

2 Cor 11:1-6 Pastoral Concerns, part 3

This is our third Sunday 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, corrupting their minds, and turning them away from the Gospel into error. That is a major problem, and that’s what Paul is concerned about.

The issue here is toleration—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. If a church is tolerating this kind of error, a pastor should be very concerned about it.

The text reveals several common pastoral concerns. These are serious, grave fears that plague many pastors.

Thus far, we’ve looked at two 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
 - A. .3a Deception is satanic. I.e., it’s like when the serpent deceived Eve. Satan’s goal is to deceive us with false teaching.

B. .3c Deception corrupts. He's concerned that their minds may be "corrupted from the simplicity in Christ."

1. The word "simplicity" (ἀπλότητος) means "single-mindedness; undivided loyalty; unswerving commitment."
2. 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: *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.

Trans: So we've seen two pastoral concerns: disloyalty and deceit.

III. .4 Discernment (i.e., gullibility, tolerance of error) is a pastoral concern. .4 Christians must be discerning. We must believe the truth and reject error. We are committed to truth and we do not waver from it. We are not gullible; we don't tolerate false teaching.

Sadly, the people in Corinth were putting up with these false teachers—"he who comes..." These are outsiders who have infiltrated the church. They claim to be Christians, but they are bringing a much different message from what Paul had taught and from what they had originally received.

App: That's exactly what the cults and many denominations do today; they talk about Jesus and the Gospel, but their message is false. And sadly, people accept it because they don't know the difference between truth and error.

.4end Not only were they tolerant/gullible, they "well" (καλως) put up with it. Someone translated this as "you put up with it beautifully," i.e., happily, favorably, cheerfully. The people of the church accepted these false teachers warmly, with friendly affection. When they should have been very skeptical and critical of them, they welcomed them with open arms. The people of the church were gullible; they put up with error; they lacked discernment and failed to see the danger of these false teachers and their bad ideas.

App: Sadly, churches today tolerate/put up with all kinds of deception and corruption. Deception is the stock and trade of the cults; they proclaim another Jesus and a different gospel. Even many legitimate churches tolerate false teaching. That's why we must be discerning.

He mentions several reasons why lack of discernment is a problem. We must intentionally avoid these errors.

A. .4a Undiscerning people tolerate those without divine authorization.

1. The “if” here is not merely hypothetical; this describes an actual situation. The false teachers were already in the church trying to lead people astray.
2. “he who comes”
 - a) The word “apostle” means “sent one.” Paul was an apostle; Jesus sent him out to preach the Gospel. Paul came to Corinth because God had sent him.
 - b) The false teachers, on the other hand, were not sent by God. They came to the church without divine approval; God had not sent them.

App: A church should be very careful *not* to accept the teaching of anyone without clear marks/proofs of divine approval. The church should listen only to those who are qualified to teach God’s word—not to people who show up without credentials and without qualifications.

If God has not sent these people, they should have no influence or authority.

B. .4a Undiscerning people tolerate a false Jesus.

1. “Another Jesus” would be teaching about Jesus that was different from what Jesus and the apostles taught. This would be a false Jesus, a fake Jesus, a fictional Jesus.
2. And the worst thing about it was that the people at Corinth tolerated this false teaching. They were receiving it as truth. They doubted Paul, their father in the faith, while they welcomed the false teachers, a false Jesus, and a false Gospel. No wonder Paul is so concerned about them.

App: Many of the cults teach a false Jesus. They talk about Jesus, but they are promoting an unbiblical and unorthodox view of Jesus.

People tend to make Jesus into whatever they want him to be. Virtually every false church has a Jesus made in their own image. Jesus to them is a liberal or a radical; he’s a pacifist; he’s a Muslim; he’s a Mormon; he’s pro-LGBT. They make Jesus into whatever they want him to be.

We *must* base our understanding of Jesus on what the Bible reveals about him. Our vision of Jesus must fit with what the Bible says about him. We believe what the Bible says about Jesus.

Only ignorant people willingly accept a false Jesus. People accept lies and falsehood because they do not know the truth.

Hosea 4:6 *My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. ...*

If anyone is preaching “another Jesus,” we must not put up with it; we must not tolerate teaching about Jesus that does not fit with biblical revelation. We must know the true Jesus well enough so that we can discern when someone is teaching a false Jesus.

C. .4b Undiscerning people receive a different spirit.

1. The word “spirit” could refer to the Holy Spirit or to a human spirit/attitude. He could be talking about the Spirit of God or about the human spirit/attitude.
2. Given that the word “spirit” here is used in the context of Jesus and the Gospel, it seems reasonable that he is speaking about the Holy Spirit. Paul had taught them about the HSp; they should have understood the truth about the person and work of the HSp.
3. The false teachers were teaching error about the HSp, and sadly, the church “received” this false teaching without complaint.

App: There is a lot of false teaching about the HSp today in many churches. They teach things about the Spirit that are truly unbiblical.

E.g. the Word/Faith movement, NAR, crazy things they do.

We should be able to detect and avoid false teaching about the HSp. We simply refuse to accept error.

D. .4c Undiscerning people accept a different gospel.

1. The apostles proclaimed the true Gospel of IX—1 Cor 15:1-4. The people of Corinth had accepted this message and were following Christ.
2. But then the false teachers arrived and began proclaiming “another gospel,” i.e., a different message, one contradictory to what Paul had proclaimed. We don’t know exactly what the false teachers were teaching, but we know that Paul saw it as something radically different; he calls it “another gospel.”

Galatians 1:8 *But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.*

3. There is only one correct, biblical Gospel—1 Cor 15:1-4. Anything other than that is a false gospel. Even adding other ideas to the Gospel makes it a false gospel—that’s what Galatians is all about—adding works to faith.

App: Anyone preaching a “different gospel” is a false teacher, an imposter, a heretic. When such people infiltrate a church and start teaching and exerting authority, that church is in big trouble.

Sometimes false teaching comes into a church very gradually. The people put up with a little falsehood, then a little more, and then a little more. Many do not even notice. They just tolerate it. At the end, they have accepted a false gospel.

Many churches today preach a watered-down, partial, corrupted form of the Gospel that has no power to save. Typically, they proclaim a tolerant, liberal, hippie Jesus who is all about love, grace, and acceptance. They preach an easy, casual, stripped-down form of the Gospel that does not call for repentance and does not require a change in lifestyle. “Just believe in Jesus and live your best life now.” Nothing about denying yourself, taking up the cross, and following him.

Quote: Jesus as Lord requires humble submission and makes absolute moral demands. Any gospel that has no moral core [and that] ... soft-pedals sacrifice is no gospel.¹

And we need to be discerning enough to tell when someone is trying to sell us a different Jesus and another gospel. If someone could come up here and teach falsehood and heresy, and if no one says anything about it, the church is in very deep trouble. We must be discerning like the Bereans—Acts 17:11.

Further, when false teachers threaten a church, a person like Paul has to boldly denounce these heretics and expose their errors. We don’t tolerate them; we denounce them and throw them out of the church if they refuse to repent. We must be bold in confronting error.

¹ David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, vol. 29, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 466.

Trans: The lack of discernment among Christian people is a huge pastoral concern still today. One of my main goals is to prevent that from happening. We ought to be biblically literate and knowledgeable enough to know the true Gospel from the false, the true Jesus from the false, and the true Spirit from the false. If we can't do that, we are in deep trouble, and we are susceptible to false teaching.

We must not tolerate theological error; we must not put up with it. We can be charitable and gracious, but we must not be gullible. We must be able to detect falsehood when we hear it and refuse to accept it. We must contend for the true faith and not tolerate error. We must rise up against it if we see it.

We must separate ourselves from error. We don't participate in it; we have nothing to do with it. When we see falsehood and error in a ministry or a denomination, we don't participate; we separate.

Make it your business to be well-educated in the Bible and in orthodox Christian theology. To the degree that we are ignorant, we are susceptible to false teaching. We must know the truth and reject error.

IV. Defiance is a pastoral concern. .5-6

A. .5 Defiant people deny spiritual authority.

1. The false teachers were apparently claiming that Paul was “inferior” in some way. They might claim that Paul did not have authority because he was not one of the original 12 apostles.
 - a) The word “inferior” (ὕστερέω) means, “to fall short, to fail to reach.” Paul fell short of true apostleship in their view.
 - b) That was not true; he was not inferior. To be “not inferior” means that he is just as good as the other apostles. Paul was a legitimate apostle with all the authority of that position.
2. The word “eminent” here (KJV “chiefest”) (ὕπερλίαν) means “supreme, super, or highest.” Some people translate this as “super-apostles.”

It seems likely that Paul is referring here to the original apostles, not the false teachers who were apparently claiming apostolic authority for themselves. Paul considered these false teachers to be deceitful workers and servants of Satan (11:13-15). So it seems highly unlikely that he would compare himself to them—“I’m just as good as the false teachers...” – seems unlikely – unless he’s speaking sarcastically.

Paul had every right to claim that he was equal to any of the original apostles, even the preeminent ones among them—Peter, James, John. He was an apostle, chosen directly and supernaturally by Jesus himself.

Perhaps the false teachers were claiming that *they* represented true apostolic teaching and that Paul did not.

3. In any case, the issue here is authority. The false teachers were denying Paul’s rightful authority in the church. They wanted the church to follow them, not Paul. They had to destroy Paul’s reputation so they could replace him as the authority; that was their goal. So they criticized and undercut him in any way possible, including the claim that he was not truly an apostle.

App: In many cases, conflict in a church often pertains to matters of authority. Someone denies the rightful authority of the leaders of the church, and that creates all kinds of trouble.

Pastors are not apostles, but they have a position of authority within the church—they are shepherds, overseers, and elders. It’s an unbiblical act of defiance to reject biblical authority.

One of the signs of trouble in the church is defiance of legitimate biblical authority. That’s the mark of a false teacher.

- B. .6 Defiant people prioritize the wrong values.

In this verse, Paul responds to two criticisms/accusations against him: 1) he’s not a very good speaker, and 2) he lacks knowledge. He admits the first and denies the second.

1. .6a Dynamic speaking ability should *not* be a high value; it should not be the primary concern.
 - a) The people of Corinth, like the Greeks in general, valued eloquent oratorical skill. They appreciated dynamic speaking abilities. They enjoyed style and performance.

- b) The false teachers were apparently quite appealing in their oratorical skills. The people so appreciated their *eloquence* that they overlooked their *error*.
- c) Paul was not a performer. He admits that he is “untrained in speech.”
 - (1) The word “untrained” here (ιδιώτης) refers to someone lacking professional skills or expertise. Some of the people in the church accused Paul of being a poor speaker.

2 Corinthians 10:10 ... *his speech contemptible*.
 - (2) It is a bit odd for Paul to say that he was untrained in speech because he was very well educated and could speak eloquently. We find him making some very eloquent speeches in the book of Acts. He was a skilled speaker.
 - (3) But in saying this to a group of Greeks, he’s saying that he was not a trained philosopher. He was well-trained in Judaism and the OT Law but not in Greek philosophy and rhetoric. His speaking was not up to the standards of what the Greeks expected of their orators. He was not a polished, eloquent, flamboyant speaker. He admits that he is a bit of an amateur in the art of Greek oratory.
 - (4) But Paul intentionally avoided using the rhetorical tricks and philosophical arguments that the Greek orators commonly used. He wanted people to be drawn to the *message*, not the *messenger*.
 - (5) Paul was much more interested in *substance* than in *show*. *What* he said was far more important than *how* he said it. Content is superior to performance.

App: We should recognize that speaking ability is *not* the highest value for pastors. One of the qualifications is that he be “apt to teach” (1 Tim 3), but that does not mean that he must be an orator or a sensational, dynamic speaker. What’s most important is the *content* of what he says, not the *style* in which he says it. *What* someone says is more important than *how* he says it.

“Matter matters more than manner.”

And regarding the people we listen to, we must not allow their dynamic speaking abilities to overcome our discernment. Sometimes false teachers are very good speakers, and people don't even recognize that what they say is false because it sounds so appealing. E.g., they can tell a good story or a joke.

The goal in our speaking is to present the Gospel in a way that the Spirit of God can use to call people to repentance and faith. Our goal is not to gain approval or applause or show off our clever eloquence.

Quote: High flown speech comes from showmen who are swollen with pride and interested only in making a splash and grabbing the limelight and honor for themselves. From Paul's perspective such methods only serve to conceal their gaping ignorance of God.²

Jude 16 ... *they mouth great swelling words, flattering people to gain advantage.*

2. .6b Distinct knowledge should be a high value. "... not [untrained] in knowledge"
 - a) Paul may *not* have been a refined, skilled, polished orator, but no one could criticize him for lack of knowledge. He was trained at the feet of Gamaliel; he was an eminent rabbi before his conversion. He likely had large parts of the OT memorized. He wrote much of the NT.
 - b) Paul knew more about God, Jesus, the church, and theology than any of the false teachers. He knew more than virtually anyone else living at that time. Paul had great insight into revealed divine truth; many of the books of the NT reflect Paul's deep, profound knowledge.
 - c) And he received much of that information directly from Christ himself.

² David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, vol. 29, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 473.

Galatians 1:12 *For I neither received [the Gospel] from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

App: Pastors likewise should be “not [untrained] in knowledge.” They should be somewhat expert on the topic of biblical Christianity. They should have significant training and a good working knowledge of the Bible and things pertaining to the Christian faith. Biblical education is a great virtue for a pastor. And churches do well to insist that their pastors are very well educated in the Bible and related fields.

3. .6end Demonstrated biblical qualifications should be a high value.
 - a) Paul’s knowledge and authority were “manifested . . . in all things.”
 - (1) The word “manifested” (φανερῶω) means “be make known, to be clearly revealed.”
 - (2) And this manifestation was “thorough” and “in all things.”
 - (3) Paul had clearly and repeatedly demonstrated to the people of Corinth that he had the qualifications of an apostle. Everything about Paul demonstrated/proved that his claims were legitimate. All the Christians of that era could testify that Paul was a genuine, legitimate apostle.
 - b) Unlike Paul, the false teachers had *not* proven themselves. They did not have the qualifications, the credentials, or the gifts and calling that Paul had. They had no divine approval.

App: Any person who wants to serve as pastor should meet the biblical qualifications. He should be able to demonstrate that he can do the job. His abilities, like Paul’s, should be “thoroughly manifested” – obvious, clearly demonstrated.

Unfortunately, churches often ignore the biblical qualifications for a pastor and choose someone who has a flamboyant speaking style or warm personal appeal, but who is not biblically qualified. False teachers are obviously not qualified to lead a church, and the church should be able to see that.

We must be very careful and cautious regarding whom we grant spiritual authority. We must not tolerate those who have the wrong values, questionable teaching, or who are not qualified.

We should value those who know the Gospel accurately and demonstrate it practically. Knowledge of the Gospel and of the Christian faith is far more important than eloquent preaching.

Vs. 3—“But I fear...” Pastors typically have many concerns for their church.

- They may fear that their church is *disloyal* to Christ. They want to prevent their church from committing spiritual adultery.
- They may fear that their church might be *deceived* and corrupted. They want to prevent satanic deception from happening in their church.
- They may fear that their church might lack *discernment* and tolerate error.
- They may fear that their churches might be *defiant* of Christ’s duly-appointed representatives.

Many of these concerns depend on the people of the church and their response to various influences. The pastor can do only so much. The people of the church must take responsibility; they must be discerning enough to avoid these errors.

It’s up to you to prevent spiritual adultery within the church. It’s up to you to prevent the church from being deceived by satanic lies. It’s up to you to exercise good judgement and not tolerate error. It’s up to you to insure that only biblically qualified people lead the church.

If you want to reduce the pastor’s fears/concerns, don’t listen to false teachers. Don’t tolerate a fake Jesus, a foreign “Spirit,” or a false “gospel.” Listen only to those who have demonstrated biblical knowledge and are thoroughly qualified. Be discerning not gullible.