

Divine Jealousy

2 Corinthians 11:1-15

What comes to your mind when you hear the word jealousy? Generally, when we think of the word jealousy we don't typically associate it with a positive trait or a Christian virtue. Jealousy is most often used in reference to someone who is insecure, self-centered or even abusive.

It is certainly true that some people can be jealous because they are self-centered and insecure, which can lead to abusive behaviors in relationships. But according to God's word, jealousy can not only be a positive trait for a Christian to possess, it's also an attribute of God.

When warning His people about the dangers of idolatry, God's word gives this explanation in Exodus 34:14, *"for you shall worship no other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God."*

Notice that God doesn't just say that he experiences jealousy but that His name is Jealous. This means that Jealousy is a primary attribute of God that His people should give special attention to.

Now since the Lord is a jealous God, what constitutes godly jealousy? Interestingly, the Hebrew word, *qinah* translated jealous has the meaning of being *inflamed*. The Greek word *zelos* translated jealous in the New Testament also carries with it the idea of to heat or to boil. Moreover, the Greek word *zelos*, is also where we derive our English word zeal, "which is generally a 'good' word. Zeal describes enthusiastic devotion, single-minded allegiance, or fervent interest in the pursuit of something." sermonindex

In light of this, godly jealousy has to do with being zealously and fervently protective of the integrity of one's relationship or wellbeing of another. If a loving father learns that his daughter is being lured by a pimp who wants to prostitute her, he will boil over with an intense desire to put a stop to it at all costs.

When God says that He is a jealous God, He is drawing attention to the fact that He is zealously protective of His people, whom He has set His love upon. He does not allow any competing alliances that would draw them away from the preeminent devotion that His glory deserves and demands.

In addition to the devotion that His glory deserves and demands, God is jealous because anything or anyone that would draw us away from putting God first is a detriment to our lives.

Similarly, as people created in God's image, we have been given the capacity to experience jealousy. However, because of our fallenness, our jealousy can be unhealthy to us and our relationships.

Jealousy can be a negative emotion when it's rooted in self-centeredness that leads us to desire what doesn't belong to us. But in the love and Spirit of Christ, godly jealousy was designed by God "to protect the integrity and prioritization of our relationships. It exists to provide warnings from one spouse to the other whenever the boundaries or integrity of the relationship is being compromised." Tru Pettigrew

Moreover, godly jealousy is an essential characteristic of men and women of God who are agents of His redeeming, restoring and reconciling love.

Main idea: Godly leaders possess a divine jealousy for those under their spiritual care.

In today's message we are going to examine 3 key elements of divine jealousy, which is an essential attribute of God's agents of gospel restoration.

1. Anchored in devotion to the Savior

In the opening verses of chapter eleven we learn that divine jealousy is anchored in devotion to the Savior. Having explained that his

detractors commended themselves at Paul's expense, but that true servants of God are commended by God and desire only His approval, Paul writes,

"I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness. Do bear with me! ² For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ." 2 Corinthians 11:1-2

As Paul had started doing in the previous chapter, in these opening verses, he continues to present his case for the authenticity of his gospel ministry. Unlike his detractors, it was not Paul's custom to go around boasting about his credentials in order to gain a following.

However, the opposition in the church of Corinth that, among things, called into question his fitness for ministry, forced Paul to highlight his credentials to expose and defeat his opponents. But even though he had legitimate reasons to present his credentials, he felt foolish and embarrassed to do so. Therefore, in verse one he asked the Corinthians to bear with him in this foolishness of having to talk about himself.

Notice also that what compelled him to present his credentials to dispel the accusations of his opponents was the *divine jealousy* he felt for the Corinthians (v.2). Moreover, he explains that the divine jealousy that he had for the Corinthians was rooted in his fatherly devotion to the Corinthians on behalf of Christ. He writes: *"For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ."* 2 Corinthians 11:2

Again, Paul's jealousy for the church wasn't rooted in envy or selfish ambition. Paul wasn't jealous of the speaking skills or popularity of his opponents who he facetiously referred to as super-apostles. His relationship to the Corinthians was like that of a father who raises his daughter not to fall for just any smooth-talking guy who's looking for a thrill.

Loving fathers want to protect their daughters from guys like that. If they desire to marry, they want their daughters to meet a godly man who will honor them and commit their lives to them in marriage before they engage in sexual intimacy. She's not a car that you test drive before you buy it.

Similarly, Paul was instrumental in bringing the Corinthians to Christ so that they would give themselves as a bride exclusively to Him. "Paul wanted to offer to Christ a church with an unadulterated loyalty to, and love for, Him." Charles R. Swindoll

Unlike the super-apostles who wanted the loyalty of the Corinthians because they were on a power trip, Paul wanted influence over them so that he could nurture them to give their primary loyalty to Christ.

O how the body of Christ needs men and women with this kind of protective and committed godly jealousy for the church, the bride of Christ. We have too many Christian leaders who, like the super-apostles, are selfishly jealous at the success of other ministers. They're insecure and territorial. They have enormous egos that keep them from seeking the counsel and accountability of others. Ministry to them is an opportunity to be served to make a name for themselves, rather than a calling to serve others for the greater fame of Jesus.

And part of the reason you have these insecure ego maniacs in the church today is because there are many professing believers who are easily deceived by their outward appeal and worldly achievements.

This brings us to our second point.

2. Alerted by the deceitfulness of the Serpent

Divine jealousy is alerted by the deceitfulness of the Serpent. Having expressed his divine jealousy for them because like a father he brought the Corinthian believers to Christ to present them as His exclusive bride, he continues: "*But I am afraid that as the serpent*

deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.” 2 Corinthians 11:3

Again, Paul’s divine jealousy was like that of a protective father for his vulnerable children. A wise father knows, as Paul also explained in 2 Timothy 3:2, there are *deceitful spirits* and *teachings of demons* in our world today seeking to capture the minds of our children and make them captives of Satan to do his will.

Social media and public schools that in many cases have our children’s attention for way more hours than we do as parents, are flooding the minds of our children with the teachings of demons. Among other things, the transgender revolution is targeting children and leading many to destructively believe that gender is not determined by the creator, but by their feelings, desires and self-perception. This has led many children and teens to mutilate their bodies to match their confused self-perception which brings all kinds of irreversible harm to their lives.

As biological and spiritual parents, we must fight with spiritual weapons to protect our children from these demonic attacks and be radically intentional about giving them a Christian worldview. The level of demonic influence in the world should alert, alarm and awaken the divine jealousy of God in us to take the primary responsibility to disciple our children for Christ. If we don’t, who will; if we don’t, the devil already is working overtime to capture them.

Similarly, Paul’s divine jealousy was alerted and alarmed by the super-apostle’s Satanically inspired false teaching that was drawing away the Corinthians believers from a pure devotion to Christ. In the church of Corinth in Paul’s day the false teachers were primarily from two camps, the Judaizers and the Docetists.

The Judaizers were adding to the grace gospel by insisting that in addition to believing in Jesus, one had to also be circumcised and keep the old covenant laws to be saved.

The Docetists, who were influenced by Greek philosophy, “rejected the full humanity of Jesus, disparaged the physical body and the physical creation, and refused to believe in the bodily resurrection. Sound familiar? Your physical biology doesn’t mean anything. Your self perception and desires are what rules today. Eat drink and be married because tomorrow you die.

Furthermore, like Eve was deceived by the serpent who drew her away from the simplicity of *what God said*, they were drawing the Corinthians away from the simplicity of the gospel message that salvation comes by faith alone in Christ alone.

As one commentator explained, “When people get caught up in false teaching, simplicity and purity get lost. All sort of debris seeps in to muddy the waters, cloud their thinking, and make it difficult for them to act on the simple biblical truths of the faith. Those caught up in false teaching get argumentative. They become divisive. They think things are far more complicated than they really are. They try to be nuanced or intellectually and socially respected. Ultimately, they become arrogant. The Bible itself gets marginalized, or it becomes something so subject to competing interpretations that they treat it as if it had no meaning at all. All of that is the opposite of what Paul means by the “simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ” (11:3). The solution? Get back to, and stay with, the basics.” Charles R. Swindoll

It’s important to note also that in verses 4-12, Paul gives three characteristics about these false teachers to help us identify them. Let me give you the three characteristics up front and then summarize each from the text.

Firstly, in verse 4 Paul explains that these false teachers proclaimed another Jesus and a different gospel. **Secondly**, in verses 5-6 he alludes to the fact that they demonstrated a captivating charisma about them. And **thirdly**, in verses 7-12, by way of contrast, he shows that unlike him, these false teachers were in the ministry for money.

Notice **first** that these false teachers preached another Jesus and a different gospel. Paul writes: “*For if someone comes and proclaims*

another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough.” 2 Corinthians 11:4

As I explained earlier, these false teachers, although they claimed to be apostles of Christ, the Jesus and the gospel they were proclaiming was not the risen Jesus and grace alone gospel of the scriptures. The same is true today.

There are many who claim to be ministers of the gospel, like prosperity preachers, who are preaching a different version of Jesus and a different gospel that suits them and appeals to our consumer driven culture.

Furthermore, because they proclaimed a different self-serving Jesus and a different self-serving gospel, they also displayed a different spirit. “[This heretical] spirit, as one commentator observed, is contrary to the Spirit of God. Instead of unity, it creates division. Instead of peace, it brings turmoil. Instead of truth, it teaches falsehood. To what other spirit could Paul be referring than the spirit of antichrist? That spirit is a devilish usurper attempting to displace the genuine work of the Spirit of God.” Charles R. Swindoll

Concerning this false teaching, notice that Paul admonished the Corinthians at the end of verse 4 by saying, *you put up with it readily enough*. In other words, they tolerated these false teachers as if it was a good thing, but in reality, they were being corrupted by them.

The **second** characteristic that Paul highlights about these false teachers is that they had a compelling charisma about them. Paul continues in verses 5-6, *“Indeed, I consider that I am not in the least inferior to these super-apostles.⁶ Even if I am unskilled in speaking, I am not so in knowledge; indeed, in every way we have made this plain to you in all things.”*

Again, Paul is not boasting of his apostolic authority because he was prideful. Rather, he was being compelled to by these super-apostles that were exalting themselves by tearing Paul down. As we learned in previous messages, they criticized him for his frail appearance and lack of the oratory flare that was characteristic of the Greek philosophers of his day who could hold the attention of the crowd.

“Paul, [as one commentator noted], though not always eloquent in speech or attractive in appearance, excelled in his revelations and knowledge of divine mysteries (2 Cor. 12:1-7). Ultimately, it wasn’t the packaging but the contents that mattered. The fakes had outward appeal; Paul had inward substance—a contrast usually found between false and true leaders.” Charles R. Swindoll

The **third** and final characteristic that Paul exposed about these false teachers was the fact that they were in the ministry for money. Unlike the greedy super-apostle who expected to get paid to preach, Paul didn’t require payment.

On the contrary, he refused to accept financial support from the Corinthians. He writes: *“Or did I commit a sin in humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached God's gospel to you free of charge? 8 I robbed other churches by accepting support from them in order to serve you. 9 And when I was with you and was in need, I did not burden anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied my need. So I refrained and will refrain from burdening you in any way.”* 2 Corinthians 11:7-9

It’s important to note here that in Paul’s day skilled speakers, especially Greek philosophers, were hired to give speeches and required payment for the privilege to sit under their teaching. Paul did not want to be associated with those professional speakers prevalent in Corinth who were in it for the money. He did not want to be accused of being in the ministry for monetary gain and thus hinder the purity of his gospel service.

Therefore, Paul looked to other more spiritually minded churches to support him and his gospel endeavors in Corinth. But ironically the

super-apostles who measured the status of a skilled speaker by how much money they made, used this against Paul. In other words, they were likely making disparaging remarks along the lines that Paul is such an unqualified speaker that he can't even charge for his speeches. But the reality was that Paul's willingness to proclaim the gospel message and train up disciples of Christ free of charge was a testament to the gospel of Jesus which he lived for and was willing to die for.

What was Paul's motivation for highlighting that he didn't receive payment for preaching in Corinth? Paul explains, "*As the truth of Christ is in me, this boasting of mine will not be silenced in the regions of Achaia. 11 And why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do! 12 And what I am doing I will continue to do, in order to undermine the claim of those who would like to claim that in their boasted mission they work on the same terms as we do.*" 2 Corinthians 11:10-12

Paul didn't boast about preaching free of charge to humiliate the Corinthians, but to expose the greedy false teachers undermining him. Moreover, he didn't take money from them because "he loved them" and he didn't want anything to get in the way of the progress of the gospel among them.

This leads us to our final point:

3. Aroused by delight in the Saints

Divine jealousy, which true godly leaders possess and that compels them to fight with spiritual weapons for those they love, is aroused by delight in the saints.

Again, what was Paul's motivation for not taking money from the Corinthians and boasting about it? He writes: "*As the truth of Christ is in me, this boasting of mine will not be silenced in the regions of Achaia. 11 And why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do!*" 2 Corinthians 11:10-11

Paul's motivation for boasting about ministering to the Corinthians "free of charge" was not simply to "one up" the false apostles, but to expose them. Furthermore, it wasn't because he delighted in making them look bad. Although he was embarrassed to have to talk about himself in his defense, he did it because he loved the Corinthians and his joy was to see them walking in the truth of the gospel.

As he also expressed in 2 Corinthians 7:3-4, "*Make room in your hearts for us. We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have taken advantage of no one. 3 I do not say this to condemn you, for I said before that you are in our hearts... 4 I am acting with great boldness toward you; I have great pride in you; I am filled with comfort. In all our affliction, I am overflowing with joy.*"

Paul didn't take any money from the Corinthians because he found his joy and delight not in money, but in their spiritual progress. And because he delighted in their spiritual progress, anyone who would threaten their spiritual progress provoked him to jealousy; a jealousy that would move him to take action, to expose and to warn those he loved.

In light of this, Paul concludes: "*For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. 14 And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. 15 So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.*" 2 Corinthians 11:13-15

The apostle Paul had a divine jealousy that provoked him and moved him to protect those he loved because he was sober to the antichrist spirit that is present in every generation. He was keenly aware that "just as Satan himself deceives the world by masquerading as an "angel of light" (11:14), so his devilish servants also disguise themselves as 'servants of righteousness' (11:15).

The word '*disguise*,' used three times in these three verses, in the Greek (*metaschēmatisō*) means '*to change in appearance.*' Though

the essence of the thing remains the same, its outward appearance looks different. The servants of Satan may appear right and good at first. But their *'end will correspond to their deeds'* (11:15). They will fall victim to their own lies and ultimately will perish without Christ."

Charles R. Swindoll

O let us not be deceived by outward appearances or a counterfeit spirit that moves us superficially, but in the end draws us away from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. Jesus is not whoever we want Him to be. He is the crucified, risen, and reigning King.

Conclusion

Beloved, apart from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ, we will never be truly content and satisfied in this life. Rather than possessing a divine jealousy that looks out for the best interests of others, we will be filled with demonic jealousy that envies the blessings of others. And rather than appreciating people that have godly jealousy for us, we will push them away.

O but when we grow in our devotion to Christ, we will know the security of His love, and we will possess a divine jealousy that is anchored in devotion to Christ, alerted by the deceitfulness of the serpent and aroused by a love and a delight that seeks the good of the saints.

May God's jealousy over you in Christ make you jealous for His name to be honored in the lives of those in your circle of influence for their eternal good and to the glory of Jesus.