

## 2 Cor 11:1-6 Pastoral Concerns, part 2

We live in a wicked, immoral culture in which perversion and moral corruption are normal. The majority of people no longer uphold Christian traditions and values. It is increasingly rare for people to follow the biblical pattern for godly living. Many people today live together without the benefit of marriage, and those who do marry often have had several relationships prior to marriage. Today, it's rare for a father to present his daughter as a "chaste virgin" to her fiancé on her wedding day.

Last week we began looking at this passage in which Paul uses the imagery of a wedding ceremony to describe the relationship of the church to Christ. Verse 2 – Paul has "betrothed" the church "to one husband, that I may present *you as* a chaste virgin to Christ." Paul's hope is to retain the purity of the church until it is presented to Christ at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.

However, something at the church was causing Paul much concern—notice verse 3a – "for I fear." He was concerned about the spiritual status of the church. False teachers had crept in and were deceiving the people. These false teachers were corrupting the minds of the people, turning them away from the Gospel into error. That is a major problem, and that's what Paul is concerned about.

Just like Paul is concerned about false teachers in the church at Corinth, many pastors are concerned about false teachers that may be influencing their churches. A church needs to be discerning enough to prevent false teachers from gaining access and authority with it.

The issue here is toleration—vs. 1 "*bear with me,*" vs. 4 "you may well *put up with* it." The question is, whom do we put up with? Whom do we allow to have an influence in the church? We should allow only those who stand for and teach the biblical Gospel. We should *not* tolerate or bear with those who teach error and falsehood—especially error regarding Jesus and the Gospel. We should have no tolerance for error on these subjects.

The text reveals several common pastoral concerns. These are serious, grave fears that plague many pastors. Pastors have good reason to be concerned about these issues. The availability and spread of false teaching is exceedingly common these days. With the power of the Internet at their disposal, and with biblical literacy and loyalty to the Bible at a very low level in many churches, false teachers are successfully spreading their errors throughout the world. And many people are being taken in by their subtle, crafty arguments. So this is still a major concern today.

Further, as we look at these concerns, we must make sure that we are not contributing to any of these pastoral fears. We don't want to be the ones the pastor is concerned about.

Last time, we looked at the first one of these pastoral concerns:

I. Disloyalty is a pastoral concern. .2

A. .2a Pastors feel a sense of godly jealousy over the church. They want to protect the flock from those who would lead them astray—the false teachers.

B. .2b Pastors want to protect the purity of the church. Paul views himself as the father of the bride. He wants to protect the church so that he can present her as a “chaste virgin” to Christ.

One of the main responsibilities of pastors is to protect the moral and spiritual purity of the church. The pastor's job is to teach the truth and prevent error from creeping in or having an influence in the church.

II. Deception is a pastoral concern. .3

.3 – Paul expresses his fear or concern here—“But I fear ...” There seems to be good reason for concern that the false teachers were deceiving the church. These imposters were seeking to seduce the church into unfaithfulness. Paul is very distressed about this situation. After all the efforts he'd poured into the church, they were readily tolerating basic theological error—and not over minor matters. They were being deeply deceived, and Paul was very concerned about that.

We have good reason to be concerned about deception in the church. I was reminded just the other day that the church is always only one or two generations away from complete apostasy. The church begins to stray by accepting false teachers, and it's not too long before it accepts a false Jesus, a false Spirit, and a false Gospel (vs. 4). That's what happened in many of the mainline denominations. Little by little, they allowed error to creep in, so that today, there is little or no Gospel witness in many of these churches. They have religion, but not genuine Christianity. So we have to be very diligent to prevent that from happening to us.

Note a few things about this deception:

A. .3a Deception is satanic. I.e., it's like when the serpent deceived Eve.

1. The serpent's deception was an historical event.

Paul believed in the Genesis creation account. He believed that “the serpent deceived Eve” as Genesis 3:13 tells us—Eve said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.” That was a historical event, not a myth or religious legend but a very important event.

Much NT doctrine is based on OT teaching. We can’t dismiss OT statements and still retain NT Christianity. The fall of man into sin is a primary biblical teaching.

The serpent deceived Eve. The root word (απατη) means “to mislead, to beguile.” This word as used here is an intensified form of the word (ἐξηπάτησεν) and implies *complete* deception.

2. The serpent’s deception was by means of “craftiness” (πανουργία). Gen 3 tells us that the “the serpent was more subtle/crafty/shrewd” than the other wild animals. The word refers to cunning trickery, wicked craftiness, or treachery.
3. How did Satan do that to Eve? The Genesis account tells us that...
  - a) He called God’s word into question/doubt—“Yea, hath God said ...?”
  - b) He cast doubt on the goodness of God—God is withholding something from her; God does not want the best for her.
  - c) He appealed to her self-interest—she would be like God if she ate the fruit.
  - d) He appealed to her senses—the fruit looked really good; no doubt it would be very tasty.
  - e) He lied to her—“You shall not surely die.”

We all know the story; Eve yielded to Satan’s deceitfully cunning tricks. She gave in to this evil influence, and along with Adam, plunged humanity into the depravity of sin.

The threat in view in 2 Cor 11 is that these satanic false teachers would deceive the Corinthians into disloyalty to Christ. They used cunning, shrewd words and arguments to lead the people astray.

4. .3b The serpent’s deception affected their “minds” (νοήματα), i.e., their thinking, their ideas, their beliefs. Satan wanted to influence how Eve was thinking because thoughts lead to actions.

**App:** How and what we think are exceedingly important. “As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.” Cf. 10:5—“casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God.” Our goal should be to bring “every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.” Cf. Phil 4:8. Our goal is to think God’s thoughts after him. We must not allow ourselves to engage in corrupt thinking.

The mind is the battlefield. Satanic false teachers are seeking to corrupt our minds, so we must be on guard against that. Virtually the entire culture is working to corrupt our minds. We see immoral images all around us; we live in a pornographic culture. Evil ideas permeate our society. So we have to focus our minds on Jesus and the Bible in order to avoid immorality and error.

5. Jesus called Satan the “father” of lies (Jn 8:44). He has many schemes and devices to deceive us, so we have to be very careful and discerning.

*Mk 13:22 For false Christs and false prophets shall rise, and shall shew signs and wonders, to seduce, if it were possible, even the elect.*

*2 Corinthians 2:11 lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices.*

The word “devices” or “purposes” here (νόημα) has the same root word.

*2 Corinthians 11:14 ... Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light.*

**App:** Satanic deception is often seductive/tempting. Satan will use anything that attracts us to disobey God and indulge our own sinful desires. False teaching may use seductive and enticing arguments. False teachers often use shrewd, cunning arguments to lead people astray. That’s why we need strong biblical discernment to tell the true from the false.

**E.g.**, Andy Stanley is a very influential pastor of a mega-church in Atlanta. Recently he's been making shrewd, deceptive—and false—arguments to convince his church and many others that they should be welcoming and affirming to the LGBT agenda. And many other preachers are making the same arguments. Many churches are following this corrupt line of thinking. What will be the result? We are seeing the initial steps toward total apostasy. If you can twist the Bible to make it support the LGBT agenda, you can twist it to say anything. Sadly, many churches are compromising and capitulating on this issue.

You perhaps heard that the pope has opened the door for the RCC to bless homosexual “unions” and to allow LGBT people to be baptized and to serve as God-parents. That's just another step away from loyalty to Christ and the Gospel and toward apostasy.

**BTW**, when we have the truth, we do not need to use craftiness, shrewdness, or trickery to convince people. We don't need gimmicks or fads; we don't need worldly arguments. That's what false teachers do—they use deceitful trickery and deceptive schemes. We don't do that. We simply proclaim the Gospel, believing it is the power of God unto salvation (Rom 1:16). We preach the word and trust the HSp to do his work. We do not engage in deception of any kind because deception is satanic.

B. .3c Deception corrupts.

1. The danger in view here is that their minds would be corrupted from Christ. Their thoughts would turn away from the Gospel and would accept falsehood.
2. The word “corrupted” (φθείρω) means, “to ruin, to waste, to spoil, to destroy.” And the sense here is “corrupted away from, to be diverted from.” This intellectual corruption would lure the people away from Christ.

**Quote:** Like [Satan, the false teachers] appear in friendly and alluring guise, but ... they contradict the Word of God and lead their victims to spiritual disaster.<sup>1</sup>

That's exactly what happens when people follow false teachers.

3. Here's the disaster—their minds may be “corrupted from the simplicity in Christ.”

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<sup>1</sup> Hughes, 376.

- a) The word “simplicity” (ἀπλότης) means “single-mindedness; undivided loyalty; unswerving commitment.”

It’s like a bride who has single-hearted devotion to her husband; she has no interest in anyone else. She does not turn away from her husband and embrace another. The relationship between the bride and groom is exclusive and undivided; the woman is loyal to her husband alone.

And the groom would be exceedingly disappointed if his wife lacked single-minded devotion to him. If her loyalty were divided—if she were carrying on with someone else—it would ruin the relationship.

- b) Sadly, the people at Corinth were listening to the satanic false teachers. The church’s single-minded devotion to Christ was wavering because of this evil influence.

**App:** False teachers can deceive us and corrupt our minds away from loyalty to Christ, but other things can do that as well.

We must recognize that *anything* that threatens our undivided loyalty and commitment to Christ is evil and satanic. We must not tolerate anything that would draw us away from single-minded devotion to Christ. Whatever hinders our undivided loyalty to Christ is sin.

Mt 6:33

Is there anything in your life corrupting your mind or threatening your single-minded devotion to Christ? It might not be false teachers, but it could be things like money, career, a relationship, recreation, or media. Many things in the world today threaten to corrupt our thinking and lead us away from God. Anything threatening your unswerving, undivided devotion to Christ is a concern. We must get rid of anything that would hinder or threaten our single-minded devotion to Christ.

What’s hindering you from reading your Bible? What hinders you from prayer? What stops you from attending church? What is hindering godly living and holiness? If there is something hindering/preventing you from faithfulness in these areas, you need to remove it. If something is hindering your single-minded devotion to Christ, get rid of it.

**App:** Deception is satanic. The Bible affirms that Satan is still trying to deceive people away from loyalty to Christ.

1 Peter 5:8 *Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.* 9 *Resist him, steadfast in the faith, ...*

We still have to be concerned about theological deception. Our minds might easily be corrupted by false teaching and false teachers. Satan is trying to seduce us or entice us away from biblical orthodoxy. That's why we have to be exceedingly careful to make sure we are biblical and orthodox in the way we think, believe, and behave. We don't want to be deceived; we don't want to become ensnared by error.

And don't think that such a deception could never happen here. Satan is a powerful foe, and he often appears as an "angel of light." If Satan could deceive *these* people, who had sat under the personal ministry of Paul, he could probably deceive us if we are not careful.

Many churches today have been deceived and corrupted by false teachers. The pastors who should be protecting the flock from immorality and deceit have failed to do their jobs. They've allowed the false teachers to gain authority within the church. Churches have strayed away from the simplicity of Christ and have accepted error. We must be diligent and discerning so as to avoid that outcome.

The best way to avoid Satanic error is to *know the truth*. We must remain alert and on guard against the satanic deception of false teaching.

Eph 5:6 *Let no one deceive you with empty words...*

We've seen two pastoral concerns thus far—the potentials of disloyalty and of deceit. I trust that none of us present a concern in either of those two areas. I trust that all of us are protecting and preserving our single-minded devotion and loyalty to Christ. And if anything is threatening that relationship, we must be willing to give it up.