

15. Satan's Power to Deceive the Church

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- [0 : 0 0] Well now we come to our Bible reading, 2 Corinthians chapter 11, and you'll find this on page 969 in our hardback Bibles.
- So we're continuing our studies in 2 Corinthians, which we were last in quite a few weeks ago, and I'm hoping we can finish this letter now over the next few Sunday evenings this month and just into October.
- So 2 Corinthians chapter 11, and I'll read verses 1 to 15 this evening. I just ought perhaps to say before I start that there's a lot of irony in this part of the letter, and the ironic tone is something which continues right the way through chapters 11 and 12.
- So do watch out for that, and it'll help us, I think, to understand what Paul is saying. And he's ironic from the first verse onwards. So here we go, chapter 11, verse 1. I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness.
- Do bear with me. I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. But I'm afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.
- [1 : 2 3] 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.
- I consider that I'm not in the least inferior to these super apostles. Even if I am unskilled in speaking, I'm not so in knowledge. Indeed, in every way we have made this plain to you in all things.
- 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? I robbed other churches by accepting support from them in order to serve you.
- 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.
- As the truth of Christ is in me, this boasting of mine will not be silenced in the regions of Achaia. And why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do.
- [2 : 3 6] 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.
- For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.
- So it is no surprise if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.
- Amen. This is the word of the Lord, and may his blessing rest upon us for it tonight. Well, let's turn once again to 2 Corinthians chapter 11, verses 1 to 15, on page 969 in our hardback Bibles.

Thank you. Now, if somebody were to give you a piece of paper and a pen, and then ask you to write down what you think are the 10 most important duties and responsibilities of ministers and pastors, I wonder what you would include in that list.

[4 : 18] Perhaps things like this. Preach the gospel. Care lovingly for the fellowship. Make sure the church is efficiently administered. Watch the bank balance.

Support our overseas workers. Et cetera, et cetera. I'm sure you'd include things like that. But would you include this? Protect the church from being deceived by the devil.

Now, really, you should include that responsibility. Responsible Christian leaders need to be regularly looking at the Christians that they're serving and asking themselves, are our people being deceived by untruths?

Are they being led astray by trends or currents of thought which distort the Bible's teaching in some way? The responsibility of the Christian leader is to teach the truth of the Bible.

But, and I'm sure we're aware of this, truth is often most effectively taught when it is laid alongside and contrasted with untruth.

[5 : 24] A truth is much more clearly seen when it is explicitly contrasted with an untruth. Now, let me just give a simple example of this. It is true to say that there is one God.

The Bible often asserts that truth. But you understand that truth more clearly and you feel its force more powerfully when you say there is one God and not many gods.

So, it's the second phrase where you deny the untruth that makes clearer the first phrase where you assert the truth. So, denying and exposing the lie, the lie that there are many gods, makes the truth that there is only one God much clearer and more powerful.

Now, throughout the second letter to the Corinthians, the Apostle Paul is exposing and denying lies and untruths in order to teach the Corinthians the truth of the gospel more clearly.

Now, the problem at Corinth, just to remind us of the situation, the problem there was that Paul had been absent for quite a long time. And the church was still very young, almost infantile, only five or six years old as a church.

[6 : 38] And Paul had been absent for the last two or three years. And in his absence, a group of leaders had got a grip on the congregation and they were beginning to influence it strongly in quite the wrong direction.

They seemed to have come in from outside. They weren't local people. They'd come in. And these people were claiming to be not only Christians, but also apostles of Christ.

As you'll see from chapter 11, verse 13, where Paul says that they are disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. So they're masquerading as the real thing, but they're not the real thing at all.

And in that same verse, Paul calls them deceitful workmen. Now, they may not consciously have been trying to deceive the Corinthians, but Paul can see that that is exactly what they're doing.

But behind the deceitfulness of the deceitful workmen, these influential leaders, Paul detects another influence, and that is a much deadlier one. Look back to verse 3 in chapter 11.

[7 : 39] But I'm afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. Now, Satan is the one who deceives by telling lies.

And his first lie was told to Eve in the Garden of Eden, when the devil encouragingly and charmingly suggested to her that it was okay to eat the fruit which the Lord God had told her should not be eaten.

Do you remember what Jesus said about Satan? There is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar.

He is the father of lies. You'll find that in John chapter 8, verse 44. Now, a successful lie, in other words, a lie that actually does deceive people, always sounds plausible.

Something which is obviously a lie is not going to deceive anybody. So if I were to say to you, for example, there is a duck-billed platypus sitting in the front row of church this evening eating a chicken sandwich.

[8 : 45] Nobody would believe me for a moment. It is obvious that such a statement was an untruth. But the lies that are successful in persuading people and duping them are the lies that seem to be plausible and intriguing and attractive.

The devil has a great deal of success and power because his lies are so often so plausible. The devil is a very skilled liar. The devil has a PhD in deception.

He is the world's expert in pulling the wool over people's eyes. So Paul tells the Corinthians here in verse 3 that he's afraid that the devil is deceiving them.

But he refers, you'll see, to Satan again in verses 14 and 15. Having spoken of the false apostles in verse 13 as deceitful workmen who disguise themselves as apostles of Christ, he then says in verse 14, And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.

So it is no surprise if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Satan is the master of disguise. He disguises untrue things so cleverly that they look just like true things.

[10 : 01] Now that word disguise you'll see appears three times in those three verses, 13, 14 and 15. Paul is saying to the Corinthians, I'm writing to you so as to undeceive you, to help you to see how these false apostles are leading you up the garden path and by their lies are acting as servants of Satan.

Now the pastor's responsibility is to protect the flock from being deceived by the devil. And Jesus, the Lord Jesus, uses exactly the same sort of idea when he says in Matthew's gospel, Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

Now again, it's disguise and deceit. The false prophet appears to be good and true. He says in effect, I'm a sheep. Look at me, I'm a lovely sheep. He looks like the real thing.

But inside, he's not only untrue, he is ravenously destructive. His aim is not just to deceive, but to destroy and devour. Now we'll get into the meat of the passage in just a moment.

But first, let's notice what Paul is doing in this section of his letter. He's doing rather more than exposing one or two satanic deceptions. What he's doing in this first half of chapter 11 is preparing to do a little bit of foolish boasting.

[11 : 28] Look with me at verse 1. I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness. Do bear with me. And then look on to verse 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.

What I'm saying with this boastful confidence, I say not with the Lord's authority, but as a fool. Since many boast according to the flesh, I too will do a little boasting.

That's rather strange talk, and I think you're quickly aware that it's full of irony. But what he means is this. Your false apostles, these men who have come into the church, they're constantly boasting about themselves, their abilities, their qualities, and their qualifications.

They've come to you with glowing letters of testimonial stuck in their back pockets. They're constantly, in the words of chapter 10, verse 12, commending themselves and each other to you.

Now this boastful, look at me behavior, Paul is saying is all wrong. Because as Paul puts it in the last two verses of chapter 10, let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord, not about himself.

[12 : 39] For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends. But, and this is the painful difficulty that Paul finds himself in, the only way in which he is going to persuade the Corinthians that he is a true apostle is by comparing himself and his qualifications with those of the false apostles.

Now he doesn't want to draw attention to himself. It's the last thing he wants to do. But he's having to show the Corinthians his credentials if they're to understand why he is a true Christian leader and these others are not.

And that's why he describes this whole exercise as foolish boasting. He hates doing it. But how else is he going to help the Corinthians to trust his authenticity? Now his actual boasting section really begins at chapter 11, verse 21, halfway through verse 21.

And we'll come on to that next week. And we'll see that it runs deep into chapter 12 as well. And we'll discover that what he boasts about is very surprising. It's not the kind of thing we would expect him to talk about at all.

But at chapter 11, verse 1, he's beginning to introduce the subject. He's saying, do bear with me a little in this foolish boasting. He's tuning their ear to get ready for this extraordinary passage where he's going to tell them why he is a true apostle.

[14 : 08] But he's not going to start the actual boasting until he gets to verse 21. So in verses 1 to 15, as he prepares for this boasting section, he's going to do a little preliminary work.

He's going to deal with three matters in which the Corinthians have been deceived. Three matters in which the false apostles have misled them and deceived them.

And in so doing, have acted as servants of Satan. Now the big deceit, you might call it the umbrella deceit, is the idea that the false apostles are true and the true apostle is false.

That's what they're trying to put across. That's the big umbrella. But underneath that umbrella, there are three matters now which Paul takes in turn and shows the Corinthians how badly they've got things wrong.

So we'll look at these three subjects now in turn. First, in verse 4, Paul shows the Corinthians their blindness and how they simply can't distinguish the true gospel from a false gospel.

[15 : 10] Here's verse 4 again. 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.

Now it's the last phrase there in verse 4 that shows the blindness of the Corinthians. And we'll come to that phrase in just a moment. But what is it that they're putting up with so readily?

The verse tells us it's the proclamation from the false apostles, the proclamation of another Jesus and of a different spirit and of a different gospel. Now when Paul says another Jesus, he doesn't mean that these false apostles are preaching about some person called Jesus who was not Jesus of Nazareth.

No. We can be sure it was Jesus of Nazareth they were preaching. The problem was they were giving a false account of him. They were misrepresenting him. They were putting a false spin on the truth about him.

Now we're familiar with exactly this kind of thing today. How Jesus of Nazareth can be presented falsely. So for example, the Quran, the book of Islam has quite a bit to say about Jesus.

[16 : 28] But it presents him very differently from the way in which the Bible presents him. It reveres him as a prophet but denies that he was crucified and denies that he is the unique son of God.

Now it's Jesus of Nazareth that the Quran is talking about but it gives a false account of him. Or think of the Jehovah's witnesses. They have a lot to say about Jesus but they deny his divinity and his eternal existence.

So it's a false Jesus that they present. Now it was something like this that was going on in Corinth. Jesus was being proclaimed but the truth about his person and his achievements was being twisted.

We don't exactly know how he was being misrepresented but we can make an educated guess. Just look on to chapter 11 verse 22.

11-22. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they offspring of Abraham? So am I.

[17 : 33] Now the they there is the false apostles and clearly they're making a big thing about their Jewishness. And as Paul begins his boasting his self-defense he has to insist that he is just as Jewish as they are.

And this suggests that they were saying Paul is not really a true Jew. He's turning his back on the real faith. He's turning his back on Moses and the Hebrew scriptures.

He's sitting light to the Old Testament law. So the false apostles may well have been saying Paul doesn't even insist on circumcision or on our precious kosher food laws.

But if you Corinthians if you really want religion at its best you have to obey Moses at every point. Now as soon as you start to speak like that you're proclaiming a different Jesus.

Paul's Jesus who is the true Jesus rescues people fully by his undeserved unearned grace and mercy. But as soon as you start insisting that as well as Jesus you have to have your kosher food laws and circumcision and various other aspects of Jewish practice you demean Jesus.

[18 : 46] You're saying that his salvation is not sufficient to save you because you have to add various bits of Jewish religious practice into the mix. In effect you have to ensure your salvation by various things that it's up to you to do.

So Jesus is no longer the all sufficient saviour. The key element now becomes various aspects of Jewish practice. Now back to verse 4.

What is the real problem that Paul puts his finger on? It's at the end of the verse. Someone comes along these false apostles they come along proclaiming a different Jesus a different spirit a false spirit and a different gospel a false gospel.

And how do the Corinthians respond? Paul says at the end of verse 4 you put up with it readily enough. In other words you allow it you receive it you give it house room you put up with it.

So this is the problem the Corinthians are blind and unable to distinguish the true gospel from false alternatives. Or if they're not blind if perhaps they do see that these incomers are preaching a different Jesus they're unwilling to say that what the what the preachers are saying is wrong.

[20 : 03] So it's either blindness or softness and weakness. But the net result is that the Corinthians are putting up with and tolerating a message that Paul says they should not tolerate.

So doesn't this verse 4 have a lot to say to the modern churches people like us? The message of verse 4 is not only that we need to learn to distinguish false gospels from the true gospel but that we must learn to be intolerant of false gospels.

Now that's the difficult spot. There's great pressure on us to behave just as the Corinthians were behaving. Think of modern society and the kind of intellectual atmosphere that we live in in the western world today.

Our world presses us to tolerate any and every type of teaching. There's one exception but it presses us to tolerate any and every type of teaching. There's a wide consensus amongst our political leaders and intellectuals and media people that everybody's teaching, everybody's gospel is acceptable and should be accepted.

In fact, in society's view the only position that should not be tolerated is the position taken by Paul and the Lord Jesus that there is truth and there is falsehood and that a sharp line needs to be drawn between them.

[21 : 21] So Paul is saying to the Corinthians, you must learn to be intolerant of false gospels. Otherwise, you're never going to grow into a mature and strong church.

And this is so important for us as we know. It doesn't mean that we have to become shrill and red-faced and aggressive. It certainly doesn't mean that we need to be filled with hatred for people who hold different positions.

Not at all. But it does mean that we shall be firm firm, gracious, and unashamed of the truth about Jesus.

So for example, if we're talking to a Muslim friend, we would say to him, my friend, let's talk about this together. Your Quran gives an account of Jesus that is quite different from the Bible's account of him.

Now I believe that the Bible's account is the right account. So let's sit down and discuss this together and see if we can learn what the real truth about Jesus is. So if you speak to your Muslim friend like that, you're dealing with him kindly and graciously, but you're firm.

[22 : 25] You're not giving an inch. Or with the Jehovah's witness who comes to your front door. We don't slam the door in their faces or turn a hose pipe on them as if they were stray cats.

Not at all. We treat them graciously because they're fellow human beings. But we don't for a moment accept their false account of Jesus. Now friends, it requires courage to behave like this.

We have to be willing to swim against the stream. We have to value the Lord's approval more than the approval of men. So we have to get over the feeling that we can't bear to be thought of as intolerant.

If we're going to stand for Christ today, we have got to be willing to be thought of as intolerant people. people. So there's the first thing.

Paul shows the Corinthians their blindness or their weakness in being willing to put up with a different gospel. Now secondly, verses 5 and 6, Paul reminds the Corinthians that he is properly equipped to be their teacher and their apostle.

[23 : 33] Despite what these others are saying, he is properly equipped. So verse 5, I consider that I'm not in the least inferior to these super apostles. Even if I am unskilled in speaking, I'm not so in knowledge.

Indeed, in every way, we've made this plain to you in all things. Now that phrase in verse 5, I'm not in the least inferior to these super apostles, that phrase is repeated almost word for word in chapter 12 verse 11.

And the repetition shows Paul's concern to reestablish the Corinthians' confidence in him. Now that phrase, super apostles, is dripping with irony.

Paul means these charlatans who are so over-inflating their profile. And you can see from verse 6 that the over-inflated profile has a lot to do with a certain style of brilliant oratory.

The Corinthians had obviously been mesmerized by the pulpit fireworks of these men. By the standards of the day, they were clearly gifted speakers.

[24 : 40] And this is probably one reason why the Corinthians were unwilling to see how false their message was. It came wrapped up in such attractive wrapping paper that they couldn't see the worthlessness of the present inside.

Do you ever have that sort of experience at Christmas time? When somebody gives you a gift, it's wrapped up beautifully, all sparkle and show on the outside, but inside, as you unwrap it, you discover that there is something there that you neither want nor need.

And let's look at verse 6. Even if I am unskilled in speaking. Now the truth about Paul's speaking or preaching style was probably that he was a most able and persuasive speaker.

You've only got to read these letters of his recorded here for us in the New Testament and the sermons that he preached recorded in the Acts of the Apostles to see how well he was able to organize his thoughts and how well he was able to present the true gospel.

Paul's sermons and letters have been one of the great foundation stones not only of the Christian church for 2,000 years but of much of Western society as well. Paul was no duffer when it came to words.

[25 : 51] So what he means when he says that he is unskilled in speaking is that he has rejected the current fads and fashions in oratory because he's simply not interested in them.

He's interested in content not form. He wants to explain the truth about Christ clearly but he has no interest in being trendy or fashionable as a speaker.

Now I think we have modern parallels not just in the church but in the world. You think of some of our media presenters these days. Some of them are very skilled speakers in a trendy and fashionable way.

Do you ever listen for example to Steve Wright in the afternoon on Radio 2? What does he call it? The big show. I sometimes listen to that. Steve Wright is a very skillful speaker.

He makes it all sound so effortless and easy but it's actually very difficult and he is very accomplished. Even some of the Radio 1 DJs are very skillful speakers.

[26 : 53] Now I should hasten to say that I never switch on Radio 1 for my own personal pleasure but I do find myself just occasionally having to listen to it. You'll understand the scenario won't you?

Some of these Radio 1 presenters are very skillful speakers. The content of what they say is usually trivial to the power of 10 but the way they use their voices and their sentences is very clever.

They have oratorical flair and so they illustrate how it's possible to sound very good even when your message is very bad. Now Paul realized that it was this kind of thing that was going on in Corinth.

A bad message that sounded so good because it was wrapped up in trendy slick oratory. But Paul was not prepared to demean the wonderful gospel by presenting it as if he were a Radio 1 disc jockey.

He was going to present it straight, unadorned, plain, forceful and direct. It is too important and too serious to dress it up in fancy dress because the gospel is a matter of life and death.

[28 : 02] To dress it up with oratorical tricks would be to rob it of its power. So he's saying in verse 6, even if I am an unskilled speaker, even if I'm not prepared to put myself forward as a fancy orator, I'm not unskilled in knowledge.

In other words, I know the gospel in a way that these fancy apostles do not know it. And, verse 6b, I've made this plain to you all the way through our relationship. You know that I know the gospel.

But these puffed up servants of Satan, they don't know it. So at the end of verse 6, Paul is appealing to the whole history of his relationship with the Corinthians.

He's saying, you know that I know the truth about Christ. And that's why you must place your confidence once again in my true teaching of the gospel. In your heart of hearts, you know that I'm not inferior to these allegedly splendid people.

So Paul's first point is, learn to be intolerant of a false gospel. His second point is, place your trust again in me and my true gospel. And now thirdly, Paul tackles yet another point at which the Corinthians have been deceived by the devil and by the super apostles.

[29 : 21] And this point is about money. Have a look at verses 7 to 11. Because there he makes the point that true gospel ministry does not require hefty financial remuneration.

Look at how he begins this in verse 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?

Now again, this is full of irony. It's almost playful. Was it a sin for me not to charge you for my services? Now there's a telling phrase there in verse 7.

Humbling myself so that you might be exalted. Remember how Jesus said, he who humbles himself will be exalted. But Paul puts a slightly different spin on this by saying, by writing of humbling himself not so that he should then be exalted but so that the Corinthians should then be exalted.

But the key idea there is that it's a self-humbling process or habit of Paul for him not to charge the Corinthians for his work.

[30 : 32] Now that idea is quite the opposite of the world's thinking. The world says the top man commands the top salary. We've heard this so often, haven't we, in relation to bankers' bonuses and bankers' enormous salaries.

Well, if we're going to attract the most capable people to these demanding posts, we've got to pay them very well. We've heard that, haven't we? I hope I hear a collective godly raspberry being blown at that idea.

But it's what people out in the world do seem to believe. And it has always been like that. And it's that worldly way of thinking that characterizes these false apostles. Because they seem to have said to the Corinthians, are you really telling us that when Paul was here, he refused to accept any money for his services?

If he's a top man, surely he would have commanded a top salary. If a man's work attracts no salary, it can't be very valuable work. You get what you pay for in this world. Now, it's that kind of malicious criticism that Paul is answering in these verses.

Now, he's not saying that he was able to exist on fresh air. He's not claiming that he could live without any income. Nobody can live without any income. Food, clothes, shelter, housing, all costs money.

[31 : 49] Even the most thrifty people need some income. But Paul explains in verses 8 and 9 that while he was working in Corinth, he did receive income from the churches of Macedonia.

Probably the chief supporting church in Macedonia would have been the church of the Philippians. You may remember in his letter to the Philippians, he thanks them very much because they're willing to be his partners in the gospel.

And that partnership would have included a financial aspect. Now, this raises a question. Why might Paul have been willing to accept financial support from the Macedonians, from the Philippians, and not from the Corinthians?

Well, he doesn't tell us in so many words, but wise Bible commentators have suggested this, and I think it's a good suggestion, that the Philippians were a church that Paul trusted much more deeply for their maturity and their understanding.

They were his partners in more ways than one. They did understand his agenda better than the Corinthians did. Much as Paul loved the Corinthian church, and he did love them, their church, if I can put it crudely, was always a bit of a basket case.

[33 : 03] It was immature, it was divisive and divided, it was worldly. And there was another factor here, that Corinth was a great commercial center, a great trading center in the ancient world, and therefore money was coming and going in large quantities and had a high profile in the city.

It was a bit like London or Hong Kong today, full of slick, shiny gold diggers who were always thinking about money. So in that kind of atmosphere, Paul would have been very keen to avoid the charge of being in it for the money.

Elsewhere in his letters, 1 Timothy chapter 5, for example, Paul instructs Christians to be sure to support their pastors properly. He's thoroughly in favor of making sure that church leaders can feed their families and have bread on the table.

But Corinth and Paul's work there seems to have been a special case in Paul's thinking. But there is something deeply gospel-shaped about verses 7 to 11.

In verse 11, Paul tells them in rather strong language that he loves them. Why? Because I do not love you. God knows I do.

[34 : 15] Now we know that if we love somebody, the last thing we want to do is to place them under financial obligation towards us. But there's a deeper element even than that.

Look back to verse 7. Paul's refusal to charge fees for his work expresses the very pattern of the gospel itself. It's the pattern of the life of Jesus.

Paul humbled himself in not taking fees and thus risking the accusation that a man who works for nothing is worth nothing. He humbled himself so that the Corinthians might be exalted.

And that's the pattern set by Jesus himself. He humbled himself. He left the bliss and the glory of heaven so as to stoop very low in order that we, in the end, should be exalted to the very presence of God.

Now that's love, giving up a great deal so that others should be blessed. He came down to earth from heaven as we sing at Christmas. And what a long way down it proved to be.

[35 : 23] And Paul repeats that great pattern and he risks malicious accusations in the process. Well, friends, I promise we'll be singing the last hymn in two minutes.

But let me just say one or two things to sum up before we stop. So before boasting of his qualifications, we'll come on to that next week, Paul is here preparing the ground by showing the Corinthians three ways in which they have gone wrong because of the devil's deception.

First, they've been culpably tolerant of a false gospel. Second, they've been duped into thinking that Paul is an inferior leader simply because he won't adopt the silly oratorical fashions of the day.

And third, they've swallowed the false apostles' line that a man who charges nothing for his work must be a substandard leader. So the lessons for us, the principal lessons, are first, let's have the courage to be intolerant of false gospels and to risk being called all sorts of names because of that.

Secondly, to learn that the content of the gospel is far more important than the forms in which it is presented. And thirdly, to learn this pattern of humbling ourselves so that others should be exalted.

[36 : 40] And that will touch our pockets and our finances as well. Now, a final thought for you to chew over and I hope delight in as you wend your weary way home later this evening.

Look with me at verse two. Why is Paul so keen that the Corinthians should not be led astray? Well, the answer is, verse two, that he sees the reality of their relationship to Christ.

And that is that they are Christ's fiancée. They are betrothed to him. They're promised to him. And Paul, like a bride's father in the ancient world, is the one who has arranged the marriage.

So here's verse two. I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I betrothed you to one husband, that's Christ, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. Paul, by preaching the gospel to the Corinthians, has brought about their union with Christ.

And now the marriage is threatened. The engagement is threatened. And so Paul has to say in verse three, but I'm afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

[37 : 49] If the Corinthians allow the devil to deceive them, they will, in effect, jilt Christ while they're halfway up the aisle. Their marriage to their true husband will never take place.

That's what's at stake. Their eternal relationship of joy and bliss in union with their true master and Lord. Now for us to think of being engaged to Christ like this is a matter of joy and wonder.

But it has a double edge to it. If we desert Christ and bow to the wishes of the devil, as Eve did to the serpent, our marriage to Christ will never be consummated in the world to come.

And we shall neither know him nor be known by him in eternity. But if we stand firm, resisting the devil, taking our stand against false gospels, following the great pattern of self-humbling, then we shall indeed be seated at the wedding banquet in the kingdom of heaven.

We shall be the bride of Christ. We shall be with him forever. Married. Inseparably.

[39 : 03] Indissolubly. Let's bow our heads and pray. Amen. Amen. How we thank you, dear Lord Jesus, for this teaching of the apostle, our teacher, the apostle to the Gentiles.

And we thank you for the way in which our believing of the gospel has brought about our betrothal to you. How we look forward to that great day. And we pray that you'll keep us firm as we resist the devil and his lies.

And we pray that you will fill our hearts with an ever-growing delight and anticipation at all that awaits us at the wedding banquet of the Lamb. Please keep us, therefore, firm, full of faith and love for you with a growing and deepening adoration.

And we ask it for your dear name's sake. Amen. Amen. Amen.