

Date: January 13-14, 2024
Title: Virtue or Vice: Jealousy
Scripture: 2 Corinthians 11:1-4, 12-15
Speaker: Kurt Bjorklund

Let's pray together. God, I thank you for bringing all of us together today, Online, in Wexford, the Chapel, the Strip District, Butler, Beaver, and Southpointe. Lord, I ask today that you would speak to each of us. That my words would reflect your word in content, tone, and emphasis. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Last weekend we began a series that we're calling *Virtue or Vice*. We're looking at Second Corinthians chapters 10 through 13. And my guess is very few of us said you know what I really want to do to start the year is study Second Corinthians chapters 10 through 13 because it's not one of those sections of Scripture that you even really know what's there. Even if you've studied your Bible a lot, even if you've done *Bible Recap*, it's just not that memorable.

And I realized when I say that to start, some of you are saying glad I braved the snow today. But here's what is happening in Second Corinthians chapters 10 through 13, and that is the Apostle Paul is in a sense, defending himself because some of these people had come into the church at Corinth. He called them the super-apostles because they were puffing themselves up, knocking him down, and he started to defend himself. In the context of this passage, he talks about some virtues that are in some ways surprising because they're the kinds of things when you first hear them, you say that doesn't sound much like a virtue.

We talked last week about boasting and how we can boast in something that makes us feel good, that's temporal, or we can boast in Christ. Today we're going to talk about jealousy. My guess is very few of us would say I can think of a lot of positive examples of jealousy because as soon as you hear jealousy what goes through your mind is a crazy ex-boyfriend or girlfriend or a boyfriend or girlfriend of somebody you know where you're saying you should run from that person.

But jealousy here, the way Paul uses it, says that he has a godly jealousy. So, there must be a kind of jealousy that isn't a vice, isn't negative, and has a positive to it. The way that he describes it in verse two is he says I have the jealousy, basically, of a father who wants to present his daughter on her wedding day pure because very few dads who have little girls say, you know what I want, I want all kinds of creeps to come around and prey on you. But they say I want something better for you. And he says that's how I feel about the people at the church in Corinth.

So, what is it that is godly jealousy? How does it help you or me in our lives? Because you may say that's one thing for the Apostle Paul, but how does that apply to me? Well, I would suggest when we read through this passage, we see that there is something to knowing the truth, something to living the truth, and something to sharing or proclaiming the truth.

Here's how we see this in chapter 11, verse three, after he's said that he has this godly jealousy. He says, "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." He

says he fears that the people he's invested in will be led astray. And by referencing the serpent, he's obviously alluding to Genesis three where the serpent came into the garden and deceived Eve. He's saying it is possible that you can be deceived.

So, there are a few things that this means. One is that there is a truth, a standard, a better way, and there's a possibility of being deceived or moved away from it. In James chapter 5, verse 19, we're told that James was saying that he was concerned the people may wander from the truth. So, you can be deceived, or you can wander from what is the best or right way to live.

It also means that there's a reality here of a spiritual battle because the serpent is thought to be known to be Satan himself. So, the idea of this when Paul uses this is he says I want you to know that there is a battle in your mind, a battle in your life about truth. And if you're not careful, you will end up deceived. You will end up in a place where you're not embracing truth, but instead, you're embracing a lie.

Here's what we see in Genesis 3, verse 1. It says, "Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, 'Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'" Now, right there, what happens is you get a little change because he didn't say you can't eat from any trees, that you can eat from the garden except for one. And so, he's changing the word of God.

Then he says this, "The woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat fruit from the trees in 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.'" If you just read this without reading the statement in Genesis to where it happens, you may miss that here. Eve now adds to the word of God and subtracts from it.

And so, what you have as a pattern for the serpent to deceive people is to say you can change the word of God to fit what works in your life, or you can add to it, or you can subtract from it. All three of them have a very similar outcome in your life. What that means is whenever you or I say I think that I have a better approach than what the Bible says, then we are living in the same place.

I don't know how many of you are old enough to remember this way, but it's online now. It used to be when you bought a car, whether you bought it new or used, that in the glove box, people kept the owner's manual. Do you remember this? You would pull the owner's manual out any time a light came on your dash, and you'd go through and find what it meant. Now it's all online. Most cars probably don't even have these anymore. But here's what was true about the owner's manual, you could drive your car and ignore the owner's manual most of the time. But when things were complex, you wanted to look at the owner's manual to make sure you didn't do something stupid to mess up your car. So, when a light would come on, you would look at the owner's manual, and go oh, what does this mean? And if you ignored certain lights, it might work out, but it might not. So, if it says change your oil and you're like I don't need to do that, drive your car for 20,000 miles, and never change your oil, you'd have a problem.

Now, most of us would say well, I know that, I just kind of picked that up, I learned that. But it was in the owner's manual that it taught us how to do it. And when you say well, I don't like the owner's manual. I'm going to change it. I'm going to do it another way. My analogy here is God is the creator, the one who made you and me thrive, has given us an owner's manual. And every time we add to, ignore, or change what the Bible says, what we're saying is I'm going to make up my own standard.

It would be a little bit like this. If you were to say I know that the owner's manual says to put gasoline in my car but gasoline's expensive so I'm going to try something else. What would happen is your car would cease to function. You would lose the very freedom because you were using it in a way it wasn't designed to be used.

The same thing is true in your life and in my life. So, he says here's my fear. It's that you're going to be deceived. You're not going to know the truth. You're not going to continue to embrace the truth. Then he defines this just a little bit. Verse 4, "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 Spirit you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough."

He says here's what you'll do. Part of the deception is you'll have a different Jesus altogether. So instead of Jesus who is the Savior, He becomes a moral example, a self-improvement deity instead of the Spirit of God who empowers us for service and convicts us of sin. We get a spirit that does tricks and helps us get the wealthier, better life that we want. And instead of the gospel that says it's good news that God has done what I can't do, we turn it into some other kind of gospel. And he's saying, here are some of the ways that you can be deceived.

Now, certainly, there are a lot of ways to be deceived, not know, or embrace the truth. But one piece of that is just not embracing the straight message of the gospel. Don Carson wrote this years ago about truth. He said, "The appeal to limitless toleration...presupposes the greatest evil is to hold a strong conviction that certain things are true and their contraries are false... But we have no right to treat as optional anything God has said." You see, what happens, maybe personally, maybe on a grander scale, is we say I don't want to be that person who has these beliefs that say this is true and something else is because it's contrary, makes it false. But what Don Carson said is we can't treat as optional what God has said because it's like saying then that the owner's manual is optional.

Now, there's a chart that I want to show you. This comes from Neil Shenvi's book on modern critical theory, and it will appear on the screen. I don't agree with everything Neil Shenvi writes in this book. It just came out recently. But what he's doing is he's trying to say here's some of the thinking that's current that goes against a biblical understanding.

So, in the question, who am I, which is kind of a worldview question, the Christian answer is a creature created in God's image. He says the modern equivalent to that answer is saying a member of a various social group is locked in a struggle for dominance. And then to the question, what's the fundamental problem of humanity? The Christian answer has always been sin, but the modern critical theory view is oppression. Then you ask the question, how is this problem solved? Again, the Christian answer is redemption through Jesus Christ. In modern theory, it's activism and solidarity. What's the primary moral duty in Christianity? It's

to glorify God with your life. In modern critical theory, it's the dismantling of unjust systems and structures. And then how do I know the truth? In Christianity, it's revelation and experience, but in critical theory, it's lived experience.

Now, why do I show you this chart? Just to say, here's one author's attempt to say here is where the fault lines are drawn. And if you go to university, if you pay attention to what's going on, you will be inundated with a way of thinking that's counter to what the word of God says that leads to different conclusions. And so, you can be one who wanders, or you can be one who is deceived from what is true and start to believe that your greatest problem is not your own sin, but that you're caught in an age-long struggle of oppression. That doesn't mean that there isn't such a thing as an age-long struggle of oppression. It doesn't mean that there isn't such a thing as fighting for justice. But what it means is that you want to understand what Scripture says, and say that's what I will embrace. And so, there's something to saying I will know the truth.

Then in verses 5 through 11, Paul gets into this dispute that he's having with these super-apostles. In verse 12, he turns and begins to name the challenge. Here's what he says. "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. For such people are false apostles, deceitful workers, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants also masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve."

So, what he does here is basically names Satan. At the beginning he says I fear that the serpent is going to deceive you like Eve was deceived, and then he says this is what happens, people just like Satan does, masquerade as angels of light. Meaning they appear to be speaking the truth, appear to be giving the truth, but they need to have what they say checked. Now, here's what that means. You should always verify what's being taught to you. Now, clearly, you will have people that you come to trust. I hope you trust what's said from this stage. But you should check it. You should never say well, you know, Kurt said it here. Orchard Hill said this and said it's true. You should read, study, check, and verify because there are people who will masquerade as angels of light and will give false narratives all the time. That's exactly what he's saying here.

What that means is you need to live in such a place where you're saying I'm trying to understand the owner's manual for myself, not just take somebody's words for it. Think about it this way. To use the car analogy. If I know nothing about a car and I just ask somebody, hey, I got an engine light on, what should I do about it? And they're like oh, don't worry about it. It means nothing. And I say sure, okay, thank you. I'm going to be led down a bad path. Or if I say to somebody who doesn't know anything, could you tell me how to change my oil, they give horrible advice, and I know nothing about the real thing. I can't understand it. So, embracing the truth means that I've studied the real thing to such an extent that I'm able to sense or know when there's a counterfeit.

In fact, counterfeits in currency, we've been told that the way people have learned to spot it, that's their job to learn it, is not by studying counterfeits, but by studying the real thing to such a degree that they can just see the slightest difference. And the slightest differences can make a world of difference in the way that we live.

I saw just this last week that Kelly Clarkson evidently is getting a divorce, and I don't know anything about her personal life. I know she won a singing contest years ago and has a talk show. Therefore, she's famous. But evidently, she is getting this divorce and has come out and said that one of the things she's learned that's important is that love is not meant to be permanent. It's meant to be temporary. Now, I don't understand the pain of her divorce or pretend to say that there's never a time that divorce isn't the right thing. There are some reasons in the Bible why you can pursue divorce.

I can also tell you that what scripture says is that love between a husband and a wife is intended to be a commitment, not just a feeling that you keep until it's no longer good for you. And what that means is that if you say oh, Kelly Clarkson, she's laying down the truth, you're probably getting deceived. And whether you call it an angel of light or whatever you want to call it, what you're doing is you're saying well, that seems reasonable to me. That's exactly why Scripture needs to be front and center for what we do. So, you have to say I'm going to know and embrace the truth.

Part of this, I believe, is also living the truth. This is why I brought up this this verse from James about wandering from the truth because here's what happens. The more times that you or I choose not to live the truth, the more we become comfortable without living the truth, and the more we doubt whether the truth is true. The way that works is really pretty simple in the sense that we start to say well, I chose not to change the oil at the prescribed time and my car was fine, so why should I worry about it? Suddenly, somewhere down the road you say, that must not be a thing, and then you end up in a place that you actually don't want to be.

I've heard some people say things like this at different times. I've had people say you know, faith or Christianity, church, it's kind of boring. And what I always want to say when I hear that is, have you actually tried living your faith? Because here's what happens when you live the truth that you believe. You become radical in a culture that is not radical. You will stand for things you will believe in, things you will practice, and things that other people will say that are crazy. And what that means is that you will prioritize things with your time, with your money, and with your affections that other people will just look at and say that makes no sense.

The other thing I love to say to people when they say church is kind of boring is have you ever volunteered with middle school students? Because here's what you know if you have kids, they ask profound questions, and they do it before middle school when they're six, seven, eight, nine, or ten. And if you haven't thought through stuff and they start asking you questions, all of a sudden, you have to answer the question. In a way, you grow from living truth, from saying, I'm going to invest my life in somebody else. This is why I talk about investing and sharing what it is that you learn because there's something in you that says because I'm being pushed a little bit, I need to understand this better for myself.

Again, kids, you understand this, if your kid comes home from school and says can you help me with my algebra? And it's been a hot minute since you've looked at algebra. You have one of a couple of options. You either say, go talk to your brother or sister, hire a tutor, brush up on algebra, or say good luck, but you do something. Usually what will happen is you'll go back and look at algebra again, start to relearn it, and go oh yeah, and as you do, you grow again.

And what I'm saying is that if you've gotten to a point where you started to say that your faith is a little stale or that you're bored, chances are you don't have a godly jealousy for truth and for living the truth and for investing in other people's lives. Because when you do, what will happen is you will see your own heart pushed to say some things matter so much that I'm willing to give myself away for those things. See, if you're bored, it means that you don't care deeply. And in a sense, if your faith feels indifferent to you, what it means is that your indifference is a sign that you don't have this kind of godly jealousy.

Look at this. This is again after he talks about boasting and some different things. He says this beginning in verse 23. "Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in 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." And the idea here is that 40 lashes was thought to be lethal. And so, to avoid breaking the law, they would flog somebody 39 times, 40 minus one to avoid breaking the law.

He says, "Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, 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 fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. I have labored 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. 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?" So, what does he say? He says, I've given my life to this, and here are all the things I've gone through. But he said you know, what's been hard for me is that I've cared so much about the well-being of other people

I don't know where you are spiritually or what your new year means. A lot of times we come into the new year with calls to get our finances in order, to be healthier, maybe to declutter the house, or maybe we have some spiritual goals. I don't know where you're at today, but godly jealousy probably is in something that you've said oh, that's one of the things that I need. And that's why we say it's a bit of a surprising virtue because what jealousy will do in your life is it will bring about passion. And when you have passion, then you will not have a sense of saying this is irrelevant. This doesn't matter. I don't miss this.

You see here that he compares this when he says I'm like a dad, basically, who wants to present my daughter. If you have kids, you know how significant it is that you want your kids to embrace faith if you're a person of faith yourself. What happens when your kids start to make choices that are contrary to faith is you start saying I want to point them to something that's real.

That's one of the reasons why as a church, we invest so thoroughly in student and kids' ministry because we want you to have every opportunity to have your kids grow and walk in faith. But that jealousy that you feel for your own child, what Paul's saying is I feel it for people all around me. And so, the way that we gain this kind of godly jealousy is to say I'm going to pursue truth constantly because if I don't, I'll fall for a lot of things. I'm going to intentionally

live the truth that I know, put myself in a place to speak the truth, and invite others to the truth. And that may have a lot of different applications.

Maybe you're here and you're saying, I'm not sure that I believe that Christianity holds truth any more than anything else. Well, maybe get into one of the apologetics classes that's coming this year, one of the Bible studies to check it out as a step for you.

Maybe you're here and you're saying you know what, I've believed in truth, but I've gotten squishy on some things. I know I've gotten squishy because kind of like the car analogy that you used, you said that sometimes we can do things and there's not an immediate consequence, so it hasn't felt like a big deal. But down deep, you know, that you're not putting yourself in the space that God created you to live in. And maybe for you just starting to say I need to re-attune my life to the truth, to the owner's manual is your step.

Or maybe for you, it is about being bold in sharing truth with those in your life. The way to do this very simply is when you're hearing different expressions of the way things ought to be in your job, in your neighborhood, you don't need to be self-righteous or obtuse to do this but simply say, you know, there's another way to see that. When I read the Bible, I see this. Here's a thought. And just simply let it hang. That will take you out of the - it's boring to be a follower. Because suddenly, you'll find yourself in a conversation that has real meat about real things in this world.

Here's what else I would say may feel aggressive to you in some ways, but what it really is, is loving. Let me just go back to the car. If you had a friend or child who started to drive, and they said gas seems expensive, I'm going to use some other concoction in my gas tank. Would the most loving thing to do or say be well, I guess you'll learn the lesson the hard way. Or would it be to say, whoa, whoa, whoa? There's another way to see that. Why don't we look at the owner's manual? There's something that it says about what should go in there. Why don't you read it for yourself? I mean, that would be a little more loving than saying just go ahead.

My point is this. That puts your passion in the middle of everything that you do. And if you're saying it all seems like a lot to talk about truth in error, I just want to live and survive, then I just want to come back to this simple statement. God created you. He is the owner in that sense, and you were created to thrive. The more that you align your life to his purposes, the more you will see God's grace show up in your life day after day.

Before we pray, I just want to give you a second to reflect on where godly jealousy is needed in your own life today. Is it in pursuing truth, living truth, or in being bold or proclaiming truth? What has God unearthed in you even as we've talked here today? Maybe today is a day where you're just recognizing that your version of Christ has been one who helps you get where you want to go instead of the Savior. Maybe today is your day just to say, God, I need Jesus as my Savior because I know I can't earn my way. And that can be done even at this moment by just acknowledging that, praying, and saying God, I trust in what Jesus has done. God, help us to embrace godly jealousy in a way that feeds passion in our own lives. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Thanks for being here. Have a great week.