

Spotting False Teachings

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Date: 09 March 2025

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[0 : 0 0] Well, thanks very much, Niamh, for reading that for us today. Yeah, my name is Craig. I'm a pastor in training here at Brunsfield. And my wife, Josie, and I have been here for about six months now.

And we're really enjoying getting to know the church family here. And it's my pleasure to take us to our next bit of 2 Corinthians. If you've been here for a while, you know that we've been tracking through 2 Corinthians.

And we have reached chapter 11. We really are in the business end of the book now. Just a couple of chapters to go. But I'm going to start by asking this question that I've put up on the screen there.

Have you ever been scammed? Now, I'm sure all of us have seen the news stories of people being scammed out of large sums of money.

It seems to happen all the time. According to a leading UK fraud prevention service, in 2024, people in the UK lost 11 billion pounds to scams.

[1 : 1 2] It's big business. So I ask you again, have you ever been scammed? Maybe you received a dodgy text from a number that you didn't recognise.

Or maybe you bought something online that turned out to not be quite what it had been made out to be. Or maybe there was a stranger on the phone who convinced you that they were from the bank and asked you to send some money over.

There's lots of different tactics that the scammers use. And the thing that people always say after being scammed is, I can't believe I fell for that.

I thought I knew better. I definitely won't fall for that sort of thing again. Even though it happens all the time to so many people, we seem to have this confidence in ourselves that we can detect the real from the counterfeit.

But what about here in church? How do we know we're following the real Jesus? Is the Jesus we've been taught the one who we read about in the Bible?

[2 : 2 8] Or is he some poor imitation? And how do we know that those who teach us and lead us in church are true messengers of the gospel?

Are they the real deal? Or do they have ulterior motives? So in chapter 11 that we've just read, Paul is really concerned that the Corinthians are being scammed.

They are being taught a different Jesus by people who look genuine. But the Corinthians, they may or may not know that they're being scammed.

But actually, they don't seem to care. And this is a big problem for Paul. So Paul has spent much of the letter of 2 Corinthians defending himself up to this point, proving his credibility as a teacher of the gospel.

But now he turns his reader's attention to his rivals, and he exposes them for who they truly are. The Corinthian teachers who have infiltrated this church, those who Paul ironically calls the super apostles, they are scammers of the worst kind.

[3 : 43] They are, in fact, servants of Satan. Strong words. But let's look at this passage and see why Paul thinks this way. So we're going to look at this passage in three sections and ask ourselves the following questions.

Are you being faithful to Jesus or are you entertaining lies? Secondly, are you clear on what your leaders should look like or are you looking for the impressive?

Thirdly, are you aware of the enemy or are you letting your guard down? So now that we know where we're going, let's look at verses 1 to 4 and ask our first question.

Are you being faithful to Jesus or are you entertaining lies? You might have seen in the passage there that Paul begins by using a marriage metaphor to describe the Corinthians' relationship with Jesus.

Paul, in his role as a minister of the gospel, had, in the past, presented the Corinthian church to Jesus like a bride is presented to a groom in a marriage ceremony.

[5 : 01] The Corinthians had entered into a solemn marriage commitment to the Lord Jesus. They had been wedded to Christ. And verse 3 tells us that they had a sincere and pure devotion to him.

They have committed to love and serve Jesus. Just as Jesus had committed to love and be faithful towards them. A wedding.

But Paul fears that this marriage is under threat. Not because of any unfaithfulness or wavering on Jesus' part. Paul identifies that the Corinthians are being enticed away from Jesus.

Paul points the Corinthians back to Genesis 3 and informs them that they, that in the same way that Eve was deceived by the cunning serpent, the Corinthians are being enticed away from their pure devotion to Jesus.

The problem with Adam and Eve was that they were tempted to believe that the perfect, intimate relationship that they enjoyed with God, it wasn't good enough for them.

[6 : 15] And they needed something more. In the same way, it seems that the relationship that the Corinthians enjoy with Jesus, it's not enough for them.

They're being offered something else. Then Paul says he is jealous for their love. Not because Paul himself desires their love.

Rather, Paul wants God to have the things that are rightfully his. Paul wants God to be the only recipient of the Corinthians' love and worship.

God desires and deserves their affection. Now, our second book of the Bible, we thought about Genesis just there. In Exodus, after God's people had messed up and broken God's law, like mere days after they'd received it.

We remember Mount Sinai, we remember the tablets of stone, the Ten Commandments. So quickly after that, they messed up, they broke God's law, and they started worshipping the golden calf.

[7 : 27] God committed himself in those days, again, in a loving relationship. They'd messed up, but he says, I'm going to commit myself to you once again. And he instructs them once again, not to worship any other God.

Why not? Because the Lord is a jealous God. The story in Exodus tells us that one of God's names is jealous. And God is jealous for our affection too.

God desires and God deserves our affection. Now, the real question is, what are the Corinthians being drawn away to instead of Jesus?

Well, we see in verse four that Paul convicts them of settling for a different Jesus than the Jesus the apostles had taught them.

Paul convicts them of settling for a different spirit to the one they had received and a different gospel from the one they had accepted. When Paul first brought the good news about Jesus to the city of Corinth, this was the true gospel message.

[8 : 43] The Corinthians weren't lacking any important information. They had the full package. But since then, others have come along and they have come in and they've said, there might be something else.

They're offering something superior. They're offering something truer. They're offering the Corinthians something other than Jesus. Maybe the Jesus that Paul had taught them wasn't in fact enough.

Maybe they did need something more. But Paul says the Jesus he had taught them was the true Jesus, the son of God, given to die for the sins of the world and who had risen to glory.

And the Holy Spirit that they had received from God on putting their trust in Jesus, he was the true Holy Spirit. They had already received him. He was already with them in the Corinthian church.

He was already helping them. They didn't receive any other spirit. Now, I was wandering around the Buchanan Galleries in Glasgow on Friday and to my amazement, I came across these really convincing pieces of artwork.

[9 : 59] I couldn't believe it when I stumbled across the Mona Lisa and the sunflowers by Van Gogh hanging in the Lego store in Buchanan Galleries. What on earth were they doing there?

But then I soon realized that these are not in fact the true artworks that we know, but are in fact poor imitations. But if you had the option, would you settle for hanging one of these pieces in your living room in pride of place if in actual fact you had the Mona Lisa in the cupboard in the spare room?

The Corinthians already had the real thing, but they were settling for something that was trash in comparison. The Corinthians were not lacking anything.

There was nothing that the world or its bogus salesmen could offer them that they didn't have already. Yes, the Corinthians were sinners, but they'd been saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

And any message that suggested otherwise was a false message. Now, Paul doesn't pity them for going astray. He accuses them of accepting and putting up with a counterfeit gospel.

[11 : 21] One of these pieces. They're putting up with trash. And for Paul, this is a serious matter. This is serious unfaithfulness to the Jesus that they had been wedded to.

So, Satan's tactic has always been to divert God's people away from wholehearted devotion to Jesus. And all God's people, that's you and I, we too must stick to the Jesus we've received, the true and glorious Jesus, and give him our pure and sincere devotion.

And we're going to be devotion. So, that was our first question. But what about our leaders and our teachers, those tasked with teaching us about Jesus?

How do we know if they're the real deal or bogus salesmen? So, we're going to look at verses 5 to 11 now. Are you clear on what your leaders should look like or are you looking for the impressive?

So, in the next section of the passage, the first thing we see is that Paul is doing a light comparison between himself and the so-called super apostles.

[12 : 37] Now, these guys have been alluded to throughout the book so far, but they're named here. He calls them the super apostles. This is ironic, ironic way of describing them.

They look really great. great. Paul is not, in fact, though, any way inferior to them. We read that in verse 5. They are excellent public speakers.

They've been trained. They speak powerfully. They're engaging. They use excellent illustrations. Their teaching is interesting.

It's often funny. But Paul has substance. Paul claims to have knowledge. But what does he mean? It means that Paul knows what he's talking about.

To use the language of 1 Timothy, Paul isn't irreverently babbling about things he doesn't understand. Paul knows Jesus personally.

[13 : 41] He knows the scriptures and he knows how they point to Jesus. The super apostles, super apostles, they might be great, entertaining speakers, but they are fools because they don't know God or his gospel.

Now, the next thing we see in verses 5 to 11 is that Paul is saying he's not going to change his ways. He's not going to bend the expectations of the super apostles.

And we see that when he starts talking about money. it seems that the super apostles got really offended by Paul's refusal to charge for his teaching and for receiving help from other churches.

Now, I think Paul was deliberately trying to make himself look as differently as possible from these super apostles. And I think this had really riled them up.

I think they're maybe saying to themselves, who does he think he is? He's taking the moral high ground by not receiving money from the Corinthians. In fact, he's undercutting our profitable business.

[14 : 56] It seems that Paul wanted to look as differently as possible to these super apostles and in this rich and wealthy city of Corinth, it meant that not receiving a wage for his teaching.

Paul needs these Corinthians to see that he is not like these super apostles in any way at all. Now, in verse 10, he says that nobody will stop him from boasting.

This word of boasting is language that Paul uses quite a lot in 2 Corinthians. And next week, Archie's going to take us to our next passage and Paul's going to go in full tilt on his boasting about his Christ-like credentials.

But before we get there, he's saying, don't expect a different approach from me. I'm going to keep doing the things that I've always done amongst you. I'm not going to change just because the super apostles want me to change.

And why does he refuse to change? Well, we learn in verse 11, it's because he loves them. If Paul was to suddenly change because of pressure from the super apostles, that would be a very unloving thing to do.

[16 : 13] For it would cause the Corinthians to doubt his gospel message. If he was to bend to their pressure and become more like them, he would end up proclaiming a very different Jesus and the way he lived would no longer back up his message.

it would throw doubt on his credibility. It would throw doubt on his integrity if he suddenly started preaching a different gospel. And it would throw doubt on his distinctiveness.

He would look no different to these super apostles anymore. Paul will remain consistent. He won't change his message to suit himself. He will teach the gospel faithfully in a way that promotes Jesus and not himself.

Why does he do it? Because he loves Jesus and he loves the people he is teaching. And he wants them to understand this true gospel and to stick to it.

Okay. Verses 12 to 11. Are you aware of the enemy or are you letting your guard down? So Paul has spent much of 2 Corinthians defending his ministry and convincing the Corinthians to get on board with his teaching.

[17 : 31] Now he wants to expose the super apostles for who they truly are. They aren't just pesky rivals but they are really dangerous enemies of Christ.

You probably saw the strong language in verses 12 to 15. So for much of Paul's ministry he has been going around Europe taking the gospel with him proclaiming it to people who have never heard about Jesus but he is being followed around Europe by these false teachers.

They have popped up everywhere that he had been. They were people who had positions of authority in church in leading and in teaching. They had influence and when they spoke others listened.

Now we heard a little bit about these guys in Acts chapter 20 as Paul said his final words to the elders of the Ephesian church, a church much like Corinth.

He warned them about such people and I've just got the relevant bit up on the screen and he says, I know that after I leave savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock.

[18 : 49] Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard.

That's in Acts 20 but back in our passage in verse 13 Paul is warning the Corinthians of a very similar thing. Paul calls these guys false teachers he calls them deceitful workers.

They are liars and they disguise themselves as true Christians and true teachers of the Bible. The passage says that they masquerade as apostles of Christ.

Now the masquerade language just means to go about in disguise. So you might have heard of a masquerade ball. These were really popular in the past and people would go around with masks on to disguise themselves.

They wanted to veil their true identity and in the same way these deceitful false teaching super apostles wear these masks and seek to veil their true identity.

[20 : 03] But Paul wants to strip these masks from their faces and expose them for who they truly are loud and clear. Verse 15 we read they are servants of Satan.

And Paul explains that even Satan himself disguises himself as a angel of light. So it's no surprise then that his followers likewise pretend to be something that they are not.

And these false teachers they don't just keep to themselves but they seek to infiltrate weed their way in and they seek to disrupt churches just like their master.

Now we as Christians living in the 21st century we must also be aware of the spiritual reality of these things even in our day. This wasn't just an issue back then but it's a contemporary issue too.

There are enemies of the gospel who are wittingly or unwittingly carrying out the will of Satan. They oppose Jesus. They oppose his church.

[21 : 15] And Paul told the Ephesian elders to be on their guard and we too are to be on our guard against false teachers and false teaching. But I don't want you to freak out.

We're not to start freaking out and start looking around every corner for things which aren't as they seem. We are to have a quiet confidence in our strong and mighty Savior and in his spirit which leads us and dwells within us.

We must know that Satan is active and his agents are active but we also must know that Christ is also active and he is sitting on his throne today.

he has already claimed the victory. But what of these false teachers? Well we read in verse 15 these false teachers will get what their actions deserve for opposing Jesus and siding with Satan.

Their end has already been declared but we must still be on our guard today. So as we seek to apply this passage and bring it to a close I want us to think about two D's.

[22 : 28] We're going to think about devotion and we're going to think about discernment. So let's first think about our devotion. Have you gotten on board with Jesus?

Now we thought about that at the beginning these Corinthians were being led away from the Jesus that they knew. Have you gotten on board with Jesus?

Have you trusted in his death and resurrection? so that you might be saved from your sins? Are you a Christian? And if so, how is your devotion to Jesus?

Maybe you've been following for a long time, maybe a short time. Do you love him? Do you love Jesus? Some of us have known him for quite a long time.

Do you still love him? love him? Or have you forsaken the love that you had for him at first? Are you living faithfully to him like in a faithful marriage?

[23 : 32] Or is there anything getting in the way of your relationship with him? God is jealous for our affection. He deserves our everything.

Are we giving him the love he deserves? do we still love him? Are you entertaining anything in your life that might lead you astray from him?

Is the Jesus or the spirit or the gospel that you're settling for actually a forgery of the real thing? How does it match up to what you first learned?

Secondly, we need to think about our discernment. We need to carefully examine the message and the messenger. This means examining what I or Graham or Archie or any of the elders or anybody who comes up the front on a Sunday, examining what they say.

Are we saying what the Bible says? And that's why we often tell you to keep your Bibles open on the pews and to scan through as we teach to see if we are saying what the Bible passage is saying.

[24 : 45] Now, maybe in the future if you move to another town, you might be church searching, you might be looking for a good gospel church somewhere, or maybe you might find yourself in the future looking to appoint a new pastor.

Now, if you ever find yourselves in one of those situations, if you're looking for someone to come and lead you spiritually, I want you to remember this passage and don't aim for impressiveness.

Don't aim for people who can achieve results. Don't even look for people who are entertaining. Paul doesn't value those things. First, if you find yourself in one of these situations, either looking for a church or looking to appoint someone new, ask yourself this question first.

Does this teacher know Jesus personally? Do they actually love Jesus and love his people? Do they speak well of Jesus? Do they say true things about him?

Does what they say stack up with what the Bible says? The way people speak about Jesus shows whether they are devoted to him or not.

[26 : 01] We need to carefully examine the messenger. We thought about examining the message. What do they say? We need to examine the messenger. Do they have a godly character?

Jesus says that you can tell a scammer from a faithful teacher by the fruit that they bear. I've got some more verses. This is from Matthew chapter seven.

Jesus says these words, 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 thorn bushes or figs from thistles? Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.

Skipping on, thus by their fruit you will recognize them. These messengers. Now their message might be really good. These guys, they might look like the real deal, but how do they treat people?

[27 : 07] How are they with their families? What are they like in the pews after the service? What are they like in the tea and coffee time? How do they treat people? What are they like?

What is their character like? We need to be examining these people's character and see if the fruit that they are bearing in their lives, if it is good fruit.

So examine the fruit that they bear in their lives. Now like the experts in fraud detection, so you know these people who examine money, they look out for money that's fake.

These people, they know the paper money so well. They know all its patterns and its intricacies. They know all the things that should be there on that note.

So that when something else comes along that's a fake, they can see straight away, oh hold on a minute, it doesn't have this or it doesn't have that. Now another example might be thinking about painting.

[28 : 07] So by knowing the characteristics of a famous painter's work, so maybe the brush strokes that they tend to employ or the colour combinations that they prefer, by knowing their work so well, the things that they use in their work, when a fake comes along you will spot it a mile off because it will fail to match up with the real thing.

So how closely does the messenger resemble Jesus? The more time that we spend getting to know Jesus, seeing how Jesus loves others, seeing how Jesus trusted the Father, seeing how Jesus acted not in his own interests but in the interests of others, as we see him more and more clearly, as we know what he looks like, then the more clearly you can tell one of his true messengers.

his messengers should look like Jesus. We need to know our messengers, we need to know what they look like, their lives.

Now this is why we shouldn't depend on online preachers to teach us. Now I'm not talking about those who for our live stream is a bit of a lifeline because they can't be with us, but we need to be wary of depending on online teaching to supplement our understanding of the Bible.

There's a lot of very good teaching online, I'm not denying that, but there's a lot of false teaching on there too. And sometimes it's hard to tell the difference. The online pastor might preach a really good message, but you don't actually know them.

[29 : 47] You can't examine their character, you don't know what their motives are, and you can't examine how they love others because you've never seen them in action. God intended his word to be taught in the local church.

So if you can, if you're able, sit under the teaching of one of the leaders in the local church. And if that's here in Brunsfield, we love that we have you here.

But if not, if you're ever looking for a church, sit under the teaching of the local church, listen carefully, and see, examine those local leaders, those local messengers.

And finally, so we've thought about examining the message and the messenger, but how do we discern carefully that D, that second D? How do we do it? How do we discern well? Well, we must examine the message and the messenger prayerfully and with one another.

We must discern these things prayerfully. We must ask God for clarity as we sit in church. We must ask for his help as we sit and listen. That's something that we can be doing as we come to church.

[31 : 00] Lord, would you be speaking to me today? And would you be helping the person that's going to be standing up? Would you help them to speak the truth today? So we must pray, we must discern prayerfully, and we must do these things together, united.

As a church family, we need to be depending on Jesus to keep leading us and to help us to spot things that come up which maybe aren't quite right. We must do these things together.

This is not about examining the person sitting in the pew next to you this morning, sussing them out. This is not about taking cheap shots at our leaders when they teach us something that we are uncomfortable with.

This is about whether the message that's preached from the front is the message of the Bible. And this is whether the character, the person that's standing up, whether their character matches up with our great teacher and Lord Jesus.

And please pray for us too. Pray for us, your church leaders. Pray for all those who are involved in teaching in church, whether it's in creche or Sunday school or in growth groups or preaching on a Sunday.

[32 : 08] Please pray for us. Please pray for all those people. Ask God to help us to teach what the Bible says, not anything more, not anything less, and ask God to help us depend on him as we do it.

Please pray for us that we would be depending on our Lord Jesus to speak through us on a Sunday. And not through any sort of self-confidence but through the strength that he provides.

So I'm going to pray and then we're going to hand back over to the band. Let's pray. Our Lord Jesus, we thank you for preserving us.

This message in 2 Corinthians, thank you for the good and true things that we can learn from it, even today after so many years since it was written. Thank you that you deliberately preserved these words for us.

They are your words. This is your gospel, your message. Lord, I pray for each one of us here today, whether we know you or not. I pray that we would be drawn to you, that we would see you for who you are, the true king over the universe, over your creation, who has died for the sins of the world, who's died to suffer in our place so that we could be saved from our sins.

[33 : 27] I pray that we would be drawn to you, that we would love you, Lord, that we would grow in our love for you. Lord, some of us, we may have become cold to you.

Lord, I just pray that you'd reignite in us a love for you and a love for your people. I pray that we would be devoted to you and hold fast the gospel. And Lord, I pray for us as a church that we would be on our guard, that we would be aware that we do have an enemy, but one that you have conquered over already and who still has plans and ways that he seeks to infiltrate and disrupt our church.

But we pray that we would hold fast to our Lord Jesus and that we would remain devoted to you and we would discern these things prayerfully. We'd be looking at your word and seeing how it stacks up with what's being preached at the front and that we would be just depending on you together as a church family to lead us and remain faithful to you.

And so, Lord, I just want to pray all these things in the name of our powerful Lord Jesus. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.