

SECOND CORINTHIANS

Chapter 11

Paul and the False Apostles

I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness. Do bear with me! 2 For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. 3 But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. 4 For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough. 5 Indeed, I consider that I am not in the least inferior to these super-apostles. 6 Even if I am unskilled in speaking, I am not so in knowledge; indeed, in every way we have made this plain to you in all things. 7 Or did I commit a sin in humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached God's gospel to you free of charge? 8 I robbed other churches by accepting support from them in order to serve you. 9 And when I was with you and was in need, I did not burden anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied my need. So I refrained and will refrain from burdening you in any way. 10 As the truth of Christ is in me, this boasting of mine will not be silenced in the regions of Achaia. 11 And why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do! 12 And what I am doing I will continue to do, in order to undermine the claim of those who would like to claim that in their boasted mission they work on the same terms as we do. 13 For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. 14 And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. 15 So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.

11:1 *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 *divine 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 betrothed 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. Undefined 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 *deceived.* 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 *another Jesus than the one we proclaimed.* 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 readily 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 am unskilled in speaking.* Using the skills, references and flourishes of professional rhetoric. (CSB)

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

I am not so in 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. 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)

on the same terms. In financial matters. (CSB)

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

11:13 *disguising themselves 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. (CSB)

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)

Paul's Sufferings as an Apostle

16 I repeat, let no one think me foolish. But even if you do, accept me as a fool, so that I too may boast a little. 17 What I am saying with this boastful confidence, I say not as the Lord would but as a fool. 18 Since many boast according to the flesh, I too will boast. 19 For you gladly bear with fools, being wise yourselves! 20 For you bear it if someone makes slaves of you, or devours you, or takes advantage of you, or puts on airs, or strikes you in the face. 21 To my shame, I must say, we were too weak for that! But whatever anyone else dares to boast of—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast of that. 22 Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they offspring of Abraham? So am I. 23 Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. 24 Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; 26 on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; 27 in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. 28 And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. 29 Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant? 30 If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. 31 The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, he who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. 32 At Damascus, the governor under King Aretas was guarding the city of Damascus in order to seize me, 33 but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped his hands.

11:16 *Let no one think me foolish.* 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 *I say not as the Lord would.* 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 bear 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)

makes slaves of 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)

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

Exploits their hospitality. (TLSB)

puts on airs. For the purpose of lording it over the members of the church (cf. 1:24). (CSB)

Elevates themselves to humble the Corinthians. (TLSB)

strikes 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)

often near death. 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 beating 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 times.* 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 adrift 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. (CSB)

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)