

Sermon: Be Devoted to Christ

This sermon was delivered September 23, 2009 at Northeast Ohio Bible College in Calcutta, Ohio.

Text: II Corinthians 11:1-6

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Introduction: Before we get into the meat of tonight's lesson, I think it is important to define two terms. One is implied in the text; the other is explicit. The first is *leadership*. John Maxwell says: "Leadership is influence." You understand that leadership can be for good or evil. Paul was trying to clear up this issue of devotion in the Corinthian church. Maxwell goes on to share this proverb: "He who thinketh he leadeth and hath no one following him is only taking a walk" (*Developing the Leader within You*, p. 1). The Apostle Paul is trying to qualify who can be trusted as leaders, i.e., who are devoted to Christ.

So you don't get the idea I mean to talk only to elders, deacons and ministers, you need to understand that *everyone* is a leader for someone else - for good or evil. Everyone is *influential*.

We also need to discuss the word translated *devotion* in [verse 3](#) in the NIV text and rendered *simplicity* in the KJV. The Greek word is *ἀπλοτης*. BAGD, p. 86 says the word means "sincere devotion to Christ." It is a heart issue. Our hearts cannot be divided; they cannot be given to another. It is a purity issue and this "singleness of heart" is related to truth (*ἀληθεια*). - *TDNT*, Vol 1, p. 386 c.

In the context of our passage it fits well with the idea of a virgin keeping herself and her heart devoted to *only* "one husband," her husband-to-be. It also seems clear that Paul is saying that the church is in a betrothal period. The wedding is coming when everything will be finalized. The guest list or book of life will be published. In the meantime...

We need to be devoted to Christ by being:

I. Responsible Leaders ([vv. 1-3](#))

[II Corinthians 11:1-3 \(NIV\)](#) ¹I hope you will put up with a little of my foolishness; but you are already doing that. ²I 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. ³But 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.

Responsible leaders:

A. Hope for the best in those under their care (v. 1).

Paul does everything that he can to get the Word of God through to his spiritually adopted children. He hopes they understand why he has been forced in some ways to use the same methods of those already causing trouble in the church.

It is difficult most Sundays to be compared with the latest, greatest pop-theologian. It also is becoming harder to walk, forget about running, like a young minister. I haven't gone to the clear lectern and polo shirts on Sunday mornings - not because they are improper, but I like the ability to hide my expanding waistline behind a suit and pulpit. Wednesday night is different. People just nod their heads in agreement with Peyton Manning's commercial where he says: "maybe you ought to just get a bigger sweatshirt."

The way Paul is being forced to defend himself to the Corinthians he calls foolishness because he would much rather be teaching or preaching to them about Jesus.

Illus. It is a little like what ends up happening in political campaigns. Rumors are spread and the defamed candidate has to defend his character and that gets him off-message.

Responsible leaders:

B. Love like God loves (v. 2).

Paul wants to clarify that he is jealous like God is jealous - looking out for their well-being. God does demand fidelity, and threatens punishment for the disobedient.

Exodus 20:5 (NIV) ... for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God,

Paul's jealousy is not selfish or self-centered because it is inspired by God's heart for his people. He is all about protecting the bride-to-be's integrity, purity, and holiness because it ultimately reflects on the Groom's character.

Here in our text, Paul is portrayed as what in Jewish culture was "the friend of the bridegroom" or "best man." His responsibility to the bridegroom with regards to the virgin was "to guard her, and to bear testimony to her corporeal and marital endowments; and it was upon this testimony of this friend that the bridegroom chose his bride. He was the *internuncio* between her and her spouse elect; carrying all messages from her to him, and from him to her:" (Clarke)

This is also our responsibility.

Responsible leaders:

C. Help guard against falsehood (v. 3)

Here is where devotion to Christ and godly leaders are critical. The battle takes place in the mind and heart. Paul is concerned that the minds of the Corinthians might be corrupted and their hearts seduced by another.

There are many competing voices for our attention today. Many would tell us that religion in general, and Jesus specifically, is a waste of a person's life. *Sound* doctrine has always been tied to ethics and morality. Behavior ought to be rooted in God's word, yet in today's church too many times practitioners go hunting for proof-texts to justify clearly what is prohibited in God's word. Paul knew the dangers.

II Corinthians 12:20-21 (NIV) ²⁰For I am afraid that when I come I may not find you as I want you to be, and you may not find me as you want me to be. I fear that there may be quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, factions, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder. ²¹I am afraid that when I come again my God will humble me before you, and I will be grieved over many who have sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual sin and debauchery in which they have indulged.

Sin is expected - even in the church. What cannot be accepted is a lack of repentance.

It is as old as the Garden of Eden debacle. Eve is tricked by smooth talk and lies by that ancient deceiver, Satan. Innocence is lost (**Gen. 3:7**). Man's relationship with God is fractured and nearly lost.

This horrible lesson from a distant past needs to be protected against even now. It does matter what you believe, and Whom. Paul says: believe God; believe me.

In these times of relativism and private, baseless spirituality there is a call for:

II. Able Leaders (v. 4)

II Corinthians 11:4 (NIV) ⁴For 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.

Paul is anxious. This false teaching was a real and present danger, and it continues today. In a time of biblical illiteracy, both then and now, and a great deal of misinformation; we desperately need *able leaders*. These pneumatic leaders can recognize correct doctrine about:

A. Jesus' true identity and character.

Paul preached Christ who had suffered as a servant, been crucified and risen. He was more than an exceptional man. These pseudo-apostles were presenting another Jesus that we cannot find in Scripture. His nature must be fully human, yes, but also fully divine. His mission must be centered around redemption. Jesus is God's one and *only* Son. Even though the details about Jesus were a scandal or foolishness to some, Paul insists it is all true!

Able leaders are needed to explain:

B. The workings of the Holy Spirit.

There had been confusion in the Corinthian church over both the importance and purpose of gifts from the Spirit. If Jesus is different, it follows that the spirit would also change in its purpose and mission. Having the same Spirit is critical because of what Paul had also shared with the Roman church:

Romans 8:9 (NIV) ⁹You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.

It is the difference between heaven and hell. Yet, the Spirit is not for show. It is not for self-credentialing but for the building up of the Body of Christ.

Also from the beginning the Corinthian church had been torn in different directions by charismatic leaders and:

C. The content of the gospel.

Batey has said: "Paul's antagonists were to him a snake (11:3) under the flower of a different gospel -- enticing, but deadly." - **Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 745**

The problem of competing and false gospels happens within 10-15 years after Jesus' ascends back to heaven. **Galatians 1:8 (NIV)** ⁸But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!

People will still come to your door, today, and try to convince you to accept their false gospel talking of salvation and Jesus and a spirit you can feel in your bosom. Be very careful because it is from the ranks of nominal Christians and biblically illiterate followers that they fill up their rolls on their way to hell.

I've always struggled with whether to engage cults who show up at my door uninvited. I always felt it was like trying to convince an Hasidic Jew which pork barbecue tastes better: tomato-based or vinegar-based.

Some final counsel from the Apostle John:

II John 1:7-11 (NIV) ⁷Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist. ⁸Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully. ⁹Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. ¹⁰If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him. ¹¹Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work.

Able leaders will confront and rebuke false teaching wherever it is found. And they will do so using the Word of God. They need to be:

III. Accurate Leaders (vv. 5-6)

II Corinthians 11:5-6 (NIV) ⁵But I do not think I am in the least inferior to those “super-apostles.” ⁶I may not be a trained speaker, but I do have knowledge. We have made this perfectly clear to you in every way.

It is not what or whom we are against, but what and whom we are for that should make up the majority of our messages.

Within the church because of man’s fallen nature there will always be the issue of:

A. Self-appointed vs. God-appointed (v. 5) - Not every member is a Christian.

These “other” apostles had not been sent by God. They had come in among the Corinthians for their own selfish reasons. Paul even makes fun of them by the way he calls them “extra, super-duper apostles.”

It is almost like the dilemma some people have in not knowing how to refer to me. Do I call you Pastor, Reverend, Father - what? I usually say “minister” is alright, but my friends call me Gary. Don’t call me sweetie or honey; that upsets my wife. For my catholic friends, I tell them Monsignor (My Lord) or your eminence is OK.

I’d like to be excellent in both, but if I must make a choice between manner and matter, style and substance, or even homiletics and hermeneutics,

B. Give me knowledge about God (v. 6)

This knowledge Paul has comes from years of study and listening to the Spirit of God. Paul readily concedes that he is an untrained, unpolished speaker (ιδιωτης), but he refuses to diminish the value of his message.

We have all heard great orators, people who were skilled as speakers. Some politicians will dazzle you with their vocabulary, but afterwards you can't really nail down anything that was said of importance.

Karl Barth, who was a great theologian of the 20th century and who wrote an extremely difficult-to-read commentary on the book of Romans, was once asked, in what has now become a famous story, "What is the greatest theological thought that has ever crossed your mind?" The hearers of the question expected a long and complicated answer, but he said this: "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so."

At the end of the day we need to communicate the truth about Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and the Gospel. Like Paul, who even asks others to imitate his life and faith, we will share the knowledge we have been given, and hopefully we will **have made this perfectly clear ... in every way... AND just like Paul**

C. Will show God to their students (v. 6)

A story is told about a dinner party where the guests were expected to stand after the meal and recite something for the group. A famous actor was present, and he recited the twenty-third Psalm with great dramatic flair and emotion, and sat down to great applause. Then a very simple man got up and began to recite the same Psalm. He wasn't very eloquent, so at first people thought it was a little funny. But his presentation was straight from his heart, so when he finished, the group sat in respectful silence. It was obvious that the simple man's presentation was more powerful than the actors, and afterwards the actor told him: "I know the Psalm, but you know the Shepherd." (David Guzik's *Commentaries on the Bible*)

Conclusion: A person who is truly devoted to Christ will be an effective leader for others in not only what we say and teach, but what we do.

"I think I was twenty years old when I read Albert Schweitzer's *Quest for the Historical Jesus*. I found his christology woefully lacking--more water than wine. I marked it up, wrote in the margins, raised questions of all kinds. And one day, one day I read in the Knoxville News-Sentinel that Albert Schweitzer was going to be in Cleveland, Ohio, to play the dedicatory concert for a big organ in a big church up there. According to the article he would remain afterward in the fellowship hall for conversation and refreshment.

I bought a Greyhound bus ticket and went to Cleveland. All the way up there I worked on this Quest for the Historical Jesus. I laid out my questions. I had my questions on a separate sheet of paper, but I made references to the pages. ‘You said...’ because I figured, if there was conversation in the fellowship hall, there’d be room for a question or two.

I went there; I heard the concert; I rushed into the fellowship hall, got a seat in the front row, and waited with my lap of questions. After a while he came in, shaggy hair, big white mustache, stooped, and seventy-five years old. He had played a marvelous concert. You know he was a master organist, medical doctor, philosopher, biblical scholar, lecturer, writer, everything. He came in with a cup of tea and some refreshments and stood in front of the group, and there I was, close.

Dr. Schweitzer thanked everyone: ‘You’ve been very warm, *and* hospitable to me. I thank you for it, and I wish I could stay longer among you, but I must go back to Africa. I must go back to Africa because my people are poor and diseased and hungry and dying, and I have to go. We have a medical station at Lambarene. If there’s anyone here in this room who has the love of Jesus, would you be prompted by that love to go with me and help me?’

I looked down at my questions; they were absolutely stupid. And I learned, again, what it means to be Christian and had hopes that I could be that someday.”
(Craddock Stories, pp. 125-126)

“Christianity cannot be defined only in terms of faith over against works or only as visiting orphans and widows in their affliction and keeping oneself unstained from the world (**James 1:27**).” - **Best, *Second Corinthians*, p. 103**

Paul would divide up many of his letters into theology AND practicum. But it cannot be an “either, or;” *it must be* a “both, and.” The Churches of Christ and Christian Churches have traditionally been very good at pointing out error (and we should in love), but how have we been at helping others, showing love, and demonstrating what we say we believe?

I really believe that to be devoted to Christ, we must teach and do!