

# The Preparation to Be the Bride of Christ

by Zac Poonen

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of daily encouragement and exhortation, purification, and being ready for Christ's coming to be part of the Bride of Christ.*

**Duration:** 1:10:17

**Scripture:** 2 Corinthians 5:10, 2 Corinthians 11:3-4, Ephesians 2:13-16, Hebrews 3:13, 1 John 2:28

**Topics:** "Spiritual Purity", "Christian Devotion"

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## Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of maintaining simple and pure devotion to Christ, warning against being led astray by the deceitfulness of sin and distractions like accumulating knowledge without true transformation. It highlights the need for believers to be like a pure virgin for Christ, free from selfishness and division, and to prioritize unity and love within the local church as a reflection of the Bride of Christ. The message stresses the significance of daily surrendering our self-life to God, allowing the sword of the Spirit to cut through selfish desires and leading us to the tree of life, which is simple, fervent devotion to Jesus.

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## Transcript

I'm always humbled when I think of people who take all the trouble to travel from distant places to come and hear the same thing again and again, year after year. Our message never changes. But the Bible says, encourage one another or exhort one another every day, as long as it is called today, lest any of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

That's Hebrews in chapter 3 and verse 13. So what I learned from that verse, Hebrews 3.13, is it takes only 24 hours to backslide. It doesn't take many years.

Encourage one another or exhort one another every day, lest any of you, your hearts be hardened, that's backsliding, by the deceitfulness of sin. Obvious sin, like murder, hatred, telling lies, those things are not likely to deceive us, because we know they're sin. It's the most subtle things of selfishness and pride and legalistic attitudes towards others.

These are the most subtle things that we can have, like a person can have cancer for years and not know it. A lot of believers suffer from this. I've seen through the years, I mean, I've seen it in my own life, first of all, and that's what's shown me that since all human beings have the same flesh as me, I know what they have.

And if we watch out for these dangers, if we take scripture seriously, we can be protected in these last days before Christ comes again and be ready for Him. I want to tell you one thing about Christ coming. He's coming for a bride.

He's coming for a pure bride. And the Bible says in 1 John and chapter 2, if you'll turn with me there for a moment, that when He comes, there are some believers who thought they were believers, and maybe who were, but who backslid, who took things lightly and were careless. We read in 1 John 2, 28, who did not abide in Christ.

The word abide means to make your permanent dwelling place. Some of us live in rented apartments. It's not our permanent address.

We're there for a while, and then two years later, you may be somewhere else. But then there are others who built a permanent home, and that is their permanent address. They've been there for years.

That's the word abide. And what it means here in 1 John 2, 28 is let being in Christ be your permanent address. That means there's never a time when you can't find me there.

If you want to find me anytime, that's my permanent address, in Christ. Anytime, morning, noon, night, middle of the day, middle of the night. You can't get me into a bad mood because I'm in Christ.

That's my permanent address. And it says here, abide in Christ. Why? So that when He appears, when He's coming for His bride, we will have confidence.

There are two groups mentioned here of so-called believers, because He's writing in verse 28, little children. He's not writing to unbelievers and saying little children. John is writing to those who have accepted the Lord, and he says, little children, abide in Him.

What about those little children who think, of course, I'm abiding in Him. I don't need to do anything. I decided to abide in Him 25 years ago, and I'm there.

What's the need for all these exhortations then? We insult the Holy Spirit when we say, I don't need that exhortation. I'm okay. I made a decision 25 years ago, and I'm there.

But the Holy Spirit says, little children, and He who has years to hear, let Him hear. Abide in Him, because if you don't, when He comes, you'll be in category number two. Category number one is those who have confidence and say, Lord, we're ready to meet You.

And then there's a category number two, who shrink away from Him. Are these little children? Or are we thinking of godless unbelievers? Little children, abide in Him. Make that your permanent address in Christ, so that when He appears all of a sudden, you don't have to shrink away from Him in shame at His coming.

Is there going to be a group of people who shrink away from Him in shame? I believe that. I believe there are going to be two groups among those who claim to be God's people. We all know the two groups mentioned later on in chapter 3 and verse 10.

1 John 3 10. The children of God and the children of the devil. I'm not talking about that.

It's another categorization. But among those who assume that they were God's children, little children, they're going to be those who have boldness. Confidence means boldness to meet the Lord.

And they're going to, those who shrink away from Him in shame when He comes. So it's very important to recognize who will shrink away from Him in shame, because they were not ready to be His bride. That's mentioned further on.

You know, scripture is not written in independent verses. It's a letter. And whenever you read a letter from anyone, you don't take one sentence here and one sentence there.

Unfortunately, people take the Bible like that. They got favorite verses in Ephesians, and Galatians. But remember, all these were letters.

And if you take one sentence in the middle of chapter 3 or chapter 4, you won't understand it. It's a paragraph, just like if you got a letter from your dad or a friend or your husband or wife, you read the whole thing. And anything mentioned in one sentence, you've got to understand in the context.

So here it is. He goes on to say in chapter 3 verse 2, Beloved, we are now children of God. Okay.

But we don't know what will happen when He comes. We will be like Him, and we will see Him. It's a twofold hope we have when Christ comes again.

We will see Him. That's the only hope a lot of people have. But John says there are two.

We will see Him, and we will be like Him. Not everybody has this hope. And it clarifies here, who are the ones who have this hope? For example, all of us sitting here, we claim to be believers.

I presume so. At some time in your life, you receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. And you say, I've got this hope of being with Christ and being like Him when He comes again.

I'm not yet like Him, but I will be like Him when He comes again. Just hang on. If you really have this hope, here is the proof.

We need to be sure. 1 John 3 verse 3. These are the ones who will not shrink away in shame. Everyone without exception, who really has this hope fixed on Christ, purifies himself just as Christ is pure.

Do you fall in that category? Then you have this hope. But if you are not purifying yourself, I want to tell you, according to 1 John 3 verse 3, that you imagine that you have this hope. For you, it is a mental, intellectual thing.

It's not a thing of the heart. The Bible speaks of a lot of difference between the mind and the heart. Christianity is not a mind religion.

It's a heart religion. It talks about a relationship between the individual and Jesus Christ. It's a love affair between us and Christ.

It's not intellectually understanding certain truths. Christ died for my sins. I'm clothed with His righteousness.

This is what justification means. And this is what it means to be sanctified. It's all about understanding God.

It's all intellectual. A lot of people have all that understanding and completely miss out on having a heart relationship with Jesus Christ. But if we have this hope really in our hearts, the proof of it is, how do I know

I have this double hope? I will see Him when He comes.

That doesn't make me special because the Bible says, every eye will see Him. Every unbeliever will see Him. They'll be calling upon the rocks and mountains to cover them when He comes.

But I also have this extra hope, which they don't have, that I will be like Him. How do I know that? Just because some verse in the Bible says, no, because I am purifying myself. Verse 3, every day.

And I fall in that category. Mentioned in verse 3, everyone who really has this hope, one proof will be that he purifies himself. And when does he stop purifying himself? That also is written in that verse.

When he reaches the level of the purity of Christ. I haven't got there. The Apostle Paul said towards the end of his life, I have not yet attained.

But he says, there's only one thing I do. I press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. And what was that high calling? It was not to be an apostle.

No, very few are called to be apostles. The high calling of God in Christ was to be made like Him. That was what he was pressing on towards.

Even though he had already, when he wrote Philippians 3, he'd already been a believer about maybe 25, 30 years. But he still hasn't reached. But he hasn't stopped.

He's purifying himself. And I want to say, my brothers and sisters here, please take this seriously. We are approaching the second coming of Christ.

Everything that's happening in the world around us, if you're reading the news, for me it's not depressing. It's exciting. Things are getting really bad.

Praise the Lord. It means Christ must be coming very soon. That's how I look at it.

And I'm looking forward to that. And so if that is true, and I believe it is, I want to really purify myself. I want to be in that category that's got boldness when Christ comes.

For example, I've often, you know, we've used our imagination in past years for many filthy things. All of us. And we are ashamed of it.

And Christ has cleansed us with His blood and made us pure. But now, why not use our imagination for some good things? And I do that. I sometimes imagine that Christ has come.

And I shut my eyes and imagine that Christ has come and He has set up His judgment seat. And He's asking people to come forward to be judged. Because the Bible says, every one of us will be judged.

Second Corinthians 5 verse 10, for the deeds we did in our body, even believers. It's not just a question of going to heaven or hell. There's a lot more to judgment than just going to heaven or hell.

It says for every deed we did in our bodies, talking to believers in 2nd Corinthians 5 verse 10, we will be judged. Turn with me there for a moment. 2nd Corinthians in chapter 5. This is all related to being part of the Bride of Christ.

2nd Corinthians. Who is He talking to, first of all? Verse 6, the last part, while we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord. That's not talking about unbelievers.

We walk by faith, not by sight. It's talking about believers. And we want, we prefer, verse 8, to be absent from the body, to be at home with the Lord, talking about believers.

Therefore, as believers, we have this ambition to be pleasing to Him. Whether we are at home in heaven or absent from home on this earth, we have to recognize that we are here on this earth as on a visitor's visa. This is not our permanent home.

I'm here on a visa as a visitor. There's a lot of difference between a permanent citizen and a visitor. And just like in a country, if you're going to visit a country, you know that's not your home.

So here it speaks about being at home with the Lord. That's my home. But here I'm absent.

But whether I'm there or here, I have only one ambition. And that is to be pleasing to the Lord. In other words, I know that when we get to heaven, we'll have only one ambition, without a doubt.

We won't have any ambition there to make money or to get anybody's fame or honor. It'll only be pleasing to the Lord. And that'll be the direction we're moving all throughout eternity.

Now Paul says that that is my ambition right now as well. In other words, I'm not following some other ambition now and all of a sudden when Christ comes, I have to change direction. No.

I think a lot of believers will have to change direction when Christ comes again. What is your ambition right now, when you're absent from your home? What is your ambition? That's a test of whether you are wholehearted or not. It's not a question of how well you can sing or how many church meetings you attend.

It's a question of what is your ambition? What's the direction in which you're going? Can you honestly say, I mean, I seek to judge myself with this, that at any time if Christ comes, I will not have to change my direction. It's going to be just the same as it always was. In other words, all throughout eternity, I won't have to change the direction that I'm going right now.

That my direction is not to make money or to impress somebody or to please the Lord, to please the Lord, to please the Lord every day. And Christ comes again, I just continue the same direction for all eternity. I hope you can say that.

And then it says, we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ. That is not to determine whether you're going to be cast into the lake of fire or taken to heaven. No, it is so that we can be rewarded for the deeds done in our body, whether good or bad.

Believers are going to be judged for the deeds they did while they were in an earthly body on earth. How did they use that body God gave them? You remember the story Jesus said about a man who was given 10 talents and he came and asked him, what did you do with it? Another man with one talent, he just buried it, he didn't do anything with it. So we are going to be questioned in that day.

What we did with the body God gave us, what we did with the 24 hours God gave us. See, even though there may be many differences in our gifts, like some may be an apostle, some prophet, and some just a mother with many children who has no time to be an evangelist or a preacher or a teacher or anything.

Fine.

But there's one area where all of us are exact, have been given exactly the same. Two areas actually. One is we've all been given the same body which is tempted in exactly the same way.

Whether you're a mother with many children who cannot travel outside your home or an apostle, you are tempted in exactly the same way. Single girls, older men, everybody's tempted in the same way with the lust in our body to get angry, to get irritated, to get upset, to be selfish, to be self-centered, to be proud, to get angry with others and to lust after women. And it's there in every one of our bodies.

Sexual lust and to be offended and to tell lies and cheat. That's universal. You don't have to be, it doesn't make a difference whether you're a young girl or an old mother or an apostle or a preacher or no gift at all.

See in one area we're exactly the same. And the other area we're exactly the same is every one of us whether apostle or mother or young or old are given 24 hours a day. Nobody gets 25.

Nobody gets 23. We all have one body and we all have 24 hours a day. And in that area, forget about gift.

Gift is another category. You know there are two parables Jesus spoke about gifts. I mean things that he gave.

In one he gave somebody five, somebody two, somebody one. You read about that in Matthew 25. That is referring to gift.

Some people have five, some people have two, some people have one. But another parable he gave everybody one. And there one person produced 10 with the one, another person just did nothing.

So the second parable speaks about the area where we all have the same. And that is our body and 24 hours a day. It's a question of what you're going to do with it.

And here it says we're going to give an account to God for what we did in our body, whether good or bad. And then he goes on to say in 2 Corinthians 5.11, therefore knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men. We say take this seriously.

Don't take it lightly. I find that the vast majority of believers have not taken this seriously. The devil just made them laid back and say everything will be okay.

So as I said I use my imagination to imagine that Christ has come and he set up this judgment seat we read of here to judge all believers who are standing there before him for what they did in their body, good or bad. And then I imagine the Lord says, who's going to volunteer to come first? And I want to say, yes Lord, I'm ready. That is my goal.

That when he comes and he says, who will volunteer to come first to be judged? I'll quickly jump forward and say, Lord, I'm ready. While so many others are saying, I wonder how this is going to turn out. I wasn't very careful.

I didn't take those words I heard from Brother Zach seriously that day at the conference. I hope this week will be a day and this weekend will be a life changing experience for you. Something that completely alters the direction of your life permanently in a way that will enable you to stand before the Lord without regret in the final day.

That's one of the things I stress a lot in my local church. I keep on telling them that if you listen to everything that I teach here, I can assure you one thing, you will not have any regret in the day you stand before the Lord. I can guarantee that.

But if you don't take seriously what I teach you here, you are going to have a lot of regret. You may shrink away from him in shame. I don't know.

So this is very, very important. And who is the one who's going to understand all that? They say, you know, some of the things we teach, some people say, oh, you're too extreme. I've been accused of that many times that I'm teaching something which is too extreme.

Well, this is not new. They said that about Jesus. Turn with me to John chapter 7 and verse 12.

In John chapter 7 and verse 12, we read, there was much grumbling among the multitudes concerning him, is concerning Jesus. And it will be true concerning every true prophet of God, everyone who witnesses for the Lord faithfully like Christ, there will be much grumbling among people concerning him. There will be a division.

Some will say, he's a good man. Others will say, no, he's leading the people astray. I've heard both said about me for years.

I know that's what assures me I'm on the right path because they said that about Jesus. Some say he's a good man. Others say, no, no, no, he's leading people astray.

And then it says, when Jesus knew all this, he answered them and said in verse 16, my teaching is not mine, but his who sent me. And I believe I can say that too. My teaching is not mine.

Everything I say, I can show you from a verse in the Bible. It's not mine, but his who sent me. And there's only one book in the world that our heavenly father wrote for us to read.

It's a pity that so many believers don't take the one book that God wrote seriously and spend their time reading a lot of other books. Watching a lot of other programs when they still don't know the scriptures. My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me.

I've often said to people, you can question me on anything I teach from scripture. If I cannot show it to you from scripture, you don't have to accept it. I'm very careful.

I've been very careful. I spent more than 50 years studying the scriptures so that I could be very careful and exact in what I teach. Because I often think of myself like a heart surgeon.

You know, even if a heart surgeon has done a hundred heart operations, all successful, and here he is doing his hundred and first heart operation on somebody, he's still doing it with fear and trembling. Because somebody's life is in my hands. Just because I've done so many successful operations does not mean I can take it lightly.

I've got to make sure my hands are probably properly cleansed and the gloves are all sterilized and all the instruments are sterilized. I've got to be very careful in what I do and I can't be thinking of other things now. I've got to concentrate on this.

That's how a heart surgeon does his thousandth operation. And that's how every true servant of God must preach the word. There are very few like that.

But it's very important that whatever you hear, my dear brothers and sisters, whoever you listen to, that he can show you what he teaches from the word of God. That he can show you that this is the way Jesus would do it. This is the way the apostles would do it.

And here's the scripture which shows how Jesus did it and how the apostles did it. You know, one of the things people ask us, the Lord has enabled us to plant many, many churches in different countries. And we've been going for 42 years.

And one thing unique about all the churches we've planted, more than 70 of them, is in all these 42 years, we have never taken an offering. We've never passed a bag around. We have never told people to give, not even once.

There are 1,000 sermons of mine on YouTube and you can listen to all of them. You'll never find a sermon on urging people to give money, not one. But a lot of other sermons that you hear in many churches are on that subject.

So I'll tell you why I don't speak about it. Because I say, can you show me one place in the Gospels where Jesus told people to give him money? I'm doing a great ministry. Can you support me? Or Paul? Or any of the apostles saying that? Why is the Christian church preaching things that Jesus and the apostles never preached? And why is it so many Christians are sitting there dumb, not questioning it? That's what surprises me the most.

I'm not amazed by all the deceivers who appear on Christian television. I'm amazed by the number of dumb believers who sit and swallow all that. How's that? Haven't they read the Bible? Haven't they read the scriptures? Haven't they seen how Jesus did it? Haven't they seen how Paul did it? And people say, well, it doesn't work like that now.

Things are different. Somebody asked a famous television preacher, why do you keep asking for money when Jesus didn't? Well, he said, Jesus didn't have a television program like I have. You see, his ministry had become more important than Jesus Christ's.

That's a tragedy. My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me. Every true servant of God should be able to say that.

It is not my own bright idea. It is from the scriptures. It's from the example of Jesus.

It's from the example of the apostles. It's the way they lived. It's the way they preached.

It's the way they did their ministry, that we seek to do their ministry. And then, this is the important verse I was coming to. John 7, verse 17.

I want all of you to know this verse. Very important. If, let me make it, personalize it to you.

If you are willing to do the will of God, only then will you know whether what I'm teaching is from God or whether it's some bright idea I had. Got it? You can have a very clever mind. You can analyze.

You can compare. You read a lot of books. You think you know a lot, but I'll tell you something.

It's got nothing to do with your study or your understanding. If you want to know the truth, you must have a willingness to do all the will of God. If you can honestly say, Lord, I have no ambition on earth except to do your will.

I have no ambition on earth to become a great man, or to make a lot of money, or to accomplish something which will make everybody admire me. I only have a passion to do your will. Such a man alone will know the truth.

That's what Jesus said. If you are willing to do God's will, you will know whether the teaching is from me or from God. That's what Jesus said.

And I don't want to be deceived. We are so careful not to be deceived with counterfeit currency. Maybe there's not so much danger here of counterfeit currency, but there are many countries in the world where there's a lot of counterfeit currency.

Even in India now. Well, we've got to be careful when you get a large value currency note to make sure it's not a counterfeit. How much more when I'm receiving a teaching which is more valuable than the most valuable currency note, which is determining my eternal destiny, to be absolutely sure that what I'm hearing is the truth of God.

How shall I know? God's given me his book. I don't need any other guide. The scripture has been given to teach me his way.

So that's a sort of an introduction. In 2nd Corinthians, I want you to turn with me to chapter 11. See, the title here is a local church, the Bride of Christ.

Many people say, how can you say a local church is the Bride of Christ? I thought the Bride of Christ is the whole worldwide church. Yeah, it's true. But a lot of people in the worldwide church are already up in heaven, who've gone there in the past 2,000 years.

So the Bride of Christ is a huge group of people, many already in heaven, many in other parts of the world. But yet, we are living in a particular town. And along with others whom God puts us with, God wants to build a body which has the same spirit as the overall Bride of Christ.

So in 2nd Corinthians 11, Paul is writing to a local church, the church in Corinth. There are some letters written to individuals, Timothy, Titus, Philemon. Those are written to individuals.

But Paul's letters here are to the church. And to the church in Corinth. Now he's not talking to the world, he's not talking to all the believers in Ephesus and Thessalonica.

He says to the church in Corinth, I am jealous for you. For whom? For you believers in the church in Corinth, with a godly jealousy, because I betrothed you, the local church in Corinth, to one husband, that is Christ. So what does that mean? The local church in Corinth was to be the Bride of Christ.

What else does it mean? My teaching is not mine, but what is in His Word. It doesn't mean the church in Corinth was only the Bride of Christ. No.

The Bride of Christ is a huge number of people, as I already said, many who are already in heaven and many parts of the world. But he's writing to the church in Corinth. He says, forget about all these other people.

You don't know most of them. You don't meet them. For example, when Jesus said, all men will know you're my disciples when you love one another.

Well, I mean, I love all the fine believers in Argentina and China whom I never meet. Is it difficult to love people whom you never meet? It's the easiest thing in the world. The difficulty is to love the people you meet, right? Especially the ones you meet regularly.

So when he said, all men will know you're my disciples when you love one another, is it by saying, I love the believers in Argentina and Chile and Japan? No. They're not seeing that. People are seeing you in your local church.

The local church is very important. The testimony of the local church, all men will know you're my disciples when you love one another, and they got to see you there. I have betrothed you, the church in Corinth, to one husband, to Christ.

Forget about all the others. Yes, they are the Bride of Christ. But right now you think of yourselves as a local church that should be functioning as the Bride of Jesus Christ.

And he says, I have a godly jealousy that I might present you, 2 Corinthians 11, to the local church in Corinth as a pure virgin, as a bride to Christ. So this is the responsibility Paul felt as an apostle. And every true servant of God who has the care for God's flock will feel that responsibility.

I want to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. I'm not interested in your money. I'm not interested in your honor.

I'm not interested what you think of my message. I am interested only in one thing. I want to present you not as individuals, but as one body to Christ.

Let me turn to another verse and come back here. In Ephesians, in chapter 3, sorry, Ephesians chapter 2. You know, we live in an age which is a very individualistic age, each man for himself, unfortunately. And there's a lot of that individualistic Christianity, where my Christianity is just for me, between me and Jesus, and has nothing to do with other people.

And nowadays, I don't even have to go to church on Sundays to listen to a good message. I've got a tremendous choice on the internet. And in a church, it would be rude to walk out after five minutes if the message is boring.

But on the internet, I can walk out even after two minutes if the message is boring. So it's more advantageous to listen to a message on the internet, because I can turn off one speaker and turn on to another. I can't do that in a church.

So there's a lot of individualistic Christianity today, which doesn't, it doesn't need to go to church, because it doesn't believe in fellowship, and being built together with others. This whole thing that the New Testament speaks a lot about, has disappeared. People don't value it.

That shows how ignorant they are of God's ways. And I'll tell you why they are ignorant. They don't want to do God's will.

Sometimes, you know, you read the scriptures after many, many years of reading it, and suddenly a verse hits you. Here's a verse that hit me the other day, very well known verse. Jesus was being baptized in the

river Jordan.

A voice from heaven said, this is my beloved son, in whom I'm well pleased. I had read that so many times. But the way it came to me the other day, when I read it was, Father, can you look at me and say, this is my beloved son, in whom I'm well pleased.

I long to hear that more than anything on this earth, and I'm willing to pay any price for it. It really hit me hard. Can you say that is your longing? That your Heavenly Father will look at you, the way you have lived, the way you speak, your attitude to money, the way you speak to your wife, to your husband, the way you're seeking to bring up your children, the way you spend your time, the television programs you watch, and the ones you don't watch, and you turn off, the way you spend your time, and the Heavenly Father can say, this is my beloved son, in whom I'm well pleased.

I want to tell you, those are the type of people whom the Father is selecting and gathering together today to be the bride of Jesus Christ. Take it seriously. My teaching is not mine, but according to God's Word.

So here it says in Ephesians chapter 2, about, we were all far away from Christ, verse 13, Ephesians 2.13. We were once far away, all of us were far away from the Lord, but through the blood of Jesus Christ, we were brought near to God. Meaning that there was no way to come near to God unless our past sins were blotted out. Absolutely no way.

If there's one sin left there, not cleansed, you cannot come near God. For how many sins were Adam and Eve turned out of the Garden of Eden? Did they commit 25 sins before they were turned out? One. Only one.

They were in the presence of God, and they committed one sin of going to a tree God told them not to go to, and they were out. Teaching us right in the beginning of the Bible, that one sin is serious, in God's eyes. That's to me one of the first messages in the Bible.

First chapter, where man enters the Garden. It teaches me that one sin is serious. So that's why we need the blood of Christ.

We cannot begin without being cleansed completely. That means we've confessed our sin. I don't mean we have confessed every sin, but we've turned away from every known sin, and acknowledge that we're sinners, and we've received Christ as our Savior, and believe that his blood that he shed on the cross atoned, and took care of all my past life, and blotted it out so that he doesn't remember it anymore.

I can come with a clean conscience before God. I've been brought near. And once I was brought near, Jesus himself, verse 14, became my peace.

Because it's because Jesus himself has come into my life, that I have peace with God now. And there's something else he did. Not only peace between God and man.

Listen to this. A single bar is not a cross. One vertical pole is not a cross.

It needs a horizontal bar as well, to make it a cross. And so this peace is not only between God and man. It's also between us and our fellow believers.

That's the cross. He is our peace who broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, Ephesians 2.14, and made these two groups into one. He's not talking about individualistic Christianity here.

The two groups mentioned here are the two groups with the greatest distance from each other in the history of the world. There are many ways in which people distinguish the cultured and the uncultured, the educated, the uneducated. In many religions, they have a caste system, upper caste and lower caste.

But among all these, the greatest distance was between Jew and non-Jew, Gentile. Gentiles are the non-Jews. The distance was so great.

And Jesus came and brought these two people when he stretched out his hand on the cross. Symbolically, it was that he was bringing these two extreme groups together. Two people who are completely different from each other, who before they came to Christ hated one another, would have nothing to do with one another.

They would not intermarry with each other. They wouldn't live with each other. And Jesus brought them together.

And this dividing wall, he broke it down. So there would be no dividing wall. So what that is teaching is, this is how the body of Christ is being built.

And in his flesh, when Jesus died on the cross, he abolished this enmity between these two groups and between any two groups, between you and anyone else whom you don't like. You know, there are people, I remember somebody saying that, who's a Christian, we're told to love everybody, but I love him, but I don't like him. Is that possible? Supposing God said to you, I love you, but I don't like you.

Would you feel very happy about that? Your Heavenly Father saying, I love you, but I just don't like you. What would a little child feel if his mother says, son, I love you, but I don't like you. Is it right to say to somebody, I love you, but I don't like you? I may not like what they do.

That God says to you, I don't like a lot of things you do. I don't like the way you speak to your wife. I don't like the way you speak to your husband.

But he doesn't say, I don't like you. So he broke down this barrier of a dividing wall to bring us together. Listen to this, so that, it's an amazing verse in verse 15, when he died on the cross, this enmity, there's an enmity in our flesh with others.

You know, they say that doctors, when they take, they transplant an organ from somebody else's body into your body. There's something in your body that rejects it. I don't want it.

That's not part of me. So they have to give so many medicines to prevent you rejecting that organ that's been transplanted into your body or even skin transplant. You got to, there's something in the body that rejects it.

And that's in our nature too. We just don't like others. There's something in us that rejects and Jesus broke it all down so that he might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace.

One new man. I remember reading a servant of God who was preaching out in the streets and somebody, some heckler wanted to make fun of his preaching saying, I don't want to go to heaven. There's such a, going to be such a crowd of people there.

I'll get lost. And he said, no, there's only going to be one man in heaven, one new man. We're going to be one.

It's an amazing thing. Those who really understood the body and the message of the body of Christ being the bride of Christ, there's a oneness that comes when they are brought together. And he wanted to reconcile them both, verse 16, in one body, verse 16, to God through the cross, having put to death the enmity through the cross.

So this is the reason why the local church is very important. Why the local church must be one body, because that is the place where the Lord can demonstrate that. I made these two people who are so different from each other, one.

He wants to demonstrate that in marriage as well. And that's why the devil tries to destroy every marriage. That's why there are so many divorces, even among Christians.

People don't realize that the enemy is blaspheming the name of the Lord every time, not only every time there's a divorce, every time a husband and wife fight with one another at home, the devil says, God, ha ha, these are your children, right? You want to make them one? Have a look. Do you ever see it like that? Do you ever see the importance of being one body? I've seen it. I remember in the early days, we started building the body of Christ in our town way back 40, 42 years ago.

And, you know, we were all different. And God was trying to make us one. And I remember this event once where I had made an appointment to meet with one of the brothers from our church.

And he wasn't there at the time we had appointed. And I discovered, as I look back over previous instances where we had made an appointment to meet that he was always late. He didn't seem to take punctuality seriously.

And I had this feeling in my heart, I was just beginning my Christian walk those days. I mean, in the church. And this guy's always late.

He doesn't seem to understand punctuality. I remember still what the Lord said to me that day. He says, you have learned to be punctual because you spent 11 years in the military.

It's not because you're very spiritual. Don't take credit for it. He has not been in the military.

And so you have to bear with him. Don't judge him inwardly because I'm trying to make you one. If you judge him, you will not be able, I will not be able to make you one with him.

You're different. But also remember, and this is the thing that helped me. He doesn't realize that this being unpunctual is a serious thing.

And he doesn't realize how you're struggling to with him. So forgive him. And then in the Lord, this is what the Lord said to me.

Just like he is not able to see some things in himself, which you have to bear with. Do you know there are things in you, which you don't see, which he's bearing with, and he's silent about it. That really helped me.

And I say that to husband and wife sometimes. And if you're married, do you see something in your partner, which just irritates you, but you somehow suppress it and keep quiet for the sake of fellowship? And you think you've achieved something? You haven't. It's second best, I agree.

Instead of yelling and screaming and having a fight, second best to suppress it. But there's a better way. She has to bear some things in you, which you don't see, but she's gracious enough to keep quiet about it.

So don't think you're the only one who's got to bear. You think you're perfect? Don't delude yourself. As long as we are imperfect, and we all are, there's something that others have to bear with in us.

And that's the thing the devil plays on. To prevent two people becoming one, to prevent us becoming a body and the pure bride of Jesus Christ. See, Jesus doesn't want to have a bride, which is always having conflict within itself.

Wow. It's an amazing thing. Let's turn back to 2 Corinthians 11, and verse 2. He says, I'm jealous for you with a godly jealousy.

I have betrothed you. Paul is speaking like a person who has brought a bride to the bridegroom, an apostle. And he says, I have.

Now, Paul himself is a part of the bride of Christ, remember? But yet he's speaking as an outsider here, because he's not part of the church in Corinth. So he's talking about the church in Corinth now, as the bride of Jesus Christ, and he himself is an outsider, as an apostle, wanting to make sure this bride, this church in Corinth, is a pure virgin. Jesus wants a pure virgin.

And the wonderful thing is that though we were, spiritually speaking, harlots and prostitutes, all of us, the blood of Christ has so cleansed us that we can become a pure virgin. Now, humanly speaking, a prostitute can never become a pure virgin. But the wonderful thing, spiritually, is that even though we were, spiritually speaking, harlots and prostitutes, the blood of Christ cleanses us, and the Holy Spirit comes and fills us, that we can be amazing, amazing truth, a pure spiritual virgin for Christ.

And Paul says, the purpose of all my teaching, on all my instruction, and all my discipline, and sometimes Paul is very strict with the Corinthians. You read in 1 Corinthians 4, he says, shall I come to you with a rod? He spoke really strong, because he wanted to preserve that church as a pure virgin for Christ. He wasn't going to be gentle, and when there needed to be some hard scrubbing, he said, I want to present you as a pure virgin to Christ.

I want you to be a pure virgin. I don't want, there were a lot of conflicts there in the church in Ephesus, in the church in Corinth. All types of things people had against each other.

He says, you got to get rid of all that. He spoke so strongly that the church in Corinth took it seriously. You know, it says in, if you turn back to chapter 7, let me see what he says.

He's talking about his first letter. Twice he speaks about his first letter. Turn first to 2 Corinthians 2, 2 Corinthians 2, verse 4. This is how he sought to preserve the church in Corinth as a pure bride for Christ.

2 Corinthians 2, 4, out of much affliction and anguish of heart, I wrote to you, with many tears. You know, this is how true apostles are. True servants of God.

When they write something or preach something, it's with a lot of affliction and anguish of heart, and often a lot of tears in secret. Like Jeremiah said to Israel, if you don't listen to me, I will weep for you in secret. Paul was like that.

He says, I wrote strongly to you, not to make you sorrowful, but you might know the love I have for you. But anyway, he says, I feel sorry that, about what I wrote, but I'm glad it produced a good result. In chapter 7, verse 8, though I caused you sorrow by my letter, I don't regret it.

His letter was strong. Do you have preachers and servants of God who love you so much that they'll preach you, preach such strong messages to you as to cause you sorrow? Because they love you so much. Paul was like that.

But he said, I don't regret it. Though when I did send that letter, I did regret it for a while because it caused you sorrow and I felt sorry. But I now rejoice, verse 9, that you were, not that you were made sorrowful, but that it brought you to repentance.

And that repentance, verse 10, leads to salvation. So that is how Paul preserved that church in Corinth. Not by telling them, you folks are great guys, everything's okay, just enjoy yourself.

That's not how he preached to them. He preached strong messages to them because there were things wrong in their life. I mean, for example, if there's a husband and wife sitting here who are still not one with each other, there's something wrong in that church that needs to be set right.

Is it God's will that a husband and wife should be in conflict and unable to bear with each other? No. That's what the devil wants. You tell me, those of you who are married.

Does God want you to be to love one another despite your weaknesses? Or does he want you to live in conflict always? Who wants you to be in conflict? Is it the devil or God? See for yourself. Who is the one who wants to promote conflict between both of you as husband and wife? Who is the one who keeps showing you the faults in your partner? You think it's God? No. That's the devil.

And so Paul was concerned about whether it's a husband and wife or whether it's in a church, that type of conflict, he was always wanting to set that right. So he says, turn with me to 2 Corinthians 11 again. Verse 3, I'm afraid, lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.

Satan led Eve astray from the tree of life. And we don't know what that tree of life symbolized in the Garden of Eden. There are many things in the Old Testament which are symbols.

The whole tabernacle structure is full of symbols. The New Testament explains to us what the Most Holy Place signifies, what the veil there signifies. In the same way, the New Testament explains to us what the tree of life is.

What is that tree of life? As far as I know, there's only one verse in the New Testament that explains it. Here it is. 2 Corinthians 11.3. If you want to know what the tree of life is, Satan led Eve astray from the tree of life, or in other words, simple, pure devotion to Jesus Christ.

That's what the tree of life is. So anytime I'm led away from simple, pure devotion to Jesus Christ, which will easily make me bear with every believer, which will make me bear with my wife, husband, everyone. If that's not happening, it's because I've been led astray from the tree of life.

Simple, pure devotion to Christ. Led astray to what? Something else. Knowledge.

Tree of knowledge. You know, this book, the Bible, can be the tree of knowledge or a tree of life to you. It can lead you rather to the tree of knowledge or to the tree of life.

That's your choice. The Bible is a book that is like a pathway. And as you go into it, you can take the wrong turning and go to the tree of knowledge and become a Bible scholar.

You know where all the verses are. You know where all the what the doctrines are. You wasted your life spending four years in a Bible school and sat around the tree of knowledge for four years.

Accumulated knowledge, knowledge, knowledge. You missed God's will completely. Because the tree of life is simple, pure devotion to Christ.

Fervent devotion to Christ. And there's no way to be fervently devoted to Christ without dying to my self-centered way of life. There's no way.

I'll tell you why. Because before Adam sinned, you could go to the tree of life easily. You know what it says in the last verse of Genesis 3 after Adam sinned? What did God put in front of the tree of life? You know, a flaming sword and a cherubim saying, now you can't come to the tree of life without this sword falling on your self-life.

Adam, before this you could come, but not now. There is no way to come to pure devotion to Christ without that sword falling on your self-life and slaying your selfishness. The root cause of all your problems, the reason why you don't have victory over sin, the reason why you lust after women, the reason why you fight and pursue after money, the reason why you have conflict with your marriage partner is only because the sword has not fallen on your self-life.

You don't want it to fall. And it's not something that you do once and it's it, it's done. Jesus said you got to take up the cross, how often? Every day.

Every day I must make a choice to let that sword fall on my self-life. The numerous temptations I get during the day to get offended, to get hurt, to say what I want to say, to give another person a piece of my mind, all this stuff, to pursue my own and ignore how it affects other people, what does it all indicate? I don't want the sword to fall on my self-life and then I don't come to the tree of life. I can keep going around it, but it's easier to go to the tree of knowledge because do you know that there's no sword in front of the tree of knowledge? Read Genesis 3. There is no sword in front of the tree of knowledge even today.

You can go there freely. You can accumulate tons of knowledge of the Bible without self being crucified at all. And there's a lot of proof of that all around us in Christendom.

People have accumulated tons of Bible knowledge and they are the most selfish, self-centered, defeated Christians you can meet on the face of the earth. But their knowledge is amazing. They got all types of degrees and even without degrees, a lot of Bible knowledge, the way they get up and they can preach so many wonderful things which instruct other people's minds and give other people a lot of knowledge.

So many preachers today are just leading multitudes to the tree of knowledge. The devil has led them astray just like he led Eve astray. That's what it says here.

He's like the serpent deceived Eve. I am afraid that he will lead you astray from the tree of life from simple pure devotion to Christ and then you will never be that pure virgin that Christ wants. Remember, this is the

context.

Don't take a verse by itself. He's talking about presenting us as pure virgins to Christ. It's that context.

He says, I want to preserve you as a pure virgin to Christ but I'm afraid. Well, Paul, can't you protect these Corinthians? No. I can warn them but God's given them a free will.

They can think that, oh, this Paul is too extreme. God's a loving father. He's just going to ignore all that.

Well, you're going to get a lot of surprises when Christ comes again. He who has this hope purifies himself as he is pure. You're probably hearing some of you are hearing things today that you probably never heard it so strongly in your life.

God loves you. That's why he says that. That's strong medicine.

That's bitter. It's gonna heal you. The cup of the Lord may be bitter but there's no poison in it.

The cup of the devil is sweet but it's poisonous. So, if I want to take this seriously, I'd say, Lord, I want to be preserved. And when the devil succeeded in leading Eve to the tree of knowledge, what is the next thing that happened? There was a division between him and between her and her husband immediately.

And between Eve, the husband also ate that fruit. And you know what the first thing that Adam does after they covered themselves with the fig leaves? As soon as God came to Adam and asked him a very simple question, did you eat from the tree I told you not to eat? To which there's only a simple yes or no answer. Either yes or no.

You know like these examination papers, we have question papers, we have a tick yes or no. There are only two boxes. But Adam puts another note underneath.

It's neither yes or no. Lord, my wife picked up that fruit and gave it to me. But Adam, did you open your mouth or did she catch you by the throat and shove it down your throat? You opened your mouth and ate it yourself.

Why don't you admit that? Why blame your wife for it? This is always what happens. When a separation comes between you and God, it'll also come between you and your wife, and you and your husband. And let me reverse that.

If you have a separatist attitude in your heart towards your partner, it means you're separated from God as well. I'm not saying that you and your wife will be in perfect fellowship, because that depends on the other partner as well, and you and your husband. But it does mean that if you have an attitude of superiority and criticism and judgmentalism, it is always an indication that your fellowship with God is gone.

But you're still believing in Jesus, but it is another Jesus. You say you receive the Holy Spirit and speak in tongues, but it is another spirit. That's what he says in the next verse, 2nd Corinthians 11, 4. When you go astray from the tree of life, it's not that you start believing in some heathen God.

No, no, no, no, no, no. You'll still talk about Jesus, but it is another Jesus. You will still talk about, hey, I went for that tarrying meeting there and I received the spirit.

Yes, but it was another spirit, a different spirit. You say, I believe in the gospel, but it's a gospel that teaches you how to make money. It's a different gospel, and we have plenty of that in the world today.

This is what happens when we go astray from simple to pure devotion to Christ. We end up with following another Jesus, receiving another spirit, and believing in another gospel. If you want to do his will, you will know whether this teaching is from the Bible or some bright idea that I'm sharing.

May God help us to be open to the truth. Let's bow our heads in prayer. Heavenly Father, we pray that by the Holy Spirit you'll imprint these truths straight deep in our hearts that we'll never forget them.

It'll affect the way we live, change our way of life, each one. Build us, Lord, in our local churches into a body to be a pure virgin for you. In Jesus' name we ask.

Amen. I want to encourage you to meet those whom you don't know yet, instead of hanging around with those whom you already know.

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