

THE JEALOUSY & GENEROSITY OF LOVING CARE

SERIES: THE IMPORTANCE OF MODELS

By Doug Goins

Servant-hood was something the apostle Paul was passionate about. In chapter 6 of 2 Corinthians, Paul talks about both his message and his identity in serving the Lord. We can include ourselves as well in what Paul writes, “And working together with Him [the “Him” here is the Lord Jesus Christ], we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain” (6:1). Paul then expresses his heart of concern that he would be found “giving no cause for offense in anything, in order that the ministry be not discredited, but in everything commending ourselves as servants of God,…” (6:3,4a). His message is the grace of God. He is secure in his identity and the only title Paul cares about is “servant of God.”

How do you respond when your ministry to people is seen as offensive? How do you convince people who mistrust your commitment to them that you really love them; and how do you respond to people who don't think you are doing a very good job in spiritual leadership? I have been in those painful circumstances both personally and professionally through the years, and I can remember feeling hurt, angry, defensive, confused, and even embarrassed by the confrontation. In 2 Corinthians, chapters 10-13, Paul finds himself in similar circumstances. He has to explain his relationships to people in the Corinthian church, defending his ministry of eighteen months among them. Paul was constantly plagued in every church he served with people who disagreed with him. He would often ignore them or occasionally mention a name of someone in opposition. However, in this case, Paul is convinced that things are very serious in Corinth. The church is in danger of changing its fundamental beliefs and core values as it is being seduced by people he calls “false apostles” who are very good at what they do. It is this fear that motivates him to produce credentials that his opponents cannot match.

We see the passion and intensity of the apostle's heart as he expresses his concern for the Corinthian church in 2 Corinthians 11:1-15. There are two key verses in the first half of this chapter. First, in verse 2: “For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy…” That is the jealousy of loving care. Second, in verse 11, Paul answers his question: “Why am I not willing to accept support from you? Why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do love you!”

Verses 1-15 of chapter 11 can be divided into three sections. Verses 1-4 focus on a right kind of jealousy, the only kind of jealousy that those who have responsibility for spiritual care over others can express. Verses 5-12 highlight the issue of generosity, the selflessness of love in spiritual leadership. Then in verses 13-15, Paul strips away the mask and exposes both phony jealousy and phony love which are very destructive. In verse 13 he says, “For such men are false apostles.” This is who he is going to discuss in this entire section.

The right kind of jealousy

Beginning with verses 1-4, let's consider the right kind of jealousy for spiritual care:

I wish that you would bear with me in a little foolishness; but indeed you are bearing with me. For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin. But I am afraid, lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. For if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you bear this beautifully [that is, you just accept and embrace it and are not the least bit discerning].

Paul uses the word “jealous” twice in verse 2. It means “an intense concern for another person’s reputation or honor.” This kind of jealousy is other-centered rather than self-centered. In the Old Testament, God says that he is a jealous God. He is jealous for the reputation of his own people and concerned about their reputation among the other nations around them. God’s jealousy is not controlling, possessive, or dominating. It neither imposes itself, nor usurps the rights of others, and it doesn’t demand it’s own way. Godly jealousy is passionate about the ultimate good of the other person. It focuses on their honor and character.

Paul compares himself to a father who is jealously protecting his children from danger. There is an emotional outflow from this father’s heart because he cares deeply about these people who are his spiritual family. The Corinthians were born again into God’s forever family through Paul’s ministry. In 1 Corinthians 4:15, Paul wrote that he became their father in Jesus Christ, and in 1 Corinthians 9:1, he says that they are his work in the Lord. This is one of Paul’s strongest claims to spiritual authority with these people: none of his detractors could claim to be spiritual fathers to the people in Corinth.

Paul, like the father of the bride, has betrothed them to Jesus Christ, and as a jealous father, he is neither possessive nor controlling but he longs for them to remain pure and chaste, wholeheartedly committed to their husband, Jesus Christ. In verse 3 he sees a threat to that. A seductive influence at work in the church is trying to draw her away from her love for Jesus. Eugene Peterson’s *The Message* calls it the “...simple purity of your love for Christ” (11:3b). Like Satan seduced Eve with craftiness and deceit in the Garden of Eden, there are other voices in Corinth, the “false apostles” he later identifies, who are trying to lure the people away from their wholeheartedness toward Jesus.

Paul is clear about this from the beginning of his Corinthian correspondence when he reminds them about what they were called into, “God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Corinthians 1:9). This is the core of being committed Christians. Daily companionship with the Lord Jesus and that personal intimacy which goes both directions. We are not in this love relationship with Jesus only to take; we are committed to serving him, loving him, and surrendering to him.

Ray Stedman, in his book *Power Out of Weakness*, asks these important questions:

Do you believe that Christ is yours all day long? Do you reckon upon that, think about that, live out of that relationship, out of that sense of the expectation of his presence? We often say, and rightly so, that Christianity is not a creed, it is a relationship; it is living with a Person. That is the simplicity that is in Christ. The danger we constantly face, even in a church where the Word of God is taught, is that we become involved in things about Christ and fail to live in a relationship with Christ. (1)

We can be so involved in the Bible and church and ministry activity—all the things about Christ—that we can be drawn away from relationship with Christ. That is why Paul is so jealous for his Corinthian sons and daughters in the faith to maintain simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.

When I was in college I remember hearing this story about Carl Barth, the great German theologian. In the early 1900's, God used Barth's commentary on Romans almost single-handedly to break the control of classic European liberalism on Christian orthodoxy. Barth was lecturing at the University of Chicago in the 1950's when a reporter queried him, "What is the most important, most profound religious truth you have ever heard?" Barth thought for a moment and then replied, "Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so." That is the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ and that is the main thing to be concerned about.

Paul was concerned about the Corinthian church because they were willing to accept rivals who presented a different message, a more complicated message. The outsiders who had come into the fellowship represented the danger of a different Jesus. These men stood in contrast in almost every respect to Paul's life and ministry message. What they meant by "Jesus," "Holy Spirit," and "gospel" was radically opposite to what Paul lived and taught. Nothing would do for Paul but to call it a different message.

If you pull several of Paul's comments about his opponents from these four chapters and the opening chapters of the letter together, a profile emerges. The false apostles were Palestinian Jews (11:22) who came to Corinth carrying letters of reference from the church in Jerusalem (3:1). They offered an impressive array of credentials, which turn out to be experiential, such as miracles, visions, revelations, and ecstatic experience (12:12, 12:1). They advocated a super spirituality which was strange and mysterious and they swayed the congregation with polished oratory (10:10, 11:16). Because they claimed to be apostles, they demonstrated an outward show of charismatic gifts in an attempt to be like the original apostles, doing the miraculous (12:12).

In 2 Corinthians 5:12, Paul identifies the false apostles as, "...those who take pride in appearance, and not in the heart," expressing showy, religious spectacle, but not spiritual reality. They focused on three things: Jesus as a wonder worker; the extraordinary or sign gifts of the Spirit; and, powerful rhetoric and great communication. That may very well be the different Jesus, Holy Spirit, and gospel Paul talks of in verse 4. If so, it isn't that much different from the signs and wonders movement today or a new phenomenon of the last few years called "The New Apostolic Movement" where men go around proclaiming great things for churches or areas or specific individuals as to how they should order their lives. Proclaiming apostolic authority eclipses the heart of the gospel which is the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.

I have a friend I have known since college who was involved here at PBC for a number of years. He and his wife left the church and moved into an arena of new apostolic authority, putting great confidence in prophetic words of knowledge and wisdom. My friend has been involved in large healing crusades as well as the Toronto blessing and the Brownsville revival. I have talked with him consistently through the years and he finally told me the PBC was simplistic and that I wouldn't understand the new level of spiritual experience he had entered into. In the last ten years, however, this man has been unable to find a church that is right for his family. I love this family, but I am afraid for them because they are deceived, chasing after things that are drawing them away from what is, at the core, most important.

The selflessness of love

The next section, beginning in verse 5, focuses on the generosity of loving care, the selflessness of love in spiritual leadership. Paul appeals to the Corinthian Christians in essence saying, “Don’t choose religious style over spiritual substance.” Look at verses 5 and 6,

For I consider myself not in the least inferior to the most eminent apostles [your Bible may say “super apostles”]. But even if I am unskilled in speech, yet I am not so in knowledge; in fact, in every way we have made this evident to you in all things.

The title “eminent” or “super” apostles could be the exaggerated self-definition the intruders into the life of Corinth gave themselves, or perhaps it was a title the Corinthian Christians gave them, “Hey, these are super apostles!” Like many of us today, the Corinthians got caught up in the outward form and appearance of things. Paul concentrated on preaching Christ and him crucified, preaching from personal conviction about the Christ whom he knew personally. He focused attention on what he was saying, preventing his listeners from being distracted from the significant, Biblical content.

I read a really sweet story in William Barclay’s commentary on this section of Scripture. He tells about a dinner party in nineteenth century England where the host had asked everyone to come prepared to give a recitation or reading after the meal. A famous London stage actor, with all his training and experience, stood up and eloquently recited the twenty-third psalm. When he finished he sat down to thunderous applause. Unfortunately the next person, who was not a professional nor a very good speaker, had also chosen the twenty-third psalm. As he started out, with very little polish, there were some snickers at the table. Barclay writes that by the time the man finished, a stillness had fallen around the table that was far more profound than any applause. As the man sat down, the actor said to him, “I know the psalm but you know the shepherd.”

The last verse of the hymn *How Deep the Father’s Love for Us* by Stuart Townend reflects Paul’s confidence in his own ministry,

*I will not boast in any thing,
No gifts, no pow’r, no wisdom;
But I will boast in Jesus Christ,
His death and resurrection.
Why should I gain from His reward?
I cannot give an answer.
But this I know with all my heart:
His wounds have paid my ransom. (2)*

When you are looking at leaders, don’t choose style over substance.

Beginning in verse 7, Paul responds to the Corinthian’s accusation that he didn’t love them enough to accept financial support from them. Note Paul’s sacrificial generosity in leadership, contrasting pure motives in ministry with the impure motives of exploitation:

Or did I commit a sin in humbling myself that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you without charge? I robbed other churches, taking wages from them to serve you; and when I was present with you and was in need, I was not a burden to anyone; for when

the brethren came from Macedonia, they fully supplied my need, and in everything I kept myself from being a burden to you, and will continue to do so. As the truth of Christ is in me, this boasting of mine will not be stopped in the regions of Achaia. Why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do! But what I am doing, I will continue to do, that I may cut off opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the matter about which they are boasting (verses 7-12).

Paul, viewing himself as a parent to these people, had lived sacrificially in Corinth working as a tent maker for eighteen months. He admits that he received gifts from other churches while he was doing church planting in Corinth, but there was no cost to the Corinthian Christians for Paul's ministry to them. The exaltation Paul refers to in verse 7 is their coming to Jesus, being lifted out of death and sin into eternal life. As a servant of God, Paul had the right to accept financial support, but he deliberately gave up that right in Corinth so no one could accuse him of using the gospel to make money. Additionally, as an immature church, Corinth had issues with money and power so Paul refused their money because it had strings attached. Giving for them was about showing off or having control over Paul's apostolic ministry. They didn't give out of gratitude to God as a pure act of worship.

The irony here is that Paul had preached the true gospel to them freely, but now the false teachers were preaching a false gospel and robbing the church. In verses 10-12, Paul stresses how different he is from them because he refuses to take support. He wants to undercut the antagonists' arguments. If they could manipulate him into taking support, they could say, "We all get paid for doing the work of ministry!" In contrast to Paul's generous heart, the false apostles were self-serving and greedy.

Kelly Lawson and I experienced an example of generosity and sacrificial lifestyle on our recent visit to Mexico City. We spent a few days with Jaime Guerrero, FLAG: spelling [?] our old friend from PBC who established a prison ministry there. I was with Jaime in the beginning when he was building a band of volunteers to serve in one prison. Ten years later, God's abundant blessing is evident: eighteen staff members are shepherding and leading ministries in prisons throughout eighteen Mexican states. Jaime is in awe of God's generosity toward them and said their budget is up to one million dollars a year. I drove Jaime's car from Mexico City to his home where Kelly and I had dinner with his family and him. We saw the simplicity and frugality of his lifestyle. Jaime wants to pour every penny into the ministry because he is sold out to what Jesus is doing in the lives of prisoners!

Destructive jealousy and phony love exposed

In these last three verses, 13-15, Paul strips away the façade behind which the false teachers hide and finally names them for what they are. The love they are showing is phony, and the jealousy is controlling and powerful. Look at how he describes them,

For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their deeds.

Phony apostles and dishonest workers pretending to love these people; they are masquerading as apostles of Christ and teaching attractive lies. Paul is concerned but he is not surprised by their popularity because he knows the source. Their father, Satan himself, the one who deceived Eve in the garden, is the archenemy of Jesus and everything Paul is committed to in his life and ministry. Satan does it by disguise which means “to change in fashion or appearance with the purpose to deceive someone.” Satan and his followers always try to appear good and trustworthy.

Every generation has to deal with its own false apostles who come to the historic church with their own version of super Christianity. The true gospel of God’s grace, love, forgiveness, and freedom, ministered in humility can be subtly replaced with a false gospel of fear, suspicion, and guilt, with people ending up in a bondage to control and conformity. Under that different gospel, people are not valued, or loved, or ministered to for Jesus’ sake. They are manipulated to meet the ego needs of the leader.

There is a sense of relief in that final note in verse 15. The false apostles won’t get away with the exploitation, “...whose end shall be according to their deeds.” They will fall victim to their own lies and perish without Jesus, which is a frightening and tragic prospect. They have done Satan’s work and will share in his fate of eternal destruction.

In God’s timing, this passage of Scripture comes on Servant Sunday when we consider the call to ministry and to give ourselves away for Jesus’ sake. As you consider ministry opportunities, not just here or in the community but in the future, how do you discern the true gospel from false gospels and differentiate servants of God from servants of Satan? Let me give you specific suggestions as you learn to separate the authentic from the artificial. Examine what leadership believes before you get involved.

- Do they proclaim the deity of Jesus Christ as the eternal second member of the Trinity?
- Do they offer salvation as a free gift of God purchased at the cross by Christ and available without any additional merit or works or effort?
- Is salvation based solely on Christ’s death and bodily resurrection?
- Is personal intimacy with Jesus the highest value?

In terms of generosity, selflessness, and sacrificial living, examine the private lives of the leaders.

- Are the leaders spiritually accountable?
- Do they have servant hearts?
- Are they free from sexual or moral impurity?
- Are they Christ-controlled rather than ego-driven?
- Are they free from greed?
- Are they free from financial irresponsibility or impropriety?
- Like Paul, are they willing to answer hard questions openly and honestly?

The author of Hebrews calls us to this same thoughtful evaluation of Christian leadership before we submit to their influence and authority, “Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith” (Hebrews 13:7). Only then does the writer add, “Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account...” (13:17). Spiritual leadership is accountable to God. In the right ministry setting, you can enjoy tremendous freedom in giving yourself away as a servant of God. Whatever Paul

knew about godly leadership, he learned from what Jesus modeled and taught. Our Lord Jesus himself has said, “...Freely you have received, freely give” (Matthew 10:8).

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NOTES:

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