
2 Corinthians

Lesson 13

“2 Corinthians 11”

Objective: To explore the ancient text of 2 Corinthians in order to understand more fully and completely the call of God for us today as we seek to live out our lives in service to the Kingdom of God, to His glory, His Honor and His will. These ancient texts can challenge us, and inspire us, to live life more fully as participants in God’s story of redemption and love. At the core, the hope and desire for doing this study is that we will be continually transformed more fully and completely into useful instruments in the hands of God for bringing His message of love and compassion, and life to every creature.

Materials: The Bible, Commentaries, journal articles, dictionaries, the internet and other resources as may be appropriate. It is also our hope that each person will bring to the discussion and class times the things that God has placed upon their heart through their unique journey as people seeking the face of God and the life He seeks to bring.

Procedures

1. To explore biblically and logically what matters most to God in order to understand how we are to live. This will entail exploring the background of these texts in order to understand more fully their intended meaning for their original target audience.
2. We will also seek to explore how these ancient texts, addressed to ancient peoples, should, and must challenge us today in our walk of faith and obedience to the will of God.

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 - 3.** We intend in each instance to offer some practical suggestions as to how the call of God, through His Apostle, Paul, calls us to live our lives in such a way as to reflect our confident hope and expectation in the power of God. We seek the face of God.

In chapter 10 Paul had sharply criticized those who “boast beyond measure,” while here as we begin chapter 11 Paul requests a little indulgence on the part of his audience so that he can engage in a little “foolishness” (ἄφροσύνης). The word that Paul uses here carries with it the meaning of not using one’s capacity for understanding. He begs indulgence in order for his audience to allow him to act like a fool.¹ In verse 2, he begins by expressing the fact that he feels a “godly jealousy” (θεοῦ ζήλω) for his audience. Here he reverts back to a role he has stepped into before in this letter, the role of a father (1 Corinthians 4:14-16; 2 Corinthians 6:11-13). Here though the imagery is associated with the role of a father of the bride who intends to present his daughter, the believers in Corinth and Achaia to Christ as a chaste, or pure virgin (παρθένον ἀγνήν). According to Plutarch the main example that children were expected to imitate as they grew up was the example of their father (13 *Moralia* 9D). He indicates that, “Fathers ought, above all, by not misbehaving and doing as they ought to do, make themselves a manifest example to their children, so that the latter, by looking at their fathers’ lives as at a

¹ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, eds., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, Volume 1, Second edition (New York NY: United Bible Societies, 1988, 1989), p. 387. 35.53.

mirror may be deterred from disgraceful deeds and words (20 *Moralia* 14A).

Previously Paul had declared to the Corinthians “I am not writing this to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as beloved children. For though you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers. Indeed, in Christ, I became your father through the gospel” (1 Corinthians 4:14-15). It is important for us to understand the role and authority of the father in Roman society. It is different from the role of the father in modern American society. In a Roman context fathers possessed total authority over their children. In this society fathers were seen as ontologically superior to their children and it was a requirement that children not only obey their fathers they were expected to emulate them as well. The Roman Empire itself was organized and administered like a household with the Caesar being the father of all who dwelt in the empire. The obligation of the people of the empire was therefore to obey their father, to emulate him (Caesar) as obedient and even grateful children. The claim of Paul to be father of the believers of Corinth and Achaia is

to claim more than affection it is to claim a role of authority and example that calls for obedience on the part of his audience.²

We should also understand that a daughter's virginity did not indicate a particular holiness, or purity on her part in this time and locale. It was the primary role of a woman to produce a legitimate heir for her husband and in a world without paternity tests a betrothed woman's virginity before marriage was an assurance that her children were indeed those of her husband. In this context a woman's sexuality was the possession of her father first, and then this possession was passed to her husband at marriage.³ A woman's "proper" sexual behavior was strictly regulated, and adultery was a capital crime in every legal system in antiquity.⁴ Understanding the background for Paul's words here are important for us in our understanding. If we interpret the words of Paul here with our national, and modern history as a background for what is said here, we are going to hear a very

² Mitzi L. Minor, *2 Corinthians*, in the Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary series (Macon GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing Incorporated, 2009), pp. 205-206.

³ Mitzi L. Minor, *2 Corinthians*, p. 206.

⁴ Luise Schottroff, *Lydia's Impatient Sisters: A Feminist Social History of Early Christianity*, trans. by Barbara and Martin Rumscheidt (Louisville KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), p. 182.

different message than the one heard by the original audience of this letter.

The Roman philosopher Cicero described the “correct” organization of the Roman Empire to be rooted directly into the “rule of fathers.” This rule was exercised on four comprehensive levels: Level 1 was the rule of the gods over human beings; level 2 was the rule of the state over its people; level 3 was the rule of fathers over their households; and finally level 4 was the rule of the mind over the body. At each of these levels this rule is based upon the *natural inequality* between the ruling fathers and the ruled children. On all levels the origination of this model is in the father’s rule of his household. He cares for his children and in return he is owed a corresponding obedience. It is from this model of the household that the necessity of having a state arises as an organization which is administered like a household. Caesar is thus the father of the household. The role of the mother in this model is to supply sons to fathers in a way that is unambiguous. Consequently, a woman’s sexuality is owned, and controlled initially by her father and finally by her husband.⁵

⁵ Luise Schottroff, *Lydia’s Impatient Sisters: A Feminist Social History of Early Christianity*, pp. 22-31.

When we take into consideration this background it should be no surprise that Paul's next move is to invoke the account of Eve being deceived by the serpent. One of the perceptions amongst some Jewish thinkers was that the serpent seduced Eve so that her sin was adultery against Adam. According to a number of early church fathers (Tertullian, Jerome, Chrysostom and Augustine) they too understood there to be a sexual element to the sin of Eve. Paul makes a connection here in his letter between the potential that the Corinthians and Achaeans could betray Christ because they are being deceived and being led away from a "sincere and pure" devotion to Christ.⁶ The imagery of marriage is used in Scripture, not least in the book of Hosea, to reflect the devotion and purity that is expected in the relationship between God and his people. Notice how Paul indicates that great care is needed on the part of the audience in order that they not be deceived too.

So often today, we hear so many competing voices that it is often difficult for us to hear the voice of God amongst the din of voices. We are bombarded daily with immense amounts of data.

⁶ Mitzi L. Minor, *2 Corinthians*, pp. 205-207.

We have data available at the tip of our fingers through our phones and via our many electronic devices. We do however, need to recognize that not all data is reliable and of the same authority. Today we even try to understand things from the Bible based upon our science and that can at times be very good, but if we place science as our primary, and first source of authority, in reality, we have become like so many before us and each does what is right in their own eyes (Judges 17:6; 21:25). Where is your primary source of authority? For many centuries it has been the case that the primary source of authority rested in either the Scriptures, or in the church. In our skeptical age we have so often changed this so that for many these two sources of authority are no longer consider decisive or, even of note in our consideration. As we hear the words of Paul to the church of Corinth we need to ask ourselves where do we look for what is authoritative in our lives today? How are we going to seek to order our lives and the order of our households? Are we going to seek to truly be devoted to Christ, and if so where to we look for our direction in doing this?

Paul continues in verse 4 telling them that even if someone comes to them proclaiming another Jesus (and this certainly did happen, one example is the gnostic Jesus of the second century) they are in fact persuaded and they change directions and follow this different gospel readily enough. They are like a ship without a rudder, or an anchor, drifting wherever the wind takes them and it is only a matter of time before they are swept onto the rocks. In verse 5 Paul talks about these so called “special apostles” (ὑπερλίαν ἀποστόλων). Evidently these people were trained in speech and came across as very eloquent and polished. They sounded much better to the ears of the people of Corinth than Paul did. They were very convincing and they were leading many in a different direction than Paul and his companions had. Paul challenges his audience to recognize real “knowledge” (γνώσει) as opposed to great sounding rhetoric. Paul reminds them that he and his companions have made them aware of knowledge, real knowledge.

How would you define knowledge? Knowledge is not exactly the same as information. It is a bit like the commercial on TV where the man says that he uses his smartphone all the time

and it has not made him any smarter. Information is not enough, we have to somehow incorporate that information in a manner that includes action and when we do, that information then can be transformed from information into knowledge and in knowledge there is tremendous power. In all of this Paul is seeking to grab their attention and to guide them to do the right things that he has taught them and, which they started out doing. Often we can make a good start on a journey and fail to follow through and that great start can be wasted. More important than how we begin the journey is how we finish the journey. This is especially the case with the journey of faith. Paul continues to plead with them to come to their senses and commit themselves devotedly to Christ and to avoid the deception that will lead to their fall just as it did to the first mother of humanity, Eve.

At verse 7 Paul reverts back to the issue of not taking money from them. He asks the question of whether he sinned by humbling himself and not accepting compensation from them for proclaiming the gospel. In this, his concern is also perhaps a reference to the fact that these so called “special apostles” had not done the same. It is highly likely that they were all too willing to

accept money for what they proclaimed to the people of Corinth and Achaia. Paul indicates that he did indeed accept support from other churches (verse 8) in order to proclaim the gospel to them. He uses the word “to rob” (ἔσúλησα) here. He indicates (verse 9) that he was supported by his friends from Macedonia in order to be able to preach to them. Not only is this what Paul did in the past, it is his intent to continue doing this. Refusal of patronage in this culture was not only unheard of; it was also considered a major insult. Paul knew this, and yet he still refused to accept support and this rankled the people of Corinth and Achaia.⁷

Paul is going to mention his refusal of patronage two further times in this epistle (11:20; 12:13-17), which suggests that this issue had become very heated by the time he sends them this letter. To add insult to injury, it appears that he had indeed accepted support from those of Macedonia in order to proclaim the Gospel to Corinth. Many in Corinth will have seen these people as their rivals. Another aspect of this issue is that, had Paul accepted patronage from the Corinthians it would have likely exacerbated the division between those that had means and those

⁷ Mitzi L. Minor, *2 Corinthians*, p. 212.

that did not. Despite all of the good intentions on Paul's part it is highly likely that Paul's rivals used this to renounce what Paul had done as a shameful rebuke against the people of Corinth. It may be the case that his rivals even accused Paul of robbery and this is why he used this wording earlier.⁸ Paul indicates at verse 10, that his boast of not accepting patronage from those of the region of Achaia will not be silenced. It is likely that motives for Paul's failure to accept this patronage were being ascribed to him and it is likely that at least one of the motivations ascribed was that Paul did not love the people of Achaia. In verse 11 Paul flatly denies that this is his motivation.

Beginning in verse 12, Paul will lay out his motivation for not accepting patronage and it relates to the motives of those that he will, in this section (verse 13) for the first time, designate as "false apostles" (ψευδαπόστολοι). He will not accept support in order to rob such people as this of an opportunity to be recognized as in any sense an equal to Paul and his companions as true apostles of Jesus Christ. These people are disguising themselves as apostles and in fact they are doing what Satan does

⁸ Mitzi L. Minor, *2 Corinthians*, p. 212.

as he also disguises himself as an “angel of light” (ἄγγελον φωτός). The disguise of Satan, just like the disguise of these apostles is a lie, a deception. At the end of verse 15, Paul indicates that in the end they will receive retribution for what they have been doing. They will in time receive the same end as the one they follow, Satan. Paul’s words here are very much a warning of what these people can expect in the future and these words should also serve as a powerful warning to those that choose to side with them.

At verse 16, Paul reverts once again to boasting in the manner that some might consider foolish: this would be the case were it not for the fact that what Paul is going to say is in fact true and for those who would take the time to really discern it they would know that it was true. He indicates that what he is about to say (verse 17) comes from himself and not with the Lord’s authority thus indicating that other things he has already said, and some things that he is yet to say do indeed have the Lord’s authority. There is stark warning here in the words of Paul. At verse 18 Paul insults the Corinthians indicating that they happily put up with fools, those “false apostles” who have so eloquently

and convincingly gained an audience with the people of Achaia. Paul becomes even more insulting and accusatory in verses 19 and 20 as he indicates that these “false apostles” have actually made them “slaves,” taken advantage of them, and even slapped them in the face all the while acting high and mighty. In verse 21, Paul sarcastically indicates that he is too weak for that.

In the latter part of verse 21, Paul will even boast in the fact that he was too weak to exploit them, enslave them, and slap them in the face. Evidently those that have been doing this have claimed pridefully that they are Hebrews and Paul can clearly claim this too. They are claiming that they are blood descendants of Abraham (verse 22) and “ministers of Christ” (verse 23). Paul will claim that he is a better minister of Christ. Here he speaks in the manner that is like those that have spoken as “special apostles” and Paul calls it foolishness. He will lay out his qualifications as an apostle of Jesus Christ: those qualifications are imprisonments (verse 23), floggings, and being near death. He has been beaten five times (verse 24) by the Jews, and three times with rods (verse 25), even being stoned once, shipwrecked three

times. I think if I saw Paul getting onto a ship I might stay on dry ground and take the next ship.

Paul lays out his qualifications for being a disciple of Jesus Christ and he does not lay out degrees, or honors from men; instead he lays out honors from God. Those honors are being allowed to suffer in the name of Christ and to be shamed in the name of Christ, in a manner like Christ. In this list he lays out the case that he is a true disciple of Christ, one who lives, breathes, and bleeds for Christ, as a disciple. He endures danger after danger to fulfill the mission given to him by God to serve as His messenger. He carries that message as no one else and he will not back down, slow down, or give in. There is hardship and pain from every side, but notice what he is anxious about, (verse 28) he has anxiety, concern, for the churches. His heart, his concern, is for the churches, for the people of God. He longs and desires not for the things of this world, that are valuable in this world, but for the things that are of kingdom value, eternal value, the things that are of concern to God, and were of concern to Jesus in his time on earth. These are things that are still of concern to him even now as he stands at the right hand of Almighty God.

At verse 30 Paul indicates that his boasting is in the things that show his weakness and by contrast the great power of a loving and caring God. In verse 31, he calls as a witness the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ to validate the fact that he is being truthful. In verses 32 and 33, Paul ends this section listing yet one more thing that demonstrates his weakness and the power of God; that is his escape from the city of Damascus. In this boasting Paul powerfully contrasts his ministry with that of his rivals. Paul is beaten, bedraggled, and not eloquent by contrast to his rivals who are none of these things. Paul once again challenges his readers to recognize the reality of what God is doing in a way that turns the more traditional perspective of a person living in the Roman Empire completely on its head. Paul challenges his audience to see the world, and especially his ministry through the eyes of God and not through the eyes of men. Paul wants them to understand the nature of the call of God to discipleship. It is the call to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. It is to take the way of the cross and to “please” God and not self.


This same call rings out to us today. It is so easy for us to get wrapped up in our lives today in modern day America and lose

sight of the calling of God. He calls us to pursue the things of value to God and not the things that are of value to society, things that are of eternal consequence. So often the temporary and the fleeting so clouds our field of vision that we lose sight of the things that important to God. In that moment we are blinded to the call of Christ who came to lead us back to our Father, to our home, and to our destiny as image-bearers of God living in community with God and His people.

Synopsis

In chapter 11, Paul signals his audience that he is going to need a little forbearance from them as engages in some foolishness. He then challenges them regarding their loyalty to Christ using the marriage of a virgin to her husband as an example. He warns them that he fears that Satan may have deceived them and led them astray from their devotion to Christ. He then challenges them with the fact that he believes the so-called apostles have proclaimed a different Jesus to them. He indicates that those who have made this proclamation are highly trained in speech and the implication is they have very eloquently put forth their case. Their case is in words. Paul will later on answer with his deeds as well as with his words.

Paul indicates once again that one of the issues that is very much a bone of contention is his failure to accept patronage from the people of Corinth and Achaia. In this, it appears that these other so-called apostles have been more than willing to accommodate and accept patronage. Paul does confess that he accepted support from the people of Macedonia in order to be able to preach to the people of Achaia. He indicates that his



motivation for not accepting funding from the people of Corinth and Achaia is not due to his lack of love for them. It is absolutely the opposite, he loves them deeply.

He actually refuses support in order that these other apostles would not be recognized as his equals. He here labels them as false apostles, deceitful workers, who wear the disguise of an apostle in a manner reminiscent of Satan wearing the disguise of an angel of light. He then goes on to boast and in his boasting turns the world upside down boasting about things that would seem strange, and undesirable to the world of Rome. He does not boast in things that are valued by human standards, but in things that God values and are marks of God's grace. He challenges them to throw off the shackles of enslavement put on them by these false apostles and to recognize the truth of his message. In his weakness, the power of God can be clearly seen as Paul emulates in his life the life of Christ, the sufferings of Christ, and the values of Christ.

Questions

1. What are some things that the world says are important, but in reality are foolish?
2. How would you define loyalty?
3. Why do you think loyalty is important?
4. What are some things that pull people away from loyalty to Christ?
5. What do you think it means to be loyal to Christ in modern America?
6. What are some ways that you think Satan tries to impact your life and change your loyalties?
7. What do you think Paul means in verse 7 by talking about proclaiming another Jesus?
8. What do you think the message of the Gospel is that Paul wants the people of Corinth and Achaia to understand?
9. When you listen to someone preaching what things do you look for as being of most importance? Why?
10. What is sin?
11. How can you tell if someone really loves someone else?
12. Why do you think Satan would choose to disguise himself as an “angel of light?”

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13. How do you tell if someone is truly a follower of Christ?
 14. Have you ever felt that someone preyed on another person? What does that look like?
 15. What things are you most proud of in your walk with Christ? Why?
 16. What are some things that make you anxious? Why?
 17. Why do you think Paul boasts in his weakness (verse 30)?
 18. What is the most important thing that you believe God has called you to do in your life?