

## Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Dave Smith

Sermon manuscript

### Sermon Series: AUTHENTIC

(studies in the book of 2 Corinthians)

## **High Stakes Credibility**

(2 Corinthians 10:12--11:15)

Study #16

### Introduction: John Wayne, doing John Wayne...

Impersonators cut their teeth mimicking well-known voices. We've all heard John Wayne's distinctive drawl routinely "channeled."

But nobody really "did" John Wayne. He was, himself, the best John Wayne ever. (We recently re-watched a couple of John Wayne movies. His speech and his swagger are inimitable!)

In 2 Corinthians, Paul invites others to mimic him, confident that imposters WON'T and hopeful that growing Christians WILL.

Last Sunday we listened as Paul told us of a weapon to use in spiritual warfare - namely, love. We adapt our "style of relating" to best meet the needs of the person we are trying to serve in Jesus' Name.

And when we do that, not treating everyone like a cookie cutter clone, but loving creatively and energetically, God's power flows.

As he continues, Paul is quick to condemn the widespread practice of comparison. Comparing ourselves with others or against our own standard is a practice as common today as it was in the first century.

And it is just as counter-productive today as it was then. Paul warns us against the comparison trap.

### Comparison is a Curse! (10:12-18)

#### **Avoid Comparison like the Plague! (v. 12)**

*[12] For we are not bold to class or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves; but when they measure themselves by themselves, and compare themselves with themselves, they are without understanding.*

Playing the comparison game leads either to depression or to arrogance. In the case of the Corinthians, it led to arrogance.<sup>1</sup>

The Corinthians were tooting their own horns, and there are few things less appealing than listening to someone toot his or her own horn.

On any given day at church I'll receive promotional material advertising Christian ministries, speakers, singers and seminars. Sometimes the mailings come direct from the source and will contain self descriptions like "dynamic speaker" and "world-renowned preacher" and "universally acclaimed [whatever]"

Solomon tells us that self-commendation is not only ugly. It's unwise:

***[Proverbs 27:2] Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; A stranger, and not your own lips.***

It may be tempting for us to perpetually paint ourselves in such a way that we always look pretty shiny. But spiritual impact flies out the window when we pat ourselves on the back.

It is far better to not compare and to not boast. It is far better to just state the facts of the case.

Paul leads the way, reminding his audience of his accomplishments. No brag, just fact.

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<sup>1</sup> It can do the same for any of us if we are *very* careful about those with whom we choose to compare ourselves...

## No Brags, Just Facts (vv. 12-16)

*Facts are our friends (vv. 13-14)*

***[13] But we will not boast beyond our measure, but within the measure of the sphere which God apportioned to us as a measure, to reach even as far as you. [14] For we are not overextending ourselves, as if we did not reach to you, for we were the first to come even as far as you in the gospel of Christ;***

No exaggerations allowed. No bragging permitted. But go ahead and state the facts. That's what Paul did.

Paul was the first person to travel as far as Corinth with the message of the Gospel. So, he mentioned that fact without embellishment.

To that point in time, no other Christian had gone as far as Macedonia and Achaia with the Gospel.

But Paul doesn't take that factoid and rub it in the Corinthians' faces to get them to **finally** respect him. No, he moves on.

Clearly, for Paul, the thing was NOT what he had accomplished. It was about what was left to do. It's all about the MISSION - and he wanted to take the Gospel farther and farther west!

*The MISSION is the thing (vv. 15-16)*

***[15] not boasting beyond our measure, that is, in other men's labors, but with the hope that as your faith grows, we will be, within our sphere, enlarged even more by you [16] so as to preach the gospel even to the regions beyond you, and not to boast in what has been accomplished in the sphere of another.***

Catch this. He doesn't linger at all at the issue of what they thought about him or if they appreciated him.

He moves straight to the biggest game in town - taking the Gospel where it had never been before.

His dream is that as the Corinthians' faith grows he will be enabled (by their financial support?) to go to other places with the Gospel.

That's focus. And power comes with that focus.

It is focus when, at the end of the day all we are really excited about is what our amazing God has done and all we care about is what our amazing God thinks about what we have done.

## Be all About God (vv. 17-18)

***[17] But HE WHO BOASTS IS TO BOAST IN THE LORD.<sup>2</sup> [18] For it is not he who commends himself that is approved, but he whom the Lord commends.***

So, Paul flatly refused to engage in comparison.

Then he immediately compares himself to those in Corinth who were claiming that they were apostles and that he (Paul!) was not.

## Comparison Brings Clarity (11:1-2, 5-6, 7-11)

### Comparison is Silly..., So Let's Compare (vv. 1-2)

*An invitation to foolishness*

***[1] I wish that you would bear with me in a little foolishness; but indeed you are bearing with me.***

He knows there is an element of foolishness in comparing himself to those who have "dissed" him. But he feels that it is necessary to do so in this case, for jealousy's sake...

*Godly jealousy*

***[2] For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin.<sup>3</sup>***

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<sup>2</sup> Similarly, Galatians 6:14 says that appropriate boasting is boasting about what God has accomplished in and through us.

Jealousy is a powerful emotion that has done untold damage throughout human history.

Cain killed Abel because of jealousy. Jacob's sons sold Joseph into slavery because of jealousy. King Saul tried to kill the young shepherd, David, because of jealousy. The Gospels tell us that it was the Pharisees' jealousy that prompted their opposition to Jesus.<sup>4</sup>

Jealousy is dangerous - but all jealousy is not evil.

Moses, quoting God, wrote [*Exodus 20:5*] ***"I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God"***, and James writes [*4:5*] ***Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: "He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us"?***<sup>5</sup>

God's jealousy is protective. His jealousy is what prompts His concern for our welfare.

So, there is a beautiful side to jealousy as well as an ugly side.<sup>6</sup> Jealousy in a covenant relationship is right and proper. A husband and wife are rightfully jealous for each other's affections.

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<sup>3</sup> How could Paul present the Corinthian believers to Christ as "pure virgins" when they had been, as he said in 1 Corinthians 6, ***"fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, homosexuals, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers and swindlers"***? This can be nothing but a statement about the reality of the forgiveness of sin. Despite their past, the hope and vision for the future was that they would be pure. The past has passed and **purity** is now a real possibility.

<sup>4</sup> See Genesis 4, Genesis 37, 1 Samuel 18 and following, and numerous places in the Gospels. For other passages that highlight the ugliness of jealousy, see Proverbs 6:34 - ***"For jealousy enrages a man, And he will not spare in the day of vengeance."***; Proverbs 27:4; Acts 5:17; 13:45; 17:5; Romans 13:13; 1 Cor. 3:3; 13:4; 2 Cor. 12:20; Galatians 5:20; James 3:14; James 3:16.

<sup>5</sup> Exodus 20:5 - ***"You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me"***; see also Exodus 34:14; Deut. 4:24; 5:9; 6:15; 29:20; 32:16; Joshua 24:19; 1 Kings 14:22; Psalm 78:58; 79:5; Ezekiel 23:25; 36:5-6; 39:25; Nahum 1:2; Zeph. 1:18; Zech. 1:14; 8:2

<sup>6</sup> There are times in Scripture where people are commended for their jealousy for God, as in Numbers 11 and Numbers 25. Additionally, Scripture says that God used jealousy as a tool to prompt Israel to return to Him when He actively sought the Gentiles' salvation. Deut. 32:21 - ***"They have made Me jealous with what is not God; They have provoked Me to anger with their idols. So I will make them***

And the Apostle Paul was jealous for the spiritual health of his brothers and sisters in Corinth.

In other places, he has pictured himself as a mid-wife to their spiritual birth. Now, he presents himself as the father of the bride in a wedding.

The Corinthians are the bride. Christ is the husband. And Paul is the father of the bride.

He is going to do everything he can to ensure that the Corinthians (the bride) are "pure" when he presents them to Christ.

He is so passionate about this fatherly role that he uses the word "jealous" to describe how he feels.<sup>7</sup>

He's even willing to engage in the foolishness of comparison to drive these folks to listen to his loving counsel and to drive them back to Christian essentials.

### Comparing Giftedness (vv. 5-6)

***[5] For I consider myself not in the least inferior to the most eminent apostles. [6] But even if I am unskilled in speech, yet I am not so in knowledge; in fact, in every way we have made this evident to you in all things.***

There was not one way in which Paul was inferior to Peter, John, Thomas and the rest of the original apostles.

True, he had determined to know nothing but Christ and Him crucified in Corinth, so his speaking style had not been terribly elevated.

But he had successfully evangelized. He had discipled. He had performed miracles. He had been used as a tool by the Holy Spirit to transform lives.

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***jealous with those who are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation"***; also Romans 10:19; 11:11, 14.

<sup>7</sup> The word jealous can also be translated "zeal."

He taught them truth about Jesus and showed how the story of Jesus could be traced through the Old Testament Scriptures.

When it came to ministerial skills and knowledge, Paul's apostolic credentials were more than up to snuff.

But he continues with the comparison. And he highlights (vv. 7-11) a trait of his ministry in Corinth that he is confident will NOT be imitated by his opponents...

### Comparing Sacrifice (vv. 7-11)

#### *Apostolic practice and privilege*

When Paul wrote his first letter to Corinth, he made it clear that apostles had a right to expect support from the churches. The principle of Deuteronomy 25:4 was repeated at 1 Corinthians 9:9 - Don't muzzle the ox while he is threshing. The worker is worthy of his wages.

We know that the other apostles (Peter and the rest) took advantage of this apostolic perk, a perfectly legitimate thing to do. Paul did as well in a number of cities.

But, normal apostolic practice went out the window when he served in Corinth.

#### *Paul's practice in Corinth (vv. 7-9)*

#### Serving free of charge (v. 7)

***[7] Or did I commit a sin in humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you without charge?***

He didn't "charge" the Corinthians for his ministry. He didn't accept financial remuneration for his services.

Paul evaluated the situation in Corinth and concluded that it would be better for the sake of the Gospel if he did not receive any material benefit from them for his ministry.<sup>8</sup>

Not that he wasn't supported while he was in Corinth. He just wasn't supported BY THE CORINTHIANS.

#### Robbing others to serve Corinth (vv. 8-9)

***[8] I robbed other churches by taking wages from them to serve you [9] and when I was present with you and was in need<sup>9</sup>, I was not a burden to anyone; for when the brethren came from Macedonia they fully supplied my need, and in everything I kept myself from being a burden to you, and will continue to do so.***

Paul was a fully supported missionary when he had first traveled to Corinth and while he was in Corinth.

Throughout his time there the churches he had founded in Macedonia supported Paul (with money they could ill afford to donate because of their own poverty!) so that he wouldn't have to accept money from the Corinthians.

He was demonstrating the reality of grace to Corinth in a very graphic way.

What better way to demonstrate GRACE and the idea that the Gospel is FREE to people bound up with rules and legalism than to minister for Christ with mention of money?

Paul was being just like Jesus, who, ***[8:9] though He was rich, yet for [our] sake He became poor, so that [we], through His poverty, might become rich.***

<sup>8</sup> Had Peter thought that a situation warranted it, he no doubt would have foregone remuneration, too - although we don't have a record of him doing so.

<sup>9</sup> Evidently, Paul did have a true material need while he was in Corinth. But, he doesn't mention it specifically in this letter, so we don't know what the problem was. Some suggest that it had to do with his tent-making business. The main point to notice, though, is that he refused to allow himself to be a burden to them.

*“Dissed” for serving free of charge!*

But some in Corinth took this *gratis* approach to ministry as an indication that Paul was an amateur apostle. They turned up their noses at him, as if his self-sacrifice proved that he was an apostle of inferior rank.<sup>10</sup>

Well, he assured them that the charge of “*conduct unbecoming an apostle*” (not charging for services rendered) didn’t hold water.

Paul’s decision to not take money was prompted by **LOVE**.

*Why serve for free? LOVE!*

***[10] As the truth of Christ is in me, this boasting of mine will not be stopped in the regions of Achaia. [11] Why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do! [12] But what I am doing, I will continue to do, so that I may cut off opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the matter about which they are boasting.***

Despite what some in Corinth thought, it was his willingness to sacrifice so as to serve that marked Paul out as the real deal.<sup>11</sup>

His Corinthian policy showed how much he loved them AND it set him apart from the false teachers who were out to fleece them.

They were trying to say, “*Hey, we’re apostles just like Paul.*”

“*So,*” Paul says, “*You can do all my tricks, huh? Well, try this one. Try serving Jesus without pay.*”<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> From ancient Greek writings, we have this about a man who didn’t charge for his teaching of philosophy, “*It may well be that you are a just man because you do not cheat people through avarice; but wise you cannot be, since your knowledge is not worth anything*” (Xenophon, *Memorabilia*).

<sup>11</sup> Paul did not reject financial support from the Corinthians because he maintained - on principle - an ascetic ideal of poverty. It was what he was willing to do in this case because of extenuating circumstances.

<sup>12</sup> It is a morally effective argument, but not a logically effective one. The opposition could still claim that they were just following apostolic tradition set by Peter and the rest. Even so, they could never claim to be a “*pauline*” kind of apostle. It is certainly true that the church owes more to Paul’s kind of ministry (free) than to the other (paid clergy).

Fat chance! That was one trick he knew they wouldn’t try, because he knew they were in it for the money.

So, Paul has gone to great lengths to establish his *bona fides*, his credibility, as an apostle. He seems oddly desperate that the Corinthians accept him as a genuine apostle and pay attention to his teachings.

And the reason he is so concerned that they listen to him (and NOT to the opposition) is found in words near the front end of this passage.

### **Listen to Paul - the Stakes are Sky High! (11:3-4, 12-15)**

#### **BE Devoted to Christ (vv. 3-4)**

***[3] But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. [4] For if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you bear this beautifully.***

Life is complicated. Kathy and I went over to Ben and Melissa’s recently to do a little bit of grandparent-powered baby-sitting. After the kids were asleep I took out a DVD I had brought over to watch on their bigger-than-our-screen TV.

We still haven’t seen the new “True Grit” and I thought it would be fun to watch the old, John Wayne, original. I’m sure it would have been fun, but I never could figure out how to get the movie to run on their equipment. Operating their new universal remote was beyond my technological expertise.

It used to be that I would do most of the work on my own cars. But in recent years cars have become so computer-driven, high-tech, and complicated that there are very few repairs I can make in my own driveway.

We all seem to move at an increasingly fast pace today. Life’s complexities offer a baffling array of choices for entertainment, education, employment, exercise, diet, savings and investing, and family activities. It’s enough to make your head spin!

Simplicity. It sounds nice. We hunger for it.

And here, Paul brings up the story of humanity's first sin in the Garden of Eden because he sees a similar temptation being placed before Christians with results that would be, while less global, equally disastrous.

He sees Christians being led astray from *“the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.”* We leave a simple and pure devotion to Jesus at our great spiritual peril.

Paul lived an amazingly busy life, and that busyness is apparent as we trace his travels through the book of Acts.

Yet, at the heart of his activity was a quiet dependence on Jesus, the realization that Jesus was with him every step of the way **in** his busyness, **in** his activities.

The Christian life is a very simple thing - which is not to say that it is either a **simplistic** thing or an **easy** thing. But, it is uncomplicated.

It is simpler than we would ever believe to live as a Christian. It is to be devoted to Christ.

One of the great Christian theologians of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was a German named Karl Barth. Barth wrote some 500 books, pamphlets and articles. He lectured on theology for over 50 years and had a worldwide reputation as a brilliant thinker.

Late in life, on his one and only trip to America, Karl Barth was asked to summarize his writings in one statement (his writings, all compiled contain something over a million words). He is said to have thought for a minute and then said, *“Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.”*

Barth got that idea straight from Paul. The Christian life is a love relationship. God's love constantly cascading down to us; our love and devotion flowing back to Him.

And if we ever veer off of that straight and narrow path, it will be because we have been duped by a satanically inspired plot.

## DON'T Fall for the False (vv. 13-15)

*Satan's temptation in the Garden*

***[3] But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.***

Paul refers to the story of Genesis 3 as an historical narrative. It records true history. Adam and Eve were, actually, the first man and woman on earth.

They lived in the Garden of Eden until they ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And, because it is in the Word of God, we believe the story. It is not a myth or an allegory. It is history.

For his part, Adam is held completely culpable for eating. After all, he had the direct command from God's own mouth to NOT EAT. But here and elsewhere, Paul says that Eve was *deceived* by the craftiness of the serpent.

Eve stood in Paradise, perfect in every way. There was nothing within her that would have made it impossible for her to not eat. Yet, she was conned by the serpent into eating.

In the Genesis account, the serpent is the representative of Satan. Eve's eating was followed by Adam's and in his eating, the human race was plunged into alienation from God.

For us, today, to “stay the course” of simplicity will require that we keep our eyes open and watch for any person or for any system that would complicate life in Jesus.

We will have to be VERY attentive. And the reason for the need to be vigilant is that there is an enemy behind whatever enemy we can see who is pushing this complicating heresy.

*Satan's temptations today*

***[13] For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. [14] No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. [15] Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds.***

There is no question but that Satan is frightening when he approaches as a roaring lion. But, he is actually most dangerous when he approaches as an angel of light.

I would love it if he would come to us and announce, *“Good morning, I’m the devil. I’ve come to ruin your life. I want to trip you up and destroy your relationships and disrupt your intimacy with God. I want to fill your heart with hatred and violence.”*

It would be easy to resist that. But Satan doesn’t do that. This wolf more often comes dressed as a lamb.

He says, *“Greetings, friend. I’ve come to help you. I want to introduce you to something so exciting and so fulfilling that you can’t afford to miss it! It’s a new and different way to walk with Jesus. Just a few rules. No more than a dozen “have to’s” and a couple dozen “better not’s. You’ll enjoy the adventure of this new way I have for you.”*

Paul has alerted us to some things to watch out for, and he concludes with blunt words about these false teachers.

He calls them names (actually, he names them).<sup>13</sup> He says that they take orders from Satan himself.

He says that they will get what’s coming to them in terms of judgment!<sup>14</sup> In the end, they will be destroyed by their own lies.

And you and I have to be on our toes because if we aren’t we will be led astray from the heart of Christianity - which is the simplicity and purity of devotion to Jesus.

### **Conclusion:**

What about you? Have you allowed yourself to be led astray from the heart of the faith - from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ?

Is there something that has come between you and your love for Jesus?

- Is it another person who has lured you into spiritual lethargy through their influence?
- Is it a system that has you all tied up in knots, concerned with rule-keeping and earning brownie points with God that has derailed you.

If you have moved away from that “first love” relationship with the Lord, He is calling you to return - NOW!

Put aside all the things that would hinder you and run back to Him.

He is a jealous Lover. He wants you all for Himself and will bless you with the richness of His presence when you return.

<sup>13</sup> Paul’s method is reminiscent of Jesus in Matthew 23 when He called His opponents *“snakes and vipers”* right to their faces and *“dead men’s tombs, filled with rotting bones.”*

<sup>14</sup> Judgment will be on the basis of works - either Christ’s works or our own.