

Beware Cheap Imitations

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Preacher: Paul Barker

[0 : 00] So it's 2 Corinthians chapter 11, reading from verse 1 to 15. I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness.

Do bear with me. I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I promised you in marriage to one husband to present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.

But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by its cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you submit to it readily enough.

I think that I am not in the least inferior to these super-apostles. I may be untrained in speech, but not in knowledge. Certainly in every way and in all things, we have made this evident to you. Did I commit a sin by humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I proclaimed God's good news to you free of charge? I robbed other churches by accepting support from them in order to serve you.

[1 : 26] And when I was with you and was in need, I did not burden anyone, for my needs were supplied by the friends who came from Macedonia. So I refrained, and will continue to refrain from burdening you in any way.

As the truth of Christ is in me, this boast of mine will not be silenced in the region of Achaia. And why? Because I do not love you.

God knows I do. And what I do, I will also continue to do, in order to deny an opportunity to those who want an opportunity to be recognised as our equals in what they boast about.

For such boasters are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.

So it is not strange if his ministers also disguise themselves as ministers of righteousness. Their end will match their deeds.

[2 : 51] God, our Father, may the words that I speak be truth and light and lead us to stand firm in Christ.

For Jesus' sake. Amen. For many fathers, it's one of the happiest days of their life. The proudest day.

The dinner suit. The rose or orchid or something in the lapel. The long walk down the aisle. The question. Who brings this woman to be married to this man?

And the response. I do. And of course, it's doubly happy if they like the son-in-law as well. I'm not quite sure what fathers think when they don't particularly like the son-in-law, but it's doubly happy, I imagine, if they're very happy with the choice that their daughter has made.

Well, of course, in Hollywood and in reality, it's not always smooth sailing. Because fiancées frequently flirt, seduced by someone else in books and films and sometimes in reality as well.

[4 : 00] Someone who's better looking, a smooth talker, suave, richer, flashier car, social charmer, all that sort of stuff. It's not always the matters of light romantic comedy.

It's quite serious. And nowhere more serious, really, than here in 2 Corinthians chapter 11. Because this section of 2 Corinthians 11 uses that illustration of being presented to the groom.

But, the fiancée's flirting. And it's a dangerous liaison. In fact, it's worse than that. It's a fatal attraction.

Paul is a bit like the anxious father of the bride. Corinthian church is being blinded. They're starry-eyed and blinded thereby, by another whom they're chasing, it seems, rather than the one to whom they are meant to have been betrothed.

Well, there are times in life when it's the wisest advice to answer a fool according to their folly. And that's what Paul does here. He says, I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness.

[5 : 14] They are probably accusing him of being a bit of a fool. That's an issue that he's picked up in 1 Corinthians, in a sense, at the beginning of 1 Corinthians as well. Paul says, OK, you think I'm foolish.

Well, let me answer a fool according to their folly. Because really, it's you that are foolish, not me, is behind what he says at the beginning of chapter 11. Do bear with me, he says.

Perhaps slightly tongue-in-cheek, as we'll see a little bit later in this chapter. The foolishness that Paul is entering into, by way of some self-defense, and we'll see that especially next week, is a foolishness driven by love.

So he says in verse 2, I feel a divine jealousy for you. We often think that jealousy is a sin like envy. But there is an appropriate jealousy.

The Bible tells us in both Old and New Testaments that God is a jealous God that is jealous for our exclusive affection and attention. It's the jealousy of a husband for a wife.

[6 : 15] That the wife is not flirting with others. That the wife's full devotion is to her husband. And indeed, of course, we could say it the other way around as well. But here the divine jealousy is from the husband to the wife.

And Paul feels, he says, that same jealousy. So he says, I feel a divine jealousy for you. Literally, I'm jealous over you with the jealousy of God.

For, and this is the reason, I promised you in marriage to one husband to present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.

Paul's a bit like the father of the bride or at least the matchmaker. And he has promised the Corinthian church to Christ. And he's expecting that now that they are betrothed, that's the idea behind promised.

It's a much stronger idea in the Old and New Testament times than it is for us. When someone's engaged, then they're as good as married. And if the engagement breaks off, then in effect, it's divorce proceedings.

[7 : 20] Unlike in our day where engagement is a looser arrangement. Here, Paul is saying, I've in effect betrothed you to Christ. And I'm worried that you're flirting with another.

And in betrothing you to Christ, I'm wanting to present you as a chaste virgin. That is somebody who's pure in their devotion to Jesus Christ. How has Paul done this?

Well, through preaching the gospel. He's using this analogy to show us the effect of what a gospel preacher is on about. In effect, a gospel preacher is like a father of the bride, is like a matchmaker. That is somebody to whom they preach the gospel is converted to follow Jesus Christ. It's as though that preacher has now pledged them, promised them, betrothed them to Jesus.

But of course, that's the beginning of the relationship. And the aim of it is that on that final day, they are presented pure and chaste to Jesus Christ, the groom.

[8 : 20] A pattern or picture that is found several times in the scriptures that God's people are like the bride for God or for God's son in the New Testament. The idea of God's jealousy as well shows how passionate God is for us.

whilst God is sovereign and all things belong to him, there is a passion that each one of us belongs to him and responds to him with devotion.

It shows us that God is saddened, grieved, offended when we turn away from him, when we flirt with others. He's not indifferent to that.

It's not that there's such a big multitude that God doesn't notice that. God is highly offended when we turn away from him. It's what instigates his wrath to us for our sins.

And here we see it in a way that should encourage us that God longs for and is passionate and jealous for our affection and response and devotion back to him.

[9 : 29] Well, Paul is the gospel minister who's betrothed the Corinthian church to Christ. He's the one who started this church, if you remember, back in Acts. He's the one who went there first with the message of the gospel.

Their conversion is, humanly speaking, because of his ministry. He's like their father, the father of the bride, and betrothed them back to Jesus. Paul's ministry, though he's moved on from Corinth, in one sense doesn't end because that's, as I say, the beginning of the process which culminates ideally with them as a chaste version to use his analogy here on the final day the wedding feast

when the church is in a sense married back to Jesus.

Paul's concern is that the Corinthian church is not remaining pure and sincere in its devotion to him. He says in verse three, I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by its cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

That's the goal, a sincere, pure devotion to Christ. But Paul is worried that they're flirting with another. And he expresses that here, that they've been deceived.

Just as the serpent in the Garden of Eden way back in the third chapter of the Bible, Genesis 3, deceived Eve, the wife of Adam by its cunning, he's worried that their thoughts will be led astray from where they should be in a sincere devotion to Christ.

[11:10] they seem to be taken in, deceived, beguiled, misled in a sense by something like the serpent who deceived Eve in the Garden of Eden.

And of course, by using the analogy of the serpent, it reminds us that this attraction for the Corinthian church is fatal unless they stop it.

because the issue back in the Garden of Eden was that if you sin, if you eat the fruit, you will surely die. And not that day, but sometime later, Adam and Eve did die.

The serpent's words were wrong. They didn't live forever. Death is the result of sin. And if they continue in this fatal attraction, if they continue to be deceived and led astray from a pure and sincere devotion to Christ, that's not a matter of indifference.

It's a matter that leads to death and to hell. Eve, when she was deceived by the serpent, was deceived by his cunning.

[12:18] The word is used there at the beginning of Genesis 3 that the serpent of all the animals that God made was the most cunning or the shrewdest is the word that's used. Here Paul picks up that description of the serpent.

To be cunning is to be deceptive, to beguile, and he beguiled Eve by his words. Not actually by his looks, I imagine. Serpents don't look particularly exciting, I think.

But by his words. If you eat of this, you will not die. But even before that, the way, the intonation of what the serpent said to Eve. Did God really say that you can't do that?

sowing seeds of doubt or almost unbelief about what God had said. And Eve is taken in by that cunning, by the question, by the denial, and of course she eats the forbidden fruit with disastrous consequences.

And that's the same problem, the same issue, in effect, that's going on here in Corinth. That's why Paul draws the parallel to show how serious it is and how deceptive it is as well.

[13:27] And notice that it's their thoughts that he's worried will be led astray in the middle of verse 3. As the serpent deceived Eve by its cunning, your thoughts, her thoughts were led astray because her thoughts became, God will not punish to death.

I will not die. And the Corinthian thoughts are being beguiled and led astray. For Eve, she thought it was okay to disobey God, to not to believe his word.

She thought it was okay to strive to be like God, which was part of her motivation in taking that fruit. What this verse is reminding us, which we saw last week and have seen in earlier chapters of 2 Corinthians, is that the battleground, the spiritual battleground of the universe, takes place in the human mind, in a sense.

It's a battle for our thoughts. In the old covenant, in 2 Corinthians 3, Paul said their minds were darkened with a veil over it. Their minds are blocked out to the truth of the new covenant or the new gospel of Jesus Christ.

Remember what Paul said back in 2 Corinthians chapter 4, for example. In their case, the God of this world, that is the devil, serpent, Satan, has blinded the minds of the unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ.

[14:51] That's the battleground that we live in. It was the Corinthian world as well. And remember what we saw last week, early in chapter 10. Paul said that as a minister of the gospel, the weapons of our warfare are not merely human, but they have divine power to destroy strongholds.

What are the strongholds? The arguments that he goes on to talk about in verse 5 of chapter 10. We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle raised up against the knowledge of God and we take every thought captive to Christ.

See how Paul views Christian ministry and what's going on. The devil wants to blind our thoughts and minds. He wants to darken them, to deceive them. The ministry of the gospel is to take our

minds captive to Christ.

It's a battle for our mind, actually. And that's what Paul is engaging in as he writes this letter of 2 Corinthians. You see, what we think matters. Our minds matter.

What we think determines a lot of our actions and our words, our behavior, our character. Our minds are under attack, Paul is saying.

[16:06] That even for believers who've come to embrace the new covenant, had the veil removed and seen glimpses of the glory of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the devil doesn't give up.

He's still battling for our minds to darken them, deceive them, beguile them. And Paul is saying you are in danger, having been betrothed to Christ, of having your thoughts led astray by the cunning of the devil.

Remember his words to Eve? If you eat this, you will not die. If you pursue other gods, that's okay. If you pursue this path of sexual immorality, that's okay. If you pursue a view that, oh, well, that religion and this religion, a bit of that, and there's lots of good and put them all together, there's lots of ways to heaven.

If you pursue that, that's okay. That's the cunning, that's the beguiling of the devil today. Little different from the days of Eve and little different from the days of Corinth when Paul writes this letter as well.

[17:12] Oh, for an educated person today, how can you really believe that the physical Jesus rose from the dead? Oh, you're an intelligent person, so why do you take this simple Bible truth that the death of Jesus atones for sins, that he's in our place?

I mean, really, it's just, it's cosmic child abuse, the heavenly father abusing the child. You can't really believe, can you, that salvation comes from the cross of Christ? My friends, the devil is as cunning, beguiling, and deceptive today as in Paul's day, as in Eden.

It hasn't changed. The arguments might change from time to time, but the deception is still there. well-educated people, you're not, you're not going to fall for a miracle, are you?

I mean, we know in our scientific rational age, you see how it flatters us because of our, we're educated, we like to think that we're clever, and oh, okay, yes, well, if I'm educated, maybe I shouldn't really believe in a miracle.

You can't really believe the Bible, I mean, you've got a university degree, and you think you can believe the Bible, come on, it's primitive, it's old-fashioned, it's myths. I've heard all of that hundreds of times in recent years, and it's devilish deception still at work, and how seductive it is, how flattering it is, pandering to our egos, our intelligence, our reason, our scientific acumen, and all that sort of stuff, and that's what these imposters at Corinth are trying to do.

[18:49] We don't know exactly the fine detail of the points that they're trying to lead astray. We've got a sense that probably they were trying to push a slightly more Jewish agenda, but maybe other things as well that they were undermining and denying, and Paul won't have anything to do with it.

So he says about them that they are actually promoting another Jesus, another spirit, and another gospel. For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, well, you submit to it readily enough.

He's having a go at the Corinthians here for being gullible and chasing after another Jesus, another spirit, and another gospel, and the words at the end of verse 4 are literally what he said at the end of verse 1.

You bear with it readily enough. And so when he said at the beginning, please bear with me in a little foolishness, do bear with me, he's actually using a play on words with this in verse 4.

That is, you've submitted or you've borne readily enough to all this false teaching. Well, now bear with me for a minute in my correction of what is wrong.

[20:05] We don't know the details of what's being preached that's wrong, but gleaning bits of evidence through this letter, for example, it seems that they downplay the humility of Jesus, the meekness, gentleness of Jesus.

We saw that last week at the beginning of chapter 10. They play down the cross and suffering. Seems to be a triumphalistic Jesus. Maybe the spirit that they speak about is simply a spirit of power, of miracles and signs, and whilst in one sense that's true, maybe there's no spirit of godliness, spirit of holiness.

And the gospel of strength in ourselves seems to clash with the gospel of our weakness, which displays even better the power of God in the cross.

These people who were coming to Corinth claimed to be super apostles or hyper apostles to be more accurate to the Greek word. A superior gospel, a superior ministry, a downplaying of Paul, that Paul who's so unimpressive.

He's always in prison. He's beaten. He's rejected by places. How on earth can you go after a man like that? Come on. I mean, look at us. We're eloquent. We're smooth talkers.

[21 : 22] We know what we're on about. We're educated and all that sort of stuff. We're strong. He's weak. We speak well. He doesn't. Paul says earlier, remember, I'm just a clay jar, but with treasure inside.

So Paul responds with maybe some sarcasm to this countering against him. I think that I'm not in the least inferior to these, probably inverted commas, super or hyper apostles.

That's what they're claiming to be. And notice how cleverly he responds in the next verse 6. I may be untrained in speech. That is, okay, I'll concede that point, but not in knowledge.

Not just because he is well educated, that's not Paul's point, but rather that what he speaks and preaches is true. What his knowledge is based on is the true gospel.

And notice then what Paul is actually implying here. It's not style, but content. The Greeks ran after style.

[22 : 33] You see it in the art of ancient Greece today. The physical beauty that they loved and adored. And our world, in the last few decades, has become almost a replica of the idols of the ancient Greco-Roman world.

Never think that the New Testament is out of date. It's actually becoming more and more in date. Because our world is becoming more and more like the Greco-Roman world. That values and esteems above anything else superficial beauty and style.

And it infiltrates the church. What matters, Paul says, is content, not style. I may be untrained in speech, he says, but actually that makes it even clearer that what I say is the power of God.

My weakness, Paul says, is part of the gospel, actually. And that's why through this letter, Paul has gone to such extraordinary lengths to defend himself. He's not really fussed about his reputation, but because the attack on him and his ministry is actually an attack on the gospel.

And that's why Paul comes out in this letter with all guns blazing. because they're flirting with another Jesus. That's how serious all of this is.

[23 : 57] Another issue that we've seen already a glimpse of in chapters 8 and 9 that Paul was attacked for was the issue of money. Paul's pattern was to receive support from other churches for his ministry in the church where he currently is.

He's, when he was in Corinth, he received financial support, not only from his own tent making, he made tents physically, literally, but he also received some support from churches up in Macedonia where he'd earlier been.

That is, he didn't want to charge for the gospel to the people to whom he evangelised. That's actually quite a good principle. It's a good principle because the gospel is free and so it's preached freely.

But it ran counter to the Greco-Roman culture where philosophers and orators and rhetoricians would walk around sprouting forth their great ideas in beautiful words and get paid for it.

And so the attack on Paul, ironically, is you don't love the Corinthians. That's why you refused their money. They wanted to pay you and you declined. You don't love them. Paul comes back to that issue in the next few verses here.

[25 : 05] And whilst the attackers say it shows that you don't love us, Paul makes it clear that in fact he acted that way precisely because he did love the Corinthians.

So in verse 7 he says, did I commit a sin by humbling myself so that you might be exalted because I proclaim God's good news to you free of charge?

Now actually that's a stunning sentence. It is full of sarcasm, exaggeration, all the rhetorical skills that you can actually pack into a sentence by someone so-called untrained in speech.

I know it's writing but the same ideas apply. Did I commit a sin? Paul's exaggerating here. Is it really that bad? Of course it's not a sin. And he says, by humbling myself, abasing myself, that is by tent making and receiving money from others, so that you might be exalted.

Now here's the play on words because the word exalted is the word super. They claim to be super apostles by having a super message to make the Corinthians super Christians. But Paul actually says, I abased myself, I humbled myself by not taking your money, by working as a tent maker so that you might be exalted, lifted up, hyper.

[26 : 29] Same word or word play that he uses there. It's a very clever sort of arrangement or sentence that Paul is dealing with here. But he says, and bear in mind that Greeks despise manual labor as well.

Philosophers, orators, rhetoricians, they were highly esteemed. And it was almost unheard of that somebody who was in the speaking business would go with manual labor to find a living for themselves.

It showed that they weren't actually that good or that they didn't think of their message or themselves as particularly worthy. It's a bit like when we buy expensive clothes because we think the cheap ones are not really worth buying.

But you know, you can buy Nike shoes for whatever they cost, you know, hundreds of dollars and you can buy exactly the same shoe without a Nike brand in a cheap market of Bangkok for five dollars or something. Same thing.

But we tend perhaps to refrain from that thinking that somehow, you know, the product we buy is worth the money that you put into it. And that's partly the Greek thinking here that because it's free, it's worthless.

[27 : 35] It's cheap. We dismiss it. We put it to one side. That is, pay money, you'll value what is said. But Paul says it's free but that doesn't mean that it's cheap.

The gospel's far from cheap. He goes on then saying I robbed other churches. Well, not robbed as in the sense of steel but he's using such dramatic language to underscore his argument, to shock them into realizing the folly of their attack.

I robbed other churches by accepting support from them in order to serve you. And when I was with you and was in need, I did not burden anyone for my needs were supplied.

Literally, the idea is being topped up. That is, from his tent making he supported himself but when there was further need it was topped up or supplemented by the friends who came from Macedonia, presumably from Philippi, maybe Thessalonica or Berea as well and we know the Philippians did give money to support Paul's ministry after he left Philippi as well.

Paul turns the accusation completely on its head. The very reason he did not charge them was because he loved them which is the very thing they're attacking him about.

[28 : 48] So I refrained and will continue to refrain from burdening you in any way as the truth of Christ is in me. Strong statement. And he's making an oath here. This boast of mine will not be silenced in the regions of Achaia where Corinth is.

And why? Because I do not love you. God knows I do. The language is actually quite passionate. I really love you.

You think I don't? But the very reason I don't charge you and will not charge you and I'm not ashamed of not charging you is because I love you. That's why.

Financial integrity matters for ministers. And Paul's defense of this issue as it was in chapters 8 and 9 probably implies that the super apostles were filling their pockets by speaking their words of smooth talk.

Another Jesus another spirit another gospel. It's always worth bearing in mind. What sort of lifestyle does the Christian preacher, minister, pastor, evangelist lead?

[29 : 58] I remember when Billy Graham came to Sydney in 1979. There was a great furor because he was staying in, I can't remember what the name of the hotel was, but it was one of Sydney's best.

As though somehow we were just filling his pockets. I think Billy Graham's got a high integrity on money, but that's part of the issue that I think Paul is attacking here.

And I think there's an implication that these so-called super apostles who'd come to Corinth were actually filling their own pockets and greedy as well. Well, Paul now comes out bluntly.

So much for all the sarcasm and the rhetorical skill to respond. Now there's no place for that sort of subtlety now in the last verses of today's passage from verse 12 to the end.

Paul says, and what I do, I will also continue to do in order to deny an opportunity to those who want an opportunity to be recognized as our equals in what they boast about.

[30 : 59] That is, these super apostles, they want to be on the same level as me. I'm not going to get paid, he says. What are they going to do about it? They want to get paid. They're not on the same level as me.

And now come all guns blazing. for such boasters are false apostles, deceitful workers disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.

They claim to be super apostles. They are false apostles. They are deceitful and disguising. They are masquerading. They're pretenders.

They are not who they purport to be. Strong language. No sort of, I'm sure there's bits of truth that they're saying, glean the truth and ignore, you know, there's no sort of middle ground here.

They are false apostles. But it gets worse by way of what Paul says in response to them in the next verse. And no wonder even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.

[32 : 05] There were Jewish writings, not in the Old Testament, but from the time just before Paul and Jesus, what's called the Jewish pseudepigrapha, where Satan as an angel of light was part of their folklore.

And whilst Paul referring to that here doesn't necessarily say it is biblically true, he's referring to the context of what people would perhaps understand about Satan. Satan himself disguises himself as an angel of light.

So don't be surprised when people who claim to be super apostles actually do what Satan did. And he makes that connection stronger in the last verse. So it is not strange if his, Satan's, ministers also disguise themselves as ministers of righteousness.

Paul, remember last week, followed the gentleness and meekness of Jesus as his example for ministry. These super apostles might claim that they are following the real Jesus.

But actually their model is Satan. We wonder maybe whether the devil wears Prada. I imagine Prada wasn't around, whatever Prada is.

[33 : 21] But the devil certainly wears clerical collars, ministers' robes, bishops' mitres, other sort of wear that a preacher and evangelist then, now, might wear.

Paul's attack here on these super apostles is not an overstatement. We are not to underestimate the importance of these words. We are not to underestimate the importance of our minds.

The gospel's aim is to capture our minds, make every thought captive to Christ. We saw that in chapter 10 last week. Our minds are the battlefield between the gospel and the devil.

The devil deceives. He disguises. He beguiles. He leads astray. With smooth talk.

With the power of persuasion. With suave and sophisticated speeches. With flattery. Pampering our pride. And making us stroke our ego.

[34 : 32] Sometimes the devil's words are coated thickly with Christian vocabulary. It sort of looks right and it looks plausible. It might be okay to say, well, you know, that Jesus didn't rise from the dead, but the spirit of the resurrection is what matters.

It's all about the spirit of it. The body might have stayed in the grave, but it's a spirit of life that matters, that there's hope somehow. Well, that's the sort of existentialist rubbish that many people have been beguiled by in the last 60 or 70 years.

It's not Christian gospel, that's true, for sure. And they look as though they're ministers of righteousness. They look as though they're doing the right thing. They're ministers not of righteousness, but of the devil.

They're disguising themselves as ministers of righteousness, as Paul says in verse 15. But the real righteousness comes from the real gospel, which Paul made so clear back in chapter 5, if you remember.

For our sake, he made Jesus to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. Anyone who preaches a gospel other than the atoning, sacrificial, substitutionary death of Jesus, etc., is not actually promoting the righteousness of God.

[35 : 47] They might look as though they are, but they're servants of the devil and not the servants of the gospel. How does the devil act today?

Oh, come on. You really can't believe, can you, that God, who's meant to be loving and so nice, would send an innocent son to die?

I mean, that's horrible. Well, that's one of the devilish attacks that the church is facing in recent years, and many are beguiled by it. You can't believe in a bodily resurrection?

Can you? I mean, really, it just doesn't happen. It's just language to try and convey a sense of hope and life. You're educated.

You're modern. You're postmodern. This is primitive. We've moved on from there. Oh, come on, use your minds and realise that this is just an ancient myth. It's little more than an Aesop fable.

[36 : 50] How beguiling is that? We know that God is love. And of course, love is just being inclusive. So love the Muslim brother and love the homosexual brother.

It doesn't matter what they do or what they believe because love, and God is love, means that we embrace and welcome everyone on their terms. How beguiling is that? But they're the devilish deceptions that our church is capitulating before in these days.

And of course, there are many others on many different issues. The devil is not dormant. The devil is active and prowling around. And the attack here that Paul is addressing, note, is not an attack on the church from outside the church.

You know, a Richard Dawkins atheist attack from out there. That's relatively impotent. You know, a few little loose hand grenades that fall well short. The real danger is inside.

The wolves who are in sheep's clothing. The devil wearing dog collars and bishop's miters and clerical robes and all those sort of academic gowns or whatever. That's the real danger.

[37 : 57] That's the subtlety. That's the deception. Now, don't fear at this point that if you're a believer, somehow your mind is going to and fro and who knows where it's going to end up.

The Bible is clear. The gospel is clear that there is a protection from God. That those whom he's called will stay with him. But there is an equal obligation on us to guard our minds, to stand firm, which is the reiterated imperative and command of the New Testament.

Not to flirt with the devil, but to flee the devil, to shun temptation, to flee idolatry and keep away from heresy.

The devil deceives us, blinds us, leads us to falsehood as if it is truth. Don't be deceived. As in Corinth, so today.

Another Jesus, another spirit, another gospel. Don't be fooled for the argument that the Christian gospel is so elastic that it can brace anything.

[39 : 13] It's not. But notice too here. The ancient church was a mixed church of people who spouted forth heresy and immorality and those who are faithful.

So today, there's no pure church. There's no church that is only those who are mature in Christian faith and have shunned all heresy, wrong thinking and immorality.

It's a mixed church. We're mixed people. We still sin in our minds and in our actions. Certainly the Anglican church of today around the world abounds in false prophets, in deception.

I counter those arguments time and again in diocesan meetings and in Australian general synod type meetings. They are clever. They are sophisticated.

They are smooth talkers. But they are servants of the devil. We need to be on our guard and we need to be alert.

[40 : 14] And the prime New Testament command and response can be summed up as stand firm in the gospel of Jesus Christ. The content matters far more than style.

Maintain a sincere, pure devotion to the real Jesus Christ, the Christ of the Bible, which we are to believe and trust. Paul's self-defense in 2 Corinthians is not for his own sake.

It's not for his reputation. He cares only a couple of drachma about that. But the reason he goes at such lengths to defend himself is because the very gospel of Jesus Christ is being attacked and undermined by devilish deception and beguilement.

And don't think that this is a light matter. He ends this section, verse 15, by saying their end will match their deeds. Hell.

Death. It matters, this battle. Stand firm.