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9:00 a.m. Christian Education

10:00 a.m. Worship

Children's Sunday School during Worship



"From the Heart: Godly Jealousy and Boasting"

2 Corinthians 11:1-15

Rev. Ron Holmes

November 7, 2010



We are drawing near the conclusion of our journey through Paul's second letter to the church at Corinth. As I mentioned last week, the final four chapters of 2 Corinthians are questioned as to whether or not they are part of Paul's second letter, or a fragment of another letter that gets attached to his second letter. There is a change in tone to the letter, certainly a change in tone from what immediately precedes it regarding cheerful giving. At the very least, Paul returns to his concern about what is being taught in Corinth by itinerant preachers and how that is not only affecting the faith of the Corinthians, but also affecting how they view Paul. Paul's unsettling about that is clear as he often uses sarcasm and invective in these final chapters. That will be abundantly clear to you as today's passage is read.

In today's passage, 2 Corinthians 11:1-15, Paul also uses the relational language of marriage to describe the relationship between Christ, the bridegroom, and the Church, his bride, an image that is repeated elsewhere in the New Testament. So, listen to the Word of God found in 2 Corinthians 11:1-15. (Read)

Can jealousy be a good thing? Mostly we think of jealousy as a bad thing don't we? Most of the dictionary definitions for jealousy are negative:

- 1. Intolerant of rivalry or unfaithfulness; disposed to suspect rivalry or unfaithfulness*
- 2. Hostile toward a rival*

But then there is a hint of the positive side of jealousy in a third definition from the dictionary:

- 3. Vigilant in guarding a possession*

If you have something valuable and precious, and you must turn it over to someone else to guard and protect, you want them to do so jealously, wouldn't you? Someone hired to watch over your children, you'd want them to be jealous about doing so, wouldn't you? A valuable piece of jewelry, a treasured

keepsake from a family member—one would jealously protect, wouldn't one? Can jealousy be a good thing? I think so.

Just this past Thursday, Kim and I were driving from one errand to another and our route took us past some of our old high school stomping grounds. It led to some conversation about those days. As most of you know, Kim and I met in the 7th grade, started "going steady" in the 8th grade, married seven years later to the day of when we started "going steady." However, that's not to say we were "steady" through those seven years. We had a couple of breakups—mostly my fault(!)—during that time. We went out on a few dates with other people. Our Thursday night drive through some old stomping grounds brought up one of the guys Kim went out with during that time. We shared a humorous story about that guy that basically went like this. This guy, let's say his name is Biff, and I along with another guy on our football team, let's say his name is Garfield, were driving to Ft. Collins on a recruitment trip to Colorado State University. I was driving. On the way to Ft. Collins, Biff and Garfield started talking about a movie they had seen the night before. Now, Garfield had a regular girlfriend, let's say her name is Jane, and he mentioned something about her being along. So, I looked at Biff, who was sitting in the back seat and I could see him in the rearview mirror, and I asked him, "Who did you take to the movie?" And he kind of hung his head and mumbled something like, "Uh...nobody. I didn't take nobody." Now, there is no way Biff would've tagged along with Garfield and Jane to a movie, some kind of a third wheel. Biff was not a third wheel kind of guy. He was handsome and popular and dated a lot of different girls. I knew he had taken Kim to the movie! Kim and I laughed about that, but it reminded me of the jealousy I felt at that moment...and other such moments, few though they were. That was a good jealousy. It was a kind of affirmation—"Hey dummy! Kim's the one you really want to be with, the one you really care about!" And the rest, as they say, is history.

Can jealousy be a good thing? I think so. H. L. Goude, in his commentary on 2 Corinthians, says, "*All love involves jealousy, if its exclusive claim is set aside.*" Of course we know the dark side of jealousy—where it becomes obsessive and isn't based in reality and fact. Or where the "love" that fuels it is one-sided and becomes obsessive. The person becomes intolerant, suspicious, hostile. But there is a good side to jealousy in a relationship of mutual love, where one is being vigilant and protective of the relationship. It confirms the feelings we have for each other and reaffirms the exclusive claim that each has with one another in a loving relationship.

That's what is meant in several sections of Scripture where jealousy is mentioned...here in 2 Corinthians, and elsewhere. It is the "exclusive claim" of God for us, and us for God. Interestingly, the root word for the word "jealous" is zeal. That is the word Paul uses here, *zēlos*. It's the same word he used in chapter 7 in describing the result of godly sorrow. Remember the list? *Earnestness. Eagerness to clear yourselves. Indignation. Alarm. Longing. Concern/Zeal. Readiness to see justice done.* It is the word used in the Old Testament (Greek translations like the Septuagint) to describe God as a "jealous" God: Most famously in Exodus 20:5 in the giving of the 10 Commandments. In the prohibition against making earthly images and worshipping them, it says, "*You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God.*" It is the word used by Isaiah, in his familiar prophecy regarding the coming of the Messiah, to describe God's motivation, "*For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this*" (Isaiah 9:6, 7). A "jealous" God will accomplish this. God is zealous in His love for us. He has exclusive claim on our love for Him...and "all love involves jealousy if its exclusive claim is set aside."

In turn, Paul has great love for the Corinthians. His anger and sarcasm rises up in him because of his desire to protect the Corinthians from false teachings that would lead them astray. That is a good kind of jealousy, a "godly jealousy" wanting to protect the Corinthians from pursuing idols. His concern for them is Christocentric—centered on Christ and Christ's exclusive claim on our lives. Paul is concerned that the Corinthians are being led astray from sincere and pure devotion to Christ, that they are being taught by these itinerant preachers about "another Jesus" than the one Paul preached to them. Paul is concerned about his standing with the Corinthians, but his greater concern is for the Corinthians standing with Christ. Not a watered down Christ. Not the incomplete Christ of much of the incorrect teaching of that day—a Christ who wasn't human; or a Christ who didn't really die on the cross; a Christ who didn't bring God's grace to His people, but rather still required strict adherence to the Law. Whatever the exact teaching of these itinerant preachers, it seems apparent they were teaching an inferior Christ to the Corinthians. And it sparks Paul's jealous response for the Corinthians and righteous indignation against the false teachers.

We ought to feel the same jealousy for one another—a desire to proclaim and teach the good news of Jesus Christ, to jealousy protect the truth of the good news and those who receive it...and to bring back any who are led astray. Imagine a church with godly jealousy for one another!

Can jealousy be good? I think so. The table that is set before us today is an example of "godly jealousy," how jealous God is for us. It is a reminder of the lengths to which God would go in our relationship—to rescue us and protect us from false gods that would lead us astray and ultimately disappoint us. It is a reminder for the Church, the bride of Christ, that she has been made pure through the loving sacrifice of the bridegroom and He has exclusive claim on our lives. Let us, in turn, celebrate this sacrament—and live our lives—with hearts filled with jealous love for our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ...an affirmation that He is the One for us!