

# **A Study of Second Corinthians**

## **Week Nine**

### **2 Corinthians 11:13-33**

#### **Day One**

13 For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. 14 And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. 15 It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve.

v. 13 – This is a scary verse. Paul warned that there were some traveling and ministering who were masquerading as apostles. How can we know who is who? It takes discernment and patience, but it can be done as the Ephesians did:

I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false (Revelation 2:2).

That means that the public or pulpit ministry isn't the only or even the main means by which we can test those who claim to be someone in Christ. We must test leaders and ministers by the following criteria:

"Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them" (Matthew 7:15-2).

**What kind of fruit do you think is realistic to expect from a true prophet or apostle? In the interest of space, I will have to make that your assignment for today.**

v. 14 – Satan is a master at disguise, but he cannot produce the fruit of righteousness.

"If you were Abraham's children," said Jesus, "then you would do the things Abraham did. As it is, you are determined to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things. You are doing the things your own father does" (John 8:39-41).

These so-called leaders wanted to kill Jesus! They were producing bad fruit, which meant that they were evil people. I don't want to foster distrust of leadership, but neither should leadership be given "carte blanche" to do whatever it is they want to do because they are the anointed of God. And to discern the fruit in someone's life takes time, so leaders must not insist on quick acceptance, but allow their patience to prove to people that they are indeed "anointed."

v. 15 – The leaders in Jesus’ day were just imitating their father, the devil. Here is more of what Jesus had to say about fruit and leaders:

Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now am here. I have not come on my own; but he sent me. Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me! Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe me? He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God" (John 8:42-47).

## Day Two

16 I repeat: Let no one take me for a fool. But if you do, then receive me just as you would a fool, so that I may do a little boasting. 17 In this self-confident boasting I am not talking as the Lord would, but as a fool. 18 Since many are boasting in the way the world does, I too will boast.

v. 16 – Paul had a accurate assessment of what was going on in Corinth along with his own abilities and calling. Some were mistaking him for a fool because of his meek demeanor, but they were mistaken. Once again Paul utilized sarcasm by requesting that, if some were going to treat him as a fool, they allow him to act as such, for just a brief moment.

I sit and interview many people who go through my profile assessment program and those who are searching for purpose. I have met with about 1,500 people over the last five years, and 90% of them had a hard time talking about their strengths and what they can and cannot do. I asked a man the other day if he was a good preacher and he “danced, himmed and hawed” his way past the question, which I posed three times. He could not bring himself to say that he was, even though he finally admitted that he was. What’s more, many other people had told him he was an effective preacher and teacher. But he had a hard time saying it himself.

We as Christians must get over this false humility that causes us to deny what we can do in the interests of avoiding pride. Pride is the belief you do it on your own. Humility says, “I can do this or that and God helps me do it. I have worked to make myself the best I can be, but it’s still God’s grace that enables and empowers me.” On the other hand, to say, “I’m not a very good preacher” when you are may sound spiritual but it’s really a lie. **Does that make sense? Do you agree or disagree with me?**

v. 17 – Is this verse a continuation of Paul’s sarcasm? He wrote that the Lord would not boast, but what about the following statement. Doesn’t what Jesus said sound like “pride” and “boasting” to you?

“Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:29-30).

For some, that would indeed be a boastful, prideful statement. It was accurate, however, so Jesus had ever right to say it. When you speak accurately, it isn't pride. As I have stated in previous studies, I am a very good conference organizer. I am also a good teacher and gifted to help others find their purpose. This is who God made me to be. To deny those things isn't spiritual; it's a lie. To deny that God has enabled me to do them is also a lie.

**What can you do? Who are you? What are you “good” at? What are you afraid to say that you're good at?**

v. 18 – Paul was going to give the Corinthians a dose of their own medicine. He tried not to draw attention to what he could do in Christ. Since others were doing so, however, he determined that he would state clearly his spiritual credentials and pedigree, so to speak, so that his opponents would be silenced and shamed in the light of what God had done in and through him. In some ways, you could say that the Corinthians were the ones that set the tone for how Paul dealt with them.

### **Day Three**

19 You gladly put up with fools since you are so wise! 20 In fact, you even put up with anyone who enslaves you or exploits you or takes advantage of you or pushes himself forward or slaps you in the face. 21 To my shame I admit that we were too weak for that! What anyone else dares to boast about — I am speaking as a fool — I also dare to boast about.

v. 19 – Paul continued to employ sarcasm. *The Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary* describes sarcasm as: 1) sharp and often satirical or ironic utterance designed to cut or give pain; 2) a mode of satirical wit depending for its effect on bitter, caustic, and often ironic language that is usually directed against an individual.

In this case, Paul directed his sarcasm toward the entire church, treating them as one, even though some probably agreed with Paul in opposition to his critics. The Corinthians tolerated and celebrated a fool, while they questioned and dismissed Paul. What foolishness! Because Paul was meek and had worked as a tentmaker while with them, he was now being victimized by others who were more dominant in their personalities.

v. 20 – Paul had been gentle among them but now others came along who enslaved, took advantage, pushed around and slapped the Corinthians in the face. To Paul's astonishment, they accepted this treatment, calling into question Paul's Christ-like attitude and behavior!

A few years ago, I noticed my own tendency to “fuss” at the people while I was teaching and preaching. In some ways, I felt like I was taking advantage of them and in some sense, slapping them in the face while I spoke! What’s more, I saw that some of the people liked it. They liked to be bullied from the pulpit and some preachers like to bully. I was one of them. There was no gentleness, only. “You need to do more of this” or “You need to do less of that” and “Until you do this, God isn’t going to do that.” I was a bully, beating up the people! And when I did, they felt like they had been to church!

I made a conscious effort to stop doing that and especially to stop talking down to the people. Instead I try now to speak to them and to give them room in the Spirit to come to their own conclusions.

v. 21 – Paul did not do what these others did; he didn’t “slap them around.” Instead I’m sure he acted there like he acted in Thessalonica:

You know, brothers, that our visit to you was not a failure. We had previously suffered and been insulted in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in spite of strong opposition. For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. On the contrary, we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts. You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed — God is our witness. We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else. As apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you, but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us. Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you. You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory (1 Thessalonians 2:1-12).

**I maintain that this is the model for ministry and not much of what we accept as the norm today. Do you act like Paul or do you act like a spiritual bully? Do you look for leadership that is meek or leadership that pushes itself on you? Do you see why I have said that the greatest crisis in the Church today is leadership philosophy and use of authority? What we have accepted as leadership in the Church has not been in the image of Jesus and we are suffering the consequences.**

#### Day Four

22 Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham's descendants? So am I. 23 Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been

flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. 24 Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one.

v. 22 – It seems that Paul’s opponents were Jews? Could this have been the same group, commonly called the Judaizers, who followed Paul and insisted that the Gentiles follow the Law of Moses? I didn’t think it was this group that gave him trouble in Corinth, for Paul’s counterattack didn’t focus on the role of the Law but his own apostolic ministry. These men, on the other hand, could have tried a different approach in Corinth than Galatia. They could have first tried to discredit Paul the apostle rather than attack his teaching. If they could undermine his credibility, then they could introduce their perverted gospel. This could have been their strategy.

Remember what I have often written: Your opponents aren’t a sign that you are doing something *wrong*, but something *right*. In fact, think of the great Bible heroes like Joseph, Moses, David, and Daniel (not to mention Jesus). They didn’t have an enemy that we know of *until* they began to fulfill their purpose. Then their enemies showed up in force. Also remember what Jesus said:

Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets (Luke 6:26).

v. 23 – I have often referred to these verses as the job description for anyone who wants to be known as an “apostle.” Look at what Paul endured to do God’s will! If nothing else, he worked harder than all the rest. I have never known anyone who has made an impact without hard work, and that sometimes means putting in long hours. More often than not, however, it means making hard decisions, decisions that sometimes negatively affect the lives of people.

I have also come to the realization that most great men and women have spent some time in exile or prison. Think of Martin Luther, Martin Luther King, Paul, Joseph, Nelson Mandela, Vaclav Havel, and Alexander Solzhenitsyn. Am I saying that everyone who wants to be effective will go to prison? No. I am saying that anyone who wants to see great change take place in the world must be *willing* to spend time in prison if that’s what it takes to get the job done. Prison isn’t the end of the world for men and women of purpose.

**What price are you willing to pay for what you believe in? Paul was not only imprisoned, but flogged and left for dead. Anyone who romanticizes the life of an apostle is deluded. Any spiritual leader or any leader who uses his position for personal comfort and gain is deceived. Read this list of Paul’s suffering and see what someone may have to endure to preach the kingdom of God.**

v. 24 – Paul received 215 lashes from the Jews for being “obstinate.” I think Paul went home to Tarsus (before Barnabas came to get him in Acts 11) and his family and associates repeatedly tried to beat the gospel out of him. He refused. Can you imagine how scarred his back must have been? How much blood he lost?

**Again I ask: What price are you willing to pay to see God’s kingdom advance? Are you willing to pay the price of leadership?**

### **Day Five**

25 Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, 26 I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. 27 I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.

v. 25 – Ouch! Paul was beaten with rods, three times no less. This was how the Romans punished their prisoners, and we read about one of the three instances Paul referred to in Acts 16:22. We don’t know where and when the other two instances occurred. Paul was stoned once at Lystra in Acts 14:19. What’s more, Paul knew something about transport problems! He had three shipwrecks and those were before his shipwreck described in Acts 27. I’ll never complain about a flat tire again! When Paul was shipwrecked on one occasion, he floated for one full day on the open sea.

v. 26 – When I read this verse, I always feel better about my own travel schedule. Paul was constantly on the move. Imagine what Paul could have done today if he had modern travel conveniences. He would have had a lot of frequent flier miles, that’s for sure!

Paul mentioned eight things which put him in danger as he went about his apostolic work. What courage Paul must have had! What determination he had to carry out the work to which the Lord had called him. One of Paul’s dangers came from “false” brothers, those appearing to be brothers but who weren’t. Instead they were spies and parasites, wishing to feed on the saints and undermine Paul.

**Do you think there are false brothers today?** As a pastor, I think I had some! Of course, some of them may have thought I was one myself, for when you pastor, many people judge and disagree with what you do. How will we determine who the false brothers are? The same way we will identify false leaders, I would imagine, and that is by their fruit! No one can feign the fruit of the Spirit, for it can only be produced by yielding to the Spirit. And that is why we must avoid quick judgments. We may have discernment about a person, but only time will tell. Jesus gave us this advice with the following parable:

Jesus told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. “The owner’s servants came to him and said, ‘Sir, didn’t you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?’ ‘An enemy did this,’ he

replied. “The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?' "'No,' he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn’” (Matthew 13:24-30).

**Don't be in too much of a hurry to pull up what and who you think are tares. Give it and them time and the real wheat and tares will be evident to all. The waiting can be hard, however, but that is where patience, one of the Spirit's fruits, can be developed in your life.**

v. 27 – Not only did Paul endure the traumas of travel and work, he also experienced deprivations of the basic necessities—food, clothing, water and shelter. How did Paul do all that he did with the challenges he endured and encountered? It is only by God's grace and Paul's magnificent determination. I am up at 5 am writing this study and I think I am making a sacrifice. When I compare my work to Paul's, I have done nothing!

**What more can you do than you are currently doing? When you study Paul's life and productivity, what are you inspired to do? Then I suggest you get on with doing it!**

### Day Six

28 Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.  
29 Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?  
30 If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.

vs. 28&29 – Paul endured all kinds of sufferings and inconveniences. Plus he had the added pressure of the new churches he had helped found. They were young and under attack. He didn't have enough workers to help. His enemies were many, and they were persuasive and determined to undermine Paul's work. This is undoubtedly why Paul spent so much time in prayer; it was the only recourse he had to preserve his work—and his own sanity!

Here are some of the indications that Paul's prayer life was as deep as his trials!

God, whom I serve with my whole heart in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you in my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God's will the way may be opened for me to come to you (Romans 1:9-10).

I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ (Philemon 6-7).

I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now,

being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus (Philippians 1:3-5).

We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers (1 Thessalonians 1:2).

I thank God, whom I serve, as my forefathers did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers (2 Timothy 1:3-4).

**How is your prayer life? What can you do to improve? Who is on your prayer list? Do you have a list, or do you just sit down and do “random prayer”?**

v. 30 – Paul determined to talk and write about his weakness, and his “weakness” was certainly manifest in his ability to pastor and oversee churches over a long distance in the midst of intense personal pressure. When Paul mentioned “weakness” here, it is in the context of his terrible external pressures and challenges and not his internal failures and shortcomings. This discussion of weakness in these verses has caused many people to justify, glory in and focus on things that they aren’t gifted and graced to do. This is the wrong conclusion from this and the following verses. **Do you think Paul did what he did by not using every strength and gift that he had, rather relying on the things he wasn’t gifted to do?** Absolutely not! Absolutely not! He suffered greatly because of what God called him to do and it was in that weakness that he accomplished his task.

Please don’t think that God is going to give you work to do that will be unsuited to your personal gift mix. If you can’t sing, God isn’t going to put you in charge of the choir, so you can boast of your weakness! **Do you need to rethink this whole concept of weakness from this context? Has it caused you to be sloppy about your work? Has it caused you to deny what you can do so that you won’t seem strong?** We’ll discuss this more in the days to come.

### **Day Seven**

31 The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, who is to be praised forever, knows that I am not lying. 32 In Damascus the governor under King Aretas had the city of the Damascenes guarded in order to arrest me. 33 But I was lowered in a basket from a window in the wall and slipped through his hands.

v. 31 – Here is a case where the truth seems so untrue that Paul had to reassure his readers that he was being truthful. In essence, Paul swore an oath here that he was not exaggerating or lying. Jesus had to do the same thing. What else could Jesus tell but the truth? His truth, however, seemed so fantastic and so unusual compared to what others were saying and teaching that Jesus had to regularly assure his listeners that He was speaking truth:

“So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. *I tell you the truth*, they have received their reward in full” (Matthew 6:2-3 emphasis added).

I count 27 times in Matthew alone where Jesus said “I tell you the truth.” On numerous other occasions He said, “I tell you,” which could have left out the “the truth” but with the same meaning as if “the truth” was included. Spiritual reality can be in opposition to “natural truth” that it seems bizarre, i.e. give and you will have, die and you will live.

v. 32 – This story is described in Acts 9:23 and happened early in Paul’s ministry career, shortly after his conversion. It is believed that King Aretas was Herod’s father-in-law and was appointed to his position for obvious reasons. Can you imagine that Paul, the preacher of truth, was seen as an enemy of the state and people and had to become a fugitive?

Notice that Paul always avoided danger and arrest where he could. Where he could not, then he stood and accepted his mistreatment. Paul did not go looking for trouble and sidestepped in whenever possible. He was not a troublemaker, but he did not run from trouble. That is a good philosophy to have, don’t you think?

v. 33 – Paul had to have helpers in order to escape as he did. I used to have a pastor say, “Don’t worry about opposition. Not everyone’s against you. Most people don’t care!” His point was well taken. When you are being persecuted or criticized, it is easy to think, “Everyone’s against me.” That’s usually not true. Some people are for you and, in many cases, most people don’t care one way or the other. So don’t allow your mind to be carried away with an exaggerated of how bad things are.

It is hard to fathom how Paul could have been in so much trouble simply by preaching the kingdom of God. He was a good Roman citizen, but the Kingdom message is radical. It declares that Jesus is King. In Paul’s times, that meant that Caesar was not. It also meant that the Law was not the “king,” as the Jews had determined. Paul confronted the powers of his day with the truth and the truth cost him dearly. Yet Paul never wavered (he was afraid at times) and we can understand why the Lord appeared to Paul on six occasions (that we know of) to personally assure him that he was doing God’s will.

**There are many people who want encouragement, but they don’t need it because they aren’t doing anything! Is that you? Do you want encouragement to do what you already know you should do? In all probability, God won’t give that kind of encouragement to you if you are disobedient. He will, however, if you are doing His will and need a boost. I guess you could say that you need to earn God’s encouragement. Delay and disobedience aren’t ways to earn it.**