

SECOND CORINTHIANS

Chapter 11

Paul and the False Apostles

I hope you will put up with a little of my foolishness; but you are already doing that. ² I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him. ³ But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ. ⁴ For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough. ⁵ But I do not think I am in the least inferior to those "super-apostles." ⁶ I may not be a trained speaker, but I do have knowledge. We have made this perfectly clear to you in every way. ⁷ Was it a sin for me to lower myself in order to elevate you by preaching the gospel of God to you free of charge? ⁸ I robbed other churches by receiving support from them so as to serve you. ⁹ And when I was with you and needed something, I was not a burden to anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied what I needed. I have kept myself from being a burden to you in any way, and will continue to do so. ¹⁰ As surely as the truth of Christ is in me, nobody in the regions of Achaia will stop this boasting of mine. ¹¹ Why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do! ¹² And I will keep on doing what I am doing in order to cut the ground from under those who want an opportunity to be considered equal with us in the things they boast about. ¹³ For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. ¹⁴ And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. ¹⁵ It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve.

11:1 *my foolishness.* In order to compare his own ministry with that of the false apostles who have invaded the Corinthian church, Paul has to speak about himself, which inevitably seems like foolish boasting. (CSB)

The intruders' self-focus nauseates Paul, who wants "to know nothing among [the Corinthians] except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1Co 2:2). He must now respond with boasting to silence them. He thereby connects them with reality according to his desire in 10:7. (TLSB)

11:2 *godly jealousy.* Paul cannot bear the thought that there might be any rival to Christ and his gospel. (CSB)

Our passionate God is stirred when His people give themselves to idols or divide their allegiance between Him and other gods (syncretism). Paul was likewise passionate that his converts belong wholly to Christ and not revert to Belial (cf 6:15) (TLSB)

I promised you to one husband. As their spiritual father (cf. 6:13), Paul has promised the Corinthian believers to Christ, who is frequently depicted in the NT as the bridegroom, with the church portrayed as his bride (Mt 9:15; Jn 3:29; Ro 7:4; 1Co 6:15; Eph 5:23–32; Rev 19:7–9; 21:2). (CSB)

Paul revives the image of the “joyous exchange,” introducing the subject of the marriage between Christ and the Church, picturing himself as the one who arranged the engagement for the Bride (the Corinthians). The emphasis here is not so much on the Bridegroom’s gift as on the faithfulness due from the Bride. (TLSB)

pure virgin. Undeclared by the doctrines of false teachers (see vv. 3–4). (CSB)

Not literally true of many Corinthians. Cf 1Co 6:11, which also tells how God’s cleansing forgiveness, poured out in Baptism, restored the Corinthians to virginal purity (cf Lk 15:22, the “best robe”). (TLSB)

11:3 *led astray.* Eve was the naive victim of the evil one, that master of cunning. (TLSB)

devotion. Despite good intentions on the Corinthians’ part, forces are at work to steer their minds away from single-hearted loyalty to Christ. (TLSB)

11:4 *a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached.* They presented a Jesus cast in the mold of Judaistic teachings (Paul’s opponents were Jews; see v. 22). (CSB)

someone. Likely a ringleader of the intruders undermining Paul’s ministry in Corinth. *another Jesus.* Already in the apostolic age, Judaizing Christians and Gnostics began to promote views of “Jesus” as not fully God or fully man. Luther marvelously presented the whole biblical Jesus in his explanation of the Second Article of the Apostles’ Creed (p xxxvii). Run from any other “Jesus” at top speed (cf 2Jn 7)! (TLSB)

different spirit. A spirit of bondage, fear and worldliness (cf. Ro 8:15; 1Co 2:12; Gal 2:4; 4:24; Col 2:20–23) instead of a spirit of freedom, love, joy, peace and power (cf. 3:17; Ro 14:17; Gal 2:4; 5:1, 22; Eph 3:20; Col 1:11; 2Ti 1:7). (CSB)

Only the real Jesus joins the Father in sending Christians the true Holy Spirit. Luther could not practice fellowship with those who denied the real presence in Holy Communion because they had “a different spirit.” (TLSB)

received ... accepted. Accepting the Gospel seems like a voluntary, conscious act from the human perspective. However, no one comes to faith in the Gospel apart from the gracious work of the Holy Spirit. (TLSB)

different gospel. Cf. Gal 1:6–9. (CSB)

The message of the intruders was substantially different from the genuine Gospel (vv 13–15, 20). Paul focused on the issue of their boasting and claims of apostolic authority. (TLSB)

you put up with it easily enough. They have been undiscerningly tolerant of these deceivers in their midst. (CSB)

Doctrine can easily slip to last place, but pure doctrine should come first because false doctrine endangers salvation itself. (TLSB)

11:5 *those “super-apostles.”* Paul’s sarcastic way of referring to the false apostles who had infiltrated the Corinthian church and were in reality not apostles at all, except in their own arrogantly inflated opinion of themselves (cf. 10:12). (CSB)

This ironic and biting expression cannot refer to the apostle “pillars” (Peter, James, and John) in Jerusalem. Paul emphasized his fellowship with them (Gal 2:2, 9) and understood his labors for the Judean relief fund as an expression of this fellowship. The super-apostles are false apostles (v 13), intruders of pastoral rank (probably prophets, teachers, or presbyters) who may have had strong connections to the Jerusalem Church. (TLSB)

11:6 *I may not be a trained speaker.* Using the skills, references and flourishes of professional rhetoric (see note on 10:10). (CSB)

Likely hyperbole. Paul admits his rivals can and do outshine him in this skill. (TLSB)

I do have knowledge. As the Corinthian believers well knew, Paul had knowledge of Christ that was true, powerful and God-given, totally distinct from the powerless human wisdom with which the false teachers were attempting to deceive them (cf. 1Co 2:6–10). (CSB)

11:7 *free of charge.* Another slanderous criticism made by Paul’s adversaries was that his refusal to accept payment for his instruction proved that it was worth nothing. This accusation at the same time helped to cloak their own grasping character, since their method of operation, like that of first-century traveling philosophers and religious teachers, was to demand payment for their “professional” services. Paul, his enemies said, was lowering himself and committing a sin by breaking the rule that a teacher should receive payment in proportion to the worth of his performance. (CSB)

Paul renounced the right to payment, granted by the earthly Jesus Himself (1Co 9:14), with a noble view in mind;. (TLSB)

11:8 *robbed other churches.* Accepted freely given support from established congregations. (CSB)

Hyperbole. Outsiders helped pay Paul’s expenses during his lengthy first stay in Corinth, when he also worked as a tentmaker to support himself (Ac 18:3). It seems he accepted payment from no church while he was actually founding or revisiting it because he did not want to give the

impression that he was a hireling they could command. The intruders interpreted Paul's refusal to accept maintenance from Corinth as an admission that he lacked full apostolic status. (TLSB)

11:9 *burden*. A financial liability (see note on 2:17). This reinforced his teaching that the gospel of Jesus Christ is a free gift. (CSB)

brothers who came from Macedonia. They brought gifts from the churches in that province (Ac 18:5), particularly from the church at Philippi (Php 4:15). (CSB)

Not necessarily native Macedonians, but possibly Silas and Timothy (cf Ac 18:5). (TLSB)

11:10 *regions of Achaia*. The individual districts of the Roman province that included southern Greece. (TLSB)

11:11 Paul anticipated the pain his confrontation with the super-apostles would cause. (TLSB)

11:12 *I will keep on*. Paul will not be deterred from presenting the gospel without charge. Actually, this practice made his adversaries look bad. They were greedy for gain, and it would have suited them better if Paul had been willing to accept money for his teaching, for this would have put him on a level with their practice. (CSB)

Paul will keep on renouncing his rights to show the intruders as lovers of comfort addicted to the perks. (TLSB)

equal. In financial matters. (CSB)

They want to be regarded as Paul's equals at the very least. (TLSB)

11:13 *masquerading as apostles of Christ*. Now Paul exposes these would-be "super-apostles" (v. 5) as false apostles and servants of Satan (v. 14) who are covering up their true identity. (CSB)

false apostles. They are envoys indeed, but of a false Gospel (cf v 4). *deceitful workmen*. Their work looks solid but is a fraud. "The false apostles pushed circumcision (Acts 15:1) in order to establish their false doctrine that the works of the Law were necessary for righteousness and salvation" (FC SD X 12). (TLSB)

11:14 *as an angel of light*. Though he is in reality the prince of darkness.

Because sinful people still know the difference between right and wrong, the evil one seduces them into his camp by making wicked deeds appear good. Satan cloaks naked evil in attractive garments.

11:15 *his servants*. Not his unwilling slaves, but his eager co-workers. (TLSB)

Their end will correspond to their deeds. False prophets may flourish here on earth, but their coming penalty will be no laughing matter. Cf 5:10; Rv 19:19–21. (TLSB)

11:1–15 Paul went over the top in real ministry to bring the true Christ and the true Church to the Corinthians. He now grieves that they are falling for fake ministers who push a fake Christ. Today, believers must wake up to the fact that pure doctrine, right worship, and genuine pastors cannot be taken for granted. Although Christ knew many would cast aside His mercy, He still bore the cross and He still sends out true shepherds with the genuine Gospel. • O Jesus, whose exalted body bears the wounds You suffered for us, cause us joyfully to suffer for the sake of remaining connected to You in Your true Church through the service of true shepherds. Amen. (TLSB) (TLSB)

Paul Boasts About His Sufferings

16 I repeat: Let no one take me for a fool. But if you do, then receive me just as you would a fool, so that I may do a little boasting. **17** In this self-confident boasting I am not talking as the Lord would, but as a fool. **18** Since many are boasting in the way the world does, I too will boast. **19** You gladly put up with fools since you are so wise! **20** In fact, you even put up with anyone who enslaves you or exploits you or takes advantage of you or pushes himself forward or slaps you in the face. **21** To my shame I admit that we were too weak for that! What anyone else dares to boast about—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast about. **22** Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham’s descendants? So am I. **23** Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. **24** Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. **25** Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, **26** I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. **27** I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. **28** Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. **29** Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn? **30** If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. **31** The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, who is to be praised forever, knows that I am not lying. **32** In Damascus the governor under King Aretas had the city of the Damascenes guarded in order to arrest me. **33** But I was lowered in a basket from a window in the wall and slipped through his hands.

11:16 *Let no one take me for a fool.* See note on v. 1. (CSB)

A fool is a pathetic figure treading the way of death. Under normal circumstances, what follows might be as distasteful as a pastor singing “How Great I Am” at a Good Friday service. Paul must perform this risky routine to beat the intruders at their own game. (TLSB)

11:17 *not with the Lord's authority.* This is not a denial that the Holy Spirit is inspiring this section of the letter, but an acknowledgment that no genuine servant of Christ speaks this way except under extraordinary conditions. (TLSB)

11:18 *boast.* By speaking of the nature of his apostolic ministry. (CSB)

I.e., boasting about their heritage. (TLSB)

11:19 *You gladly put up with fools.* Resumes the implied rebuke of v. 4, and has the same ironic tone. There it was a matter of their readiness to tolerate false teaching; here it is a matter of their willingness to put up with disgraceful treatment by these false teachers, who are described as fools because of their self-centered boasting. (CSB)

Sarcasm. The Corinthians have let themselves be duped. (TLSB)

11:20 Sarcasm characterizing the performances of the super-apostles. It is impossible to interpret these deliberately folksy expressions with precision, but obviously the Corinthians are getting the sharp edge of Paul's tongue. (TLSB)

enslaves you. By the imposition of tyrannical man-made rules and prohibitions (cf. Gal 5:1). (CSB)

Strips them of their freedom in Christ (cf Gal 4:21–5:5). (TLSB)

exploits you. See Mk 12:40. (CSB)

Exploits their hospitality. (TLSB)

takes advantage of you. Thanks to the Corinthians' lack of discernment and their readiness to be impressed by outward show and clever talk. (CSB)

pushes himself forward. For the purpose of lording it over the members of the church (cf. 1:24). (CSB)

Elevates themselves to humble the Corinthians. (TLSB)

slaps you in the face. Using physical violence to cow them into submission. (CSB)

As Jewish Christians from the Judean homeland, the intruders got away with treating the Gentile Corinthian converts as second-class Christians. (TLSB)

11:21 *too weak for that.* Compared with the crude self-seeking roughness of the impostors, Paul's conduct may well be considered weak, but he is probably speaking ironically here. (CSB)

Sarcasm. Paul's refusal to exploit the Corinthians showed his spiritual maturity. (TLSB)

11:22 *Hebrews ... Israelites ... Abraham's descendants.* The claims implied here on the part of the false apostles indicate that they were Jews who felt superior to Gentile Christians. From this there follows the probability that they were Judaizers, i.e., they wished to impose distinctive Jewish practices and observances as required for Gentile converts. This, of course, was not Paul's position (see Ro 2:28–29; 1Co 12:13; Gal 3:28–29; Eph 2:11–18; Col 3:11). For Paul's claim see Ac 22:3–5; 26:4–5; Php 3:5–6. (CSB)

Interchangeable terms multiplied for rhetorical effect. The first term emphasizes ethnicity and the second, national allegiance. Paul used the last expression elsewhere to allude to Christ as the Seed of Abraham (Gal 3:16). (TLSB)

11:23–27 Paul presents a litany of the “downside” of his ministry, which amply fulfilled the risen Lord's words to Ananias (Ac 9:16). Paul's misery in the line of duty contrasts with the soft life of the intruders in Corinth, where the proconsul Gallio shielded the fledgling church from Roman-orchestrated persecution (Ac 18:12–17). (TLSB)

11:23 *servants of Christ.* Paul is not granting their claim to be servants of Christ. Indeed, the consideration of the nature of his ministry and its cost to him in suffering will show that he is more Christ's servant than any or all of them. (CSB)

Ministers, not laypersons. (TLSB)

exposed to death again and again. Cf. 4:8–11. He means this literally, for the sufferings he lists here and in the verses that follow were life-threatening. The catalogue that follows makes it clear that Luke's account in Acts is selective. (CSB)

11:24–25 *lashes ... rods.* Eight floggings are mentioned here, five at the hands of the Jews (cf. Dt 25:1–3) and three at the hands of the Roman authorities, who used rods on these occasions (see Ac 16:22–23). The three beatings with rods took place despite the fact that Paul, being a Roman citizen, was legally protected from such punishment (cf. Ac 16:37–39; 22:25–29). (CSB)

11:24 Jewish punishment at the hands of synagogue authorities based on Dt 25:1–3. (TLSB)

11:25 *Three ... rods.* Roman punishment, from which Paul should have been exempt as a citizen of the empire, but note what happened in Philippi (Ac 16:22). (TLSB)

stoned. A traditional manner of Jewish execution (cf. Ac 14:19–20). (CSB)

Jewish punishment inflicted at Lystra (Ac 14:19). (TLSB)

shipwrecked. Only one shipwreck is recorded in Acts, but it took place after the writing of this letter (Ac 27:39–44). The three shipwrecks referred to here could have taken place during the voyages mentioned in Ac 9:30; 11:25–26; 13:4, 13; 14:25–26; 16:11; 17:14; 18:18–19, 21–22. (CSB)

a night and a day in the open sea. Probably as a result of one of the shipwrecks. (CSB)

11:26 *in danger*. Apart from the specific incidents referred to in the preceding verses, Paul constantly faced situations of danger as well as labors and hardships (see note on Ac 14:24). (CSB)

robbers. Paul was a prime target for muggers whenever he carried money for the relief fund. (TLSB)

my own people. The Pharisees regarded Paul as a traitor. (TLSB)

false brothers. The enemy within is a worse threat than foes without. Paul likely has Gnostics and/or Judaizers in mind. (TLSB)

11:27 Church planting was not a 9-to-5 job with benefits, but constant labor to the point of exhaustion. (TLSB)

11:28 *daily pressure ... anxiety for all the churches*. The trials listed in vv 23–27 are sporadic and temporary, but worry for the welfare of the sheep is constant, esp those in the churches Paul founded (cf Ac 15:36). (TLSB)

11:29 So closely did Paul identify himself with them that he felt the weakness of any member who was weak. If anyone was led into sin, he not only burned with indignation against the person responsible but also experienced the shame of the offense and longed for the restoration of the one who had stumbled. (CSB)

Paul viewed himself as a shepherd for all his siblings in Christ (cf 1Co 12:26). (TLSB)

11:30 *I will boast of the things that show my weakness*. His weakness opens the way for him to experience the superabundant strength of God's grace. Therefore his boasting in its entirety, unlike that of the false apostles, is not in what he has done but in what God has done. (CSB)

If Paul must boast, he will highlight instances where he can come across as a laughingstock, as in vv 31–33. (TLSB)

11:31 *not lying*. This oath formula guarantees the truthfulness of the whole unlikely catalog from v 23 through 12:10. (TLSB)

11:32 *King Aretas.* Aretas IV, father-in-law of Herod Antipas, ruled over the Nabatean Arabs from c. 9 B.C. to A.D. 40. The Roman emperor Caligula may have given Damascus to Aretas since it was once part of his territory.

Aretas IV was the Roman client king of Nabatea from 9 BC to c AD 40. Ac 9:23–24 indicates that the governor was in league with the Jews of Damascus. (TLSB)

11:16–33 Paul gives sensitive personal information to prove that a genuine servant of Christ carries his Master’s cross and drinks His cup. We, too, must suffer with Christ now in order to reign with Him later. The Lord and His angels protect and accompany His servants even when they seem to have forsaken us. • Jesus, I trust in You as “I walk in danger all the way.” Amen. (*LSB* 716:1) (TLSB)