

Sermon: What Then is Tim Keller?

Series: Christ and His Church, 1 Corinthians, Part 1 (5)

Bible Passage: 1 Corinthians 3:1-9

1 But I, brothers could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. **2** I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, **3** for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? **4** For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not being merely human?

5 What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. **6** I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. **7** So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. **8** He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. **9** For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building.

10 According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. **11** For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

Would you bow your heads with me in prayer?

God, wake us up spiritually, that we might have our eyes open to your Word. May the Holy Spirit move in us, encourage us, challenge us. May we leave this sanctuary as people who have been challenged and transformed by the power of your Word. That this would be relevant to our lives, that this would minister to us, and that this would bring you glory. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

Today we're going to talk about a topic, I think when I was younger, wouldn't have thought that I struggled with. It's not really part of my identity, I don't think anyone has ever labeled me this to my knowledge, and I don't think I consciously go around thinking about it either. But I think confess to you today, that one of the adjectives you can use to describe me is this: I am a jealous person. I am prone to jealousy. I don't recognize it because at the time it doesn't seem very sinister, but I notice when people get credit that I deep down want. I notice when people have more gifts or abilities or success. I may congratulate them, but deep down I'm thinking, "Why didn't I get that God?"

Going back to being a child in elementary school, I remember when the teacher would ask a question and we'd all raise our hands to answer. I remember that every time someone answered a question, I would think or even say out loud, "Tsk, I knew that."

Going through life, I realized other people are faster than me, smarter than me, taller than me, shorter than me, whatever it is depending on my mood. I began to understand how jealousy works. According to the world, one way to deal with jealous is to say, "You deserve it too. You can do it too. You can work

hard. You can run just as fast as them. You can jump just as far as them. You can be just as strong as them.”

In fact, that’s part of the inspiring literature and movies we have today. It’s about the underdog working super hard to get to their success and that’s sort of an inspiring story. In pop culture, we define an inspiring story as a jealous person achieving the level of success as other people. Of course, that doesn’t make money when I put it that way, but if you think about it, isn’t that kind of jealousy? Basically, it’s a story of overcoming great odds, but on the other hand if we’re honest with ourselves, it’s the story of a fragile, jealous soul, under the circumstances of them or God, getting everything he or she wanted.

The moral version of jealous is to say, “You don’t deserve it anyway so stop asking for it.” It’s a very Asian tendency. “Don’t ask your boss for a raise. Don’t ask your employer for a promotion. Don’t ask your teacher for a better grade. Well no, do ask your teacher for a better grade. But for all those other things, don’t ask for those things. You don’t deserve it. It’ll come to you, and if it doesn’t don’t worry about it.”

When you become a Christian, jealousy doesn’t just go away. When you get older, jealousy does not go away either. When you’re younger, jealousy comes in the version of toys: who’s got the bigger toy, the shinier toy, the more expensive toy. Nowadays, it’s who’s got the nicer smart phone.

I was at a wedding last weekend and I took a picture of a kid, who had a massive device with headphones and cable. I sent the picture to Karen and said, “This is what some parents use to manage their kids.” My plan was to show it to my kids and tell them, “This is how some parents manage their kids. Don’t be jealous. You just have to sit there.”

When you get older, jealousy becomes about different things. “Why do some people make the sports team? Why do some people get voted onto student government? Why do some people go off to college?” When you get married, it doesn’t get better. “How come some people get married earlier? How come some people get married to better looking people? How come some people get married?” When you get older and get married and have a job, it becomes, “How come people have kids? How come some people’s kids are better or smarter? How come some people’s kids are born healthier?” And it goes on and on and on.

You come to the church. The church version struggles are very similar. “How some people’s kids walk with the Lord, but mine don’t? I don’t want you to think that jealousy is always about trivial, superficial things. But, the topic here is this: I see someone else’s success and I, deep down, wonder, “Why don’t I get that?” I deep down wish, “Can I please have that. God, if you’re real, why won’t you give me that?”

This series on Christ and His Church, as we go through the first few chapters of 1 Corinthians, talks about how that jealous can ravage a church in the form of controversy, rivalry, and factions. This

morning, Lord willing, with the few moments we have together focused on this passage, I would like us to see three things about this issue of jealousy:

1. Where does jealousy come from?
2. Why shouldn't we be jealous?
3. How do we overcome jealousy?

1. Where does jealousy come from?

We've been going through 1st Corinthians and we know that 1st Corinthians is written to a church in Corinth and this church, among other things, was praised by Paul in the opening of his letter. He says, "You guys are awesome. You guys have everything and you're amazingly gifted people." He also mentioned in earlier chapters this idea of factions. There's this teacher Apollos, a skilled orator, who is schooled in Alexandria, there's Paul, the man of God and the preacher, and there's Cephas or Peter, one of the pillars of the early church. As we come to this place, Paul begins to describe where this jealousy comes from as factions in a group of people who call themselves Christians.

Please take a look here as we look through 1 Corinthians 3:1-4:

1 But I, brothers could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. **2** I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, **3** for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? **4** For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not being merely human?

Here Paul paints a very nuanced picture of a Christian. In the New Testament, a Christian is someone who has been named by Christ, who has been saved, who has confessed and put their faith in Jesus Christ. Paul is going to lay out this description and we need to see if we match up to this description. He uses a neutral term. He says, "Some of you are Christians, but you're acting like you're still baby Christians, infants in the Lord." That might seem very innocent, but it's not a very positive description. He actually calls them "of the flesh" and whether you're Christian or not, you know that that's a negative term.

"But I, brothers could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh," Now he's not talking about non-believers. We want to make a very clear distinction between people who say and act like they're Christian but they aren't and people who have just come to Christ and, in the course of that,

are still living the way they were in the world. They haven't learned anything yet or been transformed fully yet.

Where' does jealousy come from? It comes from stunted spiritual growth. It comes from the fact that we already start with people who are insecure and jealous. If you're a Christian and you've been serving and growing in the Lord all these years, but we still struggle with jealousy, there is a dimension of our spiritual lives in which we are still acting like infants.

Now, we know that infants are cute. Everything they do (burp, barf, whatever) is cute. When you see a baby, you always ask, "Oh how old is your baby? 8 or 9 months?" and the parent responds, "Oh no, more like 10 or 12 years old." You wonder, "Woah! Why is he or she acting like that?" The opposite is true. You don't take a 10 or 12 year old boy and bring him to school dressed up in a onesie and a bib. They should have grown. We think it's funny, but it's pretty sad. One of my friends has a brother who is developmentally a two-year old. He's really fun to play with, but he's also a big strong guy. On some level, it's not the way it should be.

Spiritually, here's the same thing. When you and I have jealousy, you and I recognize that this is where we come from. If you're a Christian and you have jealousy, Christ tells us that there's something in our spiritual life that has not flowered or fully developed. That's why verse three says, "you are still of the flesh" and verse two, "I fed you with milk, not solid food for you were not ready." Even now, four or five years later after Paul founded this church, he says, "you're still infants. You're still spiritually immature. And do you want to know how I know you struggle with insecurity? You have divisions, factions, and rivalries." The people follow Apollos, Paul, Cephas, or Christ. They still have factions.

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This is where jealousy comes from. It's not created by external circumstances. You can't say, "He made me jealous" or "she made me jealous", but jealousy comes from our own stunted spiritual lives. This is so important because what Paul is saying is in Corinth is that spiritual giftedness is not necessarily equivalent to spiritual maturity. Spiritually giftedness, talent, and ability is not necessarily an indicator of one's spiritual maturity, and that's the problem in Corinth isn't it. You have potentially amazingly gifted people, perhaps even in high positions in the church, but they just don't have the maturity.

You see this in relationships. This person that you want to date is a good looking, fully developed adult, but when you get to know him or her, they don't have the maturity. Far away they may have all these good qualities, but when you get closer they're not there.

Or you may hire someone and they've got the right credentials. They've done the job and they can do the tasks you've asked them to do. They've got it all, except when it comes to dealing with people because they don't have the maturity to handle the work, to handle the finances, to handle the responsibility.

What Paul is saying this, "Corinthians, you've so gifted as believers. You've been given by God so many gifts and abilities. You're a talented bunch of people, but you're not spiritually mature. You know how I know that? Because you're jealous."

You know friends, this is something to think about. I'm a pastor and I still even struggle with jealous and I don't know if I ever won't. I've been growing and I trust that the Lord is helping me. I want to ask you: what are the things you think I struggle with? I thought of this title "What Then is Tim Keller?" and I was thinking about whether or not I should keep it there. This is probably the only time in the world where his name will be in the title of a sermon. Tim Keller is a pastor who, on one hand, I have learned a lot from and I idolize, and on the other hand, I'm deeply jealous of. I think the people you idolize most are the people you're most prone to be jealous of.

Let's see this in the context of the church. It's easy for me because I can see factions in the church, but what about the sin and the struggles of sin? Don't you know this week you've been jealous of someone else's success? Don't you know this week, as you were riding the T or walking or driving in a car, you've wondered why someone else has gotten more than you, gotten farther than you, gotten more credit than you.

Jealousy is here. It's in the church, not because it's in the structure of the church, but because it's in people. And jealousy kills. It destroys the Christ's church, relationships, and marriages. Spiritual giftedness, monetary giftedness, gain, career advancement are no good indicators of spiritual maturity. You can be a successful practitioner of a huge field, but still be plagued by jealousy. In fact, I suspect, the people who are most successful are probably, in some ways, very gifted, but in their memoirs, they confess they are also the most insecure. Insecurity drives them to that success.

That's where it comes from. It comes from our own stunted spiritual growth. It begins this way; no one makes us jealous. We sometimes get caught off guard because we've learned skills, we've gained abilities, resources, accolades, and reputation, but it doesn't address the jealous in our hearts.

2. Why shouldn't we be jealous?

The Bible gives a very theological reason –because it's just plain silly. Seriously. Or to use a biblical term, it's foolish. Or to use a colloquial term, it's stupid. To understand this, the apostle Paul uses this farm analogy having to do with plants. Let's take a look, beginning in verse 5:

5 What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. **6** I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. **7** So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. **8** He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. **9** For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building.

He's basically saying this. "You've got this great leader in the church: Apollos, he's an incredible speaker. You've got this great leader in the church named Paul; he founded the church and he's got this agrarian ministry spirit. Amazingly gifted people." This is what he says, "they're servants." The Greek term there means a menial, manual, unskilled worker. He's not saying you don't need skills to do ministry. He's not saying you don't need skills in life. He's not saying skills are irrelevant. He's trying to use this metaphor that we don't quite grasp because we're not farmers, but the term is a term the people in this agrarian society would have known. They [Apollos and Paul] are the equivalent of unskilled laborers and there's no point in giving them the credit.

To use a more modern analogy: if you're at a restaurant and the server brings you this amazing dish. You could thank the server; you should. However, it would be foolish to say, "Can I get your name? Can you come to my house and serve me at my house because I love this dish." People at the table would say, "You know, he's just the waiter. I don't even think he's our waiter. He's just bringing out your plate." It's kind of silly, and that's what Paul is saying.

You might be thinking. "Really? Is this true?" Let's use this in the context of leaders and preachers. So, pick your favorite preacher. I picked mine, Tim Keller. Realize, Paul says, in the scheme of things, they're the equivalent of unskilled laborers and it would be foolish to boast because everything is from God.

A few weeks ago, the family fellowship went apple picking and that reminded me of a time in California where I went cherry picking. Cherry picking is cooler than apple picking because they're squishier, they stain your clothing, and you have to climb ladders to get to the cherries in the trees. In apple picking, the tall person who's allergic to apples, you know, gets the apples for you. In cherry picking, you have to climb up a ladder with a giant wooden bucket and you pick the cherries; it's actually kind of scary. I remember being a kid and talking about getting the best cherries. We would compare the cherries at the end and someone would say, "I'm the better picker because my cherries taste better." I would say, "Darn

it. Why do your cherries taste better?” My parents would go, “Because he climbed up in the ladder to get those cherries. Why are you jealous? He just had the ladder. He’s not better than you or smarter than you. He just had a different tool. Because he had a different tool and a different set of circumstances, his fruit was better. If you had the same tool, you would get the same results.”

What Paul is saying is this: everything that is produced that is good in this world, every success we’ve ever seen or experienced whether it’s a parental success, a ministerial success, or a vocational success, at the end of the day, is from God. He tells us: don’t be jealous because they just had different tools or different circumstances; they were dealt a different set of cards or they had a different set of equipment to start with. It would be foolish to be jealous of that because they’re just the same as you. They’re just working in a different place with a different set of circumstances.

This doesn’t undervalue hard work or say that everything is equal. If anything, it says that everything is not equal. Some of you are smarter. Some of you are better looking. Some of you have better eyesight (I’m truly jealous of that). Paul is saying that if you’re jealous of that, it’s no different than being jealous of someone who happens to pick the fruit from the tree rather than the person who waters it or plants it; they’re all workers in God’s kingdom. That’s why it says in verse 8:

8 He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor.

God isn’t going to evaluate you based on how many people you’ve impressed with your business or your skills. He’s going to evaluate you based on your faithfulness. If you’ve been given more, God expects more. If you’re given less, He knows you’re probably going to produce less, and God doesn’t care about those things. God measures by faithfulness. At the end of it all, the fact is that we are jealous because of our own stunted spiritual growth.

If you’re not a believer, and this might be offensive, you don’t have a spiritual life in Christ. I hope you’d agree with that. So, jealousy is just a normal part of life. We want something that other people have. We ask, “how come they have this and I don’t?” What Paul is saying is that this is silly and foolish. It’s like telling the waiter, “This is a great meal!” and the waiter says, “I just brought this to you. I don’t even know how to cook it.” Paul is saying: whatever you’re jealous of, whether it’s someone’s smarts or skills or salary or reputation, it’s foolish to be silly. It would be a pretty discouraging way to end the sermon if I just told you, “Just stop being jealous! Stop being foolish! Just stop it!”

I think, for a lot of my Christian life, I thought that that was how it was supposed to be. I thought to myself, “Being jealous is wrong. So, just stop doing it. Just stop.” But that’s not how you overcome jealousy. Nestled in the last verse in this passage and perhaps one of the shortest verses we’ll be looking

at is probably the most important gospel truth about how you and I, with whatever we're dealing with, can overcome jealousy. It sounds like I'm overstating it, but I'm not. Let's take a look at verse 9:

9 For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building.

There's actually repetition there. The repetition is the possessive term of God. It's basically saying, "We belong to God." So where does jealousy come from? It comes from our stunted spiritual growth. We all start off insecure and maybe, throughout life because we do well in school or at work, we become less overtly jealous because we have successes that we can feel good about. But really, deep down, we're still measuring our success.

That's why if I'm in a relationship and I'm dating or married to someone and I lose that person, I'm totally devastated. Now don't get me wrong. It's extremely painful to go through a breakup or a divorce, but there's a pain from the divorce and then there's a deeper pain of "I don't have my source of value anymore." Or sometimes we say to ourselves, "I told myself I was jealous because he's got a higher salary or she's got a better family. I worked hard and now I have it. I'm not jealous anymore." But we're still the same people. We just have a different set of circumstances.

We wake up to that when, God in his great wisdom and providence, allows us to lose that. One of my good friends was unfortunately in the newspaper this past summer. He was a minister at a church in the city and made some mistakes and had to resign his ministry. I had lunch with him after that and he was sharing with me. He said, "You know Enoch, I preach so often that you have to find your identity in Christ. You have to put your worth in Jesus. It's so different when everything you put your value in is ripped out of you, especially by your own mistake. I know I'm supposed to put my value in Christ. I know He died for my sins. But when I lose my ministry and my reputation, and I put my family at risk..." When we lose what we put our identity into, we're exposed for the insecure people that we are.

3. How do we overcome jealousy?

Don't just do the world's way. "I'm jealous of some person's success, so I'll become unjealous by achieving that same level of success!" That's not going to work well because one day you'll lose it. Or, the alternative is, "I'm jealous of that person's success, so I'll become unjealous by saying that I don't really care about that success or it's not that important." That's kind of a religious, moral way.

Do you know what God says about why we should not be jealous of someone else's success? Not because you're trying hard to get it or because you're not trying hard at all, but because in Christ, you have it. Paul tells the church, "Look, you're impressed by a guy named Paul? Those leaders you idolize are just

laborers or God's work. He's the one who makes it grow. He's the one who deserves all the glory. He's does it all. We're merely workers. You are God's field. You are God's building.

In the Bible, identity is not answered by the American question "Who am I?" In the Bible, identity is secured by the ancient question of "Whose am I?" You cannot know who you are until you understand whose you are. You cannot understand who you are until you understand who you belong to. That's Biblical. There is no identity. There is no hope for no jealous apart from understanding "Whose am I?" I'm Christ's. Bought by his blood. Bought by his death. Saved by his resurrection. Sealed by His Spirit. Dwelled in by the living Spirit of God. Adopted into the Father's family with a heavenly inheritance that begins now for all eternity. You cannot know your identity by asking "Who am I?" You only know your identity by asking "Whose am I?" And God says, "you're mine."

When you and I understand whose we are, what is there to be jealous of? The Bible says that we are rich in Christ. What's to be jealous of? You want a deep relationship? There's a father that loves you more than you can ever imagine. Why be jealous of anyone's success? At the end of your life, God isn't going to measure you by the amount of money you have, how many stars you have, how many letters you have at the end of your name. He's going to measure you by the one thing that He has given everyone a chance to be: faithful. Because his son teaches us and enables us to be faithful and His Spirit shows us faithfulness.

This is how Christ and His church operates. Paul says to them, " You've got all this jealousy, all these factions and divisions. Don't you know that you're acting like you don't belong to God. It's foolish because if everyone belongs to God and everything is from God, then you will overcome jealousy every time when you understand whose you are.

Think about what you're jealous about. Think about what I'm jealous about. I could remedy my jealousy by achieving those successes, but that's short lived. I could remedy that jealousy by saying "I don't really want that anyway" and play the sour grapes card, but we would just be lying to ourselves. God says that our desires aren't wrong. He says, "You want that success? I gave you that desire. You want to feel good about yourself? I gave you that desire, but I also gave you the way to achieve that which by a relationship with me, by going to Christ, by knowing whose you are.

I promise you, you will not find remedy from the bitter and strife of jealousy in your heart by simply working hard or by simply getting more. You will overcome it when you realize, "This is good. I'm going to work hard for everything God has given me. But it's God that makes it grow. It's God that does the work. It's God that deserves all the glory and credit. It's not who am I but whose am I." The moment we understand that is the moment we'll act like the church Christ wants us to be.

If you're not a believer this morning, would you consider coming to Christ? This is what it's about. Take any problem or struggle you have, like jealousy, and we show that Jesus is the hero and gives us life by his death on the cross. He gives us life and purpose and meaning because we can belong to Him. Let's bow our heads.

Our gracious Father, so often we ask "Who am I? Am I my parents' daughter or son? Am I an engineer? Am I a husband, a wife, a parent? Lord all those things cry out for a measurement of success. We wonder: If I'm a parent, well how good of am I? If I'm a doctor, how successful am I? But if we understand whose we are, that we are saved, redeemed people, there is no success we earn in that. If our first and complete identity is in being redeemed by the blood of Christ, we don't have to be jealous.

It's hard to apply the gospel to day-to-day life and we're going to have to work on it in our small groups and we're going to have to be reminded and challenged of it and we're going to need to be honest and see where we are jealous, but let's come back to the table, Lord. You sent us your son and He has shown us through the giving of His body and His blood to redeem us and save us. We don't have to be jealous because You've given us everything we have. That's not just a cliché. That's absolutely true. Help us to see that. In Christ's name. Amen.