

# (Secret of Paul's Authority) 4. Paul Was Dead to the World

by Zac Poonen

---

*The secret to Paul's authority was his being 'dead to the world' and recognizing himself as an ambassador of Christ, which allowed him to be effective for God and have spiritual authority.*

**Duration:** 36:21

**Scripture:** 2 Corinthians 6:14

**Topics:** "Authority"

---

## Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the concept of spiritual adultery and the state of the church in the world today. He emphasizes that friendship with the world is enmity with God, and warns against letting the world come into one's life. The preacher shares a thought-provoking poem about Jesus coming to stay with someone and highlights the importance of prioritizing time with God. He then delves into the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes, explaining that these desires can hinder one's love for God. The preacher concludes by urging Christians to examine their lives and ensure that they are not being influenced by the world.

---

## Transcript

Let us bow our heads in prayer. Heavenly Father, we draw near to thee with thanksgiving for thy faithfulness to us in past days and praising thee afresh this day because thy faithfulness is great, thy mercies are new. Lord, we come with a hunger to know thy word.

Pray you would make us not mere hearers but doers that bring delight to thy heart. Lord, we pray that your word will go forth and fulfill the function that it should. Pray that your will may be done this evening.

Your name be glorified, our God, our Father. We humbly pray. Pray that thou wouldst overrule every human limitation and minister in the power of the Holy Spirit in such a way that we may see Jesus and the things of earth may grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace.

Lord, make us indeed lights that shine for thee in this world. We pray that your word will meet the need of every heart and there might be a real sense of thy presence so that we may go away from here having met with thee. We ask this in Jesus name.

We have been considering Paul's authority and seeking to see the reason why God could commit his authority to this man. God is not arbitrary in his choice of people and in his committing of his authority to them. There are specific reasons why God could commit his authority and power to this man Paul.

And we saw also that the reason why Paul's ministry was so effective was because of his life. The secret of his authority lay not in any human qualification. Now this is the thing that we must firmly grasp in our minds.

The secret of Paul's authority lay in no human qualification that he had which any of us do not have. He said that word which has come to us again and again, I know that in me that is in my flesh there dwells no good thing. In other words he was saying humanly speaking I'm zero.

There is absolutely nothing in me that can make me an effective servant of God. Now this is given in the word for our encouragement so that no one need feel that because of any limitation that he has humanly that thereby God cannot use him. So often I remember as a young Christian myself I would listen to somebody preaching or singing and I'd wish oh if only I could have that gift, only my voice were as good as that person's, I could sing and God could perhaps use me.

Or if only I could be so eloquent and I found I couldn't. I was naturally shy, reserved, withdrawn, always wanting to be lost in the crowd. This is my nature and I used to wish that I could be like these people, outgoing and no fear about speaking before great multitudes and all this.

And until I came to recognize from the scriptures that it's none of these things that God is looking for. God's not worried whether our temperament is outgoing or introvertish, it makes no difference to him. Now when we recognize this we shall not envy other people.

We shall recognize that the only person whom God can use is the man who has come to an end of himself and who has come to the place where he's leaning upon God, trusting in God's authority to make his ministry effective and in no human qualification, not in the elephants of his preaching, not in the beauty of his singing, in nothing human but in the authority of God. Now we shall have opportunity to look into that a little more another evening. But let's get this firmly entrenched in our own minds that Paul's authority lay in no human factor.

In fact there was everything in him, humanly speaking, to prevent him from being the great apostle he was, because he had no personality as I said. Now one secret of his authority that we need to look into this evening is found in Galatians 6 verse 14. Galatians 6 verse 14 Paul tells us about something that was true in his own life.

Yesterday we saw Galatians 2 20. I am crucified with Christ, it is no longer I but Christ who lives in me. He accepted the way of the cross.

Now there's another aspect of the way of the cross that we need to look into this evening. That's described in Galatians 6 14 where he says, God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ whereby the world is crucified to me and I am crucified to the world. Now I believe here lay one of the secrets of Paul's authority.

As far as the world was concerned he was a dead man. And as far as he was concerned the world was dead to him. And Paul, now let's get this very clearly.

I believe we need to get this more clearly, particularly those of us who live in materialistic cities, cities like Singapore. We need to recognize that as far as Paul was concerned he had as little attraction for this world as a dead man has. That's what that verse means.

That verse means that I have as little attraction for this world as a dead man has. You go into the cemetery in Singapore and a whole lot of dead people lying there, they don't have any attraction for this world. Anything can happen in the city it doesn't disturb them.

Now that was Paul's attitude to the world. He says I'm dead to this world for in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ I have died not only to myself, not only to my own nature but also to this world. Now why does God ask us to take this position? In 1st John 5 verse 19 it says the whole world lies in the lap of the wicked one.

Now we perhaps don't realize this, but the whole world is under the control of the devil. Jesus Christ himself called the devil the prince of this world. Jesus acknowledged that fact that the devil was the prince of this world.

Of course God had allowed him to be the prince of this world but nevertheless the devil is the prince of this world and he'll continue to be the prince of this world until Jesus comes back and takes over authority as king of kings and lord of lords on this earth as well. Now therefore the only way that we can be effective for God is if our attitude to this world is one of death. What happens when a man dies? He's transported out of this world into another world.

That's what happens when a man dies. And Paul says that's what happened to me when I accepted the cross in my life. Spiritually I was transported out of this world.

My citizenship he says is now in heaven. That's what he says in the last verse of Philippians 3. Our citizenship is in heaven. We belong there now.

But a man can say that only if he is spiritually passed out of this world through accepting the cross and death. When I say the devil is in control of this world it doesn't mean just of the godless atheists and murderers. The devil is in control of politics.

He's in control of business. He's in control of education. He's in control even of religion.

He's in control of the most unsuspecting areas of the world that we can think of. Areas where we never think we are touching the devil. Yet we are.

You see the devil is so controlling politics in the world as to lead men away from God. The devil so controls business in this world as to lead men away from God. The devil even controls education to lead men away from God and religion as well.

And we have to be careful living in such a world. Always alert if we are to be free from the devil's power. Now Paul when he was writing to the Corinthians, 2nd Corinthians, he gives us three statements there concerning the Christian's attitude to the world.

Now 2nd Corinthians is one of the most personal of Paul's episodes. It's very much like an autobiography. He tells us a lot about his own experience, his own inner walk with God, his own struggles and his own victories in this episode.

And here and there in his exhortations you find coming out that which he had proved in experience himself. In 2nd Corinthians 5:20 first of all he tells us what he himself is in this world. 2nd Corinthians 5:20 he says we are ambassadors of Christ.

Now you know an ambassador is one who belongs to a foreign country. For example the ambassador of India and Singapore. He doesn't belong here, he belongs to India and he has come here to represent his country.

He only lives here for a short period and then he goes back to his country. That's what Paul says I am in this world. I'm a pilgrim, I'm an ambassador.

This is not my home. My citizenship is in heaven. I belong there, the Lord's kept me here as his ambassador and I have to worthily represent my country which is heaven as long as I'm in this world.

Just like any ambassador in Singapore whether it's the British ambassador or the American ambassador or the Indian ambassador or the Russian ambassador anyone will be so careful to represent their country worthily. They'll be so careful not to do anything that brings a bad name on their country. And you know Paul was gripped by this consciousness.

I am an ambassador. I'm a citizen of heaven. God's placed me here as an ambassador.

And he had the dignity, the spiritual dignity of an ambassador about him. Therefore the spiritual authority as well. You see an ambassador here is not like any other Indian.

He has some authority to represent his country. So Paul had authority because he recognized he was an ambassador. He didn't get mixed up with this world and become one with the world.

Now I believe here's a great secret of authority. If we want to have authority in our witness to this world we must recognize our position not as citizens of this world, belonging to this world, living like the rest of the world but as ambassadors as distinct and different. Now if you were to look at the average Christian not only in Singapore and India the other parts of the world and you compare his life with the life of the worldly person very often you find very little difference.

And even if you were to compare the fundamentalist and evangelical Christian in his attitude to the world with the liberal Christian very often there's not much difference either. The difference is only in their doctrines. When it comes to the world they all behave in the same way.

Now Voltaire was a French atheist who lived about 200 years ago and he made a statement. He was a man who despised these hypocrites. He felt all Christians are hypocrites.

He was an atheist and he said yeah these Christians talk a lot about God and all that but when it comes to money everybody's got the same religion. You know that's what he said and there was a lot of truth in what he said. When it comes to money everybody's got the same religion and if that can be said about you you can't be an ambassador.

You know I've felt more and more that a man's attitude to money is one of the clearest tests of his salvation. We'll come to that in a moment but this is what Paul said. He's an ambassador for Christ and he recognized he was a citizen of another country.

Then in chapter 6 of 2nd Corinthians verse 14 to 18 he says you are distinct from the world therefore you must be separate. Light and darkness cannot mix together. They must be separated.

The temple of God cannot mix with the temple of idols. They must be separated and the true Christian has to be separated from the world not physically. Now there are so many mistakes people make in relation to separation.

Let me tell you one or two of them. One mistake that people make when they say the Bible says you must be separate from the world they think it's being separated from the civilized world and they go off into a forest or into a mountain and think they're separated from the world. Other people make another mistake.

They think being separated from the world means I wear a white shirt and a white pant and everything white and it's again an outward separation. But real separation is not just separation from people nor separation in dress but in the heart, in the mind. The world is in the mind and it's there where the world should not be.

Now Jesus he mixed with people. He didn't go off to a forest or a mountain. He lived with people and I believe Jesus dressed just like everybody else.

He didn't have any special dress about him. That's a mistake many Christians make. Jesus dressed just like the others but he was separate from the world, completely separate.

He could say the prince of this world comes but he's got nothing in me. He could say that. How many Christians can say that? There's nothing in me as far as this world.

That's why Paul says in Romans 12 2 when he speaks about being not conformed to this world. Romans 12 2 he says be not conformed to this world but be transformed. How? Not by changing your clothes, not by going up to a mountain, but by the renewing of your mind.

Do you see there the connection between the world and the mind? Don't be conformed to this world but be transformed. And that word transformed is the same word as transfigured in Matthew 17 where it says Jesus was transfigured. And Paul is saying if you want to be transfigured like Jesus, if you want to shine as the light of the world, then don't be conformed to this world.

Be transfigured by the renewing of your mind so that you don't think like worldly people. Start thinking like God. So the world is essentially in the mind and the Christian is called to be in the world like a ship in the water.

The water shouldn't be in the ship but the ship should be in the water. The Christian is not called to be like a ship in dry dock. You know many Christians are like ships in dry dock.

They say oh there's no water in us but they're not in the water either. They're locked up among themselves with no contact with the outside world and therefore no witness to them. God has not called us to be like ships in dry dock.

He has called us to be ships in the middle of the water. Now when I was working in the Indian Navy and our ships were out at sea, every day we had to go down to the lower compartments of the ship to see whether there were any holes on the side of the ship. Because one small hole is enough to sink a ship.

You don't need a great big three-foot hole to sink a ship. One small one-inch hole can let the water keep coming in and flood and sink the ship. And so a Christian must check his luck to see if the world is coming daily.

It can come in without our knowing about it. Now the third passage in Corinthians where Paul speaks about the Christian's relationship to the world is 2nd Corinthians 11 verses 2 and 3. He says I have espoused you to be a pure virgin for Jesus Christ because you're the bride of Christ. And therefore I want you to keep yourself pure.

But I'm afraid he says like the devil came and tempted Eve, he will also come and tempt you so that you lose that purity. You know the picture here is of an engaged girl waiting for her fiancé who has gone on a long journey to come back. She's waiting for him to come back and she is keeping herself pure for him.

But while, this is the picture of the church waiting for Christ to come back. But while this engaged girl is waiting for her fiancé to come back, there's another young fellow who is courting her and saying how about being friends with me. And that's the world.

That's the picture here. The world coming to the church and saying just don't hold such high standards. Compromise a little bit.

After all we are in the 20th century, not in the first century like Paul. You have to compromise a little bit. And he tempts preachers to lower their standards when they preach.

And he tempts Christians to lower the standards in their homes. Let me just take you away. Come along with me a little bit.

And the moment this engaged girl goes around with this other boy, flirts around with him, she has become unfaithful to her divine bridegroom. That's the state of the church in most places in the world today. The bible says, James 4 verse 4, you adulteresses, you who have committed spiritual adultery, don't you know that friendship with the world is enmity with God.

Will you let the world come into your life? I remember reading a little poem some time ago which said, if Jesus one day came to your home, how would things be? And the substance of that poem was, one day as you look out of your window in the morning, you find walking down the street, Jesus Christ in person. And he walks up to your front door and knocks at your door. And you open the door and you ask him to come in.

And he says, I've come to stay with you for a few days. And of course you're very happy to have him. You'll give him the best room in the house.

You'll give him the best food. But will you have to make a few changes in your house? Will you have to hide some of those magazines which are lying around in the drawing room? And will you have to take away some of those books you've got in your library, lest he see them? And will you have to stop listening to that worldly music that comes over your radio when Jesus is living with you? Will you ladies have to change into something more decent in your dress when Jesus is living? Because you have to go walking in the street with Jesus Christ. Will you wish that some of your friends don't come to see you when Jesus is there? Because he may get a wrong idea of the type of friends you have.

Will you be extra kind to your wife that day? And extra sweet to your neighbor whom you normally quarrel with? Because Jesus is with you that day. Do you see what a difference it can make? And that shows whether Jesus is really living in your home or not. He is not.

He's not living there. You can talk about him living in your heart, think about him being in your home, but he's not there. Because if he's there, some things would be different in your home.

The world has come in, into Christian homes. And the devil has robbed the Christian church of spiritual power, spiritual authority, because the world has come right in. And everybody is just keeping quiet about it, let people get offended.

We need to hear the word that comes from the Lord. Come out from among them, be separate, said the Lord. Touch not the unclean, then I will receive you.

I will be a father unto you, and you shall be my sons and daughters, said the Lord God Almighty. Sons and daughters of the Almighty God, with the authority and dignity becoming of a son and daughter of the Almighty God. Now let's just very briefly look at what the world really consists of, described for us by John in 1 John 2 16.

You know before he says about what the world consists of, he says in verse 15, if you love the world you cannot love the Father. That's clear cut. It's either or.

Either you love the Father or you love the world, but you cannot love both. Paul recognized that. That's why his attitude to the world was one of death.

Then only he knew he could love God. Now what does the world consist of? First of all, the lust of the flesh. Now the lust of the flesh means satisfying the desires of this body, loving ease and pleasure.

Satisfying the desires of this body for pleasure and ease. You know what Paul said in 2 Timothy 3. He said men in the last days will be lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God. And I tell you, this is true.

It's true in Singapore. It's perhaps true in many of your lives, that you love pleasure more than you love God. We'll never know spiritual authority if we love pleasure more than we love God.

I tell you this, if within us there is some desire for ease and comfort and pleasure, we can come to many conventions, but we'll never know spiritual authority. Paul was not like that. He was a man who had no desire for comfort and ease.

If God gave him comfort and ease, he took it. He says, I know how to abound, but I also know how to be amazed. He had no love for it.

It's not that if God gives you comfort, you shouldn't take it. If God gives you a soft cushioned bed to sleep on, there is no virtue in sleeping on the floor. But if you so love cushioned beds, that you always want to sleep on cushioned bed, you can't be a servant of God.

I'll tell you that. You can't be a disciple of Jesus Christ. If you love it, if God gives it to you, take it.

And if he doesn't give it to you, praise the Lord. That was Paul's attitude. I know how to abound, and I know how to be amazed.

These things are not what I look for. If I have them, I have them. If I lose them, I lose them, like Job.

God gave, God has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord. That was Paul's attitude.

And Paul was no lazy man. He did not love comfort and ease. He was a man who labored day and night, very often to support himself, in order to preach the gospel without charge to other people.

That was the type of man he was. He died to the lust of the flesh. That's what he means when he says, I died to the world.

He put to death the desires of the body, which cry out for ease, which cry out at six o'clock in the morning, stay in bed a little longer. And then you get up, and then you say, I don't have any time to have a quiet time with God this morning. Paul had the same body as you and me, but he put to death that desire.

And I like the Living Bible paraphrase of 1 Corinthians 9.27, where Paul says, he says, I discipline my body so that it does what it should, not what it wants to. That's what Paul did with his body, so that it listens to me and does what it should, not what it wants to. He died to put to death the desire for the lust of the flesh.

Then secondly, the lust of the eyes. The lust of the eyes. Now the Living Bible paraphrases this as, listen to this very carefully, the world consists of the ambition to buy whatever appeals to your eyes.

How we need to hear that word in the days in which we live. The ambition to buy, not what's necessary, but whatever appeals to your eyes. That's the lust of the eyes.

Not just looking at a woman with lust. That's one part of it. The other part of it is lusting after possession.

You see something in somebody's home, whether you need it or not in your home, oh I want it. The ambition to get whatever appeals to your eyes, whether you need it or not. And you go by the shops and you see something, whether you need it or not, you want it.

The ambition to buy whatever appeals to your eyes. The man who is covetous like that, whose love for possessions, who has love for possessions, is as much a slave to the lust of his eyes, as that man who is always lusting after women. Exactly equal.

Let not the man who is covetous, who loves possessions, judge the man who lusts after women. But as far as God is concerned they are both in the same category. And Paul, when he's writing to Timothy, again from his own experience, he says, Timothy, let me tell you something that I've seen.

The love of money is the root of all evil. 1 Timothy 6 10. Verse 9 he says, I've seen many people who have tried to be rich in this world, and who have thereby gone astray from God and his calling for their lives, and fallen into many a foolish and hurtful lust.

Lovers of money more than lovers of God. What was Paul's attitude to money? You know he never took money from people where anybody could say, this fellow's preaching for money. He was so careful with money, he would rather work with his own hands and support himself, rather than let anyone say something wrong about him in relation to money.

It's money which has ruined many Christian workers, in the Bible and subsequently. Jesus once made a strong statement in Luke 16 verse 13. Let me read this to you.

No man can serve two masters, either God or money. One of the two you must choose. If you love God, you will hate money.

Is that true in your life? That's what Jesus said, that if you love God you'll hate money. Now those are not my words. Jesus said that in Luke 16 verse 13.

And he said if you love money, whether you know it or not, you hate God. You can call yourself a fundamentalist, but you hate God. If you love money, that's what Jesus said.

And he said if you hold on to money, you are, whether you're knowing it or not, despising God. We live in days when people don't take the words of Jesus seriously. That's the reason why people have never noticed the seriousness of this verse.

This is why I said the attitude a man has to money, is one of the clearest tests of his attitude to God. That's what Jesus himself said. If he loves money, he hates the other.

If he holds on to one, he despises the other. It's one or the other. What was the trouble with a man like Balaam? He went after money.

He wasn't satisfied with what he had. And he was willing to compromise his message and change his message for the sake of a little more money. He was willing to go when God told him not to go somewhere.

For money. God told him not to go. Finally he went.

There are preachers like that today. To go places, oh, because there, there are some material attractions. Following in the footsteps of Balaam, many, many, many preachers, their judgment awaits the final day.

They may be fundamentalists in their doctrine, oh yes. But as Walter said, when it comes to money and material things, they've all got the same religion. Like Balaam.

What is the trouble with Gehazi? Servant of Elisha. He could have got a double portion of the spirit, just like Elisha got Elijah's double portion of his spirit. But he didn't get that.

He got leprosy instead. Because he loved money. He went after Naaman.

And he said, we've conducted a healing campaign for you. Now, I want to pass the bag around. Please put some money in.

Because he healed you, you know. Please give money. Now, many other people like that.

I believe this is the thing, particularly in an affluent society, that's drawing so many people away from God. And we need to hear this right very clearly. You cannot serve God and money.

You cannot love God and money. You may be a fundamentalist. But if you love money, my friend, you hate God.

And you can never know anything about the deeper life. Because first of all, you need to know something about the beginnings of life. Which can only come when you forsake this world.

Finally, the pride of life. The love for position and honor. Paul never sought for position and honor.

He had as little desire for honor as a dead man. If you have a dead man here, and you go to him and say, oh, you're such a wonderful fellow. He's not bothered by it.

Or you go to him and say, you're a good-for-nothing rotten fellow. He's still not bothered by it. That was Paul's attitude to the opinion of other men.

They could tell him he was rotten. They could tell him, brother, you're so wonderful. And it didn't make the slightest difference to him.

Oh, that there were more Christians like that. I believe God's looking for men like that. Who don't care what other people think about them.

Who are not looking for honor from other men. Who are not seeking for position. Who are not seeking for position in the world.

And who are not seeking for position in the evangelical world. Some people forsake position in the world to seek position in the evangelical world. But Paul had desire for neither.

He had no desire for honor or position or the praise of men. He forsook it all. He was dead to it.

That's why nobody could touch him. Nobody could make him compromise his message because he was not looking for their recommendation or their votes or their money. They were not giving him his salary.

So they could not control his message. This is what made some people furious with Paul. They just could not make this man compromise.

Some preachers can be made to compromise by the elders saying, well, we'll reduce your allowance. Or we won't give you the promotion. But you couldn't do that with Paul.

He was not looking for a promotion. He was not looking for salary. He preached faithfully.

There was authority in his life and ministry because he was dead to this world. Nothing in this world could touch him. And this is where one of his co-workers thought it was too much and left him.

2 Timothy 4.10 Paul speaks about Demas. Demas, once my co-worker, now he has forsaken me, having loved this present world. You know, you could not live long with Paul if you loved this world and carry on working with him.

It was impossible to work with a man like Paul and love this world. Because Paul was not looking for money. He was not looking for ease.

He was not looking for honor. And here was Demas hoping that he would get a little percentage of the commission from all these prophets that came in. Or hoping that he'll get some glory.

And he found nothing of the sort. He was just being treated as rubbish. And he had to work hard and all this.

He said, this is too much. And like that, Christians today are divided into these two categories. Those like Paul.

Those like Demas. Some who have finished with the world once and for all. Who have set their hands to the plow and said, God, I'm not looking back.

I'm going. No matter what happens. It's not so much, there's nothing wrong in having possessions, provided we are detached from them.

We don't care for them. So that if God takes them away, we are happy. Can you say that, Lord? That house I've got.

That car I've got. And that fridge I've got. And all these things.

I can use them. But Lord, if tomorrow you tell me to give them up. Or you take them away in a fire or something.

I'll say, praise the Lord. Can you say that? That's the test of whether you love the world or not. One of them.

You love position, honor. Are you looking for advancement in the eyes of men? You love this world. Even if you're a fundamentalist.

May the Lord speak to us. God's looking for those who can manifest his authority in the world today.

---

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/26/SID26045.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/zac-poonen/secret-of-pauls-authority-4-paul-was-dead-to-the-world/>

# *Grow in Your Walk with Christ*

---

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

**[www.sermonindex.net](http://www.sermonindex.net)**