

Bold, Part 19: “True Apostles vs. False Apostles”

2 Corinthians 11:1-15

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[SERMON MANUSCRIPT]

Introduction

Hello church family and friends visiting us today! As I mentioned earlier, we are trying a live sermon today and then some time to interact with each other- simply just some sharing and praying for each other. My main reason for this is not just to try something different, but to help facilitate *being the church together* while we're still locked down and in the thick of this pandemic. I've been praying about what we need in order to be healthy and faithful as a church and I have a few introductory thoughts...

First, we need God's Word. Psalm 119:25 says, *My soul clings to the dust; give me life according to your word!* When our souls feel empty and dry- like through this pandemic that has gone on way too long- we must turn to God's words to give life to our souls. So we're gathered here to hear God's Word preached. I can say confidently that we as your church elders will work very hard to feed you well.

Second, we need each other. It's very easy to drift off in isolation when we feel like we're in the "desert," but what we need to do is resist being absent- physically but also emotionally- from our gatherings. But we're here together, as Hebrews 10:24-25 says, *to stir up one another to love and good works and to encourage one another to persevere until the very end.* Unfortunately we don't know when this pandemic will end. We need each other to persevere...we will persevere if we stick together!

Third, we need God's Spirit. We've been talking about how this season's "rallying cry" is to focus on discipling each other. And as we commit ourselves to this as a church, we can be sure that Jesus has sent the Holy Spirit to teach us (John 14:26), to guide us in truth (John 16:13), and to bring true transformation of heart (Galatians 5:22). So let's be led by the Spirit and open that he will pour out his grace upon us as we're gathered here today.

So are you ready? There's no time more crucial than now that we need to **BE THE CHURCH**. These days we're working through the book of 2 Corinthians. Today's sermon is titled "True Apostles vs. False Apostles" and it's from 2 Corinthians 11:1-15.

Scripture Reading

We are in the section of this letter where Paul has been addressing a small group within the church of Corinth that has been questioning Paul's authority as an apostle to them. There were other men who had come who were far more impressive outwardly- eloquent, charismatic, and talented- and were casting doubt on Paul because he didn't quite measure up to them.

Paul shared his confidence that he was a servant of Christ and did not need to compare himself to others (10:7-12). He sought after the Lord's commendation alone in his ministry (10:13-18). Paul continued his defense as a "true apostle" by contrasting himself with the "false apostles" that were opposing him in today's passage. Let's go ahead and read it. This is God's Word...

2 Corinthians 11:1-15 (ESV):

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.

Amen!

Proposition

Paul's main point can be summarized in this way- this is the "one thing" that we can take to heart from 2 Corinthians 11:1-15:

***Discern the true gospel of Christ
and live it out- together as a church!***

Organizational Statement

There are three things that Paul did in order to help the church in Corinth to ***discern the true gospel of Christ and live it out- together as a church***. First, he *distinguished* the true gospel of Christ (in verses 1-6); second, he *demonstrated* the true gospel of Christ (in verses 7-11); and third, he *defended* the true gospel of Christ (in verses 12-15).

Transition: Alright church, let's ***discern the true gospel of Christ and live it out- together as a church***, first by seeing how...

Sermon Outline

I. Paul distinguished the true gospel of Christ (vv. 1-6).

- A. In verses 1-6, he made clear that the message his opponents preached was different than true gospel of Christ that he preached as a genuine apostle.
 1. [For this point, I'm going to specifically highlight this ...] Truth #1: Our goal as a church is to stay on the path of sincere and pure devotion to Christ until he returns.
 - a) In verse 1, Paul wrote: *I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness*. Why was this "foolishness"? He was actually using a bit of irony here, turning the criticism of his opponents into the very reasons why they should accept him and his message. Basically, Paul would engage in this foolish talk in order to show that his opponents were actually the fools. In verse 6, Paul said that even though he might not be as skilled as a speaker, he was skilled in *knowledge*- in knowing the gospel and its implications in people's lives. This was his special set of skills as the "apostle to the Gentiles." What he did here was that he pointed out strongly of *who they were as the church* and *what they were called to be doing*.
 - b) First, let's talk about *who they were as the church*. Paul considered himself like a father (that was in verse 2) to the Corinthians because God used him to start the church there. The Corinthian church was like Paul's own daughter, whom he handed over to Christ to

be betrothed. That word “betrothed” is an old-fashioned term that was part of the process when a man and woman got married: the first step was the betrothal and the second step was the wedding- the betrothal (step 1) is a legal, initial but-not-yet-complete step; the wedding (step 2) is the final consummation of the marriage.

- c) Context: This is something important from verse 2 that we need to park on for some time. Who are we, if we believe in Jesus Christ as his disciple? Who are we, if we consider ourselves a true Christian? We are the bride of Jesus Christ: loved, chosen, forgiven, and cleansed from sin- now betrothed to the Savior and King of the universe! We are Christ’s bride! And we are securely Christ’s, betrothed to him- waiting faithfully for him to return for the final wedding- but fully loved, accepted, and belonging to God! This is your identity and mine: This is something to live up to!
- d) Context: In theological terms, our betrothal- the first step in our relationship with Jesus- is our justification. We are made right with God- through Christ’s sacrifice of his life as the substitute sacrifice for our sins. We are legally made right before God by Jesus; thus, when God sees us, he no longer regards us as guilty of sin but as righteous- we are credited Christ’s righteousness, to be precise. This is our status before God as soon as we believe in Jesus; this status is secure throughout our whole lives as we trust in Jesus. Our wedding day- the second step in our relationship with Jesus- is our glorification. This is when we will be united with Christ physically, perfectly, and forever. This is the final goal of our faith, to be faithful when he returns and takes us home to be with him for eternity.
- e) Context: For friends here who do not yet know this, this is the “good news” for you! God loves you with an everlasting love; he offers this salvation to you as a gift. If you acknowledge that you are a sinner and that you can’t do anything to save yourself, and if you put your trust in Jesus Christ as the only way your sins can be forgiven- the Bible promises that you will be saved. If you believe in Jesus, you are justified by faith in Christ and you will be glorified when Jesus returns. I want to invite you to take that first step of receiving God’s gift of salvation and starting your new relationship with God today.
- f) Second, let’s talk about *what they were called to be doing*- or in Paul’s words here, the path that they were to walk on as the church. The reason he did this was because he was concerned that the church in Corinth- or at least a small number of them within the church- were being led astray by some false apostles and their false message. Paul wrote in verse 3 that he was worried that the saints in Corinth would be *led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ*. You see, the Corinthians erred on being too “open-minded,” In Paul’s words, they willingly listened when these supposed “apostles” proclaimed another Jesus than what he and his team proclaimed; they willingly received a different spirit than the Holy Spirit that they had received from he and his team; they willingly accepted a different gospel than the Gospel they originally received when Paul founded the church.
- g) These critical differences made Paul “jealous”- but it wasn’t a human, selfish jealousy. He had a *divine jealousy* for them- his heart was God’s heart for them, that they would be solely Jesus’ bride. He wanted them to know the truth about Jesus from the Scriptures; he wanted them to receive the Holy Spirit who would guide them to the truth; he wanted them to accept the true, biblical Gospel and reject any other counterfeits. In other words, Paul wanted them to have that *sincere and pure devotion to Christ* while they walked the path from justification to glorification. This path from justification to glorification is the theological term “sanctification”- it’s growing in sincerity and devotion to Jesus!
- h) Context: This leads us to the truth I want to highlight here in this first point: ***Our goal as a church is to stay on the path of sincere and pure devotion to Christ until he returns.*** Look at this graphic called “The Cross Chart” (which I got from the website, “The Gospel-Centered Life”). Notice the two lines that split off from each other. The top line is a

growing awareness of God's holiness- not that God's holiness changes, but as we are in relationship with God, we grow to understand how holy he is! The bottom line is a *growing awareness of my flesh and sinfulness*- by God's grace we are changing to be more like Christ in our obedience and character, but we also become more aware of how deep our depravity goes. As both happen on our path of sanctification, Christ becomes bigger and bigger in our lives!

- i) Context: This is important because sometimes we wrongly think that we're saved by God's grace (that inflection point), but our sanctification is up to us- we either have to perform or at least pretend that we're true "Christians." Any thinking or teaching that makes us perform or pretend are false gospels! The truth is that we'll always need the true, biblical gospel in our lives- we need his grace because he is far more holy than we understood before and we are far more sinful than we understood before. Our sincerity- genuineness and freedom from deceit- grows and our pure devotion- love and loyalty- to Christ grows as we walk in the true, biblical gospel!

Transition: So first, Paul distinguished the true gospel of Christ, exhorting the Corinthians to *discern the true gospel of Christ and live it out- together as a church*. Now, second let's see how...

II. Paul demonstrated the true gospel of Christ (vv. 7-11).

A. In verses 7-11, he made clear that his intentional practice of embodying Christ's values actually confirmed the authenticity of his apostleship.

1. [For this point, I'm going to specifically highlight this...] Truth #2: Our responsibility as a church is to faithfully embody Christ's values, no matter what the results may be.
 - a) Let me explain what is going on between Paul and the Corinthian church that led to what he wrote. Paul's opponents accused him of not being a "real" or "reputable" apostle because he didn't demand compensation for his ministry to the Corinthians. Additionally, Paul's opponents accused him of not being a "qualified" or "learned" apostle because he worked to support himself as a tentmaker for a time. You see, back then people who earned a living through manual labor were looked down upon as inferior to those who earned a living through just thinking and talking- this same kind of incorrect mindset happens today too.
 - b) Furthermore, Paul's opponents put the idea into the minds of some of the Corinthian church that Paul did not sincerely love them because he did not exert his authority like the other, more impressive, supposed apostles. But contrary to what others said, Paul claimed in verse 10 that the *truth of Christ* was in him and that God knew that Paul did everything out of love for them.
 - c) On a side note (if you're thinking critically here), Paul's argument sounds a little like, "He said, she said," in that he claimed that he spoke the truth...and his opponents also claimed that they spoke the truth. For everything in this life, we can't just accept everything that people claim to be true- we need to *discern what is true*. Paul started out his letter by claiming to be *an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God (1:1)*. He challenged them in chapter 3 (2 Corinthians 3:1-3) to think about the validity of his ministry to them: to examine the Scriptures themselves regarding what he taught them about Christ as God's promised King and Savior. As they straightened this out, they themselves- collectively as a church- would be his *letter of recommendation*, the work of God's covenant of grace through the Holy Spirit.
 - d) Context: *Here's the first connection in this second part that I want to make for us*. The power to transform is not in the messenger, but in the message! This is a subtle point that Paul is making- but I want to scream it out here! Paul constantly makes clear in this letter (and in his other New Testament letters) that in God's covenant of grace, God did this miraculous work of salvation in people's hearts- thus it was truly foolish to think that it was him at all that was responsible for the salvation of the church- for their

regeneration, justification, sanctification, or glorification. It was 100% the work of God's grace! Paul certainly experienced a lot of good results in his ministry in Corinth, BUT it was not his doing or power that made it happen.

- e) So then, there's another important question that comes out of this text: *Why did Paul choose to do his ministry in this particular way?* It was because he wanted to distinguish himself from the "false apostles" who sought only to financially profit from their ministry- even claiming that this was a mark of their authenticity. These "super-apostles" impressed the Corinthian believers with their personal charisma, speaking eloquence, and abounding knowledge. It is also likely that these super-apostles had some good results in their ministry: people being introduced to Christ, starting their journey of faith, and being stimulated to grow. But in contrast- and this is really important- Paul *demonstrated the true gospel of Christ* in a much different way than them. Even though his critics attacked him for the way he lived his life, Paul faithfully embodied Christ's values.
- f) Let's slow it down again and focus on a couple key phrases from the text that show why Paul chose to do his ministry in this particular way. In verse 7, he wrote: *in humbling myself so that you might be exalted*. Some accused him of sinning- that he was doing the Corinthians wrong in accepting support from the Macedonian churches. But Paul said that he did this so that the Corinthians would be "exalted." He was willing to take menial work and appear weak and lowly in order for them to be saved by God and thus "exalted"- and by "exalted" I believe that Paul means that they were transformed into Christ's beautiful bride! Paul also said in verse 7 that he *preached God's gospel* to the Corinthians *free of charge in order to serve* them. He followed the footsteps of the Lord Jesus himself by serving the Corinthians- not seeking to be served by them, but doing twice the work and humbling himself so that they would see the true gospel through the way he lived his life.
- g) Context: This is the second connection I want to make here- the truth that I want to highlight from this second part, which is that ***our responsibility as a church is to faithfully embody Christ's values, no matter what the results may be***. Remember that the results of ministry are up to God- he can use anyone to do his will; what matters for us is how we conduct ourselves- how we embody the values that Christ values. Paul followed Christ's footsteps in his humility, service, and desire to build up others. Others criticized him for being this way- but this was Christ's way as well!
- h) Context: This is also the takeaway as we consider the spiritual "heroes" who have fallen and failed us- there are plenty of very famous ones that you might have heard of like Ravi Zacharias and Mark Driscoll. God might have used them in people's lives- maybe even some of our own here. I have my own personal spiritual "heroes" that have stumbled and fallen as well- it's been painful to see this happen and I grieve for them and the many who are negatively affected. God can and in many occasions does work because it is always by his grace. In fact, this is the danger of so many celebrity preachers who have big media platforms: the majority of people listening do not have any idea if they truly faithfully embody Christ's values or not- and sadly, many don't.
- i) Context: But let's bring it closer to home for us- for *you and me!* Our responsibility as a church- this spiritual family- is to faithfully embody Christ's values in our daily lives. It matters how we treat people we work with. It matters how we speak to our family members. It matters how we conduct ourselves when no one else is around us. Do we embody Christ's humility? His mercy? His kindness? His purity? Like I mentioned before, this doesn't mean performing or pretending- this is walking the path sincere and pure devotion to Christ, living in the biblical gospel. And the path of sanctification promises true change of heart so that we actually do embody Christ's values more and more in our lives- his humility, mercy, kindness, and purity. Most of the time, this just means being honest and humble before God- this gets us back on the path of sincerity and pure devotion to Christ.

Transition: So first, Paul distinguished the true gospel of Christ and second, Paul demonstrated the true gospel of Christ, exhorting the Corinthians to *discern the true gospel of Christ and live it out- together as a church*. Finally, third let's see how...

III. Paul defended the true gospel of Christ (vv. 12-15).

- A. In verses 12-15, he reiterated his commitment to defend the true gospel of Jesus Christ and expose the false gospel of his opponents in Corinth.
1. [For this point, I'm going to specifically highlight this...] Truth #3: Our best defense as a church is to learn the Bible and disciple each other to discern truth and falsehood.
 - a) Paul said in verse 12, *And what I am doing I will continue to do*. What was he doing again? He chose to not ask for money from the Corinthians for himself and for his ministry to them; he chose to even take on a second job (as a tentmaker) if he needed in order to make ends meet. He did this to make sure that the Corinthians knew that the Gospel of Jesus Christ was not something to "sell" to people to make money; he did this to make sure that the Corinthians knew that Jesus Christ valued humility and service and used hardships in his disciples lives for their good and for his glory. He made sure to *undermine the claim of those who claimed that their work was the same as Paul's work*.
 - b) Then Paul spoke very frankly and bluntly in verses 13-15. He said that these false apostles were literally *servants* of Satan himself! And as Satan disguises himself often as *an angel of light*, so these false apostles disguised themselves *as servants of righteousness*. What this meant was that these false apostles appeared good, attractive, and convincing. But in truth, they were evil, misleading, and deceitful. They would be exposed eventually on the Judgment Day and they would ultimately be condemned.
 - c) Context: As I'm going to conclude soon, I need to park on this a bit as a warning to all of us. What this compels us to do- in light of how Satan disguises himself as an angel of light- is that we have to really develop spiritual sharpness in discerning truth and what is truly from the Lord Jesus. How do we do this? First, we develop a sharpness in knowing and applying the Word of God in our lives- this is biblical wisdom isn't it? We all can know what the truth is by carefully examining and studying the Scriptures for ourselves.
 - d) Context: For example, most of you know that we spent the last six weeks in the U.S. and our kids were exposed to a lot more American media. Specifically, there were a lot of things that we watched that depicted same-sex attraction, gender identity questions, and other confusing stuff. It was also challenging because some people very close to us identify themselves as gay. If left to my own, I'm not sure if I would've been able to think about these issues on my own or how I would've addressed those issues with our kids. But Nickey and I talked about it together, which helped me process not only our convictions on it- our biblical beliefs- but also how to address it with both sensitivity and clarity. It's easy to get it wrong when we're alone; but we're not alone- we can figure things out together!
 - e) Context: This is a somber and serious warning- and thankfully this responsibility to defend the gospel (by defend, what I mean is thinking and living consistently with the gospel) is a community effort- it's something we do together as a church body. We disciple each other by continuing to be life-on-life, which is especially important during this pandemic. The issues don't have to be that big: how to handle conflicts with parents; how to address mental health issues with employees or colleagues; how to relate with a neighbor who is a different religion. This is the third connection I want to make here- the truth that I want to highlight from this third part, which is that ***our best defense as a church is to learn the Bible and disciple each other to discern truth and falsehood***.

- f) **Context:** We gather together as a church- in Sunday Celebration or in LIFE group- in order to give us opportunities to learn God's Word together and discuss how its gospel truths ought to look like in our lives. A lot of times it's not going to be neat and tidy- it will be messy and confusing to figure out. And that is absolutely ok! Grounded in the Bible, we can then discuss how our daily lives are affected by the gospel- in our families, dating, friendships, work and studies, motives and goals, conversations, sexuality, entertainment, finances, hobbies, and everything else under the sun. As we do this- this is living life together- the greater clarity we will have in our following of Jesus Christ- walking the path of sincere and pure devotion of Christ. We can't just do this by ourselves, on our own- especially during this pandemic while we're locked down. We can't just do it by listening to sermons at home by ourselves! Even though we have to be online it does not mean we have to be alone! We are still the church! Let's fight for this and all take on this responsibility for ourselves and for this body of Christ!

Transition: Ok- I've talked for awhile now how Paul distinguished, demonstrated, and defended the true gospel of Christ, exhorting the Corinthians and us to *discern the true gospel of Christ and live it out-together as a church*. Now let's go to the...

Conclusion

IV. Life Application

- A. **These next steps can be started right away, as I mentioned already. There are two personal questions to think about in light of today's sermon.**
1. First, what false gospels tempt you off the path of sincere and pure devotion to Christ?
 - a) By "false gospels," I mean any ways of thinking that are contrary to the gospel, or any activities or even people that we look to for meaning or security. Identify these false gospels and repent of them, turning to Jesus Christ as our salvation- he justifies us, he sanctifies us, he glorifies us. This leads us to the next question...
 2. Second, what areas of your life do you need Christ to change so that you embody his values?
 - a) Like I said before, a sincere and pure devotion to Christ isn't performing or pretending. Remember the cross chart: we grow in our awareness of God's holiness; we grow in our awareness of our flesh and sinfulness; our dependence upon Christ and his cross grows. And as he becomes greater in our lives, we can trust he also changes us from the inside out!

Transition: In a moment we're going to go back into breakout rooms for you to 1) *share your thoughts*, 2) *speak gospel truth and encouragement to each other*, and 3) *briefly pray for one another today*. It probably won't be enough time, so you can also reconnect with each other this week or make sure you share it with other people- perhaps with your spouse or with a friend. For those of you who are a bit hesitant to interact or share with people, I'd like to encourage you to try! If you absolutely don't want to, no worries- just join your breakout room and listen. Some breakout rooms might have more than two people in it, in which case you just need to share briefly and make sure everyone gets to share. We'll get back together after 10 minutes to close out our Sunday Celebration today.

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