

THE RUIN OF RELIGIOUS PRIDE

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By the Book™ A Chapter by Chapter Bible Study Series from Jerry Vines Ministries
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Let's Begin

You may have heard the humorous tale about the three kids who tried to out-brag each other about their dad. The first boy said, "My dad's so smart he can talk for one hour on any subject." Following him, the second boy chimed in, "My dad's so smart he can talk for two hours on any subject." Finally, the third boy would not be beat, "My dad's so smart he can talk for 3 hours and doesn't even need a subject"! Whether it happens to be our favorite football team, a certain brand of automobile, or a thousand other things, most of us know the feeling of getting carried away with bragging.

What about religious bragging, however? Religious bragging surely seems to impact our spiritual health more than bragging about baseball teams. Perhaps a Sunday School teacher is tempted to brag about the consistent attendance his or her class maintains. Or, it may be the pastor of a large church finding himself bragging about how big his church is compared to all the other "little" churches in town. Or perhaps you may overly comment about the money you made, or the property you purchased last year. Whatever the case, there are ample opportunities for all of us to be caught bragging about our virtues and blessings.

Apostles were apparently no different. They were every bit as human as you and I. In fact, almost the entire 11th chapter deals with what Paul calls the "folly" of his "godly jealousy" (vv. 1, 2).

So, is it ever acceptable to brag? If so, when? If so, how? As we study this chapter together and consider the role of religious pride in the believer's life, let's follow the simple outline below:

- I. Paul's Guidelines for Godly Jealousy (vv. 1-12)**
- II. Our Gravitation toward Ungodly Jealousy (vv. 13-33)**

I. Paul's Guidelines for Godly Jealousy (vv. 1-12)

Paul begins the section with a plea to the Corinthian believers, "Would to God ye could bear with me a little in my folly: and indeed bear with me" (v. 1). The Greek term twice translated "bear" literally means "to hold in," "to hold back," or "to restrain." In the Septuagint (LXX, the Greek translation of the Old Testament used many times by the Apostles), the term is used of God holding back the rain in judgment (Amos 4:7). Also, our Lord used the term to express His gracious tolerance to faithless men (Matt. 17:17). In our text, Paul summons the Corinthians to tolerate his forthcoming rehearsal of the sufferings he has personally endured simply because he was an Apostle. We often are persecuted and experience injustice just because we name the name of Christ. Every Christian must turn to the Lord in times such as these and seek His power to sustain and uphold him or her in the heat of battle.

Paul goes on to confess his passionate desire for the Corinthian believers, "For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy..." (v. 2a). "Jealousy" is the English translation of the Greek term *zēloō*, which means, "to set one's heart on" or "to be earnest." In fact, the term itself is neutral; consequently, it could refer to either a good earnestness or a bad envy (cp. Acts 13:45). Paul obviously intends his meaning to be good, for he qualifies the jealousy he feels with the term "godly."

Paul then employs the beautiful metaphor of marriage to stimulate his hearers toward a solemn warning concerning purity in the church and the possibility of following a false Gospel. The record reads, "for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted



from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with *him*" (vv. 2b-4).

First, Paul is concerned for the *purity of the bride* (v. 2). Paul possesses the right kind of jealousy. Understand: there exists a jealousy which remains wrong, a destructive jealousy which can destroy the foundation of any marriage (or in Paul's mind, the church).

Just what was Paul jealous about with a "godly jealousy"? He surely was jealous over the church's *engagement* purity. He wanted the Corinthians to be "espoused to one husband." Espousal in the ancient world was just short of the marital vows. Indeed if an espousal was broken, it carried virtually the same consequences as a divorce. Hence, during the espousal period, the bride and groom were to be faithful and pure toward each other. Purity was expected; purity was required.

For a Christian to live a compromised life would be like an engaged virgin to be unfaithful. Moral purity was foremost in the Apostle's mind. No wonder he displayed a "godly jealousy" over the Corinthians.

Furthermore, Paul was not only concerned about an *engagement* purity, he was also concerned about the *presentation* of the purity. We find this particular concern indicative of his desire to, "present *you* as a chaste virgin to Christ." What kind of bride did Paul want walking down the aisle to take the hand of the Son of God? A clean, spotless, and pure bride of Christ (cp. Eph. 5:27).

Second, Paul notes also the *simplicity of the bride* (v. 3). The Apostle reminisces over Genesis "as the serpent beguiled Eve..." Satan is presented not as a carnival jester dressed in a red suit and pitchfork. Instead, he comes as an enticing, concerned, and caring person (to Eve, then subtly, but cleverly, invoking her sense of innate independence and intuitive justice as he deceived her (Gen. 3:1-10). Raising what surely seemed to her at the time to be reasonable questions, the devil embedded in her tiny seeds of doubt, doubt about God and doubt about His word.

Paul carefully applied Eve's failure to the vulnerable Corinthians lest their "minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ." Note the term Paul used is "simplicity" not "simplistic." Our simple faith engages a simple Gospel for salvation. However, the Christian faith is anything but "simplistic"

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Reflection Connection

How does the devil corrupt the minds of people today? Be specific. Define "simplicity" in today's sophisticated world.



which denotes a fundamental naiveté. The Christian faith is so simple a child can understand it, but at the same time so sophisticated the greatest minds cannot exhaust its incredibly deep eternal truths.

Satan uses his subtlety to lure us away from the Bible's simple truth. Simplicity basically means a single-hearted faith in Jesus Christ. For those who embrace the simplicity in Christ, there remains no room whatsoever for any other lover than Jesus. Simplicity in Jesus Christ is simple obedience to Jesus Christ. Consequently, nothing spawns more thrill into the devil's mind than for our faith in Christ to become corrupt.

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Third, Paul's concern covered the *fidelity of the bride* (vv. 4-12). We are faithful to Jesus and Jesus alone. No other groom may take the bride, the church. Any other preaching is preaching another Jesus and therefore, another Gospel (cp. Gal. 1:1-4). The wonder of His sinless life, the magnitude of His substitutionary death, the amazement of His saving power, and the glory of His soon, certain return, overflows with awe and worship. We may never find a better Christ for there is no other saving Christ. Hence, the Gospel satisfies us. Paul could write elsewhere, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ" (Rom. 1:16a). Why? For the Gospel of Christ is "the power of God unto salvation to all those who believe, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16b).

Vindicating his apostleship (vv. 5-6), Paul went on to rehearse his financial policies (vv. 7-12). While Paul lamented their misunderstanding, he placed no further burden upon them (v. 9). Paul displayed apostolic pride in the fact he preached freely the Gospel, depending upon no man to support him (vv. 10-12). Yet his vocation as a tentmaker became no excuse for churches to abuse other ministers who also freely preached the Gospel even though they legitimately lived from the Gospel.

II. Our Gravitation toward Ungodly Jealousy (vv. 13-33)

While Paul demonstrates the possibility of "godly jealousy" being the sinful human beings we are, wed to a horribly depraved sin nature (cp. Eph. 2:1), we possess the tendency to gravitate toward an unhealthy, ungodly jealousy.

Paul describes in the clearest terms the false teachers who displayed godless characteristics. He writes, "For such *are* false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore *it is* no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works." (2 Cor. 11:13-15).

Jesus was careful to often warn His disciples of false prophets (Matt. 7:15). Even Paul had earlier warned the Ephesian elders about dangerous teachers



(Acts 20:29). Three traits summarize the ungodly toward which the weak tend to gravitate. First, they were “false apostles,” claiming they spoke the words of the Almighty, and were sent from the Almighty. Their claim, however, was false. Second, they were “deceitful workers.” This was their bread-and-butter approach to success. The term translated “deceitful” denotes a lure or a trap. Satan’s helpers must ever use deceit to trap the people of God.

Third, the ungodly were masters of disguise, for they “transformed themselves” into ministers of righteousness. If their father the devil could change himself (cp. John 8:44), the Corinthians should remain unsurprised if Satan’s workers could do likewise. Just how many times Satan has deceived the children of God by transforming himself into God’s angel is impossible to tell. We may be sure the devil is master at his trade.

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Reflection Connection

Do you think churches are more impressed with how a man preaches than with what he proclaims? Is pulpit oratory a form of outward appearance? Explain.

As a strategy to teach the Corinthians about ungodly jealousy, Paul reluctantly catalogued human comparisons in dealing with this sensitive issue (vv. 16-23). While he was obviously uncomfortable, he undoubtedly felt that in order to deal straight forward with the Judaizers at Corinth, he had to meet them, so to speak, on their home turf. And, since they placed so much stock in human comparisons, this is where Paul found himself.

Hear how Paul puts it, “I say again, Let no man think me a fool; if otherwise, yet as a fool receive me, that I may boast myself a little. That which I speak, I speak *it* not after the Lord, but as it were foolishly, in this confidence of boasting. Seeing that many glory after the flesh, I will glory also. For ye suffer fools gladly, seeing ye *yourselves* are wise” (vv. 16-19).

The Corinthians were well aware that whatever gifts Paul possessed, he fully understood the gifts were graciously given by God (1 Cor. 4:17; cp. Phil. 3:3). Even more, he openly conceded he was about to pen something capable of being viewed as sheer “glorying after the flesh.” Nonetheless, Paul took the risk and began his comparison.

Apparently the Corinthian church was largely impressed by servants who rehearsed their achievements (v. 19), even foolishly submitting to those who appeared to appear the most authoritative (v. 20). Is it really any different today? Are churches more inclined to follow quiet, passive humility or bombastic, overly-confident flash? Those to whom Paul referred “devoured” the church. Hence, Paul let loose with a round of steamy credentials that undoubtedly blew their socks off (vv. 21-23)!

Finally, one thing Paul experienced, the notorious Judaizers most probably did not: he suffered for his service to Christ. Paul records some of the vicious experiences he endured, “...in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure,



in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; *In journeyings...in perils...of robbers...by mine own countrymen...by the heathen...in the city...in the wilderness...in the sea...among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness...in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches.*" (2 Cor. 11:23-28).

Whether in direct persecution or physical deprivation, Paul endured suffering for the cause of Christ, a resume item the ungodly Judaizers did not—indeed could not—match. In addition, the Apostle not only had the care of all the churches (v. 28) but sustained personal criticism from his opponents (v. 29). No wonder Paul ended his teaching experiment by appealing to the glory of God displayed in suffering for Jesus' sake (v. 30).

Golden Greek Nugget

Paul warned the Corinthian believers about the incredible power of the evil one, "And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light" (v. 14). The Greek term translated "transformed" means to change in appearance or form, denoting an outward change alone. Satan disguises himself as one going to a costume party would put on fake beards, etc. pretending to be another. Hence, while Satan can change himself outwardly, he cannot change his inner nature. He lives to deceive in order to destroy.

Wrap Up

Understanding how to deal with his critics without appealing to his service and sacrifice may have been one of the greatest challenges Paul faced with the Corinthian church. While Paul possessed a measure of Christ's humility and encouraged a humble spirit in others, he nonetheless remained confident his service for Christ mattered in God's Kingdom. Every believer must learn to walk the razor's edge as did Paul. Being confident in Christ while remaining humble toward others is the perfect balance for retaining purity in the Christian walk.

