

# Betrothed to One Husband

by J. Glyn Owen

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*Christian discipleship is a lifelong commitment to Jesus Christ, marked by a pledge of fidelity and a responsibility to present converts as pure virgins to their Lord.*

**Duration:** 55:51

**Scripture:** 2 Corinthians 11:1

**Topics:** "Marriage"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on Paul's letter to the church at Corinth in 2 Corinthians 11. The preacher begins by discussing Paul's response to those who boast about themselves, stating that Paul is reluctantly putting on the mask of a fool to address them. The main thrust of the sermon is the implicit pledge in Christian discipleship, emphasizing the simplicity and sincerity of one's devotion to Jesus Christ. The preacher highlights the importance of acknowledging Jesus as the Son of God and obeying Him, even when it may not make sense. The sermon concludes by urging Christians to view themselves as engaged to the Lord, with a deep love and commitment to Him.

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## Transcript

Good morning to the only fount of truth and unerring guidance, namely to the Word of God. We have been, dare I say it, grazing in 2 Corinthians for a number of Sunday mornings during the summer months, and as I was reading in 2 Corinthians 11 earlier this week it coincided I think with the morning of the royal wedding, and I was very much gripped by some of these opening words of the chapter and felt constrained to share with you this morning some thoughts that are based on the first four verses particularly of 2 Corinthians 11, Paul's letter to the current. Let me therefore read verses 1 to 4 again.

I hope, says Paul, you will put up with me a little of, with a little of my foolishness, but you are already doing that. I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him, but I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough. Betrothed to one husband. Whether he was right or not, one of the commentators present in London in St. Paul's Cathedral for the marriage of the Prince of Wales to his princess, this particular commentator felt that the Archbishop of Canterbury had wanted to stress, and did stress, the fact that

marriage is a lifelong union between two people, along with the exclusive nature of the relationship that must obtain between husband and wife.

Now whether that is a fair comment upon the Archbishop's words, I do not know, but it certainly is true to the general teaching of Scripture, and as far as I'm concerned this morning, it serves as a very good background to the theme before us in this chapter. The least excursus into this second letter to the Corinthians will serve to reveal that the Apostles' authority was being questioned. Paul was being challenged by certain pseudo-apostles, whom he does not hesitate to call false apostles, who really had no right whatsoever to the title, and to the acceptance by the churches that that title was a key, of which it was a key.

They were impostors, ingratiating themselves upon the Corinthian church in order to propagate certain devious ideas and doctrines. Now over against that pernicious influence, the Apostle Paul was in a quandary, and if you were a man of his spirit, or a person of his spirit, you too would be in a quandary. One of the things that you never find the Apostle doing is this.

You never find him bragging about himself. You never find him boasting about his natural gifts, or generally speaking about his spiritual gifts. If he makes reference to them as he does in this particular context, it is really because he is forced to it.

You see, he was in a quandary, something of this order. Because he wasn't saying much about his own authority, laying out the facts of his call, and of the fact that the ministry of an Apostle of Jesus Christ is wholly unique. These other people were coming in, and they could speak very well.

They had a lovely bearing. People accepted them, and so they were received even by the Corinthian church members. And they began to listen to these more than they listened to their Father in God, the Apostle Paul, to whom each member of the church owed his conversion.

And so you see what is happening, because of the silence of Paul, concerning his own authority, given him by his Lord, these folk are coming in and they're stealing the hearts and the minds of the church away from the rightful teacher and authoritative exponent of the gospel, whom God had used to bring them to Christ and to establish them in the faith. Paul looks upon human boasting of any kind as folly. He tells us that.

And now he announces, because he doesn't like to do this kind of thing, he announces, look, he says, I'm going to don the fool's mask. I've got to answer these fellows. The situation is too critical.

I can't be silent anymore. So I want you to know beforehand, I'm going to put on the mask of a fool, and I'm going to do what they do. Well, what do they do? Talk a little about themselves.

A little too much. And Paul begins to open his heart and to speak of his authority, and he does so in these chapters, though not so much in our text this morning, but this is the context. Now, it is against that background that we come then to the main thrust of our own text.

And the first thing I would like you to notice in it is this. It tells us that there is a pledge that is implicit in Christian discipleship. Listen to these words again.

The image is a marital one. And Paul, writing to his converts in Corinth, says, I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him. Did you ever think of the

evangelistic ministry in those terms? I think this is one of the forgotten images, one of the forgotten metaphors, and perhaps one of the forgotten truths of the New Testament concerning evangelism of any and every kind.

The Christian convert is engaged to be the Lord's. I promised you, says Paul, that's how the NIV puts it. The King James says, I have espoused you.

And the Revised Standard Version makes it still a little clearer, I think, when it says, I betrothed you, probably implying that Paul is speaking as the father of the bride, giving her away, betrothing her to the one chosen partner for her life, Jesus Christ. Now, whereas a young person is free within the limits imposed by Scripture to befriend more persons than one in the process of seeking a life partner, an engagement marks the end of that liberty and the beginning of one's commitment to one person only, exclusively. From that time especially, there exists an unwritten covenant of fidelity between the two who thus freely choose each other.

Previously, there may have been a few young ladies or young women that he or she may have befriended, wondering, as Prince Charles did, is it this one or is it that one? And there is a legitimacy about that. But when once a person comes to the point of engagement, there is a pledge involved, and that pledge ought to be honored without any equivocation, according to the teaching of the Apostle Paul here. But now, Paul's point here is not so much to apply, though it does apply, as we've indicated, to ordinary human experience, but Paul's point here is to apply to the Christian experience.

Just as a person becomes engaged or engages someone to be his, so a Christian is committed, becomes engaged to be the Lord's. That is what it means to become a Christian. It's a love relationship.

Now, it's more than that. Earlier on in this same epistle, the Apostle Paul has been using other analogies. He says, we are ambassadors for Christ.

As though God did beseech you by us, be reconciled to God. That's another image, a complementary one. Bringing two estranged parties together, there's been enmity that has separated them.

But now this is a different one. The image here is that of bringing together two parties to love one another, taking each by the hand and introducing the one to the other in the hope and in the prayer that they will love one another till death parts them. And in the case of God and man, beyond the ravages and the range of death.

The convert then is engaged to be the Lord's. Now, if you're a Christian this morning, you should look upon yourself in this sense. You should look in the mirror of God's word and tell yourself, I belong to the Lord.

Not only by what I believe, that I believe he is the Son of God, the only Savior of men. That is basic. But there should also be something in your heart and mind which vibrates when we think of his holy name and wants to say, fine am I by all ties.

But chiefly, thine that in thy sacrifice thou, Lord, art mine. I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine. You know anything of that? But now let's go one step further.

The convert is engaged with a view to ultimate marriage. I promised you to the one husband to Christ so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him. Following upon the act of betrothal in New Testament

times, a Jewish man, the bridegroom, if we may so speak of him now, he returns from the home of the bride.

If he had engaged her personally, sometimes the heads of the family would do it. If he himself has been there to visit the bride's father, possibly paid the dowry, and the transaction has been confirmed, the father is willing that the daughter should be his, he goes back, he leaves that home of his bride to be, and he goes back home. Generally, before he did that, they would drink wine together and that sealed the transaction.

He would go back home and he wouldn't see his bride at least, or perhaps I shouldn't use the word at least, but for approximately a year. He would remain at home in his father's house. If he had any messages to convey to his bride, it would be taken through the services of the friend of the bridegroom usually, not necessarily, but generally that was the principle.

So if he wanted to correspond with the young woman that he was going to marry in due course, it would be through the agency of the friend of the bridegroom, as John the Baptist uses the word. Well, what would the bridegroom do during this whole year when he's apart from his bride? Well, he would go on with his normal pursuits in his father's house, in his father's home, but one very special thing he would do, he would prepare a home for his bride. It might be necessary to build an additional room to the house, or rooms.

And this is exactly, by the way, this is exactly the image that we have in John 14, when he said to his disciples, now he says, I'm going away to prepare a place for you. I've engaged you to be myself. You're mine.

Through their experience may not have been fully and properly Christian as yet, and it will not be until the Spirit of God seals whatever has taken place, and makes the future more certain and guarantees that they will grow up to Christian maturity. They were not, perhaps, as maturely believing and obeying as they might be. But Jesus had made them his own.

He had engaged them, and they were his, his bride. Though, by the way, I must bring in a qualification here. Generally speaking, the term bride only applies to the whole church.

But Jesus had engaged his disciples to be his own. Now he says, I'm leaving you. I'm leaving you where you are.

I've made provision for someone to come and act between us, the blessed Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, and he will convey all my thoughts and all my desires to you. He will be the go-between. But I'm going to my Father's house.

What are you going to do there? Here's a blessed thought, isn't it? I'm going to prepare a place for you. I'm going to prepare a home for you. I'm going there so that on the marriage day, when the marriage is consummated, and I present you to myself and present you to my Father as a chaste virgin, I shall be able to take you home with me, and the home will be prepared.

You have this same image, of course, elsewhere in Scripture. May I remind you of that classical passage in Ephesians 5, 25 and 27? Paul says, Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and this, and to present her to himself. As a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but

holy and blameless before him.

In Jewish life, an engagement then was considered as binding as the ultimate marriage itself. If you played around with another man or another woman after the day of engagement, the day of betrothal, then you were in for trouble. The man would suffer, but the woman, who was unfaithful, would be stoned to death.

It was as serious as that. An engagement in Jewish context, in biblical times, an engagement was as effective and as binding as marriage itself. Now you will notice the contractual or covenantal involvement in all this.

I want you to notice two things. There were two parties involved in the decision which Paul's evangelism demanded, each playing a covenantal role. First of all, the evangelist himself was acting in covenant with a prospective bridegroom.

The evangelist was the friend of the bridegroom, bringing the bride into a relationship with him that was a genuine relationship of love and a promise to keep herself pure until the marriage was consummated at his return. The point to stress now is that as evangelist, Paul was concerned to win the hearts of men for his master, and so to engage them to be the Lord's, not just for a period of time, but for all time, until the consummation. And when Paul, as an evangelist, engaged in this matchmaking between Jesus Christ, the heavenly lover, and men and women in sin, he did it with a view to their leaving sin and becoming perfected by the grace of the Savior, so that at last he would have done his part, that they might be presented before him without spot, wrinkle, shame, or any such thing, but pure, a pure virgin to Jesus Christ.

Paul was under contract. Paul was pledged to do that. And I want to suggest to you that insofar as you and I do the work of an evangelist, we need to be under this pledge too.

As I understand it, the interest of a New Testament evangelist went beyond the place of the initial commitment. Paul was concerned that his children should grow up in the knowledge of the Savior, in the experience of the grace of God. He writes to the Galatians, you remember, he says, I'm in travail again.

He uses all the metaphors in the dictionary, this man Paul. I'm in travel, he says. You may say that's terribly strange because he's talking of himself of a woman bringing forth a child.

That's the image, that's the language. I'm in travel again, he says. Paul, what are you talking about? Well, he says, I will be in travel until Christ is formed in you.

But Paul, you've introduced them to Jesus Christ, isn't that enough? You've got them to sign the dotted line, isn't that enough? No, says the apostle Paul, I can't leave them there. As an evangelist, I care for their souls. I want them to be kept as a chaste virgin to Jesus Christ.

That nobody smudges their lives or their imaginations or steals their hearts away. I'm concerned that they'd be presented at last without spot. Now, this is not always a very practical thing, but surely it is a thing that all of us need to remember.

And certainly those of us who are proclaiming the word of God. All this symbolizes the covenantal aspect in the Christian's profession to which I will not return again. It was evident in Wesley's hymn, it is here so clearly in the passage.

Let me come on something else, which is very important here. Stands out in the foreground of this passage, the peril involved in complicity with false teachers. In entering into complicity with false teachers.

Let me give you this in the picture that would be germane to this context. Now, you imagine yourself as a bride, a young woman who has been approached by a lover who has professed love for you. We're back now in New Testament times or Old Testament times.

And the bridegroom to be has won your heart and you have said, yes, I will marry you. Your father agrees. And then the prospective bridegroom goes back to his father's house for a year or so.

And he does the communication that there is, that goes on, by the use of the friend of the bridegroom, by his ministry. Now, assuming that someone came to the bride, the engaged girl. Assuming to be the friend of the bridegroom when he was not.

And bringing false knowledge or false rumors, good or bad. And talking to the bride in her father's house about her bridegroom, the one she's engaged to. And spinning yarns and spinning false stories.

You can imagine the great consternation that would emerge. The whole marriage might be upset. Now, my friends, that is the picture that we have here.

Paul had been commissioned by the Lord Jesus Christ to go to Corinth. And when he was afraid, halfway through his ministry there, he was really afraid. The Lord came to him in a special way and said, Paul, don't be afraid.

I've got many souls in this city. Hang on. Preach the word.

Be faithful. God sent him there. God kept him there.

God blessed him there. God used him there. So that from the dunghill of that ancient world, men and women were gathered to Christ.

And were washed in the blood of the Lamb. And were born again of the Holy Spirit. And their names were written in heaven.

And they were the children of God in a pagan Corinthian city. I've asked grace for you. Sovereign grace.

Paul was the man chosen to bring them to life. And he was chosen by his Lord to bring them up. To prepare them for the great marriage day.

Others came in there too, maybe. But here in Corinth, there were some people coming to the church, presuming that they had the same authority as Paul did. Presuming that they had messages from the Lord, Jesus Christ, who had gone to glory.

And they spoke so eloquently. And they were such, you know, their personalities were such. They ingratiated themselves upon you.

And they won you over. And you haven't talked to them very long when you feel, my, these guys are great guys. They must be very important people.

And you begin to listen to them. You see what's happening? The heart of the church is gradually being stolen away from the rightful representative of the ascended Lord in Corinth. And the whole marital

relationship is being threatened by this.

False prophets are coming in. Paul says that they came to you. One of the commentators, or comments I read, said that Paul is meaning there to stress this, that they came, they were not sent.

You see, an apostle means one sent from. Apostolos, sent from. Chosen by God and sent by him.

But these were not chosen and sent, they just came. Brothers and sisters in Christ, we need to be very alert in the church of Jesus Christ to be able to distinguish between men and women that come and those that God has sent. There are many churches up and on our land and other lands that are not sufficiently versed in scripture or sensitive to the powers and the workings of the Spirit to recognize the true from the false.

This is a tragedy of our age. God bring us back to his word and back to himself that we may be able to discern the true from the false. Now the false representatives of Jesus Christ involve the Corinthians in the peril of being deceived.

I'm afraid for you, says Paul, I have a terrible fear lest you be deceived. Just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Jesus Christ. Dear Christian people, men and women in Christ, you and I are always in peril of being deceived.

Now it's necessary to know this, not to be constantly living in dread, but to be alerted to the fact there is always the possibility of Christian men and women being deceived. Apart from the grace of God, this is where most of us would be living, in a territory of spiritual deception. Now, we have a record of the incident to which Paul refers as an illustration in Genesis 3, 1-7.

I have no time to go into it in detail this morning, but you remember what happened. God had said to Eve that she and Adam could eat of the fruit of all the trees in the garden except one solitary tree, which was in the middle of the garden, in the center. And Satan came and said, did God really say you must not eat from any tree in the garden? Fair play to her.

The woman replied to the serpent, we may eat fruit from the trees of the garden, but God did say, you must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die. Now comes the main thrust, you see. You will not surely die, the serpent said to the woman, for God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.

What he's saying is this. God didn't mean what he said. And what's more, he doesn't want you to grow up into maturity so that you have a kinship with himself.

He's a jealous God in the wrong sense. And he doesn't want anybody to share in his glory and share in his knowledge of good and evil very particularly. And he knows the moment you take the fruit of that forbidden tree, you will know good and evil just as he does.

You'll become as God. Now you know the story, how it ended. How she believed and swallowed Satan's lie.

She was deceived. Doesn't the devil deceive you from time to time? Doesn't he whisper in your ear, despite the clear teachings of the word of God, God didn't mean that. There's nothing wrong in it.

Look at what so-and-so is doing. And he or she is a great Christian. Look at what this particular church stands for.

And they're a Christian church. They're Christian people. They have a great history, a great heritage.

They're doing it or they believe it. Surely there's nothing wrong in it. Though God has said there is.

And we're deceived. And we allow human tradition and human ideas to swamp the word of God. And my friends, what happens to us is this, that we are living in a territory of deception.

James Denny tersely puts it. What Paul dreads is the spiritual seduction of the church. The winning away of her heart from absolute loyalty to Jesus Christ.

The serpent's agents, the servants of Satan who beguiled Eve, as Paul calls them in verse 15, are at work in Corinth. And Paul fears that their craftiness may seduce the church from its first simple loyalty to Jesus Christ. Now, the reason for Paul's fear is clear.

It isn't that Paul was always a suspicious man. I don't believe he was anything of the kind. Paul tells us in verse 4 why he was afraid.

For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it with ease. Paul, why do you think that these people will become deceived? Well, for this reason. Not only were they, were the pseudo-apostles cunning and clever, but the Corinthians were gullible.

Now, we never like to think of ourselves as being gullible, do we? We always think that we'll be able to sift truth from error, right from wrong. This is, we arrogantly believe that. My friend, were it not for the Word of God and the continuing ministry of the Spirit of God, we would not.

We cannot. Let's get that clear. And you, however clever you are, however many degrees you have or hold, whatever your position, academically or otherwise, you and I are liable to be completely led astray by Satan if we do not keep close to our Lord and His Word and obedient to His Spirit.

Actually, the New Testament, though I have no time to go after these things this morning, the New Testament is very strong about this. You read the first and second epistle of John. It says, John, if there is a person coming to you and he doesn't hold to the truth that we, the apostles, have taught, don't bid him God's speed and don't let him into your house.

That is for fellowship. It's as serious as that. Don't be deceived and don't lay yourselves open to be deceived.

You know, you see, there is a biblical doctrine of separation and sanctification still. And I know it sounds terribly strange to our infatuated ears. We are living in a pagan world.

But the New Testament is clear. You'll be deceived. And anybody in the ministry knows what this is.

There are a myriad of saints who are deceived in one way or another. And they are deceived from the simplicity which should be toward the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, the Corinthians were equally in danger of being, therefore, having been deceived, of being diverted from what was involved in their engagement to Jesus Christ.

There was the peril of being diverted from an attitude of simplicity toward Jesus Christ. Literally, it is simplicity, not in Christ, as the King James puts it, but towards Jesus Christ. Let me quote, I am afraid your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

That's the NIV. The J.B. Phillips translation puts it like this, from a single-hearted devotion to Christ. Now, I must stay with this for a moment.

Each of these slightly varying translations caps something of the intended thrust of Paul's words. Perhaps I could summarize it in this way. Simplicity towards Christ involves a wholeheartedness in the acceptance of his claims and in subsequent allegiance to his person.

A wholeheartedness. Here, simplicity is the opposite of insincerity or hypocrisy. There must be no question of professing something with a tongue in the cheek.

And it's so easy to do it. One set of circumstances or another will arise when you and I are tempted to say something with our tongues in our cheeks. Friend, don't do it.

It's a departure. It's a deviation from the simplicity toward Christ which he requires of us, which was implicit in our conversion, if we're really converted, and which ought to characterize our sanctification as that is proceeding. Jesus challenged the kind of insincerity that is evidently in mind here.

When on one occasion he turned to those around him, he says, Why do you call me Lord? Lord. And do not what I say. You see, by calling him Lord, they were conceding him a very high and lofty place and position.

It may well be that the term lordship had not by that stage, by that time, come to stand for the fullness of his deity and an understanding of his glory as the risen, reigning, coming Lord of all. But it was a very elevated epithet and term. Why do you call me that, says Jesus, and you're not prepared to obey me? Don't call me one thing and act contrary to the words you use.

A moment later, by contrast, Simon Peter exhibits a genuine simplicity toward his Lord. This is what it means. When though unable to understand why or any reason for what Jesus asked him to do, he did it because Jesus asked him.

Listen to these words, very familiar. Luke 5. When he had finished speaking, Jesus said to Simon, Put out into deep water and let down the nets for a catch. Simon answered, Master, he says, And I guess there must have been a look of bewilderment on Peter's face.

Master, he says, we worked hard all night and we haven't caught a thing. Period? No. But, because you say so, I will let down the net.

Have you got it? A simplicity toward the Lord Jesus Christ. I believe he is the Son of God. I mean, Simon believed he was the Son of God.

Simon had acknowledged him as that. The founder of the Christian church. God's only begotten Son.

Son of the living God. Very well, says Peter, you're asking me to do something that to me doesn't make sense, but because it's you, I'll obey. A simplicity, a sincerity, an absence of hypocrisy or of acting.

Simplicity toward Christ involves also a single-hearted devotion. A devotion that is not shared with anyone else but with Jesus alone. I promised you to the one husband, your one husband, your one husband.

Jesus Christ is not a member of a pantheon. I have met people in pastoral work within the congregation who talk sometimes of Jesus Christ as if he were but the president of a pantheon of deities. Oh, he's better than they, he's greater than they, but these other guys have got a lot to contribute too.

And you've always got to keep your eye on the others in the pantheon. Though Jesus gets that little place that's somewhat higher, my friend, they don't come into the category. He stands alone, there is no other.

Paul's words means that we must allow no rival to influence our minds or to occupy our hearts. Such a rivalry would be a denial of our Christian confession. His uniqueness demands a corresponding uniqueness in our attitude towards him.

If we are to maintain a simplicity toward Jesus Christ. Now this kind of simplicity toward Christ required by Paul is nothing less than plain honesty and consistency. Some of the manuscripts add the word pure at this point and make the term simplicity a matter of moral as well as of intellectual honesty and volitional integrity.

If this is accepted as genuine, then the ensuing portrait of Paul's fear concerning the Corinthians relates to the entire range of their life. I'm afraid of you. You're too gullible.

Room for charity there must be in every heart. And we should not be easily coaxed or coerced to find fault in other people. But we must not become gullible.

We must assess truths taught in the light of the word of God and influences exerted in the light of the same word and of the spirit. I come to a conclusion. I come to a conclusion by noting the pain involved in Paul's care of these converts.

I must bring it out because I think it is necessary for us to see the kind of care that we as Christians and as churches should be exercising for converts today. First of all, though he says very little about this, but it's there. There was the pain of being himself dishonored by his children in the faith.

Now anyone who has led men to Jesus Christ or founded a Christian church will know what this pain is. It was you who brought the word of life to that community. They were pagan before you arrived.

They were dead in trespasses and sins, and you preached the word, and God honored it and brought them to birth. And there they are. They are under God, your children in the faith.

And suddenly they have more confidence in some character that has a little bit of charisma of the wrong order. And because he looks well and speaks well, they go away from their father in God to a stranger whom they think is a little wiser. You know, that's painful.

And Paul felt it. Of course, in Paul's case there was this added reality, this added dimension. He was not only an evangelist, but he was an apostle in the original sense of being an apostle of Jesus Christ in the fullest possible sense.

Not an apostle of the churches, but an apostle of Jesus Christ with an authority given and an illumination given and the capacity to receive divine truth and to transmit it and to inscripturate it and to lead the church on. There was the pain of being dishonored by his own children in the faith. But the most important thing

here is this.

More pressing upon Paul's spirit was what he calls his jealousy for Jesus Christ. This brings out many things all at once. I am jealous for you.

I am jealous for you. I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I want to dwell a little upon this in closing because it's so often misunderstood.

Many people are a little bit ashamed of these words because they don't understand what they mean. First time I came to understand them was when Dr. John Stott was preaching in a church where I previously ministered. One of his regular visits, he was dealing with this, God's jealousy.

I never understood it before that day. Now, jealousy is love tormented by fear. Paul's jealousy, however, was no human brand, but a jealousy that was God-given and thus consistent with a jealousy of God himself.

You see, between the engagement day and that of the bride's eventual presentation to her chosen husband, Paul was, as we've seen, determined to guard her purity as best he could and her loyalty with jealous care. He was concerned to play the part in presenting her to her rightful master as a pure virgin. I don't need to enlarge upon those words.

Now, why do we find these words strange, this reference to jealousy? Well, it's generally because we don't realize what jealousy is. To be jealous is to resent the intrusion of rivals, said John Stott. And whether jealousy is good or bad depends on whether the rival has any right to be there or not.

For instance, if you're a good athlete, and you're carrying away all the prizes and all the medals, and then somebody suddenly comes in from nowhere, and you're put in the shade. And he or she comes in and takes all the prizes instead of you, and you begin to get jealous. Now, that is sinful jealousy.

There is no law of the universe which says that you have a monopoly upon physical prowess. And if you're jealous of somebody who comes in to compete alongside of you, and is going to take the prize, you have no right to do that. That's sinful jealousy.

Or, change the metaphor, if you're in business, and then somebody comes and sets up business just a couple of hundred yards down the road, and your business is not going very well, but his begins to thrive. And in your heart, you begin to get a little bit angry and a little bit hot under the collar and terribly jealous. That's sinful jealousy.

It's really sinful jealousy. There is nothing in the ordinances of the universe which says that you have a monopoly upon any kind of trade, or a thing. Everybody else has as much right to it as you have or I have.

But, supposing a man and wife have solemnly before God and their friends and relatives in church, vowed to be loyal and true in love to one another, to the exclusion of all else and until death parts them. And supposing a third person begins to intrude into that marriage, the husband and wife, or wife, whoever it may be, is right to be jealous, right to be jealous and to resent the intrusion because that rival has no right to be there. I don't want to introduce funny statements at this point, and yet I guess I can tell you this.

I was reading somewhere the other day, someone said that all triangles in marriage relationships are rectangles. They bring wrecks. They leave nothing behind but wrecks.

Concerning this kind of situation, not only should we be jealous, God is jealous. And we should be jealous with the jealousy of God. It is in the light of that that we must understand the jealousy of God.

In the Bible you see, Israel was God's bride. And he demanded the pure love, the exclusive love of his people. Sometimes Israel went after false gods and they were charged with adultery, spiritual adultery.

God says you're giving your hearts to other people, to other gods, and you must not do that. And he charged them through the prophets with adultery and called them to repentance and to come back to the simplicity that faith and love toward him require. But we find further that men and women are meant to share in that divine jealousy.

And you have two great examples, one in the Old Testament and one in the New. Elijah in the Old Testament, when Israel had gone after Baals through the influence of an evil queen, Elijah says, I have been very jealous for the Lord of hosts. Elijah, were you wrong? Not at all.

He was just exercising his duty and manifesting the fact that he was seeing things from the divine vantage point. He was God's servant. And we should be jealous of anybody that intrudes to steal the hearts and minds of men away from Jesus Christ.

Paul, of course, is the other illustration of a person exercising this same kind of jealousy in our text. I betrothed you to Christ to present you as a pure bride to her one husband. And I'm jealous of you, or for you rather, not of you.

I want you all, I want you in a pure condition. I want you in the best spiritual condition possible to present you at last as the friend of the bridegroom to him when he comes, so that at the consummation there will be no cloud. What a ministry.

What a glorious ministry. So there is a plea underlying. There are many pleas underlying this passage.

I'll leave the theme this morning in saying this. There is the plea, first of all, to recognize the true apostles from the false. We need to do it in a spirit of humility and of due charity, but we need to do it in the light of God's Word and by his Spirit, so that we are not tempted to listen to false voices coming into the church of the twentieth century.

Not only that, there is a plea here to renounce all alien lovers and rededicate ourselves, and for the Corinthians to rededicate themselves to the grace which is in Christ Jesus our Lord, and to Jesus as the source of all grace. There is no one who can ever come into your company, into your circle, that can offer you anything valuable that is not already found in Jesus Christ. In him the whole pleroma of the Godhead dwells bodily.

He is the Alpha. He is the Omega. And whatever else you may find in another religion, in another school, you find in a better form and a purer form in Christ, if it is of God.

Therefore, keep the simplicity towards Jesus Christ, which should be characteristic of your original turning to him and trusting in him. Brothers and sisters in Christ, a word such as this has got something to say to each one of us. Maybe that not many of us will be in the same category.

We differ from one another. But of one thing I am certain. This is a word for all of us in one way or another.

Let us seek to examine it, to discover its application and its implications for ourselves first, and then for the Church. And by the grace of God to manifest before God and before people that there is a simplicity of heart and mind that characterizes our relationship with Jesus Christ. There is nothing devious, nothing hidden.

We have no cupboards locked up from him, no areas of our lives that we want to hide from him, because we love him and we trust him, Son of God, lover of our souls and our Savior. Let us pray. Our Lord, our God and Father, coming into your house on this, the Lord's Day morning, we were acknowledging our sins.

Perhaps it was a very general acknowledgement. But sitting under the light of your word, your word brings specific areas before our minds and into our memories. And our consciences are not altogether still when we consider your word and our condition in the light of this passage.

Oh, God, grant to us a wholehearted submissiveness to yourself, an obedience that knows no limit. And bring us this morning afresh, we pray, each one of us, on this lovely summer's day, bring us this morning, bring us afresh, so that whatever we may be conscious of standing between us and our lover Lord, we may tear away. Hear our cry and bless us as we shall go back into a workaday world.

Having pruned us, may there be fruit manifest in our lives to your everlasting praise and glory.

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