

Marks of a True Minister 2 Corinthians 11:1-15

Through the ages, various cults have preached another Jesus.

And many people around the world say they “believe in Jesus” ... but which one?

The Jesus of biblical revelation or the Jesus of personal imagination?

- Sun Myung Moon teaches that Jesus was the second Adam but was only partially successful in fulfilling his mission; and therefore Moon must complete it.
- Mary Baker Eddy (founder of Church of Christ, Scientist, aka Christian Science) wrote that Jesus was a divine being and only appeared to have a body.
- Victor Paul Wierwille, founder of The Way International rejected the pre-existence of Jesus and taught that Jesus was a man with a fallen nature, yet without sin.
- Charles Taze Russell, the architect of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (or the Jehovah’s Witnesses) taught that the pre-incarnate Jesus was the arch-angel, Michael, the first of God’s Creation.
- Mormonism teaches that Jesus was the first and mightiest spirit son of God and the brother of all other spirits who would eventually become humans on earth.
- New Age gurus espouse a Jesus who was a great world teacher for his ages but believe that a new world teacher is about to appear.
- Contemporary teachers claim Jesus was a “Subversive Sage” – he was witty teacher like Buddah or Socrates
- or that he is was a first century apocalyptic prophet, who expected the end of his world.
- In Islam, he is a prophet inferior to Muhammad
- Liberal teachers have considered him to be a great example and a good ethical teacher but deny his deity and his miracles and the atonement (and more)
 - Last week, overheard conversation of an older lady taking an online course on “How Jesus Became God” — and was raving about it.
- Jesus of Pop Culture: he’s on T-shirts (Jesus is my home-boy), TV: Simpsons, South Park, the movie Major League, Talledaga nights;
 - Time/Newsweek every Xmas;
 - Jesus Action Figures/Bobble Heads, Halloween Costumes;
 - Sports talk radio drifts into theo talk — “Not even Jesus Christ was perfect”

Getting Jesus right, matters. **This is the big E on the eye-chart.**

You get him wrong, you get everything else wrong.

“**Who do you say that I am?**” (Mark 8) Is still the big question.

Paul is defending himself here, but the real concern is the defense of the real gospel.

- It’s a Christocentric defense.
- The real point of contention is Christology, not Torah or circumision or Sabbath principles.

The Corinthians had been influenced by some false apostles/teachers who were preaching another Jesus.

There is no consensus among scholars concerning the identity of these false teachers.

- But they clearly emphasized more of a **health, wealth, power message with an emphasis on showy performance and ecstatic experiences.**
- They may have also had an “over-realized eschatology”
- They seem to have magnified the power of Jesus at the expense of his weakness and crucifixion; and understood the Spirit as more of a wonder worker than anything else.

See 13:4

- For Paul the **cross** is still central to the gospel. (1 Cor 2.1-5)
- And the Spirit is at work to display the **fruit** of the Spirit in our lives, working through our weakness in a way that glorifies God.

So Paul is engaging in some tough talk here — out of great concern for this young church, and because the gospel was at stake.

- He doesn't want them to be carried off by who sarcastically calls “super-apostles”
- His words are spirited and strong — but all of it is out of love and for their good. (For their “**upbuilding**” 12:19)

Some call it “**A Discourse of Fools**” where irony, sarcasm, mock humility, word-play, diatribe and rhetorical comparison play a significant role (Martin).

- Paul is contrasting his ministry with the false teachers, even though he is very reluctant to defend himself.
- Parading his apostolic credentials he thinks to be “fools speech” as he says, but its necessary for the sake of the church.
 - He thinks its foolish to boast in the things his opponents boast in; and he gladly boasts in those things his opponents think are foolish: namely his weaknesses.
 - We will see that more in the following passage.

“If he stoops to their level by boasting, he is a fool. But if he does not defend himself, he might lose the congregation to even greater fools.” (Garland)

As we observe 11:1-15, we can break it down in three parts, as Paul is describing true ministers vs. false ministers.

- While we're not apostles like Paul, we do have the apostolic gospel and carry on the apostle's mission as Christ's ambassadors.

#1: True ministers have a Christ-centered objective (11:1-3)

1: Paul asks them to “**bear with him**” (he doesn't particularly enjoy this flashing of credentials). The reality is, he is “bearing with them.”

- He feels forced to fight fire with fire by engaging in the folly of boasting... that is, discussing his apostolic credentials.
- It is folly because of what he has just said, ‘Let him who boast, boast in the Lord ... it is not the man who commends himself that is accepted, but the man whom the Lord commends’ (10:18)
- But the Corinthians' gullibility necessitates this.

2a: Paul says he feels “**divine jealousy**” for them.

- This is the love a husband has for his bride.
- Paul describes it as Christ’s love for his church (5:22-23)
- Paul as the servant of Christ feels this jealousy for the Corinthians.
- It’s the same passionate jealousy we read about in the OT, of God’s covenant love for his people (Ex 20:5; 34:14)

2b: Then Paul puts the attention on Christ: “**since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ**”

- Among the Jews, marriage consisted in two separate ceremonies: betrothal and the nuptial ceremony which consummated the marriage.
- Usually there was a year between the two.
- The betrothal commitment was considered binding.
- It was the Father’s job to protect the bride and keep her pure until the wedding day.
- Paul is acting as the spiritual father.
 - Paul is saying “be faithful to Christ, and don’t give your heart to another — to an intruder, to a predator.”

We see this already-not-yet dimension to – the Corinthians are betrothed to Christ now. But the future wedding day will come when Christ returns and the marriage is completed.

- Notice this ministerial object: to unite people to Christ.
- This is our goal: for people to meet Christ, to adore him, and to remain faithful to him.

This is the most dangerous work of these false teachers and of those who influence you today: enticing you away from singular devotion to Jesus.

Application: How may this happen? How might a passionate devotion to Jesus grow cold?

1. Sometimes, as here with false teachers
2. Where I’ve seen it most is through relationships - Satisfying sexual desires becomes more important than doctrinal beliefs
3. Sometimes it’s the slow drift (C.S. Lewis)

The Opponent behind this... the serpent

3: Paul mentions **Satan** again in this letter.

- **2:11** – “outwitted by Satan” if they don’t forgive and restore the offender
- **4:4** – “the god of this world” blinds the minds of unbelievers
- **11:14** – “Satan disguises himself as an angel of light” in the form of false teachers
- **12:7** – Satan is involved in Paul’s “thorn in the flesh”

2 Corinthians highlights the reality of spiritual warfare, and the various forms it takes.

What’s the similarity with Eve’s deception and the Corinthians?

- It’s this: **Satan makes something look good. “cunning”**
- Satan makes things look attractive and flashy.

- It was forbidden fruit for Eve; it is the outwardly impressive super-apostles for the Corinthians.

Satan's goal: **“your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ”** (3b)

- Eve betrayed her ultimate lover, the God who made her.
- Corinthians would be betraying Christ himself if they followed a false teacher.

Notice this happens in the realm of **“thoughts.”**

- thoughts (noēmata) is found only 6x in the NT, and 5 of of 6 are in 2 Corinthians.
- Paul uses it to describe the ‘designs’ of Satan (2:11), the blinding of the ‘mind’ (3:14; 4:4), the taking captive of every ‘thought’ to obey Christ (10:5),
- Satan can work in many ways, but one of the primary assaults is on the *thoughts* of people.
- Through demonically influencing their thoughts, he leads them away from devotions o Christ.

Christian: Guard your mind.

- Fill it with truth.
- Read it to behold your Savior.

Do not entertain lies, deception, immorality.

#2: True ministers proclaim the authentic gospel (11:4-6)

4: Paul drills down on the false teacher's heresy:

Another Jesus than the one Paul proclaimed

- The super-apostles had no room for a suffering apostle; only a triumphal one.
- They likely had the same kind of Jesus emphasizing his power and glory but denying or neglecting his suffering, and brutal death.
- They didn't preach “Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor 2).
- [Different Jesus' Today](#)
- [KNow the real Jesus in the Bible \(to detect counterfeits\)](#)

Receiving a **Different spirit** than the one they received

- The Spirit works virtues of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control.
- The super-apostles were authoritarian and overbearing resembling Satan's ways rather than the Spirit of Christ.
- “Test the spirits” (1 Jn 4)

Accepting **another gospel** than the one they accepted

- This is because they preached another Christ
- **Galatians 1:6–9 (ESV):** 6 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ [Christ comes to us through the gospel!] and are turning to a different gospel— 7 not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the

gospel of Christ [different team]. 8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. 9 As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.

- **Phil 1** — Christ is preached, I rejoice (even with a bad motive)
- **This is no small error to disbelieve the gospel. This is like Bill Buckner: between the legs. Miss this and you miss God.**

How are people distorting the Gospel today?

- “I’m a morally good person.” **Morality can keep you out of jail, but not hell.**
 - If morality could save you, then Jesus wouldn’t have to die.
 - **You need something far greater than morality: perfect righteousness.**
 - **Only perfectly righteous people can go to heaven, not just moral people;** and no one in history has been perfectly righteous except Jesus.
 - We need his righteousness.
- “I attend church” - “I grew up in church” **sticking my head in an oven doesn’t make me a buscuit**
- I have friends who are Christians — Jesus spent three years with Judas
- My family is Christian - but you must be born again
- **Works-Based Religions** man-centered religion

False teachers proclaim a different Jesus; a different spirit and a different gospel.

This is a huge deal — this is a first tier, closed handed issue.

This is not debatable issues within historical Christianity that are not tests for orthodoxy. This is the gospel!

“Put up with it readily enough”

- It’s the same language as verse 1 “bear with”
- They were quick to put up with false teachers, and slow to accept Paul.

Application

- Just because someone says “gospel” or “Jesus” or “spirit” doesn’t mean we’re on the same team.
- **How many movies show the villain pretending to be a policeman or a doctor, only to seek to kill and destroy? (Jack Ryan film)**

Paul shifts to his own defense...

5: Paul for the first time calls out these false teachers with the sarcastic name **“super-apostles”** (cf., 12:11)

- He uses it as a description of how they exalt themselves, but in reality are empty.

Paul doesn’t want to have to defend himself but he must because of what’s at stake, **“I am not in the least inferior to these super-apostles”**

- The Corinthians spiritual well-being is at stake, and so he must clear things up.

6: Paul is the opposite of these false teachers: they were known for what is immediately visible (speaking**), but he is marked by that which is more invisible (**knowledge**) (6a)**

- The super-apostles won people over with impressive speech.
- Paul, though obviously a good communicator, did not seek to be impressive, but did have sound doctrinal knowledge.
- This knowledge involves his understanding of the gospel.

What we proclaim is more important than how impressively one proclaims it.

- I don't think this means Paul was boring; but substance is more important than style.
- Rhetoricians aimed to move and persuade people — the audience was sovereign — but for Paul the message was sovereign.
 - I preach it — it's a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to the Greeks
- If you proclaim the wrong gospel, you're leading people astray even if you're polished.

He says that he has "made this plain**" to them (6b)**

- His lack of a silver tongue doesn't mean his message to be disregarded as worthless.

God can mediate his truth through all kinds of communicators — that should give us all hope.

- We have already observed references to this reality — like how God uses "**clay pots**" (4:7)
- In fact, the benefit of hearing from a clay pot is that the gospel will be what shines, not the communicator.

We cannot control gifting, but we can grow in "knowledge**" and commend the authentic gospel to people at work, in the marketplace, in our homes, in our gatherings.**

#3: True ministers are marked by integrity, humility and love (11:7-11)

- These verses recall Paul's previous discussion on money and generosity in 2 Cor 8-9.
- There, he spoke of the Corinthians' stewardship and handling of finances, but here he speaks of his own practices.
- It can be summarized as being characterized by humility, integrity and love
- Since Plato through Paul's day the Sophist philosophers and orators charged fees and public speaking was done not only for persuasion but also for entertainment.
- Paul charged nothing in Corinth and his opponents thought that made him inferior.

7-8: Integrity and Humility [read]

Integrity: "His opponents considered his refusal to take money, "a **sin!**"

- **This is an unusual criticism: "He works for free!"**
- **"Can we get him to mow our grass; rake our leaves..."**
- Perhaps they were saying it was a sin against the Corinthians for being deceptive.

Paul's practice among the Corinthians wasn't his practice everywhere, but it wasn't sinful!

- In Corinth he didn't receive compensation.

- He made tents.
- He did receive support from Macedonia (v. 9).
- Paul thought was fitting to support ministers:
 - He wrote to the Corinthians in 1 Cor 10 about the legitimacy of compensating teachers.
 - And in 1 Tim 5.17 instructs compensation to teaching elders.

Why did he do this in Corinth? Why did he wish to “**humbly**” (v. 7) do this work freely?

- It was fueled by a desire **an uncomplicated ministry**.
- He wanted to keep his independence, not being obligated to anyone as it pertains to money.
- And it seems he was uncomfortable taking support during the founding of the church.

But it looks like that plan didn't accomplish what he hoped for.

- Instead of commending him, some of the Corinthians, being influenced by the super-apostles, viewed this negatively:
 - “**An apostle shouldn't do manual work!**” But Paul was **humble** enough to do it. “Among the philosophers and itinerant teachers of Paul's day, continuing to work at a craft was regarded as the least acceptable way of providing for life's necessities.”
 - “**He is trying to embarrass us**” — “**that's not loving.**”
 - “**He has other motives**” — “**you can't trust him.**”
- But Paul is saying, you have nothing to complain about.

9: Paul continues describing his being above reproach with regard to finances **[read]**

- In Corinth, he didn't ask for support, lest they be “**burdened**”
- It was all for their good.
- God graciously sent support from the Macedonians to support his material needs.
- V. 11 – all of this was done **out of love** for them.

10: Integrity [read] He is saying not receiving support from the Corinthians isn't something he's embarrassed about or trying to hide — that's integrity.

- He isn't worried about the idea of his willingness to ministry free of charge.
- He is happy for the surrounding regions of Achaia to know of his ministry approach.

11: Love, “And why? Because I do not love you? You know I do.”

- If the other Christians in the area hear that the Corinthians didn't support the apostle, that might not make the Corinthians look good (honor/shame culture)
- So the Corinthians may wonder if that's actually loving of Paul.
- But Paul says “you know I love you.”
- More importantly, “**God knows!**” Sometimes that's where we have to leave the matter.

Once again we see humility and integrity and love.

Why didn't Paul receive support in Corinth?

1. **Planting vs. Pastoring** - or New church work and established church work. It's similar today, Planters need support by a lot of outside support; local pastors by their church.
2. **Independence** — He didn't want constraint.
3. **Distance himself from the false teachers who were all about money** — he elaborates on that below... “not on the same terms” as the false teachers

#4: True ministers warn about the dangers of false teaching (11:12-17)

A. How Paul Operates (v. 12)

12b: He wants to **undermine** the false apostles, who claim to operate with the same integrity as Paul [read].

- He knows they are in fact self-serving, seeking to win fans, rather than true followers of Christ.
- Like the pastor raising 60 million for a private jet!

B. How the False Apostles Operate (13-15)

13: He reveals the true nature of his opponents in vivid terms: “**For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.**”

False apostles – *psudeoapostoloi* – only occurs one time in the NT (here); notes a fake ministry parading oneself around as genuine.

- False apostles were not sent. (Apostle means “sent”).
- And they proclaimed a false message as well.
- They were bogus apostles masquerading as real apostles.
- **Contemporary challenge: not sent // rapid planting**

Deceitful workmen – the word “deceitful” (*dolios*) only occurs one time in the NT (here), though the noun form occurs eleven times (*dolos*)

- Refers to deliberate cunning with a view toward deceiving.

Disguising themselves as angels of light

- Appearances re deceptive.
- They transform themselves (positive use of “disguising) *metaschematizo*, in Phil 3:21)
- In all of this, there is a sneakiness, a darkness, an evilness to their leadership but not immediately visible to the young church.
- Paul was concerned for them – as these teachers were enticing and alluring.
- Most false teachers have a following for the same reasons – strong, eloquent, crafty.

14-15: Paul says these teachers were simply doing what their master (**Satan**) does [read]

14: Satan disguises himself [same word as above *metaschematizo*] as an angel of light

- He makes false gospels look good
- There are now mentions of the devil's transformation

15: His “**servants**” follow suit

- False teachers don't walk around and say, "Hug me, I'm a false apostle."
- They creep in like wolves.

Church in Ephesus Commended for **Their Discernment...**

you cannot tolerate wicked men... and tested those who call themselves apostles but are not, and found them to be false."

- What an astounding claim to make in our pluralistic age - it was then and now.
- Jesus says, "I commend your *intolerance*"
- The Ephesians remembered **Acts 20**.

The Corinthians lacked discernment... It's so important.

Not all that glitters is gold.

15: The delay of justice doesn't mean the absence of justice (Dane)

- God will not be mocked (Gal 6:7)
- One day Jesus will have the last word.
- For believers, this is a word of comfort.
- To the false teachers, it's a word of terrifying warning.
- They follow Satan's ways, and they will share his fate.

So let us keep our eyes on the Jesus of Holy Scripture.

He alone saves and satisfies.

And he will come again in power and glory for those who have put their faith and hope in him.