

LESSON 20
2 CORINTHIANS 11:1-15

Paul's jealousy for the Corinthians. 11:1-6.

1 Would that ye could bear with me in a little foolishness: but indeed ye do bear with me.

2 For I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy: for I espoused you to one husband, that I might present you [as] a pure virgin to Christ.

3 But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve in his craftiness, your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity and the purity that is toward Christ.

4 For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we did not preach, or [if] ye receive a different spirit, which ye did not receive, or a different gospel, which ye did not accept, ye do well to bear with [him].

5 For I reckon that I am not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles.

6 But though [I be] rude in speech, yet [am I] not in knowledge; nay, in every way have we made [this] manifest unto you in all things.

Vv. 1-6

1) Paul has firmly stated that self-praise is inadmissible and worthless (3:1; 5:12; 10:12), but he realizes that the present situation demands it if his converts at Corinth are to be preserved intact for Christ (v.2).

a) It is not self-esteem that causes him to do so, but the menace to the Corinthians from those who, claiming a spurious authority and inflated with self-importance, had intruded themselves and their erroneous teachings into the sphere of his apostolic authority.

b) There are still those who major in self-esteem.

i) Robert H. Schuller of The Glass Cathedral fame, wrote a book entitled "Self-Esteem: The New Reformation."

ii) His definition of sin is: "Sin is any act or thought that robs myself or another human being of his or her self-esteem."

iii) He continues: "And what is 'hell'? It is the loss of pride that naturally follows separation from God – the ultimate and unfailing source of our soul's sense of self-respect."

- iv) When Christ cried out, “My God! My God! What hast thou forsaken me,” it was “because he experienced the ultimate horror – humiliation, shame, and loss of pride as a human being. A person is in hell when he has lost his self-esteem.”
- b) His antagonists were indulging in self-praise (5:12; 10:7, 12-18) and the Corinthians were evidently to a large extent sympathetic.
 - i) Consequently his hand was forced (12:11); he must indulge in foolish boasting in order to win the Corinthians' attention and gain a fair hearing.
 - ii) It is loving anxious concern for the spiritual welfare of those who are his children in Christ that moves him so strongly – so much so that he is prepared to indulge in what he calls “a little foolishness,” by speaking about himself in order to counteract the impact of the intruders who by their foolishness have been extolling themselves.
 - iii) Reluctantly (he asks his readers to “bear with” him), he decides to employ his opponents' methods; unlike theirs, his motive is not personal gain but the Corinthians' welfare (v.2).
 - iv) His reluctance is bolstered by his remembrance that they are already such as bear with him, so that he need not fear a misconstruction of his motives.
 - v) He would be boasting "in the Lord" (10:17).
- c) So he ironically requests the Corinthians' indulgence, knowing they had already been humoring "a little of...[his] foolishness" (see 6:3-10; 10:13-17).

V. 2

- 2) Paul supplies three grounds (each introduced by *gar*, "for") for his appeal to the Corinthians to bear with him:
 - a) his divine jealousy for the Corinthians especially when they were endangered (vv.2, 3);
 - b) their willingness to put up with rivals who presented an adulterated message (v.4); and
 - c) his claim not to be in the least inferior to the "super-apostles" (v.5).
 - i) With a jealousy that sprang from God and was like God's

- own jealousy for his people (e.g., Hos. 2:19-20; 4:12; 6:4; 11:8), Paul was jealous for his converts' undivided loyalty to Christ in the interval between their conversion (=betrothal to Christ) and their glorification (= presentation to Christ).
- ii) He pictures himself as the father of the bride (cf. I Cor. 4:15; 2 Cor 12:14), whose ultimate purpose in betrothing "the church of God in Corinth" (1:1) to her heavenly bridegroom Jesus Christ, was to present her as a virgin to her husband at his appearance (cf. 4:14; Eph 5:27; 1 John 3:2, 3).
 - iii) Human jealousy is a vice, but to share divine jealousy is a virtue.
 - (1) It is the motive and object of the jealousy that is all-important.
 - (2) Paul's jealousy is not a human jealousy of selfish possessiveness, it is of God.
 - (3) Jealousy for his own reputation is the farthest thing from his mind; his jealousy is projected outward and as it were protectively over the Corinthians as its object, and, being one with the jealousy that God has for those that are His, it is centered in God and the honor of His name.
 - (4) Indeed, Paul wishes them to see that theirs is a particularly intimate relationship with God, a relationship that he was involved in bring about.
 - (5) They were his work in the Lord, and the seal of his apostleship in the Lord; he had begotten them through the gospel (1 Cor. 9:1f; 4:15).
 - (6) There is a place for a spiritual father's passionate concern for the exclusive and pure devotion to Christ of his spiritual children, and also a place for anger at potential violators of that purity (11:29).
 - (7) By adding the word "one", Paul stresses the truth that, just as the marriage relationship is exclusive, so believers in Christ owe an exclusive loyalty to Him.
 - iv. It is the essence of Christology that Christ, who is the husband of God's people under the new dispensation is

none other than Jehovah, who was the husband of God's people under the old dispensation, and therefore that He is Himself very God of very God, who became man and suffered for our redemption, and who, as the risen, ascended, and glorified Lord, is the ever-living Bridegroom of those who are His.

V. 3

3) Prompting Paul's jealousy for Corinthian fidelity was his fear, based on disturbing evidence (v.4), that their minds and affections might be corrupted so that they would lose their single-minded faithfulness to Christ.

- a) Paul was concerned because he recognized that the Corinthian converts, though in grave danger of being seduced into unfaithfulness by the imposters who had invaded their community.
- b) He recognized the false apostles as Satan's agents (v.15), capable of repeating at Corinth what Satan had successfully achieved in the garden of Eden (Gen 3:13; 1 Tim 2:14)—complete deception (*exepatesen*) by cunning.
- c) What is here implicit is made explicit in vv. 13-15.
- d) The danger was not moral corruption but intellectual deception (see v.4) leading to spiritual apostasy.
 - i) They disguise themselves as ministers of light in order to hide their true operation as servants of Satan.
 - ii) Like him, they appear friendly and alluring, but like him again, they contradict the Word of God and lead their victims to spiritual disaster, described by Paul here as the corruption of their minds, that is, of their whole outlook, volitional as well as intellectual.

V. 4

4) Paul's fear had a foundation in fact.

- a) The "if" does not introduce some hypothetical condition ("if someone were to come") but an actual situation ("if, as has happened, someone comes").
 - i) In justification of his plea for the Corinthians' tolerance of his enforced boasting (v.1), Paul ironically appeals to the ready welcome they gave visitors who came proclaiming a message other than the gospel that they had embraced and that had brought them salvation.
 - ii) Surely they ought to show their father in the faith the same degree of tolerance they showed a newcomer preaching a different faith!
- b) It is impossible to reconstruct the precise content of the message of these false apostles, and it is uncertain whether Paul is here alluding to the Holy Spirit or to a spirit of fear and slavery (Rom 8:15; 2 Tim 1:7) as opposed to a spirit of peace and freedom (Rom 14:17; 2 Cor 3:17).
- c) What seems clear, however, is that the willingness of the Corinthian believers to entertain the eloquent preacher of an adulterated gospel (cf. Gal 1:6-9) that gave an interpretation of the earthly ministry of Jesus and the function of the Spirit radically different from Paul's illustrated their tendency to look "only on the surface of things" (10:7) and their preoccupation with manner rather than matter (1 Cor 1:17; 2:1, 4, 5; 13:1; 2 Cor 10:10; 11:6).

V. 5

- 5) The third justification for the request of v. 1a now appears; from expressions of concern, Paul now turns to personal defense.
 - a) Still engaging in his "senseless" but pardonable self-praise, Paul expresses his opinion that he is in no way inferior to the "super-apostles."
 - b) As discussed last week, the "super apostles" were the false teachers who had come among the Corinthians.
 - i) They apparently had at first presented themselves as those who carried out their mission on the same basis as Paul (11:12).
 - ii) But they had adopted an authoritarian stance in Corinth

- and succeeded in imposing their authority upon the church (11:19-21).
- c) Their teaching cannot be known with certainty; however, some things are certain:
- i) They prided themselves on belonging to Christ (10:7);
 - ii) They preached a gospel different from the one Paul preached (11:4); and
 - iii) They prided themselves on their speaking ability (11:6).
- d) As far as Paul was concerned these men were not true apostles.
- i) His accusation that they preached another gospel reminds us of Gal. 1:6-9.
 - ii) In that case the opponents were Judaizers, a name coined to describe Christian Jews who sought to impose upon Gentile converts the obligation of law and to make them submit to circumcision.
 - iii) Paul's language here seems to make no such charge, and there appears to be other differences as well.
 - 1) Paul's Corinthian opponents laid great stress upon oratorical skills
 - 2) The "super apostles" seemed to lay stress on the importance of v (12:1-2), displays of power to prove that Christ spoke through them (13:3), and the so-called apostolic signs (12:11-13).
 - 3) Thus, Paul's Corinthian opponents seemed to have borrowed much
- e) In saying that he was not in the least inferior to these false apostles, Paul is not saying that they are his superiors or even that they are his equals.
- i) He is just responding to their claims.
 - ii) Later he will make his own claims and assert that he is superior to them (vv. 21b-33).

V. 6

- 6) This is not an explanation of the truth of v.5.

- a) To admit an exception ("I may not be a trained speaker") immediately after the bold assertion, "I am in no way inferior" (v.5), would be intolerable.
- b) Rather, Paul is rating himself by the criteria used by the Corinthians to assess the credentials of apostles or visiting missionaries.
- c) With regard to his lack of professional training and skill in rhetoric, Paul is quite willing to admit his deficiency (cf. 10:10) and perhaps even his inferiority to the "false apostles."
- d) But in his judgment his expertise in knowledge, which he had made perfectly clear to the Corinthians, more than compensated for this deficiency. Matter was more significant than manner (cf. v.4 and 1 Cor 2:13, NIV).
 - i) The false teachers sought to commend themselves by rhetorical art and philosophical-religious *gnosis* calculated to appeal to the Greek mind, hoping to discredit him by highlighting his deficiencies.
 - ii) Recall in his first letter that he had already exposed the incompatibility of
 - iii) While Paul would concede that he was not a professional speaker, it would
 - iv) The Athenians may have called him a "babbler," but they took him to the Areopagus which was either the famous forum for public speaking or, some suppose, the supreme council of Athens, to hear more of what he had to say.
- e) The contrast was between rhetoric and preaching.
 - i) Rhetoric was superficial, artificial, formal, ephemeral, attractive to the ear, but unrelated to the depth of human need.
 - ii) Preaching is direct, serious, earnest, directed to the heart and mind and will, related to eternal issues, concerned with the message rather than with the method of its utterance.
 - iii) The former is applauded because it appeals to human adulation; the latter is unapplauded because it brings men face to face with God.
- e) William Barclay tells of a "famous story" of a company of people who dined together. It was their custom after dinner that each would recite something. A well-known actor arose and recited the 23rd Psalm using all of his resources of elocution and dramatic art. He sat down to thunderous applause. He was followed by a quiet man who also began to recite the 23rd

Psalm. At first there was a quiet titter that went through the room, but before he finished there was a stillness that was more eloquent than any applause. Finally, breaking the silence, the actor spoke, "Sir, I know the Psalm, but you know the Shepherd." Matter is more significant than manner!

Financial dependence and independence. 11:7-12.

7 Or did I commit a sin in abasing myself that ye might be exalted, because I preached to you the gospel of God for naught?

8 I robbed other churches, taking wages [of them] that I might minister unto you;

9 and when I was present with you and was in want, I was not a burden on any man; for the brethren, when they came from Macedonia, supplied the measure of my want; and in everything I kept myself from being burdensome unto you, and [so] will I keep [myself].

10 As the truth of Christ is in me, no man shall stop me of this glorying in the regions of Achaia.

11 Wherefore? because I love you not? God knoweth.

12 But what I do, that I will do, that I may cut off occasion from them that desire an occasion; that wherein they glory, they may be found even as we.

Vv. 7-8

- 1) In spite of what Paul had written in 1 Corinthians 9:3-18 about the matter, the believers at Corinth had been influenced by the pseudo-apostles into thinking that the acceptance of remuneration for teaching was another criterion of true apostolicity.
 - a) Their thought seemed to be: "If it is the apostles' right to refrain from working for a living and to get their living by the gospel [1 Cor 9:6, 14], why has Paul always refused to accept our gifts and yet receives support from other churches?"
 - b) No doubt Paul's rivals interpreted his refusal as evidence of his being a false apostle.
- 2) In his defense, notable for its powerful irony, Paul makes two points.
 - a) He committed no offense, surely, simply by waiving his apostolic right to support (1 Cor 9:12, 15, 18) so that no one could charge him with peddling God's word for profit (2:17).
 - b) Second, his purpose in "humbling" himself in the Corinthians'

eyes to undertake manual labor while ministering to them (see Acts 18:3) was to "elevate" them above their inherited idolatry and vicious past (v.7; cf. 4:12; 8:9), just as his "robbing" other churches of money they could not really spare was motivated solely by his desire to serve the Corinthians gratuitously and more effectively (v.8).

- i) It was Paul's policy not to accept financial support from churches in which he was currently ministering.
- ii) The fact that Paul says he robbed other churches to preach to the Corinthians implies, if it does not state, that Corinth is indebted to these other churches that had generously helped to supply Paul's wages.

V. 9

- 3) During his initial visit to Corinth (Fall A.D. 50-Spring A.D. 52), Paul had at first supported himself by plying his trade as a "leather-worker" (*skenopoios*, Acts 18:3), but on the arrival of Silas and Timothy from Macedonia, "he began to devote himself entirely to preaching" (*syneicheto to logo*, Acts 18:5).
 - a) It is a fair inference from the present verse that the reason for this alteration in Paul's daily schedule was that the "brothers who came from Macedonia" brought monetary gifts from Philippi (Phil 4:15) and possibly Thessalonica (cf. 1 Thess 3:6).
 2. Providentially the gift arrived just when his resources had failed and he had begun to feel need (*hysteretheis*).
 3. Even in this extremity he had not been a burden to anyone.
 4. Financial independence would continue to be his policy with regard to Corinth.

Vv. 10-12

- 4) This policy, which enabled Paul to boast that he was preaching the gospel free of charge (v.7; cf. 1 Cor 9:18), he resolutely refused to abandon (cf. 1 Cor 9:15).
 - a) It was Christ's truth he was speaking when he affirmed that he would not bow to pressure from his opponents anywhere in Achaia regarding this issue (v.10).

- b) As to the motive for Paul's inflexible policy, two conflicting explanations are mentioned.
- i) Some had malevolently asserted that it was evidence of his lack of affection for the Corinthians; there were no limits to how far these intruders would go in order to alienate the Apostle from his dearly beloved children in the gospel.
 - ii) Paul dismisses this by appealing to God's knowledge of his heart, "God knows" (v. 11).
 - 1) This was a cry from the heart.
 - 2) Words and explanations and justifications are out of place when the relationship involved is that between a father and his children.
 - 3) Paul leaves this monstrous insinuation that he has no love for them to the judgment of God, who knows and will vindicate the truth.
 - 4) In so doing he also leaves it to their consciences.
- c) His own explanation is given in v.12.
- i) The force of this verse is not clear from many translations: Paul is saying that what it was his practice to do (namely, to refuse pay from those to whom he ministered), that he would continue to do so, in order that he might remove the opportunity from those that desired an opportunity for being found on a level with him in the work in which they boast.
 - ii) Like the wandering preachers of the day, the intruders at Corinth had apparently received some remuneration for their instruction.
 - iii) Regarding themselves as in some sense apostles, they probably felt fully within their rights in accepting or even demanding appropriate wages; this validated their apostleship.
 - iv) But Paul's stance was an acute embarrassment to them, for they could not boast as he did about preaching a message gratuitously.
 - v) This, then, was Paul's motive for persisting in his longstanding policy—to deprive his opponents of the opportunity they longed for so they might boast that they were working at Corinth on precisely the same terms he had been.

- vi) He hoped his financial independence would highlight his rivals' financial dependence and cause the Corinthians to rethink their attitude toward him.

False apostles. 11:13-15.

13 For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, fashioning themselves into apostles of Christ.

14 And no marvel; for even Satan fashioneth himself into an angel of light.

15 It is no great thing therefore if his ministers also fashion themselves as ministers of righteousness, whose end shall be according to their works.

V. 13-15

- 5) The time has come for Paul to drop the veil of irony and to speak in the plainest possible terms in denunciation of these would-be super-apostles who have invaded his territory in Achaia. Paul does not even contest the right of his adversaries to support but rather lays against them a single all-embracing charge.
 - a) Those who vaunted their apostleship and vainly sought equality with him were in fact "false apostles," apostolic pretenders who passed themselves off as "righteous servants" of Christ (cf. 1:23) while in reality they were agents of Satan.
 - b) Like their principal, the arch-deceiver (John 8:44) whose habit was to masquerade "as a shining angel," they relied on disguise and deceit in carrying out their nefarious schemes such as the corruption of the intellect and the diversion of the affections from Christ (vv.3, 4).
 - i) What was false was not simply their claim to apostleship but also their message.
 - ii) Behind both were Satanic designs upon the Corinthians—designs Paul was well aware of (2:11).
 - c) The destiny of these men would accord with the actual deeds they performed (cf. 5:10; Phil 3:19), not the outward appearance they adopted (cf. 5:12).
 - d) As preachers of "a different gospel" (v.4), they stood under the anathema of Galatians 1:8, 9.
- 6) When referring to the "super-apostles" (11:5; 12:11), Paul shows remarkable restraint; he is not their inferior in any respect.

- a) But he does not hesitate to attack ruthlessly the Judaizing intruders from Jerusalem.
- b) In one case Paul is defensive and mildly ironical; in the other case he is polemical and intensely serious.
- c) Part of the Pauline solution was outright condemnation, since the intruders were minions of Satan who sought to impose certain elements of Jewish teaching and practice on Gentile Christians as prerequisites for salvation.
 - i) Since Satan transforms himself into an angel of light (the word use here is the same as that used in Phil. 3:21 where Paul describes the tra
 - ii) Jesus denounced Satan as the father of lying, having no truth in him (John 8:44).
 - iii) So far is he from being an angel of light that it is darkness that is his proper sphere (cf. Luke 22:53; Eph. 6:12; Col. 1:13).
 - iv) To turn from Satan unto God is to turn from darkness to light (Acts 26:13).
- d) God, in antithesis to Satan “is light and in him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5).
- e) It is God’s Word that dispels the darkness and causes the light of salvation to shine in our hearts (4:6); light can have no communion with darkness (6:14).
- f) Nothing is more inconsistent than for Satan to pose as an angel of light.
 - i) He can do so only by falsehood, that is by the contradiction of God’s Word, as he has done from the beginning, and by his lies he murders the souls of men.
 - ii) In denying the truth of the Word of God and promising life to the sinner (Gen. 3:4), he was both a liar and a murderer, for the seed of unbelief and disobedience that he sowed in the heart of man was also and inevitably the seed of death.
 - iii) Death follows sin as certainly as darkness follows the setting of the sun (cf. John 8:44; Rom. 5:16-17, 6:23; Jas. 1:15; Eph. 2:1, 5).
- g) Concerning these false apostles, Paul adds that their “end shall be according to their works.”
 - i) It is characteristic of Paul to comment in this manner of the final destiny of those who willfully oppose or pervert the gospel of Jesus Christ.

- ii) Thus in Phil. 3:18f. he speaks of “enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is perdition.”
- iii) In 2 Tim. 4:14 he says of Alexander the coppersmith who did him much evil: “The Lord will render to him according to his works.”
- iv) Cf. also Rom. 6:21; 2 Thess. 1:8f.