

## **One Jesus, One Spirit, One Gospel**

2 Corinthians 11:1 – 15

**Proposition:** False teachers cause believers to embrace a false Jesus, a counterfeit spirit and a defective Gospel.

**Application:** Prevent spiritual drift by not tolerating a false Jesus, by not receiving counterfeit spirits, and by not believing a defective Gospel. Prevent spiritual drift by appointing leaders who are faithful, fruitful and sacrificial.

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### **Introduction**

Many years ago government officials in The Hague, invited Van Courtonne, a famous preacher in Paris, to give a message in the State Church chapel. Because Van Couronne considered their invitation more social than spiritual, he declined. When the invitation was given a few more times he agreed to it on condition that all government officials be present. When Van Courtonne appeared, he spoke on “The Ethiopian” (a court official for the Queen of Ethiopia) from Acts 8.

His message had three points: 1). A government official who read his Bible – something rare. 2). A government official who asked a lesser person for instruction – something rarer still. 3). A government official who was converted – the rarest of all! Needless to say he was never asked to come back. Sometimes truth is hard to take.

### **I. The False (11:1 – 4, 13 – 15)**

*Forced to be foolish* (11:1): False apostles infiltrated the church in Corinth flaunting their credentials while at the same challenging Paul's. Paul was not in the habit of boasting about his credentials, in fact he felt foolish doing so. But out of necessity he was driven to it because they were undermining his influence and credibility.

**Read** Prov 26:5

*Forced by Jealousy (11:2a):* Paul was also compelled to defend himself, because he was moved by God's jealousy. God's jealousy is grounded in His love. His jealousy is His reaction to spiritual adultery. Paul's jealousy was a jealousy that came from God. He was jealous because the spiritual welfare of the Corinthian believers was in danger. He was jealous because they were drifting from the Lord Jesus. He was jealous because the Gospel was compromised.

**Read** Num 25:11 – 13

**Transition:** Paul described his jealousy using the metaphor of marriage.

*Jealous for the Betrothed (11:2b):* In ancient Israel, Jewish marriage customs involved two stages: the betrothal and the wedding ceremony. The betrothal was more than an engagement.

It entailed a legally binding contract that could be broken only by death or divorce.

Unfaithfulness of the betrothed was viewed as adultery.

**Read** Matt 1:18, 19

Although the betrothed woman was legally the man's wife, she still lived at home under the safeguard of her father until marriage, which took place about a year later. It was the father's duty to safeguard the sexual purity of his daughter until the marriage day.

The metaphor of a betrothal suggests that the Corinthians were betrothed to the Lord Jesus. Paul was their father. He arranged this betrothal to the Lord. As their spiritual father he assumed responsibility to safeguard their spiritual purity.

**Read** 1 Cor 4:15

As Christians we are in the betrothal stage in our union with the Lord Jesus. This is indeed a blessed state! Yet there is still more! Our marriage to the Lord will take place at His return or when we are glorified with Him. Then we shall delight in a marriage feast with Him. Then we shall enter His abode. Then we shall receive all the benefits and blessings as His Bride. The betrothal is *now*. The wedding is *still to come*. Now we are justified. Now we are being sanctified. One day we shall be glorified.

A betrothed wife cannot expect to have the full rights and privileges as a married wife. In the same way, we may wish to have all the blessings and privileges of our marriage relationship to the Lord, yet we are still in the betrothal stage. As justified believers we are kept pure through the process of sanctification, but we cannot expect to receive the full blessing until we are glorified.

**Read Rev 19:7**

**Transition:** As their spiritual father in the faith Paul was jealous for his spiritual children.

Why? Because they were in danger of drifting from the Lord.

*Defection Because of Deception (11:3):* Deception leads to defection. What we believe governs how we behave. Our mind is a battle zone. It is the target of satan's crafty assaults. One of his chief weapons is to get us to embrace false beliefs. By sugar coating lies with truth, by smooth and flattering speech, by depicting sin as alternative lifestyles, we may be tempted to bite the bait that brings the hook.

Wolves that devour the sheep do not howl and bare their teeth. They come in sheep's clothing, teaching alluring doctrines, giving appealing speeches, displaying exciting signs and wonders.

When Eve sinned, she was not beaten into submission by the serpent, she was allured by his deceitful methods. By the serpent's smooth and flattering speech she was made to reject God's Word and His will.

**Read** Rom 16:18b

*Deconstruct – Reconstruct:* How might deception work in our present context? I believe it takes place through a process of *deconstruction* and *reconstruction*. It goes something like this: We are told that most of what we learned from history, from parents, teachers, church, Bible is not to be trusted. Everything is thrown into question. Even historic doctrines of the faith. We are encouraged to reject the wisdom of the past because such beliefs are worn-out and no longer useful in a progressive culture.

Once Scripture is *deconstructed*, once the text is emptied of its historic meaning, the *reconstruction* phase begins. New meanings are brought into the text of Scripture.

Words and phrases will be the same, such as redemption, atonement, salvation, but the words and phrases will have new meanings.

**Application:** The meaning of the text of Scripture does not change over time – what it meant to the original readers, is the same meaning for 21<sup>st</sup> century readers. What changes is how we apply the text of Scripture.

*Deceptive Message* (11:4): The false message of pseudo apostles caused the believers to embrace a false Jesus, a counterfeit spirit and a defective Gospel.

- ***A False Jesus:*** These *pseudo apostles* were not preaching the Biblical Jesus in a different way, they were presenting another Jesus altogether.



They were preaching a non-Biblical Jesus using Biblical terms. Maybe it was a Jesus stripped of His Jewish identity. Maybe it was a denial of His sinless humanity or a rejection of His eternal deity.

- ***A Counterfeit spirit:*** Not only were they preaching another Jesus they were moved by a different spirit. God's Spirit is not the only spirit at work in the church. Not all unusual phenomenon can be ascribed to the power of God. There are only two kinds of spirit, the Holy Spirit or unholy spirits. An unholy spirit impersonates the Holy Spirit. Such a spirit may perform powerful works in the form of spiritual gifts, but fruit and holiness will be sorely missing. Gifts of the Spirit can be counterfeited, but not the fruit of the Spirit. I believe every Christian has a duty to test the spirits. Such testing implies the existence of an objective standard. The objective standard is Scripture.

**Read** 1 John 4:1

- ***A Defective Gospel:*** Not only were these false apostles preaching another Jesus, moved by a different spirit, they were also teaching a defective gospel. A defective Gospel downplays the seriousness of sin. It may be a social gospel which is more concerned with social justice than salvation from sin. It may be a prosperity Gospel, which avoids the need to live crucified lives. It may be a Gospel of works which adds our good deeds to His divine grace. Any good news message that fails to proclaim salvation from sin in Christ alone, by grace alone through repentance and faith alone is a defective gospel.

Tolerating *another Jesus*, accepting a *different spirit*, embracing a *distorted Gospel*, leads to spiritual drift.

Paul was perplexed as to why the Corinthian believers were welcoming the wrong people. They should be rejecting rather than receiving these false apostles.

*Super-apostles are Pseudo-apostles* (11:13 – 15): Halloween is coming up. The point of Halloween is to pretend to be someone we are not. In the same way these false apostles pretended to be what they were not. They passed themselves off as true apostles even though they were not called by God, nor given His authority to serve in this way.

Should we be surprised? This is the modus operandi of satan himself. He who is associated with darkness presents himself in a way that is out of line with his true nature. He comes as a serpent to destroy; he comes as a lion to devour; he comes as an angel of light to deceive. He influences people not by repulsive suggestions but with a destructive hook covered with tasty bait.

Since he transforms himself into an angel of light should we be surprised that his servants disguise themselves as apostles clothed with self – righteousness.

**Transition:** False teachers seduce people to another Jesus in the name of Jesus. They manifest signs of a different spirit in the name of the Holy Spirit. They work against the Gospel in the name of the Gospel. Any leader or pastor who engages in this kind of work will have to reckon with God’s judgement unless they repent. We are not judged according to who we pretend to be but according to who we truly are.

**Transition:** Not only were the false apostles twisting the message of the Gospel they were also mis-representing the messenger of the Gospel. Paul makes the case that those called of God may not be endowed with eloquent speech, financial status, or even formal training.

## **II. The True (11:5 – 12)**

*The Message Trumps the Method* (11:5, 6): Because Paul's public speaking skills were no match to these false – apostles, he was accused of being less qualified as a servant of God. When it comes to speaking truth, content trumps style. The message is far more important than the method. Paul's opponents had better speaking skills, better credentials and even better looks, yet they were deficient in the truth that sets us free.

Let us not judge messengers of the Gospel by their eloquence, credentials or even appearance, rather we are to assess leaders based on faithful and fruitful service over time.

**Transition:** False teachers twist the message of the Gospel and mis-represent messengers of the Gospel.

*The Message is Offered Free of Charge (11:7, 8):* The argument these religious leaders made was that Paul did not charge speaking fees because he was an amateur. His speeches were not worthy of payment. In contrast these false teachers charged large speaking fees which proved that their message was of value.

**Illustration:** In the Greek culture of the NT, speaking fees were determined by one's status. This is still the case today. For example, Bill Clinton charged over \$750 000 for a single speech he gave in Hong Kong. Barack Obama charged \$1.2 million for three separate speeches he gave to a group of Wall Street executives. Status determines fees. Because Paul did not charge fees, the false apostles believed it was because he did not have the status of an apostle.

But the Gospel is priceless! No monetary value can be attached to it. It can only be offered as a free gift.

So what is the standard of conduct for a true servant of God? Not financial success, not eloquent speech, not graduate degrees but self-sacrifice. Paul's concern was whether he helped or hindered the advance of the Gospel. He was willing to do with less if it meant a greater advance of the Gospel in the City of Corinth.

## **Conclusion**

- To prevent spiritual drift, we are to reject a Jesus whose Jewish identity, sinless humanity and eternal deity are denied.
- To prevent spiritual drift, let us not receive a counterfeit spirit. Rather test the spirits by looking for fruit rather than gifts.

- To prevent spiritual drift, accept only a Gospel message that includes salvation from sin in Christ alone, by grace alone through repentance and faith alone.
- To prevent spiritual defection, we should appoint servants of God who display faithfulness, fruitfulness and sacrifice in their service for the Lord.