

Temptation to unfaithfulness

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[0 : 00] Good to see you this morning. Well, if you're married, whether you're a Christian or not, if you're married, you will know about an ever-present danger that exists in your life, that you've got to guard against.

And that is the danger of being in situations where you might be tempted to be unfaithful. And if you're wise, you'll know that no matter how well your marriage is going, you're not above such temptations.

You're not immune to such temptations. I know close friends, and you might as well, close friends who have fallen into adultery and ruined families, and these are people that I never expected would do such a thing, and they never expected it of themselves.

But the truth is, to fall into unfaithfulness is easier than we think, because we are all sinners. And so, we know, if you are married, you'll know we need to take special precautions to avoid compromising situations where we may be tempted, right?

So, going out for after-work drinks with that attractive colleague, just the two of you, if you're married, that's a bad idea. And I don't need to convince you of that. It makes common sense.

[1 : 18] It's a bad idea. And I think we'd all agree on that, that precautions like that are necessary for a healthy marriage, right? To avoid compromising situations where we might be tempted to be unfaithful.

But now let me ask you, whether you're married or not, what precautions do you take to avoid situations in which you may be tempted to be unfaithful to God?

Think about that for a second, because we don't think about that nearly enough. We take all these precautions, if we're married, against being unfaithful to our spouse. But do we take any similar precautions against being unfaithful to our God?

Because that is, in fact, the most important relationship any of us have. Far more important than our relationship with our spouse, important as that is. But our relationship with our Creator, whether you're married or not, no matter what relationships in life you have, your relationship with your Creator is the central, most important relationship you could ever have.

And so how do we guard against drifting away from that relationship and being unfaithful to God? It's a very important question, and that's what this passage in 2 Corinthians is here to help us with, answering that question.

[2 : 40] Because that's Paul's major concern here, about the Corinthian Christians who he's writing to. He's worried that they are getting into a situation that they're not noticing, where they'll be tempted to be unfaithful to God.

And he uses a very vivid image to make his point. So at the beginning of the passage in verse 2, you'll see this. This is his opening statement that explains just why he writes what he does here. So have a look at verse 2. He says, Alright, this is his thesis statement for the whole passage. Now to understand what he means, we first got to understand the culture of the day. So back in the day, especially in Hebrew culture, where Paul was from, when a virgin was engaged to be married, it was the duty of the father to make sure that she remained pure until her wedding day.

A very important job that was. And yes, yes, sexual abstinence before marriage was the norm for God's people, and it should still be today.

[3 : 56] I'm sad I have to mention that, but I do in today's world. Because sexual promiscuity is so normal, but it's not the norm for God's people. Sex outside of marriage is a sin.

That should be obvious, but it's not. So I have to say it. Anyway, so the father, if he suspected his daughter was getting involved with some other guy before her marriage, he would make sure that relationship didn't go anywhere.

That was his job as the father. And in some ways, nothing's changed, right? I saw a t-shirt the other day that said, Guns don't kill people. Dads with pretty daughters kill people.

And in Israel, this was literally true, okay? Fathers would go to any extent to ensure their daughter wasn't unfaithful to who she was promised to. And that is the image that Paul is using to describe his relationship with the Corinthians.

Basically, he's saying he was their father, their spiritual father. He brought the gospel to them. He was responsible for their spiritual rebirth, if you like. And he, therefore, will do anything to make sure that they, as a group of believers, remain faithful to the one they're engaged to, which is Jesus Christ.

[5 : 08] Because the wedding day hasn't yet come. When they will be his once and for all, and nothing will be able to change that. And they will live under his provision and eternal protection.

That's going to happen, by the way, when Jesus comes back to earth. And to gather his people, to make his church his. And that event is described in Revelation as a marriage.

As a marriage feast, as a marriage ceremony. It's the great marriage that is going to happen. Which all human marriages point to. And that we should be looking forward to every day as Christians.

If we are believers in what Jesus did. If we believe that through his death he has washed us clean. And made resurrection possible for us. And opened the way to eternal life. That marriage is what we wait for and look forward to.

And what we should be excited about every day. Now if you are married, you'll probably remember, I hope. The excitement that you felt leading up to your wedding day, right?

[6 : 09] It's a very heady time. And it's very exciting. Well, that is the kind of excitement and anticipation that God's people should be living with in this life. For the day when Jesus comes back. That's how we should be feeling.

But even more so. Because a marriage, an earthly marriage is only temporary. And it can only give you a certain amount of security and happiness. The marriage of Jesus with his church is the ultimate joy and delight and happiness a human could ever experience.

And it's eternal security. It's the greatest. Every pleasure you receive from marriage, you will receive a thousand times more in the marriage of Christ and his church.

So I'm trying to describe, I'm trying to show you that we should be emotionally attached to that day to come. We should be anticipating it with great excitement. You know, people spend so much time chasing after and looking forward to getting married in this life.

Right? Let's be honest. Almost all of your young adult years are spent looking for a mate, basically. So you can settle down one day and enjoy the suburban bliss of a home, a car, a dog and two kids.

[7 : 18] You know, that's kind of what everybody is living for. But Christians have something much better to spend our lives on. And spend our lives looking forward to and living in light of.

Not our earthly relationships and retirement investments. But our eternal marriage and our eternal inheritance in the world to come. When Jesus comes to dwell with his people, who he made pure through his death on the cross.

And when he comes and defeats sin and death and pain and suffering once and for all. And he rules this creation and we rule it under him.

In righteousness, without end. The world that God has always planned. That is a much better thing to live for than the house and the dog and two kids.

Am I right? And that is what we are called to live for. But the point of what Paul is saying here. Is that while Christians already belong to Christ now.

[8 : 18] We're still looking forward to the wedding day to come. That's the image that he's giving us here. And we need to understand that. He's saying to the Corinthians.

Even though they already belong to Christ. In terms of being engaged. The wedding hasn't happened yet. And until it does, he tells them. There's always a danger.

That they're going to turn away. And ruin the engagement. And therefore never reach the wedding day. That's the point he's making. And he's very concerned. About the very real danger.

Of these believers becoming unfaithful. To who they had previously committed to. And as he puts it in verse 3. Being led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

He wouldn't have said this to them. And he wouldn't be so concerned. If it couldn't actually happen. They can. What this means. Christians can have a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

[9 : 17] Christ. And still be led away from that. And forsake their place in the kingdom. And this is such an important thing for us to realize. And it's not taught enough.

From pulpits. You know. Because pastors. Typically are tempted to. Preach things that people want to hear. What will make them feel happy. What will give them.

A warm feeling when they leave church on Sunday. So that they'll come back and the church will grow. That's what. Pastors often wrongly. Think. And so that what they'll tell people is. You're completely. You know.

You don't have to do anything. Jesus has done it all. So just sit back and relax. And. You know. They won't say this. But the implication is. Live. Live however you want. Because. You're okay. You're safe.

But. Paul. That's not what Paul says. That's not what the Bible says. All right. It is possible for a Christian to fall away from a sincere devotion to Christ. That's what this passage is teaching.

[10 : 12] And therefore. We always need to guard against it. And we must never assume. Well. It'll never happen to me. You know. It's the husband. Who says.

I would never cheat on my wife. And therefore doesn't do anything to guard against it. It's that husband who does end up cheating on his wife. And it's just as unwise for a Christian to say. Well. I'm not going to fall away from Christ.

You know. Once saved. Always saved. I'm fine. And so they never guard against that from happening. But if it wasn't possible for that to happen. Then Paul wouldn't be at pains to prevent these Corinthians from falling away.

From a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. Because it can happen. Jesus himself talks about people who receive the word and believe for a time.

But then they fall away under temptation or trial. Just read the parable of the sower. He says these exact words. According to Jesus it's possible to believe for a time.

[11 : 08] With joy and receive the word. And then still fall away. Paul elsewhere spoke of particular people by name. Who he knew.

Who he says made a shipwreck of their faith. You can't make a shipwreck. If there was no ship there in the first place. Right. And there are many passages in scripture.

John read one of them from Hebrews for us earlier. Many passages in scripture warning us against falling away from the faith. But we don't like those passages. And we don't like to read them.

And I'll tell you why. Because we think that to think that way. Well that undermines our assurance as Christians. Doesn't it? That if we believe that we could fall away.

Then we'll never be sure that we're actually saved. That's what we think. And yet that actually. That thinking makes no sense. You know. If you're married.

[12 : 03] It doesn't work in the situation of marriage. If you're married. Just because there's the possibility of being unfaithful. Doesn't mean you have to doubt whether you're really married. Or whether you're safe in that marriage.

And even more so. If you're a Christian. You don't need to worry. Because it's God who enables his people to persevere. In the faith. It's the doctrine called perseverance of the saints.

It's not because of our own ability that we persevere in the faith. And we don't become unfaithful. It's God who enables us to persevere. Otherwise nobody would persevere.

In the faith. God provides us with everything we need to stand firm. But we still must use what he provides to God against unfaithfulness.

And that's the point here. Okay. So how do we do that? Now that we know it's possible. To fall away from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. And we need to guard against that. How do we guard against that?

[13 : 00] That's what the rest of the passage is about. And to answer that question. If we first need to know. What it is. That could cause us. To fall away from our devotion to Christ.

What is the main thing? The main threat to Christians. That will cause them to slip away. And become unfaithful to Christ. Well Paul tells us in this passage. But it's not what we expect. You know what it is?

What can cause you to fall away from Christ? Is bad theology. Wrong thinking about Jesus. Because look at the end of verse 3.

Paul says to the Corinthians. He's afraid that their minds may somehow be led astray. You see that? In your Bibles. End of verse 3. Their minds may somehow be led astray.

Not their bodies or their actions. But their minds. The way they think about Jesus. Is what's going to lead them to be faithful to him or not.

[13:59] That's the determining factor. And so right here. Right here in this passage. We see the connection. Between the way we think. And the way we live.

Those two things are. Are inseparably bound. You can't. Separate how you think. And how you live. You can't.

Think whatever thoughts you want. And still maintain a holy lifestyle. We've got to guard how we actually think. And the world does not tell us that. You know. The world says. You know.

As long as you don't say or do the wrong thing. You can think how you want. But that's not what the Bible says. If you want to combat sin in your life. It actually starts in what you allow yourself to meditate on in your mind.

What you allow yourself to think. Jesus taught this. He taught that sin begins in the mind. Adultery begins with lustful thoughts.

[14:56] Husbands. You won't remain faithful to your wife. If you don't keep a tight rein on your thoughts. And so. That's the point. How we think is essential to how we live.

And how we think about God. Therefore. Is essential. For our devotion. To him. Our theology. That's why it's so important to have good theology.

And I'm. By the way. I'm not just talking. About. Pastors. And Christians. Those are not the only people who have theology. Right. Or who. Have to think about theology.

No. Every Christian. Has a theology. And. I would actually go further. And say. Every human. Has a theology. An understanding.

Of. Theos. That's the Greek word for God. And who. This God is. Or who he isn't. Every human has. Some kind of understanding of that.

[15:55] Even if it's subconscious. Every human. Has a theology. You have a theology. Question is. How solid is that theology? How true is that theology?

How based on truth is that theology? Where did you get that theology from? Was it. As you were growing up. That you absorbed it from the people around you? How do you know their theology was right?

Where did you get your theology from? How accurate is it? And that's. You know. What the problem in Corinth was. That they're thinking.

Their theology was under threat. Okay. So we saw last week. 2 Corinthians chapter 10. That there were a whole lot of false teachers. Coming in. To Corinth.

And. Messing. With the Corinthians theology. By teaching things about God. That were contrary to what Paul. Had taught them. When he was there. And now these Corinthians didn't know what to think.

[16:53] And. That is. This whole section. By the way. Of. 2 Corinthians. From. Chapter 10. To the end. Is Paul trying to help them. To see this. That their theology is under threat. And.

And what to do about it. And. Here he says. That there were three specific areas. Of their theology. Where the battle for their minds. Was taking place. And he lists them in verse 4. Have a look. He says.

For if someone. Comes to you. And preaches a Jesus. Other than the Jesus we preached. Or 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. Okay. So that was the problem. Their thinking. In these three areas.

Was going astray. How they thought about Jesus. And who he was. How they thought about. The spirit. And what he really does. In the Christian life. And how they thought about. The gospel.

[17:49] Itself. How to be saved. From your sins. And these false teachers. Now we don't know exactly. What these false teachers. Were teaching. But it obviously. Had to do with these three areas.

Of theology. Otherwise Paul wouldn't have listed them. And Paul knew. If the Corinthians. Got these things wrong. If they got Jesus wrong. Or the spirit wrong. Or the gospel wrong. Then they would fall away.

From their devotion to Christ. But of course. We don't have to look far today. Do we? To find false teachings. In these three areas. For example.

False teachings about. Who Jesus really is. So the Jehovah's Witnesses. Who will knock on your door. And who will come. With smiles on their faces. And you know what?

Probably good intentions. In their hearts. And they will say. You know. We don't. We. You're a Christian. That's great. You'll say to them. No sorry. I'm a Christian. You know what they'll say. They'll say. I know. That's great. You know.

[18 : 43] If you're a Christian. We believe the same things. They won't tell you. That they don't. Believe. What you believe about Jesus. What we believe.

What the Bible teaches about Jesus. They believe in a completely different Jesus. To what the Bible says. Their Jesus is not God. Their Jesus is not part of the Trinity. He's a created being. Jesus is a creature. And there was a time when he didn't exist. That's what the Jehovah's Witnesses believed. But they won't tell you that at your door. No. They'll tell you all the things that. We have in common. But they're preaching.

Completely different Jesus. So that's. That's example of false teaching about Jesus. You also get false teachings about the Holy Spirit. And what he does.

And the role he has in a Christian's life. So the prosperity gospel. Which we've been talking about already. Will teach you that the Holy Spirit. Is there. And works in your life.

[19 : 38] To liberate you from difficulty. And suffering. And to give you power. To be healthy and rich. That's his job. That's what he does. And people who listen to that. They only want to receive a spirit.

Who will help them to do that. Right? If the pastor says. You know. The spirit is going to give you victory. Over your sickness. And over your poverty. And he's going to. He's going to empower you. To be rich. And all that. That false teachers sprout. The prosperity gospel teachers. If you listen to that. And believe it. Then you will want to receive a spirit. Who's going to help you. To do those things. And people.

Who listen to that. Often. Do receive a spirit. But it's not God's spirit. Another way people receive. A different spirit. Is when they don't believe. That the spirit said.

What he said in scripture. In other words. When people say. That the bible. Is not. Actually inspired. And that word. Inspired. Just means. Inspired. The spirit.

[20 : 35] Has. Has. Put it. Into place. The spirit. Has. Caused it to be. The spirit. Has. Inspired. Those who wrote it. That. And. And. And. So you'll find.

People who say no. No. The bible's not actually inspired. Or at least parts of it. Are not actually inspired. It's the words of men. And that thinking. If you take that on board.

And it might. They might have very reasonable arguments. They'll take you back to the councils of Trent. And the. You know. The third. The third century. And they'll sound like they know what they're talking about. And you might even begin to think.

Yeah. Actually. Maybe the bible is just a collection of. Of what men said. But you know. The moment you start thinking about that. Thinking like that. You will drift away.

From devotion to Christ. Because. How can you possibly have a proper relationship with someone. If you doubt what they say to you. Imagine. Imagine every time your friend said something to you. You said. I don't believe you.

[21 : 29] I don't believe you're talking to me right now. That. That. Your relationship wouldn't go very far. Right. So. So. Our understanding of scripture. And the inspiration of scripture.

Is vital. For our devotion to Christ. And then. The third area. Of theology. Which is under threat. Paul says. Is how people think about the gospel. And today.

You get false teachings about the gospel itself. And how it is that you are saved. From your sins. So the Roman Catholic Church. For example. Teaches that Jesus dying on the cross. Wasn't enough. That. You still need to do things. In order to secure that salvation. And there are subtle forms. Of that works based. Salvation. All over. Christianity.

And in other religions. Of course. But you see. The point I'm trying to make. Is that the same false teachings. That were endangering. The Corinthians. Devotion to Christ.

[22 : 23] Are still alive. And well today. And can endanger. Your and my devotion to Christ. But the thing is. They're often not as obvious. As the examples I gave.

They're often very subtle. Hardly noticeable. These false teachings. And false theology. And many of them. Sound persuasive. And impressive. So we saw last week.

Remember. If you were here. If you weren't. Listen to the sermon. I think it's a very important one. Important passage. Because. Paul's point there. Was that the ability. To communicate well. From a pulpit. And being true. Don't always go together. Often it's the opposite. Often the most impressive speakers. Are the ones sprouting rubbish. Because they can. Because they're so convincing. And they're so entertaining. And how could. What they say. Be possibly wrong. When they have thousands of people. Listening to them. You see. The good speakers.

[23 : 21] The captivating. And engaging speakers. Are the ones who can get away. With talking rubbish. While the boring speakers. Who lose their place. In their notes. And don't finish on time.

And aren't that engaging. And aren't entertaining. They're often the most solid. And reliable. In their teaching. Because that's all they have. Right. They don't necessarily have the skills.

To communicate well. But they've got the truth. And now you might say to me. Okay yeah. But you need the skills as well. And skills are useful. But look what Paul says.

In verse 6. He says exactly that. About himself. He says. I don't have the skills. But I've got the truth. Look at that. I may indeed be untrained. As a speaker. But I do have knowledge.

And so. Basically. What he's saying. Is listen to me. Rather than these impressive. Eloquent speakers. Don't fall. For their attractiveness. And their. Captivating.

[24 : 16] Style. And in fact. He goes on. To say. Shockingly. That these guys. Are actually. Servants of Satan. And this is.

This is harsh language. But look at verse 13 to 15. What he says about these. Eloquent. Impressive speakers. Coming to the Corinthians. From verse 13. 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. Now this is a. Another. Very important teaching. We must take away. From this passage. Satan's best.

Tactic. To get you. To fall away. From Christ. Is to disguise. Himself. As an angel. Of light. In other words. A messenger.

[25 : 12] That's what the word angel means. A messenger. Of truth. And so. His servants. More often than not. Will look like Christians. You wondering where.

Satan's servants are today. Well. Start your search. In the church itself. Because. That's the way. Satan works. That's his tactic. He.

His servants. Will look. Just like one of us. They will look like Christians. Rather than. They won't look like Satanists. And Muslims. And people who openly oppose Jesus.

Satan knows. We won't listen to them. Right? So there's no point. Him working through them. Too much. What he prefers to do. Is that he gets in under the radar.

And he puts on a disguise. And he takes the most dangerous things. That can lead you away from Jesus. And he dresses them up in Christian clothes. And so we need to guard.

[26 : 08] Our theology. And be very careful. Who we listen to. To make sure we don't fall into that trap. But how do we do that? You know.

How do we know what is truth. And what is not? Well. That's easy. Paul and the apostles. That's what they're there for. Okay? That's why we have them. And their writings in the Bible.

Jesus specifically commissioned them. To be the guardians of true knowledge about him. And to have the right interpretation. Of the events of the gospel. So. You know. Anybody can read the gospel.

And there's many things we can understand. Solidly. As truth from the gospels. But. What does that mean for our life? How do we interpret what Jesus did? There's not a lot of interpretation.

Interestingly. In the gospels. There's a lot of. Well. There's a lot of. Recounting. It's. It's the histories of Jesus. What he said. What he did. But there's no. Matthew.

[27 : 03] Mark. Luke. And John. Don't often. Step aside. And say. Now let me explain to you. What this means for your life. No. That's what the apostles are for. To. To not only preserve. But to interpret. The gospel for us.

And that's why Paul also says. In verse five and six here. I do not think. I am the least inferior. To these super apostles. I may indeed.

Be an untrained speaker. But I do have knowledge. Okay. Let me just. Pause for a second. And explain this verse. Because lots of people think. That he's referring.

Sarcastically. To these false teachers. In Corinth. And that's how lots of the. Translations of the Bible. Will translate it. As super apostles. In inverted commas. But. And that might be true. But the language. Isn't actually clear. The underlying. Greek language. It could also be translated. As preeminent apostles. The preeminent apostles.

[28 : 01] Rather than. Those super apostles. It's. The Greek isn't clear. In other words. He could be. Talking about. The first apostles. That Jesus commissioned. Peter and John.

And all of them. As opposed to Paul. Who came later. And so he could be saying. If that's the reading. That his teaching. Is no less authoritative. Than theirs. Just because he came later. He carries the same knowledge. Of God. That was entrusted to them. And so he has the same. Apostolic authority. That they do. So that's.

One reading of it. But. Even if he is speaking. Sarcastically. About the false teachers. The point. Is the same. Because he's saying. That he's no second rate. Preacher. But he's a legitimate.

Apostle. Who carries God's. Revealed truth. Same as the other. Apostles. That Jesus commissioned. That's his point here. And we have their words. To know what. True theology is.

[28 : 57] To test. Whatever messages. And philosophies. We hear in the world. Around us. We have their words. In the Bible. And of course. The prophets. And the rest of scripture. To test.

What we hear. How to think properly. About who Jesus is. How to think properly. About what the spirit. Does. And. How to think properly.

About being saved. From your sins. And so. Everything you hear. In this world. Needs to be weighed. Against the teachings. We find in the Bible. Now.

I admit. That's not an easy task. Because the Bible. Is a big and. Complex. Book. Of course. It's the history. Of God's dealings. With humanity. From the beginning.

Of time. And so. It's not a small read. And that's why. You have teachers. In the church. Who are trained. And commissioned. Especially. To teach the Bible. faithfully.

[29 : 52] But. Don't. Think. That every Christian. Teacher. Does that. Because they don't. You know. It's very easy. To take. I can tell you. I promise you.

It's very easy. To take verses. Out of context. In the Bible. And to. To. Use them. To teach. What I want to teach. Rather than what. God is trying.

To teach. And. Preachers often do that. Even without knowing. And so. That's. You know. Paul's whole point here. Is. Choose your teachers.

Wisely. Choose the books. You read. Wisely. Guard your theology. Because your theology. How you think. About God. And his gospel.

Will. Determine. How you live. You know. I used to work. In IT. Before I. Entered the ministry. And we had a phrase. When it came to information.

[30 : 46] In computer systems. It was. The. It was the. Acronym. G.I.G.O. You know. What it is. Garbage in. Garbage out. But it's not just computers.

The same goes. For our minds. To make sure. We're not putting. Garbage. In there. We need to evaluate. Everything we hear. According to the word of God.

That needs to be our final. Authority. Because this. Is the only thing. You can know. For sure. Is true. In this entire world. This is the only thing. The words in here.

Are the only. Absolute. Certain truth. That you have. And I have. And so we've got to take this.

Seriously. This has got to be front and center. Of our attention. Day in.

And day out. This is light. In darkness. And so. Read it. And learn it. And take. Every opportunity. To. To learn it more. And sit under.

[31 : 40] Sermons. Listen to faithful preaching. Often. As often as you can. Whenever. Christians are gathering. To open the Bible. Get there. Make sure. You put other things aside.

So you can be there. Take every opportunity. To sit under. Proper teaching. Of this word. Because this is going to. Determine how you live. And this is the means of grace.

That God has given. To you. To preserve you. From falling away. And to bring you. Safely with his church. To that great marriage. In the coming age.

He wants you to be there. And he's given you this. To preserve you. To that day. So don't neglect it. Let's pray. Lord. We do. Thank you.

For that great. Promise. Of the wedding. To come. Between. You. And your people. That is. Human marriages. Are just a. Poor reflection.

[32 : 35] Of the. Great. And glorious. Relationship. That your church. Will have with you. In the new creation. Forever. In the coming age. And so we. We pray that you would help us. To look forward.

With excitement. To that day. To focus. Our. Time. And our energy. And our resources. On. Bringing other people. Into. Your church.

So that they might also. Have that great hope. That we have. But we also pray Lord. Even. As we are believers. In your church. That you would help us. Not to take that for granted. Help us. Not to. Neglect. Guarding. Against. False teachings. And Satan's schemes. To take us away from you. And to. Cause us to break.

Of the engagement. And so we pray Lord. Would you help us to guard. Our minds. Would you help us to. To be disciplined. In our study of. Your word.

[33 : 30] And would you. Continue to give us. All the means of grace. That you give us. In order to persevere. Till the end. And we pray this in Jesus name. Amen.