

Temples of the Living God

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, good morning again. My name is Jeff. I am one of the pastors here at Church of the Advent.
- And if you're here this morning and it's your first time, I just want to say welcome. We're so glad that you decided to join us. We would love to connect with you. During the announcements, there's going to be a QR code on the screen for you to scan.
- It's also in the lobby on your way out. We'd love for you to scan that, fill out a form, and connect with you. And one of our pastors will follow up with you. And we would love to just get coffee and hear your story and hear about what God is doing in your life.
- If you would have walked the streets of Corinth in the first century, you would have noticed a number of things about this city.
- You would have noticed that it was a very wealthy city. That it was a center of commerce and trade, of banking and finance.
- [1 : 0 6] You would have noticed that it was a center of a lot of travelers and tourism. Tourists who came to the city for the city's many festivals and athletic games, athletic events.
- You would have noticed that it was a city full of vice and crime. One of the things that Corinth was famous for was its flourishing industry of prostitution.
- All of this led one scholar to conclude that Corinth was at once the New York, the Los Angeles, and the Las Vegas of the ancient world combined.
- Another thing that you would have noticed about the city of Corinth, in addition to all this, is that it was a very religious city. There were 26 shrines and temples scattered throughout the city to various gods and goddesses.
- The most prominent of which stood atop the city's highest point on a large hill. And it was the temple of Aphrodite, the goddess of love and beauty and fertility.
- [2 : 2 0] And it's to people in this city that Paul writes this letter. And in this section, he's writing to people who are living in a city of temples.
- And to people living in a city of temples, he tells them, you're to be the one temple. You're to be the one temple that stands apart all the rest.
- We've been in a series in 2 Corinthians called Power and Weakness. And we've been walking through that letter chapter by chapter. And if you're just reading 2 Corinthians straight through, if you're reading it straight through all in one go, when you get to this section in 2 Corinthians 6, it can feel like this abrupt left turn.
- In Paul's thought and in the flow of his words. We're in this section, as we had two weeks ago, where Paul is making this direct appeal to the Corinthian church.
- Some people that he's had some conflict with in the past. And he's seeking to ask them to accept his authority as an apostle. And for them to receive the authenticity of his ministry.
- [3 : 3 2] But he's also asking them to open their hearts to him again in love. He's seeking to restore his relationship with them. And right in the middle of the section, he sort of makes this what feels like an abrupt left turn.

He goes right into this really strong exhortation about pursuing holiness. About pursuing holiness. And you're like, okay, Paul, like, I thought I knew where this was going.

But I didn't realize that this is where we were headed. But we're here now. So, okay. But I didn't realize that this was where we were going. And what may feel like an abrupt transition in the flow of this letter actually shows us something really important.

It shows us that Paul's main concern, although he cares about his relationship with the Corinthians, his main concern isn't about hurt feelings.

His main concern is about seeing the gospel transform the Corinthian church. And as the gospel transformed the Corinthian church, that it would transform the city in which they live.

[4 : 41] Paul calls on people living in a city of temples to be the temple of the living God. Because that is what they are. And so we're going to look at two things this morning that Paul reminds us of.

We're going to see that we're called to live the story of the temple. And we're called to draw sacred boundaries. We're called to live the story of the temple.

And we're called to draw sacred boundaries. Let's pray together. Lord, thank you for your word. Thank you that all of it is true. It is given to us in love.

I pray that you would speak to us by your Holy Spirit through your word. That we may know, love, follow, and worship you. In Christ's name, amen.

So first, Paul shows us that we're to live the story of the temple. The central image of the temple comes from verse 16, where Paul says, for we are the temple of the living God.

[5 : 48] And in many ways, the story of the Bible is the story of the temple. That place where God reveals his glory and manifests his presence with his people.

Genesis 1 and 2 shows us that all of creation is God's temple. His presence and glory fills the cosmos. And the Garden of Eden is sort of this microcosm of creation, where human beings made in his image embody his presence and his rule to the rest of creation as kings and as priests.

And humanity's job description is not only to serve God and worship God in this garden temple, but to extend its borders.

To extend its borders by cultivating God's creation until the earth is filled with the glory of God. Old Testament scholar T. Desmond Alexander says this.

He says, And so what did they do?

[7 : 27] How did they respond to this boundary? Well, when I was in seminary, I had an Old Testament professor who would talk about Genesis 3. And he would say that the way that Genesis 3 should read is that a serpent came into the garden.

A serpent came into the garden and split. Adam killed the serpent. That's how Genesis 3 should read. That Adam protects the garden from the presence of evil.

But that's not what Genesis 3 says. Instead, Adam and Eve listen to the serpent. And they rebel against the sacred boundary that God had set. And so God expels them from the garden.

He expels them from his prisons. And he strips them of their status as kings and priests. And the story of the Old Testament is a story of God coming to restore his glory and his presence to his fallen creation.

That glory and that presence that was lost in Eden. And the echoes of Eden run throughout the Old Testament story. We see the echoes of Eden all throughout the Old Testament.

[8 : 39] In particular, we see these striking similarities between Eden and these places where God came to dwell with his people. The tabernacle and the temple. So in Genesis, we see that the Lord himself walks with Adam and Eve in the garden.

But Leviticus and Deuteronomy say the exact same thing about the tabernacle and the temple. That the Lord comes and dwells and walks with his people.

We know that Genesis 3 says that Eden was... The entrance to the east of Eden was guarded by angels, by cherubim. The tabernacle and the temple are entered from the east.

And the altar is guarded by angels, by cherubim. The lampstand, the menorah in the tabernacle is designed to look like what?

Like a tree. Symbolizing the tree of life. And so the tabernacle and the temple, the place of God's dwelling, are meant to point us back to the Garden of Eden.

[9 : 48] They're meant to point us back to Genesis. And the message that we're supposed to get is supposed to be loud and clear. It's supposed to be loud and clear that the redemption and the salvation that God brings is always about the restoration of his purposes in creation.

That's what we're supposed to see throughout the Old Testament story. And here in 2 Corinthians chapter 6, Paul is following the grain of the story.

He's following the grain of the story of the temple. In three verses, he quotes and alludes to six or seven different Old Testament passages that are all about God's covenant relationship with his people through his temple.

In verse 16, he quotes Leviticus 26, which says, I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God and they shall be my people.

God dwelling among his people. God walking among his people. Those are echoes of Genesis. They're echoes of Eden. In verse 17, he quotes Isaiah 52, which says, Therefore, go out from their midst and be separate from them and touch no unclean thing, and then I will welcome you.

[11 : 13] And here God is speaking through Isaiah to people who are living in exile in Babylon, and he's saying to them, Even though you live in exile, you're still people of the temple.

And so don't worship the idols around you. Don't worship the gods around you, because one day I'm going to bring you out of exile, and I'm going to once again make you my dwelling place.

Again, we should hear Genesis, Eden, temple, these echoes. And then in verse 18, Paul does this thing where he actually brings together two different passages.

He brings together 2 Samuel 7 and Deuteronomy 32. And he brings them together in this quotation that says, I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me.

And what this is, is again, it's a reference of God dwelling among his covenant people in intimate relationship.

[12 : 22] God is a father who dwells with his people as a father dwells with his sons and daughters. And all of these references here in 2 Corinthians 6 were meant to hear the story of the temple that goes all the way back to the Garden of Eden in Genesis.

And Paul is saying that this story has reached its climax in you, the church. In Jesus Christ, we don't just have a temple.

We are the temple of the living God. Jesus is our great high priest and our atoning sacrifice. He entered the temple of the Holy of Holies and tore the curtain so that the presence of God, the glory of God, might be poured out by the Holy Spirit to all people.

The temple of God is no longer brick and mortar, but it is flesh and blood. It is you. It is your very bodies have become the temple of the living God.

And so we see this story unfold from garden to tabernacle to temple to exile to Jesus to the church of God filling all creation with his glory and then in love coming to save and redeem and dwell with people who had rejected that glory and to restore them once again to their vocation as royal priests.

[13 : 51] And it is this glorious truth. It is this new covenant reality about the temple that motivates us to be holy people, that motivates us to pursue holiness in our lives.

Holiness is its moral purity. It's godly maturity. Holiness is looking like God.

It's looking like Jesus. That's what holiness is. And in chapter 7, verse 1, Paul says, Since we have these promises, beloved, since we are inheritors of this story, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.

He's saying if we are in fact God's temple, if we've been receivers and inheritors of these promises in this story, then we should take holiness in our lives seriously.

If Old Testament believers had to be cleansed from sin in order to enter God's holy temple, how much more should we pursue holiness in our lives now that we have become that temple in our bodies?

[15 : 15] And it's important to see, though, that as we talk about pursuing holiness, as Paul exhorts and commands the Corinthians here to pursue holiness in our lives, it's important to see that in this verse, Paul is rooting our pursuit of holiness.

He's rooting it in God's grace. He's rooting it in God's grace. He says, Since we have these promises, beloved, since we have these promises, he's talking about the assurance of all the promises that we have through faith in Christ.

And this says something really important that I think we can sometimes miss about the pursuit of holiness in our life. And it's this, that the pursuit of holiness isn't about becoming somebody that we're not yet.

It's not about becoming somebody that we're not yet. It's about becoming more and more of who we already are in Christ as recipients of the gospel.

Pursuing holiness isn't about becoming more and more of something, someone that we're not yet. It's about becoming more and more of who we already are in Christ by grace through faith.

[16 : 37] And so this story of garden to temple, to tabernacle to temple, to Jesus, frames and shows us what Paul means when he says in verse 16 that in a city of temples, we're to be the temple of the living God.

And it shows us why we should pursue holiness. And it shows us the particular way that God, that Paul is, God through Paul, is calling the Corinthians to pursue holiness in their lives.

It shows us why, it shows us one particular way that we're actually meant to pursue holiness in our lives. And that is that we're to draw sacred boundaries.

That we're to draw sacred boundaries in our lives. The central command here in this section is kind of a strange one, to be honest.

In verse 14, Paul says, do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. Now, what in the world does that mean? Don't be unequally yoked with unbelievers.

[17 : 50] Well, a yoke is a large piece of wood that farmers would harness to the backs of two animals who would drag a plow through a field together as they were plowing the field for planting.

And this yoke, this large beam of wood harnessed to these two animals would allow the animals to work together productively. It would allow them to pull the plow together in the same direction.

And in Deuteronomy 2, there are some laws about the agricultural life of Israel. And there was a law that said that you can't make an ox and a donkey plow together.

You can yoke together two oxen. You can yoke together two donkeys. But don't yoke together an ox and a donkey. Why is that?

Well, because an ox and a donkey are fundamentally, they're fundamentally incompatible plowing partners. They're fundamentally incompatible. An ox is clearly bigger and stronger than a donkey.

[19 : 02] And so they won't share the load equally. And so if you harness them together, it's going to be hard for them to move in the same direction. It's going to be hard for them to move the plow.

And if you harness them together, you also risk doing damage to the animals. You risk hurting the animals. The ox is going to be exhausted from having to do all the work.

And the donkey is going to run the risk of breaking a leg while he tries to keep up. And if that happens, and your animals are hurt and exhausted, then you can forget about plowing your field.

You can forget about planting your crops. Instead, you need two animals of the same kind who can be yoked equally and move the plow in the same direction and share the load together.

And most likely, Paul is using this image, he's using this metaphor to talk about worship and fellowship in the Corinthian temples.

[20 : 04] And the 26 temples scattered around the city. And he's warning them against participating in idol worship, participating in pagan practices like the temple feasts and things like prostitution.

He's warning them against harnessing themselves to all the various cults and religions around the city. And we see this because of what follows in verses 14 through 16.

In verses 14 through 16, he asks several rhetorical questions in a row. And these five questions are all making the same point. He says, for what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness?

What fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Belial is this name for Satan, meaning worthless one?

What portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? And so, why does Paul ask this string of questions?

[21 : 17] He asks them to make one singular point, which is, all of these are pointing to a fundamental spiritual incompatibility between having communion with Jesus and having communion with idols.

And so, to be unequally yoked is to be fundamentally aligned with somebody or something that is your spiritual opposite.

To be unequally yoked is to be fundamentally aligned at your core with somebody or something that's your spiritual opposite. There's something at the center of all of our lives that is driving the plow of our decisions, of our choices, our habits, our values.

It could be money. It could be success. It could be comfort. It could be even a good thing like family. But whatever it is, that is what you're harnessing yourself to.

It's what you're harnessing the deepest places of your soul to. That is what you worship. And Paul says, don't be harnessed together with people and things that are your spiritual opposite.

- [22 : 35] Don't align yourself with what is going to do real damage to your soul and pull you away, pull your heart away from following Jesus.

Now, here's what this doesn't mean. It's important to see here's what this doesn't mean. This is not about not having any relationships or associations with people who aren't Christians.

Of course, it doesn't mean this. We know this from the rest of Paul's writings. In other places, he assumes that people have relationships with non-Christians. And he always encourages love and friendship and hospitality in those relationships.

We also know this just because of what the rest of the Bible teaches. All throughout Scripture, we see that we're called to love our neighbors. We're called to be salt and light. We're called to love all people.

And that implies relationship and friendship. I mean, if you look at the life of Jesus, I mean, Jesus had more non-Christian friends than anybody. He was known for hanging out with people who weren't believers.

- [23 : 37] And so, what this command is about then, what it is about is creating sacred boundaries in your life with people and things that are your spiritual opposites.

Creating sacred boundaries in your life with people and things that are your spiritual opposites. So, we're to love our neighbors. We're to love our friends.

You're to share your lives with them. You're to share your worldly goods with them. You're to invite them to your dinner table. You're to have friendships with all kinds of people.

You're to share everything that you have with them. But don't worship their idols. Don't worship their gods.

Don't be harnessed into situations where you're being dragged away into sin, where you're being pulled away from following Jesus. Instead, we're to create sacred boundaries. You might say, okay, well, what are some examples of this?

- [24 : 43] What are some examples of what this looks like practically? I'm going to give you three. A lot of people, actually, when they read this verse, and you might have been thinking this when we read the passage earlier, a lot of people think that this verse is primarily talking about marriage.

That's most often how people quote this passage. But hopefully, by seeing the context, hopefully, what you're able to see is that marriage is actually not what this verse is primarily about.

It's actually much broader than that. Again, it's about anything in your life that you're aligning yourself with that is your spiritual opposite. Having said that, marriage is one particular potential application of this verse.

Because marriage, let's be honest, marriage is one of the bigger harnesses that you can get into in life, where you're hitching yourself to somebody else.

And you don't want to marry someone who's your spiritual opposite. You want to marry someone who's your spiritual partner, someone who can encourage you to follow Jesus, someone who can pray with you and for you, someone who knows how to speak gospel truth to the intricacies of your personality.

- [26 : 04] At the same time, we know that, we know from Paul in 1 Corinthians that if you do in fact find yourself in a marriage with an unbeliever, we're actually encouraged to nevertheless stay in that marriage.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 7, Paul talks about how someone can continue to be a spiritual influence on their spouse and potentially even lead them to faith in Christ.

But still, the ideal is to marry someone that you're spiritual equals with, that you're spiritually compatible with. A more common example for all of us might be something like in the workplace, perhaps a political or a business relationship.

Maybe at work, you could be asked to enter into a contract or an agreement, a business dealing, a financial agreement that would clearly compromise your identity in Christ, that would clearly compromise your ethics and your values as a Christian.

And so, in those kinds of situations, you may need to draw a sacred boundary and say, this is antithetical to my identity in Christ. Let's say, hypothetically, you were an employee of the Washington football team, the Washington commanders, and hypothetically, the owner of that team asked you to create two sets of financial books.

[27 : 38] One that it reported to the NFL and one that was actually true in order to commit financial fraud and pay executives millions of dollars. This is just a hypothetical example.

But this would be a good opportunity for a sacred boundary. This would be a situation in which you should probably unhitch yourself from. another example more common to us would be certain friendships that we have.

Maybe there are some friendships where you have to draw some spiritual boundaries because maybe that friendship, that relationship is pulling you, dragging you away from following Jesus and into sin.

And again, I want to be clear, all of us in this room should have relationships and friendships with people who don't know Jesus. but our deepest spiritual fellowship, our deepest spiritual communion should be people who are going in the same direction as us.

People who are plowing the field of discipleship and who can carry the load with us and who can encourage us as our spiritual partners to follow Jesus.

[28 : 49] Those are the people that we should be in closest spiritual fellowship with. Now, I fully admit that most situations in which creating these type of boundaries would apply are probably way too complex for a sermon.

I mean, there's probably some really complicated, difficult situations in which this should rise. And so, I think it's important to say that these types of things, these types of boundaries are best to serve not individually and privately but in community with a wise counsel of brothers and sisters in Christ who can speak into that situation.

But also, you know, if you're here this morning and you're maybe wrestling with a situation or your relationship and you're wondering, am I unequally yoked in this situation?

Here's a list of maybe some diagnostic questions that could help you discern if you are. So, here's a list of some diagnostic questions. Is this situation, is this relationship drawing me to idolatry?

Drawing me to worship something other than God? Am I being pulled to center my life on something other than Jesus? Am I being led to delight in what grieves the heart of God?

[30 : 17] Am I being influenced to sin? Are my choices or my actions or my habits drifting away from my pursuit of holiness?

Is this situation, is this relation causing my affections, my desire for Jesus to wane? And if you can answer yes to two or three of those questions, it could be that you may need to create a sacred boundary in your life.

And to sum all this up, Paul is telling the Corinthians, he's saying in the city of temples, we are to be the temple that is set apart and unique, we're to be the temple of the living God and this is something that motivates us to pursue holy lives.

A pursuit that is rooted in God's grace, that's rooted in the gospel, that's rooted in who we are in Christ, but nonetheless a pursuit that calls us to draw sacred boundaries in our lives.

Now that might seem like a tall order and that's because it is. The pursuit of holiness is a tall order and that's why to pursue holiness in this way, to create these kinds of boundaries, you need something better, you need something stronger, you need something more beautiful and compelling in your life to be yoked to if you're going to unhitch yourself from something else.

[31 : 55] You know, one of the passages that Paul quotes here is from Leviticus chapter 26 and he quotes verses 11 to 12. Interestingly, verse 13, the very next verse says, I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt that you should not be their slaves and I have broken the bars of your yoke that you should walk upright.

The Lord rescued Israel from Egypt from the yoke of slavery and this would be a small picture of what Jesus Christ would come and do for us to break us from the yoke of sin and death.

If comfort and security and wealth are driving the plow of your life, it's inevitably going to crush you. It's inevitably going to enslave you because idols, see idols can only promise but they can't deliver.

Money and success and wealth are, if that's what you're harnessing the center of your life to, if it's what's driving the plow, it's going to lead you to exhaustion and it's going to lead you to real spiritual damage in your soul.

But to people who are weary, to people who are burdened, to people who are exhausted, from harnessing themselves to idols, from harnessing themselves to things like comfort and security and wealth, and the heavy, heavy yoke that they become.

[33 : 42] Jesus says these words to us in Matthew chapter 11. He says, come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble heart and you will find rest for your souls.

For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. The glory of Jesus is that on one hand, he is our total spiritual opposite.

We're totally incompatible with him. He's God, he's holy, he's righteous, he's eternal. He's our total spiritual opposite. and yet, at the same time, he's our fully human counterpart.

He knows every single burden that you've faced because he's faced them himself. He's walked the same roads that you've walked down, he's plowed the same fields that you've plowed, and Jesus is the one person that you can center your life on.

[34 : 56] He's the one person that you can align yourself with. He's the one person that you can harness yourself to, whose expectations of you feel light as a feather, whose commands are restful and life-giving and joyful, who when you stumble and fall again and again, is gentle and lowly in heart.

He's patient, he's compassionate, he's kind, he's loving. And when Jesus carried the heavy yoke of the wooden cross, when he carried the heavy yoke of the cross, no one else carried it with him.

He carried it, he did it all by himself, and he did it all for you so that you could believe him, so that you could trust him. When he says to you, my yoke is easy, my burden is light, come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest.

And when you see that, when you see Jesus as the one who has carried the yoke of the cross for you, you can look at all the situations, you can look at all the relationships in your life, and all of their complexity, and all of their messiness, and all of their difficulty, and you can look at those situations and say, maybe it's time to unhitch, maybe it's time to unharness myself, so I can pursue the holy life that God's called me to live, that I might know and worship and follow and be in relationship with Jesus.

let's pray. Lord, thank you for your word. Thank you that you have made us into temples of your presence, our bodies, our places where you dwell.

[37 : 04] Lord, I pray that you would help us to see the areas of our lives, Lord, where we need to pursue holiness, maybe where we need to draw some boundaries in our lives. Thank you, Jesus, that you have carried the ultimate yoke for us.

You have carried the ultimate burden for us by taking the weight of the cross on yourself. And it's in your name we pray. Amen.