

2 Cor 11:1-6 Pastoral Concerns

In this passage, 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.

Vs. 1 is an introductory comment that expresses Paul’s frustration with the church. Paul wishes that they would put up with him as well as they put up with the false teachers. He uses the word “to bear with, put up with” (ἀνέχομαι) three times in these few verses. He wishes that they would bear with him (.1a); they are bearing with him (.1b); he wishes that they would *not* bear with the false teachers (.4end).

The “little folly/foolishness” that he mentions here refers to his own self-defense in response to the accusations against him. Most of the letter is a defense of himself and his actions. He feels foolish in having to defend himself or mention his accomplishments, but he feels that he has to defend himself against his critics. The false teachers have been promoting themselves, and so Paul has to talk about himself a bit to refute these accusations. The Corinthians tolerate a lot of foolishness from the false teachers, so they should be able to tolerate a little foolishness from Paul.

The issue here is toleration—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. As we look at these concerns, we must make sure that we are not contributing to any of these pastoral fears. You don't want to be the basis of these fears/concerns for the pastor. In fact, you should want do the opposite of being a concern in these areas.

Let's look at several pastoral concerns. – perhaps only one of these today.

I. Disloyalty is a pastoral concern. .2

Notice the language here—he uses terms like “jealousy” and “betrothed.” He's comparing the church to an engaged couple. And in this case, there is some concern about the loyalty of the bride to her fiancé. Why would an engaged man be concerned about the woman he's engaged to? Because he is suspicious that she might be cheating on him. Likewise, Paul was concerned that the church had been or would be disloyal to Christ because of these false teachers.

A. .2 Pastors feel a sense of godly jealousy over the church.

1. Paul had started this church, so he definitely feels a sense of connection to these people. Many of them had been converted through his ministry. He's the spiritual father of the church.

1 Corinthians 4:15 ... *in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.*

2. Paul is jealous because he loves these people, and he wants what is best for them. He wants to protect them from those who would lead them astray—the false teachers.
3. He's *not* jealous that they have rejected *him*; he's jealous on God's behalf—it's a “godly jealousy, lit. a “jealousy of God.” It's not a human form of jealousy; it's the same kind of jealousy that God has for his people.
 - a) Remember that the Bible describes God as “a jealous God” (Ex 20:5; Deut 5:9). Like God is jealous for his people, so Paul was jealous over the people in Corinth.
 - b) He was concerned about their loyalty to Christ. If the church follows the false teachers, it will become an apostate congregation.

App: Part of the job of the pastor is to protect the church from false teachers. Pastors are jealous over the church in the sense that they don't want the church to become disloyal to Christ. Just like the shepherd protects his flock from wolves, so the pastor protects his flock from wolves in sheep's clothing. Pastors feel a sense of protective jealousy over the church. They are naturally concerned if the church's loyalty to Christ and the Gospel is questionable.

Note the words, "I have betrothed you to *one* husband." The relationship of a betrothed couple is supposed to be exclusive; no one else is allowed in. An engaged man does not tolerate other suitors trying to seduce his intended bride.

The danger here is that the Corinthian church was allowing the false teachers to gain a foothold in the church. They were being led astray—seduced—into disloyalty to Christ. That was a major concern to Paul.

App: Our relationship with God is supposed to be exclusive. No one and nothing else can be a rival to God; he demands first place. We must not allow anything to compromise our relationship with God.

Would you say that your relationship with God is exclusive? Are you tolerating any rivals to God in your life? Is anything else leading you away from God? Anything seducing you from your commitment to Christ? Whenever God is *not* first in your life, it means that you have replaced God with a higher concern/value. We must allow no rivals to God, nothing and no one else who would take God's place in our lives.

B. Pastors want to protect the purity of the church.

1. The church is "betrothed ... to one husband." The imagery is that of an engaged couple; Jesus is the groom; the church is the bride. They are currently engaged (*ἡρμωσάμενην*)—betrothed, promised in marriage.

a) The *betrothal* happens at salvation. We become part of the body of Christ at conversion.

b) The *presentation* happens in heaven. Shortly after the 2nd Coming, Christ and his bride will be wed—the marriage supper of the Lamb. Right now, Christ and his church are engaged/betrothed.

2. Paul views himself as the father of the bride. He's looking forward to walking the bride down the aisle with his daughter to present her to her husband.

In the Jewish culture of the biblical era, the father was responsible to insure the purity of his daughter until her wedding day. Engagements would typically last for about a year, and during that time, the father of the bride would make sure that his daughter was kept pure for her future husband. At the end of that year, the groom would take the bride to his own house. The marriage began when the woman moved in to his house. There would usually be a great celebration when this happened. E.g., John 2—marriage at Cana.

The Jews took betrothal very seriously. The vows and pledges of marriage happened at the betrothal, not at the wedding ceremony. A betrothal was so serious that it could be dissolved only by a formal divorce (e.g., Joseph with Mary) or by death. If a betrothed person was immoral during this time, it was considered to be adultery.

3. The church is (supposed to be) like a “chaste virgin.” Someday, the groom will arrive to take the church to his home; the groom and bride will be married. Until that time, the church must remain pure. That's the pastor's job—to keep the church morally and doctrinally pure.

Ephesians 5:27 that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

Quote: [Paul] guards [the Corinthian church] like a father who watches protectively over his daughter before she is given in marriage to her future husband. . . . Paul exerts himself to keep the church pure from doctrine contrary to the gospel as he strives to present her to Christ.¹

¹ Simon J. Kistemaker and William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, vol. 19, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 359.

That's what pastors are striving to do—to preserve and protect the virtue of the church just like a father would do for his daughter. And if there is some question about the church's loyalty to Christ, it becomes a great concern for the pastor.

App: That image of a protective father presenting his daughter as a chaste virgin to her husband on the wedding day is still the pattern we ought to be following today. Both men and women are to remain morally chaste and pure until their wedding day. We must still maintain that biblical expectation for our children. Parents must protect the purity of their children. It's a great sin and shame if people fail to remain morally pure.

Our culture today is the very opposite of morally pure. Influences in our world conspire to damage or destroy godly purity, especially among young people. Parents must be diligent to protect the innocence and purity of their children.

4. These false teachers were threatening to corrupt the purity of the church. They were leading the church toward spiritual adultery by their false teachings. And sadly, the church seemed to be susceptible to this temptation; they were listening to the false teachers and contemplating disloyalty to the Gospel. Paul wants to prevent that; he wants to protect the purity of the church.
5. You can imagine the dismay and disappointment Paul would experience if the church accepted the false teachers and their wrong theology.

Illus.: It would be like a father who had been protecting the virtue of his daughter from the sinful attentions of evil men finding out that she had given in to temptation and had committed fornication. That would be a major disappointment for any Christian father.

Likewise, it would be a major sin and failure for the church if it accepted the false teachers and followed their error.

App: One of the main concerns for pastors is protecting the moral and doctrinal purity of the church. Pastors strive to prevent immoral behavior and false teaching within the church. They protect the church with a godly jealousy, watching over it like a father protects his daughter.

At some point, Christ will come to take his bride to his home. But until that time, the pastor's job is to protect and ensure the purity of the church.

App: Sadly, many churches these days are highly susceptible to false teachers and false teaching. They seem to have little discernment because they are ignorant of God's word. They are guilty of spiritual adultery.

2 Timothy 4:3–4 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; 4 And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.

Churches often become spiritually adulterous; they are disloyal to Christ and the gospel. They accept false teaching and become apostate. Faithful pastors do their best to prevent that from happening. They work to protect the church so that they can present it to Christ as a chaste virgin.

How do they do that? Paul exhorts pastors to

2 Tim 4:2 Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.

Trans: I don't think that disloyalty to Christ is a major concern for our church. We don't have false teachers who are seeking to lead the congregation astray, and I am grateful for that. I'm not overly concerned that our church's loyalty to Christ is in question.

But we still have to be diligent to maintain our devotion to Christ and not tolerate the presence of false teachers or bad theology. We must jealously guard the moral and doctrinal purity of the church. We must rise up boldly against anything that threatens the moral and spiritual purity of the church.

We should do all we can to prevent disloyalty to Christ from becoming a concern in our church. We do that by knowing the truth and maintaining our commitment to it.