

Text: 2 Corinthians 11:1-4

Title: Pure Devotion to Christ

Truth: Christians are called to a single-minded purity toward Christ.

Date/Location: August 9, 2026 at FBC (rewrite of 10/1/2006 sermon)

Introduction

Paul's deep care for the Corinthian Christians is driving him to stoop to their level of foolishness for a few moments and boast about his apostolic credentials. He is doing what he can to try to bring them back from what we are going to learn is a very dangerous doctrine that threatens to draw them away from the simple gospel of Jesus Christ. The focus in the first paragraph of chapter 11 is on his motivation for stooping to their level. Later in the chapter we will look at his boasting.

The exact doctrinal error is not clear, which is fine because we must be alert for a whole range of defections from the truth by being super familiar *with* the truth. But it appears that whatever form it took, their teaching had certain clear impacts on the church. I do not know whether these were direct or indirect results of the false teaching, but the false teaching may have:

1. Encouraged them to tolerate immorality of the 1 Cor. 5 sort.
2. Persuaded them to be critical of Paul, their spiritual father.
3. Focused them on oratory and rhetoric instead of truth.
4. Directed their attention to a standard of comparison that was empty and meaningless instead of focusing on the Lord's commendation.
5. Encouraged a glorying in self instead of in the Lord.
6. Incited division and a focus on a party spirit instead of a unified spirit in the church.
7. Fostered the belief that there will be no bodily resurrection.
8. Cultivated idolatry and being unequally yoked.
9. Culminated in a straight-up false gospel. Some departure from the person and work of Jesus Christ was in the mix.

Paul pleaded with the church to help him straighten some things out with regard to the false teachers that have barged in. In the midst of his plea, he begins to offer a defense of his apostolic appointment and authority. He began in chapter 10 by offering several points of defense:

1. Our ministry *is not* carried out in the flesh, but rather in the power of God. Since it promotes the gospel, it can take down false ideologies and replace them with the Christian worldview (10:1-6).
2. Our ministry *is* one of an apostle, directly authorized by Christ for the edification of the church (10:7-11).
3. Our ministry *is* carried out within proper limits, and we are not boasting outside of those limits, nor in another man's work, but in the Lord (10:12-18). He is the One who measures our work, not ourselves or some other “exclusive” club.

Paul continues his apostolic defense in chapter 11 and following. Paul lowers himself to the Corinthian's level when he boasts about himself. This section is sometimes called Paul's “Fool's Speech” because he does this to arrest their attention. He has written that the kind of boasting done by the false teachers is invalid, because it relies on self-comparison and is not focused on God's evaluation. However, the Corinthians are accepting this kind of boasting from the false teachers, so perhaps they will accept some from him, with a better edifying outcome!

In 11:1-4, it becomes clear what Paul's concern is. The false teachers are not just an annoyance. Rather, they are an extreme danger to the church.

These false apostles may have convinced some in the church that Paul is a “fool.” So, he asks them to bear with him in some folly. He asks them to listen to him (bear with him) because:

I. Godly Jealousy, v. 2

- A. Paul is jealous for them with godly (not sinful merely human jealousy or petty possessiveness). He cares for their spiritual purity, for their spiritual outcome.

- B. His explanation is in verse 2b when it says, “for I have betrothed you...” He is jealous because he has prepared this bride for one husband. Betrothal pictures conversion of the church members and presenting them to Christ pictures future glorification. There is only one “man” for the church, and that is the true Christ who came and lived and died sinlessly and rose and ascended to Heaven, the Son of God.
- C. Paul pictures it like a father who has raised his daughter to be ready for marriage and kept her safe from men who would take her purity. The father gets to know his daughter’s desire, a fine young man, and he gives his permission and pledges the girl to the young man. The father feels a special responsibility to protect the daughter for her wedding day, zealous that she remains a virgin, pure both from outsiders and from her own temptation to wander. He also feels a responsibility toward the young man, having been a young man himself before, knowing the importance and expectation of a pure bride.
- D. In the spiritual realm, it is same with you. At your conversion you are promised to Christ. You are, can I say, contractually bound to him like in a betrothal, and the goal of your minister(s) is to present you perfect before him in the end (Col. 1:28). His primary concern for you is not superficial or mundane; it does not consist of things of this life like wealth or friends or fame or status. It consists of purity to Christ, soundness of doctrine, love for God above all else, love toward others, serving the Lord, keeping your focus on things above. Certainly, it concerns faith toward the real Jesus, and the work of the one Spirit.

You do not have everything yet until the marriage is consummated. Meanwhile, there is a danger that you leave your purity, like the nation of Israel going after idols instead of staying faithful to their divine Husband and Father.

II. Fear of Impurity and Apostasy, v. 3

- A. Paul fears that they may be deceived like Eve and corrupted (inner ruination) from following Christ. This could be like a brief affair,

which is greatly damaging and sully to the virgin (picturing the Christian) and damaging their Christian testimony at great cost.

- B. Or it could be a total departure (divorce for another, or leaving one for a life of spiritual prostitution), thus indicating they never truly, faithfully believed in Him in the first place.

Either way—brief dalliance or long-term departure---the **Corinthians' faithfulness to Christ is threatened** by Satan's deceptiveness.

- C. Paul is concerned. As a jealous father, he is unsure from his human vantage point if they are truly saved, or if they will in the end be deceived away from God just like Eve was deceived by the serpent. Satan is the serpent, and he is a crafty, clever, and subtle. He knows the ins and outs of human nature and can design a situation to try to lure people away from God.
- D. Think about the connection to Eve. She was deceived by the words of the serpent. WORDS deceived Eve. How exactly that deception worked out is a brain-buster.
 - 1. At a simplistic level, we might imagine that she should have realized that something is wrong with talking to a snake. Or, she had everything, what else could she want? Or how could she be so dumb?
 - 2. At a deeper level, we observe that she knew what God had said, but the serpent used words to get her to question it by using logic of her own. He sowed a seed of doubt. Right there, where she did not express dependence upon God but instead looked with her own eyes, is where the failure began. She thought herself competent to decide what was right and what was wrong. She got herself turned around morally, and then headed off in a direction, and it was a wrong direction.

In the same way the false apostles deceived the church members by flattering words (Romans 16:18). The false apostles are emissaries of Satan, the opposite of Paul who is a messenger of Jesus.

- E. How should the Corinthians maintain purity to Christ? Their focus, as ours, must be on pure devotion to Christ Jesus—the Christ presented in the New Testament and predicted in the Old.
1. There are three parts of real faith: (1) Information about the person and work of Jesus including that He is Lord and that He died for sinners and rose again from the grave; (2) acceptance of that information as true; and (3) full reliance upon the person and work of Jesus for one's present life and eternal destiny.
 2. It is not entirely clear if some in the Corinthian church were stuck at step 1, like the betrayer Judas. Or were they at step 2 like the demons (James 2:19)? Or had they truly received Christ but were toying with adding on other elements and in so doing being unfaithful in their marriage?
 3. What we aim for when we talk about repentant Christian faith is **all** of parts 1, 2, and 3 together. The difference is knowing *about* Jesus versus actually knowing Jesus. The difference is *saying* you are a Christian or actually *following* Jesus.
- F. Satan tries to lure the Corinthians (and many other believers) away from the “simplicity that is in Christ.” This phrase means that the gospel of our Saviour is not loaded with complicated baggage. It is simple belief in Him and Him alone. It is “single” instead of multiple in its focus—a single-minded faithfulness to Christ. To add other trappings is not only wrong, but also dangerous to your soul!
- What they had learned before was the “simplicity” of 1 Cor 15 – the gospel is that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and was raised again, all according to the Scriptures. They learned that salvation is through Christ *alone*, not anything else, and that HE is the object of our faith. It is not that we want to believe in God the way Jesus believed in God; no—it is that we must believe in JESUS!
- The idea of “**simplicity**” **does not mean** that any involved theological concept must be thrown out as if it conflicts with “simplicity in Christ.” It means purity, single-minded devotion.

III. You are Listening to Other Voices Out There, v. 4

- A. The Corinthians seem to tolerate false teaching even if it is a different Jesus, a different spirit, or a different gospel. If they tolerate that, then they should at least give Paul a little attention! “You hear them out, so hear me out!” “You put up with them, so put up with me!”
- B. It is ironic that they tolerate the false teachers but many of them no longer tolerate the true teacher, the one who brought them to the faith!
- C. What they are paying attention to is similar but vastly different from what Paul brought them. He brought the real Jesus, the true Holy Spirit, and the one and only gospel. The false teachers were bringing something different. We do not know exactly what the false teachers were adding to the gospel, or taking away from it, but both Paul and the Corinthians knew—and they knew it did not match up to what they had learned before. It could be a number of things: Maybe they brought:
 - 1) **Another Jesus.** The “just a man” heresy. The “another god/not deity” heresy. The “just a prophet” heresy. The “good teacher” heresy. The “no incarnation” heresy (1 John 4:2-3). The “there are other ways to God” heresy (John 14:6).
 - 2) A **different spirit.** The “spirit is a force” heresy. The “spirit is not God” heresy. The “Spirit is the center of our attention” heresy (John 16:14).
 - 3) A **different gospel.** The “faith plus works” heresy. Or “faith plus works of the law.” The “faith without repentance” heresy. The “intellectual assent only” or the “easy believism” heresy. The “Christ plus the law” heresy (Acts 15:1, 5). See also Galatians 1:6-9.
- D. The danger, of course, is that in hearing them out (even with an air of maturity, open-mindedness, or tolerance), they open themselves to the very dangerous reality of a false gospel. Being tolerant of false teaching is not a virtue. It is a positive vice.

We **CANNOT tolerate false teaching**. We have to be **discerning**, because the same words can be used (Jesus, gospel, spirit, etc.) but with such different definitions that there are no real similarities between the fake and the real. We **cannot dabble in evil** things and bad teaching and think that we get off scot-free. The Corinthians were opening themselves up for big trouble: hearing could lead to tolerance, then to acceptance, then to promotion and apostasy. Just because we are Christians does not mean we are immune from things or are allowed to expose ourselves to bad stuff with no ill effect. Garbage in...

- E. We could find ourselves in a similar spot. A minister who poured his labors into your soul...and loves you and shared the gospel with you...but you go and listen to some man or woman online who you do not even know, and who certainly does not know you...and they get you convinced into some niche doctrine. They do not care about you, but you not only put up with their teaching and accept it perhaps because the grass is greener over there (so you think).

When God's teaching is on the one hand and some cult or some conspiracy or some hobby horse issue is on the other, there is a temptation to leave the old and good behind for the new and interesting.

Thinking of the betrothal metaphor, shockingly, the false teachers are trying to get the young virgin church to go to ANOTHER husband! That is an attack on the husband, an attack on the daughter pledged to him, and on the spiritual father trying to keep things going in the right direction.

Conclusion

Grasp the powerful idea implied here that the gospel is not just proclamation followed by response. Rather, Paul is concerned for the long-haul until the bride's hand is transferred into the hand of the groom, and the marriage is completed when the believers are glorified in Heaven. It is true that once someone is saved (truly) they are always going to remain saved. But that is not the end of things. We need constant vigilance for purity, constant growth,

constant drawing near to our bridegroom in sincere devotion so that we are not led astray.

The betrothal/marriage metaphor works very well for a founding apostle who starts the church. But any pastor who comes after in an established church is doing the exact same thing. He is continuing to preach the gospel, warning and teaching everyone to be faithful to Christ. New ones are coming to faith and are starting on this same road. A godly-jealous minister is concerned for their souls all the way until their funeral!

Paul wants our minds to be directed simply to Christ, and no one else for our salvation.

Have you received the true gospel? Or has your information been mixed up because of the independent American spirit, the cults that add works and subtract from Jesus, or something else?

How can you guard yourself from error like that which was trying to push into Corinth? First, there is such a thing as a healthy level of skepticism. 1 John 4:1 tells us not to believe in every spirit. We have to check them out (Acts 17:11) and not be gullible. Second, you have to learn how to be more discerning of the false and true. This comes by practice—using the Scriptures to compare and contrast right from wrong (Heb. 5:12-14). Third, do not leave the confines of God’s appointed safe haven—the church. Thinking that “assembling together is not that important” is foolish. Those who are lackadaisical about church attendance in a doctrinally sound church open themselves up to error. The cults prey on those kinds of people because they are necessarily weak in the spiritual domain. They are like the animal strayed from the herd. A lion will go after it because it is easy to pick it off.

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