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II Corinthians 11:7-15 "We Are Not Them and It Shows"
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All right. Let's open our Bibles to II Corinthians Chapter 11.

I think it was P.T. Barnum who said, "There's a sucker born every minute," and that certainly explains man and sin. One of the greatest effects that sin brings upon our lives is the susceptibility to deceit. Think about this: We live today in the most educated society in world history, and yet there is no shortage of scammers and hustlers and people that are so gullible, that are taken advantage of. Whole industries have started to protect us from those that would look to take advantage of us. But that's what sin does: It leaves us gullible and it leaves us willing to take advantage of others.

Now, as bad as that is in the world, it gets much worse when you a start to apply those things to your spiritual life, because you do have an enemy, Satan, that is desiring to take you out, doesn't want you to do well, doesn't want you to know the Lord, doesn't want you to know your God's forgiveness of His love. Jesus warned His own, He said, "What profit would be it for you if you could gain the whole world and then you ended up losing your soul?" Satan's plot against you is to blind your hearts against God's truth, to keep you in the dark, to keep you from getting up off the couch, from stepping out to serve; just to kind of sideline you and put you on the shelf. That's his desire. He is called the prince of the power of the air. He is a spirit that works in the lives of the children of disobedience. He has a plan to lead you away from God. And that's your enemy. And because sin already makes us gullible, now in the battle against the enemy of our souls, our only advantage is that we have God's word, because else we're open to the deceitfulness of those who would come to the church to seek to use it for themselves.

That problem increases even greater as we get towards the last days. Paul said in his first letter to Timothy in

Chapter 4 that in the last days some would depart from the faith and they would give heed, they would respond to seducing spirits and to the doctrines of demons. We have to be careful, because according to the Bible, the father of lies looks to take people captive to do his will. In fact, Paul when he wrote to Timothy said that we should in humility correct those who stand in opposition, maybe God would give them repentance, they could come to know the truth, and they could come to their senses and they could escape the snare of the devil, because he has placed them captive at his own will.

The big fight for your life, and we don't fight against flesh and blood. And yet once you came to Jesus, you've been delivered from the kingdom of darkness. You've been delivered into what Paul said to the Colossians, the kingdom of His dear Son. You have an advantage. You don't have to be the sucker born every minute. You can actually turn to God's word and line yourself up with the light that it gives you, and it can keep you from the deception, not only in the world, which is the obvious one, but from the enemy who wants to do more than just mess up your day; he wants to mess up your eternity, and looks to do just that.

Unfortunately, so often the body of Christ, God's kids, the saints, are still extremely susceptible to deceit, and the susceptibility increases as the word of God is known less, or followed less. You might know it, but if you don't do it you might as well not know it. In case of fire, break glass. But if you don't do it, the sign can be clear. Your life will still be in ruins. We are to put on the whole armor of God so we can stand against the wiles -- or the willies, if you will. Depends how pronounce the word -- of the devil. And that we might, having done all, be able to stand fast.

The only advantage we have is discernment, and discernment involves the application of biblical truth. Throughout history, if you look back just at the church from the day that it was born, the greatest threat against the church has not come from atheists, or from humanists, or even from persecutions or those who would openly attack the church. The greatest threat has always been from those who claim to know God, and yet don't; who claim to be teaching the Bible, but yet they are not; who turn you away from the things of God. They push their biblical perspective so that they might take advantage of

you. And we are constantly warned of that. Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount said, "You be careful. Beware the false prophets, who will come to you in sheep's clothing, but are inwardly like ravenous wolves." Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, and he said to them, "Don't be soon shaken, whether in mind or troubled in spirit, as if some word had come from us in regards to the coming of the Lord. Don't let anyone deceive you by any means. Know this," and then he quoted the scriptures to them. So how important that you and I are well-versed in the scriptures; and not just knowing them, but believing them to the point that we follow them. We govern our lives based on what God has said, convinced that God is right.

When Paul wrote to Titus, his trainee, if you will, in Crete, he said to them, "Make sure that you are careful for those of the circumcision, whose mouths must be stopped. They just are subverting complete households. They are teaching things what they shouldn't teach, but they're doing so for dishonest gain." Well, that's really what Paul was up against in Corinth, a bunch of false teachers who had rolled in. Didn't care about the church or the people in it. They cared about what they could get out of it. And when the gain dried up, they left.

And it is certainly what we see so often in the world today. If you're prone to turn on your late night T.V., sometimes you see these T.V. evangelists with their always need to collect money and have you give them some more, and boy, if you had faith, you'd send it to them immediately, and God has spoken to them. They need a new plane. And the problem is, they get it. That's the tragedy. I would think most of you would just go, yeah, another channel. I'll go to M.T.V. At least they're telling me the truth about who they believe and what they are. It's the deception that follows.

Paul found himself in these last four chapters of this book writing to a church that for the most part was back on track, but in the church for over a year had been these false teachers who were there to just manipulate the people, make merchandise of them. And it broke Paul's heart. And so, in these last chapters he goes after not only the people who are being led astray, but those who are leading them astray. And he's very forceful, and he's very outspoken, and he doesn't beat around the bush.

Peter would write in his second letter of the two that he wrote, "There are many false prophets among you, and teachers as well, who will bring in destructive heresy, even deny the Lord that bought them. And because of their destructive ways, many will follow. And many will be turned into that way, and because of their way of life, the truth of God will be blasphemed by others."

I don't know how many times I've heard over the years somebody I'm sharing with, "Oh, you Christians are only after our money." I say, "Well, that isn't me." But they get that understanding based solely upon what they see. "By covetousness," Peter will write, "they will exploit you with deceptive words," but the Lord said, "For a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction is not slumbering." God keeps track. But we should be careful.

When Paul wrote to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20 -- or actually when he delivered his last message to them, he told them about the wolves that were going to follow him in; some of them arising in the church; some of them coming in from without the church. And Paul said, "I've warned you for three years. They're coming in to speak perverse things, and their whole goal is to draw men after themselves." That's the battle we're in. Especially in our culture today, where absolutes are set aside for relativism and personal opinion. When Paul finished his little warning to the Ephesian elders, he finally said to them, "I'm just going to leave you with the word of God's grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among those that are being set apart." In other words, Paul's hope for the church was that even though they were going to be under such attacks spiritually from the false teachers, their strength was going to be to stand upon God's word. And that's ours as well.

Paul had been really diligent to teach God's word to the church, but some hadn't listened. This morning from verse 7 through verse 15, Paul continues on with his comparison show. He's been forced to boast about what God has been doing. He hates it, but he's going to continue to do it, because he wants them to put him next to the people that are now standing in a place he once stood. Because the enemy, the greatest enemy of our soul, is not when he attacks the pulpit, it's when he stands in it -- and they

were standing in it. Paul wants to talk to them this morning, and I like the verses very much. Look, I'm not out for your money, but they are. I'm not out to take from you, but they are. They're here for their own benefit. I've just come for yours. And he asked them to make the comparison, so we've entitled the message "We Are Not Them and It Shows." But Paul in these chapters kind of uncomfortably sits for a self-portrait. But his message is pretty clear: Be discerning. Church, be discerning. Look at God's word and stand on what God has said.

Well, Paul begins by talking about the fact that his arrival in Corinth many years earlier, he had come with self-support and without any need for them to take care of him whatsoever. He says in verse 7, very sarcastically, "Did I commit sin in humbling myself that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you free of charge? I robbed other churches, taking wages from them to minister to you. And when I was present with you, and in need, I was a burden to no one, for what I lacked the brethren who came from Macedonia supplied. And in everything I kept myself from being a burden to you, and I will keep myself." Paul starts his comparison off with these false teachers with great sarcasm, a gift of the spirit. I know, I know, not the Holy Spirit, but I like the sarcasm. And he says this to the Corinthians, "Did I really sin against you in just showing up and not having you pay me for anything? Or demanding that somehow you take care of me? That I preach the good word of God to you without charging a fee?"

You remember last week we ended with Paul saying about his speech, I'm not as well trained as these Greek orators that you now find amongst yourselves, and I really don't want to be that guy with that kind of style. I'm only interested in the result. I want people to be saved. I want their souls to turn their hearts over to the Lord, and so I come in the power of God's Spirit, not in the power of the words, if you will. Paul was only interested here the false teachers they came and they needed help and they needed to be paid and they were highly educated and they had credentials in hand, Chapter 3, verse 1 through 3 I think letters of famous people; this guy really rates high and you got to pay him good. And that's why they came, because they want money. They wanted to use the people. And Paul went, yeah, I'm

just -- I'm not here for nothing. You don't have to give me nothing. I just want to serve the Lord. I want you to hear what God has to say. Unfortunately, the false teachers turned that against Paul and they began to say, well, the reason he doesn't charge is he can't get any money. He has nothing; no credentials, no platform to stand on. What he gives you is about as much as he charges you.

If you go back to Chapter 9 of I Corinthians, literally the whole chapter Paul writes on this one issue and he says, I served for free because the gospel is free and I don't want you to get the wrong opinion. And there's so many crooks out there, I don't want to be associated with them, and so I'd like to just separate and be different, and that's what I choose to do. We read here that Paul says to these Corinthians in the church that he had founded, "I've humbled myself so you could be exalted." He took an extra job. He pastored the church plus made tents on the side. If you go read Acts Chapter 18, which is the account of Paul's year and a half in Corinth, he worked a lot at the loom making tents. Now, the false teachers didn't do that. They lived in the lap of luxury. They never lifted a finger to serve. Manual labor to them was a term they didn't understand. But Paul was only interested in one thing: Whatever it takes for me to do, whatever the cost that's to me, if in the end the Corinthians get saved, it'll be worth it to me. That was his reward. That was his challenge. That's all that mattered to him. And Paul said, "Did I sin in just giving this away to you?" Remember, they'd seen him for 18 months, not just for a couple of weeks or a couple of months.

I'm always interested, these traveling evangelists, they come into town just long enough to take your money. But if on Tuesday you call them, hey, I need some help, I guarantee you they're not available. They don't live with what they teach. They dump it on you and they leave. Paul had stayed there. He had lived the life. They should have known. And notice that Paul said, compare me to the false teachers. I did this as a matter of choice.

If you go back and read history, Corinth was an extremely wealthy, very carnal city. Paul didn't want to add any hindrances to the gospel. And by the way, that was always Paul's practice. Whenever he went to a new place

to start a new work, he always did so in a way that would not leave him dependent upon anyone there. When he wrote to the Corinthians in II Corinthians, he said, I want you to know that we didn't eat anyone's bread free of charge. We worked. We toiled night and day so that we wouldn't be a burden to any of you, even though we have that authority. But we want to make ourselves an example to you so that you can follow our example. And so, Paul wherever he went was interested in being sure that he didn't cause himself to be a burden.

Now, if you read all of the gospels, and then the book of Acts and then the epistles that followed, you will learn that Paul did allow churches to support the work to get the word to other places once they were on board. So once they came to the Lord, if they wanted to be with Paul and helping him get to the frontier, the places that hadn't heard the gospel, that was fine with Paul, because now it was a missionary investment on their part, not somehow meeting Paul's needs, as if that was so important to him. In fact, he said more than once to the Philippians, I know that I can get along without stuff. I trust the Lord. But when he came to these new places, like Corinth, he would always come to serve, with hard work, so that he didn't rely upon them for anything. And I think that's a good example; right? You don't want to come in and want stuff; you want to come in and get stuff. You want to give the word. And notice what he said in verse 9, I didn't and wasn't a burden to you then, and I don't want to be a burden to you now. I don't want to have it be more difficult for you than it has been in the past. It's important.

From verse 8, "I robbed other churches, and took wages from them." We do know that Paul was supported a lot in the southern Greek area by the folks in the north. The word Macedonia is just northern Greece. It's where the Thessalonian church was, where the Philippian church was, where Paul kind of ministered first in Europe. When they got on board and got saved, for years they supported Paul in his effort to reach the southern part of Greece, which was much more resistant, I guess, to the gospel, even more carnal, if that makes any sense. He used some of the support that he was receiving from other churches just to go and serve and minister to the Corinthians. He didn't want anything from them, because then he felt like that was setting a bad example.

By the way, the word "robbed" here is the word for plunder, and it's being so sarcastic and kind of angry at this point, I think it kind of communicates the level of disdain that Paul had for those who, though he had made such sacrifices, now believed to a certain extent that these lies of the false teachers were that he had sacrificed nothing at all.

Notice verse 20 -- and we'll get there in another week -- but he said this to them: "For you put up with it if one would bring you into bondage, if one devours you, if one takes from you, if one exalts himself, even if one would slap you in the face. To our shame I say we were too weak, literally, to treat you like that." Very sarcastic. You guys like being ripped off by these guys, and you take it well, but we didn't come to rip you off. Compare us with them. Set us together with them. So even when Paul had needs, verse 9, he never told them about it. He didn't ask for help.

The word "burden," by the way, in Greek is the word for growing numb, but it came to be meaning dead weight; something that takes a pressure, or place it upon you and doesn't contribute anything back.

Paul when he showed up in Corinth, I think we've mentioned to you, if you read Acts, came from years of beatings and chased out of town, and not unsuccessful, but highly costly church planting, and especially in the north. When he finally got to Corinth, he was there for months by himself. Just come from Athens, where things hadn't gone very well. And he thought about quitting. He wasn't going to preach. You'll read in Acts that he went to synagogue on Saturdays, but that was it. He didn't engage people, he didn't preach to anyone. He'd had enough. I think the bruises hadn't gone away.

When Silas and Timothy showed up, they brought an offering from the Macedonian churches, in particular the Thessalonians, and they said, "Paul, they want to help. They want to get the word out. Like God has saved them, they want other people to get saved." In those couple of days, the Lord also sat at Paul's feet one night as he was praying, and said, "Paul, I'm going to protect you here. Let's get the word out." And so that's how the church got planted for the year and a half that he was there.

Paul had been given support. In fact, he writes to the Philippians in his letter, "From the first day that the gospel came to you, no church has been so involved in giving and supporting and receiving than all of you. And the Thessalonians once and time again, they sent for my necessities." He was blessed by the northern churches. But his investment in the south had been to just come and serve. And he wanted them to see that in light of what these other folks were doing, and beating them and slapping them across the face and taking advantage of them, as he writes in verse 20. I can't imagine. Paul's goal was souls; their goal was gain.

He says in verse 10, "As the truth of Christ is in me, no one's going to stop me from boasting in the regions of Achaia." That's just southern Greece. "Why? Because I don't love you? God knows!" How awesome it was for Paul to be able to boast of God's provision in serving without cost -- and not like these other guys, twisting their motives and pretending to be something they weren't. And so, Paul would boast throughout southern Greece, God has always provided. And notice what he said, "You think I came this way because I don't love you?" Which was the accusation. No, no. Of course we love you. This is why we've denied ourselves in coming to you. As the truth of Christ is in me, no one else might believe it, but I know that the Lord knows my heart.

So again, he calls them to make a comparison. Or if you will, he causes them to say, hey, have some discernment. Take a look what God's doing and what the motives are. Compare the faithful teacher to the false one by his behavior, by his actions, not just by his words.

In fact, I love in verse 12 he said, "For what I do, I will also continue to do. Here's why: That I might cut off the opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the things of which they boast." In other words, the false teachers are put in a dilemma now. They want to be considered as we were, that we're here to serve and love the people. Let's face it, they're not here for that at all. They're here for money. They're here for gain. They want to be held in equal kind of footing, but there really is no comparison. And the problem with Paul bringing this up is, it puts the false teacher kind of in a dilemma. On the one hand he's kind of exposed; on the other hand, he can't stop, because that's why he's there. The contrast between

selflessness and loss, and then greed; unmistakable. Paul hadn't been a burden to them. These parasitic false teachers were another matter. Paul said, I'm going to do this so that they've got no leg to stand on. I'm going to keep saying, well, the Lord provides for us. And what are you doing taking another offering, and another offering, and another offering? You know the difference. We hate it as much as he did.

Well, then just to make things clear, and Paul doesn't pull any punches, because these last four chapters are Paul as the apostle calling things as they are. No gentleness, no reservedness, no -- nothing being held back. He just said, "I'll tell you what, they are false apostles. They are deceitful workers. They will transform themselves into the apostles of Christ, and it's no wonder, for Satan himself will transform himself into an angel of light. Therefore, it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works." Lying, deceiving, false apostles; pretend to be something they are not; in league with their father, the devil, whose tactics of imitation and pretense have gone before him.

He uses the word three times in these verses, "transform." That these false teachers transform themselves until you don't even know what you've got. It is, by the way, the same word that the Bible uses in Philippians 3 to speak about what happens to you and I the day that the rapture takes place. You'll be transformed. You'll be transformed in a good way. This is a deceitfulness. Paul was not one to sacrifice truth for unity, and he uses very forceful language to mark out with these false teachers.

I've noticed lately, and maybe you have as well, there's a lot of cries today for tolerance, the virtue of tolerance. But I've also noticed that when confronted with the truth, the proponents of tolerance are anything but. They respond with fury. "I thought you were going to be tolerant." Not of you. Everything but you.

Paul says, look, discern. The word "false apostles," it has the word "pseudo" in the front, as you might suspect. It is the only place that it shows up in the Bible. In fact, it doesn't show up very often in Greek literature at all. It almost sounds like it's a word Paul made up

just because he's mad. Like, these fake apostles, delivering their fake news.

So that isn't a new thing. I mean, the false apostles have always brought false reports. When the Lord sent Jeremiah to the nation, the Lord said these prophets, "They're just prophesying lies in My name. I haven't sent them, I haven't commanded them, haven't spoken to them, haven't given them a dream or a vision. They're just speaking worthless things out of the deceitfulness of their hearts." So that's not new, but the fact that we should be on guard, it is, because there is a sucker born every minute, and you don't want to be that person, especially not spiritually. God warned us about them, that the false christs have gone into the world. Jesus said, "They'll even do great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, the very elect." That's coming. But it's a characteristic of the last days.

When Paul and the others met in Jerusalem in Acts 15 to talk about grace and how people get saved, because there was a whole group that believed that you should become a Jew before you became a Christian, and these guys would run all over the country, and they were the guys that kind of birthed this movement of these false teachers, but when the council of Jerusalem of believers sent a letter out to these churches to warn them, part of the letter is recorded in Acts. It says, "We've heard that some have come out from us who have troubled you with words, unsettling your soul, telling you, you have to be circumcised, and you have to keep the law if you're going to be a Christian. Look, we've not given that kind of commandment to anyone." It was just a deceit that had just kind of gone forward, to deceive and to lead astray. He says in verse 14, It's no wonder these guys can masquerade as God's servants, because their father, the prince of darkness, does it as well. He's most effective not as your open enemy, but as your false friend.

The founder of Mormonism, Joseph Smith, claimed that on September 21st of 1823, he had a visit from an angel who told him about some gold plates that were buried in the Cumorah Hills in New York. He went and dug up the box, and discovered the everlasting gospel written on golden plates in Egyptian hieroglyphics that he alone could interpret with the aid of an Urim and Thummim provided for him by the angel. Same Joseph Smith who years earlier had had a visit from God the Father and God the

Son, two different gods and different bodies. Well, this angel gave to this Joseph Smith this false doctrine that we know as Mormonism today. But look, just because he says he's an angel, we know where that angel comes from. Sometimes called Nephi, sometimes called Moroni. Whatever.

Satan before he fell was named Lucifer, son of the dawn, because of his brightness. Isaiah Chapter 14 and Ezekiel 28 tells us he was the chief worship leader in Heaven before God's throne; that he was given a voice and given talent and all to be in that position, and it wasn't until his rebellion that his name was changed. It was no longer a bright shining one, but it was now the deceiver and the liar. One day when the Lord returns, he will find his total defeat. Isaiah tells us in Chapter 14, "On that day the world will look at him and shake their heads and say, this is the guy that's deceived us for all these years? And they'll stand in awe."

We learn from the Bible that this fallen angel has great power, but he must receive approval from God to do anything. Read the book of Job and you'll find him constantly checking in with God as to what he can and cannot do. He's the God of this world. He can change the weather and inflict disease and cause great pain and resist angels on their way to serve God, according to Daniel. Even Michael, the great archangel of Heaven, will not try to fight him without the name of the Lord. But he's a submissive spirit in the sense that God has the final word.

By the time you get to Revelation Chapter 11, Satan will, as the great red dragon, be cast out of Heaven or be refused access anymore to God's throne. It'll be the beginning of the end. When Jesus comes with you and I to rule and to reign on the earth, Satan will be locked up for 1,000 years, and life will be as man should see it: God being in charge. After being released for a little while to invite anyone who didn't like God's rules to follow him, he'll be cast into the lake of fire. His reward, as well as those who serve under his strength and by his power, will be according to his works. Let me assure you, you don't want to be rewarded according to your works. I'll take the works of Jesus and I'll stand in line for those rewards. And that's what God offers you.

We will get to verse 20 next time, but I want to remind you that Paul says to them, "You would do well and you will put up with so much in being deceived, and yet you won't listen to what God has to say." I think tolerance is a virtue only to those who lack strong convictions. If you're not sure, you'll put up with a lot. But if you're sure about what God wants to say, at least in your own life, you won't put up with it. You'll stand fast.

So may the Lord give you in His Word and may you learn it well. Don't be duped by these guys who come with their - - and there's so many of them today. It's just amazing. You know, but if you don't discern, you open the door wide to the enemy. He's going to come in and take you down whatever road he can, and your life, he'll ruin what God wants to do.

Stand fast. Light to your path. The enemy of our souls. Paul says this: Compare.