



2 Corinthians 11:1-33

Taught at our Sunday evening service, 3rd April 2022 @ Deal Christian Fellowship

Reading: 1 Corinthians 9:1-18

Good evening. Let's pray.

Introduction

We're in the final part of this letter written by the apostle Paul to the church in Corinth - a church that he founded, and now writes to, in order to encourage, equip and correct them.

Overview of 2 Corinthians

And before we get going, as I've made a habit of doing, let's quickly remind ourselves of how we can summarise this book:

- Chapters 1 to 7 - Christian living
- Chapters 8 to 9 - Christian giving
- Chapters 10 to 13 - Christian guarding

Now, last week in chapter 10, we saw that Paul gave authentication of his apostleship - showing himself and his calling to be genuine and valid. Tonight, we'll look at all of chapter 11, where Paul will *continue* defending his apostleship - his God-given authority - and he'll offer, in a sense, a vindication - a clearing himself of blame or suspicion.

Overview of chapter eleven

And we can summarise this chapter as follows:

- Paul's jealousy for the Corinthian Christians (v1-4)
- Paul's generosity to the Corinthian Christians (v5-11)
- Paul's Anxiety about the Corinthian Christians (v12-28)

As we've often seen, Paul builds on that which he previously wrote about in 1 Corinthians, and as we begin our study this evening, I think it's helpful to remind ourselves of what he wrote in chapter 4 of that first letter:

1 Corinthians 4:14-15

I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn you. For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.

You see, Paul, had been instrumental in these folks coming to know the Lord. And as such, there was a special love he had for them - as children. And we see that come out in these opening verses.

Chapter eleven

In verse 1 of chapter 11 we read...

2 Corinthians 11:1

Oh, that you would bear with me in a little folly—and indeed you do bear with me.

What is this foolishness? The folly of boasting, of being egotistical. For he'll write a lot about himself in this chapter. Then in the first verse of chapter 12 he'll write "It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast." - that is, this doesn't move us forward. Why talk like this then? Well, not to build his ego, but because it was necessary to ensure they didn't move backward. And so he'll lay out some facts for them to digest. He continues...

2 Corinthians 11:2

For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.

So that is, his heart wasn't for his glory, but their purity - their holiness - for Christ's glory in the end.

And he uses the example of a virgin bride, because it was both culturally expected of a bride to be a virgin, and seen as the father's responsibility to ensure she was still a virgin on her wedding day. And that's the same expectation set in the Bible by the way. For guys too.

And here, Paul is acting as the father - doing all he can to encourage purity. Not forced, but that the Corinthian's desire, and *our* desire might be for it too. Similarly, John writes in *his* first letter...

1 John 2:28-3:3

And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming. If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him.

Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

And Paul wants to be able to walk this bride down the aisle, so to speak, wearing white, completely pure, that she would have no shame before her husband - knowing that would be an immense joy to him as a spiritual father, so to speak, as he writes to the Thessalonian church:

1 Thessalonians 2:19-20

For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For you are our glory and joy.

However, Paul is concerned. He writes in verse 3...

2 Corinthians 11:3

But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

He's concerned about the oldest trick in the book. What's that? Let's look at Genesis chapter 3

Genesis 3:1

Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?"

The devil says... "Has God indeed said..." - in other words, "did God *really* say...?"

We read on...

Genesis 3:2-3

And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.' " Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

This oldest of tricks causes us to *question* what God has said, then follows up by *telling* us that God *didn't* say what we know to be true.

So what was Paul concerned the devil would seek to cause the Corinthians to doubt? The simplicity that is in Christ.

What's that? It's God's grace. Paul was concerned that false teachers would come into the church and preach Jesus AND something. That somehow God's grace was not sufficient, that rather we must keep to some type of rule or rules in order to be saved. That doing so would somehow make us more spiritual - and take note of that. The concern wasn't that someone would walk in and say, let's all head up to the temple prostitutes this evening. No, his concern was that someone would walk in and say - to be really spiritual you must do this. Whether that is keeping the sabbath, tithing 10%, dressing in a suit, wearing a head covering, or keeping of men's doctrines instead of what the Bible says. He was concerned that they might put up with this nonsense!

2 Corinthians 11:4

For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it!

Again, the concern was that they might put up with the idea of Jesus AND something. Or worse, something instead of Jesus. Would we put up with it?

If our love for God, and our choice of church, is all rooted in music & entertainment, atmosphere, feelings, social calendars, and social action - we've missed the point. It MUST be about Jesus. And it can't be about Jesus if His Word is not central. For out of that come all things - our purity, our worship, our service to Him, and our love for others!

Let us not think this concern, this risk, this reality, was unique to the Corinthian church. Paul wrote likewise to the church in Galatia:

Galatians 1:6-9

I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. 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. 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.

If anyone comes in and says Jesus was not God, that He wasn't born of a virgin, that He didn't rise from the dead, ascend into Heaven, nor will return for us. Don't listen to them. For they are lying. They are trying to deceive you.

If anyone says you need to keep certain rules in order to be saved, or do certain things to earn God's forgiveness, or that merely Jesus tops up our goodness so that we're acceptable, don't listen to them. Remember, the gospel can be summed up in four words - "Christ died for me". Don't forget that simplicity.

So concerned was Paul that the Corinthians *would* tolerate this dodgy theology from *false* teachers, he finds it needful to lay out the facts of his apostleship.

2 Corinthians 11:5-6

For I consider that I am not at all inferior to the most eminent apostles. Even though I am untrained in speech, yet I am not in knowledge. But we have been thoroughly manifested among you in all things.

Paul didn't preach using the wisdom of man's words. He clearly didn't think himself eloquent. But first, he knew the scriptures. He'd studied at the feet of Gamaliel, one of the most highly regarded Jewish teachers. But, crucially, he knew Jesus. He'd had the most dramatic of conversions on the road to Damascus, and his relationship with Jesus was evident in his life, and now the fruit of his ministry was evident in their lives.

Here's a helpful anecdote...

Asked to quote Psalm 23, the famous Shakespearean actor articulated each and every phrase perfectly. Then the host of the party asked his pastor, who was also in attendance, to quote the same psalm. The pastor lacked the rhythmic cadence, the powerful voice, and the smooth speech. All he had was a tear rolling down his cheek.

"I know the psalm," said the actor. "But this man knows the Shepherd."

Paul knew the shepherd. He knew Jesus. He might have been an untrained speaker, but he had a relationship with the One who enabled him to speak. He continues...

2 Corinthians 11:7-9

Did I commit sin in humbling myself that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you free of charge? I robbed other churches, taking wages from them to minister to you. And when I was present with you, and in need, I was a burden to no one, for what I lacked the brethren who came from Macedonia supplied. And in everything I kept myself from being burdensome to you, and so I will keep myself.

Paul had a heart to feed, not to fleece the flock - especially this church in Corinth. And that's how it should be. If you're thinking of going into ministry for what you can get out of it, don't do it (or get out of it). Of course, it's not that those in ministry shouldn't be supported, for we see that Paul was indeed supported by other churches, and by his own labour as a tentmaker.

But again he's building on what he wrote in his first letter to the Corinthians where he said:

1 Corinthians 9:14-16

Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel. But I have used none of these things, nor have I written these things that it should be done so to me; for it would be better for me to die than that anyone should make my boasting void. For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!

So would it have been wrong for Paul to have been financially supported by this church? Not at all. But rather, Paul saw it as his calling, his duty, his responsibility to preach the gospel. To feed the sheep. And he didn't want anything to get in the way of that. He didn't want support from this church, only for them to cite that as the reason he preached to them. We read...

2 Corinthians 11:10-11

As the truth of Christ is in me, no one shall stop me from this boasting in the regions of Achaia. Why? Because I do not love you? God knows!

So, it seems it wasn't just the church in Corinth that he took no support from - but all those in the Achaia region of Greece. Why? Simply to cut off opportunity from those who wanted to slander him as we read in verse 12...

2 Corinthians 11:12

But what I do, I will also continue to do, that I may cut off the opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the things of which they boast.

In other words, I'm not going to take any support from you, and I dare these false teachers to do the same, that their motives may be exposed.

What we read next is sobering and concerning, but in reality, to be expected:

2 Corinthians 11:13-15

For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.

What does this mean? It means that there are ministers in churches that are not Christians. You heard that right. There are ministers in churches that are not Christians. There are people who stand up in a pulpit, and quote the Bible, but don't even know Jesus themselves. They are false apostles, ministers of Satan, who try and make the narrow way wider. Who try and pervert the gospel. Who say there are many roads to God. Who want to bring all religions together. Who do not believe the Bible, do not teach it, and even discourage those in their churches from reading it.

Yes, they'll talk about morals, about living a better life, about being kind. They'll even talk about God, and about Jesus. But they are deceiving others, and they'll happily deceive you too. For it's not the God or Jesus of the Bible whom they preach.

And you know what? Some of them have podcasts. And TV shows. And blogs. And YouTube channels. And social media accounts. And web sites. Lies are not confined to the pulpit - which is why you must be so very careful of what teaching you read, watch and listen to online. And Paul says we shouldn't be surprised, for even Satan transforms himself into an angel of light. We have a wrong picture of Satan when we think of him in terms of cloven hooves, horns and a pitch-fork.

Paul continues...

2 Corinthians 11:16-19

I say again, let no one think me a fool. If otherwise, at least receive me as a fool, that I also may boast a little. What I speak, I speak not according to the Lord, but as it were, foolishly, in this confidence of boasting. Seeing that many boast according to the flesh, I also will boast. For you put up with fools gladly, since you yourselves are wise!

Paul is again pointing to the fact that he doesn't want to boast, but since they seem to be putting up with those that do, so he will boast - sarcastically appealing to their wisdom, pointing out the absurdity of what they are doing...

2 Corinthians 11:20

For you put up with it if one brings you into bondage, if one devours you, if one takes from you, if one exalts himself, if one strikes you on the face.

Paul, who didn't charge, and preached grace, is saying - look these false apostles who not only take money from you, but put you back under the law. They make salvation something you have to earn.

These crazy Corinthians, right? Well, there are people today who will do the same. There are priests who stand between people and God, when our relationship is now direct with Him. There are those who refuse you taking communion if you are not part of that specific church, or specific denomination. Those that insist on doing this or doing that in order to comply. And even those that kick people in the face to supposedly heal them.

This is no joke. And it baffles me still how when Todd Bentley was literally kicking people to heal them, how some Christians said "oh, we ought to give him some time". No! No!

Paul writes...

2 Corinthians 11:21

To our shame I say that we were too weak for that! But in whatever anyone is bold—I speak foolishly—I am bold also.

I can imagine Paul shaking his head at this in despair, saying Jesus and His grace are all that I need, and all that you need. But since you respond to boldness, let me boast in something...

2 Corinthians 11:22

Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I.

Paul says, they want to put people under the law? I know what the law does!

2 Corinthians 11:23-27

Are they ministers of Christ?—I speak as a fool—I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness—

Rather than boast in accomplishments or qualifications, Paul points to his sufferings for Christ. Not with a woe is me attitude, but one of privilege of sharing in Christ's sufferings. And he continues...

2 Corinthians 11:28

besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches.

Indeed, it should weigh on a pastor, the spiritual state of those in their church. And it certainly happens with ours - I know it brings sadness to our pastor when any of our church family are away from church, especially if it's for anything other than shift work that can't be done at other times, or the necessary rest of holidays. It's not that he's a school teacher annoyed by those bunking of school. No, rather he cares for your spiritual state - and when some choose not to come along when they could, or never come along to anything more than a Sunday morning, he's genuinely concerned for you. And I tell you, I share in that concern - especially when I see folks staring at the ground or ceiling or Instagram during a sermon, or going in and out during a service for no apparent reason, or messaging their friends instead of making notes.

Likewise, Paul desperately wanted to see this church, and all the churches he'd served, on fire for the Lord. And he writes...

2 Corinthians 11:29

Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation?

He had such care for their souls! If one part of the body was hurting, he'd be hurting too. If a brother or sister in Christ was tripped up in their walk, he'd be righteously angry about it.

Now he writes:

2 Corinthians 11:30-31

If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying.

So saying, look if I really need to boast so that you will not put up with these false teachers, consider not my strengths, but my weaknesses and my sufferings. And how God has used or done something with them! And he gives an example...

2 Corinthians 11:32-33

In Damascus the governor, under Aretas the king, was guarding the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desiring to arrest me; but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped from his hands.

This situation, recorded in Acts 9, was one where Paul had to run for his life. And that's the example he gives. And that's interesting - for what do we latch onto with Christian speakers? The number of followers they have on Twitter? The size of their church? Or perhaps how much God has blessed them materially? Or do we look for what someone has given up for Christ? Or how much they've suffered for Him?

I have the feeling Paul was uncomfortable writing this. He didn't want to boast. But the Holy Spirit has been very good to us in ensuring these things were written down, that we might learn, and be challenged to as to who and what we latch onto in terms of teaching. For we need sound doctrine, not dodgy theology.

Summary

Taking a quick look in the rear-view mirror, we've looked at three topics this evening

- Paul's jealousy for the Corinthian Christians (v1-4) - how Paul feared of them being corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ - that is, salvation by grace alone.
- Paul's generosity to the Corinthian Christians (v5-11) - how Paul was only interested in feeding not fleecing them. So much so, he relied on support from other churches to do so.
- Paul's Anxiety about the Corinthian Christians (v12-28) - how Paul was compelled to warn them of the dangers of accepting anyone who says they are a minister of Christ

Application questions

I encourage you to think carefully about 3 things this week:

- Have we moved away from the simplicity that is in Christ? At all?
- How carefully do we choose who to listen to online?
- What impresses us the most about Christian speakers? Is that a good thing?!

Let's pray.