

**07/19/26 Undivided Devotion to Christ
2 Corinthians 11:1-15**

Welcome...

We are studying the book of 2 Corinthians. Since Paul's first letter, the Corinthian church had been swayed by false teachers who stirred the people against Paul. They claimed Paul was unimpressive in appearance and speech, dishonest, and unqualified as an apostle of Jesus Christ.

The Corinthian church has been swayed by these false teachers who have stirred the people against Paul. So, in chapter 10 through chapter 13 of 2 Corinthians Paul defends his apostolic conduct, character, and call. And he expresses his sincere concern that some in the Corinthian church are being led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.

Let's read 2 Corinthians 11:1–15...

Marriages seldom unravel overnight. More often, unfaithfulness begins with small compromises: a neglected relationship, misplaced affections, a subtle drift of the heart. Long before adultery occurs physically, it usually begins emotionally.

The same is true spiritually. Very few Christians wake up one morning and consciously decide to abandon Christ. Instead, their hearts slowly drift. Their love for Christ cools. Their attention is captured by new ideas, attractive personalities, or exciting experiences. Before long, they find themselves believing "another Jesus," embracing "another gospel," or following leaders who do not truly represent Christ.

That is Paul's concern in this chapter. False apostles had entered Corinth. They were eloquent, impressive, confident, and persuasive, and many Corinthians were captivated by them. Paul is not jealous for himself; he is jealous for Christ. Like a loving father protecting his daughter before her wedding, Paul longs to present the church as a pure bride to Jesus Christ.

That same danger exists today. Not every preacher speaks for Christ. Not every bestselling Christian author teaches the truth. Not every church that uses the name "Jesus" proclaims the biblical Jesus. Our greatest need is an undivided devotion to Christ. And that brings us to our main point.

Main point: 2 Corinthians 11:1–15 reveals three safeguards for undivided devotion to Christ so that you remain faithful to the true gospel and reject spiritual deception.

- I. Guard Your Devotion to Christ (verses 1–4)**
- II. Value Faithful Servants of Christ (verses 5–11)**
- III. Reject Counterfeit Servants of Christ (verses 12–15)**

My prayer is that we each know and love the true and perfect Savior, Jesus Christ, and be rooted in the gospel, growing in holiness, and faithfully living in anticipation of Christ's glorious return.

I. Guard Your Devotion to Christ

Verse 1...

Paul calls what he is about to do “foolishness” because he is going to speak about himself and compare his ministry to that of his opponents. This is not the foolishness of the cross that Paul described in 1 Corinthians 1, where the message of Christ crucified appears foolish to the world but is actually the wisdom and power of God.

Here in 2 Corinthians 11:1, this is the foolishness of human self-exaltation — the vanity that boasts in itself rather than in the Lord.

Paul does not understand himself apart from Christ. “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.” Galatians 2:20

Paul does not want to make himself the center of attention. He only speaks about himself because the Corinthians’ spiritual welfare is at stake.

Notice verse 2 “For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy.”

True love is never envious, but it has a right to be jealous over those who are loved. A husband is jealous over his wife and rightfully resists any rivalry that threatens their love. Paul describes a godly jealousy — not petty possessiveness, but a holy concern to protect a relationship that rightfully belongs to God.

Throughout Scripture, God is jealous for the exclusive devotion of His covenant people. He will not share their worship with idols, because He alone is God and He alone deserves their love. In Revelation 2:4, Jesus rebukes the Ephesian church because they had left their first love.

Paul shares that same godly concern for the Corinthians. He says in verse 2, “for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin.” He places their relationship with Christ in the framework of betrothal and marriage.

In the first-century Jewish world, betrothal was far more binding than a modern engagement. The betrothed couple, though not yet physically united, was legally regarded as husband and wife; the betrothal could be broken only by death or divorce, and unfaithfulness during the engagement time was considered adultery. During the betrothal period, it was the father’s responsibility to ensure his daughter remained faithful to her pledged husband, so that he could present her to him at the wedding as a pure virgin.

When Paul preached the gospel to the Corinthians, he betrothed them to one husband. At salvation, they pledged their loyalty to Christ, and Paul wanted to make sure they remained faithful.

Notice again: he betrothed them “to one husband.” The church does not belong to Paul, to a pastor, to an elder board, a denomination, a ministry organization, or a popular teacher. The church belongs to Christ.

The Christian life is not merely agreeing with certain doctrines or attending religious services. It is a covenant relationship of love, loyalty, devotion, and submission to Jesus Christ.

The thought of the Corinthians being seduced into error by the false apostles was heartbreaking to Paul.

Look at verse 3, “But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.”

Paul takes us back to Genesis 3, where Satan’s deception began in the garden. Eve did not intend to rebel against God, but as Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 2:13, “the woman being deceived, fell into transgression.”

The focus here in 11:3 is on the mind, for Satan is a liar who tries to get us to listen to his lies, ponder them, and then believe them. In Genesis 3 first he questioned God's word: "Has God said?" Then he denied it: "You shall not surely die!" Then he substituted his own lie when he told Eve eat of the fruit and: "You will be like God." Eve wanted God's best, so Satan's counsel seemed perfect. Having been thoroughly deceived, she ate the forbidden fruit, as did Adam and the human race was plunged into sin (Romans 5:12–19).

Ever since, false teachers have followed Satan's pattern: portraying the truth as error and offering error as the truth. Paul fears the same thing is happening in Corinth. The false apostles had slithered into the congregation with smooth speech and impressive personalities, offering a more attractive religion — one emphasizing power, status, spiritual experience, eloquence, and human glory. But it was deadly.

If you are a passenger on a plane leaving San Francisco for Honolulu and the pilot is only one degree off course you won't notice much difference during the first few minutes of the flight. But after traveling 2,400 miles, that tiny error would cause the airplane to miss Honolulu by more than 40 miles. Small deviations become major departures over time. In the same way, false teaching often begins with what seems like a minor doctrinal shift—a slightly different view of Christ, a subtle addition to the gospel, or a small compromise with God's Word. At first, it hardly seems significant. But over time, that small deviation can lead a person far from the true Christ.

That's why in verse 3 Paul warns the Corinthians to guard "the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ." The phrase "simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ" in verse 3 describes sincere, wholehearted, undivided loyalty and love for Jesus. Christ alone is our Savior. Christ alone is our Lord. Christ alone is our righteousness. Christ alone is our hope.

Satan's strategy is to move us from that pure devotion by persuading us that Christ is not enough — that we need Christ plus worldly wisdom, Christ plus human achievement, Christ plus spiritual experience, Christ plus personal prosperity, Christ plus the approval of admired teachers. But whenever something is added to Christ as necessary for our acceptance with God, Christ is diminished.

Look at verse 4, "For if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you bear this beautifully."

Paul speaks with biting irony. The Corinthians were reluctant to bear with Paul, the apostle who brought them the gospel, yet remarkably tolerant of almost anyone who arrived with an impressive presentation. Someone merely "comes," whereas Paul had been sent by Christ — yet the Corinthians welcomed these intruders and tolerated their teaching.

The false apostles preached another Jesus, a different spirit, and a different gospel. Paul does not give us their full doctrinal statement, but their conduct reveals their theology. Their Jesus was apparently a Jesus of glory without weakness — a triumphant Jesus disconnected from the humiliation of the cross.

Notice at the end of verse 4 Paul says, "you bear this beautifully." In other words, they tolerated the false teaching, thus justifying Paul's fear for their devotion to Christ.

But Paul preached Jesus Christ crucified and Jesus Christ as Lord. The Jesus Paul preached humbled Himself, suffered, served, sacrificed, and died; those who follow Him must deny themselves, take up their cross, and submit to His lordship.

The true Jesus is the eternal Son of God who became man, lived without sin, died as our substitute, rose bodily from the grave, reigns as Lord, and will return as Judge and King.

Paul also warns of “a different spirit.” The false apostles likely emphasized dramatic experiences, displays of power, visions, and spiritual superiority. But the Holy Spirit does not exalt us over others; He glorifies Christ and transforms believers into Christ’s image.

Jesus said in John 16:14 “The Holy Spirit will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you.”

“We all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory.” 2 Corinthians 3:18

Any supposed work of the Spirit that produces pride, division, sensuality, self-exaltation, or contempt for others does not bear His character.

Groups like the Jehovah's Witnesses or the Latter Day Saints of Jesus Christ (Mormons) illustrate Paul's warning. They use the name Jesus but deny essential truths about the Triune God revealed in Scripture.

When speaking with Jehovah’s Witnesses at the door, my goal is to help them test the Watchtower’s teaching against the true Scriptures, so they might see the glorious fellowship of the Trinity and how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ.

Perhaps you are here this morning and have realized that the Jesus you have believed in is not the Jesus revealed in Scripture. Maybe you have trusted in your own goodness, your religious efforts, your spiritual experiences, or a distorted picture of Christ. If so, hear the good news of the true gospel.

The Bible says that every one of us is a sinner who has rebelled against a holy God. We cannot earn His favor or save ourselves through our good works, morality, or religion. That is why God sent His Son. Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, lived the perfect life we could never live, died on the cross to bear the penalty our sins deserved, and rose bodily from the grave, conquering sin and death.

Salvation is not found in another Jesus, another spirit, or another gospel. It is found in Christ alone. The true gospel humbles us because we contribute nothing to our salvation, and it exalts Christ because He has accomplished everything necessary to reconcile us to God.

If you have never turned to Christ, I urge you to do so today. Turn from trusting in yourself, repent of your sin, and place your faith in Jesus Christ alone. He promises that all who come to Him He will never cast out (John 6:37). There is forgiveness for your sins, peace with God, and the gift of eternal life—not because of what you have done, but because of what Christ has done for you.

Don't settle for a counterfeit Christ or a counterfeit gospel. Come to the true Savior, who alone is able to forgive your sins, transform your life, and keep you as His own forever.

And brothers and sisters, if you know the Savior, Paul has shown us what must be protected — our devotion to Christ. Guarding that devotion also requires knowing whom we should follow and whom we should value. That leads to Paul’s second safeguard.

II. Value Faithful Servants of Christ

Notice verse 5, “For I consider myself not in the least inferior to the most eminent apostles.”

The expression “most eminent apostles” is almost certainly ironic, referring to the rivals who had arrived in Corinth presenting themselves as superior apostles — what we might call the “super-apostles.” They were full of themselves, treating their speaking ability, confidence, experience, and credentials as proof of spiritual superiority. But no true apostle announces, “I am number one.” Every genuine servant of Christ is second to One. And that One is Jesus Christ. He comes first; the focus belongs on Him.

When you go to see a Broadway show or performance, that spotlight faithfully follows the lead actor wherever he goes. It illuminates his face, his movements, and his expressions so the audience can see him clearly.

No one buys a ticket to simply admire the spotlight. It does its job best when no one notices it — the spotlight’s purpose is to make what it’s shining on clearly visible, not to draw attention to itself.

Faithful ministry works the same way. Imagine visiting Yellowstone National Park and you go on a tour with a guide. And it turns out your guide spends the entire day talking about himself. He tells you about his education. His accomplishments. His awards. His social media following. How long he has worked at Yellowstone and how many tours he has given.

At the end of the day, you’ve learned everything about the guide—but almost nothing about Yellowstone.

But another guide hardly talks about himself at all. Instead, he keeps pointing: “Look at the geyser.” “Look at the waterfall.” “Look at the wildlife.”

When the tour is over, you barely remember the guide—but you’ll never forget what he showed you. That is faithful ministry.

A faithful pastor is not trying to make people impressed with himself. He wants people captivated by Christ.

John the Baptist understood this perfectly when he said in John 3:30 “Christ must increase, but I must decrease.”

Paul understood it too as you hear Larry read from 1 Corinthians 2:2 “I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.” 1 Corinthians 2:4-5, “my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.”

The false apostles wanted the spotlight for themselves. Paul wanted every beam of light to fall on Jesus Christ alone.

Notice verse 6 Paul writes, “But even if I am unskilled in speech, yet I am not so in knowledge.”

Paul essentially says, “If I am a poor speaker, at least I know what I am talking about.” Faithful ministry is not measured by a preacher’s ability to make himself memorable. It is measured by whether he accurately and humbly makes Christ known.

Paul continues in verse 7, “Or did I commit a sin in humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you without charge?”

In the Greco-Roman world, teachers and philosophers were expected to charge for their services, and people often judged a teacher’s worth by his fee.

But much like the modern saying, “You get what you pay for” Paul’s critics dismissed him as second-rate because Paul refused financial support from the Corinthians.

Paul says in verses 8–9 that he “robbed other churches” by taking wages from them to serve the Corinthians — which is a deliberate exaggeration. Poorer churches in Macedonia supported him so he could preach the gospel free of charge in wealthy Corinth. He had every right to receive support but chose not to exercise that right.

In Paul’s day, financial support usually came with strings attached; wealthy patrons expected loyalty, public honor, and influence in return. Paul refused to become anyone’s client, because he was a servant of Christ alone. By declining their support, he remained free to preach the whole counsel of God, confront sin without favoritism, and minister to everyone equally.

Paul writes in verses 10-11, “As the truth of Christ is in me, this boasting of mine will not be stopped in the regions of Achaia. Why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do!”

The Corinthians interpreted Paul’s refusal of support as rejection — in their culture, refusing a gift could mean refusing friendship. Because Paul accepted help from the Macedonians but not from the Corinthians, they concluded he loved other churches more. Paul insists his decision was not an absence of love but an expression of sacrificial love.

Love does not always do what people expect; it does what will promote their spiritual good. Paul was willing to be misunderstood, dishonored, and financially deprived if it would protect the gospel and help the Corinthians grow in humility.

This is the pattern of faithful ministry. Faithful ministers do not use people to build their ministries; faithful shepherds use their gifts to build up people in Christ.

Faithful teachers do not seek personal honor; they seek Christ’s glory. They do not measure success merely by popularity, money, influence, or applause, but by faithfulness to Christ and love for His church.

So, how should we evaluate Christian leaders? We should look for faithfulness to Scripture, clarity about the gospel, humility of character, sacrificial love, financial integrity, willingness to suffer, and a ministry that consistently points people to Christ.

Paul now removes the mask from these impressive false teachers and shows us who they really are.

III. Reject Counterfeit Servants of Christ

Look at verse 12, “But what I am doing I will continue to do, so that I may cut off opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the matter about which they are boasting.”

The false apostles wanted to claim they ministered on the same level as Paul. Paul cuts the ground out from under them: if they claimed to be his equals, let them imitate his self-sacrifice — stop exploiting the Corinthians, humble themselves, work with their hands, serve without demanding payment. Paul knew they were unlikely to do that. The true mark of apostleship is not self-promotion but self-sacrifice. The rivals were not sacrificial shepherds; they were self-absorbed opportunists using ministry to advance their own status.

He continues in verse 13, “For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.”

Paul does not soften his language. They are not merely mistaken teachers; they are false apostles. How could Paul be so confident? Here are three signs of a false teacher:

First, a sign of a false teacher is that he tries to discredit true Christian teachers —just as these false teachers in Corinth were discrediting Paul’s credentials and authority to build their own following in the church he had founded.

Second, a sign of a false teacher is a self-serving method — boasting of their own credentials, comparing themselves to Paul, seeking their own financial welfare rather than the Corinthians’ spiritual welfare.

Third, a sign of a false teacher is division and conflict — instead of building on the one foundation, the gospel of Jesus Christ, and building the church up, they were tearing it down to build their own following.

The Corinthians should have tested these teachers and failed to do so, letting them wreak havoc in the congregation. The Corinthians should have been like the Berean believers, who in Acts 17:11 “received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether the things they were being taught were true.”

So, Paul says in verse 14, “no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.”

Satan rarely appears openly evil. He disguises himself as something attractive, persuasive, and even religious.

One of the most famous military deceptions in history is the story of the Trojan Horse.

For ten years the Greek army tried unsuccessfully to conquer the fortified city of Troy. The city walls were too strong, and every attack failed.

Finally, the Greeks pretended to give up. They sailed away, leaving behind what appeared to be a magnificent wooden horse as a peace offering. The Trojans celebrated what they thought was victory. They opened the gates of their city and pulled the horse inside.

But hidden inside the horse were Greek soldiers.

That night, while the city slept, the soldiers climbed out, opened the gates from the inside, and allowed the Greek army to enter. Troy did not fall because the enemy broke through its walls. It fell because the enemy was welcomed inside.

That is exactly how false teachers often work. As Paul says in verses 13–14, “For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.”

False teachers rarely introduce themselves by knocking on your door and saying, “Hello, I’m here to deceive you.” They usually speak the language of Christianity. They mention Jesus. They even quote Scripture. They talk about faith, love, and blessing. They may even appear sincere, compassionate, and persuasive. But hidden beneath attractive words is another gospel.

Like the Trojan Horse, they gain entrance by appearing harmless. Once inside the church, they begin to undermine confidence in God’s Word, diminish the sufficiency of Christ, exalt human wisdom, or promote themselves rather than the Savior.

Satan's strategy has never been merely to attack the church from the outside. Often his greatest damage comes from within, through teachers who look like servants of Christ but actually serve themselves.

This is why discernment is so essential. We must not judge teachers by their personality, popularity, or polished presentation. We must examine whether their message agrees with Scripture and whether their ministry exalts Christ alone.

The Bereans in Acts 17 were called noble because they examined the Scriptures daily to see whether what Paul taught was true. If they tested even the Apostle Paul by Scripture, how much more should we test every preacher, author, podcaster, and conference speaker today?

Don't simply ask, "Is this teacher engaging? Did his teaching make me feel encouraged?" Ask:

Does he faithfully preach the biblical Christ?

Does he proclaim the true gospel?

Does he submit to Scripture?

Does his ministry produce humility, holiness, and love for Christ?

The apostle Paul does not tell the Corinthians, "Catalog every deception these false apostles are using." He tells them to guard "the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ."

The strongest defense against the Trojan Horse of false teaching is not stronger walls of skepticism—it is a congregation that knows the true Christ. It is knowing the true Christ so intimately — through His Word, in prayer, in worship, in fellowship, in daily obedience — that when something false is poured out and offered to us, however well-packaged, it simply doesn't taste right.

So, three safeguards: 1) Guard your devotion to Christ. 2) Value faithful servants of Christ. 3) Reject counterfeit servants of Christ.

And by God's grace, may He preserve us as a faithful bride, sincerely and purely devoted to Jesus Christ until the day we see our Bridegroom face to face.

Let's pray...