

Equally Yoked: The Minister's Proper Partners, Part 2

2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1

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Introduction

Well it is a pleasure to be together on Resurrection Sunday, and to rejoice together in the great victory of our King and Champion, the Lord Jesus Christ. He who was delivered over because of our transgressions was also raised for our justification (Rom 4:25). The One who humbled Himself by becoming obedient unto death, even death on a cross, is the One whom God highly exalted, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil 2:8–11). Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! And it is through Christ's resurrection that God testifies that sin has been paid for, and death has been conquered for all who turn from sin and trust in Jesus alone for forgiveness.

And though it's tempting to preach an entire sermon on the resurrection of our Lord from the dead, I'm going to return instead to our study of Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians. And I'm going to pick up where we left off last week—in the paragraph contained in 2 Corinthians 6:14 to chapter 7 verse 1. And I want to begin by reading that passage again together. “Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? ¹⁵Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? ¹⁶Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, ‘I will dwell in them and walk among them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.’ ¹⁷Therefore, ‘Come out from their midst and be separate,’ says the Lord. ‘And do not touch what is unclean; And I will welcome you. ¹⁸And I will be a father to you, And you shall be sons and daughters to Me,’ Says the Lord Almighty. ^{7:1}Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”

Now, this is a text that discusses the proper and improper partners that genuine Christians may have in the task of Christian ministry. And that question, “Who can the faithful church of God legitimately partner with in ministry?” has been a point of contention among professing Christians for the past 100 years. And that has been illustrated in the ecumenical movement, the history of which we surveyed in depth last week. And the principal dogma of the ecumenical movement of the 20th century was that anyone who called themselves a Christian was to be regarded as a Christian. It didn't matter if they were a theological liberal who denied the bodily

resurrection of Christ or penal substitutionary atonement, or if they were a Roman Catholic who denied the Gospel of justification by faith alone. The important thing was that those who called themselves Christians, and held somewhat to a “Christian” view of morality, were able to unite together in order to show strength in numbers and therefore compete in the culture wars for larger societal influence. Whether it was religious liberty, the unborn child’s right to life, race relations, a free-market economy, or improving education—winning the battle over these social issues was more important than the doctrine that divided these people. So they downplayed the importance of the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith, so that they could partner together on these issues.

And that had several iterations through the whole of the last century. There was the Federal Council of Churches in 1908, the World Council of Churches in 1948, the Billy Graham evangelistic crusades in which Graham partnered with liberals, the question of fellowship there could be between British evangelicalism and an Anglican Church that had compromised with liberalism and Roman Catholicism; there was the Second Vatican Council, the “Evangelicals and Catholics Together” document of 1994, the “Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification” between Lutherans and Roman Catholics in 1999, and the Manhattan Declaration of 2009 which declared Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, and Evangelicals “Christians,” effectively denying that the Gospel has anything to do with whether someone is a Christian or not.

And again: it’s always done in the name of seizing influence, which, it is always assumed is absolutely necessary for successful evangelism and for revival. It’s a fundamentally man-centered concept of salvation, because it supposes that unbelievers will be more likely to convert to Christianity if they see how popular, influential, and culturally relevant it is. This is illustrated in a classic interaction between a pro-ecumenical minister and Martyn Lloyd-Jones. The man believed the ecumenical movement to be a sign of hope for the future. He said, “But surely, when so many churches are coming together in a World Council of Churches, revival must be on the way.” Do you hear the unspoken assumption? “If we can have worldwide movements and such large gatherings in the name of Christ, surely unbelievers will want to join us!” And Martyn Lloyd-Jones’ reply was just brilliant. He said, “You seem to be arguing that if you succeed in bringing together a sufficient number of dead bodies they will come alive!” (Collins, “The Friend,” *Chosen by God*, 262–63).

And you hear in Lloyd-Jones’ response a different fundamental conviction about human nature and about what it meant to be a Christian. Becoming a Christian isn’t joining a cultural movement. It’s not deciding to join a social club or some sort of fraternity. Becoming a Christian means happens when a sinner who is spiritually dead is miraculously raised to spiritual life by God’s sovereign work of regeneration. A Christian is one whom God has made alive from the dead through the preaching of the one true Gospel of Christ. And those who are possessed of different fundamental convictions concerning the Gospel are not just “separated brethren;” they

are the one spiritually alive and the other spiritually dead. And so Lloyd-Jones said, it doesn't make a difference how many dead bodies you could gather into one place. What matters is whether God, by the Holy Spirit, breathes spiritual life into men and women by the preaching of the Gospel.

That is the test of whether Christianity is advancing in the world. Not how big our churches can get, but whether sinners were united to Christ by faith in the Gospel, and thus had found forgiveness of sins in Him. And if that is what mattered, then it is the height of folly to downplay the importance of the doctrines of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which is the only way of salvation, in service of a substance-less "unity." There can be no genuine unity between those who have been saved from their sins through the Gospel, and those who yet remain enemies of that Gospel—no matter what people are willing to call themselves. And so there can be no partnership in ministry between believers and unbelievers, because there is such a radical difference between them.

And that is the burden of Paul's main point in our passage. Chapter 6 verse 14: "Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers." Now, this passage certainly has application for how believers conduct themselves among unbelievers in the world. We are to heed the exhortation of Romans 12:2, where Paul says, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind," of 1 John 2:15, where John says, "Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him," and of James 4:4, who says, "You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God."

But as we mentioned last time, this **call for separation** between believers and unbelievers comes in the context of the conflict between Paul, the Corinthians, and the false apostles who are seeking to undermine Paul's ministry and Paul's Gospel. It's true that the Corinthians are still living in the midst of an extremely pagan culture, and that they have to guard against any compromise with the Greco-Roman idolatry that dominates their society. But the pressing concern as Paul writes 2 Corinthians isn't so much the pressure of pagan syncretism as it is the corrupting doctrine of the Judaizing false apostles. These men are teaching that faith in Christ is *necessary*, but *not enough* for salvation. "If you want to be a true Christian," they're saying, "you need to be circumcised and keep the customs of Moses, too!" And in order to peddle their false doctrine, they've slandered Paul's character to the Corinthians so as to drive a wedge between them. And 2 Corinthians comprises Paul's defense of his character and ministry against the false accusations of these interlopers, as well as a passionate plea to repudiate the false apostles and to be reconciled to him and to the one true Gospel of Christ.

And that is the function of this passage as a call to separation. The false apostles are the unbelievers that the Corinthians must not be yoked together with. And we mentioned last week

how significant it is that Paul applies the language of pagan idolatry to the false doctrine of the Judaizers. He's saying to the Corinthians, "Because these false apostles teach you that salvation comes by faith in Christ *plus* religious ritualism, they preach another gospel, which is really no gospel at all! And though they call Christ their God, He is"—as Paul will say in chapter 11 verse 4—"another Jesus whom we have not preached, and therefore is not the true God, but just another idol in the vast array of false gods in the Greco-Roman pantheon! And just as much as you cannot have any spiritual partnership with the idols of the Gentiles, neither can you have any spiritual partnership with these heretics! You cannot be bound together with them! You must come out from them and be separate!"

And so he says in verse 14: "Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers." And he borrows that imagery of animals bound together under a single yoke, and he says, "You can't put two fundamentally different kinds of animals in the same yoke and expect them to pull that plow in an effective manner. There's only going to be confusion and discord." And the point is: genuine believers in Jesus Christ and those who do not have saving faith in Christ are "different breeds," so to speak. Believers and unbelievers are moving in different directions; they live in two different worlds; they're energized by different powers, and motivated by different passions. Any intimate association or spiritual partnership between them will eventually only result in dissonance, difficulty, and disaster.

Now, that doesn't mean that Christians must withdraw from society. It doesn't mean that we become monks, or retreat into a Christian bubble where we only interact with other Christians. No, the Lord Jesus has commissioned us to go *into* all the world and preach the Gospel. We are to bring the Gospel to the unbelieving world into which we have been providentially and strategically placed. What it does mean is that there can be no commingling of worship or of ministry among genuine regenerate Christians and false converts. No Christian is to take up common spiritual cause with a non-Christian—even if that non-Christian calls himself a Christian, but denies his profession by his life or his doctrine.

And so it is this radical difference between believer and unbeliever—between regenerate and unregenerate, between child of God and child of Satan—that stands at the heart of this prohibition. We cannot be under the same yoke because we are **fundamentally different** from one another. And Paul illustrates that essential incongruity between believers and unbelievers by asking **five rhetorical questions**—each one of them exposing a **fundamental difference** between believers and unbelievers, and illustrating the impossibility of their being yoked together in common spiritual cause.

Review I: Governed by Different Rules of Life (v. 14b)

First he asks, “What partnership have righteousness and lawlessness?” That is to say, believers and unbelievers are **governed by different rules of life**. Righteousness refers to *obedience* to the law of God, whereas lawlessness speaks of *rebellion* to the law of God. How could there be any partnership—any sharing of common cause, common goals, common efforts—between these two? Obedience and rebellion are diametrically opposed! Righteousness and lawlessness are total opposites!

Review II: Subjects of Different Kingdoms (v. 14c)

Second, believers and unbelievers are **subjects of different kingdoms**. He asks, “What fellowship has light with darkness?” And I say that these relate to different kingdoms because of Colossians 1:12–13, which says that God “rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son,” and thus “qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light.” Nothing can be more incompatible than light and darkness. The presence of one drives out the presence of the other! Therefore, the children of light can no more partner in ministry with the children of darkness than it can be light and dark in the same place at the same time.

Review III: Ruled by Different Kings (v. 15a)

Third, Christians and non-Christians are **ruled by different kings**. Verse 15: “Or what harmony has Christ with Belial,” or Satan? Christ is the king of righteousness, the ruler of the kingdom of light. Satan is the spirit of lawlessness, the prince of the domain of darkness. And every person in the world is **ruled by** one of these two **different kings**. And to think that there could be harmony between the subjects of these kings is as blasphemous as the Holy Son of God linking arms with Satan Himself in common spiritual cause.

Review IV: Possessed of Different Worldviews (v. 15b)

Fourth, the regenerate and the unregenerate are **possessed of different worldviews**. Paul asks, “Or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?” What commonality is there between belief and unbelief? Between faith and no faith? There is a difference in fundamental convictions that drive one’s life. The unbeliever trusts himself and the man-made philosophies of false religion. The believer puts all his trust in the person of Christ and the promises of Scripture. The unbeliever’s life is centered on self, and his passion is to magnify his own worth. The believer’s life is dominated by Christ, and his great passion is to magnify the glory and worth of Christ!

V. Worship Different Gods (v. 16)

And that brings us to where we left off last week. Paul asks a **fifth and final** rhetorical question in verse 16, which is: “What agreement has the temple of God with idols?” Believers and unbelievers are governed by different rules of life, are subjects of different kingdoms, are ruled by different kings, and are possessed of different worldviews. The **fifth fundamental difference** between believers and unbelievers is, quite simply, that we **worship different Gods**. “What agreement has the temple of God with idols?” And this imagery of the worship of the one true God in His temple in contrast to the worship of idols launches Paul into a beautiful reflection on how the Church of Christ is the temple of God in this age of New Covenant fulfillment. And that is going to be the focus of our message today.

There is an absolute incompatibility between God and idols. And that is because all false religion is demonic. We saw that last week as we looked to Paul’s instruction in 1 Corinthians. In 1 Corinthians 8:4, Paul says, “We know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one.” There’s no such thing as idols; there’s only one God. In 1 Corinthians 10:19 he says, “What do I mean then? That a thing sacrificed to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? No!” Idols are no true gods, because there’s only one true God, and that is Yahweh, the Triune God of Scripture. “But,” 1 Corinthians 10:20, “the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God.” The fact that idols don’t exist doesn’t mean that there is no spiritual component to idolatry. Scripture says the millions of false gods of the thousands of false religions in the world are actually demons. So Deuteronomy 32:17 says of Israel, “They sacrificed to demons who were not God, to gods whom they have not known, new gods who came lately, whom your fathers did not dread.” When Israel turned from the worship of Yahweh and committed idolatry by making sacrifices to the gods of the nations, Scripture says they sacrificed to demons. And so 1 Timothy 4:1 warns of those professing Christians who will abandon the faith and embrace false religion, saying, “The Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons.” This means that every false religion in the world is not just wrong; it is demonic. Every made-up idol—every false god of every false religion—isn’t just not true; it is a demon. It is energized and powered by the kingdom of darkness that is ruled by Satan himself. And so there simply cannot be any agreement between the worship of these demons and the worship of the one true and living God.

That’s why, from the very beginning of Israel’s history, God speaks so severely about idolatry. The first two of the Ten Commandments are devoted to this. Exodus 20, verse 3: “You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, Yahweh your God, am a jealous God.” And to the second generation Moses says in Deuteronomy 6:14: “You shall not follow other gods, any of the gods of the peoples who surround you, for Yahweh your God in the midst of you is a jealous God; otherwise the anger of Yahweh your God will be kindled against you, and He will wipe you off the face of

the earth.” God is jealous for His own glory! He will not share the worship that He rightly deserves with demons! Isaiah 42:8: “I am Yahweh, that is *My* name; I will not give *My* glory to another, nor *My* praise to graven images!”

You say, “How serious is God about there being no possibility of agreement between the temple of God and idols?” Turn with me in your Bibles to 2 Kings chapter 21. 2 Kings 21 chronicles the wickedness of King Manasseh, who is perhaps the most evil king in Judah’s history. And his wickedness consisted chiefly in his idolatry. Verse 3: “He rebuilt the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed; and he erected altars for Baal and made an Asherah, as Ahab king of Israel had done, and worshiped all the host of heaven and served them.” This is high-handed idolatry perpetrated by the *king* of Israel! Oh, but it gets worse. Verse 4: “He built altars in the house of Yahweh, of which Yahweh had said, ‘In Jerusalem I will put *My* name.’” Verse 7: “Then he set the carved image of the Asherah that he had made, in the house of which Yahweh said to David and to his son Solomon, ‘In this house and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen from all the tribes of Israel, I will put *My* name forever.’” You remember in 1 Kings 8, when the temple is finally completed under Solomon, how the cloud of God’s glory had filled the temple, so that the priests had to run out of there. God was declaring to His people that He would take up residence with them and dwell among them in His temple. In 1 Kings 8:29 Solomon calls the temple “the place of which You have said, ‘*My* name shall be there.’” This is where God’s special presence dwells with His people! This is where His holy *name* dwells! And Manasseh builds altars to Baal, and to the sun and the stars, in the courts of this temple! He brings a wood carving of the idol Asherah into the very temple of Yahweh!

Now, how seriously does God take this? Verse 12: “Behold, I am bringing such calamity on Jerusalem and Judah, that whoever hears of it, both his ears will tingle.” Middle of verse 13: “I will wipe Jerusalem as one wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down.” And then this unthinkable statement in verse 14: “I will abandon the remnant of *My* inheritance and deliver them into the hand of their enemies, and they will become as plunder and spoil to all their enemies; because they have done evil in *My* sight, and have been provoking Me to anger since the day their fathers came from Egypt, even to this day.” “I will abandon the remnant of *My* inheritance.” That ought to make every last one of us tremble. There is no greater insult, no greater blasphemy, than to bring idols of demons into the holy temple of God, and, in adulterous fashion, worship them rather than Him as it were right in front of His face.

One other illustration of this. Turn to Ezekiel chapter 8. The Lord is about to bring about the judgment He spoke of in 2 Kings 21, and that will come in the form of exile into Babylon. And in Ezekiel 8, God gives the prophet a vision of the gross idolatry that provokes Him to the wrath He will exercise upon them. In verses 3 and 4 Ezekiel says the Spirit gave him a vision of the temple. And in the temple, right alongside the physical manifestation of the glory of God, was the seat of the idol of jealousy—an idol that the people had placed in Yahweh’s temple. Verse 6:

“And [God] said to me, ‘Son of man, do you see what they are doing, the great abominations which the house of Israel are committing here, so that I would be far from My sanctuary?’ We need to feel the weight of that! “So that God would be far from His own sanctuary”? So that He would be *absent* from the very place that was designed to house His special *presence* with His people? This is unthinkable. “But,” verse 6, God says, “you will see still greater abominations.”

Then God tells Ezekiel to dig through a hole in the wall to see what was going on in there. Verse 10: “So I entered and looked, and behold, every form of creeping things and beasts and detestable things, with all the idols of the house of Israel, were carved on the wall all around. Standing in front of them were seventy elders of the house of Israel, . . . each man with his censer in his hand and the fragrance of the cloud of incense rising.” The elders of Israel—the spiritual leaders of God’s people—were worshipping the images of idols that they had carved on the wall of Yahweh’s temple! But God says again, verse 13, “You will see still greater abominations.” And then he sees women weeping for the Babylonian god Tammuz. And then in verse 16 he finds twenty-five men with their backs to the temple of Yahweh and their faces toward the east, bowing and worshipping the sun. How symbolic that these men have turned their backs upon Yahweh’s temple. These abominations, this mass idolatry, is happening in the *temple* of God! In the place where His glory dwells! In the place where He condescends and meets Israel and provides atonement for their sin!

So once again: what is God’s response? Verse 18: “Therefore, I indeed will deal in wrath. My eye will have no pity nor will I spare; and though they cry in My ears with a loud voice, yet I will not listen to them.” And then Ezekiel sees God send executioners into the city to destroy all those who have committed idolatry. Chapter 9 verse 6, God commands them: “Utterly slay old men, young men, maidens, little children, and women, . . . and you shall start from My sanctuary.” Judgment begins with the household of God (1 Pet 4:17). But then, even worse than that, the shekinah glory of God, which symbolizes God’s presence with His people, starts to stir. In chapter 10 verse 4 it moves from the ark of the covenant to the entrance of the temple. And then in verses 18 and 19 the glory stands over the angels of Ezekiel’s vision, who then move to the east gate of the temple. And then, finally, in chapter 11 verse 23, the glory of God departs from His temple, and stands over the Mount of Olives, before ascending into heaven. For the first time in Israel’s history—for the first time in 850 years—the people of God are without the presence of God. Yahweh is no longer dwelling with His people.

“What agreement has the temple of God with idols?” What happens when you try to yoke believers together with unbelievers? What happens when you try to mix demonic false religion with the worship of the one true God? What happens to a church that tries to make common spiritual cause with and partner in ministry with those who are not genuine believers in Christ? I’ll tell you what happens: God writes *Ichabod* over the doorpost of that church. The glory of

God's presence departs from that place. Dear people, do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers, for what agreement has the temple of God with idols?

We are God's Temple (v. 16)

You say, "Now wait a minute. I can see how all this 'temple' talk relates to Israel. But what does that have to do with the church?" Look at the middle of verse 16: "For *we* are the temple of the living God!" That is just an astounding statement! "For we are the temple of the living God." And then he supports that claim by quoting from the Old Testament: "Just as God said, 'I will dwell in them and walk among them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.'" In this age, the centuries-old promise of God to dwell in and with His people is fulfilled in the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ!

Now, in order to understand the significance of the truth that we Christians are the temple of God, we need to understand what the temple was for the people of God in the Old Covenant era. And for that we can turn to Exodus 29, where God is giving instructions concerning the construction of the Tabernacle, which was sort of the portable pre-cursor to the temple. In Exodus 29:42 to 46, God speaks about what the tabernacle will be to the sons of Israel: "...at the doorway of the tent of meeting before Yahweh, [...] I will meet with you, to speak to you there. I will meet there with the sons of Israel, and it shall be consecrated by My glory. I will consecrate the tent of meeting and the altar; I will also consecrate Aaron and his sons to minister as priests to Me. I will dwell among the sons of Israel and will be their God. They shall know that I am Yahweh their God who brought them out of the land of Egypt, that I might dwell among them; I am Yahweh their God."

So from this passage we learn that the tabernacle will be a place of fellowship: it is "in the presence of Yahweh, where I will meet with you," verse 42. It will be a place of revelation; God will speak to them there. It will be a place that is consecrated by His glory, so Yahweh will condescend in His glory and His presence will sanctify His people. Verse 44 says that it will be the place of priestly ministry, so it is also the place of propitiation, where God's wrath against Israel's sin will be temporarily appeased by the sacrifices offered by the priests. And in verses 45 and 46, He says that the reason He brought them out of Egypt—the aim of their redemption from slavery—was so that Yahweh would dwell among His people and would be their God. And all that is true of the Tabernacle as described here is true of the temple, which is built once God brings Israel into the land and gives them rest from their enemies. Just as the glory of God filled the Tabernacle in Exodus 40, symbolizing that Yahweh had taken up residence with His people in the Tabernacle, so also (as we mentioned) in 1 Kings 8 the glory of the Lord fills the temple, as Yahweh declares that this will now be His dwelling place among His people.

The temple is the way in which God fulfills the ancient covenant promise to dwell with His people and to be their God. That promise began with Abraham in Genesis 17:7–8, where God says, “I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you. I will give to you and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.” He repeats this promise in Leviticus 26:11–12, which is the text that Paul quotes in 2 Corinthians 6:16: “I will make My dwelling among you, and My soul will not reject you. I will also walk among you and be your God, and you shall be My people.” He repeats it again through Moses as He renews the covenant with the second generation as they prepare to enter the land. Deuteronomy 29:12–13: “. . . that you may enter into the covenant with Yahweh your God, and into His oath which Yahweh your God is making with you today, in order that He may establish you today as His people and that He may be your God.” This ancient promise of dwelling with His people and being their God is fulfilled as His presence dwells with them in the temple!

Now, all of that is glorious! But what about all that we just talked about? The temple was supposed to be the very center of God’s fellowship with His people—the place of worship, of atonement, and of celebration. But Israel has so profaned the sanctuary of God by their idolatry, that the glory of God’s presence departs from His temple, and He abandons His people into exile! Well, along with the promise of impending judgment for their idolatry, the prophets also prophesied of a coming New Covenant, in which God would rescue Israel from their judgment, save them, and once again dwell with them. In Jeremiah 31:33, God promises, “But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days. I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.” And in Ezekiel 37:23, He says, “They will no longer defile themselves with their idols, or with their detestable things, or with any of their transgressions; but I will deliver them from all their dwelling places in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them. And they will be My people, and I will be their God.” And verse 26: “I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will place them and multiply them, and will set My sanctuary in their midst forever. My dwelling place also will be with them; and I will be their God, and they will be My people.” God is going to restore the fortunes of His people! Through this New Covenant, He will once again set His sanctuary in their midst, will dwell with them, and be their God! (See also Jer 7:23; 11:4; 24:7; 30:22; 32:38; Ezek 36:28; 43:7, 9; Zech 2:10–11; 8:8.)

And from the moment those promises were made, Israel anxiously hoped in their fulfillment, longing for the temple to be built again. But the people return from exile and experience no such revival. Zerubbabel’s temple pales in comparison to Solomon’s, and there’s no record of the glory of God filling that temple the way it had in the Tabernacle and in Solomon’s temple. In fact, after the shekinah glory ascended from the Mount of Olives into heaven in Ezekiel 11, there

is no mention of the glory of Yahweh in the rest of Old Testament history. The next time the glory of the Lord is seen on earth, it is 600 years later, when an angel of the Lord announces the birth of Jesus to shepherds in the fields! Luke 2:9: “And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and *the glory of the Lord* shone around them.” And the angel said, “Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” In John 1:14, the Apostle John says, “The Word became flesh and *dwelt* among us”—literally, He *tabernacled* among us, “and we saw His *glory*, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth!” In Jesus Christ, Colossians 2:9, “all the fullness of Deity *dwells* in bodily form,” so that He is rightly called Immanuel: God with us (Matt 1:23)! The glory of the Lord has returned to dwell among His people in the Person of His Son! *Jesus* is the temple of God!

Just as the temple was the place where God condescended to meet and fellowship with His people, so now Jesus is the where God condescends and fellowships with man. Just as the temple was the place of revelation, where God spoke to His people, so now in these last days God has spoken to us in His Son—the eternal Word from the Father. Just as the temple was the place where atonement for sin was made and God’s wrath was propitiated, so now Jesus is where atonement is made and is where God’s anger is satisfied. Just as the temple was the place where Israel worshiped God, so now the “hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth,” for they will worship Him in Jesus, and in Jesus alone. “To meet God, to talk with God, to worship God, you no longer come to a building . . . made with human hands. You come to Jesus! Jesus is the temple of God!” (Storms 226).

But that’s not the end of the story! Because we are united by faith to Christ as our Head, Christ Himself dwells in us. In Ephesians 3:17, Paul prays for the certain reality that Christ would dwell in our hearts through faith. In Romans 8:9–11, he says that Christ dwells in everyone who belongs to Him. In Colossians 1:27, he defines the mystery of the Gospel as “Christ *in* you, the hope of glory.” Because all the fullness of deity dwells in Christ, and because Christ dwells in us His people, the Church is the temple of God—the new divine sanctuary, where the living God most fully expresses his presence (cf. Harris, 505)!

And that is true of the Church on a universal level, on a local level, and on an individual level. Speaking of the universal church—that is, collectively, of all believers in Jesus in this New Covenant era—Paul writes in Ephesians 2:19–22: “You are of God’s household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.” The whole church of God is growing into a *holy temple* in Christ. Peter expresses a similar thought in 1 Peter 2:5: “You also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” We’re a kingdom of priests that

constitute a spiritual house, which is to say, the temple of God. It's also proper to speak of a particular local church as the temple of God. Paul does this very thing in 1 Corinthians 3:16, where he says, "Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are." And it is proper to speak of an individual believer as a temple of God, as Paul does in 1 Corinthians 6:19, when he asks, "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?"

Dear friends, we are the temple of the living God! All the wonderfully rich history of the Tabernacle and the Temple—filled with the glory and presence of God, as the center of communion between God and man, of the promises to dwell with His people and walk among them and be their God—that is all fulfilled in the church! In *us*, the people of God, who partake of the New Covenant! And God no longer dwells merely *with* us, in a sanctuary or a building that we construct for *Him*; He dwells *in* us, in hearts that *He* has recreated for Himself, and we ourselves become His temple! Absolutely glorious!

Conclusion

But dear people, if we are the temple of the living God, what is the consequence of that reality for our lives? What responsibility does it create for us? Verse 17: "Therefore,"—because we are the temple of the living God, because God's promise to dwell in and walk among His people, and to be their God, is fulfilled in us—Therefore, 'come out from their midst and be separate,' says the Lord. 'And do not touch what is unclean.'" If it was unthinkable—the height of blasphemy—for a temple made of wood and stone to have any association with idols, how much more unthinkable—how much more blasphemous—is it to bring idols into the temple which is constructed with *living* stones? If God brought such destruction and judgment upon Israel for desecrating His temple with idolatry—if He delivered them over to death and to exile, if He removed the glory of His presence from their midst, and destroyed the very temple where He had caused His Name to dwell—how much severer should His punishment be for those who unite the *living* temple of God with idols?

And yet that is what we do, brothers and sisters, when, in ecumenical fashion, we propose to unite in common spiritual cause or ministerial partnership with the enemies of the Gospel. It doesn't matter if they call themselves Christians and say they love and worship Jesus; if they do not confess faith in the only true and saving Gospel—that sinners are separated from a Holy God by the breaking of His law; that they stand condemned before Him and will rightly experience eternal punishment in hell for their crimes; and yet that they may have their sins washed away and their righteousness secured for them as a pure gift, by grace alone, through faith alone apart from works, in the Lord Jesus Christ alone, the sole Mediator between God and men, who has

lived, died, and risen again on their behalf—if they do not confess faith in *that* Gospel, they are no true Christians, they do not worship God in Christ, they worship a false god, an idol whom they've fashioned in their image, and thus they share in the worship of demons. Any religion which demeans the perfect sufficiency of the atonement that Christ accomplished once-for-all by insisting that man must add to it the filthy rags of his own “good works,” *corrupts* the one true Gospel of Christ, and is a doctrine of demons.

And that describes every other religion in the world apart from Biblical Christianity. It doesn't matter what you call it: whether Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnessism, or even “liberal Christianity.” Dear friends, it doesn't matter how many social issues or political positions we agree on, the people caught up in these idolatrous false religions are not our partners in ministry. They are our mission field! They need the Gospel! They do not need to be inoculated against the Gospel by being led to believe that they are genuine partners in ministry with the true people of God. We need to come out from them and be separate. Not so that we can shun them and feel superior about ourselves! But so that the difference between us might be made plain, so that their need for faith in the true Gospel of the true Jesus might be made clear, and so that we can bring them that message of Good News in its purity.

And dear sinner, what is that Gospel? You who sit here this morning without a saving relationship with Jesus Christ by faith in the true Gospel, you who are a stranger to God's grace—I offer you no illusions that you are a Christian simply because you came to church on Easter Sunday. But what is that Good News that we preach to you who are outside of Christ this morning? It is the Good News of Resurrection Sunday! That Christ is risen from the dead! That He died on the cross on Good Friday, bearing in Himself all the wrath of God which was due to sinners—all the punishment, all the bitterness of hell itself that we were sure to experience ourselves because of our sin—though He Himself was perfectly innocent. That He drank the bitter cup of God's wrath down to its very dregs, the Author of Life succumbed to death, and yet rose in victory over sin and death, alive from the grave three days later!

And this Good News is the promise that if you confess your sin and guilt to God, *own* before Him that you're a sinner who's broken His law and deserves hell, and if you abandon all hope of earning your own forgiveness by your own good works, and put your trust in the doing and the dying of Christ alone for your righteousness before God, then you will be forgiven of your sins and have everlasting life! Christ Himself will come to dwell in your heart by faith, and you will be a temple of the Holy Presence of Almighty God! Come to Christ this Resurrection Sunday! Share in His resurrection life!

And to my brothers and sisters, fellow worshipers of the Risen King, conduct yourselves in purity—both in life and in ministry—for we are the temple of the Living God.