about. I am compelled by God to do it. How terrible for me if I didn’t preach the Good News!*” Yet make no mistake. While indeed “compelled,” he was no prisoner. He still had a choice, one in which he could have simply sailed away to a tropical island and left the world to rot. Such is the “whispering voice” that comes to all pastors from time to time! But the reality is, the price of caring for other people is pain. There is no option or escaping that reality. If you do not really care about people, you will likely be spared much of what Paul experienced. But to love people is to ultimately embrace the road of Paul the apostle.

For Paul, *and many who have followed him*, the very destiny of mankind was at stake. Paul and his ilk carry not just the weight of those in their direct ministry and churches, but they carry the weight of the world.

11:20 -21

2 Corinthians 11:20-21 NLT “*You put up with it when they make you their slaves, take everything you have, take advantage of you, put on airs, and slap you in the face. I’m ashamed to say that we were not strong enough to do that! But whatever they dare to boast about—I’m talking like a fool again—I can boast about it, too.*”

No matter how we might attempt to soften this message, there seems to be no other way to interpret this passage than that Paul is “calling them out.” He is starkly stating that the Corinthians seemed quite willing to be duped. Many people today are as willing. Truth is, there is something in our flesh that always gravitates toward comfort and “shiny objects” and Paul was not so “shiny,” and he sure wasn’t “comfortable.”

Satan, manifesting as an angel of light, has always had a unique ability to draw people to himself. This is because of our fallen state. It is crucial that we know this truth! It may be inexplicable, but the fact remains that Satan looks good when he manifests himself in this world. Maybe this is because he doesn’t appear to us as a creature from a horror flick or a red devil cartoon with horns and a pitchfork! In our natural selves, He can be quite enticing. He can look so good, and seem so genuine for so long a period. I have no doubt that the apostles themselves never recognized Judas for what he really was. We too are not always aware of what...*or rather who*, is operating in our midst at any given moment. When Jesus acknowledged at the last supper that there was a wolf in their midst, they all seemed aghast, incredulous at the thought that any of them would be such a traitor. After all, they had all walked together, served the kingdom and experienced Jesus up close. Yet, the end declared the truth, and as always, at a very great cost.

Ours must be a loving yet cautious walk through this world, and frankly with a healthy dose of skepticism. We need to look to what the **Bible** says is a leader and yes, even what is a brother! We must be scripturally well versed as to what is a genuine “*died-in-the wool believing Christian*,” not what the **world** says is one! In light of that fact, we must “lay hands on no man quickly.” (1 Tim 5:22).

Well, how do we recognize these people? One, we must always look at the fruit of their lives: Is there godly peace and joy in their lives? Are they faithful to the Word in all they do? Are they consistent? Are they *givers* or are they *takers*? And do they do all that continually and do not cease in such?

Second, we look at their life ministry: Is it according to scripture? Are the people around them being transformed into the image of Christ at their example? Are their families a reflection of Christ? Because they are always a reflection of *them* after all.

Third, are they humble and accountable to others in counsel and responsibility? Or are they flying solo? Do they turn and “bite the hand that feeds them?”

And lastly, do they endure? For the bible tells us that “true repentance is a repentance not to be repented of.” In other words, they carry on and do not turn back. They “finish the race” and “keep the faith” unto the end. (2 Tim 4:7) A false witness can carry on for a long time and I have witnessed such on several occasions. But they always eventually show their hand. I believe that

such occurs because eventually...after stealing everything from them and using them as cannon fodder, even Satan abandons them.

What will come of these people? To be sure, God does not take such things lightly: Deut 28 *“It shall come to pass, if you do not obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes which I command you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you...The LORD will send on you cursing, confusion, and rebuke in all that you set your hand to do... The LORD will strike you with madness and blindness and confusion of heart. And you shall grope at noonday, as a blind man gropes in darkness; you shall not prosper in your ways; you shall be only oppressed and plundered continually, and no one shall save you.”*

11:22

The killer in this case was pride. Pride was killing these people. That malady is still a death sentence today. They thought they were *somebody*. They thought they had arrived, that they were spiritual giants. They were relying on their history, their education, and their social status.

They believed *who they were* was more important than *what they were*. It's a common stumble for us all! We can easily think that God is looking at our church attendance, our bible study participation, our service and activities to declare our standing. However the truth lies in our daily relationship with God and our fellow man. It's who we are today and what we are at the end of the race that determines our standing before God. Because you aren't done until you are done.

Paul also had all the same “credentials” that they had. He had the same bloodline, the history, the background, and the training. *But...* were they ministers of Christ? Ah, therein lies the difference. What was Paul's credentials? His seminary degree? His smooth operation and great speaking ability? No. Not if we are to believe scripture and the secular account of him.

The proof of Paul's position and standing lies in verse 23:

11:23-27

“The Apostle Paul could never forget he was a follower of the suffering Savior. He realized that the servant is not above his master, and that an apostle could not expect better treatment in the world than his Master had received. Paul reckoned that the more faithfully he served Christ and reproduced the Savior, the more abundantly he would suffer at the hands of men. To him, suffering was the mark or badge of Christ's servants.” (Believers Bible Commentary)

The liars in their midst were not willing to suffer. The liars in *our* midst are not willing to suffer. They were recognized by the overwhelming fact that they inevitably took the easy path. They ran from humility, hardships and accountability. They wanted nothing to do with the life Paul was leading nor the one he was espousing. They wanted a cheap grace, but in fact true grace was and is yet very expensive! Paul's life was the manifestation of that. Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said that :

“Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.”

They thought ministering and pastoring was about having a church building, a title, and many followers. But this passage is *Paul's* idea of ministry! Despite the pain, suffering, and trials, Paul

wrote most of the New Testament, was responsible for planting numerous churches, and was party to leading thousands to Christ. Make no mistake, these two seemingly opposing and even contrary paths are inexplicably intertwined. You cannot have the latter without the former.

Indeed...no matter what trials I face, Paul's life makes mine look very, very easy. I will try to remember that when the next hard times come my way. I need to remember that the price paid was well worth it.

11:28

Despite all the distracting trials and pain, Paul's ultimate concern was for the churches. He was the *real thing*. He loved and cared for his flock. It was never about him, it was about *them*. He would endure it all because he loved them and He loved the Lord who called him. He knew the saying first hand, "*Church making is heartbreaking. Church mending is never ending.*"

11:29

Whatever the *churches* went through, *Paul* went through. He did not remove himself from the fray. He did not attempt to insulate himself from their trials and tribulations in some ivory tower someplace. What *they* went through, *he* went through, good or bad. This is a heavy load for any man to carry. That's why a pastor must lean so heavily upon the Spirit to carry him.

11:30-31

Why would Paul boast about these things? Well, if indeed they were proof of his righteous calling, then they were his "business card." The ultimate judge of who and what he was, was his Creator. For only *He* knows the real facts, and there is no hiding from that.

11:32-33

Humility was a constant and innate part of Paul's ministry. He wasn't asking for something that he was unwilling to live out as an example. To illustrate this, Paul hearkens back to an event in his life which truly shows just how far he would go. In this case, he literally had to run for his life, being lowered over the city walls in a basket to make a getaway!

There is truly nothing glamorous about that. There is nothing glamorous about ministry at all really. The pastorate is not prestigious or grandiose. It is however a daily verification, constant trial, and "to-the-brink" testing.

Bruce Thielemann says it this way: "*There is no special honor in being called to the preaching ministry. There is only special pain. The pulpit calls those anointed to it as the sea calls its sailors; and like the sea, it batters and bruises, and does not rest. ... To preach, to really preach, is to die naked a little at a time and to know each time you do it that you're gonna have to do it again.*"

Through it all, one must be face to face with the greater understanding of our own shortcomings and inadequacies. We must daily face the fact that we are unable to carry what we have been called to carry. Thus I, as Paul was, am drawn always to the arms of Jesus because He can carry anything.

Paul's heart was that of Pastor Richard Baxter back in the 1600's... "*I preached as never sure to preach again, and as a dying man to dying men.*"

