

Introduction

When a professional golfer is preparing for a tournament, he makes a wise game plan for every hole. He looks at how the golf course architect has designed each hole to be played. The architect may have a generous landing area that is 280 yards from the tee, and it may shrink down considerably after that. The architect is telling golfers that this is where to hit your tee shot. If a golfer decides to hit it further than that, to get a shorter approach shot, then there is a risk involved. The narrower fairway may bring hazards, bunkers, rough, or other problems into play, which could cost the golfer a higher score. A professional looks at his own game and determines the best way to hit his tee shot to that ideal position. Some professionals may elect an iron or fairway wood, as that is all that is needed to hit to the ideal landing area. Good golfers stick with their game plan for each hole, and this helps them consistently play their best golf.

In the fall of 1993, I was playing the last hole of the six-round PGA Tour Qualifying tournament. My game plan for the last hole was to hit a two-iron off the tee, which would leave me a six or seven-iron approach shot. Only the top twenty-five golfers would earn their tour cards, and I thought that I was on the bubble and needed a birdie to secure my Tour card for the following year. A driver off the tee would give me a short iron into the green, giving me the best chance of making a birdie. Therefore, I went against my game plan and used a driver off the tee. I decided the risk was worth the gamble, because if I did not birdie the hole, I would not qualify. Using my driver brought a bunker and water into play on the right side. I almost hit a perfect drive, but it was a few yards right of where I wanted it, and it landed on the edge of the bunker that ran alongside the fairway. Instead of kicking forward or into the bunker, it took a 90-degree kick straight right and went across the bunker and rolled into the water. I had to take a drop in the bunker, and my ball plugged. It turns out that changing my game plan was foolish, as I could have bogeyed the final hole and still earned my card. Sometimes we take a foolish approach if we think it is the only option left for us.

Paul has been attacked by some people wanting to take control of the church in Corinth. They attacked his character, his apostleship, and were bringing false doctrine into the church. Paul began this section by saying that the weapons of his warfare are not fleshly, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. He was going to come as a soldier and fight these speculations and lofty thoughts that were against the knowledge of God. He was giving these attackers a warning that he was coming and that they should repent, so that he does not have to act boldly when he comes. Paul said that God had given him authority, something that his attackers had falsely accused him about. They said he was not a real apostle and was self-appointed, which is why the Corinthians had asked him to provide a letter of commendation. Paul had authority, but his authority was given to him to build up the body, not to destroy it.

In chapter eleven, Paul continues his defense, but he does something that he considered foolish. He did not want to boast about his credentials, his service, or his suffering, but he felt like this was the only option. His attackers had made so many false and misleading accusations about him that he thought that he needed to openly speak about his credentials and apostolic ministry, and set the records straight. He begins by asking the Corinthians to bear with him in a little foolishness, and boasting was the foolishness that he was referring to. He had ended chapter ten by quoting Jeremiah 9:24, "He who boasts is to boast in the Lord." The wisest game plan is not to boast, and if you do boast, it should be in the Lord. Paul knew that God teaches us in Proverbs to let another praise us and not boast about ourselves. But Paul needed to address the attacks and he boasted about his work as an apostle. In our passage today, we will look at Paul's Desire for the Corinthians, his Concern for the Corinthians, and his credentials.

(2 Cor 10:17) “But he who boasts is to boast in the Lord.”

(Pr 27:2) “Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; A stranger, and not your own lips.”

Paul's Warning and Defense – Part 3

1. Paul's Goal (2 Cor 11:1-2)
2. Paul's Concern (2 Cor 11:3-4)

(2 Cor 11:1–4) “I wish that you would bear with me in a little foolishness; but indeed you are bearing with me. {2} 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.”

1. Paul's Goal in Ministry (2 Cor 10:17-11-2)

Paul begins by asking them to bear with him in a little foolishness, and that foolishness was speaking about his credentials and his apostolic ministry. He has just reminded them that if a person boasts, he should boast in the Lord. Therefore, this foolishness is boasting about his own apostolic ministry. Paul is really telling the Corinthians that he does not want to do what he is going to do, but that he has no better option. He needs to address the things that have been spoken about him. He asked them to bear with him while he addresses these concerns about his ministry.

(2 Co 10:17–11:1) “But he who boasts is to boast in the Lord. {18} For it is not he who commends himself that is approved, but he whom the Lord commends. {1} I wish that you would bear with me in a little foolishness; but indeed you are bearing with me.”

Then, Paul shares his goal in ministry. This goal is what motivated and drove Paul in his ministry. His desire was to present the church to Christ as a pure virgin. The church is referred to in Scripture as the bride of Christ. In Ephesians, when God tells husbands to love their wives, He is really speaking about how Christ loves the church, and what the Lord is doing to prepare the bride. God is sanctifying her and cleansing her by the washing of water with the word so that He can present the church to Himself without spot or wrinkle. Paul was passionate about presenting the church to the Lord as a pure virgin, one without spot or wrinkle. Paul said that he had betrothed them to one husband, that is to Christ, and his goal is to present them to the Lord as a pure virgin.

(2 Co 11:2) “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.”

(Eph 5:25–32) “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, {26} so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, {27} that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless... {32} This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.”

In Colossians 1:28-29, Paul said that proclaimed Christ, admonished and taught every man with all wisdom so that he could present every man complete in Christ. The word complete in Greek is *teleios* (Strong's G5046), which also means perfected or matured. The root word is *tello*, which means to set out for a definite point or goal. *Teleios* means that you have reached that distant point or goal; you have completed the goal. Since Christ is coming for a church that is holy and blameless, without spot or wrinkle, to complete that goal means that the church is perfect, complete, and holy. What does it take to reach that goal? It takes what Paul did. He proclaimed the gospel, and then he taught and admonished the church with all wisdom. It takes a lot of effort to do this. Paul said that he labored, striving according to God's power, which mightily works within him. The Greek word for striving is *agonizomai* (Strong's G75), which is what we get our English word, agony from. *Agonizomai* means to fight, struggle, or compete for a prize. Athletes trained hard and exhausted themselves, and then for some, it was a fight until one of the contestants died. In order to present the church spotless and without blemish, it takes striving according to God's power. Paul's goal was to present the Corinthians to Christ as a pure virgin.

(Col 1:28–29) “We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. {29} For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.”

Paul had work to do because Corinth was considered one of the most immoral places on earth. To “corinthianize” meant to indulge in sexual immorality. Paul's goal was to present the church as a pure virgin. In 1 Corinthians 6, Paul told the Corinthians that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God. He told them not to be deceived, that fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, effeminate, homosexuals, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, and swindlers will not inherit the kingdom of God. Then, he said, “Such were some of you.” The Corinthian church was born out of this immoral culture. Paul's work was to take these immoral people and present them as a pure virgin. Notice that Paul did not stop there. He said, “but you were washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.” A pastor cannot do those things; only God can wash, sanctify, and justify us. Paul proclaimed the gospel, and the Corinthians had believed the gospel, and received Christ into their lives. When Christ comes into our lives, He seals us with the Holy Spirit. He washes us, taking away our sins. He sanctifies us, which means that he makes us holy. He justifies us, which means that He declares us to be innocent. He removes our guilt, shame, and sin record. He washes the slate clean. He removes our sin from us as far as the east is from the west, and they never meet.

(1 Co 6:9–11) “Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, {10} nor thieves, nor *the* covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. {11} Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.”

(Ps 103:12) “As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.”

The work of sanctification is two-fold. Positionally, we are made and declared holy when we receive Christ. But that does not mean that the old sin habits, thought processes, and attitudes were immediately changed. We are exhorted to be holy, as Christ is holy. We are told to put away the deeds of the flesh, and put on Christ. We are told not to be conformed to the world, but

to be transformed by the renewing of our mind. The second part of sanctification is the process of transformation, where our lives become more Christlike. As an apostle, Paul proclaimed the gospel message, and then he admonished and taught the church so that he could present the church to Christ as a pure virgin. That was his goal.

That should be the goal of every pastor. The primary goal is not to see how many people we can assemble together, although God wants the church to grow. The primary goal is to help people leave our meetings as different people, as transformed people, as more Christlike in their thoughts, attitudes, and lives. Our culture is not much different than the Corinthian culture, and it is going to take striving according to God's power, in order to present the church to Christ as a pure virgin, without spot or wrinkle.

Paul said that he was jealous for them with a godly jealousy. Jealousy is a very strong passion. The Greek word is zeloo (Strong's G2206), and the root word is zelos (Strong's G2205), which where we get our English word zeal from. The root word is zeo, which means to be hot, boiling hot for liquid and glowing hot for solids. Jealousy is a strong passion. Jealousy is not normally considered a good thing. We are not to be jealous of others or to covet what they have. Jealousy is mentioned as a deed of the flesh in Galatians 5:19, and it is not in good company. It is mentioned with immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. Jealousy is not normally considered a good thing. we are not to walk in the flesh, but the Spirit.

(2 Co 11:2) "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.*"

(Ga 5:19–21) "Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, {20} idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, **jealousy**, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, {21} envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God."

Is Paul's jealousy for the Corinthians a bad thing? No. Paul has a godly jealousy. In Exodus 20, God tells us not to make idols or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath. We are not to worship them or serve them, because God is a jealous God. God wants an intimate relationship with us, and He is a jealous God. God is a jealous husband, and is not willing to share His bride with idols.

(Ex 20:4–6) "You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. {5} "You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, {6} but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

Paul had a godly jealousy, which meant that he was jealous on behalf of God. He did not want the Corinthians to have another God or idol in their lives. In Numbers 25, Israel was at Shittim, which was a town named after the acacia trees in that area. They began to play the harlot there, and ate and bowed down to the gods of the daughters of Moab. They joined themselves to Baal of Peor, and the Lord was angry against Israel. He was jealous over Israel. One of the sons of Israel brought a Midian woman home, and Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, and arose from the midst of the congregation and took a spear in his hand, and

went after the man of Israel into the tent and pierced both of them. Then, the Lord said to Moses, “Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned away My wrath from the sons of Israel in that he was jealous with My jealousy.” Phinehas did not have the jealousy that was a deed of the flesh, but he had a godly jealousy. He was filled with God’s jealousy for His bride. That is what Paul had for the Corinthians. He was jealous with God’s jealousy for the church at Corinth.

(Nu 25:1–11) “While Israel remained at Shittim, the people began to play the harlot with the daughters of Moab. {2} For they invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. {3} So Israel joined themselves to Baal of Peor, and the Lord was angry against Israel. {4} The Lord said to Moses, “Take all the leaders of the people and execute them in broad daylight before the Lord, so that the fierce anger of the Lord may turn away from Israel.” {5} So Moses said to the judges of Israel, “Each of you slay his men who have joined themselves to Baal of Peor.” {6} Then behold, one of the sons of Israel came and brought to his relatives a Midianite woman, in the sight of Moses and in the sight of all the congregation of the sons of Israel, while they were weeping at the doorway of the tent of meeting. {7} When Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he arose from the midst of the congregation and took a spear in his hand, {8} and he went after the man of Israel into the tent and pierced both of them through, the man of Israel and the woman, through the body. So the plague on the sons of Israel was checked. {9} Those who died by the plague were 24,000. {10} Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, {11} “Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned away My wrath from the sons of Israel in that he was jealous with My jealousy among them, so that I did not destroy the sons of Israel in My jealousy.”

2. Paul's Concern for the Corinthians (2 Cor 11:3-4)

The reason that Paul had godly jealousy for the Corinthians is that he was concerned that the Corinthians had been deceived and gone after a false god. He said, “But I am afraid...” Paul was deeply concerned about their spiritual well-being. Paul had a godly jealousy that they had gone after a strange god. Paul was afraid that they had been led astray, just as Eve had been deceived by the serpent. He was concerned that they had been led away from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. He was afraid that these people who had come in had preached another Jesus than whom he had preached. He was afraid that they had received a different spirit, a demonic spirit. He was concerned that they had received a different gospel.

(2 Co 11:3–4) “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.”

How does this deception take place? Deception has the appearance of good. This deception had come in by men that were calling themselves apostles. Paul said that such men were false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. He said that even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. These servants of Satan, these false apostles, disguised themselves as servants of righteousness. Deception has the appearance of good, of light, of righteousness.

(2 Co 11:13–15) “For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. {14} No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. {15} Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds.”

Paul took the Corinthians back to the garden of Eden, where Eve was deceived by the serpent. It is important to note the source of deception, which is the serpent. Paul said that these servants were servants of Satan. There is a kingdom of light and a kingdom of darkness, and deception comes out of the kingdom of darkness. How do we recognize deceivers? Paul said that their end will be according to their deeds. We must look at the fruit in people's lives. In Matthew 7, Jesus said, “Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits.” We have to be fruit inspectors. “Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles.” What kind of fruit is coming from those that are trying to teach us. Recently, someone asked me about how to choose a church. I said that you must trust the leadership. What kind of leadership do they have? What is the fruit in their lives? What is the fruit in the lives of those who follow them? We must be fruit inspectors.

(Mt 7:15–20) “Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. {16} “You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn *bushes* nor figs from thistles, are they? {17} “So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. {18} “A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. {19} “Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. {20} “So then, you will know them by their fruits.”

Jesus said, “So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit.” If a leader has bad fruit, then move on quickly. If the leader has good fruit, there is good cause to trust the leader. There are other considerations in choosing a church, but the fruit of the leadership is important to look at. The first way to discern deception is by the fruit of their lives. Notice that the first way was not by outward appearance. Paul said that they disguised themselves as angels of light. Jesus said that false prophets come to us in sheep's clothing. The outward appearance can be very deceptive. We have to look at their fruit, because good fruit will not come from a bad tree, and bad fruit will not come from a good tree. The fruit of their lives will let us know what they are inwardly.

In the garden, the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field. Deceivers are crafty. They can be smooth talkers and cunning. They are great at disguising themselves, and making themselves look good. The people attacking Paul made Paul look bad, and they made themselves look good. The people in Corinth had been quite deceived, and were now questioning Paul's credentials, and wanted a letter of commendation. When someone makes someone else look bad so that they can look good, it is a dangerous red flag. Be careful around that person.

(Ge 3:1-3) “Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, “Indeed, has God said, ‘You shall not eat from any tree of the garden’? {2} The woman said to the serpent, “From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; {3} but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.’”

Another sign of a deceiver is the questions they ask. The serpent asked questions that brought doubt about what God had said. Questions that are asked to help gain understanding are very useful, but the serpent did not ask to gain understanding, but to create doubt and unbelief in Eve.

The first question the serpent asked was, “Indeed, has God said, ‘You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?’” Then the serpent stated, “You surely will not die!” The serpent brought questions, and then the serpent spoke against what God had said. We recognize deception by knowing the truth. Eve should have known and trusted in what God had said. We must take our stand on the truth of God's word. If someone comes and preaches something against God's word, beware of that person. I have many friends in ministry and not everyone agrees on everything. When we are talking about a deceiver, we are speaking about the essential doctrines. The essential doctrines would include the deity of Christ, the death and resurrection of Christ, salvation by faith and not by works, etc. I would be very careful about calling someone a false prophet because they did not use the King James Version.

(Gen 3:4) “The serpent said to the woman, “You surely will not die!”

Next, the serpent gave an alternative view to what God had said. He twisted and perverted the truth by saying, “For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” To be like God sounds great. Who does not want to become like God? Who does not want to discern good and evil? Eve bought into the lie of the serpent and saw that the tree was good for food, and a delight to her eyes, and would make her wise. She took the fruit and ate it, and also gave some to her husband and he ate.

(Gen 3:5-7) For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” {6} When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make *one* wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. {7} Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings.”

In 1 John 2, God tells us that the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life are not from the Father, but from the world. The serpent made the forbidden fruit to look good to the eyes, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes. The serpent said the fruit would make her wise, the boastful pride of life. Be very careful about those who appeal to your pride.

(1 Jn 2:16) “For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.”

One year I was speaking with a leader and he appealed to my pride. He said that I was a champion, and I needed to be on a championship team, which was his team. I discerned that this man was not speaking from the Lord. The other things that he said to me were not in alignment with God's word. I had several red flags about being involved with this man. We must pay attention to the red flags and cautions so that we are not deceived.

Paul was concerned that the Corinthians had been deceived and led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. I love that verse. We sometimes can get caught up in other things that we stray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. God wants to have fellowship with us. He wants relationship with us. He wants us to spend time with Him. He wants us to talk to Him, which we call prayer. He wants us to worship Him. Our relationship with Christ is not about programs. Our relationship with Christ is not about lots of activities and service projects. God wants us to serve, but it should flow out of our love for God. Our activities should never replace our time with the Lord.

(2 Co 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.”

Karen and I were part of a church that hired a new associate pastor. The pastor was new out of seminary, and had lots of complicated things in mind. He developed a vision for the church that was so complex that nobody in the church could follow or understand it when he presented it to the church. It may have been okay for a theology professor to try and make sense of, but it was way too complicated and complex for everyone else. That pastor did not connect with the people in the church, and after about a year, he was voted out by the congregation. God wants a simple and pure devotion to Him, not something complicated, legalistic, or burdensome.

The accusers of Paul, the deceivers, those that were disguised as angels of light and angels of righteousness, appeared righteous. Scholars believe that these false apostles were Jewish, evidenced by Paul's questions in verse twenty-two, when he asked, “Are they Hebrews? Are they Israelites? Are they descendants of Abraham?” These Judaizers were causing problems throughout the church, not just the local church in Corinth. They had come to Antioch and caused problems. In Acts 15, the church sent Barnabas and Paul to Jerusalem to discuss the matter with the elders and apostles in Jerusalem. Paul was dealing with them everywhere he went.

(2 Co 11:22) “Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I.”

In Paul's letter to the Galatians, he began by saying that he was amazed that they were deserting Christ who called them by the grace of Christ and were turning to a different gospel. The false teachers were distorting the gospel of Christ, telling people that they had to be circumcised, and they had to follow the Law. Paul said that if anyone preaches a gospel contrary to what he had preached, he is to be accursed, and Paul repeated that again. The same thing that he was writing about to the Galatians was happening to the Corinthians. There were those that were coming in and preaching a different gospel, one that included circumcision and the works of the law.

(Ga 1:6–9) “I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; {7} which is *really* not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. {8} But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! {9} As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!”

Paul told the Galatians that if they receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to them. If someone receives circumcision, they are under obligation to keep the whole Law. He told them that they had been severed from Christ because they were seeking to be justified by law instead of grace.

(Ga 5:2–4) “Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you. {3} And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law.”

These false teachers and apostles had gone throughout the churches; this was not a localized issue, but a global issue that the church was fighting. Paul warned the church in Philippi to beware of the dogs, the evil workers, the false circumcision. In Peter's second letter, all of

chapter two was devoted to false prophets. In Paul's letters to Titus and Timothy, he told them to silence these men who are upsetting the church. When Paul met with the Ephesian elders at Miletus (Acts 20:28-29), he warned them to be on guard because savage wolves would come in, not sparing the flock. Unfortunately, this was not an isolated case, but a global problem.

(Php 3:2–3) “Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision; {3} for we are the *true* circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh,”

These false apostles had come to Corinth were trying to do the same thing, teach a different gospel, one that included circumcision and the works of the law. They were attacking Paul so that they could take control of the church. They had impure motives. They were leading people away from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. They were bringing in all the provisions of the law, something very complicated. Paul was raised a Pharisee, and knew only too well the complexity of the Pharisaical laws, and interpretations of the Law.

We want to grow in our knowledge of God. We want to grow and mature in the Lord. There is so much to learn. There is a lot of work to be done in the kingdom of God. With that being said, we must never let works come before our relationship with the Lord. We must remember the simplicity and devotion to the Lord. How can we do that? I believe the answer is that we must make our relationship with Christ our priority. Paul said that he considered all things as loss and rubbish compared to knowing God. We must put our relationship with Christ as the highest priority. We must love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength.

(Php 3:8) “More than that, 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,”

Our service, and God wants us to be servants, needs to flow out of our relationship with Christ. While Jesus was on earth in His earthly ministry, He spent the early hours with the Father. He would go to the wilderness, a quiet and deserted place, so He could spend time with the Father. Then, He would minister the rest of the day. His ministry flowed out of His relationship with the Father.

(Mk 1:35) “In the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left *the house*, and went away to a secluded place, and was praying there.”

In John 5, Jesus said that the Son could do nothing unless it was something that He saw the Father doing. He said the Father loves the Son and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing. Jesus prioritized His relationship with the Father, and spent time every day with the Father. In His time with the Father, the Father would show Him what He was doing, and Jesus would do in like manner. Our ministry should flow out of our relationship with God. When it becomes more works and activities than relationship with Christ, we have forgotten the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.

(Jn 5:19–20) “Therefore Jesus answered and was saying to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless *it is* something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner. {20} “For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing; and *the Father* will show Him greater works than these, so that you will marvel.”

Conclusion and Applications

Paul's goal was to present the church in Corinth to the Lord as a pure virgin. That should be the goal of every pastor, to prepare the bride of Christ and present her to Him as a pure bride, without spot or wrinkle. Paul was jealous with the jealousy of God; he had a godly jealousy for the Corinthians. God does not want to share His bride with idols and false gods; He wants to be first in our lives.

Paul's concern was that they had been deceived and led astray from the simplicity and purity of the devotion to Christ. We need to keep things simple. God wants relationship with us. He does not want a legalistic set of laws, rituals, and rules; He wants relationship. We need to be careful that we do not complicate things. We need childlike faith, which is not complicated. We need to spend time with the Lord, reading, praying, and worshiping. Our service for Him should flow out of our relationship with Him. Paul was concerned that the church in Corinth had been led astray and had received a different gospel and a different spirit.

Let's look at applications for our lives. Has your walk with the Lord become a religious duty, or are you passionately in love with the Lord? Has your walk with the Lord become what you do for God or is it about spending time with Him? Do you long to worship Him? Do you long to speak with Him? Do you long to hear from Him, or do you simply read your Bible or devotional material as a sense of duty? Do you have simple and pure devotion to the Lord? God wants to fellowship with us. He wants us to have a pure and simple devotion to Him

How is your marriage preparation coming? Are you a pure virgin that is ready to meet her husband, or are there some wrinkles in your life that need to be ironed? Are your clothes spotless, or do some of your garments need to be laundered? Are you without spot or wrinkle? Are you growing in your love for the Lord? Are you growing in your passion for the Lord? Are you growing in wisdom and knowledge? Are your attitudes and actions becoming more Christlike? Can you see progress in your spiritual journey?

Take a few minutes this week to talk to the Lord about these things. If you would like to discuss or share a burden with someone, we will be more than willing to help you. If you would like prayer support, we have prayer cards, and we will be glad to lift you up in prayer.

Closing Prayer

Father God, thank You for Your word. Thank You for desiring relationship and fellowship with us. Thank You for a simple and pure relationship with You. Help us to always put our relationship with You before our service to You. Help us to love You with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. Help us to be on guard about becoming complacent and doing things out of obligation. Give us a holy passion for You.

Help us to be on guard for false teachers, false prophets, and false apostles. Give us discernment and wisdom. Help us to become fruit inspectors. Help us to become knowledgeable and to grow to maturity. We want to be a pure virgin without spot or wrinkle, and to be complete in You. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

