

Text: 2 Corinthians 11:5-15

Title: Will the Real Apostle Please Stand Up?

Truth: We are warned not to be duped by false teachers offering a false hope.

Date/Location: Sunday August 16, 2026 at FBC (rewrite of 10/8/2006)

Introduction

In verses 1-4, we saw the importance of single-minded devotion to Christ. Paul there gave three reasons that the Corinthians should hear his concerns along that line:

1. He was jealous for them with a godly jealousy, concerned that they remain faithful to their divine husband: a figure of speech taken from the betrothment/marriage culture of the day.
2. He feared that they were on the verge of being deceived, like Eve in the Garden of Eden. Satan works by causing confusion over God's clear word, injecting his own words into the mix via false teachers and inducing doubt and independence from God.
3. He knew that they were listening to other voices, so they should have been happy to have his voice in their thinking—especially since he was the one who brought them the gospel in the first place. They were being exposed to another gospel, another spirit, and another Jesus. If they would “bear with” those things, they should easily “bear with” Paul!

I. A Fourth Reason: Paul is not Inferior to the Others, v. 5-6

Another reason that they should “put up with Paul” is that he is not lesser than these “super apostles” (not Peter or John, but the false apostles) that have come into Corinth. They somehow deceived some members of the church that they were superior to Paul, and they used their self-made benchmarks to measure themselves among themselves.

- A. Paul acknowledges that he was untrained in speech. The word means someone “who is relatively unskilled or inexperienced in some activity or field of knowledge.” In this case, it speaks of a specialist skill of speaking. He was not a trained Greek orator. Instead, he was an apostle, a minister, a theologian! This does not

mean he was terrible at preaching or teaching, but that he was not an Apollos-level preacher. He was not fit for the stage to act out a Greek tragedy, or to make a political speech at the Areopagus. He was adequate, but not an expert by any means.

- B. Far more importantly, he was *not* untrained in knowledge. He was a specialist and expert in the gospel. That is really what made his speaking to them so critical. He might not have it all polished perfectly, but the content was there, it was clearly and adequately presented, and it did *not allow for* a false Jesus or false gospel. His gospel came from Jesus directly (Gal. 1:1, 12).
- C. The Corinthians knew this if they stopped to think about it. Paul had been thoroughly transparent with them in everything.
- D. Trained speaking can be false teaching. Polished oration can be bad doctrine. What Paul had was more important: the truth. And if you are a Christian and have done some thinking about the gospel in line with God's word and the good sermons you have heard, then you have the truth as well. That beats eloquent nonsense any day. Suave does not save.

This reminds me of what Jesus said in Luke 12:11 about not worrying what you will say if you are brought before a judge and called into question for your faith. The manner may not be as perfect as you like, but if you have thought about the truth and have it ingrained in your heart, you can with God's help speak the truth at that stressful time too.

Or if you are teaching your children, or a Sunday school class, give them knowledge, and pray that knowledge becomes the foundation of repentant faith that alone saves.

- E. The issue is one of form and substance. Paul was about substance over form. The false apostles were big on form and had their own substance to differentiate themselves from Paul (and the truth). Packaging does not matter nearly as much as the contents. If you are, say, a church looking for your next pastor, do not get caught up on form as a first-order issue. Is the man sound in doctrine? Does he give evidence of having a good marriage and being a faithful man? Is his family in order? Does he conduct himself with

gravity? Does he know the truth? Does he teach adequately? Does he meet the qualifications of 1 Timothy 3:1-8—that is, is he blameless, self-controlled, sober-minded, hospitable, able to teach, not hooked on wine, not greedy, gentle, not given to money, humble? You might see a candidate who speaks very well, but to get him, must you compromise your doctrine or these standards? Then the answer is NO. He could be the next Charles Spurgeon as far as eloquence but if he is mean or has some doctrinal ticks, he is a no-go.

II. Responding to a Reason They Might Not Listen, v. 7-12

- A. Some in the church had a problem with Paul: he did not take their money. The normal practice of itinerant teachers was to make a living by receiving support from the people to whom they spoke. But Paul did not do that. Was he weird? Did he not respect them enough to receive their money? Did he not love them?
- B. They were focusing on an ancillary issue—non-receipt of support—which was basically another form issue and not a substance issue.
- C. The charge against Paul seems to be, “If you were a real apostle, you would receive compensation.” But accepting money was not a sign of apostleship. There were other signs—like having seen the risen Christ, being appointed by Christ, and working authenticating miracles or having one or more gifts of the Spirit. Although Paul had a right to support, he voluntarily set that aside in order to be most effective for the gospel.
- D. Was it a sin that Paul preached the gospel free of charge? It sounds almost nonsensical to even ask the question: it was no sin! Paul came to them in humble fashion, working as necessary to support himself, to give them the gospel freely, so that they would be lifted up. Paul lowered his status so he could elevate their status.
- E. It was Paul’s personal policy when he went to a new area *not* to ask for financial support, like an established church supports its pastors financially. Rather, he went to the place and worked on his tent-making job or received support from *other* churches. Read about this in 1 Cor. 9:12-15. There he explains that he purposefully does not use all of his rights as an apostle—including

the right to financial remuneration—because he does not want to be seen as abusing his right as an apostle, and he wants to present the gospel of Christ without charge. In this way, his ministry becomes a little picture of the bountiful blessing of the free gospel. It costs you nothing to “buy” the salvation of Christ. It did, of course, cost Him a tremendous amount, but you can be “justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:24). In this connection, read Isaiah 55:1-8 and ponder the costless gospel—no works or fees need to be paid to receive it.

- F. Some in Corinth accused Paul of not loving them because of this personal policy of limited non-remuneration. In fact, the opposite was the case. *Because* Paul loved these people, he did not want to put *any* hindrance in the way of their reception of the truth. Perceived greed could be one such hindrance.
- G. There are multiple explanations as to why Paul might choose not to receive funds:
1. His personal policy. This is not a ministry principle that must be followed by every minister, but it is a possible course of action.
 2. If he receives money, there could be strings attached. He cannot modify the gospel or his delivery because of strings.
 3. He wants to make the offer of the gospel free, like the gospel itself. He is modeling that the gospel and the word of God is not for sale.
 4. He is not peddling God’s word for profit. He is not greedy for financial gain.
 5. He does not need to receive their money. He has other avenues of support (working, other churches).
 6. He wants to demonstrate a strong work ethic as an example for some who may have a lazy tendency (1 Cor. 4:12, 1 Thess. 2:9, 2 Thess. 3:8, and possibly 1 Tim. 4:10).
 7. He does not want to be a burden to anyone, and as such be a hindrance to the gospel.
 8. To serve the people, he gives of himself.

9. To elevate the Corinthians and to lower himself.

10. Finally, he wanted to distinguish himself from the false teachers. They cannot “boast” that they are like Paul in this regard! It may have been somewhat of an embarrassment to them because they were looking for money, and it would be a better “look” for them if Paul would do the same. Paul did not want them to be able to see themselves as equal to Paul. There truly was a difference—not only in method, but also in message.

H. Paul’s refusing financial support was certainly not a *lack* of love for the Corinthians, but rather an *expression* of love! How we can sometimes get something completely backwards if we are not understanding the other person!

I. The Macedonian churches sent money to Paul several times (v. 9). In Philippians 4:16, Paul thanks the Philippians for sending him help more than once. This was not literal “robbery” (v. 8)—that is another sarcastic phrase.

III. Direct Attack on the False Apostles, v. 13-15

Another way to look at these sections is to see them as Paul comparing himself to the so-called eminent or super apostles.

Section I: He is not inferior to them because his message is truth regardless of his eloquence.

Section II: He does not take money like they do.

Section III (this section): They are not apostles of Christ like Paul.

For those reasons, he asks them to “bear with me” (v. 1).

These “super apostles,” as Paul sarcastically calls them, are most emphatically not just like Paul for a couple of big reasons—not only the financial support. Consider:

A. They are false (pseudo) apostles. Paul comes out and says what his concern is. No beating around the bush here. Today’s “politically correct” and “tolerate everything” sensibilities try to close down direct speech like this. But the danger is so real that Paul has to drop out of sarcasm and irony and nice-sounding names to speak directly about the danger. People don’t like to hear that their

favorite preacher is on Satan's payroll, but it has to be said when it is true.

- B. They are deceitful workers. Their ministry is lies. See 2 Cor. 11:4 which indicates they preach a different Jesus, Spirit, and gospel.
 - C. They make themselves out to be apostles of Christ, but they are actually apostles of Satan. You can fool some of the people some of the time by attaching the title of "apostle" to your ministry. But you cannot fool all of the people with this trick. There are simply no apostles today. The qualifications for true, technical apostleship are impossible to fulfill. A true apostle must be an eyewitness of Jesus' ministry and resurrection (Acts 1:21-22) and must work the signs of an apostle (2 Cor. 12:12). No one can say that today.
 - D. Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. This is how he gets a false gospel into people's minds. He even deceives people into thinking they are seeing the light. He uses certain people to start new religions. Paul adds that it is no surprise if his ministers do the same—making themselves look like ministers of righteousness when they are far from it. Their judgment will be according to their works (Rev. 20:12), which is fitting since false religions often preach a gospel of works.
1. Consider the origin of the Mormon religion: On September 21, 1823, Joseph Smith prayed in his bedroom and reported that an angel named Moroni (or by some accounts, Nephi) appeared in a bright light, above the brightness of the sun at noon. The angel told Smith to find some golden plates which he later translated. There is no other eyewitness verification for the angelic vision; there are several people who claimed to have seen the plates. It is reported that Smith later placed a "seer stone" into a hat, put his face into the hat to block out light, and dictated the English text of the translated plates to scribes.

Notice the angel and the light. And notice something else. The LDS church proclaims a different Christ (a spirit-child of God who took on a mortal body, and although preeminent in their view, he is the elder brother to humans and all angels, a distinct god from God the Father, and there is no Trinity). They offer a different gospel (people are saved by Jesus Christ *after all that*

they can do). They preach a different spirit (again, not part of the Triune God, a spirit son of the Heavenly Father). With the angel of light and the different Jesus, different spirit, and different gospel, the Mormon faith has fallen into the same trap as some of the Corinthians did (2 Cor. 1:4). An estimated 25 to 30 million people since 1830 have embraced this doctrine either completely or partially.

2. Then, consider the origin of Islam. Mohammed is said to have encountered a very bright angel name Jibril (Gabriel), in a cave, who told him words to recite. Over a period of 23 years, he memorized the words and companions also recorded them. His book was not compiled as a single bound book until after his death. But again, Islam proclaims a different Jesus (not God's Son, he allegedly did not die or rise again from the dead). The gospel is different (one is saved by faith, righteous deeds, and ultimately the mercy of Allah). Finally, the spirit is different, he is the angel Gabriel, not divine, and Allah is not a Trinity). Sound familiar? A different Jesus, a different Spirit, and a different gospel, and an angel of light. It is the same error the Corinthians fell into, under the spell of angels of light masquerading as ministers of righteousness. Roughly 7 billion people have been born into or lived as Muslims in the past 1400 years.¹

E. Remember Galatians 1:6-9—⁶ I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, ⁷ which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. ⁸ But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. ⁹ As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.

¹ Because of very incomplete records, there is no official count of how many people have practiced the Christian faith. By some estimates, tens of billions of people have practiced Christianity since its founding in the 1st century AD, out of roughly 100 to 110 billion humans who have ever lived on Earth. I leave for separate consideration how many of those were truly born-again Christians.

Conclusion

Be aware of false apostles looking like white-robed angels with a false gospel and a false Jesus and a false spirit.

Do not give up on the Christian faith for flimsy reasons—like, “he does not take our money!”

And remember the guy who brought the real gospel goods—the apostle Paul, and before Him, Jesus Himself. Remember those who shared the word of God with you and do not diss them (Heb. 13:7).

Looking ahead, we are going to see that Paul will boast not in his superiority, but in his inferiority, his weakness. His strength is his weakness. His best credentials are his suffering for Christ. He was not proud, for God ensured that by giving him a thorn in the flesh.

MAP

To Tell the Truth

“To Tell the Truth is an American television game show that has been seen in various forms on and off since 1956. The basic premise consists of three contestants, each of whom claims to be the same person, being interrogated by a panel of four celebrities in an attempt to identify who is the real one and who is bluffing. The contestant in question usually holds an unusual occupation or has done something noteworthy. After each celebrity has had a turn to question the guests, they each vote as to who they think is the real person.

When this is finished, the moderator says, “Will the real _____ please stand up?” The real person stands, the other two then reveal who they really are, and money is awarded to the players based on how many incorrect votes were placed.”²

The moderator’s question “will the real...” serves distinguish between the true and the false. “This phrase of identification became a well-known expression in American culture. Even today, the expression will be used to encourage someone to quit pretending.”³

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/To_Tell_the_Truth

³ <http://home.snu.edu/~hculbert/mold.htm>