

A DIFFERENT GOSPEL  
II Corinthians 11:1-15

Intro: Sadly---many things done in the name of the Lord are not from Him.

- While seeking to do things for the Lord---in His name---some are actually doing things on their own.
- They see a need or an opportunity---and pour themselves into a ministry to meet that need---assuming they are doing the Lord's will.
- But as we discovered last week---that may not always be the case.
  
- In fact---Paul gave us several questions to ask of any ministry---including our own---that can help us evaluate whether a ministry is actually from the Lord---or not.
  
- Is it always comparing?
- A ministry should be evaluated on the basis of what it's doing---and not how it compares to any other ministry.
  
- Did the Lord initiate it?
- Is it fairly obvious that the Lord opened the door to a particular ministry---or did someone kick the door open---forcing his vision on others?
  
- Does it overextend itself?
- Can a ministry afford what it's trying to do---or is it unnecessarily duplicating or competing with another ministry?

- Does it grow by itself?
- Is the ministry expanding naturally---or does it take constant promotion to make it grow?
  
- And finally---does it bring glory to God?
- Or is someone always basking in the glory of what he's doing for the Lord?
  
- These questions can help us evaluate the nature of a ministry---but they really don't evaluate the nature of the gospel proclaimed by a ministry.
- A ministry can be spiritual in nature---and avoid the pitfalls of being driven by an entrepreneur---but still not be doctrinally sound.
  
- In fact---as Paul points out in our text for this week---there are some who actually preach another Jesus---offer a different spirit---and proclaim a different gospel.
- So we not only need to evaluate the nature of a ministry---we also need to carefully evaluate the gospel being proclaimed by a ministry.
  
- Sometimes that's easy to do---and sometimes it's not.
- You don't have to look very far into the beliefs of Latter Day Saints---Jehovah's Witnesses---or Christian Scientists to see that there's a reason they're classified as cults.
- Doctrinal differences between denominations---however---may not be quite as obvious.
  
- Now---not all differences are theologically significant.
- But some are---so we need to know how to spot a different gospel when it's being taught---and the Corinthians were in such a need.

- They were being taken in by a different gospel---one being proclaimed by the Judaizers---Jewish Christians who sought to make Christianity into a legalistic sect of Judaism.
- And these Judaizers had taken the offensive against Paul---in his absence of course---and against his teaching.
- Now he found himself in the awkward position of having to defend himself by letter.
- He has already made it clear that he doesn't like boasting---but since the Corinthians seemed to give credence to the Judaizers when they did so---Paul felt he had to do the same to make them listen to him.
- So in our text for this morning he begins with a defense of his apostleship---and the gospel he proclaimed.
- And that's fortunate for us.
- Because by examining what he said about himself and the way he proclaimed the gospel---we can note some things to look for when trying to identify a false gospel---and those who might be proclaiming it.
- One of the first things we note is Paul's fear that the Corinthians were being led astray from the simplicity of the gospel---indicating that a different gospel---as a rule---won't be simple.

I. IT WON'T BE SIMPLE  
II Corinthians 11:1-3

- "I wish that you would bear with me in a little foolishness; but indeed you are bearing with me.

- For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin.
- But I am afraid, lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ."
- Paul begins by apologizing for what he's about to do.
- He's going to have to brag a bit---and he calls that foolishness.
- He also says what he's about to do is motivated by jealousy ---but not the green-eyed kind.
- He's motivated by godly jealousy.
- A jealousy that's not self-centered---but God-centered.
- He's not jealous of their finding another teacher---but of their in reality finding another god---of becoming unfaithful to Christ.
- He's afraid that they are on the brink of being deceived as the serpent had deceived Eve.
- Apparently there were some snakes loose in the church at Corinth---and they were striking at the minds of the Christians.
- And notice the nature of their attack.
- They weren't saying Paul's gospel was too complicated---too hard to understand---and that they had something easier to offer.
- They were---in fact---trying to lead them away from the simplicity of the gospel.

- They were suggesting Paul's gospel was too simplistic---that there wasn't enough to it---that it didn't go far enough.
- That he had been holding back on them---keeping them in the dark.
- They were going to let the Corinthians in on the whole truth ---let them see how things really were.
- But as Paul pointed out---that was the same line Satan used in the garden.
- God told Adam and Eve He had given them everything they needed to enjoy life---and to have a good relationship with Him.
- There was no need for them to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.
- In fact---if they did---it would ruin everything---their life and their relationship with Him.
- But Satan convinced them God was holding out on them.
- That if they really wanted to be like God---they would have to gain knowledge that hadn't been given to them.
- That's the same thing the Judaizers were doing.
- Apparently they were saying Paul was preaching some juvenile---simplistic faith.
- He was teaching that all you needed to do was believe Jesus died for you---and that if you'd trust Him and let Him live within you---your relationship with God would be secure.
- The Judaizers insisted that wasn't enough.
- They said in order to have a relationship with God you had to know the Law---and follow all the regulations---and customs---and rituals.
- That you needed to follow a schedule of religious observances and practices to convince God of your sincerity.
- You had to do this and not do that---give up this and give up that---learn this and learn that.
- Then---and only then---would you find approval in God's eyes.
- That was the message of the Judaizers.
- And that's usually the message of different gospels today.
- Believe it or not---most people don't like to be totally dependent on grace.
- They feel better if they can think they are earning their standing before God---at least partially.
- So if someone comes along and makes salvation more complicated---tougher to achieve---they're attracted to it.
- It's been said that if God declared that everyone who would crawl one mile over broken glass would be guaranteed eternal life---everyone would do it.
- They would feel as if God then owed them something---or at least as if they'd paid their dues.
- That's the appeal of false gospels---and a characteristic of most of them.
- Now it may be expressed differently.

- They may require the mental gymnastics of Christian Science---the pre-covid door knocking of the Jehovah's Witnesses---or the secret ceremonies of the Mormons---but most will be more complicated than the simple unadulterated gospel of Jesus Christ.
- Very few of them would respond as did Karl Barth---a famous theologian of the last generation---who---when asked what was the greatest theological thought that had ever crossed his mind said---“Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.”
- No---a different gospel won't be that simple.
- And most will have a dynamic spokesperson promoting it.

## II. IT WILL HAVE A DYNAMIC SPOKESPERSON II Corinthians 11:4-6

- “For if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you bear this beautifully.
- For I consider myself not in the least inferior to the most eminent apostles.
- But even if I am unskilled in speech, yet I am not so in knowledge; in fact, in every way we have made this evident to you in all things.”
- Paul is being a little sarcastic here---especially in verse 4 when he say---“You bear this beautifully.”
- He's not praising them for the beauty of their response to a different gospel.

- He's sarcastically commenting on how they've accepted a beautifully presented new gospel.
- Apparently some in Corinth were preaching another Jesus.
- It was the same Jesus of Nazareth---but what they said about Him made Him out to be an entirely different Jesus.
- Furthermore---the message they proclaimed---while being spiritual in nature---wasn't empowered by the Holy Spirit.
- And even though their gospel sounded like good news---it wasn't *the* good news.
- Yet the Corinthians were accepting what these men---who---according to verse 5 were setting themselves up as “most eminent apostles”---had to say.
- And apparently they said it very well.
- By comparison with them---Paul said he was unskilled in speech.
- But then again he did say in I Corinthians that he didn't try to preach with cleverness or superiority of speech.
- He didn't want his message and preaching to be persuasive words of wisdom---but demonstrations of the Spirit and power.
- He didn't want people to listen because he was a flowery orator---nor be moved because he was a dynamic motivator.
- He wanted people to listen because he had something to say.
- And in that department---he adds---he took second seat to no one.

- He was skilled in knowledge---or we should say blessed with knowledge---because the Lord gave it to him.
- And that knowledge was very evident.
- Paul knew the will of God---and he communicated it accurately.
- But he wasn't an ex-officio member of the actor's guild---putting on live performances.
- He didn't want his presentation of the gospel to overshadow the gospel itself.
- By comparison---many preachers of other gospels depend on their style and their skill to gain a following.
- They have charismatic personalities---and generally project well from the stage---so people listen to whatever they have to say---because of the way they say it.
- There's an obvious caution for us here.
- We must carefully examine what the past---present---and future superstars of the religious world have to say---and the way they say it.
- If someone is coming on too strong---we better back off and look again---because he or she may be hiding something very deceptive under that cloak of rhetoric.
- Then Paul brings up the matter of money.
- And by comparing his attitude about support and fundraising---with those who preach a different gospel---one thing becomes obvious.
- A different gospel won't be free.

### III. IT WON'T BE FREE II Corinthians 11:7-12

- “Or did I commit a sin in humbling myself that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you without charge?
- I robbed other churches, taking wages from them to serve you;
- and when I was present with you and was in need, I was not a burden to anyone; for when the brethren came from Macedonia, they fully supplied my need, and in everything I kept myself from being a burden to you, and will continue to do so.
- As the truth of Christ is in me, this boasting of mine will not be stopped in the regions of Achaia.
- Why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do!
- But what I am doing, I will continue to do, that I may cut off opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the matter about which they are boasting.”
- Again---we have to read between the lines a bit because we have only one side of this discussion.
- But it looks like these “most eminent apostles” who were preaching a different gospel in Corinth had been bad-mouthing Paul for not accepting money from the Corinthians.
- Verse 12 seems to indicate they wanted to be supported financially---and were claiming Paul wouldn't take anything from them because he knew he had nothing to offer them in return.

- Or he was trying to keep aloof from them---thinking himself too good to take their money.
- Paul responded by asking if it were a sin for him to preach the gospel without charge.
- He had worked hard as a tent maker while in Corinth---and only accepted money from the Christians in Macedonia---so he'd be able to preach to the Corinthians without charge.
- He didn't do that because he didn't love them---but because he did.
- He didn't want anything to stand in the way of their accepting the gospel.
- He was willing to humble himself---to go without---in order that they might be exalted before the throne of God.
- Paul would accept support from those who had become Christians---as he did from the Macedonians.
- But he wouldn't let anyone pay for the privilege of hearing the gospel.
- Now that can easily be contrasted with preachers of different gospels who charge before they let you in on the secrets they've discovered---or rid you of the psycho/spiritual problems you have.
- If you want in on their gospel you have to buy their books---or attend their seminars---or sign over your possessions and move into their communities.
- They might even pay millions for advertising during the Super Bowl in order to find new customers---as did Scientology this year.

- Marketing good news for a profit doesn't sound like Jesus' instruction to His disciples in Matthew 10:8 where He said--- "Freely you received, freely give."
- But then again---the purveyors of a different gospel aren't disciples of that Jesus.
- When it comes to spiritual matters the old adage about nothing of value being free is reversed.
- If it's not free---you should become more that just a little suspicious.
- The last point Paul makes is that a different gospel will usually look good.

#### IV. IT WILL LOOK GOOD II Corinthians 11:13-15

- "For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.
- And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.
- Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their deeds."
- Paul doesn't pull any punches when he expresses the true nature of these preachers of different gospels.
- He says they are false apostles---deceitful workers---and servants of Satan---who disguises himself as an angel of light.

- Even Satan can look good---like the old Terry Gibbs' song said about the devil having blue eyes and wearing blue jeans.
- Paul says these false apostles can disguise themselves as servants of righteousness---and the message they proclaim can really sound good.
- And how true that is.
- Different gospels aren't accepted because they look bad---but because they look so good.
- What could appear to be more wholesome and family friendly than Mormonism?
- If you want to really understand how Mormon theology plays out in the real world---you should read John Krakauer's *Under the Banner of Heaven*.
- It shouldn't surprise us how Satan's servants can disguise themselves as servants of righteousness.
- But---sorry to say---many Christians in our pluralistic society are caught off guard by it---and are led away from the simplicity of the gospel of Christ by it.
- We need to be on guard.
- We must expect that some will be preaching another Jesus---offering a different spirit---and proclaiming a different gospel.
- If someone is calling into question the simplicity of the gospel message---building a following on the basis of his charismatic personality or oratorical skills---getting rich off the contributions of people hungry to know what he has to offer---and promising a picture perfect life free of heartache and struggle---you can be pretty sure the gospel he's proclaiming is not the gospel of Christ.
- The gospel of Christ is simple enough for a child to understand---even though the depths of it will never be plumbed in this life.
- The gospel itself will always outshine the one presenting it.
- The gospel is made available without cost---but once accepted it costs you everything.
- And the gospel has a beauty---but it's the beauty of a cross and a sacrificial life.
- If that's the gospel you want---I can betroth you to the Christ who offers it.
- You can come out of the bondage of false gospels and disguised darkness---into the gospel of freedom---gladness and light.
- You can come the Jesus Paul preached---the one I'm privileged to offer to you today as Savior and Lord.
- If you've not done so---now is the time to accept the gospel.
- Now is the time to come to the real Jesus.