

Paul has been defending himself against the accusations of the false teachers that he sarcastically calls super-apostles. In this letter he does not define exactly what they taught, but in the previous verses Paul tells us they were teaching a different Jesus, a different spirit, and a different gospel (11:4ⁱ). In that Greek culture, flowing, beautiful, convincing rhetoric was honored as the skill of the intelligent. The better they were, the more they charged their students, so Paul's refusing to take a fee had them challenging his worth. Paul's demeanor was expressed in gentle persuasion. The Greeks honored bold and demanding teachers. But Paul was not about to let these imposters steal the sheep that God had appointed him to shepherd. Like a good shepherd, he was running to face the wolves rather than to run from them (John 10:12ⁱⁱ).

⁵ Indeed, I consider that I am not in the least inferior to these super-apostles. 2 Corinthians 11:5 Paul started this section by saying it was foolish to compare worldly credentials, but since they are doing so, he will answer these fools according to their folly (Proverbs 24:5ⁱⁱⁱ). He mocks them by referring to them as super-apostles, for that is how they presented themselves, not just as God's representatives, but as the elite representatives of Jesus, or we should say, another Jesus.

When clever fallen people see a humble group of people, they see dollar signs.

Even today some Christian leaders' names whom we highly respect are or were receiving salaries that would make them blush if asked about it in public. Paul says ministers are worthy of double honor (1 Timothy 5:17^{iv}), which implied being well supported, but that is quite different from the outlandish salaries that makes some ministers multi-millionaires.

Our passage today starts off with Paul telling them he is not in the least inferior to them. They had demeaned him to the congregation and some of the church had fallen for their deception. It seems that criticism is something the fallen nature readily joins in. But the standards they were declaring as important were all worldly ones and even the opposite of the fruit of the Spirit in some cases. We must remember that the early church did not have the Bible like we have today. It was still being written. They may have had one gospel, and they had the first letter from Paul, but they did experience a year and a half of Paul's teaching. Yet the cultural influence of the false teachers pulled them back into their old worldly mindset. So, Paul tells them the claim that he is inferior is rubbish.

⁶ Even if I am unskilled in speaking, I am not so in knowledge; indeed, in every way we have made this plain to you in all things. 2 Corinthians 11:6 One area of their attack was Paul's speaking ability. Paul spent his youth studying under Gamaliel, one of the leading rabbis of his day. He had grown up in the college town of Tarsus. He could quote Greek philosophers. He knew the Old Testament better than most anyone. The church of Corinth had a year and a half of his teaching from Old Testament texts showing them that Jesus is the Messiah and how He had come to redeem them from their sins. If the false teachers thought they were superior in speaking ability, Paul tells them knowledge is more important, and that is where he beats them hands down. Paul refused to use manipulative rhetoric for fear it would empty the cross of its power. He knew a clear presentation of the truth of what Jesus did for us was where the power lay (1 Corinthians 1:17^v).

We need to remember this truth. Some people are very charismatic. They have a great personality and come across as your best friend. They sound so sincere. But what are they teaching? Is the power of the Holy Spirit present? Are people being drawn to Jesus or to the person? Knowledge of the holy does come from the study of the Word, but it also comes from walking with the Lord. James refers to it as wisdom that comes from above (James 3:17^{vi}). The Corinthians had witnessed the knowledge and wisdom of Paul and his team. Their style was so different from the false teachers.

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? ⁸ I robbed other churches by accepting support from them in order to serve you. 2 Corinthians 11:7,8 The next defense he makes is regarding his refusal to ask for their financial support. Most of the churches Paul established helped to finance his team's expenses. It was the wisdom of God that had him not ask for that support in Corinth. This is one of those catch twenty-two situations. If he was supported by them, the false teachers would have said his motivation was greed. Since he did not, they say it is because he knew he is not worth it. Paul declares that the reason he humbled himself to not receive support was so that the congregation may be exalted. He did not want to give Satan something to hinder their growth. He asks them if it was a sin to not charge them for his teaching. I think it is a rhetorical question. They knew it revealed his love and generosity. They witnessed how hard he worked.

He says he robbed other churches in order to serve them. That is hyperbole meaning he used so much of other churches' support to help the Corinthian church it felt like robbery. He also worked with his own hands to support himself so he could serve them (Acts 18:1-4^{vii}). Ministry means to serve. Jesus said He came not to be served but to serve (Matthew 20:28^{viii}). Paul was following the example of his Lord. Preaching and teaching is one form of service and worthy of being supported (1 Corinthians 9:3-7^{ix}).

⁹ 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. 2 Corinthians 11:9 When Paul first came to Corinth, he found Aquila and Priscilla and practiced his leather working trade with them. But in Acts 18:5^x, it tells us he became occupied with the Word, showing the Jews from the Old Testament that Jesus is the Messiah. That is when the Jews came down from Macedonia and brought the support for Paul so he could preach and teach full-time.

This is the standard for missions in the third world. The missionaries rarely ask the people they are serving for support for a similar reason. But over time, once the people have matured, the people begin to want to give out of their poverty to the work of the Lord. We see that with the radio tower in Guinea Bissau. It is a nation at the very bottom for per person income, but they send what little they have because they value hearing the gospel radio programs. We get to share in helping the churches in poverty, but as they mature, they want to help support the work.

Paul says he refrained and will refrain from burdening them in any way. Many in the church may have been slaves. Corinth had 100,000 slaves. But there were also many wealthy people. Paul did not want them to think he was in it for the money. He knew that in this situation, it was better to not ask for support, but this was the exception to the rule. Letting others participate in the ministry means they share in the fruit that comes from the ministry. That is laying up treasure in heaven (Matthew 6:20^{xi}). It takes discernment to

know when to ask for support and when asking would be harmful to the spiritual growth of the church.

Those of you who have been with us for a long time know that I rarely preach on giving. God provides and often does so by touching hearts. If we have shortfall, I will inform the congregation. Our books are open. Rarely have we not ended the year even or ahead. The pressure to give I hear about in some congregations saddens me. It is detrimental to the gospel and plays into the old argument that churches are here to make money. I trust the Holy Spirit can direct you as to what to give. Most of you know it is better to give than to receive (Acts 20:35^{xiii}).

¹⁰ As the truth of Christ is in me, this boasting of mine will not be silenced in the regions of Achaia. 2 Corinthians 11:10 Paul was not going to stop boasting of the fact that churches supported his ministry so that he did not need to accept support in places where it would give the enemy an opportunity to paint the church in a negative light. I feel the same way. I will not stop boasting in the fact that we do not give yearly tithing sermons and yet God always provides. He touches your hearts, and we always have enough. We can give more than 20% to missions consistently because God is faithful, and you are faithful to respond to His prompting. I have always believed that if we are being obedient, God will provide. We say, “Where God guides, He provides.”

¹¹ And why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do! 2 Corinthians 11:11 The reason Paul will boast is not to put the Corinthians in a bad light. It is to give glory to God and show how all the churches work together for the advancement of the kingdom. Paul says that before God, he can declare that he truly loves the Corinthians.

Churches in need should never be offended when others find out they are supported by other churches. We are in this together for one purpose and it is not for the glory of man, but for the glory of God. It is sad that so many churches are in competition with one another. We should see ourselves on the same team as all other Bible believing, Christ honoring churches. This past week we joined a 24-hour prayer vigil at the local Methodist church to know God’s direction as the denomination wants to charge them half the cost of their building that the congregants paid for and built. It is not because the church changed, but the denomination that changed and that church wants to stay true to God’s Word. Please continue to pray for them. They are a Bible believing church who honor Christ.

¹² And what I am doing 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. 2 Corinthians 11:12 The reason Paul will not back down from proclaiming his freedom to preach without charges is to make it clear that he is not like the money-grubbing false apostles. When they come into an area and start asking for fees, people will be reminded how Paul would insist on working day and night without charge and easily see the motivation of the false teachers. If they say they are just like Paul and his team, those who have heard this account will know it is not true. Paul was protecting the churches of that region by warning them of the motivation of these false apostles.

¹³ For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. 2 Corinthians 11:13 Now Paul tells us what he really thinks of them. Those preaching with the motivation of money are false apostles. They are not God’s chosen representatives. They are deceptive workers saying one thing and practicing

another (Matthew 23:3^{xiii}). They act like Jesus' apostles at first, but they have a different Jesus, a different spirit, and a different gospel. He could be so blunt because of the fruit they had produced (Matthew 7:20^{xiv}). *The work of these false apostles is already becoming evident, as enumerated in 2 Corinthians 12:20: "discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder."*^{xv} Paul did not want to lose the ground he had gained for the kingdom of God in the city of Corinth. Each convert was precious to him, and their location was central to the spread of the gospel.

¹⁴ And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. 2 Corinthians 11:14 Here is another of those verses we mark as a reminder of kingdom truth. Satan does not show up with two horns and a pointy tail. He does not show his fangs and say that he wants to destroy you. He is way too clever for that. He comes to us like he did to Eve. He offers us spirituality on our terms and with something sensual thrown in. He appeals to our old nature in subtle ways, never outright. Remember Screwtape's diabolical counsel to Wormwood? *"Indeed, the safest road to Hell is the gradual one—the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts."*^{xvi} Many in our modern culture do not believe there is a being called Satan, and yet his existence is the one thing that accounts for the condition of the world in which we live (John 14:30^{xvii}).

Now to those who are self-indulgent he may just reveal himself and offer them what they are lusting after, but for those who have any fear of God, he must lie and deceive. He offered Eve wisdom and to become Godlike. That is to be disguised as an angel of light. He sounds spiritual. **The hook of fleshly desire is often covered with spiritual sounding bait.**

I have talked to people who said an angel of light appeared to them and taught them, but that teaching was contrary to Scripture. He made them feel they had special knowledge. Then they misinterpreted Scripture to make it match their special revelation. They go about trying to find naive Christians to follow them. Some of the biggest cults in America have had a Christian emphasis with the distortion of some basic doctrine that made them special in their minds, as the only ones who know that important revelation. They think all the other believers they meet are uninformed if not the pagan church called Babylon in Revelation. It is a pride trip, and they cannot see it (Proverbs 16:18^{xviii}).

¹⁵ So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds. 2 Corinthians 11:15 If that is how Satan works, and that is how his ministers will work. They sound so spiritual, and of course they have revelations that you need to understand. Little by little, you are drawn into believing you are better than other Christians because of some secret knowledge or unique interpretation that most everyone else has missed. Pride takes hold and is hard to break free from (Hosea 7:10^{xix}).

Brothers and sisters, men and women have been walking with the Lord and studying His Word for 2000 years! The chance that you will find some essential truth that no one else has ever seen before is zero. You may find some nuance that sheds some light on a passage. You may read some things that you personally have never been taught, but it is nothing to start a new denomination over. If it makes you feel you are better than all others who claim to follow Christ, it is probably from the pit of hell. *Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall.* Proverbs 16:18.

Their end corresponds to their deeds. It is an often-repeated expression in Scripture (Psalm 28:4^{xx}; Jeremiah 17:10^{xxi}, Matthew 16:27^{xxii}). Our lives conform to what we truly believe. If we accept the pride trip the enemy offers us, our end is determined by that. If we humble ourselves and serve others in love because the love of Christ is in our hearts, our end will correspond to our deeds as well (Galatians 5:13,14^{xxiii}). The Lord will return, and He says that He brings His reward with Him to repay everyone according to what they have done (Revelation 20:12^{xxiv}).

I have run into a number of super-apostles in my lifetime and generally they can be described as follows: They talk about themselves and their ideas incessantly to try and convince you they are as awesome as they believe themselves to be. They do not care about what God has done and is doing among you, as they have their own agenda to push. They are critical and condemn things in the church, especially leadership, as they think they have a better way. They are ungrateful for anything done for them as they feel they deserve more than you can give them. Conversations are always one sided as they cannot listen to anyone who would share even God's Word with them. They are prideful to the degree that if there is a disagreement, it must be you that is wrong. They rarely use Scripture, and if they do, it is some obscure passage that they have distorted or found some strange application OR they have a few favorite passages that they misuse to manipulate others. They are uninterested in you as an individual, as it is all about them. Many of these descriptions will apply to them, though not necessarily all of them. Sometimes they will hide certain of these traits.

What do we do about this attack from the enemy on the church through prideful false teachers? If you think you see these signs in someone, take the facts to the elders so they are aware of what is happening. They may clarify something you were unaware of, or it may warn them that there is a wolf in sheep's clothing in the flock. Jesus warned us that would be the case (Matthew 7:15^{xxv}; Acts 20:29^{xxvi}). They will probably pull the person aside and ask about what they have heard. The person may explain it away, but as shepherds, they will keep a close eye on the person. When wolves know they are spotted, they usually look for another flock. Pastors of one church will often warn other churches of a person's sneaky behavior. And finally, serve one another in love, for love fulfills the law. Then "our end will correspond to our deeds" can be a glorious promise instead of a warning.

Questions:

- 1 What was Paul's attitude toward skilled rhetoric?
- 2 What did Paul have to a greater degree than his detractors?
- 3 How was Paul's team supported?
- 4 Why did Paul contrast this with the way of the false teachers?
- 5 Why did he insist on continuing the boast?
- 6 How did it undermine the false teacher's claims?
- 7 What words does he use to describe false teachers?
- 8 How do they appear?
- 9 Whose example are they following?
- 10 What do we do if we notice a false teacher is present?

ⁱ **2 Corinthians 11:4 (ESV)**

⁴ 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.

ⁱⁱ **John 10:12 (ESV)**

¹² He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them.

ⁱⁱⁱ **Proverbs 26:5 (ESV)**

⁵ Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes.

^{iv} **1 Timothy 5:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.

^v **1 Corinthians 1:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

^{vi} **James 3:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.

^{vii} **Acts 18:1-4 (ESV)**

¹ After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. ² And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. And he went to see them, ³ and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them and worked, for they were tentmakers by trade. ⁴ And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks.

^{viii} **Matthew 20:28 (ESV)**

²⁸ even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

^{ix} **1 Corinthians 9:3-7 (ESV)**

³ This is my defense to those who would examine me. ⁴ Do we not have the right to eat and drink?

⁵ Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas? ⁶ Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living? ⁷ Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit? Or who tends a flock without getting some of the milk?

^x **Acts 18:5 (ESV)**

⁵ When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus.

^{xi} **Matthew 6:20 (ESV)**

²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.

^{xii} **Acts 20:35 (ESV)**

³⁵ In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

^{xiii} **Matthew 23:3 (ESV)**

³ so do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works they do. For they preach, but do not practice.

^{xiv} **Matthew 7:20 (ESV)**

²⁰ Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.

^{xv} Moyer V. Hubbard, [2 Corinthians](#), ed. Mark L. Strauss, Teach the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books: A Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2017), 184

^{xvi} R. Kent Hughes, [2 Corinthians: Power in Weakness](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2006), 199. Quoting C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (London: Geoffrey Bles: The Centenary Press, 1942), p. 65.

^{xvii} **John 14:30 (ESV)**

³⁰ I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no claim on me,

^{xviii} **Proverbs 16:18 (ESV)**

¹⁸ Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.

^{xix} **Hosea 7:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ The pride of Israel testifies to his face; yet they do not return to the LORD their God, nor seek him, for all this.

^{xx} **Psalm 28:4 (ESV)**

⁴ Give to them according to their work and according to the evil of their deeds; give to them according to the work of their hands; render them their due reward.

^{xxi} **Jeremiah 17:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ "I the LORD search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds."

^{xxii} **Matthew 16:27 (ESV)**

²⁷ For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.

^{xxiii} **Galatians 5:13-14 (ESV)**

¹³ For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

¹⁴ For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

^{xxiv} **Revelation 20:12 (ESV)**

¹² And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done.

^{xxv} **Matthew 7:15 (ESV)**

¹⁵ "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

^{xxvi} **Acts 20:29 (ESV)**

²⁹ I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock;