

2 Corinthians 11:13

by St. John Chrysostom

Paul warns the Corinthians about false apostles who deceive and destroy the soul, and exhorts them to seek the true glory that comes from God.

Scripture: 1 Samuel 12:3, 1 Samuel 17:34, Isaiah 40:6, Amos 7:14, Micah 3:8, 2 Corinthians 11:14, 2 Corinthians 11:20-21, Philippians 3:4

Topics: "False Apostles", "Spiritual Discernment"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about false apostles who deceive by pretending to be true messengers of Christ, warning against those who seek to manipulate and exploit others for personal gain. He emphasizes the importance of discerning true ministers of righteousness from those who only appear righteous on the outside but lack genuine power and sincerity. Chrysostom challenges the congregation to evaluate leaders by their actions rather than outward appearances, highlighting the dangers of envy, vainglory, and the slavery that comes with seeking worldly recognition and approval.

Transcript

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

What do you say? They that preach Christ, they that take not money, they that bring not in a different gospel, false apostles? 'Yes,' he says, and for this very reason most of all, because they make pretense of all these things for the purpose of deceiving. Deceitful workers, for they do work indeed, but pull up what has been planted. For being well aware that otherwise they would not be well received, they take the mask of truth and so enact the drama of error. 'And yet,' says one, 'they take no money.' That they may take greater things; that they may destroy the soul. Yea rather, even that was a falsehood; and they took money but did it secretly: and he shows this in what follows. And indeed he already hinted this where he said, that wherein they glory, they may be found even as we: 2 Corinthians 11:12 in what follows, however, he hinted it more plainly, saying, If a man devour you, if a man take you captive, if a man exalt himself, you bear with him. 2 Corinthians 11:20 But at present he accuses them on another account, saying, fashioning themselves. They had only a fashion; the skin of the sheep was but outside clothing.

2 Corinthians 11:14-15

And no marvel; for if even Satan fashions himself into an angel of light, is it a great thing if his ministers also fashion themselves as ministers of righteousness?

So that if one ought to marvel, this is what he ought to marvel at, and not at their transformation. For when their teacher dares do any thing, no marvel that the disciples also follow. But what is an angel of light? That has free liberty to speak, that stands near to God. For there are also angels of darkness; those which be the devil's, those dark and cruel ones. And the devil has deceived many so, fashioning himself into, not becoming, an angel of light. So do also do these bear about them the form of an Apostle, not the power itself, for this they cannot. But nothing is so like the devil as to do things for display. But what is a ministry of righteousness? That which we are who preach to you a Gospel having righteousness. For he either means this, or else that they invest themselves with the character of righteous men. How then shall we know them? By their works, as Christ said. Wherefore he is compelled to place his own good deeds and their wickedness side by side, that the spurious may become evident by the comparison. And when about again to enter upon his own praises, he first accuses them, in order to show that such an argument was forced upon him, lest any should accuse him for speaking about himself, and says,

2 Corinthians 11:16

Again I say. For he had even already used much preparatory corrective: 'But nevertheless I am not contented with what I have said, but I say yet again,'

Let no man think me foolish. For this was what they did -- boasted without a reason. -- But observe, I pray you, how often, when about to enter upon his own praises, he checks himself. 'For indeed it is the act of folly,' he says, 'to boast: but I do it, not as playing the fool, but because compelled. But if you do not believe me, but though ye see there is a necessity will condemn me; not even so will I decline the task.' Do you see how he showed that there was great necessity for his speaking. For he that shunned not even this suspicion, consider what violent impulsion to speak he must have undergone, how he travailed and was constrained to speak. But, nevertheless, even so he employs this thing with moderation. For he did not say, 'that I may glory.' And when about to do a little, again he uses yet another deprecatory expression, saying,

2 Corinthians 11:17

That which I speak, I speak not after the Lord, but as in foolishness, in this confidence of glorifying.

Do you see how glorying is not after the Lord? For He says, When you shall have done all, say, We are unprofitable servants. Luke 17:10 Howbeit, by itself indeed it is not after the Lord, but by the intention it becomes so. And therefore he said, That which I speak, not accusing the motive, but the words. Since his aim is so admirable as to dignify the words also. For as a manslayer, though his action be of those most strictly forbidden, has often been approved from the intention; and as circumcision, although it is not 'after the Lord,' has become so from the intention, so also glorying. And wherefore then does he not use so great strictness of expression? Because he is hastening on to another point, and he freely gratifies even to superfluity those who are desirous to find a handle against him, so that he may say only the things that are profitable; for when said they were enough to extinguish all that suspicion. But as in foolishness. Before he says, Would that you could bear with me in a little foolishness," 2 Corinthians 11:4 but now as in foolishness; for the farther he proceeds, the more he clears his language. Then that you may not think that he plays the fool on all points, he added, in this confidence of glorying. In this particular he means: just as in another place he said, that we be not put to shame, and added, in this confidence of glorying. 2 Corinthians 9:4 And again, in another place, having said, Or what I purpose do I purpose according to the flesh, that with me there should be the yea yea, and the nay nay? 2 Corinthians 1:17 And having shown

that he cannot in all cases even fulfil what he promises, because he does not purpose after the flesh, lest any should make this suspicion stretch to the doctrine also, he adds, But as God is faithful our word towards you was not yea and nay. 2 Corinthians 1:18

2. And observe how after having said so many things before, he again sets down yet other grounds of excuse, saying further thus,

2 Corinthians 11:18

Seeing that many glory after the flesh, I will glory also.

What is, after the flesh? Of things external, of high birth, of wealth, of wisdom, of being circumcised, of Hebrew ancestry, of popular renown. And behold wisdom. He sets down those things which he shows to be nothings, and then, folly also. For if to glory in what are really good things be folly, much more is it so [to glory in] those that are nothing. And this is what he calls, not after the Lord. For it is no advantage to be a Hebrew, or any such like things soever. 'Think not, therefore, that I set these down as a virtue; no; but because those men boast I also am compelled to institute my comparison on these points.' Which he does also in another place, saying, If any man thinks that he may trust in the flesh, I more: Philippians 3:4 and there, it is on their account that trusted in this. Just as if one who had come of an illustrious race but had chosen a philosophic life, should see others priding themselves greatly on being well-born; and being desirous of taking down their vanity, should be compelled to speak of his own distinction; not to adorn himself, but to humble them; so, truly, does Paul also do. Then leaving those, he empties all his censure upon the Corinthians, saying,

2 Corinthians 11:19

For you bear with the foolish gladly. 'So that you are to blame for this, and more than they. For if you had not borne with them, and so far as it lay in them received damage, I would not have spoken a word; but I do it out of a tender care for your salvation, and in condescension. And behold, how he accompanies even his censure with praise. For having said, ye bear with the foolish gladly; he added,

Being wise yourselves. For it was a sign of folly to glory, and on such matters. And yet it behooved to rebuke them, and say, 'Do not bear with the foolish;' he does this, however, at greater advantage. For in that case he would have seemed to rebuke them because he himself was destitute of these advantages; but now having showed himself to be their superior even in these points, and to esteem them to be nothing, he corrects them with greater effect. At present, however, before entering upon his own praises and the comparison, he also reproaches the Corinthians with their great slavishness, because they were extravagantly submissive to them. And observe how he ridicules them.

2 Corinthians 11:20

For you bear with a man, he says, if he devour you.

How then did you say, that wherein they glory, they may be found even as we? 2 Corinthians 11:12 Do you see that he shows that they did take of them, and not simply take, but even in excess: for the term devour plainly shows this,

If a man bring you into bondage. 'You have given away both your money,' he says, 'and your persons, and your freedom. For this is more than taking of you; to be masters not only of your money, but of yourselves

also.' And he makes this plain even before, where he says, If others partake of this right over you, do not we much more? 1 Corinthians 9:12 Then he adds what is more severe, saying,

If a man exalt himself. 'For neither is your slavery of a moderate sort, nor are your masters gentle, but burdensome and odious.'

If a man smite you on the face. Do you see again a further stretch of tyranny? He said this, not meaning that they were stricken on the face, but that they spat upon and dishonored them; wherefore he added,

2 Corinthians 11:21

I speak by way of disparagement, for you suffer no whit less than men smitten on the face. What now can be stronger than this? What oppression more bitter than this? When having taken from you both your money and your freedom and your honor, they even so are not gentle towards you nor suffer you to abide in the rank of servants, but have used you more insultingly than any bought slave.

As though we had been weak. The expression is obscure. For since it was a disagreeable subject he therefore so expressed it as to steal away the offensiveness by the obscurity. For what he wishes to say is this. 'For cannot we also do these things? Yes, but we do them not. Wherefore then do ye bear with these men, as though we could not do these things? Surely it were something to impute to you that you even bear with men who play the fool; but that you do this, even when they so despise you, plunder you, exalt themselves, smite you, can admit neither of excuse nor any reason at all. For this is a new fashion of deceiving. For men that deceive both give and flatter; but these both deceive, and take and insult you. Whence ye cannot have a shadow of allowance, seeing that you spit on those that humble themselves for your sakes that you may be exalted, but admire those who exalt themselves that you may be humbled. For could not we too do these things? Yes, but we do not wish it, looking to your advantage. For they indeed sacrificing your interests seek their own, but we sacrificing our own interests seek for yours.' Do you see how in every instance, while speaking plainly to them, he also alarms them by what he says. 'For,' he says, 'if it be on this account that you honor them, because they smite and insult you, we also can do this, enslave, smite, exalt ourselves against you.'

3. Do you see how he lays upon them the whole blame, both of their senseless pride and of what seems to be folly in himself. 'For not that I may show myself more conspicuous, but that I may set you free from this bitter slavery, am I compelled to glory some little. But it is meet to examine not simply things that are said, but, in addition, the reason also. For Samuel also put together a high panegyric upon himself, when he anointed Saul, saying, Whose ass have I taken, or calf, or shoes?

Or have I oppressed any of you? 1 Samuel 12:3, Septuagint And yet no one finds fault with him. And the reason is because he did not say it by way of setting off himself; but because he was going to appoint a king, he wishes under the form of a defense [of himself] to instruct him to be meek and gentle. And observe the wisdom of the prophet, or rather the loving kindness of God. For because he wished to turn them from [their design,] bringing together a number of grievous things he asserted them of their future king, as, for instance, that he would make their wives grind at the mill, 1 Samuel 8:11-18 the men shepherds and muleteers; for he went through all the service appertaining to the kingdom with minuteness.

But when he saw that they would not be hindered by any of these things, but were incurably distempered; he thus both spares them and composes their king to gentleness. 1 Samuel 12:5 Therefore he also takes

him to witness. For indeed no one was then bringing suit or charge against him that he needed to defend himself, but he said those things in order to make him better. And therefore also he added, to take down his pride, If you will hearken, you and your king, 1 Samuel 12:14 such and such good things shall be yours; but if you will not hearken, then the reverse of all.

Amos also said, I was no prophet, nor the son of a prophet, but only a herdsman, a gatherer of sycamore fruit. And God took me. Amos 7:14-15 But he did not say this to exalt himself, but to stop their mouths that suspected him as no prophet, and to show that he is no deceiver, nor says of his own mind the things which he says. Again, another also, to show the very same thing, said, But truly I am full of power by the spirit and might of the Lord. Micah 3:8 And David also when he related the matter of the lion and of the bear, 1 Samuel 17:34, etc. spoke not to glorify himself, but to bring about a great and admirable end.

For since it was not believed possible he could conquer the barbarian unarmed, he that was not able even to bear arms; he was compelled to give proofs of his own valor. And when he cut off Saul's skirt, he said not what he said out of display, but to repel an ill suspicion which they had scattered abroad against him, saying, that he wished to kill him. 1 Samuel 24:4, etc. It is meet therefore every where to seek for the reason. For he that looks to the advantage of his hearers even though he should praise himself, not only deserves not to be found fault with, but even to be crowned; and if he is silent, then to be found fault with.

For if David had then been silent in the matter of Goliath, they would not have allowed him to go out to the battle, nor to have raised that illustrious trophy. On this account then he speaks being compelled; and that not to his brethren, although he was distrusted by them too as well as by the king; but envy stopped their ears. Therefore leaving them alone, he tells his tale to him who was not as yet envious of him.

4. For envy is a fearful, a fearful thing, and persuades men to despise their own salvation. In this way did both Cain destroy himself, and again, before his time, the devil who was the destroyer of his father. So did Saul invite an evil demon against his own soul; and when he had invited, he again envied his physician. For such is the nature of envy; he knew that he was saved, yet he would rather have perished than see him that saved him had in honor. What can be more grievous than this passion?

One cannot err in calling it the devil's offspring. And in it is contained the fruit of vainglory, or rather its root also; for both these evils are wont mutually to produce each other. And thus in truth it was that Saul even thus envied, when they said, David smote by ten thousands, 1 Samuel 18:7 than which what can be more senseless? For why do you envy? Tell me! 'Because such an one praised him?' Yet surely you ought to rejoice; besides, thou dost not know even whether the praise be true.

And do you therefore grieve because without being admirable he has been praised as such? And yet you ought to feel pity. For if he be good, you ought not to envy him when praised, but yourself to praise along with those that speak well of him; but if not such, why are you galled? Why thrust the sword against yourself? 'Because admired by men.' But men today are and tomorrow are not. 'But because he enjoys glory?' Of what sort, tell me? That of which the prophet says that it is the flower of grass.

Isaiah 40:6. Septuagint Are you then therefore envious because you bear no burden, nor carry about with you such loads of grass? But if he seems to you to be enviable on this account, then why not also woodcutters who carry burdens every day and come to the city [with them]? For that burden is nothing better than this, but even worse. For theirs indeed galls the body only, but this has oftentimes harmed the soul even and occasioned greater solicitude than pleasure. And should one have gained renown through eloquence, the fear he endures is greater than the good report he bears; yea, what is more, the one is

short, the other perpetual.

'But he is in favor with those in authority?' In that too again is danger and envy. For as you feel towards him, so do many others feel. 'But he is praised continually?' This produces bitter slavery. For he will not dare to do fearlessly anything of what according to his judgment he should, lest he should offend those that extol him, for that distinction is a hard bondage to him. So that the more he is known to, so many the more masters he has, and his slavery becomes the greater, as masters of his are found in every quarter.

A servant indeed, when he is released from the eye of his master, both takes breath and lives in all freedom; but this man meets with masters at every turn, for he is the slave of all that appear in the forum. And even should some necessary object press, he dares not set foot in the forum, except it be with his servants following, and his horse, and all his other show set in array, lest his masters condemn him. And if he sees some friend of those who are truly so, he has not the boldness to talk with him on an equal footing: for he is afraid of his masters, lest they depose him from his glory.

So that the more distinguished he is, so much the more he is enslaved. And if he suffer anything that is disagreeable, the insult is the more annoying, both in that he has more to witness it and it seems to infringe his dignity. It is not only an insult, but a calamity also, for he has also many who exult at it; and in like way if he come to the enjoyment of any good thing, he has more who envy and detract and do their vigilance to destroy him. Is this then a good? Tell me. Is this glory?

By no means; but ingloriousness, and slavery, and bonds, and every burdensome thing one can say. But if the glory that comes of men be so greatly to be coveted in your account, and if it quite disquiets you that such and such an one is applauded of the many; when you behold him in the enjoyment of that applause, pass over in your thought to the world to come and the glory which is there. And just as when hurrying to escape the onset of a wild beast, you enter into a cabin and shut the doors; so now also flee unto the life to come, and that unspeakable glory.

For so shall you both tread this under your feet, and will easily lay hold upon that, and will enjoy the true liberty, and the eternal good things; whereunto may we all attain through the grace and love towards men of our Lord Jesus Christ, with Whom to the Father, with the Holy Spirit, be glory, might, honor, now and ever, and world without end. Amen.

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