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## 2 CORINTHIANS 11:1-15

### 2 Corinthians Series

[PRAYER] Lord, each of us comes to you in our own situations and challenges that we face. We come this morning expecting from you. Expecting you to speak, expecting to drink from your well of grace today. We enjoy singing and worshiping. Thank you for Rose's testimony just about wanting to be different. Father, now we're going to open your word. This is a solemn moment, we know. We ask that you would speak to us through it and you would cause us to go away different people and inspire to be the people you want us to be. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

When we study God's word every week, this is what we do. I want you to know this because this is what you could do on your own and really should do. First there are three words I want you to know – interpretation, principle, and application.

When we do interpretation what that means is we look at what the passage means in its context. There's only one interpretation of any passage in the Bible. Now we might disagree what the interpretation is, but there's only one interpretation of a particular passage. From the passage then we look for principles. These are timeless truths that would pass over time from Paul's day into here in our 21<sup>st</sup> century or they would go cross-culturally into a different kind of community. They're for young people, old people. Those are timeless principles. I'm going to share three of those with you that I see in this passage that will help us today. From those timeless principles we then take those down and we apply them. That's your third word, application.

Interpretation. There's only one interpretation. There are several principles from each passage, but there are many, many applications. So when you leave here, the application that you take will be differently, likely, than the person next to you. But that's the power of God's word. Because God's word describes itself as being *living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword pierces even to dividing soul and spirit; dividing the attitudes or discerning the attitudes of our hearts.* So it goes right into our hearts and that application is really significant.

So today be listening, not only for the interpretation I'm going to share with you through my study. You might do the same thing when you study God's word. You're looking for the historical background, the cultural background, what was going on at the time. I'll share some of those things with you from my own study. And then I'm going to draw these three principles that are good for anybody, anytime, anywhere. But the application is something you're going to take with you. You're going to take Jesus home. That application is very important because it brings the change in your life. Notice it comes from God's word. There's a path that it takes. As we

look at God's word today, I just trust God will speak to you and provide you with applications that are relevant and practical for your lives today.

We're looking today at 2 Corinthians 11:1-15. You can open your Bibles here, if you'd like. 2 Corinthians 11:1-15. I'm going to throw the words up on the screen if you don't have your Bible. I'm going to read them to you in just a moment, so you'll have the passage in your mind and in front of you as we go through the text.

We're in a passage where keep in mind that Paul started the church in Corinth and now he's writing a letter to them. He started the church in Corinth, but the church is one of those churches that has a lot of challenges. They've got factions. In fact they have names for them. There's the Paul faction, the people who follow Paul. And then there's the Cephas faction, the people who follow Cephas or Peter. And then there's the Apollos faction, the people who like to follow Apollos. And then there's the Christ faction. Of course they must be the super spiritual ones, right, because they're not associated with anybody but the Christ group. So these are groups within the church. As with many churches, there are factions and challenges in the Corinthians church.

I'm grateful for our church that we have a significant amount of unity. We're not dealing with any conflict right now. But churches do go through those things.

So Paul is writing to the Corinthian. In particular some of these people who are leading these groups within the church were putting Paul down and they were saying Paul wasn't really an apostle. In fact they were calling themselves the true apostles or the "super apostles." So Paul is writing some stern words to them in 2 Corinthians 11 that we're going to read and we're going to understand and we're going to apply to our lives.

So I want you to stand with me in honor of God's word as I read the passage in 2 Corinthians 11. Mark these words. You can read them in your own Bible, but listen to what Paul is saying to these people.

*He says – I hope you will put up with me in a little foolishness. Yes, please put up with me! I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him. But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the Spirit you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough.*

*I do not think I am in the least inferior to those "super-apostles." I may indeed be untrained as a speaker, but I do have knowledge. We have made this perfectly clear to you in every way. Was it a sin for me to lower myself in order to elevate you by preaching the gospel of God to you free of charge? I robbed other churches by receiving support from them so as to serve you. And when I was with you and needed something, I was not a burden to anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied what I needed. I have kept myself from being a burden to you in any*

*way, and will continue to do so. As surely as the truth of Christ is in me, nobody in the regions of Achaia will stop this boasting of mine. Why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do!*

*And I will keep on doing what I am doing in order to cut the ground from under those who want an opportunity to be considered equal with us in the things they boast about. For such people are false apostles, deceitful workers, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants also masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve.*

You may be seated.

As I was trying to look at this passage this week for myself, I actually saw here groups of applications for me. There's the group of applications that have to do with church leadership because he's writing to churches and talking about the leadership. So I can look at those and say there's some good applications for me as a leader of a church. There's a whole group of applications that I think are helpful if you're trying to find a church. I thought about entitling this sermon "How to Find a Good Church." I think you'll find and maybe I'll bring some application along that line for you. Because although most of you have found a good church, I would suggest, at some point in our lives we're looking for a good church and I want you to know how to find one. So we might bring some application there.

But it's the third group of application I'm going to spend most of the time on today that are personal about our own personal faith and about what God wants to do in our own hearts and lives.

I was thinking about how do you find a good church. We're talking about false teachers and things they're emphasizing anything else but Jesus. All of it is being mentioned in the passage. I think that there are challenges that churches have and we have to evaluate and say, "Is this a church we want to be a part of?" On the other hand, there are some people who just go from church to church and they're not satisfied with anything it seems at times. So they find themselves traveling around quite a bit.

I like the story of the man who was on a deserted island for several years by himself, alone. Finally he was rescued. As he was rescued, they're leaving the island on the ship and taking this lone man. Finally he gets away. The rescuer says, "Can you tell me about those three huts that are on the beach there?"

He said, "Well the first hut, that's where I lived. The second hut was my church."

"Well that's really nice," he said. "What's the third hut for?"

He said, "Well that's the church I used to go to." Some people move around a lot even when they're alone. Finding a church is important. We'll see some applications I think in this passage.

I want to draw your attention to three different pictures. There are actually three pictures in this passage that are going to be helpful. A picture is worth a thousand words, so maybe this will be a shorter sermon, but the pictures that are there in this passage are quite interesting.

When you go into an art museum or you see a painting, it's designed to create an impression on you. Last year my wife and I had the privilege of going to Italy on vacation. In Italy there's a lot of art museums. Just beautiful historic art is there. We went to the Vatican and there's the Sistine Chapel, which has an artwork in it, in fact the whole ceiling is painted by Michelangelo. And then you got it all around the walls.

Now when you go into the Sistine Chapel, there's just so many people trying to see this. You're just crowded into this room and you can't talk. You have to be really quiet. It's a solemn place. But everybody is just looking at the ceiling and looking at the walls because of all the stories that are represented. So you just stare over here for a little bit. Oh yeah, it's that story. Oh there's creation. And you're just going right through all the different pictures on the ceiling about the Bible. You walk out of that place and it's just, oh man, what an impression. An impression about God and His magnificence, about the history of the church, about the message that God has when He comes. It's all in art form. It's just an amazing impression that you receive.

As we go through this story in 2 Corinthians 11, we're going to come to three different pictures that represent three different principles that we're going to see. These are the principles that I see in the passage that will help us on a practical level. Number one – be totally devoted to Christ. Number two – know God's word. And number three – avoid counterfeit spirituality. We're going to look at them in picture form because as we look at the pictures, we're going to be left with this impression. It's almost like this emotional reaction we have because of the pictures that are used to illustrate these three points.

The first principle is to be totally devoted to Christ. He's going to use this picture of a jealous father. Let me read the part to you again. It says – *I am jealous*. Now Paul is representing himself as this father of them who led them to Christ. *I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him.*

So this picture of the wedding and he's a jealous dad that wants his daughter to have a good relationship with her husband. So he's overly protective. He's wanting to be really protective. Nothing to get in the way of that relationship with them.

Marriage is really hard today. If anything gets in the way, it can cause a rift and cause challenges, so he's using that picture of marriage and the jealousy he has for them as a dad. I just want this relationship to be so strong. If anything gets in the way, I know it could be a hard thing for you. We don't want work to get in the way, kids to get in the way. We don't want money to get in the way. We don't want your house to get in the way. We don't want your in-laws to get in the way. We don't want anything in the way. We want this relationship to be close.

I'm a father of three daughters, five kids. I cherish their relationship with their mates. My daughter Megan is getting married this fall. I can hardly wait. So I can feel the experience of the jealous father Paul is saying when he comes to this statement that he's making here.

He says – *But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a*

*different spirit from the Spirit you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough.* It's okay. You're one of those people that's very tolerant. You're open to whatever ideas might come along.

You've got to understand that one of the principles that help us to experience success is total devotion. In a marriage it's really important for a marriage to be successful. Nothing can get in the way in order for that relationship to be whole, to be strong. He's using that analogy then to describe the relationships we have with Christ. If you want to have a pure, a strong relationship, then nothing can get in the way. Nothing.

He uses the term jealous to describe this. We usually think of the word 'jealous' in a negative term. "Green with envy" we say. I want to suggest there's a difference between being jealous of someone and being jealous for someone. If you're jealous of someone then you're competing somehow with this person. I don't want you to think that God is somehow an employer concerned that His employees will go off somewhere for a better salary or something. He's competing. That's not what we're talking about here. He's jealous for us because he knows that true fulfillment in our lives will take place only when that relationship is closest. So He's jealous for us.

Sometimes people think of the Ten Commandments as the job description for Christians. I don't think that's what we see in the Old Testament. It's really the marriage vows or the covenant relationship that's established between God the Father and His people.

I want to take you to a verse of scripture that maybe you've never seen before that one of the names for God is Jealous. Let me show you where that is in Exodus 34. Here's the story. The Lord is describing these commandments He's just given to everybody. You can think about this. This happened back in the times when they were wandering in the wilderness and they come to Sinai and they get the Ten Commandments and all of that is there. So He's making the statements. But we can take this and apply it by application to our own lives.

It says – *The Lord said, "I am making a covenant with you. Before all your people I will do wonders never before done in any nation in all the world."* I just think I'm convinced that God wants to do and reveal to us as believers things that other people can't see. Our eyes will be opened to see the spiritual things that are happening in our world.

He says – *"The people you live among will see how awesome is the work that I, the Lord, will do for you."* And other people will see it in our own lives. *"Obey what I command you today. I will drive out before you the Amorites, Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. Be careful not to make a treaty with those who live in the land where you are going, or they will be a snare among you."* We can make treaties among other things in our lives. You can make treaty with money in a way that's unproductive. You can make a treaty with substances or alcohol that can be damaging to us. You can make a treaty even with work or even family that can get in the way of this relationship. God wants to have a personal relationship with you that's totally devoted.

Notice what happens when you do that. It becomes a snare. It will *become a snare among you. Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones and cut down their Asherah poles.* No mercy here for false gods. No mercy for anything that will get in the way of this devotion. *Do not worship any other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.*

God is jealous for us. Not because He's afraid or He's in competition with other gods, but because He knows that when we love Him with all of our heart, all of our soul, all our mind, and all of our strength, something happens inside of us that frees us from those challenges that we experience otherwise. God wants us to experience total devotion to Him in our lives. That's what He's describing there.

Now as we look at that first painting, that painting of the jealous father picture, we're left with an impression. As we leave this room and go to the next painting in just a moment, I'm left with this impression in my heart of gratefulness to God for His desire for me to be strong and for me to have what I need in my life.

Let's go to the second picture, the second room. The principle that we're going to see here is to know God's word, but the picture is really this picture of a deceived person. So you're looking at the wall and you're seeing really Eve is the deceived person here. This is an illustration within the other illustration we just looked at. So I'll read the verses again. It says – *But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.*

There's this craftiness about Satan's work that gets our minds twisted and easily start moving a direction that's counterproductive for our lives. So we have this deception that's taking place.

I know you must experience as I do, sometimes you're watching a movie and the movie is not going in the right direction and someone is getting deceived, you feel like yelling and saying, "Stop! Stop! Stop!" Well if you're watching the unfolding of this picture in the garden, it doesn't stop. Eve gets deceived and it creates quite a problem for everyone.

Verse 4 – *For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the Spirit you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough.* So you're easily deceived. You get sucked in.

The problem today is that sometimes the false teachers mentioned in the passage are people who look like good people. What happens is they are preaching a gospel that's just a little bit different. That you need to have Jesus Christ and then of course you need to have this other thing, like this list of dos and don'ts. Or you have to pray a certain way or pray this over and over again. Or whatever it is somehow adds to this salvation, this devotion that we have before God.

And then there's the deception that takes place because I want all that God wants for me. I want it all. So when somebody stands up and says you could have more, just send me money and I'll send you this bookmark. You can put it under your pillow and you can pray and your prayers will be answered. I want more.

So I've got to tell you, Christians are some of the most gullible people in the world. Here's why. It's built into the system. It's because we are the kind of people that we give people the benefit of the doubt. Right? We're the people that are trusting. We've learned how to trust God and we become trusting of other people. So there's sometimes when we get sucked into things that we don't even realize we get sucked into. Because it's built into the system that we're trusting people.

Eve was deceived. In fact let's go to the passage. This comes from a Bible story in the Old Testament in Genesis 3. So as you're looking at the painting and you're seeing Eve be deceived in this painting, here's the story that actually took place. This is where I get the principle that we need to honor God's word and value it in our lives.

*Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"* You see, that's what Satan does is he challenges the word of God. Does that really mean that? Is that really the correct interpretation of that passage? Did God really mean for that to happen to you? So he's challenging God's word.

*The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'" Notice Satan says, "You will not certainly die."* Do you see what he's doing? He's casting doubt. He's questioning God's word. Is that really a Bible that's relevant for today? It was written so many years ago. That's what Satan is basically saying.

*"You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows..."* and here's where the subtly, the appealing to her own heart that causes her to go astray. Notice what he says. *"God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good from evil."* Don't we all want our eyes opened? So he's appealing to her. I'm going to show you how to get your eyes opened. This is going to be great. *And you will be like what? You will be like God.* That would be great. If I could be like God, then I could be in control, then I would have the power to do what I need to do. So this whole message that's appealing to her heart, she wants to be like God. This would be a good idea. And then of course she acts on the basis of that deception and it creates this huge problem.

Now the problem that we see is a picture for being deceived. She was deceived by this serpent who comes in. Satan is a crafty person who wants to deceive us in all kinds of different ways. To say, "Well this is also really important here." Or "I've been hurt a lot, so this anger I hold onto is justified." Or whatever it might be that we have in our own hearts that we start talking ourselves into or that Satan uses to latch hold in our lives to ruin the freedom that God wants. God wants so much for us. He wants to give us so much. God's word there is really important. So the study there is then a study of God's word that can help us to stay true. So we know what God's word is and we're able to rely on God's word.

One Sunday school teacher said to the eleven and twelve year old kids in his class, "Who knocked down the walls of Jericho?"

Billy said, “I didn’t do it. And I don’t know who did.”

So the teacher went and said to the mom, “I just got to tell you, I was in Sunday school and I said to the kids, ‘Who knocked down the walls of Jericho?’ Your son said he didn’t do it and he didn’t know who did.”

And the mom says, “Well if he said he didn’t do it, then he didn’t do it.”

Well so the Sunday school teacher went to the dad and said, “Look. This is what happened.” And the dad said, “Well look. Let’s just get the estimates and we’ll get it repaired.”

I would suggest in our lives there are a lot of people who don’t know a lot about the Bible. We’ve got to know the facts. Like if you don’t know the answer, the answer is Joshua and the Lord. That’s who knocked down the walls of Jericho. The story is in the Old Testament. You can read it. But it’s not just Bible facts. Math facts would be good too, not just Bible facts that we need in our lives. We need to get it into our hearts.

Does the Bible change our behavior? Well the answer to that question is yes or no. The answer is no unless it gets down into our hearts, then the answer is yes. When the Bible gets down into our hearts and it changes the way we live, it changes the way we act. That’s why Psalm 119:11 says – *If we hide God’s word in our hearts, then we will not sin against him.* It changes our behavior. We have to know God’s word. It will prevent the subtleties of culture and the subtleties of Satan’s influence from hindering us from these great things that God would have for us.

So as we leave the second room, this one with the serpent being deceived, I leave here with this sense of anger, a righteous anger of the deception that takes place. I’m sure you see it too where you know people who are doing the wrong thing and they’re stuck in their own problems and their bitterness or their own problems and the habits that they have and they’re damaging them. You just feel angry at the deception that takes place. I think that’s the impression as we leave this room.

We go to the next room. We get to a third principle and this principle is the one that I say avoid spiritual counterfeits. To avoid spiritual counterfeits. The picture we’re going to see is there’s a masked man here. That’s the picture we see. Someone who’s pretending to be something on the outside but is really something else on the inside. Let me read the passage. This is the word the end of the verses we read earlier.

Verse 12 says – *And I will keep on doing what I am doing in order to cut the ground from under those who want an opportunity to be considered equal with us in the things they boast about. For such people are false apostles, deceitful workers, masquerading as apostles of Christ.* So they’re false. Masquerading is putting a mask on to pretend to be something you’re not. It’s what a hypocrite is. A hypocrite is someone who pretends to be something they’re not.

They’re *false apostles, deceitful workers, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder...* Now we’re going to go back to Satan himself as some evidence for the backing of these people who are false prophets or false apostles. He says – *for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of*



*light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants also masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve.*

Sometimes when I'm working with a group of young people, young adults, I'll ask this question: How far can Satan go? If you were drawing a line, how far can he go from darkness to light? So many of the people will say he can go all the way through the black. That's where he can go, but he can't go any farther than that. But others will say no, I think he can go halfway into the gray. That's where Satan's realm is. He can go halfway into the gray. Others will say no, he can go all the way into the gray, but that's where it has to stop. But you see what the passage says? He *masquerades as an angel of light*, which means he can come all the way into the light area.

So as I look at this painting, I come away with this impression in my own heart of fear. Fear in a healthy respect kind of fear. I think we need to have a healthy skepticism of the newest spiritual idea that comes about or let's add this to our spirituality or that to our spirituality. I think there's a healthy skepticism there. Because we don't know. Could this be Satan trying to weasel in on the gospel of Christ? Should it stand alone, should it be by itself?

That Satan looks for ways to sneak in there by adding other things to what our faith should be I find to be rather scary. Because it means sometimes those people I respect or the people I like or whatever, they could be mistaken people. How do you know? You go back to the word of God. You don't take anything I say a face value. You check out what I say with God's word because that is the standard.

If you're looking for another church to go to at some point in your life, which likely we all may do... I don't get to visit churches very often given my occupation, but I visited a church about twenty years ago I remember. I've visited churches since then, but this is a church I visited about twenty years ago or so. I was eager to hear the pastor preach his sermon.

When the pastor preached that day, I didn't know what to do. It was so odd to me because his sermon was on littering and how we shouldn't be littering. I thought that was so odd. The passage that he took for this was the passage where the 5,000 were fed and they picked up twelve basketfuls. Littering? I just was so confused by that. I thought that's not an accurate way of handling God's word. We need to be handling God's word in an honoring way.

Who knows? I was just there one week. Maybe the church is great and the pastor is great. I don't know. All I know is you've got to be careful. When you start looking for another church for whatever reason and God moves you to another place, you want to choose a church carefully.

Young people, as you go off to college or you move out of the area or something, find a church and get into it. You know what one of the challenges that Eve had was that she was alone. When she was alone Satan was able to tempt her. You want to get in a church, find a church that's teaching the Bible. Not teaching about the latest movies that are going on. Not teaching about the social things going on in the community or the news report from yesterday. What does the Bible have to say? That's what we want to know. You have to apply the Bible to movies or news or things that are going on socially in our world, but let's stick with the Bible because the Bible is

our church. It becomes the standard upon which we live. God would have us to be able to experience a tremendous amount in our lives and it comes by understanding that.

Let's just review these three rooms for just a moment. As we understand this passage of 2 Corinthians 11, the first principle is we be totally devoted to Christ. The picture is this jealous father who just wants so much for his daughter to be united in a marriage that can last forever and experience the beauty of marriage. And we leave this impression of gratefulness of what God wants to do for us.

We go to the second room and we see this painting of Eve being deceived. You're on edge. You're like, "No, no, no, no. Ahhh!" And we recognize the importance of knowing God's word because if she would have just stuck with God's word she wouldn't have been deceived. So there's this anger that rises up with righteous indignation about the misleading that sin does in people's lives and it wreaks havoc in their hearts. It's damaging.

We go to the third room. We see a masked man. Jesus called them wolves in sheep's clothing to describe the appearance of something good yet being evil behind. Scary, in my opinion, because Satan can even go into the light. See, I don't spend a lot of time in the black area in my life. I don't even spend a lot of time in the gray area. It's not those things that are going to get me in trouble. You know what gets me in trouble? It's the good things that rob me of the best that God wants for me. God wants me to be doing the best things over here, but it's the good things that get me in trouble. A lot of stuff in that white area is not for me. Satan masquerading as an angel of light is in here and I need to be really careful to stay on track with what God would have for me in my own life. Those are personal applications that I think we can walk away with from this passage that God wants for us from 2 Corinthians 11.

Now let God speak to you. What application do that leave for you and how might you live differently this week? Because I do believe that every time we open God's word He speaks. My dad used to say, as he'd hold the Bible before devotions, "Are you ready? I don't know whether He's going to say something big or say something small, but He's about to speak," and then he would open the Bible. He speaks to kids, He speaks to young people, He speaks to adults. God speaks. The question isn't will He speak; the question is will we listen. That's the application we bring down to our lives and say, "I'm going to make that tough decision this week. I'm going to start doing this thing differently or that thing differently." God wants to do work in our hearts.

Would you stand with me? I'm going to pray for us and then we'll have a time of worship together.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, we come before you now and we thank you for your great work in our lives. We thank you for establishing your word as a standard for our lives. I pray for each young person here, each older person here, single person, married person, man, woman, and I ask you would convict our hearts. Lord, help us to really wrestle with sin issues. Help us to make hard choices. Help us to be totally devoted to you, we ask. We thank you for doing it on the cross and requiring that we just receive it. In Jesus' name, amen.