

9. Where our allegiance lies

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- [0 : 0 0] We come now, friends, to our Bible reading, and we're continuing our studies in Paul's second letter to the Corinthians. So will you turn with me to 2 Corinthians chapter 5, and you'll find that on page 966 in our church Bibles, page 966.
- Our passage for study tonight is really chapter 6, verse 1, to chapter 7, verse 1, but I'll start the reading at chapter 5, verse 16, so we can have a little continuity of the context of what the Apostle Paul is saying to the Corinthians.
- So 2 Corinthians chapter 5, beginning at verse 16. From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh.
- Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.
- The old has passed away. Behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.
- [1 : 1 3] That is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them. And entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.
- Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you, on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.
- For our sake, he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain.
- For he says, In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you. Behold, now is the favorable time.
- Behold, now is the day of salvation. We put no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry. But as servants of God, we commend ourselves in every way.
- [2 : 2 1] By great endurance, in afflictions, in hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger.
- By purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love. By truthful speech and the power of God.
- With the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left. Through honor and dishonor. Through slander and praise. We are treated as imposters, and yet are true.
- As unknown, and yet well known. As dying, and behold, we live. As punished, and yet not killed. As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing.
- As poor, yet making many rich. As having nothing, yet possessing everything. We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians.
- [3 : 2 1] Our heart is wide open. You are not restricted by us. But you are restricted in your own affections. In return, I speak as to children. Widen your hearts also.

Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial?

Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God said, I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them.

And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore, go out from their midst and be separate from them, says the Lord. And touch no unclean thing.

Then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you. And you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty. Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.

[4 : 34] Amen. This is the word of the Lord, and may it be so indeed to us tonight. Let's bow our heads for a moment of prayer again.

Dear God, our Father, without your power and love and strength, we cannot hear your words, because our understanding naturally is dulled, and our hearts are weak and frail.

So we pray that in your mercy, you will open our hearts afresh to you, and our ears and our minds, and give us grace and joy to hear your words to us and to understand them.

And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, friends, do let's take our 2 Corinthians chapter 6 again. 5, 6, and 7, on pages 9, 6, 6, and 9, 67, in our church Bibles.

5, 6, 7, 7, 67, in our church Bibles.

[6 : 06] 6, 7, 6, 7, 7, hasty, 7, 7, 8, 8, 7, 12, 8, 8. So she asked me if I would go down to Devon and take the funeral service in the parish church there, which I was very glad to do. Now, one of the Bible readings that my cousin had chosen was that wonderful passage at the end of Romans chapter 8, which is quite often used at funeral services.

And she had asked an old family friend to read this passage out during the service. This man was a retired naval officer, Captain So-and-So. And Captain Sonson stood up and read the passage out, and he read it really rather well.

He put the right emphasis in the right place and so on. That doesn't always happen, does it, when the Bible is read out? But he read it well. So after the service was over, and we went back to the family home for tea and sandwiches and so on, I went up to this retired naval man and had a word with him.

And I said to him, thank you, Captain, so much for reading that passage so clearly and so well. And he said to me, with a slight smile on his face, he said, Ah, yes, that was St. Paul at his most obscure, don't you think?

You can imagine the scenario, can't you? Now, I can't remember what I said to him. But I thought about that remark later on, and I realized that the captain, while he was trying to be gently humorous, I also realized that he was expressing a tip of the iceberg of the way in which Paul is popularly viewed.

[7 : 32] As if the old captain was saying to me, well, we all know, don't we? In fact, the whole world knows how difficult Paul's writing is, how obscure he is. He's dark, and therefore, he's not to be taken too seriously.

Now, of course, Paul is not only criticized for being obscure and difficult. In recent generations, he's also been criticized for being allegedly anti-women and homophobic.

And theological writers battle over him, and quite a few are rather unfriendly to him, and will say, for example, that the pure, simple gospel is taught by Jesus in the four gospels, but then Paul came along and muddled the waters and made everything harder for us to understand.

Now, it's interesting to find in 2 Corinthians and throughout Paul's letters, and indeed his sermons in the Acts of the Apostles, that he strongly divided opinion, not only about the Lord Jesus, but about himself.

He did that in the first century, and he still does it in the 21st century. Some people were for him, and others were against him. Of course, as it had been with Jesus, so it was with Paul.

[8 : 42] He had loyal supporters, and he had determined opponents. Now, if we're going to understand 2 Corinthians, we need to see how, throughout this letter, Paul is appealing to the Corinthians to stick with him and his gospel, rather than allowing those whom Paul calls the false apostles at Corinth to reshape the thinking and life of the Corinthians.

We saw last week from chapter 5, verse 12, that the false apostles seem to have boasted about outward appearances, rather than about what is in the heart.

They seem, from chapter 5, verse 16, to have regarded people according to the flesh, in other words, just in terms of their external human characteristics, rather than in terms of whether they were born again and part of the new creation.

So these false leaders were not interested in the inner transformation that the gospel brings to those who come to Christ. Now, the passage that we have this evening, chapter 6, verse 1, to chapter 7, verse 1.

And as we study this passage, I want to raise two questions from it. First, will the Corinthians have the courage to stick with the true apostle?

[9 : 57] And second, will they have the courage to part company with the false apostles of Corinth? First then, will the Corinthians have the courage to stick with Paul, their true apostle?

Or will they ditch him? Will they distance themselves from him as the false leaders that Corinth want the Corinthians to do? Now, let's pick up the trail back in chapter 5, verse 20.

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. I want to start here because I touched on this verse last week, but didn't really grapple with its implications.

The we here is, I think, in the first instance, Paul and Timothy, when he says we are ambassadors. Paul and Timothy, perhaps a slightly wider circle, but certainly Paul and Timothy, who was Paul's co-author of this letter.

So Paul pictures himself and Timothy as Christ's ambassadors. Now, you know that an ambassador's job is to represent the concerns and the agenda of the one who sends him.

[11 : 00] So, for example, the British ambassador to Paris represents the concerns and agenda of the British government to the French government. Paul and Timothy, then, are Christ's ambassadors, representing God's concerns to whom?

Well, to the Corinthians, to the Corinthian Christians. So, halfway through verse 20, we, Christ's ambassadors, implore you, Corinthian Christians, the people to whom our ambassadorial commission is sent.

We implore you to be reconciled to God. In other words, although you are Christians, you're in grave danger of drifting away from God and from Christ because of the influence of these false apostles.

Come back to God, therefore, and be reconciled to him. And how are they to do that? By coming back to Paul. Now, Paul immediately gives weight to his appeal by adding verse 21 to verse 20.

And you'll see verse 21 is in memorable language describing the very heart of the gospel. How God was willing, for the sake of needy human beings, to submit his son to the cross and make him to be sin.

[12 : 12] So that in him, we needy, sinful people might become the righteousness of God. Well, it's the great exchange, isn't it? Whereby Christ's righteousness is exchanged for human sinfulness.

And we needy sinners are given the righteousness of Christ as Christ bears our sin and its dreadful penalty. So Paul is saying, come back to me and thus to God, because this gospel of the great exchange is my gospel.

And you're never going to hear it from the false apostles. And then in chapter 6, verse 1, he immediately speaks as Christ's ambassador again.

This is still ambassadorial language here in verse 1. Working together with him then, with Christ as his ambassador, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God, which I've just outlined in verse 21, in vain.

You know the gospel, brothers, Paul is saying. Don't let it slip out of your grasp now. And verse 2 pushes home the appeal of verse 1. The time of God's favor and the day of opportunity to be saved is now.

[13 : 20] We are living, you dear foolish Corinthians, in the age of gospel salvation. Christ has died for us. It's a fact. It's history. The great exchange of verse 21 has happened.

God has demonstrated through the death of Christ that the righteousness of Christ can be put to our account. So, friends, don't even think of deserting that gospel.

But you will desert it if you desert me. Now, this is why from verse 3 to verse 10 in chapter 6, Paul reminds the Corinthians of his lifestyle and his style of ministry, of the character of his work as a servant of Christ.

So, the purpose of verses 3 to 10 is for Paul to say to the Corinthians, my lifestyle, which you know well, authenticates my gospel. Because Paul is such a humble man, he hates having to draw attention to himself like this because it feels to him a bit like blowing his own trumpet.

And that's the last thing that a man like Paul wants to do. But he has to do it in this letter because it's the only way in which he can show how different his lifestyle and ministry is from that of the false apostles.

[14 : 33] And the Corinthians have got to see that. Otherwise, they're not going to come back to him or to the true gospel. So, let's have a look at this self-description. Starting in verse 3.

We put no obstacle in anyone's way so that no fault may be found with our ministry. In other words, we know that people are going to speak against us. That's inevitable.

But we are determined to give them no justifiable reason to do so. We don't want any opponent to be able to lodge a justifiable complaint against us.

So, verse 4, we commend ourselves as God's servants in every part of our lives. First, by great endurance.

Halfway through verse 4. That's the quality you see that heads the list. In fact, it's the quality that characterizes every other word in verses 4 and 5. Great endurance.

[15 : 30] Calvin, writing of Paul, speaks of his indefatigable endurance of the cross. Don't you love that phrase? His indefatigable endurance of the cross.

He went on and on. How could Paul do anything else if he was following in the footsteps of a master who went on and on until his work was accomplished and he was able to cry out, finished?

And this great endurance that Paul showed, verse 4, was expressed in afflictions. That is, tribulations of all kinds. Hardships.

Calamities. What are calamities? I guess the kind of things that happen to us which threaten to knock us entirely off course, to knock us over. Beatings. Hands up, friends, if you've ever been beaten with whips or rods for the sake of the gospel.

Okay, nobody. That includes me. But Paul was prepared to go through that. Does he say later in the letter? Five times I've received the 40 lashes, lest one. 195 lashes.

[16 : 34] Imprisonments, he mentions here. Riots. Labors. Hard, hard work. Sleepless nights. Hunger. I defy anyone to dwell imaginatively on the contents of verses 4 and 5 and remain unmoved.

Now, Paul is saying, dear Corinthians, have you not noticed these things? Or are you just wanting a pain-free Christian life? Then look at verse 6, and you'll see that Paul abruptly changes gear there.

Verses 4 and 5 show his willingness to suffer for the sake of Christ. But verse 6 and following describe the characteristics of authentic Christian life and authentic Christian leadership.

By purity. In other words, a pure, single-minded aim in life to serve Christ and preach the gospel. By knowledge. Surely he means in this context a true knowledge of the real gospel which is revealed in Christ.

By patience. Or as the authorized version translates it, long-suffering. The ability to endure opposition without punching people in the face, without retaliating.

[17 : 44] Kindness. Do you think of Paul as a kind man or a very tough man? Well, he was tough. He had to be tough. But he was very kind. It would have been lovely to have dinner with him.

He was no longer a Pharisee. The Holy Spirit, he mentions. His nine-fold fruit readily displayed. Genuine love. Pretend love is going to show itself up for what it is sooner or later.

But genuine love, in the end, is unmistakable. Then verse 7. Truthful speech and the power of God. Perhaps better translated, the word of truth in the power of God.

In other words, Paul was constantly preaching the gospel, which is the power of God for salvation. Then we have the weapons of righteousness in the right hand and for the left.

He's probably for a moment dipping into his vocabulary of the Christian in full armor in Ephesians chapter 6 here. What does the person clothed in the righteousness of Christ do? Well, the answer is he battles for Christ.

[18 : 48] He fights. In his right hand, assuming he's a right-handed soldier. In his right hand, he has the sword, his weapon of attack. And in his left hand, he has the great shield of faith to defend himself.

We then have this lyrical, beautiful passage in verses 8, 9, and 10, which I want to read out loud again. But as I read it out, ask yourself, who else, who other than Paul might be being described here?

Do not see somebody else in these words of verses 8, 9, and 10. Don't you think those words?

Those words are a lovely description of the Lord Jesus himself during his three years of public ministry. Honored by some, dishonored by many. Slandered by some, praised by others.

Treated as an imposter, and yet not only true, but the truth. Unknown. Who is this fellow? A provincial carpenter, and yet so well-known.

[20 : 18] Dying. Yes, dying. Yet behold, raised on the third day. Punished. Yet ultimately indestructible. Sorrowful. The man of sorrows acquainted with grief.

And yet full of joy. Poor. Not a penny to his name. Relying on others for his support. Remember when Peter and he had to pay their temple tax?

He didn't have any coins in his pocket, so he sent Peter down to the loch shore, didn't he? Take the first fish, you'll find a two-penny piece in its mouth. That'll do for the two of us. Yet making many rich.

That's an understatement. Having nothing. Nothing. Not even a loincloth to wear on the cross in the end. And yet possessing everything. Possessing the universe.

So through this passage from verse 4 to verse 10, Paul is saying to the Corinthians, Do you not see how my life and Timothy's life reproduce the pattern of Jesus' life?

[21 : 18] And it's this pattern of life, patterned on Jesus, that authenticates both us and our message. These false teachers at Corinth don't live life in this way at all.

They're only concerned with putting on an outward show and looking good. They know nothing of the suffering and the dying. Therefore, verses 11 to 13, open your hearts once again to us, dear Corinthians.

Don't shut us out of your heart and your affections. And you see how he gently reminds them in verse 13 that he is their father in the gospel. What he means by that is that he was the one who first preached the gospel to them and brought them to Christ initially and then fed them with baby food in their early days as Christians.

So of course he is saying children should gladly accept the love and the instruction of their own father. So the question is, will these Corinthians have the courage to stick with Paul as their true apostle?

Will they accept him as Christ's ambassador? And by accepting him, be reconciled to God after their time of wandering away. Now, friends, how is this going to affect us and our thinking and our lives?

[22 : 33] Is this just a piece of ancient history? Well, it certainly is not. If we can understand chapter 5, verse 20 properly, it's going to make a very great difference to the way we read our Bibles and live the Christian life.

Just look back to chapter 5, verse 20, because it's easy to think in a muddled way about that verse. It's common, but I think mistaken, for us to identify ourselves with Paul as the ambassador.

But it's much better for us to identify ourselves with the Corinthians to whom Paul comes as Christ's ambassador. The point of the ambassador is that he represents the one in authority who sends him.

If the Corinthians are willing to accept Paul and his message, it means they're accepting Christ and his message. But if they reject Paul, the ambassador, they're rejecting Christ who sent the ambassador.

And a great deal is going to be at stake for us as well in all this. The implications for us today are very great. Let's just stand back from the text for a moment.

[23 : 42] Let me ask this question. Why have 13 letters of the apostle Paul found their way into the New Testament? Why has God arranged the New Testament to include so much material from Paul's pen when we have only three letters from John, two of them very short, two letters from Peter, one from Jude, and one from the author to the Hebrews?

The reason surely is this, that Jesus commissioned Paul to be the apostle to the Gentiles, the chief teacher of the gospel and its implications to the Gentile world.

And that's us and the great majority of the worldwide church. The Lord Jesus, you remember, stopped Paul in his tracks on the road to Damascus. He turned his life inside out and commissioned him.

And these words are recorded in Acts chapter nine. Commissioned him to be a chosen instrument of mine. This is Jesus speaking. A chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and the children of Israel.

To receive Paul's teaching, then, is to receive the teaching and gospel of Jesus himself. It is Jesus who speaks to the Corinthians and the Glaswegians of today through Paul.

[25 : 00] Paul is Christ's ambassador. So we separate Jesus and Paul at our peril. If we say, as some do say today, Jesus teaches the real gospel, but Paul's teaching is a bit of an add-on, which we can take with a pinch of salt.

If we say that, we're denying that Jesus sent Paul as his ambassador. Paul is Christ's ambassador to you and me, as well as to the Corinthians. So if we start saying, I don't like Paul very much.

I don't like his teaching about men and women and their different roles in the church. I don't like his condemnation of homosexual activity. I don't like the very sharp distinctions that he draws between truth and falsehood.

We are, in effect, if we say that kind of thing, taking up arms against Jesus. Academic books regularly appear which try to separate Jesus from Paul.

And you'll find books which develop a theology of mission from the teaching of Jesus without paying any serious attention to Paul at all. And we can't do this.

[26 : 07] He is Christ's ambassador. To reject the ambassador is to reject the one who sent him. It is Jesus who teaches us through Paul. We dare not, in effect, say that Jesus made a poor appointment in commissioning Paul to teach the Gentiles.

So there's our first question. Will the Corinthians have the courage to stick with Paul as their true apostle? Will they say, in the words of chapter 6, verse 13, sorry, will they, in the words of that verse, widen their hearts to readmit Paul as their true teacher and thus be reconciled to God?

Well, now the second question follows immediately behind the first. It's obviously closely related to it. Will the Corinthians have the courage to part company with the false apostles?

And that's the question Paul immediately turns to in chapter 6, verse 14, the very next verse, where he says, do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers.

Paul is saying to them, really, you've done two foolish things, you Corinthians. First, you've parted company with me, and therefore you need to be reconciled to God. And second, you have yoked yourselves with unbelievers, the false apostles whom you are allowing to influence you and lead you astray.

[27 : 29] Now, the portrait of these false apostles is going to emerge much more clearly as the letter develops, especially in verses, chapters 10 to 13. So I won't say too much about them now, except to point out what Paul says about them here in chapter 6.

How does he characterize them? Well, look at verse 14. Unbelievers, lawlessness, darkness. Verse 15, belial, which literally means worthlessness, but is being used here as a synonym for Satan.

Then unbeliever again, verse 15. Verse 16, idols. And all this brings, chapter 7, verse 1, defilement of body and spirit.

Paul is saying in this final section of chapter 6, you are in the process, my Corinthian friends, of yoking yourselves together with Satan and his works.

Don't do it. It is an unequal yoking. And just look how forcefully Paul is expressing himself in these verses, having given this initial command in the first few words of verse 14.

[28 : 41] You see, he immediately fires five unanswerable questions at them. And each of these questions shockingly polarizes the contrasting features of God and Satan.

What partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? What fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? What portion does a believer share with an unbeliever?

What agreement does the temple of God have with idols? Now, it's the fierce juxtaposition of those five opposites that is intended to jolt the Corinthians into realizing what they're doing as they meekly submit to these false leaders.

Don't you realize what you're doing, Paul is saying? Unhitch the yoke while you still can. And then he backs up his appeal by bringing in two great quotations, first from Leviticus and second from the prophet Isaiah.

Just look at the last of his five questions. What agreement has the temple of God with idols? Answer, of course, none. And then he says, for we, we Christians, are the temple of the living God.

[29 : 51] And then he takes them back to these wonderful words from Leviticus chapter 26, where God expresses the essence of the covenant which he made between himself and his people.

I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people. Now, friends, if anyone here asks the question, what is the Bible covenant?

Well, that is the Bible covenant expressed there in those words from Leviticus. It's a sure, solemn, reliable promise from God, A, to dwell with his people and to be with them, B, to possess them.

You will be mine, he says, and C, to be possessed by them. I will be yours. Now, Paul is saying that is the relationship that God established with his people in the time of Moses.

And it is still the relationship that God has with his people. Yes, there's a change at one level. No longer do we need a temple, the stone temple at Jerusalem, to speak of God's dwelling amongst his people.

[30 : 56] We don't need that because now we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. We are now the temple of the living God. How then, says Paul, can we who are indwelt by God possibly have any kind of liaison with idols?

Such a thought is abhorrent and impossible. But Paul is saying, if you yoke yourselves to these servants of Satan, you're inviting idols to move house into the temple of God and to share it with the Holy Spirit.

So there's only one thing for you to do. And here he quotes from the prophet Isaiah in verse 17. Go out from their midst, be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing.

Then I will welcome you and I will be a father to you and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty. In other words, if you are prepared to cut your ties with these people, the family relationship of father to children will be restored.

And then Paul drives his appeal home in the first verse of chapter 7. Since we have these promises, beloved, that's the promises given in the previous three verses.

[32 : 06] Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of the Lord.

Now just notice that final phrase, in the fear of God. If we allow ourselves to be governed by the fear of God, we will have the courage to unyoke ourselves from false leaders.

But if we allow ourselves to be governed by the fear of men, the yoke will remain in place and the door of God's temple will be opened wide to admit lawlessness, darkness and belial.

When our congregation made the decision a year ago to take off the yoke, which joined us then to the Church of Scotland, we did the right thing. I'm not saying we're a perfect church, anything but.

We have a great deal of growing and learning to do. We're far from perfect. We're a gathering of frail, sinful men and women. We know that. But we did the right thing. The Church of Scotland had set itself on a pathway which denied the teaching of Paul.

[33 : 22] And as we've seen, those who deny the teaching of Christ's ambassador deny the teaching of the one who sent him. Now, I just say this and bring this up again because it's an obvious application of what Paul is saying here to the Corinthians.

But I say it also because I'm sure that sometimes we still grieve over that painful separation of last year. I do. I do. And I'm really an Anglican. And I'm sure that some of you do as well, much more than I, because many of you were converted and nurtured and truly nourished by Church of Scotland ministry in days gone by.

And that's why the separation was so painful. But we have done the right thing in unhitching that yoke. Because it became obvious a number of years ago that the teaching of Christ and his apostles was being contradicted in the Church of Scotland in a determined manner.

Now, let me raise a question here. Somebody might ask, how is it that Paul can command the Corinthians to separate themselves from a group of people here in 2 Corinthians, when in other places, in Romans and other letters, he commands people not to be divisive?

Isn't Paul being divisive himself? Somebody might say here in 2 Corinthians 6, when he tells the Corinthians to be separate from the false apostles. Now, that's an important question, but it's not difficult to answer.

[34 : 48] When Paul writes to a congregation and says, don't be divisive, he always has in mind the odd individual who is causing difficulty over matters of secondary importance, such as whether you should eat food that is non-kosher, or food that has been offered in sacrifice to idols, or whether you should observe certain days in the calendar as special days.

Now, Paul says we must gently allow one another within the congregation to follow different practices over food and drink and special days and that kind of thing. Don't stir up divisions over that kind of secondary matter.

Don't be judgmental with each other over things like that. But when it comes to the central truths of the gospel, it's a different matter altogether. Paul is going to tell the Corinthians in chapter 11, verse 4 of this letter, that their false apostles are proclaiming another Jesus and a different spirit and a different gospel from the one that they received from Paul.

And that is why they must pull apart from these false teachers and unyoke themselves from them. Now, when we took off the yoke which had bound us to the Church of Scotland, it was a necessary separation from those who were following a very different agenda from that of Jesus and his apostles.

Remember how Jesus himself said in Matthew chapter 7, beware of false prophets, people who speak out in the name of religion, but say what is untrue. Jesus says, they come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they're ravenous wolves, and you will recognize them by their fruits.

[36 : 32] If the wolf came in wolf's clothing and said, I am a wolf, it would be easy to spot him. The problem is he wears sheep's clothing.

He professes to be something that he's not. So says Jesus, how do we recognize him? Not by his clothing, but by his fruits. In other words, the moral quality of his life.

Now, Paul knew these false apostles by the moral quality of their lives. That's why he boldly calls them, later in the letter, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ, like wolves disguising themselves as sheep.

And no wonder, Paul goes on in chapter 11, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is no surprise if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness.

Their end, says Paul, will correspond to their deeds. And deeds and fruit are the same thing. Paul knows the falseness of these false apostles by their lifestyle.

[37 : 38] So do you see the thrust of this verse 14 in chapter 6? Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. Paul is not giving the Corinthians ethical lessons about who is the right or wrong person to marry.

He's not thinking about that kind of thing at all, or who is the right person to go into a business partnership with. Not that kind of thing. He's talking about the false apostles, and he's urging his beloved Corinthians to break all ties with them.

Well, friends, coffee calls to us. I can smell its nice aroma drifting up the stairs already. So let me wind up. Paul lays before the 21st century reader, in other words, us, two vitally important questions.

First, will we stick with Paul as Christ's ambassador? Or will we draw away from him and compromise our allegiance to him and modify his teaching and hedge it about with qualifications?

If he is Christ's ambassador, he speaks for his master. So to draw away from Paul is to draw away from Christ. Second, will we be willing to maintain an attitude of opposition to the teaching of false apostles and false leaders?

[39 : 02] It is costly to do that. We know it. It will be costly to go on doing it. It means being happy, being content, to be called narrow and bigoted and blinkered and fundamentalist and awkward and stubborn and extreme.

It was because Paul was utterly determined to stick with the true gospel that his head in the end was sundered from his body by the executioner's sword.

That can be the ultimate price. But if we are prepared to be as unmovable as the apostle Paul, we have this great promise to us from God at the end of chapter 6.

Go out from their midst and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing. Then, here's the promise, then I will welcome you and I will be a father to you and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty.

Let's bow our heads and we'll pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[40 : 19] Dear God, our Father, we don't deserve any of these wonderful promises that you have given to your people, but we thank you so much for your apostle Paul who takes them and applies them to the church today.

And we pray that you will help us, dear Father, to value before all other things this relationship whereby you are a father to us and we shall be your sons and daughters truly and belong to the family forever.

So we have these promises and therefore, dear Father, give us the grace and the strength and the willingness to cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.

And we ask it to the glory of the name of our Lord Jesus. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.