

The Village Church – Rancho Santa Fe
Week #28 – Adult Bible Study
Study Notes

2 Corinthians 11:1 – 12:13

April 29 & 30

Overview:

- **Context:**

Paul is defending his ministry and authority against the false apostles who have gained influence in the Corinthian church.

- **Paul's Approach:**

He uses a mixture of humility and boldness, acknowledging his "foolishness" while also asserting his apostolic credentials.

- **Key Themes:**

- **Godly Jealousy:** Paul expresses his concern for the Corinthians' spiritual purity and faithfulness to Christ.
- **False Apostles:** He exposes the deceitful nature of those who preach a different gospel and Jesus.
- **Suffering as a Mark of True Apostleship:** Paul highlights his own suffering and hardships as evidence of his commitment to the Gospel.
- **Visions and Revelations:** He mentions his own spiritual experiences to further establish his authority.

- **Structure:**

- **11:1-6:** Paul expresses his concern for the Corinthians and his "foolish" approach to defending himself.
- **11:7-15:** He contrasts his own ministry with that of the false apostles, highlighting their deceit and false teachings.
- **11:16-21:** Paul acknowledges his own "foolishness" and the Corinthians' tendency to accept those who are "wise" and "powerful".
- **11:22-33:** He lists his own sufferings and hardships as evidence of his commitment to the Gospel.
- **12:1-10:** Paul recounts his visions and revelations, emphasizing his dependence on God's strength in weakness.
- **12:11-13:** He defends his ministry and rebukes the Corinthians for their criticism and lack of support.

11: 1-6

The Corinthians have accused Paul of foolishness, so he takes up that theme, cajoling them about putting up with him. While he sometimes takes the figurative role of a mother or a nurse (1 Thess 2:7), here Paul is a father (1Cor. 4:15; Phil 2:22) giving away his virgin daughter in marriage.

1. Paul also alludes to the Genesis story in which Eve is the first to eat of the forbidden fruit, continuing the notion of the community as feminine.

This is a simple comparison, that does not blame Eve for the seduction of Adam and the fall. Blaming Eve was an idea first put forward in Sirach 25:24 (a book in the Apocrypha that Protestants do not believe is inspired) but Paul is not promoting that idea here.

2. Paul accuses his competitors, derisively referring to them as “super apostles,” of preaching a different gospel, even a different Jesus and Holy Spirit. Paul is alarmed that his rivals use the same terms as he does, for they sound as Christian as he himself is.
3. In verse 6, the text once again refers to the intruder’s complaint that Paul is less than superlative in speech. Paul, brought up in Tarsus and trained as a rabbi in Jerusalem could not have been totally ignorant of this art.
4. Paul does not deny it but counters by saying that he is not unskilled in knowledge. By this he does not mean intellectual sophistication but knowledge of God. The one who knows God is able to do more than simply argue logically or theoretically about God.

11:7-21

5. The language of humiliation and exaltation is a continuation of the honor/shame motif: Just as with Christ, so also Paul’s humiliation is paradoxically his exaltation. (see Phil 2:8-9, 3:7-11)
6. We know from elsewhere that Paul did not depend on the Corinthians for support when he was among them. They did not take kindly to it but considered it an insult that he did not accept their hospitality.
7. The level of sarcasm deepens. He is going to say what he has to say even if they think him a fool for it. He accuses his competitors of boasting according to human standards.
8. Paul did not play that game with them, and that is why he faces their rejection. But if that is what they want, he can – and will – play that game, too, by boasting just as the competitors do. The content of his boasting, however, will be very different.

11:22-33

9. **The first category** for boasting is that of credentials of origins. The common ancestry of Paul and his competitors as Hebrews, Israelites and descendants of Abraham tells us that Paul is dealing with Jewish missionaries who lay claim to status because of their distinguished lineage.

10. **The second category** for boasting is in the quality of apostolic labors and sufferings.

11. **Paul concludes** by saying that he knows what it is to experience weakness and setbacks, and this gives him a special sensitivity to those who are going through the same thing.

12. The statement from 30-31 concludes the preceding section but it also introduces what is to come through 12:13. *“If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.”*³¹ *The God and Father of the Lord Jesus (blessed be he forever!) knows that I do not lie.”*

12:1-10

13. Paul addresses the idea promoted by the “*super-apostles*” which stated Paul was not nearly as spiritual as he claimed because he did not have the same hyper-spiritual experiences as these false teachers. While they boast of their glory and power, Paul will boast of his weakness and suffering.

14. In verses 1-6, Paul recounts that he, in fact, does have cause to boast before the Corinthians in a manner that would put the spirituality of these heretics to shame. He himself had been taken up into the third heaven in some sort of supernatural experience. To maintain his humility here, Paul presents his experience in the third person.

15. In verses 7-10, Paul will focus in on a thorn God has placed in his flesh. We would do well not to dwell on the nature of the thorn as Paul spends no time delving into the nature of his suffering.

16. Speculations as to the nature of this “messenger of Satan” will only distract the hearer from Paul’s main argument: God’s grace is made perfect in weakness, not in our glorious experiences.

- **Hebrew Bible:**

In the Hebrew Bible, the term "ha-satan" (meaning "the accuser" or "adversary") initially refers to a heavenly prosecutor who serves God by testing the loyalty of God's followers.

- **Intertestamental Period:**

During the period between the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, the figure of "the satan" evolved into a malevolent entity, possibly influenced by the Zoroastrian figure of Angra Mainyu.

- **Christianity:**

In some Christian tradition, Satan is identified as a fallen angel, Lucifer (meaning "light-bearer"), who rebelled against God and was cast out of heaven. Other traditions reject the idea of an entity with a parallel power to God and acts as an enemy of God.

12: 11-13

17. Paul claims his credentials vis-à-vis the super-apostles, recalling for his audience the works of the Spirit – perhaps prophecy, tongues, and healing – that happened to them under his guidance. His only offense was in not expecting support from them

REFLECTIONS

1. Discuss what you understand the difference to be, between denominations or faith traditions that differ in theology and “pseudo- Christianity.” (Does not hold true to the basic tenants of the Christian Faith). Share a time when you feel you were experiencing, witnessing or participating in something that sounded Christian, but something felt off.

2. Paul had a very private experience of God that he only shared once and did not rely on to unpack as a Christian principle in any other writings. His experience of being brought to the 3rd heaven. Why was such an extraordinary event in his life minimized to mean so little in his teachings?

3. If you are willing to share, what kinds of extra-ordinary spiritual experiences have you had that you are very selective about who you share them with and why?

4. What are your thoughts about Paul’s tactics in refuting the intruders’ case against him? What do you think you might have done differently? What was Paul’s most effective tactic or weapon against his critics?

Notes by The Rev. Janice Y. Cook, Interim Associate Pastor, The Village Church RSF

RESOURCES

1. Second Corinthians, Interpretation, Ernest Best
2. Second Letter to the Corinthians, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, Roy E. Ciampa and Brian Rosner
3. The Message of 2 Corinthians, The Bible Speaks Today Series, Paul Barnett
4. Feasting on the Word, David Bartlett, Barbara Brown Taylor Editors
5. C.S. Lewis, Paul and the Theology of Suffering
6. Second Corinthians, New Interpreter’s Study
7. The Message Translation

A DIFFERENT GOSPEL – A DIFFERENT JESUS

Some self-identified Christian denominations that do not believe Jesus is God, or that the Trinity is a false doctrine, include Jehovah's Witnesses, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and Unitarians.

Here's a more detailed look at these and a few other groups:

- **Jehovah's Witnesses:**

They believe Jesus is God's "only begotten Son" and his life began in heaven, but they do not believe he is part of a Trinity, or that Jesus is God.

- **Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons):**

They believe in God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost as separate personages, but not as one God.

- **Unitarians:**

They believe that Jesus was a great man and a prophet of God, perhaps even a supernatural being, but not God himself.

- **Christadelphians:**

They believe Jesus is the Son of God, but only in a relational sense, and that the Father alone is truly God.

- **Iglesia Ni Cristo:**

They believe in one God, and that Jesus is the Son of God, but not God himself.

- **Oneness Pentecostals:**

They believe in one God, but that Jesus is the same as God the Father, rather than a separate person of the Trinity.

- **Christian Scientists:**

They believe in one God, and that Jesus is the Son of God, but not God himself.

- **Liberal Quakers:**

Many members and attenders do not believe Jesus was God, and many are nontheists.

- **Prosperity Gospel:**

The prosperity gospel, also known as the "health and wealth gospel" or "name it and claim it" theology, teaches that God will bless his people with financial prosperity and physical well-being. It often emphasizes that faith, positive speech, and donations to select Christian ministries can increase one's material wealth and health. The movement gained traction in the mid-20th century, particularly through radio and television, and is often associated with Pentecostalism and charismatic churches. Some prominent figures associated with prosperity gospel include Joel Osteen and Creflo Dollar.