

No Holds Barred!

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[0 : 0 0] Good evening, everyone. Nice to see you all. If you're new, my name is Aaron. I'd love to meet you afterwards. Come and say hi. This is Jordan. Right, so we are in 2 Corinthians, and we've been powering through 2 Corinthians.

It's been wonderful. In the previous chapter, you'll remember, if you were here, that Paul was talking about how vain our boasting was. And, you know, you just don't want to be sort of talking yourself up all the time.

And the false teachers in Corinth liked to do that, liked to let everyone know how wonderful they were. Now, he still has them in his sights here in chapter 11.

But the way he talks about the false teachers and addresses them and the damage they're doing is very clever. The beginning of chapter 11, he says this very interesting line here.

He says, I wish you would bear with me a little foolishness. Do bear with me. He's being, I think he's being really ironic here. Terribly ironic.

[1 : 0 5] The foolishness he's talking about here is boasting, which he's about to do. So if basically for the sermon series cut chapter 11 in half, the second half of chapter 11 is him boasting.

Is Paul actually boasting? But he's not going to boast like the false teachers do, which is self-promotion. What he's going to boast about is how often he's been beaten up and shipwrecked and whipped and in prison and stuff.

He's been wonderfully ironic and sarcastic. It's basically like a parody. He's going to sort of parody what the false teachers do. But his goal is not to be funny.

It's to point people to Christ. But before he does that, before he does this foolish boasting, he wants to let people know, the readers, why he's doing this boasting.

Why is he going to do this really silly thing which he just says is really stupid before? Well, because it's really important who you listen to.

[2 : 0 5] Who you listen to really matters. I think that's why he wrote this first part of the chapter here. Let me explain that a bit. So he's talking to this Corinthian church.

And he's also got a relationship with the Macedonian church in the north there. And the difference between these two churches is not like the difference between denominations. It's not like the Corinthian church baptized infants and the Macedonians up in the north didn't.

And the Macedonians took communion in their seats and the Corinthians went up front. No, the difference between the two churches is that they're hearing a different gospel. The Corinthians were hearing about a different Jesus.

And how did that happen? It happened because they were listening to the slippery words of these false teachers instead of listening to Paul. And Paul is gutted.

He is gutted about this. We see that in verse 4. It says, He says, Paul's picture of what that feels like to him is very tender and quite moving, I think.

[3 : 41] Look at verse 2 there. For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband to present you as a pure virgin to Christ.

Okay, what's that about? Okay, the bride, in this kind of picture here, the betrothed, that's the believer of the church. The father is Paul. The husband is Christ.

So the bride is the church. The father of the bride is Paul. The husband is Christ. So back in the days, parents would, in this kind of culture here, on this lectern, this lecternal culture, in the ancient church, right?

They would, parents would arrange, you know, marriages, right? That was just what happened for their children. And there was a betrothal stage that was the promise to marry. Like engagement, but hardcore engagement.

Hardcore engagement. And then there's the marriage itself. So betrothal, marriage. During the betrothal stage, the father's job is he would do his best to protect the integrity of his daughter.

[4 : 43] You know, he wouldn't want her doing silly things. So he'd protect her, look after her. Now imagine this, imagine this. There's a father, and at the end of the night, this is what I do in my house. The last thing I do before I go to bed is I walk around the house and check all the windows, lock all the doors, right?

And so imagine there's a dad who's going around the house doing that. He walks around the house, and he's got a 20-year-old daughter who's upstairs. She's still living at home. She's betrothed, but she's living at home.

And she's promise to this really wonderful guy. So it's all great. So he thinks, before I go to bed, I'm just going to knock on my daughter's door and give her a kiss goodnight because I love her and sentimental, you know. Right, opens the door to see her climbing out the window.

So it turns out she's been sneaking out at nights to hang out with some local smooth-talking scumbag who, you know, who she only really likes because he's got like a really cool car or something like that.

I don't know. She's not thinking, this is not typical of women. This is just like, I'm just saying, in this story here. As I was saying this, I was thinking, wow, this is very, I'm saying, anyway.

[5 : 46] Right, so she's being seduced by the smooth-talking loser. It's a horrific picture. That's what Paul is saying here.

I betrothed you to a husband to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. And you're off, you know, off with some dude, some other guy. That's the picture Paul uses to describe what's happening in Corinth.

See, Paul's their spiritual father. He knows the gospel. He's met Jesus. He started this church. But they're listening to someone else, to people with a false gospel.

It's really important who you listen to. How serious does Paul think this problem is? He describes it in verse 3. But I'm afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve from his cunning, your thoughts will be led away from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

The fact that Paul references the fall of humanity tells us how serious Paul thought the danger was. He's not like guys. It's a little bit silly what you're doing, isn't it?

[6 : 57] I mean, it's kind of like, remember that time you were making a smoothie, the kale smoothie, and you forgot to put the lid on the blender, and you turned it on, and it's crazy. That was just silly and crazy.

Took me a while to clean that up. That was a mess, wasn't it? No. He says, remember that time, you guys listening to the super apostles, it's kind of like, remember that time that Eve allowed herself to be deceived by Satan, and the horror of death entered the world.

Like, he uses the worst thing that happened to describe what's happening to them. That's how serious this is.

See, Paul wants them to see that. His opponents in this church, these false teachers who are in it for themselves, they want to destroy this marriage between the church and Christ.

Like Satan wanted to destroy the relationship Eve had with God, and Satan did it with smooth and deceptive talking, with smooth ideas and concepts, and Paul is afraid the Corinthian church are falling for the same old trick, the most ancient of all tricks.

[8 : 03] You might be thinking, oh, those stupid Corinthians. I am not deviating from the gospel. I'm in good shape. Well, I hope so.

I hope you are. But I thought anyway, I thought it might be helpful to really quickly, just really, really quickly, list some of the most common, modern seductions of the gospel in terms of common, modern variations of the gospel that actually lead us away from Christ, that sound really good, but actually take us away from Christ.

I'm drawing from a book here by a guy called Trevon Wax called Counterfeit Gospels. So in his book, he lists nine counterfeit gospels, and they're all gradual shifts away from the unchanging gospel, and they're shifts that put us in danger.

So I'll name four of them. Firstly, here we go. First, you may have heard of this one, the therapeutic gospel. So in this, and I'll just sort of say it in bullet points just to sort of pass through it.

So in this gospel variant, the basic narrative is this. It's kind of a feel-good gospel. The basic narrative is this. Is it sin, in this narrative of the therapeutic gospel, sin doesn't sort of ruin our relationship with God.

[9 : 26] It kind of just ruins our sense of fullness. And when Christ died, it shows us how much Christ loves us. That's the big thing. And also, we now have power to reach our potential, potential to reach our own goals that we have for our particular life.

And the church is the place that makes us happy. Therapeutic gospel. There is the moralist, it's a big one actually in North America, the therapeutic gospel. The moralist gospel.

In this one, the big story is this. Our big problem is sins. Things we do that are bad. Not sin, which is our nature. They're different things.

The good news in this gospel, the good news of Jesus becomes this. It's this. It's we have a second chance, and the goal is to be better people. Really big on willpower.

If we try really, really hard, we can be a great person, and the church help us to do that. Now you can see in both of these so far, there's truth in them, right? There's kind of truth in there, but it's muddled.

[10 : 28] It's muddled from the pure gospel. The third is the activist gospel. I spent a little bit more time on this, because this was one I've had a bit more experience in. So the narrative is this.

The activist gospel. The kingdom is advanced through our efforts to build a just society. The gospel's power is demonstrated through cultural transformation, and the church is united around political causes and social projects.

Now some of that is like, yeah, totally, that's actually great. A church that's not actively involved in the community is not living out the gospel mandate. That's 100% true. But it can get twisted, right?

So the problem with the gospel, the activist gospel, is it can become, our slippery hearts make it become about us. So we become the saviors. We become the agents of transformation.

And we might not ever say that, but we operate like that. And what can happen, my experience with this, is that individual salvation can become a secondary issue to social reform.

[11 : 32] And this is something we need to understand well, because it can sideline the work of Christ. Because Christ, the kingdom of God moves forward, its construction and consummation, its foundation, this is all Christ's work, and we're his tools.

That's the way the Bible talks about it. It's a subtle distinction, but a really important one. We aren't building the kingdom. God is building the kingdom, and is using us. Now my experience in kicking around with, I'm a social justice guy.

When I've kicked around with the real hardcore social justice folks, what can happen is the idea of personal salvation can become a slightly embarrassing thing, and not an aim.

And it's really sidelined. Now, that doesn't mean that everyone involved in social justice, of course, is that, because if you're not thinking, you're not seeking justness in society, you're not living out the gospel mandate.

But if Christ is not at the center of that, and individual salvation is not at the center of that, then you've actually drifted slightly. Now the opposite variant of the gospel to that one is the quietest gospel.

[12 : 38] Okay. The major narrative of this one is this. Salvation is about spiritual things, not secular things. Christianity is about your individual life. It's not concerned about society or politics, which is ridiculous.

The church is about kind of, you know, self-preservation, just keeping the machine going, and doesn't really engage in culture at all, really. These are all counterfeit gospels.

All counterfeit gospels. We don't know exactly what the false teachers were teaching in the Corinthian church. Probably something in the lines of a moralistic gospel, we think.

Not exactly, we don't exactly know for sure. But here's what we do know. What they were being sold was putting them in danger because they're listening to the wrong people.

Paul knew that. But actually the super apostles knew that as well. The super apostles knew that it's really important who you listen to. And they didn't want the congregation listening to Paul. Paul, they were trying to undermine Paul, which explains verses 5 to 9 there.

[13 : 47] It seems like a bit of a transition in the passage, right? All of a sudden he's talking about not being a good speaker, and then all of a sudden he's talking about not getting paid. Why is that in there? Well, this is two of the ways that the false teachers in Corinth tried to undermine Paul.

They accuse him of, one, not being a good orator. They accuse him, two, of not taking money from them, which seems like a funny thing to accuse somebody of. We'll get to that in a moment, and we'll finish up.

So Paul addresses these things. Let's talk about the speaking thing first. Verses 6 there, you see it. Paul admits, he goes, even if I'm unschooled in speaking, I'm not so in knowledge.

Indeed, in every way we have made this plain to you in all things. So clearly the false teachers didn't rate Paul as a communicator. In the Greco-Roman culture, speaking, oratory, this was the high point of kind of a classic education.

You learn to all your stuff, but what you really wanted to be good at was speaking, being a public communicator. These guys back in the days who were really good, they were rock stars. So these super apostles were probably trained, very good.

- [14 : 52] Paul, on the other hand, maybe not so good, or perhaps he refused to kind of use their techniques. Either way, Paul says to them, I'm not a good rhetorician, but that doesn't mean my ideas aren't good.
- He says, I'm not a professional speaker, but I'm no amateur when it comes to the knowledge of God. And that's what's important. Now, William Barclay wrote a commentary on 2 Corinthians, and in it he tells a story of a group of people dining together.
- Let me read a little snippet of this. It's great. After dinner, it was agreed that each person should recite something. A well-known actor arose. I actually read, I did a bit of research.
- It might have been Richard Burton, if older people know who he is. What am I talking about here? All right. A well-known actor arose.
- With all the resources of elocution and dramatic art, he read the 23rd Psalm and sat down to tremendous applause. A quiet man followed him.
- [15 : 58] He too began to recite the 23rd Psalm, and at first there was rather a bit of laughter. But before he had ended, there was a stillness that was more eloquent than any applause.
- When he had spoken the last words, there was silence, and then the actor leant across and said, Sir, I know the psalm, but you know the shepherd. Okay.
- That's the speaking issue. Paul deals with that. And then he turns to the money issue. So the super apostles try to undermine Paul's authority. They don't want the congregation listening to him, even though he's the spiritual father of the place.
- And their peculiar attack was this. They go, look, he doesn't let us pay him. Therefore, he's inferior. You shouldn't trust him. So Paul addresses that in verses 7 to 9.
- I'll remind you of them. He goes, So here's the situation.
- [17 : 07] Paul didn't charge them when he preached. He is not against getting charged or getting paid for ministry. He talks about that at the end of 1 Corinthians. And clearly he's relying on money from Macedonians.
- And when he couldn't make ends meet, he was a tent maker. But he wouldn't take money from the Corinthian church, who was the wealthiest church around. He would not let them pay him. Why is that?
- I mean, it's complicated because he actually receives funds from them for another church. But he wouldn't let them pay him for preaching. Why wouldn't he do that?
- In the Roman world, business was conducted, particularly in a place like Corinth, through this elaborate system of clients and patrons. Patrons. So patrons are the people with power.
- There's not many of them. The people with power. Authority. They're the people that know other people who have power and authority. And they have resources. And the clients are everyone else. The plebs.
- [18 : 09] So patrons help the little people. In return, the client must be loyal. Maybe helping them in their own little way when they can. They say nice things about the patron to their friends.
- They're like little teamsters. If you can't wrap your head around this, think of the opening scene of The Godfather, which is the movie. Apparently, I read today, one of the best opening scenes in cinematic history.
- Number three, anyway. So, if you don't know the movie, or if you've seen it but can't remember, Don Corleone, he's The Godfather. He's, you know this movie, right? You're Italian. Right.
- So, he's in a room, sort of a darkened room. It's on the day of his daughter's wedding. And he's sitting behind a desk, and he's wearing a tux.

And people come in sort of one at a time and ask for help, ask for things. The scene opens, actually, with the first sort of five minutes just on this one guy, a baker. You don't even see a Marlon Brando who plays Don Corleone.

[19 : 17] So, this baker is talking about his life, and his daughter was assaulted by these two men who got away with it. And the baker wants Don Corleone to get rid of these guys. He makes this impassioned speech.

Another guy comes in later, and he's a singer, famous singer, but he wants to break into Hollywood. And so, he's begging The Godfather, please, will you help me break into the movies? So, The Godfather does help them.

And with the baker, anyway, as the baker's walking out, he puts his arm around him. And he says, I may call upon you for a favor in the future. So, these people, who the Don helps out, are indebted to the Godfather now.

Indebted to them. In this movie, what you're seeing there is basically the modern remains of the patronage system from ancient Rome. It wasn't a legally binding system, but it was very ingrained socially.

So, in a city like Corinth, where money ruled, where this is just how life worked there, if the church had paid Paul, what would they have seen him as?

[20 : 22] A client. A client. Under their control. Paul obviously didn't want that to happen, because it would hurt the gospel.

So, that's why he says, I'm not going to take money from you. You never will. Now, the final little section, before we finish here quickly. Paul finally has been leading up to this, verses 10 to 15.

He finally, he brings the hammer down. And he specifically targets the people who have been attacking him. And as a result of their attack, separating people from Jesus.

So, at this point, he drops all his kind of irony. He drops all the illusion. He drops all his funny little, you know, I'm just going to be foolish for a moment. He drops all of that, and he says, you guys are false teachers.

And you work for Satan. This is 13, 14, 15. For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.

[21 : 20] And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. It is of no surprise that his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness.

And their end will correspond to their deeds. This is fighting talk. This is Paul. He's been leading up to this for a while now. And he's saying to those people in the church still sympathetic to the new leaders.

He's saying, these teachers that you've been listening to who are very flashy, who are great communicators, they're not merely offering some harmless variation of the gospel.

They are undoing it. And whether they like it or not, they're actually working for the devil. Very strong language Paul uses here. But he was in a battle.

He was in a battle for the gospel. Okay, I'm going to finish here. This is a complicated passage. There's a lot going on. But let me try and tidy it up here. Folks.

[22 : 20] So that we can stand for the gospel and not be led away by a false one. I just thought we'll finish for 30 seconds here and remind ourselves of what the true gospel actually is.

And just using some, just three verses from 2 Corinthians. I went through, notice, pulled out three verses from 2 Corinthians here where Paul really focuses in on what the gospel is.

Not in its fullness or its completeness. But some big ideas. Let me read a couple to you here. Chapter 8 verse 9. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.

Chapter 5 verse 21. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. In chapter 122. It is, and it is God who establishes you in Christ and has anointed us, and who has also put his seal upon us and given us his spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.

What does this tell us? The gospel is about the work of Jesus. The gospel is about the work of Jesus, not our work. The gospel is about a great exchange of things.

[23 : 38] Christ's righteousness for our sin. When God looked at Christ on the cross, he saw the sin of the world. When God looks at us, he sees the righteousness of Christ. The gospel is about a heart and mind that have been changed.

That happens through the Holy Spirit. Because here's the thing about the false gospel, folks. That false gospel has no power to transform us.

All it will do is conform us to the world. God changes us and uses us in his plan to change the world. There you go.

That's the gospel. Amen, folks. Amen.