A PURE VIRGIN TO CHRIST

2 Corinthians 11:1-33

Key Verse: 11:2

“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.”

We are studying the 2nd section of this epistle. The main theme of 2Corinthians is Paul’s defence of himself against false teachers so as to protect the gospel message and the church of God. In the 2nd section of this letter, Paul’s defence gets more intense and more specific, declaring warfare in chapter 10. This warfare is to demolish the strongholds of every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God. It is to take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. We are to know that we have divine weapons, the gospel and the truth of God’s word. I could be reminded of Hebrews 3:1, “Fix your thoughts on Jesus/consider Jesus” and Joshua 1:8, “Do not let this Book of the Law depart from mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.” This was God’s command to Joshua, who was going to war for the conquest of Canaan. God’s strategy was that Joshua should meditate on the word of God day and night and obey it. Then he would win the war. In today’s passage, chapter 11 we see the words, “godly jealousy” “a pure virgin” “false apostles” and “masquerade”, which are uniquely written here in the Bible. Paul clearly shows himself as an apostle of Christ while detecting and exposing false apostles, so-called ‘super apostles.’ We will see the characteristics of a true apostle and those of false ones. Especially Paul’s jealous love for God’s flock in the church and his suffering for Christ are distinct.

**First, a pure virgin (1-6).** Paul says in verse 1, “I hope you will put up with a little of my foolishness; but you are already doing that.” In this chapter, the word “foolishness” or “fool” is written 6 times (16, 17, 19, 21). No one wants to do foolish things as a fool. However, Paul is going to do so, that is boasting, in order to help fools, the gullible believers of Corinthians so that they may become discerning mature believers of Christ.

Then Paul says in verse 2, “For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy.” Godly jealousy is the jealousy of God. Paul’s jealousy for the Christians was for their sake, not for Paul’s himself, in order that they may be faithful and loyal to God. The LORD God is a jealous God, written first in Ten Commandments, which begins, “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God…
(Exodus 20:2-5). God also says in Exodus 34:14 says, “Do not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.” And Moses says in Deuteronomy 4:24 says, “For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.” We read also in Joshua 24:19, “…He is a holy God; he is a jealous God.” His jealousy is related to his holiness and his exclusive love. He is jealous for his redeemed people delivered from the land of slavery in Egypt. His anger burns when the hearts of his people turn away from him after other gods and the things of the world. He is pained in heart when they go astray from his love, holy and exclusive.

God’s jealousy for his people is well depicted in the book of Hosea. In order to show his painful long-suffering for the unfaithful Israelites, God commanded Hosea, “Go, take to yourself an adulterous wife and children of unfaithfulness, because the land is guilty of the vilest adultery in departing from the LORD” (1:2). So, Hosea married a woman named Gomer. After bearing him a son, Gomer went after another man and another and had children one after another. But God’s command to Hosea is this, “Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another and is an adulteress. Love her as the LORD loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes” (3:2). Hosea obeyed this command and brought her back to himself paying the price. Then Hosea told her, “You are to live with me many days; you must not be a prostitute or be intimate with any man and I will live with you” (3:3). And God says in Hosea 6:6, “I desire steadfast love, not sacrifice” (ESV) or “I desire loyalty rather than sacrifice” (NASB) God also says in 7:11-13a, “Ephraim is like a dove, easily deceived and senseless—now calling Egypt, now turning to Assyria. When they go, I will throw my net over them; I will pull them down like birds of the air. When I hear them flocking together, I will catch them. Woe to them, because they have strayed from me!” What jealous love of God!

Paul had such godly jealousy for the Corinthians. He continues to say in verse 2, “For I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him.” According to NASB the translation is “for I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ.” The reason Paul was jealous for the Corinthians with a godly jealousy is their betrothal, or engagement to Christ for the hope of the holy and glorious marriage, nuptial. Here we see a wonderful revelation of the meaning of being a Christian! In the gospel story, Jesus depicted himself as a bridegroom in the explanation of why his disciples not fasting (Mt 9:15; Mk 2:19-20; Lk 5:34-35). John the Baptist said in John 3:29, “The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom’s voice…” In this illustration John talks about the blessing of church believers after him, who would be the bride of Christ and his joy as a friend of the bridegroom. And apostle Paul depicted the relationship between husbands and wives in that of Christ and the church, saying in Ephesians 5, “Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord” (5:22) and “Husbands, love your wives, just Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (5:25). Being a Christian, a believer in Christ, means being betrothed or engaged to him, which indicates a most intimate love relationship with life commitment in the hope of matrimony. In Revelation, we hear the heavenly chorus, “Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready” (19:7), and an angel’s voice, “Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb”, which is the Holy City, the new Jerusalem (21:2, 9, 10). Truly, the Christian life is a wonderful life as the bride of Christ.

Here Paul said, “For I promised you to one husband, Christ, so that I might present you to as a pure virgin to him.” In a Jewish custom, there was around one year of engagement before marriage and the betrothal or engagement is tantamount to marriage in terms of commitment. In the meantime, the father of a bride keeps his daughter safe in purity living together at home, while the bridegroom prepares a place to live together with his bride. That’s why Jesus said to his disciples in John 14:2-3, “In my Father’s house are many rooms…I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go there and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.” In this analogy of the Jewish custom, Paul likened himself to a father who raised his daughter and introduced her to a man at the proper time and was preparing her for wedding day.

And then Paul says in verse 3, “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.” Eve’s fall into deception by the serpent would be the most tragic event and the greatest deception in human history. It happened when Eve did not pay attention to the word of God in Genesis 2:16, 17, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.” She took this word of God lightly. Then she yielded to the serpent’s crafty lying, “You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Ge 3:4, 5). The serpent appealed to her physical, aesthetic desire and pride. The fruit of the tree looked good for food and pleasing to eye and gaining for wisdom, and she ate it, sinning against God.

Being deceived by the serpent, the devil, is evident in human history from the beginning to the end. The deception of the devil is very subtle. The cunning and deceptive work of the devil becomes more powerful as the end time comes close. It misleads the whole world (Rev, 12:9). That’s what Jesus said when he talked about the signs of the end of the age, “Watch out that no one deceives you”, “false Christs and false prophets will appear to deceive…” (Mt 24:4, 24). Paul also said in 2 Thessalonians 2:10-11, that Satan deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and be saved. The refusal to believe and love the truth leads to believe the lie and delight in wickedness. People are to believe the truth. The alternatively is to believe the lie. There is no middle ground.

Again, Paul said here, “I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent’s cunning your minds may somehow be led astray…” In saying this Paul surely wanted the Corinthians to be reminded of how the church became a bride to Christ. Paul said in Ephesians 1:13, “And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation” and in Colossians 1:5-6, “…the hope…that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel that has come to you…” Paul’s gospel preaching is mentioned again and again in 1 and 2 Corinthians: “Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel.” The gospel is the message of the cross. He said in 1:23, “we preach Christ crucified”, and in 2:2, “For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.” Christ was crucified, and sacrificed as written in 5:7, “Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed.” He was sacrificed shedding his blood for the forgiveness of our sins, the redemption. So according to Ephesians 1:7, “In him we have redemption by his blood, the forgiveness of sins”, an in Colossians 1:14, “in whom (in the Son) we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” The redemption is purchasing by paying the price. So Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:20, “You are not your own, you were bought at a price” in 7:23, “You are bought at a price.”

The gospel is based on a new covenant in Jesus’s blood, as Jesus said in Luke 22:20, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.” So Paul said in 2 Corinthians 3:6, “He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit, for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives.” So the gospel ministry is the ministry of the Spirit, which is more glorious than that of Moses, the law. And he said in 2 Corinthians 4:4-5, “The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” The gospel is the gospel of the glory of Christ. And Paul continued, “we have this treasure in jars of clay…” “Christ’s love compels us that he died for all.” “God is reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them.” Then he said in 5:21, “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” This can be a concise description of the gospel. Subsequently Paul says, “Therefore, come out from them and be separate. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you and you will be my sons and daughters.” Paul preached this gospel message fully to the Corinthians.

By the gospel of Christ, the Corinthians were made a pure virgin to Christ, purchased and cleansed by the blood of Christ Jesus. A pure virgin to Christ is characterized by her sincere and pure devotion to him, or undivided and pure devotion, or simplicity and purity of devotion. It is certainly related to her obedience to Christ with every thought taken captive to him. How beautiful the obedient and devoted bride to the Christ is, which Paul expected! Paul said, however, “I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent’s cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincerity and pure devotion to Christ.” What a fear! How frightening!

Paul continues, “For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, of if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different gospel form the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough/beautifully.” Paul’s fear would that they would be like foolish virgins who missed their life-time opportunity of going in with the bridegroom to the wedding banquet and live with him in eternity (Mt 25:10). What missing! What a loss! This is an eternal loss. Paul says in verse 5-6, “But I do not think I am in the least inferior to those ‘super-apostles.’ I may not be a trained speaker, but I do have knowledge. We have made this perfectly clear to you in every way.” Paul wanted them to know that he did everything for them to be prepared and presented as a pure virgin to Christ.

We should watch out for what sneaks into our minds to divest us from our sincere and pure devotion to Christ. It can be love of the world, worldly thoughts, physical sinful pleasure, a relativistic idea with absolutes being removed from the word of God, doubt, complaints, bitterness, disappointment, despair, etc. God wants us to be presented as a pure virgin with sincere and pure devotion to Christ. Devotion is a beautiful word. A wife or husband is to be devoted to a family and an employee is to be devoted to the company. But we are to be devoted to Christ in the thought of the day of being presented to him. This devotion cannot be made in a day. We need daily devotion so that we may be really prepared to be presented as a pure virgin to him. This is God’s earnest plea and hope for us. May each of us bear the wonderful grace of being a bride to Christ, and come to have godly jealousy for God’s flock of sheep so that they may also be presented as a pure virgin to Christ.

**Second, a apostle of Christ (7-33).** In this part, we see the life of a true apostle, Paul and the characteristics of false apostles. He says in verses 7-9, “Was it a sin for me to lower myself in order to elevate you by preaching the gospel of God to you free of charge? I robbed other churches by receiving support from them so as to serve you. And when I was with you and needed something, I was not a burden to anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied what I needed. I have kept myself from being a burden to you in any way, and will continue to do so.” As an apostle of Christ, he was humble and sacrificially serving.

And in verses 10 and 11, “As surely as the truth of Christ is in me, nobody in the regions of Achaia will stop this boasting of mine. Why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do!” In all such humble serving life, the truth of Christ and the love of God were in him.

In verse 12, “And I will keep on doing what I am doing in order to cut the ground from under those who want an opportunity to be considered equal with us in the things they boast about.” At that time it was a norm that preachers or teachers received support from the people who heard them. So the accusers of tempted Paul to receive such a support so that they would be considered on the same level with Paul and justify their boasting. However, Paul was very clear in this matter and would keep doing what he has been doing before God.

And then he says in verses 13-15, “For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerade as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve.” Now at this point Paul directly denounces them as false apostles. Here the word “masquerade” is written 3 times, assuring that they were false, deceitful, pretending to be true, though not. In this way, Paul wanted the Corinthian believers not to be gullible but truly discerning. The discernment based on the word of truth is one of the most important characteristics of a pure virgin to Christ, with which they cannot just follow the trend of the world or even the majority among believers.

In the following verses, we see Paul’s reluctant, yet humble boasting. Especially in verses 23-29 he testifies to his suffering for Christ, “…I have worked much harder, been prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own country men, in danger from Gentiles, in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have laboured and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.” Truly, the life of true apostles is to participate in the sufferings of Christ, willingly without limit, which the false apostles cannot copy.

And Paul says in verses 28 and 29, “Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?” This is Paul’s inner struggle for others and churches of God, which is really beautiful before God. In this way, Paul himself lived as a pure virgin to Christ as an apostle of Christ for the hope of meeting the Lord.

Thank God for his precious words. Thank and praise God for making each of us a bride to Christ, purchased and cleansed by the blood of Christ Jesus. May we prepare ourselves as a pure virgin with our undivided and sincere pure devotion to him, discerning lies and the masquerading of the god of this age, and also prepare God’s flock of sheep to be presented to Christ Jesus our Lord.