

Jealous Meekness: Thoughts on a Pauline View of the Church in It's Immaturity

by Bryan Anthony

We should be jealous for the fullness of God in the Church, but our jealousy should be accompanied by meekness and a willingness to go to the cross ourselves to walk out the reality of the Gospel.

Scripture: Matthew 7:1, 1 Corinthians 13:9, Ephesians 4:2, Colossians 3:12

Topics: "Church Growth", "Merciful Love"

Description

Bryan Anthony delivers a powerful sermon on the importance of having a humble and merciful heart towards fellow believers, emphasizing that we all see in part and are in a continual process of growth in the knowledge of God. He challenges the common mentality of writing off others due to their gaps and inconsistencies, highlighting the need to intercede and show mercy even towards those we may disagree with. Drawing from the example of Paul's approach to the Corinthian church, Bryan Anthony urges believers to address issues with love and grace, recognizing that the Body of Christ, though imperfect, is still valued by God and in need of mercy and intercession.

Transcript

"For we know in part and we prophesy in part." -1 Cor. 13.9

It was Smith Wigglesworth who stated:

Most people seem to have discernment, or think they have, and if they would turn it on themselves for twelve months they would never want to discern again. The gift of discernment is not criticism. I am satisfied that our paramount need is more perfect love.

One thing that still seems prevalent in the Church today is an "either it's God or it's not" mentality. Truth is, all of us see in part, and every movement, ministry, and individual believer is in the process of growth in the knowledge of God. The easiest thing to do in this process is to recognize the gaps and inconsistencies in other saints, and to write them off on account of those gaps.

This is terribly antithetical to the Pauline view of the Church. Do we know of anyone besides Jesus Himself who was more jealous than Paul for the salvation of Israel, the maturation of the Church, and the glorification of God in the earth? Paul is, aside from Christ, the great NT prototype for foundational

leadership, and his disposition toward the churches (even the most immature communities) was quite the opposite as that of the critical soul who sees himself as superior those who are in need of doctrinal or ethical correction.

The situation at Corinth was the clearest example of this. Paul was dealing with a community of believers who had immorality in their midst, who were fraught with jealousies, divisions and schisms, who had very disorderly gatherings, whose meetings were doing "more harm than good," who were questioning his own apostleship, and who were spreading confusion and doubts regarding the reality of the resurrection. Have you ever run into a community of believers in that rough of a condition?

In Chapter 11 of 1 Cor. Paul even states that sickness and premature death have broken out in their midst as a judgment from the Father for their lack of value for the Body in the context of the meal of the Lord. Divine chastisement is breaking out in their midst, and yet, Paul has the audacity (or should it be called an apostolic faith and sight?) to address them as "saints" and "holy ones" in the opening of the epistle.

I often hear comments along these lines with regard to certain movements within the Church:

"I have not taken the time to listen or read any of the teachings for myself, but I've heard all about them, so I just categorize them with the other counterfeits and all the hype that is out there."

Often the sharpest criticisms come from those who have taken little time to hear from those they are criticizing. Yet it doesn't matter how much certain expressions of Christendom "get under our skin", even those that bear true issues of concern. If we cannot go to the cross in intercession, even on behalf of those who are "deceivers" and "white-washed tombs", we are not expressing the wisdom of Christ. We are called to express the same reality in the present that Jesus revealed at the cross.

Indeed, there are radical mixtures out there, and those mixtures need to be addressed with the clear word of the Lord. Still, it must be asked of the critical soul, "Is your life not a mixture? Is there nothing to be addressed in your own life? If your secret life was to be examined as you are examining others, what would be revealed in that examination?"

Along those lines, is there any denominational, missionary, revival, or seminary history that can be recounted without a mixture? The fellowship that you are a part of, is it pristine and clear in every way? Is there any church or work that is expressing the fullness of Jesus Christ?

"Aren't these movements polluted wells, though?" you ask.

Indeed, there are issues that could greatly harm the believer's heart within certain movements. In the right spirit and context they need to be addressed. But the question must still be asked, 'Was Corinth a polluted well?' It was full of error and even sin, yet Paul never doubted the validity of their spiritual gifts, did he? He never questioned their salvation either. Instead, he challenged them to get things in order before the Lord, and I believe they were missing the mark in a lot more ways than many of the movements that are often criticized.

I want to look at all of the saints through the lens of Paul in the context of Corinth. Did he address issues that needed challenging? Yes, as one sent to them, he did. He addressed those with whom he had immediate responsibility and relationship as an apostle, and aside from that he was occupied with seeing the Gospel revealed to hearts who were bound in darkness.

Does this mean we have to be an apostle to raise concerns? Certainly not. But to categorize other believers (no matter how immature, or incomplete in doctrine or practice) as mere counterfeits is simply the opposite of what the apostle demonstrated.

The Body of Jesus is mangled at present, and there is not much in that Body that we may look upon with a sense of completion. We need the sight of Joseph of Arimathea, a man of "high-position" who was able to go against the tide of bitterness, self-righteousness, and unbelief which flowed so powerfully through his religious colleagues. He was able to look upon the Body of Jesus, mangled though it was, and to value it, though it had not yet appeared in resurrection glory, and despite the fact that the masses had no anticipation of that resurrection.

"It takes half a man to criticize," said Sankey, who was Moody's worship leader. It takes the resurrection life within to look upon the Body of Christ with merciful identification, as Jesus presently is from the right hand of the Father.

Shall we be jealous for the fullness of God in the Church? For a purging of bad teachings and doctrines? For a maturity to come to the Church again? Most assuredly. We must. But the only way for that maturity and depth to be restored in the last analysis is for us to go to the cross ourselves. To walk out the reality of the Gospel is the chief thing. To give ourselves to intercession on behalf of the Church is the central calling with regard to moving toward the corporate reality He is jealous for.

The mystery of Israel is the revelation that God is a God of mercy, and that His people are simply those who have received the grace to come under the rod of His Fatherhood and governance. When we think we've earned anything, we've removed ourselves from the grounds of the Gospel. If I realize that I haven't earned anything (including insight into Scriptures or maturity of vision), I have the grace to look at the Church- in all of its various deficiencies- and to thank God for it, while crying out for mercy on Her behalf.

"Then how shall I know when these heresies need to be addressed? Didn't Paul call out heretics and correct false doctrines?!"

You will know in the same way that Jesus did: When you are willing to go to the cross on their behalf. You will know in the same way that Paul did: When you have given yourself in prayer and intercession for their souls, and any correction you deliver will flow mercifully and boldly out of that place, when you have dwelt in the counsel of the Lord. It will not come in a reactionary manner, or as a result of fellowshiping with vulturous, gossiping men. We need to abide in the most holy place, to be jealous chiefly for His glory, and to come into His own truth and love for men.

I want to be found in the counsel of the Lord, friends. He's more jealous for the fullness of Christ than any of us. He's wanting to raise up foundational servants, who will proclaim His heart to Israel and the nations. The Church does need to be called to repentance. The Church does need a higher vision of the standards of God. Ultimately, we need "the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God" Himself. That Word will only come from broken-hearted vessels who have been united with Him in the Holy Place.

Jesus is the ultimate revelation of this. There is no one more jealous for truth, purity, reality, and fullness than Him. And the way He set out to establish that was by laying His own life down for the very ones who were crucifying Him. He continues to demonstrate that today, interceding from the right hand of Majesty. Shall we follow Him, or shall we strut around with a presumptuous and embittered collection of opinions and ideals?

When I stand before the judgment seat of Christ, what will be His assessment of the thoughts I have carried and the words I have spoken about others? Will they be seen as pure, true, and merciful as He Himself is, or will they be revealed as arrogant, spiteful, and serving my own exaltation? "Every idle word" shall be examined in that great day.

Oh, for the Spirit and nature of Christ Himself to permeate our lives today.

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