

## Guarding Against the Deception of the Devil

2Corinthians 11:1-15

*It was shortly after supper one evening, I believe Michelle and I were still sitting at the table in our second apartment when the phone rang.*

I answered the phone saying, “hello” expecting a response right away but there was an extended pause.

If I had known better I would have hung up right away, but instead I said, “hello” a second time.

After the second hello a voice came on saying, “Can I speak to Michael Sealy please!”

I said, “Speaking.” He said, “Yes, Mr. Sealy my name is (whatever his name was) I am calling on behalf of such and such a collection agency.”

I said, “Uh huh!” He said, “I am calling because you have an overdue balance on your visa card of \$7000 and we need to know how you are planning to pay that balance.”

*I said, “I’m not planning to pay it because I don’t have a visa card.”*

He then proceeded to confirm with me some of my personal information.

I confess I definitely shared more than I should have and am thankful that Michelle stopped me from going farther, and am further thankful that it didn’t come to anything.

From that moment on I made it a hard life rule to not do anything financial or share any personal information over the phone.

It’s a good thing to because things have only gotten worse over the years.

I’ve had a warrant out for my arrest at least twenty times.

I’ve received fake blackmail requesting large sums of money and if I didn’t pay they would tell everyone something bad about me.

It’s even worse now with AI being able to use the voice of people you know asking for money.

*I googled how much money people are scammed out of and came across an NBC news article that said in 2022 Americans lost \$8.8 billion dollars to fraud which was up 30% from the previous year.*

I would be surprised if that number has gone down in the last two years.

It is a staggering amount and that is just the US. I shudder to think how many people have lost substantial amounts even their life savings to these kinds of deceptions.

It something that all of us would be wise to guard against these days.

Avoid clicking on links that are too good to be true.

Don't give out personal information.

If a loved one calls you out of blue asking for help hang up and call them back.

If someone calls and tells you there is a problem with your computer hang up and call someone you know instead.

If there is a warrant out for your arrest wait for the police to show up and take you away.

I wish it wasn't this way, but unfortunately many people in the world are working to scam people and if you don't want to be robbed you need to be on your guard.

[As believers we should know that we need to guard much more than our bank accounts in this world. We also need to guard our souls against the deception of devil. Just like there are things we can do to protect against financial scams there are things we can do to guard against spiritual scams as well. That is the subject of our text this morning in **2Corinthians 11:1-15**. In this passage the apostle Paul pleads with the Corinthians about people that have worked their way into the church and have attempted to draw these believers away from true gospel ministry. We learn in these verses that this is more than just a problem with people trying to deceive the church, we learn that these liars are actually servants of the devil, and we learn some lessons about how to guard against such things. There are at least three important lessons for us here about standing against the lies of Satan. The first is this, that...]

**Point #1 – Guarding against the devil requires a passion for people and truth. (Verses 1-4)**

Satan is neither lazy nor neutral in his desire to ruin humanity and so neither can we be lazy or neutral in the fight against him.

Verse 1 begins with what seems like a strange request.

As we will see the 'foolishness' that Paul is talking about here is talking about himself and his qualifications as an apostle.

Why would he do that? Listen to the words of proverbs 26:4-5!

***“Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you will be like him yourself. Answer a fool according to his folly, or he will be wise in his own eyes.”***

The point is that sometimes answering a fool on his terms will turn you into a fool and sometimes answering a fool on his terms will reveal his foolishness.

So the apostle here is entering into an exercise that he would rather not because he feels it necessary to show the Corinthians their own foolishness.

He gives us his first reason for doing this in **verse 2**.

When we first hear the word 'jealousy' we might think of it in a negative light.

People can be jealous of other people in the sense of wanting what they have.

People can be jealous in the sense of feeling threatened by other people.

That kind of jealousy often creates bitterness, anger, and shows itself through controlling and manipulative behaviour.

That kind of jealousy is bad. But here Paul says he feels 'divine jealousy' for the Corinthians.

The kind of jealousy that God displays is a good thing.

*Godly jealousy is a passionate desire to see the things that belong to God be devoted to God.*

That is Paul's point here. When he told them about the good news of Jesus dying for their sins and being raised from the dead and they believed it they went from being enemies of God under His wrath to being His people loved with an immeasurable love.

He says it is like the church had been "betrothed" to Christ.

Paul is thinking along the lines of the Jewish marriages of his day.

At that time there were two ceremonies the betrothal ceremony which was an engagement and the actual wedding which usually took place about a year after the betrothal.

Once the engagement ceremony took place there was no turning back, the couple was to be committed to one another in their thoughts, affections, and bodies as though they were husband and wife even though they were not yet living under the same roof.

Paul is seeing their faith in the gospel as a betrothal to Christ with His return being the actual wedding and he is jealous for them to remain faithful to their saviour.

He has a passion for people.

He also has a passion for truth. (**Verses 3-4**)

*How did Satan deceive Eve? He got her to question God's word and His goodness.*

"Did God really say?" Yes, He did. "It's not true He is holding out on you."

Whoever has worked their way into the church of Corinth is doing the exact same thing.

Jesus isn't really like Paul has told you.

The Spirit isn't who you think.

The gospel is something different than what you have believed.

Some commentators suggest that these liars are likely prosperity preachers who ignore the humility of Jesus, focus on the power the Spirit can give but have no use for

the character that He produces, and preach a gospel of power and position rather than of service and sacrifice.

The truth is there are many ways to distort the person of Christ, the work of the Spirit, and the truth of the gospel and as believers we need to have a passion for the truth to stand against the lies of the devil.

[A couple of years ago I took a day and sailed to Pelee Island and back. Even though it is a fairly short trip it is important to have a compass that will give you an accurate heading. Very early in the trip we figured out that the one I had purchased on amazon was off by at least ten degrees. If we had trusted that compass we would have ended up in the wrong spot and the thing about a faulty compass is the greater distance you travel trusting it the farther off course you get.]

*Satan's lies often seem small and if believed cause the believer to drift only a little of course at first, but the longer the lie is believed the more off course a believer gets.*

The farther a believer gets from the truth the easier it becomes to believe the next lie and the situation becomes far worse far faster than before.

There are many ways in which the devil would try and distort the person of Christ. He will tell you that Jesus is just a good moral teacher, that He is all about love and doesn't care about holiness, that He didn't die for you sins but just as a good example for humanity, that He didn't rise from the dead physically but rather spiritually, and so on.

The devil would have you believe that if you don't speak in tongues or do miracles of healing that you don't have the Spirit.

He will lie and tell you that you can have the Spirit dwelling in you and have Him make no difference in your life.

He will lie and say the gospel is not about salvation by faith alone through Christ alone, but it is about being a nice person and doing nice things.

He will tell you the gospel is about being healthy, wealthy, and well liked instead of a call to take up your cross and die to yourself so that you might live to Christ.

[Satan would have you put your bible on the shelf and let it collect dust. He will tell you that you already know all that you need to know and you should just keep thinking and doing things according to your own desires. He will tell you to celebrate whatever people do as long as it makes them happy. If we are going to guard against those lies we need to have a passion for people. We have to want what is best for them and be unwilling to surrender their souls to the

evil one by loving, knowing, and declaring the truth. Here is a second lesson about defending against the lies of the evil one...]

**Point #2 – Guarding against the devil requires a commitment to humility. (Verses 5-9)**

Making ourselves the center of our own attention is one of the most destructive things we can do and the great deceiver loves it when we believe the lie that we should focus on ourselves.

*Paul continues to answer the fools according to their folly in verse 5.*

It is unclear whether the term ‘super-apostles’ is what these guys were calling themselves or the title Paul had sarcastically assigned to them.

Either way it seems clear that they were fairly full of themselves and portraying themselves as having greater standing and authority than true apostles.

They clearly believed themselves to be better preachers than Paul (**Verse 6**).

The Greek and Roman world, much like our own, often favoured appearance over substance.

Being polished in your words and presentation could be very convincing and it would seem Paul’s opponents here made a big deal of that.

*Paul, however, concerned himself less with polish and more with substance something he says, he has made plain to the church “in all things.”*

When he first brought the gospel to Corinth he was there for about a year and a half.

In that time and in his letters he has opened up to these believers the depths of the riches of the gospel.

No smoke show, not focus on entertainment, or making himself appear superior in intellect, just the treasures of the knowledge of God in every area of life.

In addition to his manner of presentation we also see this concerning his manner of life while he was in Corinth. (**Verse 7-9**).

Philosophers and teachers in Greek society that were considered to be of some worth were paid for their services, but the apostle Paul while he was among them never asked for a dime.

In fact, we are told in Acts 18:3 that he worked at a job of manual labor in order to supply his needs until the gifts arrived from Macedonia (almost certainly the Philippian church).

*Back in chapter 8 Paul had described the churches in Macedonia as being in ‘extreme poverty’ which is likely why he describes their gift to him as ‘robbing other churches’.*

If you go to Philippians 4:10-20 you will see that they gave to help Paul’s ministry as an act of worship and not as payment for services rendered.

So it is not that he is unwilling to ever take support from churches, but because of the situation in Corinth he wanted to make sure that he didn't ask for money for his ministry among them.

Why? Likely because he wants to combat the lie that the value of his ministry is reflected by how much he charges for his services.

He wants to show them that service in the kingdom of heaven is about serving rather than being served.

He wants to show them that being willing to humble one's self to serve the best interests of others is a virtue rather than a vice.

Where these 'super apostles' are the focus of their own attention, Paul's heart is set first on the LORD and second on others.

[The advent of smart phones and social media has taken the natural self-focus of human beings and amplified it by exponential proportions. People actually get hurt and some people even die taking selfies. People climb up towers or over barriers to get a picture that will earn them likes on social media and as they focus on themselves and getting the perfect photo they lose their balance or take a wrong step and go over the edge.]

That is what can happen to us spiritually speaking if we become the center of our own attention.

The devil wants that for us. He wants us to focus on ourselves, like the people Paul is trying to defend against in this passage.

He wants that because it is bad for us.

Why because if we try and find value and worth in and of ourselves we will find emptiness rather than treasure.

Pastor and theologian RC Sproul puts it this way. He writes, *"...man's dignity is not inherent. It does not exist in and of itself. Ours is a derived, dependent, and received dignity. In and of ourselves we are of the dust. But God has assigned a remarkable value and worth to us as His creatures made in his image. He is the source of our life and our very being. He has cloaked us with a robe of value and worth."*

Humility is what allows us to see that. It is like a pair of scissors that cuts off the blind fold of self-centeredness that the devil loves to keep over our eyes.

[Satan is quite happy to have us focus on how good we are. He is just as happy to have us focus on how bad we are. Either way what he wants to deceive us into having our attention on ourselves. The only way to guard against that is humility. To take our attention off of ourselves and put in on the LORD. That brings us to one more lesson from this text. Guarding

against the devil takes passion for people and truth, it requires a commitment to humility, and thirdly...]

**Point #3 – Guarding against the devil requires looking past good disguises. (Verses 10-15)**

The old saying that ‘appearances can be deceiving’ is very true when it comes to the schemes of Satan. He will make things that lead to eternal destruction look as attractive as possible and so we need to be careful to look deeper than the surface to avoid his traps.

In verses 10-12 he gives us a little more insight into why he is ‘boasting’ about preaching the gospel free of charge.

The region of Achaia is the area in which the city of Corinth is located.

The apostle wants to make sure that this comparison between himself and these false apostles is known throughout the whole region.

He likely does this because there is a good chance these guys are going to be going around the whole region trying to win people over to their side.

He wants everyone to know what these guys are up to so that no one will be taken in by them.

His goal here is not to make the Corinthians look bad as some might think, but he is motivated by his love for them so that they will know with certainty that these men are not apostles of Christ even though they are trying to pass themselves off as though they are.

He wants them to look past their disguise and see them for what they really are which he plainly says in **verses 13-15.**

Satan’s schemes are not going to appear bad on the surface, they are going to appear good.

Back in verse 3 it mentions the devil’s deception of Eve.

Remember how good he tried to make disobeying God look.

He said, “*God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God.*”

The very next verse says, “*So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.*”

You know the way that verse reads it is almost as if Adam and Eve didn’t pay much attention to the tree before that moment.

They were satisfied with the tree of life and all the other goodness that the LORD had provided for them in the garden.

Satan came along and tried to show them how good disobedience would be and then they saw the fruit as pleasing and desirable for wisdom.  
He made death look good.

[I had a couple of mice in my attic last winter. So I got a mouse trap and I put some peanut butter on it and set it in the attic. I have no doubt when the mouse came to the trap he thought he had found something good, but it didn't end up good for him.]

*That is exactly the same thing that happens to us when we fall for the lies of the devil.*

These teachers didn't show up at Corinth and say, "Let's worship idols and serve Satan."

They showed up and said, "Let us tell you about a better version of Jesus, the Spirit, and the Gospel."

Lots of people will tell you about a Jesus who is all about you these days.

How many of you have seen the ads "Jesus, He get us."?

It looks good. Everybody getting along and loving one another, but truth and righteousness are brushed aside.

You can see it in the prosperity gospel. Jesus wants you to have everything this world has to offer and He wants you to be happy in that.

Sounds good and looks good, but it is truly shallow and empty.

*Jesus often refers to His people as sheep.*

Do you know what He says about false teachers in the church?

In Matthew 7:15 He says they come to us "sheep's clothing" they look good, they look like one of us, but he says, "inwardly they are ferocious wolves."

Do you know what "ferocious wolves" do to sheep? They eat them!

That is not good and if we are going to safe guard against that we need to look deeper than good appearances.

There is no other Jesus who can save us, there is no other gospel that can lead us into eternal life, and there is no other Spirit other than the one that convicts us of sin and leads us into righteousness.

*So brothers and sisters, be on your guard against the deception of the devil.*

Have a passion for people and truth, be committed to humility, and don't be taken in by mere appearances.

Trust the LORD and His word and you will not be overcome.