

Just Keep It Simple

3-Year Bible Reading Plan

By Dr. Jeff Meyers

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Bible Text: 2 Corinthians 11:1-15
Preached On: Sunday, February 9, 2020

Crossroads Ministries
301 S. 8th Street
Opelika, Alabama 36801

Website: www.fbcopelika.com
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/jeffmeyers

This morning, I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to the book of 2 Corinthians 11. Now as you walk through your New Testament, one of the things that you will discover is that the Lord used a man by the name of the Apostle Paul to communicate very specifically to seven very distinct churches. You also discover that on the island of Patmos, the Lord spoke to the disciple John to seven distinct churches. Some of them overlap, some of them are unique, but it is the church at Corinth that not just in this day but in all days seems to resonate with humanity, and the reason is it's because unfortunately the believers in Corinth allowed their humanity at times to supersede what the Lord was desiring to do in their lives. In fact, when you get to the last chapter of 2 Corinthians, the Apostle Paul says, "Is it really needful that I come to you for a third time?" In other words, they were struggling grasping the foundations, the fundamentals of the faith.

They were having difficulty living out that which they professed. In fact, if you do just a quick survey of the church at Corinth, you'll discover that their issues are oftentimes our issues. 1 Corinthians 5, we find out that they were a very carnal church; that they were doing things with their bodies and speaking things with their words that they had no business doing. They were in relationships that were completely contrary to anything and everything God had shared with them. We find out later in chapter 14 of 1 Corinthians that they were confused. They didn't know what public worship should look like. They didn't know whose opinion was right, whose philosophy should they pay attention to, and there tucked in chapter 14 specifically dealing with spiritual gifts, it says that God is not the author of confusion.

By the time you get to 2 Corinthians, this carnality and this confusion has somehow metastasized into chaos. Everyone has their own opinion. Everybody kind of has their own, shall we say, segment on the truth. And over and over and over again in 2 Corinthians, he is going back to what he communicated earlier, not to change it but to emphasize that what God spoke, God meant, and we don't have the right or privilege to vary from it. Why is that important in chapter 11? Because here in this passage the Apostle Paul is gonna say, "I'm at folly with this. I'm mesmerized that you have done something." How did they become a people of carnality? How did they become a people of confusion? How did they become a people of chaos? Or shall I say, how do we fall in

the exact same footsteps of life? Because what we're gonna see is that they had removed themselves from the simplicity that is in Christ Jesus. If there is one thing that we can all claim to be guilty of this morning, it is this: you and I have an unbelievable gift of taking the simple message that God gives us and so wrap it up in humanity that it's hardly recognizable anymore.

That's exactly what they did in 2 Corinthians 11. I want you to turn to verse 1. It says,

1 Would to God ye could bear with me a little in my folly: and indeed bear with me. 2 For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. 3 But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. 4 For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with him. 5 For I suppose I was not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles. 6 But though I be rude in speech, yet not in knowledge; but we have been throughly made manifest among you in all things. 7 Have I committed an offence in abasing myself that ye might be exalted, because I have preached to you the gospel of God freely?

What's being communicated here to this group of carnal, confused and chaotic people is that they have allowed the enemy to creep in, they've allowed whom we know as the devil and Satan to get ahold of their lives in a very strategic manner, and they have allowed themselves to remove from the simplicity that God wants to share in their life.

Today I want to talk about just keeping it simple when it comes to our faith. What is the strategy that he's talking about here? Go back into verse, the very beginning of this passage where it talks about that the serpent, verse 4, has beguiled them, that the serpent has crept in among them. I think it's very strategic that here the Lord uses the phrase or the term "serpent," because whom we know as the enemy goes by a lot of different names. In fact, you go to Revelation 12:9, there is this discourse of whom we know as Lucifer, the fallen one, now as Satan and the devil, who is not only removed from the presence of God but never to be allowed again. It's one of those passage where it talks about this great cosmic battle in the supernatural where whom we know as Satan is formally, finally removed from any influence on the things of the world. That being said, in that one verse he is called by four distinct names. He's called the devil, Satan, the dragon, and that old serpent.

Now it's important here in chapter 11 that the term "serpent" is used. Why? Because devil means adversary; it means one who opposes you; one who is in your face; one who comes up into your personal space to force opposition. The term "Satan" means accuser. It means the one that though it be true or though it be false, stands besides you to accuse you to the Lord for all the wrong you've ever done. The dragon, that imagery of destruction and death, reaching all the way back into Isaiah and the book of Job with his

multifaceted attack on humanity. The devil is in our face. The Satan is by our side. The dragon is the destruction all around us. But what's interesting in Revelation 12:9, it calls him "that old serpent." You know, the very first time that our enemy shows up on the scene to converse with us, he's called a serpent. He's not called Satan. He's not called the devil. He's not called a dragon. He's called a serpent. In fact, there's commentary in 1 Timothy 2:14 going back to the garden of Eden, it says, "Did you not know that the serpent deceived them?" You know, that is the strategy of the enemy. The way that the enemy creeps into our lives is not by coming to us face-to-face, not by coming to us side-by-side, and not even reaping death and destruction all around us, he just slithers in, does he not?

If you'll turn, at least in my Bible, one page over to verse 13 of this chapter, I want you to see a passage that not only describes his strategy in our life but also will take us back to the book of Genesis in just a moment to see how he pulled it off for the first time. It says,

13 For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. 14 And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. 15 Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.

Allow me to disclose the strategy of the enemy in our lives. He rarely, if ever, shows up wearing a red suit, horns and a tail. That's not what he does. In fact, what he does is much the opposite. It says that he transforms himself, he changes himself – listen to this – to claim that he's speaking on behalf of God. That's what he does. In fact, when you get to the story at the end of the Bible prophesied in 2 Thessalonians 2, realize in Revelation 11:13 it says there's coming a day where the antichrist, who is the devil in flesh, will walk into the temple of God and claim he is God.

Now we look at that and go, "Well, that's one of those events in the future. I don't think I really have to worry about being a part of it." 1 Corinthians 6 says your body is the, what? The temple of the Holy Ghost. And what does Satan try to do in your life? He tries to walk into your life and claim he's God. He always presents himself as an angel of light. Why? Because he twists it and he turns it just enough. It's much like the frog in the kettle. You've heard the analogy, take any type of entity, the illustration is with a frog, throw it in a pot of boiling water, immediately they'll jump out. Put it in a lukewarm water, turn it up one degree at a time over enough time and he will literally boil to death. Is that not how he works in our life? He transforms himself as an angel of light. You know, it's interesting what that plays out to be in our life and I'm gonna say something because I can because I am one and I can get away with it: the devil's best agents are preachers standing in churches, holding Bibles, leading the sheep astray. Because we embrace it. We want it. We desire it. What happens? He's transformed himself into an angel of light.

That old serpent, that's his strategy but I want you to see how subtle he is. For the sake of time, I'm not gonna turn back and read Genesis 3, feel free to do so while I'm speaking, but in Genesis 3 we have that first subtle attack on humanity where Adam and Eve are in

the garden of Eden, everything seems to be going pretty well until the serpent shows up. Those of you that have turned to it, in Genesis 3:1 notice what it calls him: the serpent, this is Satan, who is more subtle than any beast of the field. Let me translate that into Southern vernacular: he knows better than anybody else how to pull this stuff off, that's what it means. And you're about to see that what he did in the garden of Eden is what he does in your life. It's what he does in my life. It's what he was doing at the church at Corinth's life. This is his single strategy. He hasn't changed. You say, "Well, why didn't he come up with a new one?" Because if it ain't broke, don't fix it, and it's not broken. They fell for it. You and I fall for it.

So how was it, how did this subtlety creep in? How did the serpent, it's a story we pretty much know well, how did he pull it off in the garden of Eden? There's really a three phase attack, a subtle attack. The first one is this: he gets us to question the word of God. That's the first stage of the attack. When he shows up on the scene, the first words out of Satan's mouth, the serpent's mouth is this, "Yea, hath God said?" Did God really mean what he said or are you now more refined, educated and cultured that we know better than what he gave us years ago? You see, it's sly, is it not, because that's what we do. We begin to question and say, "That's a great point. You know, humanity has transitioned and culture has evolved and, well, maybe we shouldn't do it like God told us then because things have changed." We begin to question does God really know what he's doing?

The seed of doubt is placed in our mind, and once the seed of doubt on whether God means what he says, we begin to rationalize it and this is what happened specifically in Genesis 3, it said that Eve spoke up and said, "You know what? Funny you mention that." Back in chapter 2, verse 16, and I know she didn't say that but I'm just giving us a reference point, back in chapter 2, verse 16, "The Lord said we could eat freely of every tree of the garden except for one and that was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for if we eat of it, we should die." That's what he said in chapter 2, verse 16. Do you know what Eve added to it? "We're not even allowed to touch it." You say, "Why is that significant?" Because when you begin to doubt the validity of God's word, the next stage is you rationalize that somehow God is this great tyrant in the sky who's limiting your freedom, he's limiting your expression of self, he's not allowing you to be who you were born to be. The problem is that we are rationalizing what we want to do versus what he has commanded us to do. She actually added to it, "Oh, we shouldn't even touch it."

The next stage is we justify it. Somehow in our minds and even to others, we so convince ourselves that we know what we're doing that not only is God the villain in the story, we elevate ourselves to a status of deity. You remember what was said in Genesis 3 when that forbidden fruit was looked upon? It was good for food. It was pleasant to the eyes. And consumption would make one so wise they would be as the gods. It's amazing how we can justify our actions, justify our behavior because we are convinced that if we were sitting on the throne of creation, we would do it better. That's exactly what happened in the garden of Eden. That's exactly what happens in our life. That's what was happening at the church of Corinth and that's what happens in our life.

I mean, think about just the illustrations I gave you earlier. There in 1 Corinthians 5 there's a relationship that is so sensual it's causing factions within the body and there is nothing in the Bible that condoned what this guy was doing. How do you get to the point where your behavior is such that the Lord says, "Not even the Gentiles could come up with this one"? Why? Because you allowed doubt to creep in. You began to rationalize and then you justify that this expression of my flesh, this expression of my will is actually what it should be and somehow God's got it all wrong. You know this doesn't happen in 24 hours, right? It's a very subtle strategic attack and that's exactly what he says here in 2 Corinthians 11, he said, "I'm remiss. I marvel that just as the serpent beguiled or was cunning with the garden of Eden, that you've allowed the same thing to happen in your life as well."

It's interesting as you continue to read this passage, in verse 4 we see what I'm gonna call today the substitution. You see, when we begin to embrace the strategy of the enemy and, by the way, hear me clearly, I don't think you wake up in the morning and say, "I decided today to become an agent of the enemy." I know that's not how it works. What happens is that it happens one step at a time or one degree at a time and we look up years later and go, "How did this happen?" It says, "For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel." Now the Apostle Paul, I mean, he's taking it up a step here. He's saying when you fall into the trap, you begin to do what's said in the book of Jude verses 3 and 4, you creep in and actually proclaim something that is not true. Another Jesus. Another spirit. Another Gospel.

You say, "Well, how does that play out? How do we see that in our culture and in our world today?" Allow me to give you some very real and very what I believe to be sad illustrations. You say, "Another Jesus? There's people preaching another Jesus?" Well, we would all state the facts today that born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, died a sacrificial death, rose victorious three days later. Those are the facts. We get that. The problem is oftentimes we take those facts and we twist and we turn them and we make a Jesus that the Bible never addresses, or if it does, it is in part but not in whole.

Allow me to illustrate. Some years ago I was at a convention and there I was with other pastors and ministers, and there was man who I had known for many years and I respected, appreciated him for all he had done. He specializes in reaching out to those nobody else wants to reach out to. He specializes in those that are economically challenged, mentally struggling, those that are in abject poverty. I think we can all agree we admire, we respect those who are willing to serve in that capacity. That's what he does. He made a statement, I can hear him say it in my ears right now because I couldn't believe he said it. Here's what he said, he said, "If you are not currently actively feeding the poor and the hungry, then you can't go to heaven." Now let that just sink in for just a minute. Should you as a believer in Jesus Christ, should you help the poor? Absolutely. Should you feed the hungry? You'd better believe it. Should you clothe the naked? Absolutely. Should you give shelter to the homeless? You got it. But did you know there are millions of people on planet earth right now that are feeding hungry people, clothing naked people, have nothing to do with Jesus and they're gonna go forever in a place the

Bible calls hell? Hear me clearly: just because you give somebody a cup of cold water doesn't give you access to heaven. Heaven is gained not on our merit but on his substitutionary death. I believe we should help those that are disenfranchised but I also believe what 1 Corinthians 12 says: we're a body. Some of us are hands. Some of us are knees. Some of us are that little pinkie toe that you don't think's important but you lose your balance if you don't have it. There are those who the Lord has called to help those that are hungry. There are those the Lord has called to help with music. There are those the Lord has called and we all work together. The problem is when what our call or concern is, we declare it as the Jesus of the Gospel. Listen to me clearly: when it says "another Jesus," the Jesus of the Bible lived a sinless life, gave a substitutionary death and rose from the dead so you could be saved, and it is my hope that out of that experience that you would want to help those that are disenfranchised.

What about another spirit? It's popular today. There are a lot of folks running around saying that if you don't express a certain spiritual gift, you must not be saved. If you don't utilize a certain expression of faith or if you've not had a certain experience, oftentimes we say, "Well, unless this has occurred or that has occurred, then somehow you really don't know the Jesus of the Bible." Can I tell you what the Jesus of the Bible is? The Jesus of the Bible is that when we come to a place in our lives not where we have some ecstatic experience but where we fall on our face and confess that we have sinned and cannot do it ourselves and he reaches down and he forgives us and he saves us, according to the Bible the Holy Spirit then dwells within us. Are there spiritual gifts that, shall we say, are a little more exciting than others? Absolutely, but that same passage of Scripture in 1 Corinthians 12 says the Lord gives the gifts to whom he will as he will for his own pleasure and purpose. And so just like oftentimes we claim the Jesus of the ministry we prefer, or the gift of that which we possess, what they were doing is saying, "If you're not doing it this way or that way, you must not have the truth."

So what does he say? It's another Gospel there in verse 4. You know, the word "Gospel" is a pretty positive word. It just means good news. That's all it means. It means that there was good news to be given. Here's the thing about another Gospel: Jesus was very exclusive in his communication. There's no doubt about that. He didn't come and say, "You know, I'm a pretty good way." He said, "I am the way." He didn't come and communicate that he was one of many multiple choice questions on the great eternal test of life. He said, "Really there's two options, there's me and there's everything else." And what we need to understand in the simplicity that's being described here is oftentimes we substitute it for a series of do's and don'ts for this's and that's.

You know, I remember some years ago a friend of mine, he was, shall we say, living a life that most of us would look at from the outside and think it was pretty sordid. His hair kind of looked like what we would imagine John the Baptist's as looking like. The only difference was he wasn't eating locusts and honey. He was wearing a whole lot of leather and he loved to ride some motorcycles. I mean, on the outside he had a pretty rough look but there came a point in his life where someone shared the Gospel message with him and he believed, he believed that he was a sinner, he believed that Jesus lived a sinless life, he believed that Jesus paid the price for his sin and rose from the grave, and so several years

ago he got down on his knees there in that leather, biker-type look and asked Jesus to save him. A few days later, the church that he attended, the one of which I was not pastoring, can I make that clear, the pastor got up and made this statement. He said, "Oh, we're all excited about our friend here and as soon as he's baptized, he's gonna cut his hair and shave his beard and look like Jesus." Hm, isn't that interesting. There's a lot of people with short hair and clean faces gonna go to hell one day. There's a lot of folks with long hair and beards gonna go to heaven. You know why? Because last time I checked, there's nothing in the Bible about facial hair as an entrance into heaven. You know what is? Has the blood of Jesus Christ been applied to our lives?

You see, so many times we get caught up, does it look the right way or is it what I would prefer or what they claim or this or that? Listen to what Paul is saying, "Guys, can't we just keep this simple? Can we just major on the majors and minor on the minors?" Let's talk about the simplicity real quick as we close. When he says that you're removed from the simplicity, let's go back to Genesis and then we're gonna work our way back to the New Testament. When the Lord comes to the garden of Eden, it's pretty simple, isn't it? There's two trees, eat of one, don't of the other. It's not complex, is it? Is there anything difficult about that? Two trees, you pick one.

When you get to the book of Acts 16, this same Apostle Paul is in the inner cell of a jail and there's a great incredible event, the jailer comes in and he says, "What must I do to be saved?" You've read it. The Apostle Paul says, "Speak in tongues, cut your beard off and you'll go to heaven." Is that what he says? He says, "Start singing this kind of music and stop singing that kind of music, then you'll go to heaven." What does he say to him? "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." It's pretty simple, isn't it? Boy, we've made it complex. You know, the church at Corinth did the same thing and we're just as guilty today. We want it to be pictured and we want it to be painted in a certain cultural acceptance or a certain means of appropriation. He tells this jailer, "If you'll just believe on Jesus you will be saved."

Last but not least, the book of 1 John 5:12. I love this verse, you know why? Because we can all handle it. It's composed of nothing but one syllable words. Didn't he say keep it simple? "He that hath the Son hath life. He that hath not the Son hath not life." Now I want you to hear me clearly before our time of response. I do believe that when we are saved and the Holy Spirit dwells within us, that it will give us a supernatural desire to be as the Lord has given so much in his word about our behavior, our mannerisms, our speech, etc. but you and I have fallen into the same trap of the church at Corinth, that if it doesn't look like this and it doesn't sound like that and it's not presented like this and it doesn't fit our personal preference, then it must not be of God. It's interesting he said, "Church, I marvel that you have removed yourselves from the simplicity that is in Christ Jesus." Today if we've been caught up in the complexity, if we've been caught up in the checking the boxes, the crossing the t's and the dotting the i's, may we heed the words of the Lord to return to a simplicity that is in Christ.