

The Minister's Jealousy

2 Corinthians 11:1-3

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Introduction

We come once again to our study of Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians, so turn with me in your Bibles to 2 Corinthians chapter 11. We're only going to get through the first few verses this morning, but I want to read through verse 15 for context. "I wish that you would bear with me in a little foolishness; indeed, do bear with me. ²For 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. ³But 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. ⁴For 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. ⁵For I consider myself not in the least inferior to the most eminent apostles. ⁶But 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. ⁷Or 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? ⁸I robbed other churches by taking wages from them to serve you; ⁹and when I was present with you and was in need, 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. ¹⁰As the truth of Christ is in me, this boasting of mine will not be stopped in the regions of Achaia. ¹¹Why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do! ¹²But 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. ¹³For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. ¹⁴No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. ¹⁵Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds."

Apostasy is an ever-present threat to the church of God. And it is the most serious, severe, terrifying, and heart-breaking reality that the people of God ever have to grapple with: that someone who is amongst the fellowship of the Lord's people, who is a member of the church, who professes to love and trust in Christ, who seems engaged in the battle against sin, who reads his Bible and prays and even evangelizes, can suddenly, and often without warning, totally renounce his faith in Christ, and fall away from the living God. That's the language of Hebrews 3:12-14, which says, "Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called 'Today,' so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of

sin. For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end.”

You say, “Wait a minute! Are you saying it’s possible to lose our salvation?” No. In John 6:39, Jesus says, “This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me *I lose nothing*, but raise it up on the last day.” Jesus doesn’t lose any one of the sheep that His Father gave Him. In John 10:27–29, He says, “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will *never* perish; and *no one* will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and *no one* is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.” Some people say, “Well, no one can snatch us out of the Father’s hand, but we can jump out of His hand.” But that’s nonsense! We are not greater than the Father! And Paul says in Romans 8:38–39 that “neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, *nor any other created thing*, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Are you a created thing? Then even you cannot separate yourself from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus!

You say, “Well, then how can you warn us against apostasy? Against falling away from the living God?” The answer is that those who fall away were never genuinely saved to begin with. 1 John 2:19 says, “They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us.” And so you see, there *are* those among us in whom there is an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God—church members, Bible readers, compassionate servants, even evangelists, who are hardened by the deceitfulness of sin, renounce faith in the Son of God, and prove themselves to never have been believers in the first place. And as I said, it is a heart-breaking reality.

And it is heart-breaking precisely because the consequences are so severe. The writer of Hebrews goes on to speak about the sin of apostasy, saying, If that happens, “there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying expectation of judgment and ‘the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries.’ Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which He was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay.’ And again, ‘Yahweh will judge His people.’ It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” Apostasy is a terrifying reality. Rejection of God, rejection of Christ, rejection of the Gospel—in full knowledge of and exposure to the truth—can only mean a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire that consumes God’s enemies.

We could wish that the church would never experience this—that we would never go through the grief and sadness and pain of having one whom we’ve regarded as a brother or sister in Christ deny Him, and lay themselves open to such a terrifying expectation of judgment. But in the inscrutable wisdom of God, that’s not to be so. We do experience this. We do witness apostasy. And when it hits close to home, it hurts. Just this week, Pastor John announced that the director of The Master’s University’s Israel Bible Extension program for 23 years has denied the deity of Christ, the deity of the Holy Spirit, and thus the doctrine of the Trinity. He’s been removed from his position, obviously. But much more sad, much more grieving, much more painful, is that one of our own—again, a man we would have called a brother, a man who labored under the auspices of Christianity for decades—has exposed himself to this terrifying expectation of judgment.

And those of you who have had friends or family members who have fallen prey to the seduction of false doctrine and apostatized from the Gospel, you know this pain as well. This sense of grief, and mourning, and loss. It breaks your heart. You hear about it, and you think, “What? How did this happen? This is obviously a result of a long, slow slide away from sound doctrine and faithfulness to Christ! When did you start doubting the truth?” And you inevitably think, “What could I have done to prevent this? Could I have had a conversation, refuted an argument, responded to a book—something, anything, that would have guarded my friend, or my mom or dad, or my son or daughter, from being taken in and seduced by heretical teaching?” And if there *was* something you knew you could do to prevent your loved one from apostatizing, I would be willing to bet that every last one of you would be willing to do whatever it would take—short of sin—to prevent it. Even if it was inconvenient, even if it was difficult, even if it made you look foolish.

Well, the Apostle Paul finds himself in just this situation in 2 Corinthians 11. The Corinthian church had come under the spell of false teaching—of damning doctrine concerning Christ and the Gospel—from false teachers who had come from Jerusalem, claiming to be apostles of Christ. Paul doesn’t spend any time describing the specific details of their heresy, but in chapter 11 verse 22 we find that they were boasting in their Hebrew roots. And in several places—especially the whole of chapter 3—we find Paul repeatedly emphasizing the freedom, and the salvific efficacy, and the permanence of the New Covenant as opposed to the Mosaic Covenant. And so we surmise from this that these false apostles were Judaizers—that they taught, Acts 15:1, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” Faith in Christ was necessary for salvation, but it was not sufficient. You had to add your own works to faith in Christ’s work.

And in addition to that Judaizing element, we’ve also observed that these men were dominated by a spirit of triumphalism. Jesus is the King! And so those who serve Jesus ought to walk in the constant victory that Christ accomplished. They had an overrealized eschatology. They expected

the external physical blessings that the church will receive in heaven to be enjoyed in the here and now. And so they measured ministerial success by fleshly externals—by a weighty personal presence, by rhetorical eloquence, by commanding significant speaking fees, by growing large followings, and by having ecstatic, mystical spiritual experiences. They were the original charismatic prosperity preachers of the Word of Faith movement.

And so these false teachers have come peddling their prosperity-laced legalism to the Corinthians, and the Corinthians had become enamored with it! But the Lord had worked through Paul's severe letter and through Titus's ministry, such that the majority of the church came to their senses and rejected the false teaching of the false apostles. But there was a still a significant minority who remained captivated by it, and in chapters 10 to 13, Paul turns his attention to this unrepentant minority, aiming to snatch them from the flames of this heresy.

Now, in the greater part of chapter 10, Paul has rebuked the false teachers for their self-commendation and fleshly boasting. They measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, and they boast beyond their measure by aiming to take credit for the what the Lord had accomplished through Paul's ministry in Corinth. And so he says in verses 17 and 18, "He who boasts is to boast in the Lord. For it is not he who commends himself that is approved, but he whom the Lord commends." But when we look ahead to chapter 11 verse 21, all the way through to chapter 12 verse 10, what do we find but Paul boasting! He says in chapter 11 verse 17, "What I am saying, I am not saying as the Lord would, but as in foolishness, in this confidence of boasting." When he begins boasting in verse 21, he says again, "But whatever respect anyone else is bold—I *speak in foolishness*—I am just as bold myself." In verse 23 he'll say he's speaking as if insane. And after he's done, he says in chapter 12 verse 11, like he's got a bad taste in his mouth, "I have become foolish; you yourselves have compelled me."

You see, because the Corinthians have been duped by the flashiness and showmanship of the false apostles—who only succeed in their deceptions by seducing the Corinthians with their lavish boasting of their own fleshly accomplishments—Paul feels forced to do what he hates to do. He adopts the tactics of his adversaries, and engages in the folly of boasting in order to expose the folly of the false apostles, as well as to show the Corinthians that his ministry and his Gospel is worthy of their wholehearted allegiance. He sees the Corinthians—of whom he says he became their father in the Gospel (1 Cor 4:15), whom he regards as his dear, spiritual children (2 Cor 12:14)—flirting with apostasy. Flirting with being hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. Flirting with being overcome by an evil and unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. Flirting with that terrifying expectation of judgment, staring down the fury of the fire that consumes the adversaries of God. And even though he finds it extremely distasteful, he will engage in foolish boasting if it means that he might be able to rescue his spiritual children from damning heresy and apostasy. One commentator says, "Such self-commendation is only justified, in the present instance, because his affection for his converts is so great, that he will go

to almost any length to prevent them from becoming dupes of unscrupulous men, and to keep them loyal to Christ” (Tasker).

And what you have in the first part of 2 Corinthians 11, is Paul’s plea for the Corinthians to excuse him for his foolish boasting. He says in verse 1: “I wish that you would bear with me in a little foolishness. Indeed, do bear with me!” “I recognize that this is ridiculous. But please, humor me. Indulge me in a little foolishness, if it means that I rescue your souls from heresy and apostasy.” And then, in the following verses, he explains why he engages in this foolish boasting.

But the reasons he gives aren’t parallel with one another; it’s not quite that he’s giving three reasons for his boasting. He gives **three reasons**, but they sort of cascade and build on one another. Follow the argument here. He says, “Bear with me in a little foolishness,” verse 1. “*For*,” verse 2, “I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy.” So the reason he’s going to act foolishly is because he is jealous for the Corinthians. And then, second half of verse 2, the reason he’s jealous for them is that like the father of the bride, he’s betrothed the Corinthians to Christ, and he hopes to present his daughter to Christ as a pure virgin at the marriage supper of the Lamb. But he’s fearful, verse 3. He’s afraid that they will be led astray, by false teachers empowered by Satan, from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. So he’s jealous for them because he betrothed them to one husband, but fears that they’re being seduced from single-minded devotion to that one husband. And the reason he’s fearful of their disloyalty, verse 4, is that they so willingly tolerate the heresies of the false teachers. So each **reason** builds on the previous reason.

In these opening verses, Paul describes himself as foolish, as jealous, and as fearful—adjectives that are so uncharacteristic of this great Apostle! a state he could only be driven to by the unbearable thought of his dear spiritual children falling away from Christ! And as we go through this text we’ll outline it according to **three reasons** for which he’s in such turmoil. First, we’ll see the reason for his **foolishness**. Second, we’ll see the reason for his **jealousy**. And third, we’ll see the reason for his **fear**.

I. The Reason for His Foolishness (v. 2a)

First is the reason for his **foolishness**. Look with me at the first part of verse 2: “I wish that you would bear with me in a little foolishness. Indeed, do bear with me! For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy.” “Bear with the foolish boasting that I’m about to engage in, because I’m acting out of jealousy!”

We know that jealousy can drive someone to rash and foolish actions. Proverbs 6:34 says, “Jealousy enrages a man.” Proverbs 27:4 says, “Wrath is fierce and anger is a flood, but who can

stand before jealousy?” And James 4:2 says, “You are envious”—or, “You are jealous and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel.” Jealousy often makes people say and do things that they wouldn’t normally say or do. And in this case, Paul’s jealousy for the faithfulness of the Corinthians is driving him to foolishness. John Calvin paraphrases Paul’s thought like this: “Do not demand that I should show the equable temper of a man that is at ease, and not excited by any emotion, for that vehemence of jealousy, with which I am inflamed towards you, does not suffer me to be at ease” (399). Someone comes to Paul and says, “Whoa, Paul, calm down! Get a hold of yourself!” And Paul says, “Don’t expect me to be calm when my dear spiritual children are in danger of committing spiritual adultery! Of abandoning faithfulness to Christ for smooth talking prosperity preaching! There is nothing more serious in the world! The last thing you can expect from me is dispassionate reasoning! My heart burns hot for my children in the faith!”

And Paul describes this jealousy in a striking way. He says, “I am jealous for you *with a godly jealousy*,” or, literally, “with the jealousy of God.” Paul is experiencing the very same jealousy that God Himself experiences. We don’t often think about it, and when we do we tend to explain it away somehow, but Scripture is clear that God is jealous. In fact, there are few things in Scripture that are as well-attested as the truth that Yahweh our God is a jealous God. In Exodus 20 verse 5, just after God has given the Second Commandment which prohibits idolatry, God says, “You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, Yahweh your God, am a *jealous* God.” And this is a consistent theme in the Law. The prohibition to idolatry is constantly grounded in Yahweh’s jealousy. Deuteronomy 4:23–24: “So watch yourselves, that you do not forget the covenant of Yahweh your God which He made with you, and make for yourselves a graven image in the form of anything against which Yahweh your God has commanded you. For Yahweh your God is a consuming fire, a *jealous God*.” And again in Deuteronomy 6:14–15: “You shall not follow other gods, any of the gods of the peoples who surround you, for Yahweh your God in the midst of you is a *jealous God*; otherwise the anger of Yahweh your God will be kindled against you, and He will wipe you off the face of the earth.” As we know, Israel brazenly defies these commandments by fashioning the golden calf and attempting to worship Yahweh through that graven image. After Moses intercedes and the Lord agrees not to destroy the whole nation, He promises to enter into covenant with them once again. And again He grounds the command to flee idolatry in His jealousy, with a significant intensification. Exodus 34:14: “For you shall not worship any other god, for Yahweh, *whose name is Jealous*, is a jealous God.” Jealousy so runs to the heart of God’s character that He declares that His *name* is Jealous! In the book of Nahum, which prophesies the destruction of Nineveh for Assyria’s wickedness, the first thing the prophet says in Nahum 1:2 is, “A *jealous* and avenging God is Yahweh.”

Now, how can this be? How can it be possible—how can it be right—for God to be jealous? Isn’t jealousy a bad thing? It’s listed as one of the deeds of the flesh in Galatians 5:20. James 3:16 says that where there is jealousy there is disorder and every evil thing! Isn’t jealousy the fruit of suspicion and insecurity, of ignorance and mistrust, of anxiety and fear—none of which could

ever be predicated of our Holy God? Isn't jealousy that sinful affection whereby we long to possess and control what does not belong to us? (Storms, 123). But there is nothing that does not belong to God, nothing that stands outside of His control.

Well, what I'm describing is sinful, human jealousy—that petty possessiveness and pride-fueled covetousness that wants what others have and hates them when they can't have it. But when God reveals Himself as jealous, He's not referring to sinful human jealousy at all. Instead, He's speaking of that kind of jealousy that is passionately committed to protecting a love relationship and to avenge it when it is threatened or broken (Packer, 170). Husbands, if your wife was approached and pursued by another man, and she was being enticed by the attention he paid to her, so that her affection and loyalty to you was being divided, how would you feel about it? Your love for your wife and your regard for the purity of marriage would compel you to rise up and protect that relationship. If such a husband felt no pangs of jealousy for his wife's exclusive devotion, we wouldn't praise him for his self-control! We'd think that he didn't care much at all for his wife's affection, and that he didn't think too highly of marriage in general. There's a sort of jealousy that's virtuous that we would expect that husband to have—that we'd fault him for *not* having.

Well, all throughout the Scriptures the Lord represents Himself as the *husband* of His people. In Isaiah 54:5, God says to Israel: "For your husband is your Maker, whose name is Yahweh of hosts." And we know from Ephesians 5 and Revelation 19 that the Church is the Bride of Christ. This is why Israel's idolatry is so often called harlotry and adultery. Jeremiah 3:9 says of Judah, "Because of the lightness of her harlotry, she polluted the land and committed adultery with stones and trees." For God's people to commit idolatry—to worship and seek satisfaction in that which is not God—is to commit spiritual adultery. And just like we would expect a faithful husband to be jealous for his wife when her affections are enticed by other men, so is the Lord appropriately zealous for the faithfulness of His bride. John Calvin puts this so well. He writes, "The Lord very frequently addresses us in the character of a husband. . . . As He performs all the duties of a true and faithful husband, so He requires love and chastity from us; that is, that we do not prostitute our souls to Satan. . . . As the purer and chaster a husband is, the more grievously he is offended when he sees his wife inclining to a rival; so the Lord, who has wedded us to Himself in truth, declares that He burns with the hottest jealousy whenever, neglecting the purity of His holy marriage, we defile ourselves with abominable lusts, and especially when the worship of His deity, which ought to have been most carefully kept unimpaired, is transferred to another, or adulterated with some superstition; since in this way we not only violate our [pledged faithfulness], but defile the [marriage bed], by giving access to adulterers" (*Institutes*, 2.8.18).

And so you see God is jealous for the wholehearted devotion, the undivided loyalty, the exclusive affection of His bride, of the people He has joined to Himself in salvation. And just as a husband cannot tolerate his wife's adultery, neither can the Lord our God indulge our spiritual

adultery. When we are enticed by false gods and false doctrines, the Lord is *jealous* for His people.

And Paul says, “Dear Corinthians, I am jealous for you with that very same kind of jealousy! When you tolerate the heresy of these false teachers—when you allow yourselves to be seduced by those preaching a different Christ and a different gospel—you’re flirting with committing spiritual adultery! And so far from being able to sit back, and calmly and dispassionately reason with you, as if it were a matter of no consequence, my love and affection for you compels me to be *jealous* for you! To be zealously protective of your loyalty and devotion! If I have to stoop to the level of boasting to protect you from these phonies who boast so much in themselves, then I beg of you, bear with me in a little foolishness!”

II. The Reason for His Jealousy (vv. 2b–3)

But you say, “Wait a second. It was difficult to accept at first, but I understand what it means for *God* to be jealous. After all, He is the husband of His people, and He has made us His bride. But why should *Paul* be jealous? The Corinthians aren’t *his* bride! Is he thinking too highly of himself? Is he just having some kind of God complex? If God is the husband, why should *Paul* be jealous? Well, that brings us to our **second** point. We saw that the reason for Paul’s foolishness is this godly jealousy that he feels for the Corinthians. Now we come to **the reason for his jealousy**, which we find in verses 2 and 3: “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. *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 doesn’t have delusions of being the Bridegroom. Paul sees himself as the father of the bride! As we’ve said several times, Paul regards the converts of the Corinthian church as his own spiritual children. He had begotten them in the Lord through the Gospel he preached during his missionary journey through Corinth. And so in 1 Corinthians 4:15 he says, “In Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel.” In 2 Corinthians 6, he says his heart is opened wide to them, and then pleads with them in verse 13: “Now in a like exchange—I speak as to children—open wide to us also.” In chapter 12 verse 14, he explains that he’s not after their money, and the explanation he gives is that “children are not responsible to save up for their parents, but parents for their children.” “I don’t want your money; you’re my children!”

And at the same time, Paul’s spiritual children are the spiritual bride of Christ. In John 3:29, John the Baptist calls himself the friend of the bridegroom, that is, the friend of Christ, who has the church for His bride. In Revelation 19:7–9 we read about the marriage supper of the Lamb, and again the church is pictured as the bride of Christ. And so Paul views himself as the father of the

bride, who, through his preaching of the Gospel and the conversion of the Corinthians, as it were betrothed his daughter as a bride to her heavenly bridegroom, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And to really understand this word picture that Paul uses, it's necessary for us to understand the nature of betrothal in Israel. Betrothal was a formal marriage contract in which a young woman passed from her father's authority to the authority of her husband (Harris, 736). It's something analogous to what we think of as engagement, except it was significantly more binding. Those who were betrothed were legally husband and wife. Deuteronomy 22 verses 23 and 24 speak of a girl betrothed to a man as his wife. In Matthew 1:18, Scripture speaks of Mary, the mother of Jesus, being *betrothed* to Joseph, and in the next verse calls Joseph her husband. So binding was a betrothal that it could only be annulled by death or divorce. Which is why, when Joseph believes Mary to have been unfaithful, he planned to "divorce her quietly" (ESV). Usually, there was an intervening period of about a year, wherein the husband would prepare a home for his new family, and at the end of that year the two would "come together" and the husband would "take his bride into his home"—that is, there would be a wedding festival followed by physical consummation and cohabitation.

But in that intervening time of betrothal, it was the father's responsibility to protect his daughter's purity. Deuteronomy 22:13–21 speaks of the case in which a husband takes his betrothed to be his wife, but discovers that she's not a virgin and publicly accuses her of fornication. In that case, Deuteronomy 22:16 says that special responsibility laid upon the girl's father to give evidence to the elders of his daughter's chastity. And so it was the father's responsibility during that betrothal period to guard her daughter's affections for her husband. He was to help her remain exclusively faithful to the man to whom she had been promised. All other potential suitors were to be warded off and rejected, all so that on her wedding day her father could present her as a pure virgin, with undivided loyalties, to the man who was to become her husband.

Paul has betrothed the Corinthians to one husband, to the Lord Jesus Christ. And during this time of betrothal—between their conversion and the time Christ returns for His bride—Paul sees it as his solemn responsibility to ensure that on that last day he can present them to Christ as a pure virgin. He sees it as his responsibility to safeguard their exclusive devotion to their husband from any rival paramours who would seek to seduce and entice her to themselves—to preserve their moral and especially their theological integrity so as to ensure that they don't commit spiritual adultery.

What a lesson this is for those who seek to serve Christ's Church! Especially to pastors and elders, but even applicable to each and every one of you, because each and every one of you—if you're in Christ—is a priest of the New Covenant, 1 Peter 2:9, a minister of reconciliation, 2 Corinthians 5:18, called to lay down your lives in sacrificial ministry to your brothers and sisters

in the body of Christ. Do you see how invested Paul is in the faithfulness and holiness of his fellow believers? Do you see how bound up his own heart is with their spiritual health and well-being? What if your daughter or your sister, engaged to be married to her fiancé within the next year, had begun to be intrigued by another man who had captured her affection? And considering how binding betrothal was: what if she was already married, and you knew that she was being tempted to pursue a relationship with another man? Wouldn't you drop everything you had to do—wouldn't you do everything you could—to admonish her from Scripture and urge her to remain faithful to the covenant she had made? Of course you would!

Well, friends, the world, the flesh, and the devil himself are in constant pursuit of the affection and fidelity of your brothers and sisters in Christ. These potential paramours are constantly aiming their seductions at the hearts of God's people. And one of the ways that we are safeguarded from that kind of spiritual adultery is through the ministry of one to another in the fellowship of the faith. Hebrews 3:12 warns us to take care that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. But how do we do that? Next verse: "But *encourage one another* day after day...so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin!" Hebrews 10:26–31 outlines that terrifying expectation of judgment and the furious fire that consumes God's adversaries that are the consequences of apostasy. But what comes immediately before that in verses 24 and 25? "And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, *not forsaking our own assembling together*, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near!"

Friends, we need the fellowship of the body of Christ! And I mean genuine fellowship! I don't mean shallow, casual, "Hi-Bye," acquaintance relationships! I mean fellowship! The watchful eye of a brother and a sister who feels so invested in our spiritual well-being that they burn with a fierce, godly jealousy when they see us enticed by sin! What a gift it was for the Corinthians to have someone so concerned about their welfare! to be willing to become foolish for the sake safeguarding the simplicity and purity of their devotion to Christ! We are so backward in the contemporary church that we would dismiss the blessing of such fatherly concern as the overly judgmental, holier-than-thou attitude of someone who won't mind his own business. How foolish we are! We need each other, GraceLife. And if we want to take seriously our calling as ministers of the New Covenant, we will feel the weight of responsibility for the sanctification of ourselves, and of the brothers and sisters the Lord has given to us as fellow members of His body.

We need to know something of what Paul meant when he said in chapter 11 verses 28 and 29: "Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches. Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern?" Who said in Galatians 4:19, "With you I am in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!" Dear friend, do you know anything of that anguish? Do you know anything of that daily pressure? Do you know anything of that intense concern? Are you committed to

defending the purity of the bride that has been entrusted to your care during this time of betrothal—of safeguarding her undivided devotion against all attacks—whether they be moral or whether they be theological? Do you spend your time investing in her, training her, equipping her, strengthening her to resist the seductions of rival lovers (Storms, 129)? That is what Christ has called us to as ministers of the New Covenant, as servants of His Church.

Paul betrothed the Corinthians to one husband, in the hope that he would present her to Christ as a pure virgin. But, look again at verse 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.” This is why he is roused to jealousy! Because he’s fearful that Satan is going to deceive them into infidelity, that they will betray the simplicity and purity of their devotion.

And what oceans of meaning and significance are wrapped up in that final phrase! The very essence of the Christian life is can be summed up as the single-minded, pure devotion to the Lord Jesus. “Simplicity” translates the Greek word *haplotēs*. It doesn’t mean simple as opposed to complicated, but speaks rather of simplicity as opposed to duplicity. It refers to single-mindedness, undivided-ness. The devotion that we are to have for Christ is not to be double-minded and two-faced, but single-minded and undivided. We are to be exclusively preoccupied with pleasing Him, serving Him, enjoying Him, seeking satisfaction in Him. It speaks of the undivided loyalty and affection that a wife is to have for her husband and a husband for his wife. It is the covenant wedding vow of “forsaking all others, and keeping yourself only for Him.” “Purity” speaks to much the same emphasis. Our devotion to Christ is to be pure, not adulterated or polluted with any adulterous infatuations with false doctrine.

This is what it all comes down to, friends. This is what life is about. This is Christianity: single-minded, pure *devotion* to Christ. He has your heart! He has captured your affections! He has so satisfied the deepest longings of your soul that you seek satisfaction in nothing and no one else! He is the treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid again. And from joy over the inestimable worth of this treasure, he goes and sells all he has and buys that field! He is the pearl of great price that a merchant finds and sells all he has and buys it! The value of that pearl makes it so infinitely desirable that it causes one to joyfully part ways with all that he owns—all that he holds dear—just so he can lay hold of that precious stone!

The worth of Christ makes us cry out with Paul, “To live is Christ, and to die is gain!” That is to say, that Jesus is more satisfying than all that life can offer and all that death can take! And again: “I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ!” And with David in Psalm 63: “O God, You are my God; I shall seek You earnestly; My soul thirsts for You, my flesh yearns for You, In a dry and weary land where there is no water!” “Your lovingkindness is better than life, and my soul is satisfied” in you! “Apostasy?

Falling away from Christ? Where else could I possibly go for greater satisfaction than Jesus?" Dear friends, are these the cries of your heart? Do you love Him? Does your heart pulse with single-minded devotion to Jesus?

If not, it can only be because you don't see Him with the eyes of saving faith. It may be that the allurements and enticements and seductions of this world have clouded your sight of Him, so that His glory appears but dimly in your eyes. You need to repent. You need to return to your first love, to put away those idols from among you and look upon Him afresh with the eyes of faith. Others of you have never seen Him with the eyes of faith, because you still need new eyes. You need to be born again. And I call you to turn from your sin, and feast the eyes of your heart upon the beauty of this glorious Savior—crushed under the weight of the wrath of God for sinners, risen in victory over sin and death, and willing to receive all those who turn from their sins and trust in Him for righteousness. Lay hold of the pearl of great price this morning! Come to the one whose lovingkindness is better than life!

"The simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ." That's Christianity. But Paul is afraid. He's afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, the Corinthians' minds would be led astray from this single-minded devotion to Christ, whose loyal love is better than life. How did Satan deceive Eve? Turn to Genesis 3. He led her mind astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to God. He came with fine-sounding arguments. Genesis 3:1: "Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?'" And immediately Satan's battle plan is exposed. He's going to aim to paint God as this narrow-hearted, tight-fisted, prohibitive kill-joy. "Has God put you in this lush garden and forbidden you to enjoy the fruit of its trees?"

And the answer, of course, is no. And Eve had at least gotten that right. She said, "From the fruit of the trees of the garden we *may* eat." God hasn't put us in this garden only to tell us that we can't enjoy it. In fact, in Genesis 2:16 He said just the opposite: "Yahweh God commanded the man, saying, 'From *any* tree of the garden you may eat *freely*; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.'" And Eve tells Satan that. And he replies, verse 4, "You surely will not die!" "No way is that going to happen! You know what's going on here, Eve? God knows that when you eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you'll know good and evil. You'll be like God! And He doesn't want that kind of competition! He wants to keep the blessing of knowing good and evil all to Himself!"

See the strategy? "God is stingy! Miserly! Tight-fisted! He's hogging the best blessings for Himself!" Which is just the most insane suggestion! Genesis 2:9 says that every tree that grew in the garden was pleasing to the sight and good for food. Verse 10 says that four rivers flowed through it, furnishing life to the fertile paradise of the garden. Verses 11 and 12 speak about how the land was rich with precious stones: with gold and bdellium and onyx. And we already spoke

about how God encourages man to enjoy all things freely, save for that one tree. And Eve, standing in paradise, with no lack of anything, began to question God's generosity and provision for her—began to suspect Him of stinginess and narrow-heartedness. Her mind had been led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to God, by the cunning deception of Satan. And because of that, she, and her husband with her, committed the most heinous act of spiritual adultery in the history of the world. In a perfect world, with unhindered fellowship with God, free from the bonds of a sinful nature, Adam and Eve abandoned their loyalty to God and broke His law.

And Paul's saying, "I'm afraid that very same thing is happening with you, Corinthians." And they say, "What? We haven't been talking to any snakes lately!" "No, but you're sure getting comfortable with his servants!" 2 Corinthians 11:14 and 15: Satan disguises himself as an angel of light, and so do his servants disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. These false teachers are nothing other than the emissaries of Satan sent to do his bidding, and just as he promised Eve a more triumphant, victorious, autonomous life on earth, so are these charlatans seducing you with the promise of a triumphant, victorious, and man-centered "Christianity" where you get to make much of yourselves rather than Christ.

This is how the Enemy works, friends. He hasn't changed his game plan in 6,000 years. He lies to us. He aims at our minds—speaking with plausible, smooth-sounding lies—and attempts to deceive us into believing that there is greater pleasure to be had in sin and apart from communion Christ than there is in a pure and single-minded devotion to Christ. "Oh, don't believe God's Word! Indeed, did God really say? He's just trying to steal your pleasure! It's much more satisfying to indulge that craving! to nurse that bitterness! to burst out in anger! Don't be so narrow-minded and judgmental about whether that professing Christian teacher is 'biblical' or not! It's much more fulfilling to decide for yourself what's true and what's false!

And this is why theology is of paramount importance in the Christian life. Satan comes for our *minds*. He aims to corrupt our *thinking*. Look at verse 3 again: "I'm 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." Some people say, "All those theological debates are just ridiculous! They're for the academic, intellectual, egg-head types who reduce their Christianity to propositions and have no sense of intimacy with Christ! What I care about is passion for Jesus! Like what you were saying before, Mike: it's *devotion* to Jesus that is the essence of the Christian life, not doctrine!" The whole point of this passage is: a sincere and pure devotion to Christ is *founded* upon sound doctrine! Satan comes to lead our *minds* astray from pure devotion to Christ. Because it's what's in our *minds* that informs and enflames our hearts. It's truth perceived in the *mind* that fires the furnace of our devotion to Christ. It's only as we know Jesus as He actually is—as He's revealed Himself in the Scriptures—that He can become the source of all our satisfaction, that He can appear so surpassingly valuable and inestimably worthy in our sight.

One commentator writes, “Your theology is the foundation on which the edifice of affection and devotion is built. Any alleged ‘sincere and pure devotion’ that is not the fruit of *thinking about Jesus* is mere infatuation, a slight, vacuous, and fleeting feeling that will soon pass. . . . The sincerity and purity of the Corinthians’ devotion to Christ is the fruit of their *minds*! What one *thinks* about Jesus, how you understand or envision him, in a word, your Christology, is key to your Christian life and love” (Storms, 137). “Gird up the loins of your *mind*,” GraceLife (1 Pet 1:13)! Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and *mind* (Matt 22:37)! Have done with that anemic counterfeit of Christianity that disdains deep study and dedicated thinking! Retain the pattern of sound words (2 Tim 1:13)! Satan is coming for your hearts, but he’s coming *through* your minds. And the only weapon against his temptations is the surpassing pleasure of possessing the pearl of great price. But you can’t be satisfied by a Jesus you don’t know. An unknown Christ is an unenjoyed Christ. And it’s the *joy* of the Lord that is your strength (cf. Neh 8:10).

III. The Reason for His Fear (v. 4)

Paul is behaving foolishly. And the reason for his foolishness is that he’s been provoked to a godly jealousy over the Corinthians. And the reason for his jealousy is that he’s betrothed them to one husband, but he’s fearful that they’re being led astray from single-minded devotion to Him. And **the reason for his fear** is our **third** point, which we aren’t going to get to this morning. But I’ll state it. The **reason for his fear** is that the Corinthians tolerate the false teachers. Verse 4: I’m afraid, “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.”

Next time, we’ll dive in to what it means to preach “another Jesus,” to receive a “different spirit,” and to trust in a “different gospel,” for those things are the *essence* of all damning doctrine. For now, let’s ask for the Lord’s grace as we go.