

Your Body is a Temple

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning, St. Silas. Great to see you. My name is Martin Ayres. If we've not met, I'm the senior pastor here. Hello if you're at home. I think still more people watching at home this morning than are here. Please be assured you've not been left behind. It's great that you can join us. And for those who are at home, if you could keep a Bible to hand at 2 Corinthians 6, that would be really helpful. If you're here, you can use the sheet or, of course, if you've got a Bible with you. But I hope you're enjoying being able to travel more than five miles. Things are going in the right direction, which is encouraging. Let's ask for God's help as we turn to his word. Let's pray. Our Father, we recognize you are a great king and we acknowledge that you speak to us with authority. We pray that where you confront us this morning, that you would give us humble hearts, that where we are discouraged, you would lift our heads, that where we're feeling spiritually flat or weary, you would inspire us and restore us, that where we are feeling lost in your world, that you would guide us. Search us, O God, and know our hearts. Test us and know our anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in us and lead us in the way everlasting. In

Jesus' name. Amen. When the Christian faith gets distorted, it often starts with people who've got a big passion for telling other people about Jesus. If you're on the forefront of the church like that and you're telling friends about Jesus or family members, you so long for them to become a Christian, that the temptation, because we get affected by their apathy or their hostility towards what we believe. And we want them to become a Christian, so the temptation is just to make the message more attractive. We might not challenge somebody to say, well, come on, are you going to put your trust in Jesus? Because we think, well, I don't want to put them off.

I'd rather they just belonged to our community for a while and the friendships grew. Or we might play down any sense of the cost of being a Christian because we think, well, yeah, I know there's all these costs, but it's great to be a Christian. And if only they became a Christian, then they might realize it's good and then they might not mind the costs. So we maybe just play it down. There's ways that we just attempted to distort things and make them seem more attractive. Now in Paul's second letter to this church he planted in Corinth, he's writing to a church that has fallen for a distortion of the Christian faith. False teachers had arrived in Corinth not long after Paul had been there. Paul planted the church in 48 AD. False teachers arrived and they've fallen for it. The false teachers were more impressive visually. Their message was more attractive. They still use the same language of Jesus and the gospel, but it's a bit more focused on the now and a bit more attractive in what's being offered. And they make Paul and his message look weak. So in chapters two to five of this letter that we looked at a little bit ago as a church, Paul put together this masterful defense of what ministry looks like between Jesus rising from the dead and Jesus coming back, between the resurrection and the return of Jesus. What does ministry, authentic Christian ministry look like? And he's having put that together, he reaches in this section here, chapter six, a bit of a climax as he urges this church to turn back to him and his message, and turn away from this false teaching that they have been seduced by. So he wants them to come to this full-blooded, genuine Christianity. And he shows in this chapter how demanding that is, but he also gives us hints as to why it has to be that demanding. So we've got four points as we look at it. And our first one is, get on board with Paul's gospel. Get on board with Paul's gospel.

His big appeal to the church comes in verses 11 to 13 of the chapter. So if you just look down, it's the second paragraph if you're looking at your sheets. And it's about their relationship with him, but that's because how they treat, there's no real distinction between how you treat Paul as an apostle of Jesus and how you're treating the historical Jesus. So have a look at verses 11 to 13.

[4 : 59] We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians, and open wide our hearts to you. We're not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us as a fair exchange. I speak as to my children. Open wide your hearts also. In other words, Paul's saying, stop sitting on the fence.

He reminds them how much he cares for them. I've mentioned this when we were looking at chapter three, that it's as though Paul, as you read the letter, is saying, you know, I love you, but you're driving me crazy. And he's not given up on the church. He's stayed committed to them, but he's saying, open your heart to me and my message about Jesus. And that's been building up throughout the letter, that appeal. So in chapter three, he talked about how the ministry that he's been given by Jesus, ministry for Christian ministry between Jesus' resurrection, his return, is an incredible privilege. Because in the fullness of time, after Jesus has risen from the dead and gone into heaven, God sent the Holy Spirit. And so Paul's ministry and new covenant ministry, new testament ministry, is supercharged by the Spirit of God. So what does that ministry look like? Well, in chapter four, he told us that it looks very weak. It's just speaking about Jesus. He said in chapter four, we've renounced secret and shameful ways. We don't peddle or distort the word of God. We just set forth the truth plainly. And that truth is, he says, we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord.

Now in chapter five, he's then gone on to say, that's a message you have to respond to. So at the end of chapter five, he said, we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. And then he said this in 521, God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him, we might become the righteousness of God. So we come before God and we are alienated from him. We're not reconciled to him because of our sin, because of the way that we've lived. The only thing that we can contribute to getting right with God is we bring the sin from which we have to be redeemed. And so God, in his generosity and his love and his grace and his wisdom, has sent Jesus and he made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that when we come to him and trust him, we get his righteousness and we can approach God without fear. So the gate is open for us to go and be reconciled with God, but we have to go through. We have to make that commitment ourselves.

[7 : 42] And he said at the beginning of chapter six, in the first verse that we didn't have read, we started in verse three, we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. So it's this quite alarming thought that you could be someone who hears about God's grace. Maybe you come to church hundreds of times and maybe you've got, maybe you're married to a Christian or maybe your kids are Christians or maybe your parents are Christians and that all the while you would find that you'd receive God's grace in vain, simply because you yourself had never actually approached God and said that you want to be reconciled to him thanks to the gift of Jesus Christ. So he urges them, don't receive God's grace in vain, rather open your hearts to Paul and his message. Get off the fence, get on board with the gospel. It's the Italian Grand Prix this afternoon. For people who are interested in Formula One, that is interesting if you're interested. Rob, our ministry trainee who's leading the service today, he's got his SkyPass. He'll be watching. Some of us might follow it on the radio. Lewis is on Paul. It's news that we might hear about that's of passing interest to us. We might watch the Grand Prix, we might not. We might hear who won. But for other people, news that the

Grand Prix is in Italy is life-changing news. If you're Max Verstappen driving a Formula One car, or you work in his team and you change the tyres and the pit lane, then where the Grand Prix is, is where you will be. You go to Italy for it. In two weeks' time, that team will be in Spain. The next week, they'll be in Portugal. Their whole life revolves around Formula One. Paul is urging us here that when we hear the news about Jesus, it's not a spectator sport for us. It's not something you just hear about and take a passing interest in. When we go to growth group or roots, it's not just a book club to muse over the Bible and go away unchanged. Rather, the gospel is this call to radical trust, obedient trust in the Lord Jesus, so that through Him, we're reconciled to God. He's done all the work for us at the cross, but the fundamental direction of our life has to be changed by what He has done.

Otherwise, we hear about God's grace, but we hear it in vain. So that's our first point. Get on board with Paul's gospel. Now, when we take action like that, what are our expectations then for what life will be like? Life by the Spirit, new covenant life. Will we enjoy life on a higher plane with untrammelled access to heaven and expectation of answered prayer for whatever we ask for? What are the marks of a Christian? Well, that's our second point. Get clear about Christian living. So Paul,

what he does now is he tells us how his life has the marks that back up the message. You see in verse 3 that he says that he desperately doesn't want to put a stumbling block in anyone's path. He doesn't want his ministry to be discredited in verse 3. So in verse 4, he commends himself as a servant. So what does it look like, Paul? What does an authentic follower of Jesus on mission look like? Have a look at verse 4.

As servants of God, we commend ourselves in every way in great endurance. And then he sets out why he's had to show endurance. First, he describes immense struggles in troubles, hardships, distresses, beatings, imprisonments, riots, in hard work, sleepless nights, and hunger. You know, what would you think if you had a Christian friend and this is what their life looks like? What would you think of it?

But those struggles, they've got no value. They're just a bad thing. Christians don't think bad things are good things. They are just a bad thing unless God is at work in the follower of Jesus through what they're going through to bring out in them character, Christ-like character. So look at verse 6 as he goes on. Purity, understanding, patience, and kindness in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love, in truthful speech and in the power of God, with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and the left, that's what we have to look for in the person who brings us the news about Jesus. It's what we have to look for in Christian leaders and Christian ministers. Character. It's Paul able to reassure them, you know my message was authentic because of my character. So we're not primarily, when we look for church ministry that we would follow, we're not primarily looking for high production values.

[12 : 51] And it wasn't that Paul was a brilliant speaker. It wasn't skillful speeches that made people think, yeah, I'll follow him. He's, you know, I really, he can really engage people. And it wasn't that God was blessing his life with luxury. What authenticated his message was that he had patience and love and self-control. He was able in Christ's strength to display during immense difficulty, godly character.

And he goes on to describe other things he went through. Verse 8, that he was misunderstood, that there was bad report about him, that he was regarded as an imposter. But his response wasn't wasn't outrage, wasn't fury, it was patience and kindness and truthful speech. Now how did he do that?

It's because he had this unshakable grasp of what Christ could give him as he depended on Christ. That to follow Jesus between his resurrection and his return involves living out his cross and his resurrection at the same time. So Paul's carrying around the death of Jesus because he's following a crucified savior. And yet because Jesus is alive, the risen Jesus can strengthen his people to endure what they face and be godly. So if you just look at verses 9 and 10, there is this great little collection of couplets. And you see the death and resurrection of Jesus in Paul through them. So look at him living out the cross of Jesus in verses 9 and 10. You see he's dying, he's beaten, he's sorrowful, and he has nothing. And then look at what Christ gives him in that. So he says, dying and yet we live on, beaten and yet not killed, sorrowful yet always rejoicing, poor yet making many rich, having nothing and yet possessing everything. So folks, let me ask you, as we hear Paul, do you need to get clearer about expectations for the Christian life? I've got a friend who was telling me last week about running the marathon. I've never run a marathon, so I said, what was it like?

He said it was awful. He said the first 10k, he ran his best ever 10k. He was so uplifted by the crowd in Edinburgh. Second 10k, it was his second best ever 10k. His third 10k, he beat the other two 10k, it was his best ever 10k. And then he hit the wall. It was horrendous. He said he just had to hobble through the rest of the marathon and just got over the line. And his time was rubbish. And he said, he wants to do it again. Because now he knows what it's like, he could actually do a better job of it.

[15 : 56] Sometimes in life, we go wrong because we have the wrong expectations and we get blindsided by difficulty. There's a writer, Gary Miller, who's written a book about this letter, about two Corinthians. And he sums up this little section from Paul with this question.

Are you ready for the rest of your life to be hard? Are you ready for the rest of your life to be hard? But we could add to that, and are you convinced, like Paul was, that the risen Jesus can and will sustain you through it if you trust him? That he alone is everything you need, however hard it gets. So that's our second point, get clear about Christian living. And now Paul calls the Corinthians fully to turn away from and reject the false teachers that are in the church and anything else that could stand in the way of them being devoted to Jesus. So our third point is get rid of anything

contaminating. So look at verse 14, and we see the command, do not be yoked together with unbelievers. Now you might be a guest here, and this might mean nothing to you, but if you've been around churches some time, you might have heard that verse used because it's often used by Christians as a bit of a, what we might call a proof text, to say that if you're a Christian, you shouldn't get married to a non-Christian, to someone who's not a Christian. Now I think there are two problems with using this verse like that. There are other places we might go to talk about that, about how you choose wisely who you'd marry, but there are two problems with using this verse like that. The first is that we've just got no evidence in this letter that that was going on in Corinth. Rather, the unbelievers in Corinth are not people they might marry, they are these false teachers in the church whose gospel is different to Paul's, and Paul is calling the church to pull away from those people rather than being yoked with them. And the second problem with saying, oh this is a verse about who you marry, is that I think it's actually a verse that's much broader than that, much more challenging, and we see that when he returns to the challenge at the beginning of chapter 7. So at the very end of our reading, chapter 7 verse 1, he kind of retells that challenge, having given some reasons why that we'll come to, and look what he says, look how broad it is. Therefore, since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God. So it's for all of us about anything that might pull us away from being holy. There's a series of novels by C.J. Sansom about a detective called Shardlake. I don't know whether you've come across them. There's seven of them, and they're set at the time of the Reformation. They're just kind of holiday reads. They're just murder mysteries, but they're set in an interesting time of history, and as you read them, you realize the monasteries, as described in these novels, that were much more around the country at the time, they were basically dens of iniquity. They become corrupt, the monasteries, and at the time of the dissolution of the monasteries, they were not good places to be. They were not places of purity, and that's because you don't become pure and holy by coming out of the world and spending all your time in an exclusive Christian bubble. Having nothing to do with people who are not Christians will not make you like Jesus. So when it says in 6:14, do not be yoked together with unbelievers, it's not about being in a business partnership with non-Christians. This isn't about having a non-Christian car mechanic or a non-Christian builder, if you're a Christian. Those things are not going to help. What Paul is calling God's people to here is to cut out whatever in your life is dividing your heart, and to be willing to be ruthless about that. Could each of us work out, well, what's beneficial for me, what's good for me that I need to pursue, and what threatens my devotion to Jesus? What causes me just to lose heart spiritually? And that means it could be a relationship. It could be. It could be a friend. It could be a set of friendships.

Or a lifestyle with friends that just is getting us in the way of temptation. And though we don't want to retreat from the world, we want to be in the world, as Christians are called to be like a sort of a colony in the world, spending time in amongst people, and yet distinctive. But there are times when it might be appropriate to think, you know, I've got this group of friends, and the reality is when I spend time with them, I'm not being distinctive and a good witness to Jesus. Because I just don't have the strength not to just get lured away when I'm with them, and I just end up looking just like them. And it's actually, it's bad for me, and it's not good for them.

[21 : 30] So it could be a relationship. What else could it be? It could be about a shop that we love, a shop that sells us a vision, whether it's a shop online or a shop in person, that sells us a vision of a lifestyle that makes us think, if I bought everything from that shop and became that person, that lifestyle, that's what would make me happy without Jesus. It could be about our media.

As Christians, we're just exposed to phenomenal amounts of media, and we get shaped by it. I think Christians of previous generations would be shocked at how undiscerning we can be at what we watch, how it shapes our values, how it shapes our minds, whether it's something that we watch on Netflix or the features and stories on the BBC website, whatever it might be. Now, I was watching a film with my kids last week. You know, it's a kids' film. None of you in the room here will have seen it, I don't think. Littlefoot. But in the film, as you watch it, you think, there is a massive agenda in this film against religion. And so, you know, because I was able to have a chat with the kids about that. But how often do we find that, undiscerningly, we're watching something that's championing an agenda, and we find that it shapes our hearts. It shapes how we think about an issue.

So we want to be engaging with culture, but there can be times when it's perfectly appropriate for any of us to think, for me personally, I'm not going to watch that because it's not good for me.

Where is my body and spirit contaminated by something? And am I willing, even when it's something where it's not obviously sin in itself, but because it's not beneficial to me, I'm willing to bear the cost of having nothing to do with it.

But why would we do that? Why does the Christian life have to be so exclusive? Why is the first of God's Ten Commandments so demanding? You shall have no other gods before me. Well, it's not that we have to purify ourselves to earn God's favor. Rather, it's that it's because of what Jesus has achieved for us. Something so extraordinary, it just really doesn't make any sense to harbor love for the world any longer. So that's our fourth point. Get a grip on what Christ has achieved for you. Get hold of what Christ has achieved for you. So when Paul gives his command in verse 14, don't be yoked together with unbelievers, he follows it with five questions. And the questions are just designed to bring out for us how incongruous it would be, how unfitting it would be to have a divided heart now. In verse 15, he says, what harmony is there between Christ and Belial? Belial is another name for a false god at the time, but it just means empty. You could use it to describe any false god, the empty thing. I found that really helpful this week, to remember that the things that people around me who are not Christians are living for, the idols of our age, comfort, leisure, career, successful children, they are fundamentally empty. They are empty ways of life. If you build your life on them, you'll be very boring and you'll be empty. What has that got to do with worshiping Jesus? [25 : 06] What have they got in common? How could we do them together? Then verse 16, what agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God.

And then what Paul does next is really amazing. He has these, you see how the alignment changes in the Bible there. Verses 16, 17, and 18, he brings this series of quotes from the Old Testament, from the scriptures. And he's using them to show us how extraordinarily privileged we are to be followers of the living God in the time we live in. Because they're promises about how God would come to be with his people through the temple. And Paul says those promises are fulfilled today in the church. The people, not the buildings, the people. So the first promise is from Leviticus, when God promised he would live with his people and walk among his people, and he would be their God, and they would be his people. And then in verse 17, he refers to the prophecies of Isaiah, about Isaiah, God called his people through Isaiah to be holy for him. He says, come out from them and be separate from the pagans around them at the time. And then in verse 18, that promise, I will be a father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty. That's a pulling together, a conflation of two different prophecies. The first was the promise in 2 Samuel 7 from God through the prophet

Nathan to King David that his son would build the temple, and that God would come and dwell in the temple in Jerusalem. And he said, you know, I will be a father to him, and he will be my son. But Paul takes it and combines it with a prophecy in Isaiah to say, no, we are God's children now. We are God's sons and daughters because we're the temple. We are the fulfillment. We are the dwelling place of God.

So you see what Paul wants us to do? He wants us to grasp the astounding place we have in redemptive history, in the history of God's dealing with humanity, that the physical temple in Jerusalem that was built, and then it was built three times. And at the time that the third temple was there, you know, in Jesus' time, remember the disciples looking at the temple, and they say to Jesus, look at the stones. It was a wonder of the world. And Paul says, that was the shadow. The fulfillment is us who trust in Jesus. We are the temple of the living God. The Spirit of God dwells in us.

We're the living stones. Now think back about the big, magnificent physical temple. How disgusting you would feel if, disgusted you would feel if you went in and there was a shrine to an idol. It just would be disgusting. Think, this is the temple to the living God. What's this doing here? And that is how inappropriate it should feel that we, the temple, would harbor in our hearts a continuing love and affection for the idols of our age. A few years ago, the cathedral around the corner from here, St. Mary's, got in the global news. Because in January, at the time when the church tends to remember the visit of the Magi to the infant Jesus, they had a Koran reading in their church service. And there was all this outrage, all over the world actually, because people were saying how unfitting it was, incongruous it was, to have a reading from the Koran in an act of Christian worship, in a building that's supposed to be set apart for Christian worship. Well, look, I mean, yes, that was inappropriate. But what 2 Corinthians 6 is saying here is, in a similar way, we should feel disgusted when we, as Christians, find ourselves thinking, you know, what I really need to be truly happy is

Jesus and something else.

[29 : 28] It's got that same kind of vibe to it. Why would we think Jesus is not enough? It should make us shudder that we'd still harbor these desires in us. So folks, I know that's challenging. I know we're all works in progress on that. Certainly, we're works in progress. But it's challenging because Jesus has called us to something so great as his people today. And for lots of us, we might not be in danger of giving up on Jesus this week. We might be people who are thinking, I'm not going to stop being a Christian this week. But we might believe a lie that says we need God and something else to get us through life and make us happy. Maybe we've become persuaded in the pandemic that what we really need when we get things back to normal is God and a better job or God and a better spouse or God and a better sex life or God and my neighbor's car or God and my friend's popularity or God and a nice day at a sensory hotel. And the way out of that, of that mindset, if we think that's not fitting, if we see that in our hearts, the way out of it is worship. We worship our way into these messes and we need to worship our ways out of them by a deeper commitment to focus our time on the God of the

Bible. Perhaps we could focus and take time to reflect on the wisdom of the living God, that in his unfolding plan of salvation, all those ancient shadows are fulfilled now that the Spirit has come and we are his people. Perhaps we could take time this week to reflect on the love of our God, the living God, displayed in his patience with us and his mercy to us. We could reflect on his goodness, that he always does what's right and just. We could reflect on the consistency of the living God, that we will never find a dark side to him that we weren't expecting, that lets us down. We could reflect on the power of the living God, that he is the one who can defeat death and take away our fear of death forever.

We can pursue purity in our devotion to him because we really don't need anything else. Let's pray together. Just have a moment of quiet for each of us to do business with God and then I'll lead a prayer.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Heavenly Father, we praise you and thank you for your simple gospel message of Jesus Christ and Lord. We open our hearts to that message.

[32 : 54] would you help us day by day to live out the cross and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And may our grasp of the privileges of being your temple deepen so that we can indeed come out from whatever is unhealthy and perfect holiness out of reverence for you.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Thanks for putting the forgiveness of trust in to I spirit. Amen. I go to baby to last time, but now the here to live in Jesus Christ and Lord Jesus Christ and who is doing, on petals in my body is the third, on presented by belonging to him to death and with the strength of Hera and in the name of Jesus Christ.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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