

Lesson Eleven

(11:1-15)

SECTION XVII 11:1-15

11 I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness. Do bear with me! 2 I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I betrothed you to Christ to present you as a pure bride to her one husband. 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 some one comes and preaches another Jesus than the one we preached, 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 submit to it readily enough. 5 I think that I am not in the least inferior to these superlative apostles. 6 Even if I am unskilled in speaking, I am not in knowledge; in every way we have made this plain to you in all things.

7 Did I commit a sin in abasing myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached God's gospel without cost to you? 8 I robbed other churches by accepting support from them in

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order to serve you. 9 And when I was with you and was in want, I did not burden any one, for my needs were supplied by the brethren who came from Macedonia. So I refrained and will refrain from burdening you in any way. 10 As the truth of Christ is in me, this boast of mine shall 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 do 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 not strange if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.

As we begin this section, it may be worth your while to attempt a portrait of those who were opposing Paul, as intimated throughout the epistle. In so doing, interpretation may be helped, as the composite picture becomes more clear. You may also want to be thinking about what Paul has said of himself, and will say in chs. 11-13. Care must be taken, however, lest the pictures be overdrawn or misdrawn, as could happen. Nevertheless, some attempt at "personalizing" those against Paul should be done. We may well be dealing with more than one group of people.

Consider these ideas as you begin your study:

1. Who was accusing Paul of vacillating, 1:17ff.?
2. Was the person(s) involved in 2:5-11 part of the problem?
3. Who was in Paul's mind in 2:17 and 4:2? (cf. 12:16-18.)
4. Was Paul implying some were commending themselves in 3:1ff., and then mentioned these same people again in 5:11-15; 6:1ff.; 10:12?
5. Was there any need for the discussion in 3:4-18 about the law? Read here 11:22; 13:5.
6. Mentioning the "god of the world" in 4:4 may have been done with the same general people in mind through whom the "god" worked as those in 10:3-4; 11:3-6, 12-15; etc.
7. The "beseeching" in 5:20—6:2 may have had to do with the problem that brought alarm to Paul as mentioned in 11:1ff. Consider here the background of the text in 6:14—7:2, which may have to do with false doctrine being taught, that would result in corruption, etc.

8. In what areas and for what reasons was the change of mind needed, 7:8-10? Was the "one wrong" (v. 12) not a part of the problem being addressed in chs. 10-13?
9. Whose disobedience is in mind in 10:6, and mentioned again in 12:19ff.?
10. The issue of apostolic authority becomes prominent in 10:1ff. Should one consider that various persons with differing problems may be involved (such as false teachers of various doctrines as well as the individuals in the congregation)?
11. When we consider 11:4-5, with a different Jesus, spirit, gospel, we must consider that the issues may be like those mentioned in Galatians 1:6 and throughout that letter. (Some think that the ideas in ch. 11:4-5 were only hypothetical and had not actually happened. They were just given to show a state of mind that was present in the congregation.)
12. When the characters of some men are clearly stated in 11:12-15, should we also judge that the same people are in view in 11:22-23 (note the fact that Paul doesn't deny that "they" are "servants of Christ," v. 23)? If not, then at least two different groups of people are in view. Consider carefully the ideas in 11:20 and how they may relate to the picture you are drawing.
13. How much of the difficulty Paul faced is to be found in the congregation itself? Check 12:20-21, 13:5ff.

Any interpretation must take into account the ideas the author had in mind, and to what those ideas are opposed. As you consider the apostle and his letter, what doctrine(s) was being presented that was opposite the truth (13:8), and in what respects opposite? When these ideas are somewhat settled, then one can begin interpretation with more confidence.

V. 1 — **little foolishness (nonsense)** — The idea is dropped and picked up again in v. 16, running through 12:10, and then plainly described in 12:11 as the words of one foolish. The reason such is so is found in the principle enunciated in 10:17-18. Such boasting as Paul did pandered to the flesh, and used men's standards. Hence he had and does negate its value. From our point-of-view what he listed is hardly foolishness but sacrifice. It was done so that they might have something for the purpose of comparison.

do bear — The Greek text permits either a statement or a command. Most translate it as a statement.

V. 2 — Paul will express both jealousy and fear about the situation.
pure bride — not corrupted by false doctrine, as was evidently being taught. See 7:2. They were a new creation, 5:17, and Paul wanted them to remain new.

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V. 3 — Eve allowed her “purity” to be corrupted in the acceptance of false doctrine, and Satan is crafty enough to pull the same thing again. Check 2:11 again.

sincere — The same word as in 8:2 (liberality) and 9:13 (generosity). It has the idea of lack of duplicity. Here comes to mind this point: just exactly what is the sum total of what one must believe about Jesus, as well as the question of how much that is false can be believed at the same time. Is the simple idea in I Corinthians 12:3 (Jesus is Lord) sufficient? Should that be stated with the ideas in I John 1:1-4; 4:1-3 understood and accepted, if not stated? What did you mean/think when you stated your belief about Christ? Has any of it changed? been added to? corrected?

V. 4 — This verse is an enigma in the sense that some take it to be simply an illustration of what they might do. Others consider that this is what was, in fact, happening; so Paul believes they should be willing to listen also to him. A different problem is what is meant by his terms: *another Jesus, different spirit, different gospel*. As we raised the question above, we will add the following: did any change in what had been taught by Paul about Christ/Spirit constitute another gospel? (An example of such would be found in Acts 15:1ff.) Is Paul’s definition of “gospel” circumscribed by I Corinthians 15:1-4? with “gospel” being different than what response is expected to it (i.e., one might preach the gospel correctly and yet falsely state the means by which that gospel is to be appropriated)?

V. 5 — **apostles** — Here described ironically as “superior” but stated to be Satan’s apostles in vs. 12-15. Some would lump these together with those described in vs. 22-23 as being one and the same.

V. 6 — Paul might concede being unskilled in oratory (note I Cor. 2:1ff.) but lack of knowledge (truth, 13:8) about Christ was not conceded. Contrariwise, he had declared the message by which they were/are saved, if they keep it in mind. So, though he was not skilled and had not accepted a salary, Paul was in every way equal to the “super apostles” (who were, in fact, not apostles of Christ at all).

V. 7 — **a sin** — Again, best taken as irony. It was his right (as is that of any workman) to be paid (argued at length in I Cor. 9. See Gal. 6:6). It was also his right (as is true of all others) to refuse any salary. Evidently he had done so in Corinth, for reasons not stated, though accepting pay in other places. Quite clearly such action had led to considerable misunderstanding, and provided “ammunition” for his opponents.

without cost — The Greek term *δωρεά*, as in 9:15.

V. 8 — **other churches** — As from Philippi, v. 9.

V. 9 — To some extent, Paul’s refusal of pay was one of his

"weaknesses" and was used, therefore as a ground of boasting. He was sometimes "short" (*ὀστέρημα*, as in John 21:3 and Phil. 4:11, but either worked, Acts 18:3, or had support from others, 18:5).

V. 11 — **God knows** — The Greek text only has these two words. Something more is to be understood, such as (God knows) I do love you, etc. Some seemingly argued that Paul's action was an indication that he didn't love them as he loved other congregations. Others argued that his action simply meant that he did not think himself and his doctrine worthy of pay, because of his inferiority, etc. It is hard to see how they would figure he did not care for them, considering all the time he spent there, other visits, letters, others like Titus who went there, etc.

V. 12 — Paul's refusal to be supported, as was his right, made opportunity for it to be said of him he thought too little 1) of himself or 2) of the Corinthians. Now neither position was true, but that was the problem. He then had to meet the argument of his opponents who were claiming to be apostles and, as such, had the right to support. Paul attempted to undermine them by refusing to take money, and showing up his opponents as being simply interested in a free ticket from Corinth.

V. 13 — More than just being money-minded, Paul stated that they were actually servants of Satan, v. 15, and not what they claimed. As pointed out above, this group may be identical to or different from those in vs. 22, 23. The language here seems hard to reconcile with the idea in v. 23 that they were servants of Christ as was Paul. Paul, however, used the term "false brethren" in 2:4 about those who were arguing for the law, as in Acts 15. These in Corinth were masquerading as apostles, wolves in sheep's clothing as in Matthew 7:15ff.

V. 15 — **their end** — This phrase rather clearly implies that what was being done was deliberately engaged in rather than a case of ignorance (Apolllos) or misunderstanding (Peter).

to their deeds — So it always is: judgment according to truth, for the truth will sooner or later come out, since nothing can really be done against it, 13:8.

QUESTIONS:

85. How were the Corinthian brethren described?
86. How did Paul describe himself?
87. Were those "apostles" in Corinth of God?
88. How would Satan transform himself into an angel of light?
89. What particular right had Paul not exercised in Corinth?
90. Why was he going to continue in this way?