

Paul's Defense of His Foolish Boasting
2 Corinthians 11:1-6
Part One

Jealousy is a common human emotion. It has been reported to be observed in infants as early as five months. In fact, it is such a common human emotion that I would doubt if there is a single person here this morning who has not experienced it.

But now let me ask you this question. Is it a sin to be jealous? And what is the answer? It depends! It depends upon whether or not our jealousy is godly or ungodly.

And this thought brings us back to our current study in **2 Corinthians**. So where are we within this current study?

Paul, in his ongoing defense of his apostleship, had just contrasted the improper boasting of his opponents with his proper boasting in **2 Corinthians 10:12-18**.

So why did Paul consider the boasting of his opponents to be improper and his boasting proper? Paul considered his opponents' boasting improper and his boasting proper because his opponents' boasting focused on their credentials and accomplishments while his boasting focused on the grace of God, both in his life and ministry.

This was the difference between Paul and his opponents, in respect to their boasting, and Paul hoped that as the Corinthians pondered that difference, they would conclude, based on that difference, that he in fact was the true apostle and that his opponents were in fact the false apostles.

But now having established this contrast between his opponents' improper boasting and his proper boasting in **2 Corinthians 10:12-18** Paul announced to the Corinthians in **2 Corinthians 11:1** his intent to deviate from his previous pattern of "**boasting [exclusively] in the Lord.**"

Let us now read **2 Corinthians 11:1** and see if this is not so. And what did he say? "**I wish that you would bear with me in a little foolishness.**" So, what is this "**foolishness?**"

Is it the foolishness of “**boasting in the Lord?**” No! Absolutely not! Rather it is the foolishness of not boasting in the Lord, or in other words it is the foolishness of boasting in one’s credentials and accomplishments. This is what Paul was referring to when he said in the Corinthians in **2 Corinthians 11:1**, “**I wish that you would bear with me in a little foolishness.**”

So is Paul actually going to do this? Yes, he is going to do this, which we will eventually see in **2 Corinthians 11:21-23** and **2 Corinthians 12:1-4**.

But before he reluctantly engaged himself in this kind of “**foolishness,**” Paul believed that he first must prepare his readers for what he was about to do. So in **2 Corinthians 11:2-15** Paul laid out for his readers his justification, or in other words his defense for having to engage in this kind of foolish boasting, which now leads us to the question that we will seeking to answer over the next three weeks. And what is that question?

How did Paul defend his willingness to engage in what he considered to be foolish boasting in 2 Corinthians 11:2-15?

First of all, Paul defended his willingness to engage in what he considered to be foolish boasting by highlighting his godly jealousy for the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 11:2-6). So let me now read for you **2 Corinthians 11:1-6** and see if this is not so. And what do these verses say? “**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. (3) But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. (4) For if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you bear this beautifully. (5) For I consider myself not in the least inferior to the most eminent apostles. (6) But even if I am unskilled in speech, yet I am not so in knowledge; in fact, in every way we have made this evident to you in all things.**” So in these verses do we see Paul seeking to defend his willingness to engage in what he considered to be foolish boasting by highlighting his godly jealousy for the Corinthians? And the answer I would like to think would be yes.

So, what is my hope for this message as we examine Paul’s initial justification or defense for his foolish boasting? My hope is that we will not

only learn how to differentiate between godly jealousy and ungodly jealousy, but that we might be able, by the grace of God, to categorically reject the one while enthusiastically embracing the other.

So let us now begin by taking a look at **2 Corinthians 11:2**. And how does it begin? It begins with these words, **“For I am jealous for you.”** So did Paul describe himself as jealous? Yes, he absolutely described himself as jealous. He described himself as jealous **“for the Corinthians.”**

Now before we go any further in the verse, it would be good for us to look at the meaning of the word “jealous.”

The root idea of the word “jealous” both in the Greek (ZELOS) and in the Hebrew (QINAH) is “heat” and is used to describe someone who is passionate. And what is a jealous person typically passionate about?

Typically a jealous person is passionate about holding on to what he (or she) believes is his (or hers). This idea of ownership is at the very heart of jealousy.

So now let me ask you this question. If ownership is at the very heart of jealousy, would it be wrong for a person to jealously or passionately hold on to a person or thing that is truly in fact theirs? And what would be the answer? I believe the answer is pretty obvious. It clearly would not be wrong for them to hold on to that person or thing passionately or jealously if in fact the person or thing that they were jealously and passionately holding on to was in fact theirs.

This is why God can righteously describe Himself as a jealous God, because God is passionately holding on to what is actually His. And what is actually His? Everything is actually His.

What does **Psalms 24:1** tell us? **“The earth is the Lord’s, and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it.”**

So if everything is the Lord’s, then what is ours? Nothing is ours. Our wife is not ours. Our husband is not ours, our children are not ours, our best friend is not ours, our boyfriend is not ours, our girlfriend is not ours. Nothing is ours.

So if nothing is ours do we have a right to jealously or passionately hold on to someone or something as if they are? And what is the answer? The answer is no!

Therefore, if we are holding on to people or things as if we are the owner of those people or things, then we are guilty of ungodly jealousy. And this would always be true if our jealousy or our passionate holding on is being generated by the mistaken belief that that person or thing that we are in fact jealously and passionately holding on to is in fact ours.

So let me ask you this question. If holding on to a person or thing, as if we are the owner of that person or thing, will always render us guilty of ungodly jealousy, is there any way for us to passionately hold on to a person or thing without being guilty of ungodly jealousy? And what is the answer? The answer is absolutely. Yes, there is a way.

And how do we know this? We know this because Paul himself was passionately holding to the Corinthians. And how did he describe his passionate holding on of the Corinthians? He described it as “**godly jealousy.**”

And this brings us back **2 Corinthians 11:2** so let us continue to read. And what did Paul say? “**For I am jealous for you [with what] with a godly jealousy.**” So how could Paul say this? If he were in fact jealous for the Corinthians, which he admits, how could he describe it as godly?

Godly jealousy is when we passionately hold on to professing believers, not because we believe they’re ours but rather because we believe they’re the Lord’s.

And how do we know this? Let us continue to read **verse 2**. And what does it say? It says this, “**For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy [and then what does it say?]; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin.**” So did Paul believe that the Corinthians belonged to him? No, he believed that they belonged to the Lord? And based on this context, in what sense did Paul believe that the Corinthians belonged to the Lord?

Paul believed that through his preaching of the gospel that the Corinthians had become betrothed to Christ and would one day be presented to Christ as His bride (cf. 4:14; Ephesians 5:27). We see this presentation referred to in **2 Corinthians 4:14**, and we see this presentation expanded on in **Ephesians 5:22-33**.

So now, knowing that Paul believed, that through his preaching of the gospel, that the Corinthians had become betrothed to Christ and would one day be presented to Christ as His bride, how did Paul view himself?

Paul, it would appear, viewed himself in a very real sense as the father of the bride, whose ultimate purpose was to present her as a pure virgin to the bridegroom at his appearance. This is how Paul apparently viewed himself. And he was not taking his role as the father of the bride lightly. He was passionately and jealously seeking to protect the bride, or in other words he was jealously and passionately holding onto the bride, not for himself but rather for the bridegroom.

But even so, even though he was jealously and passionately seeking to protect the bride, or in other words to jealously and passionately hold onto the Corinthians, he was afraid. And what was he afraid of? Let us now read **2 Corinthians 11:3**. **“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.”**

So, what was Paul afraid of? He was afraid that even though he was jealously and passionately seeking to protect Christ’s bride, or in other words to jealously and passionately hold onto the Corinthians, that even so, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, that the Corinthians might also be led astray by that same craftiness, from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.

So had Eve been deceived by the serpent? Absolutely! Eve was not beaten into submission by the serpent. The serpent deceived her. And Paul was fearful that Satan, working through his opponents in Corinth, was in the process of doing the same thing all over again, not in terms of Eve but in terms of the Corinthians. And he was scared.

And why was he so scared? He was scared because he believed that the serpent working through his opponents in Corinth might lead the Corinthians astray from the simplicity and the purity of devotion to Christ. Isn't that exactly what he said in **2 Corinthians 11:3**? Absolutely! So, what did this mean?

When Paul talked about his fear of the Corinthians being led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ, he was talking about them being led astray from the simple gospel message (2 Corinthians 11:3).

And why would that be such a fear? It is only as professing believers persevere in holding on to the simple gospel message, as was preached by Paul and other true apostles, that anyone can hope to be saved, or in other words to one day be presented to Christ as a pure virgin.

So did Paul have something to be fearful of as he passionately and jealously sought to hold to Christ's bride? Absolutely! He had a great deal to be fearful of.

So, what does this have to do with us? It has a great deal to do with us. Let me ask you something. Do you feel any sense of responsibility in protecting Christ's bride from being led away from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ, or in other words from the simple gospel message as preached by Paul and other apostles?

And I hope that our answer would be yes, for even though we may not be able to view ourselves necessarily as the father of bride as Paul did in respect to the Corinthians, we certainly should be able to view ourselves as a brother or a sister of the bride in respect to our other fellow believers, and therefore we should be just as committed as Paul to jealously and passionately holding on to our brothers and sisters in Christ when we see them being buffeted by satanic deception.

So, what was Paul specifically afraid of in terms of satanic deception? Let me now read for you **2 Corinthians 11:4**. **“For if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you bear this beautifully.”** So, what did Paul fear based on this verse?

Paul feared that through satanic deception the Corinthians would fall to three delusions: “another Jesus,” a different spirit,” and “a different gospel” (2 Corinthians 11:4). So why did Paul fear this?

He feared this because he saw his opponents were promising things that were inconsistent, and even opposed, to the gospel message that the Corinthians might fall into these various delusions. So, what specifically might Paul’s opponents have been promising the Corinthians?

Paul’s opponents were most likely promising to the Corinthians more of the Spirit, or in other words better health, greater wealth, and more ecstatic experiences to those who kept more of the law. And why would Paul’s opponents be led to promise these things? They would have been led to promise these things for in their view Jesus suffered so that they would not have to suffer themselves. People are still being deceived by these delusional promises.

Let me read you a quote from **D.A. Carson** and this is what he said, “From the time of the fall to the present day, men and women have frequently succumbed to the deceptive devices of the devil. Christians are especially open to the kind of cunning deceit that combines the language of faith and religion with the content to self-interest and flattery. We like to be told how special we are, how wise, how blessed ... We like to have our Christianity shaped less by the cross than by triumphalism or rules or charismatic leaders or subjective experience. And if this shaping can be coated with assurance of orthodoxy, complete with cliché, we may not detect the presence of the arch-deceiver, nor see that we are being weaned away from ‘sincere and pure devotion to Christ’ to a ‘different gospel.’”

The wolves in the church that devour sheep do not howl and bare their teeth. They come in sheep’s clothing, smiling, reciting Scripture, full of understanding, promising something other than what Christ promised.

And this is what Paul saw happening in Corinth. So should the Corinthians take Paul’s fears to heart? Absolutely! Why?

The Corinthians should take Paul’s fears to heart because as Christ’s true apostle he had far greater knowledge than his opponents who he sarcastically referred to as “the most eminent apostles” (2 Corinthians 11:5-6).

Let me now read for you **2 Corinthians 11:5-6** and see if this is not so. **“For I consider myself not in the least inferior to the most eminent apostles** [most likely a sarcastic reference to his opponents who were in fact claiming to be such and then what did he say?]. **But even if I am unskilled in speech, yet I am not so in knowledge; in fact, in every way we have made this evident to you in all things.”**

And how had Paul made this knowledge that he possessed evident to the Corinthians? He made knowledge evident to them “in all things,” or in other words both in his “preaching” and in his “suffering.”

If we are jealously and passionately holding on to people as if we are the owner of those people, then we are guilty of ungodly jealousy. And this is a kind of jealousy that we must by the grace of God reject.

But if we are jealously and passionately holding on to professing brothers and sisters in Christ because we believe that they are in danger of being led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ, then this is godly jealousy.

And this is what characterized Paul. He was characterized by godly jealousy for the Corinthians. And it was this godly jealousy that Paul explained to the Corinthians was not propelling him forward in foolish boasting. It was something he very much distained, but he in light of the inroads of his opponents and their delusional message felt he must do.

And this is the kind of jealousy that we must also by the grace of God embrace if we see someone slipping away, not because we believe that they are ours but rather because we believe that they are the Lord’s and that we are doing what we can so that they might one day be presented as a pure virgin to Christ as His bride.

May we be filled with godly jealousy when we believe a brother or sister in Christ is in the process of being led astray from the gospel message.