

# (2 Corinthians) ch.11:4-11:33

by Zac Poonen

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of maintaining single-minded devotion to Christ and seeking the power of the Holy Spirit in order to protect ourselves from deception and to receive the true gospel of the grace of God.*

**Duration:** 44:03

**Scripture:** Matthew 4:1-11, Matthew 22:37, Acts 20:9-12, 2 Corinthians 10:10, 2 Corinthians 11:4-5, 2 Corinthians 12:2-4

**Topics:** "Deception Warning", "Gods Grace"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the theme of deception, as mentioned in 2 Corinthians 11:4. He emphasizes that Jesus warned about the prevalence of deception in the last days. The preacher then turns to 2 Corinthians 11:5, where Paul addresses the Corinthians' fascination with other preachers who had impressive personalities and eloquent messages. Paul asserts that he is not inferior to these 'super fine apostles' and reminds the Corinthians of his mission to proclaim the gospel of the grace of God. The preacher explains that the grace of God offers forgiveness of sins and freedom from the mastery of sin. He also highlights the sufferings and hardships that Paul endured for the sake of the gospel.

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## Transcript

Let's turn today to 2 Corinthians chapter 11, verse 3. The subject here is deception. Paul is speaking about the possibility of these good Corinthian Christians being deceived by Satan, just like Satan deceived Eve. Satan cannot deceive those who fear God and walk in humility and seek for God's grace.

But he can deceive the one who is proud of his intellectual ability and thinks that because he knows the Bible so much, he won't go astray. It is the one who loves the Lord who is protected. And that's what he says here, I'm afraid lest as a serpent deceive Eve by his craftiness, your mind should be led astray from that simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ, from single-hearted devotion to Christ.

As long as you have a single-hearted devotion to Jesus Christ, that you love him with all your heart, which means you don't love money, because you can't love money and God, which means that you don't love sin, you hate sin, you hate yourself and your flesh life, you're willing to take up the cross in single-minded devotion to Christ, as long as you're on that road, you can't be led astray. But when you begin to lose your first love, like the leader in the church in Ephesus lost his first love, then you are in danger, however clever you may be, however much of the Bible you may know, however much experience you may have. It is single-minded devotion to Christ alone that protects you and keeps you from the deceptions of Satan.

In fact, Satan seeks to deceive you and lead you astray from that simple-minded devotion to Christ into something else, into being preoccupied with social work, sometimes a preoccupation with evangelism. Evangelism is a good thing, but if you lose your devotion to Christ, even evangelism can lead you astray. Social work can lead you astray.

Bible teaching, being occupied with Bible study can lead you astray. If you have lost your simple-minded, single-hearted devotion to Jesus Christ, preserve that. That is the most important thing, to love Jesus with all of our hearts.

This is the first commandment, to love God with all our heart, soul, strength and mind. And he speaks further about this deception. Once you get deceived by Satan, he's not going to come with some heathen religious book, he's going to come with a Bible.

He's not going to speak about some heathen God, he's going to speak about Jesus, but another Jesus. He says in verse 4, 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. He's being sarcastic.

He says, you Corinthians are so gullible, with all your human cleverness, the devil's just leading you astray. Somebody comes and preaches to you a Jesus, different from the Jesus we proclaimed. A Jesus who's different from the Jesus in the scriptures.

A spirit that's different from the Holy Spirit. And a gospel that's different from the gospel of the grace of God. We need to examine ourselves.

What is your reaction when you read a verse like this? Is your reaction, oh, that doesn't apply to me. You know what the word of God says to you? Let him who thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall. He's the one who is so proud that God's word cannot possibly apply to him, who is most in danger of deception.

That's exactly how the devil would want you to feel. That you are not in this danger. He's the one who recognizes the danger, who avoids it.

The one who thinks that he is in no danger, usually falls into it. What do we mean by another Jesus? The Bible says, that the Holy Spirit says, through us, that Jesus Christ is Lord. 1 Corinthians 12, 3. No one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.

This is the first testimony concerning Christ. That Jesus Christ is Lord. He is the Jehovah of the Old Testament.

He is Lord and God. He is God Almighty. The other thing that the Holy Spirit confesses through us, as John says in 1 John and chapter 4, is that Jesus Christ came in the flesh.

1 John chapter 4, verses 2 and 3. He says, by this you know the Spirit of God. And he says, don't believe every spirit. Jesus Christ came in the flesh.

It's not enough to say that Jesus Christ became a man. We would like to use our own reason and use words which are not found in Scripture. The Scriptural proclamation is, Jesus Christ is Lord and Jesus Christ came in the flesh.

The very same flesh that we have today. Jesus Christ came in this flesh. And by this we identify the Spirit of God.

Now, another Jesus that is being proclaimed is one who is not Lord. One who is not equal with the Father. One who does not have to be honoured, as Jesus said in John chapter 5, equally with the Father.

There are groups who call themselves Christians. Of course, they are not Christians. Who do not give Jesus that place of equality with the Father from all eternity.

Then, of course, it is another Jesus. There are those who speak of him as a created being. That is another Jesus.

And the devil has put forward many such other Jesuses to lead people astray. One who is not Lord. But the Bible proclaims that Jesus Christ is Lord.

He is the very same Lord that we read of as Lord in the Old Testament. And secondly, which is more subtle, that Jesus Christ came in the flesh. There are those who will not accept that Jesus Christ came in the flesh.

Because he came in the flesh, we read in Hebrews 4.15, he was tempted in all points as we are. James 1.14 says that we are tempted through the lusts in our flesh. It is because we have a flesh that we are tempted.

And Jesus was tempted like us. Of course, it is possible for us to be tempted even if we did not have a flesh. We know that Lucifer sinned in Eden without having a flesh, before man was created.

And it is possible to be tempted without having a flesh. But we are tempted as human beings through the flesh. And Jesus was tempted, we are told in Hebrews 4.15, exactly like us.

And he did not sin. Why didn't he sin? Because he sought for power from his Father. The power of the Holy Spirit to put to death the lusts of the flesh.

Therefore he overcame. That is why he tells us today to overcome as he overcame. And this is why it is important to confess and believe that Jesus Christ came in the flesh.

Because he had a flesh like ours, he had to take up the cross every day in the power of the Spirit and deny himself, deny his own will. He said in the Garden of Gethsemane, He said that for 33 years. The Garden of Gethsemane was just the last moment when he said it.

But he said that all through his life. He says in John 6.38, There were two wills. The will of Jesus as a man and the will of the Father in heaven.

And he denied his own will in order to do the will of the Father. And there we see the significance of Jesus having come in a flesh like ours and having taken up the cross. Now when people proclaim a Jesus who did not have to take up a cross, who did not have any desires of the flesh to mortify, it is another Jesus.

And the end result is of proclaiming such a Jesus is that we don't follow him, we only admire him. There are a lot of people who admire Jesus and never follow him because they say he was God. He was, but when he came to earth we are told in Philippians 2.5-8 that he emptied himself of that equality with the Father and became a man and a servant, just like us.

Hebrews 2.17 says, And the result is that we have today the shameful demonstration before the world of Christians who are seeking to represent Christ but in such shameful ways. The ways Christians, some Christians beg for money for doing the Lord's work is so shameful. It's a disgrace to Christ.

It is another Jesus that they are presenting. When a Christian preacher today gets up onto the platform and invites an unconverted bishop to open in prayer, that is equivalent to Jesus asking Annas or Caiaphas to open in prayer before he conducts a healing meeting. What is that? That is another Jesus.

When Christian preachers get secular leaders like ministers and cabinet ministers to open their crusades, that is equivalent to Jesus asking Herod or Pilate to open his meetings. It's a disgrace to the name of Christ. It is another Jesus.

And we could expand on that and go into so many areas where the Jesus being presented to the world is not the Jesus of the scriptures. People are living like big business executives with fantastic wealth made in the name of religion and claiming to be followers of that simple Jesus who walked on the earth without a place to lay his head. Dear brothers and sisters, let's not be deceived by this presentation that there is in the world today of another Jesus by those who claim to represent him.

We've got to go back to the scriptures and see the Jesus of the scriptures, how he lived and how he ministered and present him adequately to the world today. Let's turn today again to 2 Corinthians 11 verse 4. The subject here as we've been considering in our last two studies is deception. Jesus said that in the last days there would be plenty of deception.

1 Timothy 4.1, the Spirit speaks emphatically that there will be plenty of deception in the last days. Deception that is meant to lead us away from the simplicity of pure, single-minded devotion to Christ that comes preaching another Jesus. A Jesus who never had to take up the cross and deny himself when he was on earth as a man.

A Jesus who walked on the earth as God and not man. That is another Jesus. The Jesus the Bible speaks of is one who was equal with the Father from all eternity and who did not consider that equality as something to be held onto but gave it up.

Emptied himself of that equality and became a man. And humbled himself and became a servant. Was tempted in all points as we are.

Tempted with the flesh that we have and the desires in it. Denied himself as a man. Lived as a man in the power of the Holy Spirit and overcame.

And caused us to follow. A Jesus who walked in humility. A Jesus who did not use the methods of this world to do the Father's work.

Who did not beg for money. A Jesus who never sought that which was great in the eyes of the world. A Jesus who never sought popularity with worldly, secular leaders or with religious leaders in Judaism.

This is the Jesus of the Scriptures. But alas, many who claim to be his servants today portray another Jesus. Don't be deceived.

And he speaks here about another spirit. About receiving a different spirit. There are people who go to meetings and wait and seek for the power of the Spirit.

Just make sure it's the Holy Spirit. The reason why the Spirit is called the Holy Spirit is because he has come to make us holy. There is such a thing as receiving the baptism in the Holy Spirit and fire.

There is such a thing as being filled with the Holy Spirit and receiving his supernatural gifts to serve him and being a witness for Christ. But we must remember there are other spirits too waiting to deceive us. Waiting to lead us astray, give us experiences.

If it's only an experience you're looking for, a tingling in your flesh, a tingling in your body, an utterance with your tongue, there are many spirits ready to deceive you. But if you're seeking for power to fight the lusts in your flesh, there's only one spirit in the whole world that will fight the lusts in the flesh and that's the Holy Spirit. There are many spirits that can give you the gift of healing and that can give you the ability to speak in tongues, but only one spirit that can fight the flesh.

That's how we identify the Holy Spirit. By the power that we receive to fight the lusts in the flesh, by the power that we receive to proclaim Christ and not ourselves. Many people use gifts to proclaim themselves, not Christ.

The Holy Spirit exalts Christ, not a human being. The devil would give us power to exalt ourselves. The Holy Spirit exalts Christ.

You receive a different spirit. What do we mean by a different spirit? A spirit that gives you feelings, gifts perhaps, abilities to make money in the name of religion, ability to exalt yourself as a great preacher, but not exalt Christ. Beware of such a spirit.

Seek for the power of the Holy Spirit, who will give you power to fight the flesh, who will also give you supernatural gifts, perhaps tongues or healing according to his sovereign choice, or other gifts of helps perhaps, of miracles or teaching or prophecy, but also power to fight the flesh and power to exalt Christ and not yourself. A spirit that exalts man and not Christ is not the Holy Spirit. A spirit that gives you gifts but no power to fight the flesh is not the Holy Spirit.

Be careful that you don't receive another spirit. The solution to that, of course, is not to back away so much from the ministry of the Spirit that we don't want to have anything to do with the Holy Spirit at all. That's the mistake some Christians have made because they've seen some people go to extremes and bring disgrace to the name of Christ.

They've backed away from the Holy Spirit altogether and from the fullness of the Holy Spirit and the baptism and the gifts of the Spirit, and they don't want to have anything to do with it. The devil succeeded with them too. You see, the devil's got two batches of Christians, one who've gone off on an extreme and gone astray, and the other group, those who are afraid of these extremists and who have nothing.

But the solution is to follow Jesus, to exercise the power of the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit the way Jesus did it. Then we can't go astray. If we make Jesus our example in all things, we cannot go astray.

We shall not receive a different Spirit. Further, Paul speaks here about being deceived by another gospel, a different gospel. What is this different gospel? A gospel which claims to be the gospel of the grace of God, but which misinterprets grace so that we don't get the benefit that God's grace is meant to give us.

Let me present it to you very simply. Paul said in Acts chapter 20 that he had been sent to proclaim the gospel of the grace of God. Acts 20 verse 24.

He calls it also preaching the kingdom in verse 25. To preach the kingdom of God, or the government of God and the lordship of Christ over every area of our life is the same as proclaiming the gospel of the grace of God. What does the grace of God do? First of all, we read in Ephesians chapter 1 and verse 7 that we have forgiveness of our trespasses according to the riches of His grace.

Grace forgives our sins. That's the first thing grace does. The second thing grace does is Romans 6, 14.

Sin shall not be master over you anymore because you are under grace now. You are not under law. The gospel of the grace of God is a gospel that tells us how our sins can be forgiven through the death of Christ.

How we can be justified by the grace of God as we read in Romans chapter 5 and Romans chapter 3. Through Christ's death and resurrection and ascension. And also something that leads us into Romans chapter 6 where we are freed from the power of sin that operates through the lusts in our flesh. Grace not only forgives us but frees us from the power of sin.

And further, 2 Corinthians 12, 9 says grace is sufficient to help us to overcome every infirmity and weakness and insult and distress and persecution and difficulty that we face for Christ's sake. 2 Corinthians 12, verse 9 and 10. This is the gospel of the grace of God.

But alas, many people have received another gospel. A gospel that's told them that Jesus will forgive you. Of course, you can't live without sinning.

You'll keep on sinning. But you'll be forgiven continuously. And they use clever illustrations like a stone lying at the bottom of a river, constantly being cleansed by the river flowing over it.

And that we are constantly cleansed by the blood of Christ. It's almost as though people are being encouraged to sin. And the blood of Christ has become like a certificate that we have that permits us to sin.

A license to sin. Grace has become a license to sin for many people. And this is how many in Christendom are deceived today.

Jude says in his epistle, he says, I wanted to write to you about salvation but I got so burdened, he says, in Jude verse 3 and 4, about certain people who are turning the grace of God into a license to sin. It's like in areas where there's prohibition, sometimes the government gives people a license to buy alcoholic liquor. And with that license they can go and buy liquor.

And the grace of God and the gospel and the blood of Christ has become for many people just like that, a certificate, a license, given by God that permits them to sin. You can sin and the blood of Christ is there to cleanse you. This is a deception.

John says in 1 John 2, 1, I'm writing these things to you that you may not sin. If you sin, the blood of Christ will cleanse you but I'm writing to you that you may not sin. This is the gospel that leads us to forgiveness and then leads us to victory over sin.

And to overcoming the devil. And that delivers us from grumbling and complaining and murmuring that makes us come into a life where we rejoice in the Lord always and we're anxious for nothing as we read in Philippians 4 verse 4 and 6. Where we overcome Satan as we read in Revelation 12 verse 11. Where

we're delivered from all fear because God has not given us the spirit of fear or timidity.

This is the gospel that makes us rejoice in weaknesses, insults, distresses, persecutions, difficulties, everything. Because Paul says, God's grace is sufficient for every need. And this is what I mean by being deceived by another gospel that leaves us powerless, defeated, frustrated, discouraged, depressed, gloomy and in bad moods, anxious, worried, timid, having to need tranquilizer three times a day in order to live in this earth.

That's not the gospel. That's a deception. It's a gospel without the power of the Holy Spirit.

It's a gospel without the grace of God. And there are people who are receiving it. Paul says, be careful.

Don't be deceived by a Jesus who didn't have a cross to carry, a spirit who doesn't give you holiness and a gospel that doesn't deliver you from sin. Open your heart to the true Jesus, the Holy Spirit and the gospel of the grace of God. Let's turn today to 2 Corinthians chapter 11 and verse 5. Paul says here, he's continuing the theme that he began in chapter 10 about the Corinthians being taken up with other preachers who had come into their midst who had wonderful personalities and wonderful eloquence in their messages.

And Paul's personality was not impressive. His speech was contemptible, chapter 10, verse 10. He says in that context, continuing that theme, I consider myself, he says in verse 5, not in the least inferior to the most eminent apostles.

Or as another translation has it, I'm not in the least inferior to these superfine apostles of yours. These extra special messengers of yours. These people who come into your midst and boast about their abilities and their personality and their eloquence.

He says, I'm not inferior to them. If you look at me outwardly, of course I'm not as impressive. My speech is not as eloquent.

But inwardly, the thing that God looks at, there is a difference. He says, I'm not inferior. And he says, even if I'm unskilled in speech, that means even if I'm not a trained orator, I'm not a polished speaker.

But he says, I do know what I'm talking about. I'm not unskilled in knowledge. I'm not just speaking out of my, into the air, out of my hat.

I'm speaking that which I've experienced in my life. I may not be skilled in speech, but I know what I'm talking about. In fact, he says, in every way we have made this evident to you in all things.

He says, this could mean I've never failed to make myself intelligible to you. You've understood what I'm saying. And I've also made known to you clearly that I'm not a polished speaker, but I know what I'm talking about because I've got revelation from God.

This is the important thing. Paul had authority. He was absolutely certain.

He had heard God. He had come in touch with God. And he didn't bother about whether his personality was impressive or his speech was eloquent.

He had revelation. And he could speak as from God. And he says, I made that clear to you.

And he says, then did I sin? Oh, he says, perhaps I did one wrong thing. He's being sarcastic again. He says, I did one wrong thing, and that was I took a lowly, humble place in your midst and allowed you to have a high one.

And what was that? That I did not charge you for the gospel that I preached to you. When I was in your midst, I did not accept any offerings from you for my personal support. He makes that clear in 1 Corinthians 9. He worked with his own hands and supported himself during the one and a half years that he was in Corinth.

And here he tells us the reason. It's very interesting to see it. And he's being sarcastic, and he says, perhaps I did wrong in taking a humble place that you might have a high one.

I mean in preaching the gospel of God to you for nothing. He says, perhaps that was my mistake. That I did not accept any pay from you.

Which these other people do. When they preach to you, they collect your tithes and collect money from you for preaching to you, but I didn't do it. And he's being sarcastic, and he says, this was my offense.

In lowering myself and becoming a servant to you and helping to raise you up so that I wouldn't take you take any money from you. It's not that I didn't need money. I worked with my own hands and supported myself, Paul could say.

But, in addition to that, since he didn't have much time, he probably had to work at night making tents in order to support himself because he spent the day preaching the gospel. And that wasn't sufficient to meet his own needs and the needs of people like Timothy and Silas who were with him. And so he found his needs were met by other churches who had a better attitude towards him than the people in Corinth had.

And so he says, I robbed other churches. I took money from other churches. Not that he asked for it.

He never asked for money from anyone. Paul was a man who would make his needs known only to God. Not to man.

But when other people sent him money, he received it. We read in Philippians that Paul tells the church in Philippi, and this is the church in Macedonia that he's talking about here in 2 Corinthians 11. In Philippians 4, he says, after I, verse 15 of Philippians 4, after I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone.

For even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs. So the church in Philippi, in Macedonia, spontaneously, according to the leading of the Lord, sent money to Paul when he was in need. And Paul received it.

Because he had a good attitude. He had a right relationship with them and they had a right attitude towards him. But, in Corinth he received nothing.

Because there, there was a need for a testimony. This is what he means in 2 Corinthians 11.8 when he says, I took money from other churches so that I could preach freely to you. And when I was present with you, verse 9, I was not a burden to any man.

What a wonderful testimony for a true servant of God. I was not a burden to anyone. Dear brother, as God called you to be a minister of the gospel, may this be your testimony at the end of your life.

I was not a burden to anyone. Wherever you go, make sure you are not a burden to anyone but a blessing. God has not called us to be a burden to any human being but a blessing.

Even when we go and stay in a home for the preaching of the gospel, Jesus said, heal the sick that are therein so that they are not that you are not in debt to them. That they do not feel you owe them anything. You have repaid them with healing and blessing in that home.

This is a true servant of God. I was not a burden to anyone. For he says, when the brethren came from Macedonia, that's Philippi, they fully supplied my need.

They helped me. Think of this translation. I sponged on no one.

As it says in the New English Bible. I was not a burden to anyone. I didn't sponge on anyone.

A lot of Christian workers today are sponging on others. They are like a sponge drawing up money and other things for their needs from others. Paul was not like that.

He says, the brethren from Macedonia came and they, what they provided, took care of my expenses. They fully supplied my need. Paul could have taken a very spiritual tone there and said, well the Lord provided my need.

But he was humble enough to say that the Lord provided his need through the brethren in Macedonia. It didn't drop from heaven. It came through the brethren in Macedonia supplying his need.

He was humble enough to admit that. Sometimes we can have a spiritual pride that uses high sounding language saying the Lord provided my need. He provides it through human beings.

And in everything, Paul says in the last part of verse 9, I kept myself from being a burden to you. Notice that, repeated twice. I kept myself.

We have to keep ourselves from sponging on others, from being a burden to others and he says, I will continue to do so. Till the end of my life, I will continue in this way, not to be a burden to any of you. And he says, if the truth of Christ is in me, this boasting of mine will not be stopped.

No one is going to stop my being proud of this independence, this financial independence throughout all Achaia. That city of Corinth and all that region. He says, no one is going to stop me from boasting about this financial independence.

Now he says, here is the reason. Why do I do this? Is it because I don't love you that I don't receive any gifts from you? When you come and offer a gift and I don't take it, is it because I don't love you? Is it because I love the people in Macedonia more? Far from it. God knows that I do.

God who knows my heart knows that I love you. But he says, here is the reason why I do this. It is very important to see that in verse 12.

I am doing this in order to cut the ground from under the feet of those who want to show that they are serving the Lord in the same way as I do. He says, there are a lot of people who come to Corinth and say, we are serving the Lord the same way as Paul does. He says, I challenge them to serve the Lord as I do.

Working, paying for my own expenses and preaching the gospel. I challenge any one of these super apostles in your midst. These sham apostles he says in verse 13.

These spurious apostles. I challenge them to serve the Lord as I do. I challenge any of them to earn their own living and not collect your tithes and not collect your offerings and serve God.

I would like to see one of them do that. He says, that is the way I expose these false apostles. He says, I want to cut the ground from under their feet and expose them for the false apostles that they are.

Because they want to say that they are serving the Lord in the same way as we are and they are not actually doing it. He says, such people are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. Here we see the balance in our approach to money.

In chapter 8 and chapter 9 we saw how Paul pleaded with the Corinthians to give money to the poor saints in Jerusalem. In chapter 11 we see his attitude to receiving money himself. He wouldn't take it.

He wouldn't touch it. He would not take anything from those false apostles. He says, then why do they pretend to be servants of God? Because they are ministers of Satan.

Satan would like to disguise himself as an angel of light, verse 14, and therefore it's not surprising, verse 15, if his servants also disguise themselves as servants preaching righteousness, but their end will be according to their deeds. But meanwhile, Paul says, I am determined to expose them by their wrong attitude to money. Here is a lesson we can learn.

You can make out a servant of Satan by his wrong, unchristlike attitude to money. Let's turn today to 2 Corinthians chapter 11, verse 14. We are considering how Paul had a great desire to expose these false apostles who were leading the Corinthian Christians away from that simplicity of devotion to Jesus Christ.

And he says, since Satan himself comes as an angel of light, it's not surprising that his servants also will disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Remember this, that when Satan seeks to deceive Christians, he does not come with horns and hoofs. He comes as an angel of light.

He will come to you in a vision with a white dress and look like an angel. But it is in the direction he leads you that you will discover whether that is the voice of Satan or the voice of the Spirit. Do not think that every supernatural experience is from God.

A number of them can be from Satan. Do not be deceived. That which leads you to godliness and to the fighting of the lusts of the flesh is from the Spirit.

That which merely leads you to thrilling experiences and to boast about yourself can be from Satan. For he comes as an angel of light, he will quote verses of Scripture to you. Remember that if he had the audacity, the audacity to quote a verse to Jesus Christ, do not you think that he can quote verses of Scripture to you to lead you astray? He knows that you cannot be led astray by verses quoted from some heathen religious book.

So he will seek to lead you astray like he sought to lead Jesus astray from verses in the Scripture, quoted out of context and without the balancing of some other word of Scripture to counter it. When Satan said to Jesus it is written, Jesus said it is also written, something else. And that's why we need to know the word of God so that we don't get deceived when Satan comes with a Bible in his hand.

And his ministers, when they come into our pulpits with Bibles in their hands, how shall we discern them? They may talk about righteousness, but it is by their spirit that you shall discern them. Do they have the spirit of Christ? Is it arrogance strutting itself in the pulpit that you see? That is not the spirit of Christ. The spirit of Christ is one of humility, of service, of being a servant, of gentleness, goodness, purity.

If that is not there, if you see a man in the pulpit wanting your money, arrogantly lording it over you, seeking to impose his powerful personality on you, what he has is soul power, not the power of the Holy Spirit. That's not the spirit of Christ. And if we are not discerning, we'll be deceived in these days by many who claim to be the servants of Christ, but who are not.

They do not have the meekness and the gentleness and the purity and the freedom from the love of money that Christ had. And Paul says, don't be deceived by these people who speak about righteousness, but who are actually the agents of Satan. There are many today.

God allows them to flourish in the world so that he can sift out among Christians who are desiring righteousness and who are just desiring thrills and excitement and miracles. Jesus did not come into the world to do miracles. He came here to do the will of God.

He doesn't save us in order to give us thrills or to do miracles for us. He saves us in order to make us holy, to make us partakers of the divine nature. That's his ultimate aim and goal in our life.

And so it's very easy if we are sticking to what we read in verse 3, simple single-minded devotion to Christ. If that's our goal, we won't be deceived. But if we set up reason and miracles against all that, we will easily be deceived.

For Jesus says, in the last day people will come and say, Lord, we did miracles in your name. We cast out demons in your name. We prophesied in your name.

And Jesus will say, I never knew you. It was that relationship with Christ which they lacked. They had supernatural powers.

Don't be deceived by them in these days. And Paul says, since a lot of people are boasting, let me also do a little boasting. He's being sarcastic again.

He says, don't let anyone think me foolish. No one should think me a fool. But, he says, if you do think me a fool, please show the patience that you would show to fools and listen to what I have to say.

He's being sarcastic. Listen to what this fool has to burst about, he says. And one would think that he would tell us about Eutychus being raised from the dead one day and how handkerchiefs from his body went and cast out demons somewhere else.

And of all the churches he's established all across the Mediterranean. And of all the fantastic miracles he's had. And about the things he heard when he went up to the third heaven.

And he doesn't say any of those things. Not a word about the people he raised from the dead. You read that list all the way down from verse 16 down to the end of the chapter.

And he doesn't say those things which preachers boast of today. About the crowds that came to their meetings and the number of people who raised their hands. Etc, etc.

He doesn't talk a word about these things. He says, let me tell you something. He says, I'm not speaking in the spirit of the Lord now.

But I'm speaking like a fool. Just boasting, since you want to hear somebody who boasts, alright. He says, I'll boast, but in my own way.

Not in the way these other people are boasting, since many are boasting in the spirit of the flesh, verse 18. Let me also boast a little bit. But not about those things.

And he continues in verse 19 to say, you are so wise, you find pleasure yet in tolerating fools. Alright, he says, let me say something and you tolerate this fool. Before he describes the things that he can be proud of, he says, the trouble with you Corinthians is, you tolerate a man, verse 20, even when he enslaves you.

With his sole power he just dominates you. He does not allow you to have a direct contact with God. He finds God's will for you in everything.

He's become like an Old Testament prophet to find God's will for you in everything so that you have no contact with God yourself. He has enslaved you. He plunders you, takes your money.

He gets you into his power. He puts on airs of superiority when he comes into your midst. He strikes you in the face.

He preys upon you, brawl beats you. Takes advantage of you. And you accept all that.

It's amazing, he says, what you Corinthians tolerate. And he says, I admit to my shame that compared to these people I've been weak. I've not dominated over you.

I've not come between you and God so that I have to find out the will of God for you in every situation. I've allowed you to come directly in contact with Christ. He says, I have not been as powerful as they are to squeeze money out of you.

He says, let them boast as they please. But he says, I'm also equal to them. And he says, remember, I'm speaking as a fool now, not as a Christian.

They enjoy so much confidence with you. Have confidence in me. I'll also boast.

And then he begins. Verse 22. Are they Hebrews? He says, so am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I. Are they servants of Christ? He says, now remember, I'm speaking as a fool.

I am more of a servant of Christ than them. This is how the fool speaks. I am a greater servant of Christ.

More people come to my meetings than to that fellow's. More people have been healed through me than through that person. He says, I'm speaking as a fool.

I'm a greater servant of Christ than them. And then he says, I've had more labor, more toil, more imprisonment. Because that's not something many people can boast of today, not something many people would like to boast of.

But Paul had it. Far more imprisonment, far more labors. And he says, I've been beaten times without number.

I can't even remember, he says, the number of times I've been flogged for the gospel's sake. Just listen to this, dear brothers and sisters, and see the mark of a true apostle. So many false apostles that he speaks of in verse 13.

And he says, here are the marks of a true apostle now. Imprisoned, beaten, the scum of the earth. Often in danger of death for the gospel's sake.

195 lashes he received from the Jews. Five times he received 39 lashes. Beaten with rods scourged by the Romans, three times.

Shipwrecked, three times. And he had been 24 hours adrift in the open sea once when he had a shipwreck. A night and a day out in the open sea.

These are the type of things Paul suffered for the sake of the gospel. In my travels, he says, I've been in constant danger from rivers and floods, verse 26, from bandits, from my own countrymen, from pagans. I face danger in city streets, danger in the desert, danger on the high seas, danger among false Christians.

Danger everywhere. I've been through, verse 27, toil and hardship. I've passed many sleepless nights.

I've endured hunger and thirst. There were times when Paul didn't have enough to eat and not enough to drink. In fastings often, he fasted often, deliberately, and sometimes when he didn't, just didn't get food.

I've known cold and nakedness means he didn't have enough clothing. Compare the super apostles of yours who go around rambly dressed with plenty of money because they live off your tights. But he says, think of me.

I've known exhaustion, long vigils, hunger and thirst, doing without meals, cold and lack of clothing, shivering in the cold. And besides all these things, he says, think of the care, the anxiety I have for all the churches that I'm burdened about. The daily pressure.

He was concerned about all the churches. What a man he was. Is there a man who is weak in some church? I feel a concern for his weakness.

Is there a man who is hurt somewhere? I burn with indignation at the person who hurt him. And he says, if I want to glory, verse 30, I'll glory in these infirmities. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus, verse 31, he who is blessed forever knows that I'm not telling lies.

And the most humiliating thing of all, when I had to escape from Damascus, I, the great apostle, had to climb in a basket and climb out of a window. What a humiliating thing. These are the things a true apostle boasted about.

May God open our eyes to see what it means to be a true apostle as opposed to the false apostles that there are, that were in those days and that there are today.

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