

PAUL'S FOLLY AND FEAR

2 CORINTHIANS 11:1-15

Philip Pillsbury was a Yale University graduate - an All-American on the water polo team - a tenor in the Glee Club. He was born into the famous milling family. Philip ended up the Chairman of the Pillsbury Food Co.

But on the factory floor, no other executive was as respected as Philip Pillsbury. He started out his career as a simple flour miller - a laborer like everyone else in the plant. *And his three missing fingertips were proof.*

Every journeyman miller gets his fingertips caught in the grinder at some point. This happened to Philip.

In his years as chairman, whenever an employee shook the boss' hand, the worker noticed those missing fingertips. The handshake was a reminder that the boss was not above doing the same work as everyone else.

Because Philip Pillsbury understood what it was like to work in the trenches, his employees loved him.

In a sense, the last four chapters of 2 Corinthians are a handshake with the Apostle Paul. Paul shows-off his missing fingertips - what it had cost him to follow Christ.

The Apostle's call and conduct were legit! The grace of God had changed Paul's life. *How dare these charlatans in Corinth belittle God's work!* In essence, in chapters 10-13 Paul holds up his missing fingertips - his scars and his sacrifices - to prove the genuineness of his ministry and the truthfulness of the Gospel he preached.

Chapter 11 begins, “Oh, that you would bear with me in a little folly and indeed you do bear with me.”

Realize, in Chapter 11 Paul uses a line of reasoning that ordinarily would be foreign to him. He calls it “*a little folly*” and apologizes for it from the outset.

Normally, Paul didn’t talk about Paul. He refused to boast in His achievements. His ministry was not about himself, but about God. The glory belonged to Jesus.

But in Corinth the criticism Paul encountered was targeted at his ministry. Thus, to confront it, he had to talk about his own conduct. The man who despised the spotlight, turned in it on himself. In his mind it was “*folly*” to do so, but on this particular occasion he knew “*a little folly*” was necessary. Paul “*fought fire with fire.*”

On the great prairies of the American west, early settlers faced many dangers, but nothing as ominous as the threat of wildfire. A prairie fire could roar over a dry landscape and consume a settlement in an instant.

Often to counter these destructive blazes, settlers would do a controlled burn of their own fields, so once the fire arrive it had nothing left to burn - it died out.

From this practice came the phrase, “*fighting fire with fire.*” Today, the expression means, “*to respond to an attack by using a similar method as one’s attacker.*”

And this was Paul’s method of dealing with the false teachers in Corinth. If Paul’s enemies wanted to make “*him*” the issue; then he would talk about his ministry and explain his motives. He would fight “*folly with folly.*”

And he begins in verse 2, “For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy.” Notice, Paul wasn’t jealous “of” the Corinthians. He was jealous “for” Jesus’ sake.

His Lord deserves a pure and loyal bride - that’s why Paul couldn’t just stand back and watch this Church stray, or be deceived, or be seduced by false teachers!

What if you were the best man at your friend’s wedding, and you saw one of the guests flirting with the bride. For your friend’s sake you’d be upset. The flirting back and forth would break his heart. You’d probably jump in, and want to stop it, *for his sake*.

This is how Paul felt when a Christian was disloyal to Jesus - when he or she flirted with the world... He continues, “For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.”

This morning I’ve got a few photographs that help to explain this concept of “godly jealousy.” Before long, *prom season* will be upon us, and every dad with a teenage daughter knows the dangers of prom season.

Whoever invented *prom* had a few loose screws.

Beautiful little girls get all dressed up “*real lady-like*” for the first time in their lives. Then they go off with hormonal young men who may or may not be thinking of their best interests - let alone their future husband.

I’m not kidding, prom is a recipe for disaster. The fellow can deceive, or seduce, or tempt your little girl.

Here’re a few photos of “godly jealousy” in action. ***

And every dad would agree this kind of jealousy is a *good thing*. A father needs to be armed with a jealousy and a protectiveness over his daughter's welfare.

Well, Paul viewed himself as a protective father, and the Corinthians were his daughter. And it's every dad's obligation to safeguard his daughter's purity until she's presented to her groom on her wedding night.

This is what Paul saw as his spiritual responsibility.

The Church is the bride of Christ. Jesus is the bridegroom. At the moment we are betrothed, or engaged to Christ, and Paul's job as *FOB, or father of the bride*, was to help the Corinthians stay pure and dedicated to their Groom. For Jesus' sake, Paul couldn't stand by and watch these Christians get seduced by false teachers, or flirt with worldly values, and rival affections. [Since Paul loved Jesus, and Jesus loved the Corinthians; then Paul loved the Corinthians.](#)

Paul jealously *watched-over* these believers, so he could *turn-them-over* to Jesus - pure and undefiled.

Don't misunderstand, this doesn't mean Paul's care for the Corinthians was *selfish, or territorial, or controlling* in any way - he respected the Corinthians' free will. At times jealousy can forget its boundaries.

We've all heard of pastors who try to corral their flock and force feed them. That's not the shepherd's job. A good shepherd lets his sheep graze. He leads them to green pastures and still waters. He doesn't drive them.

All Paul wanted to do was to protect the heart of His Savior by safeguarding the bride for which Jesus died.

And as your pastor, this is my responsibility. I'm a spiritual dad over a large family, *and I care if you stray.*

You're the bride of Christ. Jesus paid a steep price to redeem you, and one day He's coming back for you. He wants - in fact, He deserves - your full allegiance.

It breaks His heart, and belittles His sacrifice, if you flirt with sin, or rub up against the world in a suggestive way. *If you love Him, you should reserve your heart for Him!* Because I'm jealous for Jesus, I can't just watch the world seduce you, and lure your heart from Him.

Corinth of old, and our world today, are both full of spiritual predators out to rob Jesus, and shame His people, by stealing away our purity and loyalty. *What good dad sits by, while that happens to his daughter?*

It reminds me of the pre-school Christmas play. A little 5 year old girl named Claire was playing Mary, the mother of Jesus. One of the little boys was a sheep.

Prior to the first rehearsal this little guy was going to all the other kids, saying, *"I'm a sheep, what are you?"*

When he came to Claire, she replied *"I'm Mary."*

Well, the little boy must've realized he'd stumbled on to a person with a starring role. He was feeling a bit second fiddle, so to justify the importance of his part he said to Claire, *"You know, it's hard being a sheep."* Little Claire replied, *"Yes, and it's hard being a virgin."*

Hey, I think most of us would say the same, *"It is hard being a virgin."* Not just *sexually*, but *spiritually*.

As Christians we're called to reserve our deepest longings for Jesus... *But that's hard. We get so easily distracted.* And Paul was aware of the difficulties...

This is why he writes in verse 3, **“But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.”** Paul was right to worry, for Satan is skillful. Ephesians 6:11 warns us of **“the wiles of the devil.”** His schemes and tactics are lethal.

Remember, Satan has been at it a long time. People often ask me, **“Can Satan read our minds?”** The answer is **“No.”** But here's the deal, he doesn't have to, for he's had plenty of time to study human behavior.

The devil knows what buttons to push. Seduction is his business. He's been luring folks into his web for many millennia. And though his temptations remain the same, he's refining his approach and his methods.

Here in verse 3, Paul recalls the serpent's ploy in the Garden of Eden. It's interesting, God's demands have always been simple - **“trust and obey for there is no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.”**

God's simple command is **“trust and obey.”**

But Satan complicates the issue with a series of *“what ifs”* and *“maybe nots”* and *“second guesses.”*

This is how he trapped Eve in the garden, and caused her to eat herself out of house and home...

First, he **doubted God's Word.** Satan asked Eve, **“Has God**

indeed said?" *Did God really mean that?*

Then he **denied God's Word**, "You will not surely die." *God wouldn't do that! He's not that cruel!*

Finally, Satan **distorted God's Word**, "you will be like God, knowing good and evil..." but the devil painted that as a desirable state - and thus, robbed all mankind of our innocence. Prior to sin, Eve only knew "good." Now she's acquainted with "good and evil" and becomes imprisoned in the struggle between the two.

Sadly, Eve swallowed the lie, and bit the fruit, and we've all been suffering spiritual heartburn ever since.

Paul sums up what happened to Eve with the phrase, "*corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.*"

Following Jesus at times is hard, **but it's always simple. Trust and obey.** Believe in His promises. Live your life as if His Words are true - *because they are.*

Stay focused on the simplicity that is in Christ. In Jesus you have all you need. He makes you righteous. He fills you with love. He's your peace and strength.

Apart from Christ you can do nothing. In Christ all things are possible. The key to victorious Christian living is to never be lured from the simplicity that is in Christ - as if you needed something or someone else.

Once a wise, old pastor gave some good advice to his apprentice. He exhorted the young man, "Preach a full Gospel: *Christ and nothing less.* Preach a plain Gospel: *Christ and nothing more.* Preach a pure Gospel: *Christ and nothing else.*" Christ is all we need.

It's the KISS principle - **keep it simple saint!** Friend, make Jesus your all in all, and you'll never go wrong.

Fred Rogers, of Mr. Roger's Neighborhood, the kids show, knew a little about the faith of child. Mr. Rogers once said, "Life is deep and simple, and what our society gives us is shallow and complicated." We could say it this way, "God gives us the deep and simple, but Satan tempts us with the shallow and complicated."

Verse 4, "For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted you may well put up with it!" Paul was worried about the Corinthian's spiritual discernment. The believers in Corinth had already revealed how gullible they were by putting up with the false teachers who'd lied about him.

The Corinthians failed to realize not everybody who talks the talk, walks the walk. You can speak of God, even claim to be God's spokesperson, but that doesn't mean you know Him. There are phonies on the circuit.

When a grandma enters our church with big eyes, and a great big nose, and furry whiskers, and huge fang-like teeth - even though she refers to herself as a "**grandma**" - someone among us needs to think "**wolf.**"

And Paul is saying this is a father's job. The pastor and elders of the church - the fathers of the bride - are suppose to protect the daughter. This was Paul's role in the Corinthian church. He warns of false teachers.

And notice what Paul says about them. They come preaching “*another Jesus... a different spirit... and a different Gospel.*” You need to know the Jesus some people speak of is not the true Jesus, but an imposter!

When Mormons talk of Jesus they don't have in mind the eternal Son of God - but a former human, a spirit child, who worked his way up the ladder to Godhood.

When Jehovah Witnesses speak of Jesus, they're not referring to God incarnate, but to some created being, an archangel, the brother of Lucifer no less.

There's a liberal Jesus - a good teacher, but there's nothing divine about Him. No virgin birth, no walking on water... not even a resurrection is on His resume'.

There's a prosperity Jesus who rather than lay aside this world's wealth, and come as a servant, and live for heaven. He was worldly rich. He lived his best life now.

There's also a therapeutic Jesus, who massages your guilt and props up your self-esteem. He's a feel-good guru who never speaks of sin, hell, or judgment.

The Muslim's have a Jesus - a prophet of Allah.

There's the Jesus of the Da Vinci Code who was married to a woman... In contrast, some homosexuals promote a gay Jesus... In America you can even find a political Jesus - of Democrat *or* Republican variety.

Yet, there's only *one true Jesus* - the Jesus of history who's story is accurately conveyed in the pages of the Scriptures - the same Jesus Paul met on the Road to Damascus, and

spent the rest of his life preaching.

Make sure you're following the right Jesus!

There's also *a different spirit* and *a different gospel*.

Once, a fellow stood up at the end of our Sunday morning service, and announced he had a word for the church. I was polite. I said he could share it with me first, and if I thought it was appropriate I'd let him share it with anyone who wanted to hang around and listen.

Well, his rant was some blistering judgment that was definitely not for the believers at Calvary Chapel. I told him if he had any guts he'd take his message to the streets. I wouldn't let him dump it on our church.

Of course, he accused me of quenching the Spirit. I told him, "I'm quenching a spirit alright, but not the Holy Spirit." Not every spiritual influence is of God. There are different spirits in the world, but only one Holy Spirit.

And you know the Holy Spirit by what He promotes. *He wants to make us holy, and He points us to Jesus.*

Jesus spoke of the Holy Spirit in John 15:26, "When the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me." The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth - this is His hallmark - the Spirit always harmonizes with Scripture, and He testifies of Jesus.

If a spirit contradicts the Bible, or downplays the truth about Jesus, rest assured He's not *the Holy Spirit*.

And there is only *one true gospel*... Christ died, and rose,

and lives today - and in doing so, He did all that needed to be done for us to be saved. So, if anyone calls on Jesus, God will forgive their sin for all eternity.

As Paul says there are *different gospels*, but they're all inferior - for they add to this finished work of Jesus.

They require us to keep a set of commandments, or observe a ritual, or believe some ancillary doctrine that doesn't promote Christ. Any gospel that requires more than "*faith and faith alone in Jesus*" is a *different gospel*. It's a corruption of the simplicity that's in Christ.

Today, we're all aware of the social media phenomena called **fake news** - it's a new censorship.

You silence what's true by inserting a story so sensational the number of hits it gets pushes down the true story in the news feeds. It crowds out what's true.

This has been Satan's strategy for years. *Fake good news* - all these different gospels - make it harder for folks to get the true gospel. *Fake spiritual news is fatal*.

Thus, we need to beware of anyone who comes preaching "*another Jesus, or a different spirit, or a different gospel.*" And these preachers were in Corinth.

Verse 5, "*For I consider that I am not at all inferior to the most eminent apostles.*" The false apostles who had set up shop in Corinth went by the title "*most eminent apostle*" - or literally "*hyper*" or "*super apostle.*"

It reminds me of what pastors do today. To impress their flock they think they need a title with some clout. So when "*pastor*" isn't enough they become a "*bishop.*"

And when “bishop” starts to fade they graduate to “archbishop.” And I suppose the next step is “apostle.” Well in Paul’s day there were even “*super apostles*.”

Yet Paul laughs at this notion of an eminent apostle. These so-called “*super apostles*” had nothing on him.

Despite their title, Paul had more *apostolic chops* than they did... He says, “**Even though I am untrained in speech, yet I am not in knowledge.**” This doesn’t mean Paul was a boring speaker. To the contrary, when he spoke it cut straight to the heart. He just didn’t speak in the oratorical style of the Greek philosophers.

A good example of this occurred Friday with our new president’s inaugural address. Most of the pundits expected Trump to suddenly sound like a politician.

Instead, he communicated in the same raw speaking style that resonated with the folks who voted for him. Like him or not, he broke with conventional wisdom.

And in a similar manner, Paul defied the lofty speech of the Greek philosophers. He targeted their hearts. His sermons were more about *substance* than *style*.

And this is how you should evaluate a pastor... *What he says should be more important than how he says it.*

We’ve all heard pastors who are great speakers. They’re funny, or folksy, or dramatic - and when you hear them you leave thoroughly entertained... *You’re just not quite sure what the guy actually said!*

So what if it sounds good, but doesn’t do any good.

Always remember the proof of a good preacher is not that his congregation goes away saying, “What a wonderful sermon,” but, “I’m going to follow Jesus.”

Paul continues in verse 6, “But we have been thoroughly manifested among you in all things.” In essence, Paul was an open book to the Corinthians.

They should’ve been ashamed for doubting him and his motives. Paul had lived among them for 18 months. He had proven his sincerity up close and personal.

He asks in verse 7, “Did I commit sin in humbling myself that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you free of charge?” Remember, while in Corinth Paul had worked to support himself.

He partnered with Aquila and Priscilla in their tent-making business. Paul had been a bi-vocational pastor in Corinth. He could’ve drawn a salary - he was entitled to one - but he refused. He didn’t want to give anybody any reason to say he was only in it for the money.

Yet here’s the twisted logic of the false teachers. Instead of recognizing the integrity in Paul’s approach, they said the real reason he didn’t draw a salary is that his ministry didn’t merit one. He wasn’t a true apostle.

Paul was getting what Paul was worth - *nothing*.

These guys had it all backwards. They should’ve been rewarding Paul for his faithfulness, instead they were penalizing him. The truth was, even the rich Corinthians couldn’t pay Paul what he was truly worth.

Paul explains in verse 8 how he survived in Corinth, “I robbed other churches, taking wages from them to minister to you.” In other words, he took offerings from the other churches in northern Greece - from Philippi, Berea, Thessaloniki. These were poorer churches than Corinth, but he looked to them to support his ministry.

The Greek word translated “robbed” is a colorful term. It was used for stripping armor off a dead soldier.

Paul literally took the clothes off the backs of the northern Greeks to support his time in Corinth... And it wasn't just that the Corinthians lacked appreciation of the apostle's efforts... what's worse is they twisted the meaning of his actions, and used them against him.

Verse 9, “And when I was present with you, and in need, I was a burden to no one, for what I lacked the brethren who came from Macedonia (Thessaloniki and Philippi) supplied. And in everything I kept myself from being burdensome to you, and so I will keep myself.”

Paul had been so noble in his approach. He wasn't burdensome to the Corinthians in any way. *How could they have turned on him, and doubted his intentions?*

Paul was a faithful shepherd, yet these dumb sheep in Corinth chose to follow wolves in sheep's clothing.

We marvel at their stupidity... yet this same mistake gets repeated every week in American churches.

I know pastors who love the Lord, and their people. They've make sacrifices to serve the church - yet they get mistreated by the very people they hope to serve.

Whereas, I know other pastors who dominate and manipulate folks, and use their position for their own selfish ends. Yet the church treats them like royalty.

The prideful pastor is loved while than the man of God is neglected. This is one of my greatest ironies.

This was also the situation in Jeremiah's day.

In Jeremiah 5:31 we're told, "**The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule by their own power; and My people love to have it so.**" The crooked preacher who scams for money, and the pastor who rules his church with an iron fist, both have *an accomplice, an enabler.*

It's the self-centered congregation who sits under his leadership and blindly supports his antics. It's a trade-off - he tickles their ears and they share in his celebrity... while they turn a blind eye to the corruption.

I've heard church members say, "**Well, there may be some problems, but this ministry makes me feel good.**" As if it's about *me feeling good* - not *us doing right.*

Over the years I've watched sincere, simple, legit men of God, who are careful not to ask for a dime, go without.

While church-goers fill up the coffers of slick preachers who pride themselves on being able to work a crowd.

There's an old saying, I'm sure you've heard it, "**People get the leadership they deserve.**" It's true in the church. Manipulative and money-hungry pastors are only part of the problem. Sadly, there's a part of the church who likes the circus - they love the elephants so much, they'll tolerate the poop that comes with them.

Verse 10, “As the truth of Christ is in me, no one shall stop me from this boasting in the regions of Achaia. Why? Because I do not love you? God knows!”

All this effort to prove himself, had nothing to do with Paul. The reason he was indulging in “*a little folly*” and turning the spotlight on himself, is because He loved the Corinthians and cared for their spiritual welfare!

“But what I do, I will also continue to do, that I may cut off the opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the things of which they boast.” Paul boasts and defends himself, to shut up the false teachers who boast when they have no reason to do so. Their boasting was empty!

Paul says in verse 13, “For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ.” Here Paul comes out and labels his enemies in Corinth: “false apostles” “deceitful workers.”

They were *phony* and their preaching was *baloney*.

They called themselves “*super apostles*,” in reality they were “*pseudo apostles*.” They were bogus!

And Paul says it shouldn’t surprise us when we see Christianity feigned. He explains, “And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light.”

Jesus referred to Satan as “a wolf in sheep's clothing” Here Paul calls the devil “*an angel of light*.”

It was Shakespeare who said, “The devil hath power to assume a pleasing shape.” Satan is a master of disguise. He

goes by a million aliases - has a zillion fake IDs and phony passports. He skirts detection.

The devil **was** once an angel. Ezekiel 28:14 refers to him as “the anointed cherub.” It says he was “Full of wisdom and perfect in beauty... till iniquity was found.”

Don't expect Satan to appear in red leotards, and horns, and a pointed tail - with a pitchfork in hand. He's too sophisticated to come at you as a caricature. The element of surprise is Satan's most effective weapon.

I would imagine some of you are Twilight Zone fans. It's a sci-fi series from the 1960s. In the second season there was an episode known as the “Howling Man.”

An American traveler is walking through a European city when he gets caught in a rainstorm. He seeks refuge in a monastery. There he hears the howls of a man locked up in a dungeon. The man pleads for him to remove the staff that bars the door and set him free.

The head monk, Brother Jerome, tells the American the man in the dungeon is the devil. He's kept in his cell by the staff of truth. But the traveler doesn't believe him. The howling man talks him into setting him free.

The traveler gives in to his pleas. And as the howling man walks away, his identity finally gets revealed. clip

At the end of the episode the traveler confesses to the old monk, “I saw him and I didn't recognize him.”

Brother Jerome's statement is worth remembering, “That is man's weakness and Satan's strength.”

This is why Satan and his agents almost never appear in sinister-looking garb, but in appealing packages... *He comes as the beautiful blonde in the string bikini... the clean-cut Mormon missionary talking about family values... the father figure you think you can trust... the polished preacher in a three-piece suit... the buddy who offers you pills to cure your ills...*

Don't believe it! Satan and his operatives are slick and sophisticated. They're polished and pleasing to the eye, but they're hell bent on your destruction. Beware!

Expect Satan to offer you a deal so sweet, you almost miss *the fine print*, or overlook *the one catch*.

Is it any wonder the best ads are beer commercials?

The devil makes it look like nothing but fun and games. Everybody's laughing - having a good time. *I just wish someone ran an ad that told us the truth!* clip.

I'm not saying it's a sin to drink a beer on occasion. The Bible doesn't say that... But like everything else this world offers it's never what it's cracked up to be.

The devil specializes in false advertising. He wraps temptation in pretty wrapping paper, not a trash bag.

In verse 15, Paul concludes his caution on deceiving appearances. **"Therefore it is no great thing if his (that is, Satan's) ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works."** If Satan can appear as an angel of light, obviously his demons and false prophets can also come disguised in a cloak of

respectability.

A big Bible under his arm and a name tag that says "*Reverend*" still doesn't mean a pastor is the real deal.

I read where a little girl was given a soft, cuddly teddy bear as a gift from a friend. But when she tried to take the stuffed animal on the airplane, the TSA screening found a 22 calibre pistol sewed into its lining.

Someone had hid it there years earlier. That's why everything going on a plane has to be screened...

*And everything that goes on in Church also needs to be screened. We need to make sure it's not **another Jesus**, or **a different spirit**, or **a different gospel**.*

For Paul to turn the spotlight on himself was "*a bit foolish*" - after all that Jesus had done it was *a little silly* to boast about anything else. But Paul did what was necessary to respond to his critics in Corinth. He feared for the Corinthians - they lacked discernment.

2 Corinthians 11 begins with Paul's folly and fear... *but his boasting here is just beginning*. In the next few verses Paul will show off some scars and talk about some of his deepest personal experiences. *Stay tuned*.