

## 2 Cor 11:1-15 Danger in the Church

### Introduction

We've been looking at 2 Corinthians and seen how Paul happily uses language describing warfare *in* the church – a war that is fought over our hearts and minds. And If there is war about, then surely there is danger too.

This chapter uses the word danger 8 times and words like fool or foolish six times - mostly in next week's passage. We have already noted how Paul speaks of foolishness in both of these letters to Corinth – how the non-Christian (Paul refers to him as the natural man), and Paul's opponents, see the gospel as foolish.

- “Paul says we don't do anything to get right with God. If God is so holy and righteous, how can he be “satisfied” without sacrifice on our part – that's foolish.”
- The way you take such a pedantic view of the scriptures is foolish.
- And how you speak – as someone untaught in public speaking, that is foolish too.

Paul speaks of dangers and being foolish in this chapter and we start with danger.

### **Point 1: The danger of not being pure**

*V2, 3 “I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him. 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."*

Paul's purpose here isn't to focus on marriage and I am not making comparisons with today's wedding morality and choices. Thinking along those lines misses Paul's point. We need to think back to the culture over 2000 years ago when this was written. Marriages were arranged by the head of a family to protect and increase the family inheritance, so it was key to be sure if a new child really was yours or not. In that culture, the credibility of the bride's father and that of his family would be ruined if the bride was found to be or even thought to be not a virgin.

When Paul wrote this, everyone would identify with the shame and insult of that risk, and Paul says that's what is happening in the church. Paul pictures himself presenting the pure bride (the Church) to her husband (Jesus), and he is appalled and ashamed at the insult to Jesus. Notice the double purity "*pure and virgin*" in verse 2 – no excuses, no doubt. It's not enough that the Bride is a virgin, but she is also pure, no other attachments. Paul's illustration is about the double purity of commitment to Christ. Feel the pain when Paul applies it here!

He is shocked that this church may become an impure Bride by leaving the pure gospel Paul has preached and pervert it with heresies and wrong doctrines. The first danger he expresses is a lack of purity.

Paul doesn't suggest that leaving pure doctrine is always an openly willful exercise. It may be simply that we get led astray – and he cites how Satan led Eve astray in the Garden of Eden (v4). How did that happen? She was enticed by the apparent benefits Satan dangled before her, and she failed to check if they really sat comfortably with God's revealed will. Eve put her desires and wishes above God's word. She wanted Satan's lies to be true, so she didn't examine them carefully enough.

Paul reminds the Corinthians that in exactly the same way, we can be enticed by “*other preachers telling different gospels*” (v5). Beware! Paul urges lack of purity as our biggest danger. Can you see what an insult to God it is if we suggest that one bit of doctrine or another doesn't really matter. We are suggesting that God got it wrong! Purity of doctrine and purity of life should be our highest aim.

In fact, even though we hopefully have already come to Christ to ask forgiveness of sin, we still have all the same sinful tendencies hanging on. And that's what Paul points to in verse 4. Our natural tendency is to sin, and sinning by absorbing a different gospel is natural for us. We need to be doubly on guard.

*V4 “For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the one we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different Gospel from the one you received, you put up with it easily enough.”*

Paul says, you so easily want something else other than the carefully taught real gospel. You want whatever seems popular or exciting or successful and rate that above truth. It might stem from a real desire to see more people come to church – what could we do better? It is easy to lose grip on the basics of how God orders growth. Listen to the letter to Timothy and see how protecting doctrine and the consequential life choices is key.

*2 Timothy 4:1-5. <sup>1</sup>In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: <sup>2</sup>Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage - with great patience and careful instruction. <sup>3</sup>For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their **itching** ears want to hear. <sup>4</sup>They will turn their **ears** away from the truth and turn aside to myths. <sup>5</sup>But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.*

So there's our first danger: itching ears, a loss of doctrinal purity.

## **Point 2: the danger of spiritual snobbery (v5,6)**

There is a great danger when we go to conferences or other churches and hear different speakers that we assume that there is a relationship along these lines: great speaker = great results. Maybe we add, "I could never speak like that... so I

am useless” or “I must alter my style to be like...”. Maybe we think that if I went to a church with a speaker like that I would grow more as a Christian or the Christian life would be easier. Of course, if we do go to a church with great speakers we can fall into another danger: bragging. “I go to so-an-so’s church” and I then associate my spiritual credibility with the credentials of the speaker or leader.

Paul addresses that now, because it’s the hole the Corinthians found themselves in when they compared the great speakers who were full of doctrinal error with Paul – and then preferred the great speakers.

All of those issues have a common thread: misunderstanding the heart of the gospel and substituting a different concept of how God works and changes lives. Paul responds: -

*“but I do have knowledge” v6*

He has knowledge of what the gospel is and how it works because he is an apostle: he personally met the risen Lord Jesus on that road to Damascus. He tells us he has insight by revelation from God: **(Gal 1:11, 18 and Gal 3:1)**

*“<sup>11</sup>I want you to know, brothers that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. <sup>12</sup>I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather I received it from Jesus Christ.”*

He then tells us how he validated that gospel he had received: he tested it against the teaching of the other apostles:

*<sup>18</sup>Then after 3 years I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Peter and stayed with him for 15 days”.*

*2:1 Fourteen years later I went up again to Jerusalem, this time with Barnabus. I took Titus along also. 2I went up in response to revelation and set before them the gospel that I preach among the gentiles.”*

The gospel we have is that very same gospel: passed to the apostles by their time with Jesus and to Paul by direct revelation. It isn't a man-made philosophy, but God's gospel. If it is God's gospel, it is true and right, and we can say, this is it! It won't change, we'd better believe it! And it's the gospel correctly applied that does the work, not slick preachers.

### **Point 3: the danger of a 'free' offer (v7,8)**

The next danger is about the dangers of a free offer and the position that Paul put himself in on order to present a gospel free-of-charge.

Look at verse 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”*

Paul didn't ask for or encourage payment after he preached and so the Corinthians de-valued Paul and Paul's message.

We have a gospel that cost us nothing: and because it cost me nothing then something in me devalues it.

There is no fee or entry charge to come to church or Growth groups. It is all so easy. So, I drift into thinking that because it costs me nothing, that is its value. And if it's low value then I pick and choose what I will join in with. And it's all because I associate “no cost” with “low value”.

But it isn't free: my salvation was paid for by the precious blood of Jesus.

It was written down and brought to me by the life and death of many prophets and apostles.

The Anglican church in England was founded at the cost of the lives of many Reformers.

Personally, I heard the gospel because someone else paid a high cost for me: James Broad left his job in Lloyds of London to be an evangelist among students. I was one of the people he reached. It was free to me, but it cost James his career in London.

The gospel passed down to me certainly wasn't free: someone else paid for me.

And that's true in a church like Little Eaton. We have a vicar, not because all CofE churches get one for free from the system, but because many other people put money into the Trust that pays for Dave and Helen. It's not free, but it may not be costly for me. But there is no direct charge to me and I benefit from it. And often, because I don't see the cost, I think it is cheap. Can you see how our minds may be led astray by such perceptions?

How we need to put a high value on the gospel, the church and church workers.

#### **Point 4: The danger of being a servant (v9-13)**

Brian May from the band Queen wrote a song that had a second life when Ford picked it up for their 1990 TV car

advertises. It was called, “Everything we do, is driven by you”. If you like sub-titles to sermons, that’s not a bad one for this section. Paul continues the defense of his ministry and the underlying theme is “everything I do, is driven by you”. The church in Corinth looked at Paul’s servant-like approach and took their usual approach to servants – that is pretend they aren’t there! Ignore them. They completely missed the point of Paul’s life choices.

Look back at verse 2. Paul says,

*“I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy” (2)*

He says that’s the way he looks at the church: it explains the determination he shows, and the fervour of his defense. It is all because he is jealous for them. I guess we all know what being jealous for someone feels like. Note it is jealous *for* not *jealous of* (v2) someone. Being jealous *for* someone means having a deep intense concern for their welfare. It’s the feeling that most of us will have for our children – such deep concern we’d do all we can to help, direct, support and defend them. And Paul says this jealousy is the same as God shows. He says he has a ‘godly jealousy’. And if the church is the Bride of Christ – which it is, then that is exactly what you would expect.

Don’t we expect God to be angry at false teaching? Don’t we expect God to fight for His Bride? Don’t we expect God to win that fight?

And if that is God’s view, with all His power, then He is going to win. So don’t let’s give in just because it is tough going right now and we face many dangers. This is God’s

church, His Bride, and we are His creation, under His authority and the Almighty God is jealous *for* us – yes us!

And Paul says he cares for the Corinthians in the same way, and it is how we should care for each other – a godly jealousy for each other’s lives in Christ.

Verses 9 to 12 follow that same theme: great love leading to service. And if his ministry efforts were then deemed to be worthless because he was treated like a servant, with heavy irony, he asks whether they also suggested he had robbed his Macedonian supporters by taking gifts when they said his ministry had no hope of success.

So Paul is inviting us to think what gospel ministry *should* look like. Do we rate it by the size of the congregation? Or the income for the minister? Whether he looks sleek, well fed and healthy? Whether he cruises over the bumps and bangs of this life that so affect the rest of us? Do we rate a church by whether the buildings and equipment are flashy and the latest technology?

Let me bring in a few other verses that underpin Paul’s approach: -

*Jesus speaking... Matt 10:24 “A servant is not above his master”*

*Matt 8:20 “Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the son of man has no-where to lay his head”*

i.e. Jesus says, you can see what my life is like, why would you, my followers, expect anything different?

*John 3:16 “For God so loved the world that He gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.”*

The gospel is driven by love: a love that ignores the personal cost and reputation, but solely seeks the good of the other person.

The generous gospel produces disciples driven by love and generosity.

Did the Macedonians think they had been robbed – effectively suggesting that their free-will offerings were a waste of money – money gone and nothing to show for it? Not at all. We’ve already seen in Chapter 8 how they are described. Even with the most severe trials, they overflowed with joy and in their extreme poverty they welled up in rich generosity. They gave as much as they were able, and more. (8:2, 3) Paul tells us that they pleaded for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints (v4). It’s because the grace of the gospel produces a gracious response, and Paul’s opponents looked on with human insight and chided financial folly instead of seeing the grace pouring out from changed lives.

So was Paul going to change his approach? No way. Look at verses 10, 11.

*“...as surely as the truth of Christ is in me, nobody in the regions of Achaia will stop this boasting of mine. Why, because I don’t love you? God knows I do!”*

Paul says he is driven by love. He wants their best, and that is seen by a sincere and wholehearted devotion to Christ and results in or is evidenced by changed hearts.

Finally, Paul compares his approach to the false teachers and he labels them as deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ, v13-15.

There is the obvious implied question for us to conclude with – which do you want? The truth of the gospel leading to grace-filled lives of costly sacrifice and love, often being seen as foolish by the world, or a **life lived by** a deceitful but comfortable lie?

**Turn this into closing prayer:** Let's value our fellowship here, give it a high priority in our lives, our schedules. Let's value one another. Value David and the sacrifices he and Helen make so that we can hear the gospel faithfully taught. Above all, value this great and free salvation available to all who trust in Christ. And beware of the dangers that want to distract us and weaken us.