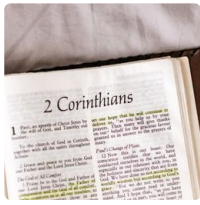


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2 Corinthians 10 - 11



2 Corinthians - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg discusses the challenges scholars face in interpreting the last chapters of 2 Corinthians. Scholars believe that the tone and contents of these chapters do not fit the natural conclusion of the earlier chapters. The use of the word "super apostles" has led scholars to believe that it may be a sarcastic reference to those who claim to be superior to Paul. Gregg suggests that when Paul uses the word "flesh," it often refers to the human condition with its fallen characteristics and limitations, and that we should not rely on our own power and strength in spiritual warfare.

Transcript

When we open to 2 Corinthians 10 we come to that portion that scholars seem to feel does not fit well as a natural conclusion or complement to the chapters that have occurred before, principally because of tone. And some things in the contents. There are many scholars who feel that Paul could not, or did not at least, write these chapters at the same time as he wrote the earlier chapters.

Now I'm not so convinced that the evidence is compelling on this, but the various theories are, as I said earlier in our introduction, that Paul wrote the... One theory is that Paul wrote the first nine chapters on one occasion, was about ready to send a letter, but new information arriving to him from Corinth concerned him about a new problem, and so he changed tone entirely and added sort of as an appendix these chapters, or almost like a whole new letter, about the new problem. And one reason that it is simply felt that the thing wasn't originally part of his letter is that he writes the first seven chapters in particular, actually entirely the first nine, with such a spirit of rejoicing, such a spirit of thanksgiving, that things have finally turned out well in Corinth. There was opposition there, but it seems like it's all over now.

The church has proved itself to be loyal to Paul and have done what they had to do to eliminate the opposition to Paul there, and everything's fine. And then in chapters 10 through 13, Paul is very, very pressed to defend his apostleship again against certain people who clearly he describes as messengers of Satan, he describes them as false apostles, he even uses the term super apostles in all likelihood referring to these people,

although it's not found in the translation we're using. In the Greek he uses the word super apostles, which has led many scholars to suspect that he is either being sarcastic, that these people claim to be apostles, and they claim to be superior apostles, superior to Paul, so Paul sarcastically calls them super apostles, or even that they were calling themselves super apostles, and that he refers to them in those terms.

But it would appear that 2 Corinthians 10 through 13 were written when there were live problems in the church of Corinth, which did not appear to be there, at least were not mentioned or hinted at, in the earlier chapters. As a matter of fact, the earlier chapters give the impression that such problems maybe of a lesser sort had arisen and been dealt with effectively and were now a thing of the past in Corinth. So, the difference there in what appears to be the circumstance under which these were written has led many to feel like it was perhaps not an original part of Paul's plan to include this part of his letter.

It may have been an addendum or an appendix or a second letter that he had to write and possibly was sent, attached to the first letter, along with Titus when he carried the letter back to Corinth. Others have felt that we have here an entirely different letter written on an entirely different occasion, even here placed out of chronological order, that this letter is either the letter or at least part of the letter that Paul alludes to earlier in the earlier chapters. In chapter 2 and in chapter 7, Paul mentions that he had written a letter, usually called the Sorrowful Letter, because he had written it in great sorrow and agony of heart, asking them to correct a situation where his apostleship apparently was challenged by someone in the church.

And we don't have that letter. The letter he refers to is either 1 Corinthians or another letter, and most believe it's another. It could be 1 Corinthians, and there are still some who believe that it is, but it is much more common for scholars to suggest that the letter Paul is referring to as the Sorrowful Letter does not exist anymore, or it has not come down to us, it is not 1 Corinthians, it's a lost letter.

But some have thought that chapters 10 through 13 might be a portion of that letter, which by some editorial mistake, some possibly generations after Paul's time, the letter was passed down along with Paul's other Corinthian correspondence, and someone attached it mistakenly or tentatively or accidentally or something to the end of this other letter. It does seem as if the last words of 2 Corinthians 9 could be a fitting conclusion for a letter, thanks be to God for his indescribable gift, sort of offering a doxology of sorts, as Paul might do at the end of a letter. However, that's no proof that the letter originally ended with chapter 9, since we can certainly observe that chapters 8 and 9 do make up a discrete section, a discrete discussion in the letter, and the ending of chapter 9 might as well serve as the end of a section, or the end of a discrete separate discussion, as the end of a complete letter.

I am not willing to come down in favor of any particular theory about these. There is little

reason to question, I don't think anyone ever has questioned, that Paul wrote these letters to the Corinthians, wrote these chapters, and therefore whether he wrote them before or after, and whether shortly after or at the same time or a long time after, the rest of the chapters in the book are not altogether relevant, although of course if we knew the answer to that, it might add some color to our perception of the scene that was set. However, the material in the chapters is stand-alone stuff.

It makes sense, it is instructive in itself, and so we won't bother ourselves too much with the theories about whether it was originally part of the letter in this position or another letter or an addendum to the letter or whatever. I only let you know that these are the things that scholars think. I will just deal with the content of the text as best we can.

In chapter 10 he says, Now I, Paul, myself am pleading with you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ, who in presence am lowly among you, but being absent, am bold toward you. I beg you that when I am present I may not be bold with that confidence by which I intend to be bold against some who think of us as if we walked according to the flesh. Now, this business about being bold, he is alluding to a criticism he has received by his opponents in Corinth.

We know that such a criticism is made using those very words, or at least very similar words, because he quotes his critics in verse 10 of this same chapter. He says, For his letters, they say, are weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak and his speech contemptible. That's a quotation of what his critics are saying about him.

So, he has heard rumors that somebody in Corinth is accusing him of being rather mamby-pamby in his personal presence, but then he puts on the tough guy hat when he writes a letter back. He's not courageous enough to say these things to our faces, but when he's out of town he'll say, he'll vent his spleen with us, but when he comes to town he's really cowardly and weak and not impressive in the least. Well, it is with allusion to that criticism that he describes himself in verse 1 as, I myself am pleading with you, who in presence am lowly among you, but being absent am bold towards you.

There is that contrast, that dichotomy between his behavior when present and his behavior when absent from him. Now, he does not deny that there is some truth in that suggestion. In fact, he may well be glorying in this, that when I'm with you I am lowly, and I am bold when I'm away from you.

But the reason for that is that I don't want to damage you, and I don't want to have to be as bold when I'm with you as I am when I'm away. When I'm away I'm hearing bad reports about you, and I have to write severe letters. When I'm with you I prefer to be gentle.

And he says, I beg you that when I am present I may not be bold with that confidence by which I intend to be bold against some. That's verse 2. In other words, you may think

that I'm not capable or courageous enough to be bold. Well, I do intend to be bold towards some.

When I come I've got some harsh things to say to some people there. I don't really want to have to say that to the whole church. And that's why I send bold letters on ahead to stir your conscience, to get you to turn around so that when I come I won't have to be so bold towards you.

Now, I do intend to be confident and bold toward a few people there that are causing problems. I intend it. And those are the people who think of us as if we walked according to the flesh.

Now, this is, what, about the third or fourth time in 2 Corinthians we've come to Paul's use of the term according to the flesh. And each time I've mentioned it, it's hard to know what he means for the simple reason that according to the flesh means different things in different contexts. When Paul in Romans chapter 1 says that Christ was of the seed of David according to the flesh, or according to the flesh, it just means of his natural ancestry.

When Paul says in Romans 8, 4 that the righteous requirements of the law are fulfilled in us who walk not according to the flesh but according to the spirit, according to the flesh there means something else. It doesn't have anything to do with ancestry. It has to do with the dynamic that empowers us to walk a holy life.

It's not the power of the flesh. It's the power of the spirit. We don't walk according to the power of the flesh and just human willpower and personal gumption.

But we walk in the power of the Holy Spirit. Now, there are other ways in which, he said earlier, henceforth know we no man after the flesh. Though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet henceforth know we him no more.

We ran into that earlier in 2 Corinthians. What's that mean, according to the flesh? And I mentioned that most translators and commentators are fairly convinced, and I think they're probably right, that Paul means we don't regard men according to worldly standards. We don't judge them by worldly considerations.

But already we've run into this expression, after the flesh or according to the flesh, to mean a variety of things. The word flesh, *sarx*, in the Greek has such a wide variety of uses, not only in its direct use as a word, but in combination with phrases that Paul uses that are idiomatic. It's not always clear what he means.

We know that people were thinking of Paul as if he walked in the flesh, but exactly how is that intended? What was the exact criticism of him? Well, we don't know for sure. But he does maybe give some clue in verse 3 when he says, though we walk in the flesh, we do not walk according to the flesh. Now, he was accused as if he walked according to the

flesh.

Well, we do walk in the flesh, but we don't war according to the flesh. Now, when he says we do walk in the flesh, he probably means nothing else than, sure, we're physical beings, we have a flesh, we live our lives in a body. In some Christian circles, the expressions in the flesh and in the spirit are used frequently in modern times to refer to a person's momentary spiritual state.

I got in the flesh there for a minute. That guy irritated me, I just really got in the flesh, and I bawled him out. But I'm really in the spirit right now.

It has more to do with subjective feelings of acting in a fleshly way or a spiritual way at a given moment. That is a very common vernacular way of speaking of being in the flesh or in the spirit in modern Christianity. I'm not sure that it's ever used that way in Scripture.

And certainly when Paul says, though we walk in the flesh, he doesn't mean by that what we would expect someone to be meaning if they said, well, I was really walking in the flesh today. Walking in the flesh certainly must mean, certainly we are limited to physical bodies. The word sarx in its primary meaning does mean a body.

It has additional metaphorical meanings. But here he means it almost certainly in the literal. We do.

Yeah. OK. They think we act according to the flesh.

Well, as a matter of fact, we do walk in the flesh, but we don't war according to the flesh. Now, flesh, I think, and whenever Paul gives it a special meaning and he does frequently. Seems to mean.

The human condition in its natural state with its all its fallen characteristics, all its fallen limitations and abilities and so forth. And I think what Paul may be saying is we do, of course, live in a body that has its limitations. But the spiritual warfare we're engaged in is not limited by these fleshly limitations.

We are not trusting in fleshly power or fleshly strength to accomplish the things that we're seeking to accomplish. Now, apparently the accusation against him was that he was doing something like that, that he was influencing the Corinthians by his own fleshly charisma, by his own fleshly manipulative shrewdness. I mean, maybe that he I mean, maybe it was even considered as a proof of his manipulative.

When he's away, he's bold because he knows that people will be stunned and can't react personally to someone who writes a letter to them and hit him. But when he's there, he's more manipulative. He's more kind and friendly and acts, puts on a different face.

Later on, there is a suggestion in chapter 12 and verse 16. Paul says, but that but be that as it may. I did not burden you, meaning financially, nevertheless, being crafty, I caught you with guile.

Now, when he says being crafty, I caught you with guile. He's not he's speaking sarcastically. He doesn't mean that he really has caught them with guile.

He means rather that, you know, likely this is what some are saying about him. That he has captured them with his guile, with his deceptiveness, and that whatever impact he may have had in the church and whatever impression positively he's made on him, he's made not in the spirit, but in the flesh, they've accused. That is, he's a sharp guy, that Paul.

He's well educated. He's an orator. He's, you know, he was a high ranking young man attached in some way to the Sanhedrin in his earlier life.

From a wealthy family, judging by his Roman citizenship, the man's got a lot going for him in the flesh. And people like that are a dime a dozen, and they have a tremendous impact on people if they can speak well, and if they present themselves well, and they're crafty and so forth. And apparently, one of the criticisms of Paul, or the accusations, was that whatever he had done in establishing the church and persuading people to be saved and all that stuff, he had done without really the Bible, without the spirits anointing or sanctioning.

He did it just in his own power. And in his own fleshly endowments as an orator or as a crafty Jew, you know. And he says, now they may think that that's the case, and while it is true that we do have a flesh side of us, we are in a body, and we're not going to say that we're pure spirits without bodies, yet the warfare we conduct is indeed a spiritual one, not a physical one.

We do not rely on physical strength, physical wisdom or craftiness, to accomplish what we're here to do. He says, our warfare is, we do not war according to the flesh. Verse 4, the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, that means fleshly, but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments, and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled.

Now, the weapons of his warfare, what are they accomplishing? Well, no doubt he's listing the things that he has in fact accomplished in his ministry, which he was formally accused of doing after the flesh. He says, no, this is done through spiritual weapons, not fleshly weapons. What had Paul done? Well, pulling down strongholds.

Now, this is obviously a military metaphor that goes along with talking about weapons

and warring. Paul was not involved in using physical weapons or in any physical wars, but he must be referring to spiritual strongholds of some kind. Now, I personally think that he is referring to his regular activity in ministry, of which the Corinthians had seen and been a part of a sampling of that.

Paul had come to Corinth, he had established a church, he laid a foundation there where no one had done it before. He ministered there for 18 months and kept it afloat and he was, you know, miracles were done and so forth. But he was up against tremendous spiritual opposition, which I believe are the strongholds he's referring to.

In Corinth, there's a very corrupt city. There was a temple, Temple of Aphrodite was in Corinth, had a thousand temple prostitutes there. A lot of idolatry, a lot of fornication in the city, a lot of, you know, demonism there, as in most of the Gentile world.

And Paul had come in there and Corinth, like many other cities he'd come to, were like a stronghold. The enemy sees the truth coming and does not want to yield. And yet Paul wins.

Paul wins over converts out of this. Not with cleverness of speech, as he pointed out very clearly in 1 Corinthians. He didn't come with enticing words of men's wisdom, but with the demonstration of the Spirit and of power.

And so the pulling down of strongholds here, I think, refers to overwhelming, overcoming the opposition to his forward movement. He is coming as an aggressor for Christ into enemy territory. And the walls of the enemy, spiritual though they are, are standing there resisting him.

Trying to prevent him from coming in and conquering that city for Christ. However, he overcomes them. He has pulled down those strongholds, as it were.

Not through his fleshly efforts, but through the spiritual means. The anointing of the Holy Spirit in his life, both the anointed preaching and the anointing in miracles that he did. Were the supernatural weapons by which these walls were come down.

And therefore we have converts in Corinth. We have church in Corinth. Because those strongholds of the enemy have been crumbled.

Additionally, Paul's ministry is seen as involving casting down arguments. Now, in the King James it always said casting down imaginations. And I was always disappointed that the New King James changed it.

Because I liked the words imaginations. But it would appear from consulting other translations that arguments is the correct translation. Which is why the New King James changed it.

The casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God. Now, there are many high things exalting themselves against the knowledge of God. Particularly, high sounding philosophies.

Anti-Christian religions. These are lofty, well-respected cultural institutions. That prevent a person, as long as they adhere to them, prevent that person from becoming a Christian.

These things have to be cast down. These have to be taken out. There are arguments of the Greek philosophers that Paul encountered when he traveled.

He disputed with them in the streets and so forth. But he cast down their arguments. He cast down the strength of the opposing philosophies and so forth when he came to Corinth.

This is what he's saying he did. Now, he didn't do this just because he was a sharp guy with a good education and a quick tongue. His casting down of the opposing arguments was accomplished through the spirit of God.

Not through his rhetorical skill. That would be the flesh. And he says the net result is bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

Now, when I have heard teachings on spiritual warfare, and of course those teachings are very popular. At least in charismatic circles and sometimes outside of those circles. There's a lot of talk these days about spiritual warfare.

There are a few passages that are inevitably going to be used. Because there are just so many passages in the New Testament that employ a military or a martial imagery. To speak of the Christian life and service.

And so you can count on it. Whenever anyone gives any kind of a lengthy treatment of spiritual warfare, they're going to deal with those key passages. One of those, of course, is Ephesians 6. About the armor of God.

Another that is almost certainly going to be used is this one. And I've heard very much teaching based on this passage about spiritual warfare. But most of what I've heard seems to act as if spiritual warfare is principally a defensive activity.

That is to say, you're in a hostile world. You've got your sanctity and your purity to maintain. Your walk with God to maintain.

There are temptations on every side. The devil's coming at you. He's bringing the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life.

And here's poor little you, apart from God, totally helpless against these things. And therefore you need to put up a stronghold. And you need to put up your shield of faith

and so forth.

All this is true. But it is because of this defensive emphasis that I've generally heard people teach on this. First verse says, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

It's usually taught that this has to do with me bringing my thoughts into captivity to Christ. That the warfare I'm engaged in is to keep my thoughts pure. To keep my thoughts obedient.

And to bring all my thoughts around to the right way of thinking. And that this warfare is strictly an internal struggle. And the stakes of the battle are my mind and my thoughts.

And therefore as the devil brings arguments against me. As the devil has strongholds in my life. Then the spiritual weapons must be employed to tear down those strongholds and cast down those arguments.

And I need to bring every one of my thoughts into the obedience of Christ. Now I don't want to in any way imply that I don't believe in bringing all your thoughts into captivity to Christ. I do.

But my impression from reading Paul is that he's not talking about how mighty his weapons are for bringing his own thoughts into captivity. That may be true also. But that's not what I don't believe that's what he's talking about.

He's talking about the effect he's had on Corinth and on other cities. He's describing his ministry in general and how he accomplishes the things he does. He doesn't do it through the power of the flesh.

He does it through the power of the spirit. His ministry and the results of his ministry are people's minds are being brought around to obedience to Christ. People who are rebelling against God.

The strongholds of the enemy that had kept them in darkness have been crumbled. The arguments and the high things that exalted themselves against these people acknowledging the knowledge of God. Those things have been cast down through Paul's ministry.

And the thoughts of people who were once only for self and for Satan and so forth, they now have been brought around to obedience to Jesus Christ. Now what I find encouraging about this is that this actually takes a much higher view of what can be accomplished through spiritual warfare. If I see it only as Paul telling me how to overcome personal temptation and get my mind and keep my mind on the right track, that's good.

That's encouraging. I need that. I want that.

And no doubt our weapons, we have resources from God adequate to accomplish that. But even if I believe that, it's hard to believe that my activity can bring other people's minds into captivity. To make them obedient to Jesus Christ.

That would take more than to bring my own mind around it seems to me. Because I can make choices for myself. I can choose what I'm going to think.

How can I choose what someone else is going to think? How can I, without forcing them, without torturing them or whatever, make them do the right thing? And this is the marvelous thing. This is the glory and the power associated with the weapons that are mighty through God. That are ours, which are better than carnal weapons.

Carnal weapons, physical weapons, have often been employed by dictators and tyrants and conquerors to try to bring conformity in their empire. To conquer new lands and bring them under their sway. And to make loyalty to themselves prevail in the hearts of all their conquered ones.

But it doesn't really work. You can with physical weapons subdue people outwardly. You can even put them in prison, but stone walls and iron bars do not a prison make.

A person can be imprisoned, but his mind is still freely rebelling. Freely rejecting the terms of the captors. Paul himself was in prison when he wrote Philippians.

He was in prison in Rome and he's describing himself as God's prisoner. But the gospel is not bound. Paul's activities, his mental and verbal activities have not changed one bit just because his body is put behind bars.

You cannot with physical prisons and physical weapons bring men's minds into captivity. It can't be done. You can torture them and intimidate them and nowadays even drug them and do all kinds of things to get them to say what you want them to say under duress and torture.

But you can't make them really have that as their convictions. You can't really change their mind through torture. You can only intimidate them into saying what you want them to say.

But the weapons of our warfare actually accomplish what no physical weapon has ever been able to do. And that is to bring minds into captivity. Willing captivity of obedience to Jesus Christ.

The gospel is the principal weapon that Paul uses. The word of God. He calls it the sword of the spirit which is the word of God in Ephesians chapter 6 and verse 17.

And there are other weapons of course too. Certainly intercessory prayer is treated in

scripture as something that has power against the enemy and is a weapon of sorts. Paul even mentions that in the armor of God.

In Ephesians 6.18 he mentions prayer. Praise is another thing that is sometimes referred to as having the power as a weapon. And so forth.

But what Paul is saying is that he does not resort to earthly and fleshly stratagems to accomplish what he is seeking to accomplish. And what he is accomplishing, there is resistance. Therefore, he is not just walking, he is warring.

They claim that he walks according to the flesh. Well, he does live in the flesh, but he wars according to the spirit. And the warfare suggests that it is not just a cake walk.

You are facing opposition and strongholds that have to be overcome. And he is doing it. He is doing it.

But not in the way that Alexander the Great did it. Not in the way that Hitler did it. Or any great conqueror.

He is doing it through spiritual weapons. Now he says, verse 7, Do you look at the things according to the outward appearance? In other words, are you judging me by the way I appear to you? I appear to be weak in your presence. Is that how you judge me to be? If anyone is convinced in himself that he is Christ, let him again consider this in himself, that just as he is Christ, even so we are Christ.

For even if I should boast somewhat more about our authority, which the Lord gave us for edification, and not for your destruction, I shall not be ashamed, lest I seem to terrify you by letters. Now that sounds a little sarcastic, lest I seem to terrify you by letters. And he follows that immediately by the quote, for his letters, they say, are weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak and his speech contemptible.

So he says, I don't really want to seem to terrify you with letters, with these bold and scary letters of mine. And therefore I want to clarify in this letter that I'm not wielding my authority in such a way as to hurt you. I'm not trying to dominate you, to exploit you, to harm you in any way, although I do have authority.

God has given us authority to you, he says. Our authority, which the Lord gave us. But this authority we have is not to destroy or to hurt or to intimidate you.

Our authority is for the purpose of edifying you. Now, this is contrary to the style of authority that his opponents exercise. And we can see that, if I can find it properly, in chapter 11, Paul sort of describes the ministry style of his opponents in Corinth.

He says in verse 18 of chapter 11, 11, 18, seen that many boast according to the flesh. I also will boast for you put up with fools gladly, since you yourselves are wise. For you put

up with it if one brings you into bondage, if one devours you, if one takes from you, if one exalts himself, if one strikes you on the face.

Now, this is a description, perhaps figurative more than literal, of the way that the leaders of the Corinthians, who were opposed to Paul, were behaving. They exalted themselves, they brought the church into bondage, they devoured them, it's as if they strike them on the face. These are not gentle leaders.

And they no doubt claim that they have some kind of authority from God, and therefore they can run roughshod over the church. There are always leaders in every age in the church who seem to interpret their authority this way. But Paul describes his authority by contrast in chapter 10, verse 8, as not for your destruction.

God didn't give me authority so that I could take advantage of you, or do you harm, he did so I could build you up, edify you. That's what he said, of course, in that last verse of chapter 1, where he said, not that we have dominion over your faith, but we're helpers for your joy. For by faith you stand.

Paul didn't see authority in the church as a form of really ruling, in the sense we usually think of that word, but rather of serving. Now, his letters, they say, are weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak and his speech is contemptible. Let such a person consider this, Paul says in verse 11, that what we are in word by our letters when we're absent, such we will also be indeed when we're present.

In other words, you say that we're only bold in our speech, but whenever we're here we're very wimpy. Don't count on it. No such luck for you.

When we come we'll be just as bold and severe with you, or at least with those who are saying these things, as we appear to be in our letters. We're not double-minded and we're not two-faced. We are as gentle as the circumstance permits and as bold as the circumstance requires.

And if that looks like dissimulation to you, if that looks like hypocrisy, if that looks like two-facedness, well then, I'll accommodate you. I'll be just as bold and severe with you when I'm with you, as I appear to be in my letters. For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves, verse 12 says, with those who commend themselves.

But they, measuring themselves among themselves or by themselves and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise. Now, he's obviously giving us some kind of a picture here of what his opponents are like. But they commend themselves, which Paul, of course, has commended himself a bit in this letter, although he keeps saying, I'm not doing this to commend myself, I'm doing this to correct the situation.

But these people apparently speak of their own credentials a great deal. And to commend yourself, you have to give the impression that there's something good about

you. But for there to be something good about you, there must be some standard by which goodness or admirableness or status is measured.

If someone wants to rise above others and say that he is superior to them, there must be some standard by which he's measuring superiority. And these people apparently are measuring by the standard of each other. They're measuring, it says, themselves by themselves and comparing themselves among themselves.

Now, that is a very typical thing to do. That's the normal human thing to do. It's not a very intelligent thing to do.

Paul says in doing that they're not wise. And Christians should never do that. But it is understandable that anybody who wishes to think himself superior has to be superior to something else.

He has to have some scale upon which superiority is measured. And generally speaking, the easiest scale for a person who wants to be egotistical is to measure by some group of people that he's superior to. He's got to be selective, because you always find people that you're inferior to if you look too far.

But if you're selective, some people like to be the big fish in the small pond, because the smaller the pond, the fewer big fish there are. And in a big pond, he might not be the biggest fish. And yet, there are people who find their status and obtain their sense of self-importance and base the credentials of their ministry on the fact that they have accomplished something or are performing in a way that the average person in the church isn't.

Maybe they fast more often. Maybe they keep the law more strictly, as the Pharisees did. Maybe they have some talent which the church particularly admires, or some gift.

And because they have this thing that sets them above their flock in general, they think themselves better, and they commend themselves by it. But comparing yourself with other people is not wise. And there's several reasons why it's not wise.

One reason is that it's simply not the standard that God's going to use to judge us. When we stand before God, God's not going to judge us by how we did on the basis of a curve of humanity. We'll be judged on the basis of what Jesus is.

Jesus is the standard. Jesus said that he that rejects my words has one that judges him. The words that I have spoken will judge him in the last day.

If we know the words of Jesus, then that'll be the standard we'll be judged by. We might be doing better than a lot of people, but compared to Jesus, we're doing very poorly. A person can begin to feel very proud of himself if he's a little more religious, a little more pious than the average.

But that doesn't mean that he's got anything that he should be really considering as a basis for his self-esteem, because when he stands before God, the standards will be changed. The bar is lifted a little higher. I remember a man that I once knew.

He's gone to be with the Lord now, an older brother. But he always struck me as one of the most humble men in my circle of acquaintance. He just seemed truly humble.

And yet, he was a very admired man. He had spiritual gifts. He was a good teacher.

Everyone thought highly of him, but he obviously didn't think too highly of himself. I once commented on that to him. I always wondered how a person as gifted and as widely admired and no doubt flattered by people as you are, how you maintain humility.

That's always been a struggle. I wonder how you do that. And he says, well, it just all depends on what you're comparing yourself with.

That's all. If you compare yourself with other Christians, you might feel somewhat elevated in your own opinion. But if you compare yourself with Jesus Christ, then there's really no temptation at all to be self-congratulating or to be proud of what you've accomplished.

And that is really, of course, one reason why it's not wise to measure yourself and compare yourself with others. Because that's not the right measure. That's not the right standard to measure from.

And it may be that one person prays for two hours a day and another man prays for only one hour a day. And the man who prays two hours, they might think, well, I'm spiritually superior to that man. Or a person might have a little more victory over some areas of lust than another person or over some other area of sin and feel good about himself for it.

But you see, perfection is the standard. Jesus is the standard. And the illustration has often been given that if my son and I wanted to have a jumping contest, Timothy and I, I could jump quite a bit higher than he could.

I don't know if he could get both feet more than six inches off the ground. I'm sure I could get mine closer to two or three feet off the ground if I really tried. And I could say, wow, look how much better than him I am.

But if we're both jumping with an attempt to reach the moon, then the difference between how high I jump and how high he jumps is immeasurably small. In fact, it's nonexistent. Neither of us come anywhere near the goal.

And any superiority in my performance over his is negligible and disappears into total obscurity when the actual goal is in view. And so, these people are not wise to measure

themselves by each other and compare themselves by each other. That's just not wise because they've got the wrong standard.

And on the Day of Judgment, it's not going to be God saying, well, you did better than... I'll put you in the 80 percentiles and I guess that's a B plus or that's just a B, but I guess that's enough to go to heaven. No, you're measured by an entirely different standard. Another reason it's not wise to measure and compare yourself with others, I think, is because we don't have the data to make an accurate comparison anyway.

Now, assuming here we're comparing virtue, there are people, perhaps, who perform with less virtue than you do in life, that you have a higher degree of virtue and spirituality than they. But it's hard to know, and you cannot possibly know, what resources you have received to aid you that they have not received. How much grace has been given to you compared to how much has been given to them.

Where they started versus where you started. And how early the advantages began in your life compared to how early the advantages began in theirs. And so forth.

All these factors, all these variables, they're simply not known to us. They're immeasurable by human standards. But it's possible that a person who accomplishes much less in terms of overcoming sin in his life may be esteemed higher in God's sight than a person who has overcome more sin in his life.

But for the simple reason that the person who overcame more had less to overcome. Or had longer to do it. Or some other consideration like that.

So it's just stupid. Really, it's unwise, Paul says, to compare yourself with others. That's not the right standard.

And you can't make an adequate comparison not having all the relevant data anyway. Paul says in verse 13, We however will not boast beyond our measure. But within the limits of the sphere which God appointed us, a sphere which especially includes you.

For we are not extending ourselves beyond our sphere, thus not reaching you. For it was to you that we came with the gospel of Christ, not boasting of things beyond our measure, that is, in other men's labors, but having hope that as your faith is increased, we shall be greatly enlarged by you in our sphere, to preach the gospel in the regions beyond you, and not to boast in another man's sphere of accomplishment. Now, these verses obviously have the recurring appearance of the word sphere and measure.

We don't boast of things beyond our measure, beyond our sphere. Paul is picturing there a sphere of authority. And this is a very good verse for us to understand this concept.

Authority, whenever it exists among men, is limited in its range. Only Jesus has all authority in heaven and earth given to him. There are others who have delegated

authority in various spheres.

I have a sphere of authority that includes certain responsibilities and authority over my family. That sphere does not extend to anyone else's family. That is, I don't have that authority in another person's family.

They're outside of my sphere. I have a certain degree of authority in this organization to determine certain things about schedules and what we'll do and when we'll do it and that kind of stuff, and even make rules for the organization. I have some authority in this sphere.

But I don't have any authority in the church down the street to make similar decisions, or in any other school, or at 7-Eleven. I can't decide the employee schedules for them. That's outside my sphere.

When you have authority, you don't have all authority. Only Jesus has that. You only have a designated, limited, delegated sphere, or limited defined range of authority.

Among men, authority always is limited to a sphere. And that is a measurable sphere. When Paul talks about the measure, he means beyond the borders of his legitimate sphere.

He will not boast. He does not intrude into trying to dictate behaviors, trying to discipline, trying to exert authority outside the sphere that is legitimately his. That's what he's saying.

And he says, of course, our legitimate sphere does include you, meaning the Corinthians, in verse 13. Why would it include them? Well, because he was their apostle. He was the one who converted them.

They were his children in the faith. He said in chapter 4 of 1 Corinthians, you might have 10,000 instructors in Christ, but only one father, because I have begotten you through the gospel. And Paul had a special, legitimate claim of authority in this church and in the churches that he established.

He says, outside of these churches, I don't claim any authority. I don't boast of things outside my measure, outside my realm. But my sphere certainly includes you.

Now, the impression is given that there are the super apostles, the false apostles in Corinth, who were claiming and boasting of some authority in Corinth, which they didn't legitimately have. It was certainly outside their sphere. They had no legitimate authority there.

Certainly they didn't have the authority to come in and undermine Paul, whose authority there was unquestionably legitimate. And so these people are boasting, commending

themselves, elevating themselves by contrast to each other. And here they don't even have any legitimate sphere of authority there.

That's not their sphere. That's not their legitimate turf. And he says, we are not extending ourselves beyond our sphere, in verse 14, thus not reaching you.

That's a strangely worded sentence, but what he means is, it's not as if our sphere does not include you. Our sphere does reach even to you. Within the measure of our boundaries, of our sphere, you are in it.

You are within it. It reaches that far. And we're not, when we try to exert authority in your life, we're not going beyond our legitimate realm of authority.

For it was to you that we came with the gospel of Christ, not boasting of things beyond measure. Again, beyond the measure of his sphere, he means. That is in other men's labor.

So I'm not trying to exert myself as authoritative in churches established by other people. That's their business. That's their sphere.

My sphere includes you and some other churches, but not churches that other people started. I don't intrude into that like these men are doing. But having hope that as your faith is increased, we shall be greatly enlarged by you in our sphere.

And what he means by that is, our sphere has only extended so far, as of this moment, and we will not extend our authority beyond what is our legitimate sphere. But we hope that our sphere is a growing range. That there are new regions that we will preach to.

And that the sphere that God has given us of ministry will be expanded. Partly through you. Greatly enlarged by you in our sphere.

Probably meaning that the Corinthians will help promote Paul's ministry as he goes off to other places to preach the gospel. He says to preach the gospel in regions beyond you. And not to boast in another man's sphere of accomplishment.

So, Paul's defending himself in taking an authoritative tone. He says, this is my legitimate turf to do that in. Unlike these guys, I don't go trying to extend my authority beyond what is legitimate.

But he who glories, let him glory in the Lord. For not he who commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends. So, even though Paul is sort of defending his authority there.

In a sense, they defend their authority. Now he's defending his authority against them. He says in the final analysis, it doesn't matter what any of us say about ourselves.

Commending yourself doesn't mean a thing. It's who the Lord commends. If God's endorsement is on a person, then their ministry is authoritative and legitimate.

If not, they can say any number of things about themselves. I can say anything about myself. And they can say anything about themselves.

But really, it's all worthless and empty if the Lord is not the one who's doing the commending. Chapter 11. Oh, that you would bear with me in a little folly.

Folly, of course, means foolishness. And indeed, you do bear with me. Since you do, I'm going to ask you to bear with me a little more.

Now, this business of folly that he's referring to comes up frequently in the remainder of the discussion. Folly is not a good thing. It is the opposite of wisdom.

And Paul recognizes that some of the things he's going to say are kind of... Well, it makes him uncomfortable. He feels it's foolish to say them. He'll interrupt some of his own statements in the middle and say, I speak as a fool.

And then finish his sentence. And essentially what he's saying is in defending himself, he's doing a foolish thing. These men who commend themselves, in verse 12, are said to not be wise.

It's not wise to commend yourself. Why? Because verse 18 of the previous chapter says not he who commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends. So, there's no... To take a tactic of self-commendation and self-defense and self-promotion is not wise.

That's what they do, and Paul's always said it's not wise. Now, it may appear that he's doing the same thing. And he says, well, I'll admit it.

It's not wise. It's foolish to do that. But there's a sense in which I'm going to do it anyway.

And you can see and sense throughout the discussion Paul's discomfort. He's kind of... This is a very uncomfortable chapter he's writing here. Because he's... And the next one, because he's in essence laying out his credentials.

Arguably, he's commending himself. He's defending his authority. And this goes right against his grain.

It goes against his better instincts to do this kind of thing. But he feels there's no option for him but to do that because no one else is reminding these people of the things that should keep them on his side. And they need to be on his side to be spiritually safe.

If they listen to these opponents of his, they'll be let off into heresy. And therefore, it's

necessary for him to keep them on his side. And he really believes, and he says so later, he shouldn't have to do this.

He says, I ought to have been commended by you. He says it in chapter 12, verse 11. He says, I have become a fool in boasting.

You have compelled me, for I ought to have been commended by you. For in nothing was I behind the most eminent apostles. That's where the Greek says the super apostles.

Though I am nothing. So, Paul realizes that it's kind of foolish. He's going to make a fool of himself.

He's going to kind of stoop to the same low level as those he's criticizing and commending himself, saying good things about himself. He says, I don't usually like to do that. I feel awkward doing that.

I feel like a fool doing that. And I wish I didn't have to do it. It's your fault that I have to do it, because you should have been saying all those things about me, so I wouldn't have to say them about myself.

I shouldn't have to come to my own defense. You know me well enough. You should have been saying all these things about me so that I could not have to make a fool of myself by boasting.

But, since you are not saying it, I'm going to do it. For your own safety, he says. Oh, that you would bear with me in a little foolishness, a little folly.

Meaning, self-commendation. And indeed you do bear with me, for I am jealous for you, with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.

But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity, or possibly sincerity, that is in Christ. For if he who comes preaches another Jesus, whom you have not preached, we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit, which you have not received, or a different gospel, which you have not accepted, you may well put up with it. So, what he is saying is, although I'm going to be embarrassed commending myself, I am concerned that if I do not, you are going to be gullible, pray to the most transparent con-artists, because you don't have any discernment.

And I need to warn you, there are people who are coming to you, preaching things, advocating things, offering a spiritual experience of a sort, but it's different. It's a different Jesus, a different gospel, a different spirit, but you don't seem to have any discernment. You well bear with it.

You listen. You receive it. I fear for you.

It's like I have betrothed you to Christ as a virgin. Christ has not yet come to take you to the wedding. But it's my determination that when he does, you will not have been defiled with other lovers.

And yet, if another Jesus comes along and you take him, that's unfaithfulness to your bridegroom. And therefore, I'm jealous over you. It's like if your brother had to leave the country on business, or in war, or something like that, and he had a fiancée who was staying behind.

And as he was gone overseas, you watched his fiancée flirting with other men, and other men flirting with her, and trying to win her over, and she starts going out to dances, and she starts staying out all night with some other guy. And you are your brother's brother. And that's his fiancée that you're seeing doing this.

And it makes you jealous, not because you want her for yourself. You're jealous on behalf of your brother. You're jealous on behalf of the one who's been cheated.

And that's what Paul says. I may sound defensive, but it's not for myself. It's for Jesus.

I'm jealous over you, because I introduced you to him. And you are betrothed to him. And because you're betrothed to him, I expect faithfulness.

Paul is essentially saying that he is in the role that John the Baptist saw himself in as. The friend of the bridegroom. The matchmaker.

He's the one who introduced them to Christ. And the friend of the bridegroom has some responsibility to see to it, if possible, that he doesn't just watch the bride go off with some other man without intervening. And speaking up.

And doing something about it. I don't know very much about where the wedding customs that are present among us originated. I heard somewhere on the radio, I think it was yesterday or somewhere, that the whole role of the best man and the maid of honor was more than just to stand there and look pretty on the stage during the formal wedding.

But by accepting a position of best man, a person is, in a sense, becoming committed to being involved in trying to keep that marriage on line. If the husband starts neglecting his responsibilities to face him and to confront him about it. He's not just there as a witness.

Everyone's there as a witness. The best man is there as someone involved. In biblical times, the friend of the bridegroom was, in many cases, the one who negotiated the whole terms of the betrothal and the marriage for the bridegroom.

And apparently bore some responsibility also for the whole thing going right and turning

out right. At least until the wedding. Now, it's interesting that Paul refers to betrothal here.

As you know, in recent years, I've had some things to say about betrothal as a biblical means of matching. Matching up with a partner. As opposed to the more popular conventions of our culture of dating.

Betrothal really involved a couple making a promise to marry each other. A little bit like what we call engagement. Except in our day, engagement can be broken.

Betrothal could not be broken. Not for anything less than the most heinous offense. A betrothal could not be broken for anything less than what a marriage itself could be broken for.

To break a betrothal required an actual divorce. It would appear. And therefore, only such things as would be in marriage grounds for divorce would be equally grounds for betrothal.

Nothing less than that would be. A promise is a promise. And betrothal comes from the old English word troth, which means promise.

A betrothed person is a person who has been promised. And had a promise made to them. And you don't break promises.

At least you're not supposed to. And therefore, if a person is betrothed, they were locked in. They've made a promise.

And the only thing that has not happened is the marriage has not been consummated and they've not begun to cohabit. But they made a promise to that effect. And the betrothed person is not at liberty any more than a married person is at liberty.

To entertain other suitors. Or to play the field a little bit more. If a person wants to still play the field, they would not get betrothed first.

Betrothed was as big a commitment as being married. And, you know, I've suggested that it would be an improvement over what the church currently practices to go back to biblical patterns about this. And some who disagree have pointed out that well, not everything that was done in the Bible should be repeated by us.

I mean, the Bible records a lot of cultural things that aren't necessarily directly relevant to us. Sometimes they'll point out the greet one another with a holy kiss or even Paul's teaching about the head coverings. Of course, a lot of Christians do practice the head covering today.

But many do not. And recognize it as something that might have been more cultural than universal. Now, what some have said is this betrothal thing.

You can't say that Christians should practice betrothal because people in the Bible times practiced betrothal. There's lots of things that people in Bible times did. In fact, one guy, as sort of a humorous criticism of my position, sent me an email with the top ten ways to get a wife according to the Bible.

And gave examples of the most extraordinary ways that people got wives. Like when the Benjamites went and kidnapped women for their wives. And gave a whole bunch of examples of really, you know, wrong things to do.

Things that would be absurd to recommend. And yet they were done in the Bible. You know? And the implication was, although the writer, I could read between the lines, subtlety is not lost on me.

He didn't say this, but the implication was by my suggesting betrothal, the biblical model of betrothal, I was essentially saying that because this was the way people in the Bible did it, this is the way everyone should do it. And if so, how about these other things? They were done in the Bible too. Should we do it that way? But the fact of the matter is, there's more to it than that.

It's more than just that they did it that way in the Bible. It's that betrothal is used by Paul in the Bible as marriage is used. As a picture of Christ in the church.

And there is something about the customs that were practiced not only by the Jews, but throughout most of the ancient world through almost all of history. That there was more to it. You don't just date around and play the field and have a series of recreational romances, maybe a different one every weekend, and eventually decide that you get serious about someone and make sort of a commitment halfway to get married.

And then eventually you're still free to break out of that if you want to. And eventually, of course, even if you get married, you're free to get out of that. The culture begins to think.

Because the whole idea of dating and passing from one romantic partner to another, even if it's not sexual in the full sense of that word. But just romantic. Just allowing one to have romantic interludes with people who are not going to be their permanent partner.

People say, well, that's getting ready for marriage. That's how you prepare for marriage. No, that's how you prepare for divorce.

The idea that you can give your heart to someone, as soon as you don't love them anymore, you go to someone else. That's that very mentality that has led, more than any other factor, I think, to the fact that marriages don't last in our country. But I think that if we could argue that the pattern of marriage that Christianity teaches is divinely ordained because Paul says it's a picture of Christ in the church, then the same argument could

apply to betrothal.

Because Paul uses that as a picture of Christ in the church also. Not just the marriage and the roles of men and women in marriage, but the whole approach to marriage through betrothal. Yes, Paul is alluding to customs that were common in the time, even among pagan lands.

Not just among the Jews. Not only holy people. They were fairly universal customs, just like the roles of man and wife in marriage have been fairly universal throughout history in all cultures.

Man being the head, the woman being the protected homemaker, and so forth, and child bearer and raiser. These things are all conventions that are challenged in this century, both by the world and by the church. By the world first, and then by the church following the world.

But the point is that many Christians are holding out for a more biblical, traditional model of marriage because Paul said it's a picture of Christ in the church, and we can't tamper with that. But they don't usually go so far as to say we need to hold out also for the biblical model of betrothal because Paul also said that is a picture of Christ in the church. Which he did.

And the time that we are living in right now, from the moment you committed to Christ to the time that Jesus comes and you're joined with him, is a betrothal period. I've often said that if we would change the roles in marriage so that they differ from what Paul gave in Ephesians chapter 5, of man being the head of the wife, the woman submitting to the husband, and so forth, if we change that, we're tampering with a divine institution that was meant to depict some spiritual reality. And that can be as damaging as tampering with the tabernacle's dimensions.

God told Moses, be sure you make it according to the pattern. And the writer of Hebrews says the reason for that is because it depicted spiritual realities. You don't want to change the pattern.

Well, marriage is a pattern of spiritual realities, according to Paul, of Christ in the church. You change the pattern and you obscure the message. Now, if that is true, and I certainly believe it is, and most Christians do, then is it not also likely to be true that betrothal, which in Paul's mind and biblical writers' minds was all part of the whole process of getting married, was the betrothal period, and Paul used it as a picture of Christ in the church, just as he used man and wife relations as a picture of Christ in the church, isn't it also arguable that if we change that pattern of betrothal to something different, something more promiscuous, like dating, that that is obscuring the message too? That the whole complex of events that caused a single person to transfer into a married person included betrothal, a wedding, and whatever else was involved.

And that these things, according to their usage by Paul at least, seem to have, they are the pattern of a spiritual reality. So that the betrothal period, known to all those in cultures who practice it, is a good image of how we are with Christ today. We have not yet been joined with him.

We do not yet cohabit with him. But we are committed to him. There are no other options open to us but him.

We are not at liberty to play the field and consider other religious options, or anything contrary to Christ, because we've made a commitment, we've made a promise, and he's made a promise to us, and that promise is as binding as if it was marriage itself. But that concept is lost on our modern Christian world because the pattern is gone. The church no longer believes in betrothal.

The evangelicals mostly still believe in marriage. But somehow that inseparable prelude to marriage that Paul used just as much as he used marriage as a picture of Christ in the church, somehow the churches feel at liberty to ignore that and go along with the corrupt cultural practices of our time and its place. And I am only saying I think something is lost by that.

Something of value. There is such a thing as engagement, of course. People don't get married before they get engaged, usually.

But the problem with engagement, as we think of it, is that it can be broken. I mean, how many times have you heard of cases where somebody got engaged and they planned the wedding and they've got the wedding dress and they've got the groom's tuxedos and they've got the church and the flowers and the camera already, I mean, the photographer already, and at the last minute, the bride or the groom starts to have second thoughts about it. And the people closest to them say, if you have second thoughts about it, call it off, you know.

And even I think Christian people say, if you don't feel good about this, you better call this off. I mean, the wedding may be tomorrow, but it's never too late to call it off before the vows are said, you know. That is the assumption about engagement here in our culture.

And that is why that's different than betrothal. Now, if our assumptions about engagement were exactly the same as biblical assumptions about betrothal, I would have to agree with you. We have, you know, we have essentially the same thing they had.

But they're not the same. See, betrothal was as binding as marriage itself. To us, engagement is just, engagement is a promise that can be broken because there have been no vows yet.

Our yea is not yea and our nay is not nay. We swore by the temple, not the gold of the temple, you know. And therefore, though we said we would do it, we don't have to because we didn't really vow.

That's really the mental, I mean, I don't think anyone ever put it so crassly before that I've ever heard, but that's essentially how our society thinks about it. You take a vow, well, you better keep that vow. But you just promised and gave a ring, well, that's not a vow.

You could get out of that. I mean, it might not be very nice to do so, but there are circumstances. I mean, if you just don't feel good about it, get out of it.

Now, see, my understanding is that young people in biblical times, it was understood, they don't enter into what we call engagement or a betrothal until they were as committed to that marriage as they were ever going to be. And that's simply not there in our society. Of course, in our society, even when they say vows, I mean, some of them have their fingers crossed and they're not really totally committed to that marriage.

But there are people who have a very high view of marriage, but they still have a rather light view of engagement in the sense that, well, we said we'd get married, but we've kind of changed our mind now. And really, there's no stigma attached to changing your mind. In fact, it's considered wise.

Good thing you didn't get married. Good thing you only promised and didn't vow. Because you break your promise, you can't break a vow.

As I understand scripture, you can't break a promise either. Your yea is yea and your nay is nay. And a person, I think a couple ought never to agree to be married until they are green as firmly as if they were saying a vow before God.

And I think that's what Jesus' whole teaching about vows is getting at, too. The Sermon on the Mount. Anyway, more on that some other time, perhaps.

Actually, we have two full tapes on betrothal in that series, Toward a Radically Christian Counterculture. I have three hours teaching from scripture on the subject of betrothal. But we don't have time for it all now.

The point I'm making is that Paul as readily uses the institution of betrothal common in his day as he uses the institution of marriage common in his day and common in our day, too, as pictures of Christ in the church. And if that is so, then we ought not lightly abandon them just in case there's some reason for them. There may be some spiritual message there that underlies them that we're supposed to be getting.

I think there is. Paul says, I fear lest somehow as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ, verse 3.

And he says in verse 4, he's concerned specifically about certain preachers. Now, I don't... I mean, Paul is essentially saying that these preachers are from the devil.

That what they are doing is the same kind of thing the devil did in the garden, or the serpent did in the garden. He doesn't call it the devil here. But these people are as deceptive and as demonic as the serpent in the garden trying to corrupt the purity of a betrothed virgin to her betrothed husband.

Now, I don't know what kind of emotions that picture calls up in you. Some of you are pretty young. Some of you may not have had any serious relationship, or very many.

I have had not only serious relationships, I've had relationships where my wives were adulterous. And I cannot, without great emotion, even contemplate, not in my own case, any case, of a woman cheating on her husband. It just brings back too much emotion.

I mean, when I hear of it in any case, it just tears me up. It's not just a matter of being concerned about myself. Actually, I'm not torn up over my situation.

God's taken so good care of me, and the wife that committed adultery and left me, I'm glad she's gone, frankly. I've done much better since then. I'm not hurt over it.

It's why I hear of someone else going through it. I remember it. And just to think that for a Christian to go after human teachers, or another Jesus, or another gospel, other than Christ himself.

And by the way, many churches, evangelical churches, have substituted, in my opinion, other Jesuses. We always talk about the Mormons have a different Jesus. Or the JW's, they have a different Jesus.

Well, is it possible that you'd find a Baptist church, or a Presbyterian church, or a Methodist church, or a Pentecostal church that has a different Jesus? I think it's possible. And many times, the church embraces different Jesuses, first by embracing an authoritative leader, who reinterprets what Christian duty is, and reinterprets what it means to be in the church, and some of those things. And the whole institutionalizing of much of what Jesus never institutionalized, I'm not saying it's the exact same offense, but I say it moves away from the purity and simplicity that is in Christ.

The simplicity in Christ is, you love Jesus? Is He your Lord? You follow Jesus. You're a Christian. And you attach all kinds of other things like that, other things to the gospel.

You change the thing. And it's like seeing a betrothed woman, in the absence of her fiancé, going off after a corrupt substitute. For I consider that I'm not at all inferior to the most eminent apostles.

Once again, most eminent apostles in the Greek is the super apostles. And he's not

talking about Peter, James, and John here, in all likelihood. He's probably talking about these professed apostles in Corinth.

How do I know there were professed apostles in Corinth? Because he says so. He says in verse 13, such are false apostles, deceitful workers. So, these people, you can't be a false apostle without claiming to be an apostle.

You can be false, but you can't be a false apostle unless you're impersonating an apostle. You can't be a false prophet unless you're claiming to be a prophet. Now, these people were claiming to be apostles because they were false apostles.

And they're the ones, apparently, that Paul's referring to, almost certainly, when he speaks of the so-called super apostles. I think the term is used in sarcasm. I'm not at all inferior to those super apostles, he says, even though I am untrained in speech, yet not in knowledge.

Now, untrained in speech, they said, back in chapter 10, verse 10, that his speech is contemptible. Now, I would expect Paul to be a powerful orator. I mean, a number of things indicate that he was not bad at public speaking.

But he may have had his times where he was a little rough around the edges. He was an emotional man. There may have been times when his speech, I mean, just read his epistles.

Sometimes he doesn't use good grammar. Sometimes he'll run a sentence on 11 verses. It's not exactly the most literary production you could imagine.

And Paul was a man of great knowledge and great education, but I think sometimes he got emotionally so involved in what he was saying that sometimes he didn't even finish a sentence where it should finish. He used not correct grammar or he just got emotional. And therefore, his opponents probably were saying, this guy's not even a trained speaker.

This guy's not even eloquent. He doesn't even use good grammar. He said, well, I might be untrained in speech, yet I'm not untrained in knowledge.

That is to say, I know what I'm talking about. My speech may not be the best at all times, but the thought behind it and what I'm saying I know is true. I tell the truth because I know what I'm talking about.

But we have been thoroughly made manifest among you in all things. That is, you've seen everything about us. You know, we're not having hidden things.

We're transparent and you've watched us. Did I commit sin in abasing myself that you might be exalted? Because I preached the gospel of God to you free of charge. Now, by

not taking money for the gospel, and by the way, Paul talked about this in 1 Corinthians also in chapter 9, where he said that he would not take money from them, although he said he had the right to and other ministers did so.

He said he would not do it. He says that in doing so, I was abasing myself. I was giving up my rights for your benefit, exalting you above myself and abasing me below you by giving you the privilege of hearing me for free instead of charging you as I could have, as other ministers do.

Now, are you offended that I did that? Did I commit a sin in abasing myself that you might be exalted because I preached the gospel of God to you free of charge? I robbed other churches, probably sarcastically referring to a charge they've made at him. You know, Paul looked pretty good as far as his motive goes when he was in Corinth because he didn't take any money from anyone. And when the critics come and say, that Paul, you know, he's walking in the flesh, blah, blah.

And someone says, well, he didn't even charge us any money. And you guys are charging us money. How can you say bad things about Paul? He wasn't in it for the money.

Well, they have to come back with something. Ah, well, he probably, well, he robbed other churches so that he wouldn't charge you. He looked good among you.

But who knows, you know, how many churches he robbed before coming to you. And Paul sometimes seems to restate the criticism in sarcasm that is being leveled against him. He said, I robbed other churches, taking wages from them to minister to you.

Now, it's also possible that he did receive gifts from other churches. And he's referring to that sarcastically as robbing them and taking wages from them. That his support came from other churches.

But that isn't likely to be the case because when Paul came to Corinth, he didn't live off the support from other churches. As a matter of fact, he got a job when he came to Corinth, according to Acts 18. But his finances were low when he came to Corinth.

And so he got a job as a tent maker with Priscilla and Aquila. Yeah, Priscilla and Aquila in Corinth. And he made his living that way.

So he didn't even take money from other churches before coming to Corinth. So the criticism that he's alluding to is entirely fallacious. He actually worked with his hands and supported himself.

And when I was present with you and in need, I was a burden to no one. For what was lacking to me, the brethren who came from Macedonia supplied. So even when he was working among them, there were times he had need, but he didn't take a collection in

Corinth.

He allowed churches like Philippi to send him money. And he actually says so when he writes to the Philippians. In Philippians chapter 4, he acknowledges that they've sent him money several times before.

Rather than take it from the Corinthians, he knew that he wanted to keep his reputation clear in this matter among them. And in everything I have kept myself from being burdensome to you, and so I will keep myself. As the truth of Christ is in me, no one shall stop me from this boasting in the regions of Achaia.

Now this boasting is the boasting that he doesn't charge. He referred to it just the same way in 1 Corinthians 9. He said, although I have the right to be paid for my ministry, no one is going to take this boasting from me. I'm not going to allow you to pay me.

So he's twice referred to this among them as what his boast is among them. They can't accuse him of being in it for the money because he hasn't taken any money from them. Why? Because I do not love you? God knows.

But what I do, I will also continue to do that I may cut off the opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the things of which they boast. That is, his opponents are trying to measure up well against Paul. The Corinthians have seen Paul, and they know the good things he's done.

And these others are trying to imitate the good things he's done, but one area where they won't imitate him is they won't do it for free. They'll copy his ministry or manner or try to accomplish as many things as he accomplished so that they measure favorably against him. But one thing they are unwilling to do is not charge.

And therefore he says, I'm going to keep not charging so that those who want to measure themselves against me and accomplish everything I'm accomplishing can't quite do so. I'll prove myself to be their spiritual superior in this way, even though they're doing everything they can to remove all differences in terms of superiority between me and them. He says that those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the things that they boast, I'm going to cut off their opportunity by refusing to take money because then they can't boast of being just like me because they do take money.

For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing for his ministers also to transform themselves into ministers of righteousness whose end will be according to their works.

Now this business that Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light has been interpreted as one of the proof texts that Satan was once an angel who fell. Whether he

was or not, this passage doesn't in any way support that any more than it supports the notion that his ministers are ministers of righteousness. It says Satan transforms himself or takes on the appearance of an angel of light just as his ministers take on the appearance of ministers of righteousness.

And just as Satan's ministers are not really ministers of righteousness, so also Satan is not really an angel of light. It is a disguise worn by him and by his ministers. And he says, don't be surprised, don't tell me that these people have a lot of good works and a lot of good evidence of being good folks.

The devil can put on a disguise too and don't be surprised that his ministers do the same. It's not that they come on looking like the devil himself, they come on looking like an angel of light. It's like the devil refused to appear to you.

He wouldn't come on looking like himself. I say again, let no one think me a fool. If otherwise, that is if you're going to think me a fool anyway, at least receive me as a fool that I may boast a little.

Now it's okay, I would prefer not to be seen as a fool, but if you're going to think I'm a fool anyway, I might as well act like a fool since you receive fools gladly. He says, but I speak, I speak not according to the Lord. Now that's an interesting statement.

He's essentially saying that God has not inspired me to speak this or this is not the way Jesus would speak. And this raises issues like the statement of 1 Corinthians. On this matter I have no word from the Lord, but I'll give you my judgment.

It certainly raises questions as to what exact type of claims Paul made for the inspiration of his own work. And we'll have no time right now to delve into that deep subject. But he says, what I speak, I speak not according to the Lord, but as it were foolishly in this confidence of boasting, seeing that many boast according to the flesh, I also will boast.

Now here's where he gets uncomfortable with himself. He's going to do what he doesn't like to do. He's going to boast according to the flesh.

But that's the standard by which the Corinthians are impressed. And his opponents are doing it and making a profound positive impression. And therefore Paul says, if I'm going to win in this contest, I'm going to have to stoop to their level.

For you put up with fools gladly since you yourselves are wise. Another instance of sarcasm. For you put up with it.

If one brings you into bondage, if one devours you, if one takes from you, if one exalts himself, if one strikes you on the face, to our shame I say that we were too weak for that. But in whatever anyone is bold, I speak foolishly. I am bold also.

Now he says we were too weak among you. Like they said, we're weak and contemptible. We were too weak to spit in your face and strike you and take your money from you.

I say that to our shame. Again, being sarcastic. Are they Hebrews? Let's get down to some credentials here.

What do they claim for themselves? They claim they're Hebrews. Well, so what? I am too. That's no difference.

Are they Israelites? I am too. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I. Now, in a sense, all those words are roughly equivalent. Hebrew, Israel, seed of Abraham.

Then he says, are they ministers of Christ? That is, servants of Christ. Apparently, these were Jewish people who claimed to be servants of Christ. Now, Paul has, of course, become accustomed to saying I am, I am, I am.

And now he's even going to say I am more a servant of Christ than they are. But he realizes this goes so against his own nature to boast of being a humble servant. He has to catch himself saying I speak as a fool.

I'm not speaking the way I would naturally want to speak. But when it comes down to it, if we're considering who is a minister of Christ and who is not, I certainly have more claim to this title than they do. I am more in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often, meaning death-defying situations.

From the Jews, five times I received 40 stripes minus one. That's 39 lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods.

Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. A night and a day I've been in the deep.

In journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles. The Jew or Gentile doesn't make a difference. He's not safe anywhere.

In perils in the city, or if he leaves the city to get safe, he's in perils in the wilderness. If he goes out to sea, he's in perils in the sea. In perils among the false brethren.

If he's with Jews, his own countrymen, he's in peril. If he goes among the Gentiles, he's in peril. If he goes among the church, there's even false brethren there, he's in peril.

If he's in the city, it's not safe. So he goes to the wilderness, it's not safe there. Go to sea, not safe there.

Everywhere Paul goes, he faces peril, he's saying. In weariness and toil, in sleeplessness

often, hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Doesn't sound like he had yet heard of the prosperity doctrine, since he was not enjoying it.

Besides other things, what comes upon me daily? My deep concern for all the churches. Who is weak and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble and I do not burn with indignation? Now Paul's saying, I have all these outward afflictions, but really that's not the whole of it. My sympathy and empathy for the people of God is such that every time I hear of someone doing badly or someone suffering, I experience it myself.

Like a husband who feels sympathy pains when his wife is in labor. I've known men who had to be hospitalized while their wife was in labor because they were having labor pains. Paul says, when anyone is hurting in the church, I feel it too.

So I not only have my own trials, but everybody else's as well on my heart. By the way, many of the things he describes there, being beaten with 39 stripes by the Jews five times, or three times with rods, or being shipwrecked three times, none of these things are really recorded in the book of Acts. So there was much more suffering that Paul went through than that which is in the book of Acts.

You might say, well, the book of Acts talks about him being shipwrecked. Not that early. Not before he wrote 2 Corinthians.

He was shipwrecked at the end of the book of Acts, but there were three times previous to that before he wrote this epistle he's referring back to. He faced a great number of sufferings. Probably more than any other man of his generation for Christ.

He says, If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity. Now, he'll talk about that more in chapter 12, how he boasts in his infirmities. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying.

In Damascus, the governor under Aretas the king was guarding the city of the Damascenes with a garrison desiring to apprehend me, but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped from his hands. Now, this is either just an example of his many sufferings, or an example of the humiliation he's faced. He's boasting in his infirmity.

He faces humiliation. He has to escape in a basket on a wall because of the persecutions. But that's okay.

He'll boast in these things, these infirmities, these humiliating things, and he'll tell you why in the next chapter. But we'll have to wait until we get to the next chapter to find out what made him so inclined to boast in infirmities.