

Missionary or Imposter?

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[0:00] Picking it up in verse 11, 2 Corinthians chapter 5 verse 11. The Apostle Paul writes, 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.

That is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespass 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.

[1:47] 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. This is the word of the Lord. Amen. Are you a missionary or an imposter?

Charles Spurgeon has been described as the prince of preachers. He was an English Baptist preacher who lived in the 19th century. Have we got a slide of him?

Look at him, what a great guy. What a beard I could never pull off. Here's a quote from one of his most famous sermons, which is just delightful, by the way. And you can find all of them online.

They're worth their weight in gold, these sermons. This sermon is all about the preciousness of Christ. He has a great, hilarious story about the first time he ever had to preach Christ. But anyway, I'm not going to tell you any of that. He says, He who really has this high estimate of Jesus will think much of him.

[2:59] And as the thoughts are sure to run over at the mouth, he will talk much of him. Do we talk so? If Jesus is precious to you, you will not be able to keep your good news to yourself.

You will be whispering it into your child's ear. You will be telling it to your husband. You will be earnestly imparting it to your friend. Without the charms of eloquence, you will be more than eloquent.

Your heart will speak and your eyes will flail as you talk of his sweet love. Every Christian here is either a missionary or an imposter. Recollect that you are either trying to spread abroad the kingdom of Christ or else you do not love him at all.

So this is what I want us to consider this morning. I mean, obviously, Spurgeon doesn't mean missionary in a capital M kind of sense or even that we'll all play the same kind of part.

You know, he's not trying to beat us up about our inadequacies particularly, and I'm not trying to either to you. But if you can hear what he's saying, are you a missionary or an imposter?

[4:05] You might say, are you a missionary or a mission field? Do you care about the lost or are you one of the lost? Now, this is a confronting thought, isn't it? And we'll come back to that at the end.

But nonetheless, if you can stomach it for a while, I think Spurgeon is right. And it seems to me that that's exactly what this passage before us is about this morning. In fact, the whole book of 2 Corinthians, as I've realized increasingly, is basically driving towards this point.

Because remember, Paul doesn't just want the Corinthians to understand and appreciate his ministry to them. No, he wants more than that. He wants them to be partners in the ministry.

The idea that you could be a Christian but not an ambassador for Christ, as he puts it in verse 20, is a contradiction in terms. Because, in fact, the whole character of the Christian life is about being

swept up in this flood of God's grace.

Remember the cascading waterfall of comfort from God that Paul talks about in chapter 1 to introduce the whole letter. So that those who have been comforted by God, comfort others.

[5:20] And the more you've been comforted by God, the more you'll bring comfort to others. Or remember that key verse in chapter 4 verse 15, where Paul says, For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends through more and more people, it may increase thanksgiving to the glory of God.

You remember talking about that verse in the Greek. It doesn't say that grace extends just to more and more people, but grace extends through more and more people. God's grace in our lives doesn't leave us as we are, sort of selfish and inward looking.

It transforms us into being a channel of grace to others. Okay, so you can work backwards too. If your life is not bringing grace into other people's lives, then you mustn't have received grace yourself.

If your life is not bringing comfort to others, then you mustn't have received any comfort yourself.

And remember, that word comfort doesn't just mean coziness and ease. It's not about that.

It's that word from Isaiah chapter 40 about salvation. The great comfort from God that is overflowing through his suffering servant.

[6:35] Transforming grace. Salvation that doesn't just save you, but overflows through you to save others. So every Christian here is either a missionary or an imposter.

Paul makes this case in a bunch of different ways. So first of all, in verse 11, he says, Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others.

And the first thing I think to realize about that statement is how significant the phrase, the fear of the Lord is. Because the fear of the Lord is one of the most important concepts across the whole Bible.

It's basically a way of describing the very essence of what it means to be one of God's people.

There are two kinds of people in the world. Those who fear the Lord and those who don't.

And Paul is saying that if you fear the Lord, evangelize. Such that if we don't seek to persuade others to fear the Lord too, and we don't fear the Lord ourselves.

[7:34] Following on from verse 10, of course, Paul is expecting one day to meet Christ face to face. Not just as his friend or savior or husband or brother, though of course he is all of those things to us and how wonderful is that, but also Christ is our Lord and judge.

And our works on that last day will expose us. That word appear in verse 10 is very important. It means to be made manifest. We will be revealed on the judgment day for who we are.

We will be revealed by our works. So we will either be exposed as frauds, impostors. We were never really saved or in Christ or true believers.

Or we will be seen for what we are as God's people by our works. Those who have the spirit will bear the fruit of the spirit. Those who have been comforted will bring comfort to others.

Those who fear the Lord will persuade others. So last week, remember, in light of the judgment day, Paul says, he lives to please Christ. And now in light of the judgment day, Paul says, he fears the Lord and it turns him, it drives him to persuade others.

[8:59] Now some people say that fear is a bad motivation, don't they? And that the gospel should never be communicated in the context of fear, shame, condemnation or exclusion to frighten people into faith.

It was put to me recently that such an approach is harmful, especially to children. And of course, unchristian. I was told by several non-Christians how unchristian this is.

I want to take issue with that. It seems to me that fear is a powerful and perfectly appropriate emotion that we use all the time to motivate ourselves and other people, including children, to make good choices.

Children should be warned of the dangers of sinning. In much the same way that we might warn them of the dangers of smoking or taking drugs, crossing the road, swimming outside the flags, or with crocodiles, engaging in criminal behavior.

It's not about giving children nightmares or anyone. It's about giving people a proper understanding of the serious danger of certain things, the consequences of ignoring warnings.

[10:06] Fear brings wisdom. And wisdom brings safety. So I fear smoking because I've seen those frightening pictures they put on the side of the packets, which is why I don't do it.

But since I don't do it, I don't kind of live my life in fear or in anxiety or panic in that sense. Let's try and live sensibly. When I cross the road, I look both ways.

When I go to the beach, I swim between the flags. When someone offers me drugs, I just say no. Right? Because fear brings wisdom and wisdom brings safety. So in this slightly counterintuitive way, fear liberates us from our fears very often.

Just so, children and adults need to be warned of the dangers of sinning so that they can avoid the fires of hell. The only reason people don't want us to talk about these things is because they don't want to leave their sins behind.

And so they suppress the truth and they want us to help them do that. But in fact, it is far more harmful and unloving and unchristian to tell people, especially kids, that they'll be fine if they ignore Christ.

[11 : 26] Because God is so unconditionally loving He's basically just a big teddy bear in the sky. The reality is that when they meet Jesus on the judgment day, He will send them to hell.

He will shame them. He will exclude them from His kingdom. He will condemn them. Just as He will do to any one of us if we ignore these serious warnings.

But rest assured, if we take these warnings to heart, we'll be safe. We'll be fine. Paul says, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others. We show them the way to safety.

And then what we are is known to God and I hope it is known also to your conscience. Now the word known here is actually the same word that was translated to peer in verse 10. The point is that on the judgment day, we will all be exposed.

We will be made manifest. We will be revealed for who we are. But of course, God already knows the realities of our hearts. He's not going to find anything out on the judgment day.

[12 : 29] And Paul is hoping that the Corinthians already know in their consciences how sincerely and righteously Paul has behaved towards them. Human beings are easily deceived by charming smiles and winsome tones.

A good sense of humor. I remember C.S. Lewis saying, a good sense of humor and you can get away with murder. But the judgment day will expose the reality of things. God looks upon the heart. And Paul wants the Corinthians to see his heart. To see the difference between outward appearance and reality. Again, if you think about how this plays into the overall sweep of the passage and of the book, I think Spurgeon's comment sums it up well.

Are you a missionary or an imposter? Actually, it's a question that first of all, we need to ask of our leaders. Which slightly worries me. And we'll come back to that at the end.

But of our leaders and then of ourselves. See, Paul wants the Corinthians to know that he is really a legitimate representative of Christ, not a fraud. He also wants to expose the super apostles and the peddlers of God's word as the imposters that they are.

[13 : 45] And then finally, he wants the Corinthians to join him in authentic gospel ministry, to be missionaries with him, as it were, and not imposters themselves. So this leads into verse 13.

Evidently, some people in Corinth were being told and perhaps believing that Paul was mad. So he says, For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God.

If we are in our right mind, it is for you. Now I think a helpful piece of background here is the Greek ideal of *meden*, again, which means nothing in excess.

Or nothing too much. It was one of the proverbs or maxims inscribed, carved into stone, in the forecourt of the temple at Delphi, which the Greeks considered to be the center of the world.

So this is one of the wise principles that is absolutely sacrosanct in Greek culture. It's of utmost importance.

[14 : 49] Nothing in excess. And I would say that's not too different from our own culture, just by the way. Religion is fine, but religious extremism is dangerous.

In fact, extremism, in any direction, is usually foolish, immature, you know, typical of the young. People say, when you grow up, you know, you'll become much more moderate, more balanced, more nuanced, etc.

There are two sides to every story. Don't be so dogmatic. In my youth, I was so black and white too. Non-Christian parents tell their children, okay, you can go to church, go to uni church, but don't let it take over your life.

You know, I don't want you joining a cult or becoming a fanatic. Or even Christian parents. Of course we want our kids to be Christians, don't we?

As long as that doesn't affect their grades, their career prospects, basically their hopes of living a normal, balanced, moderate, comfortable life.

[15:56] Heaven forbid they do MTS with Josh Russell and become a missionary and get martyred. Heaven forbid they risk their financial security or job security in the name of following Jesus.

Of course, it's not heaven forbidding these things. In fact, heaven is demanding that we live this way. It's just that we're scared, isn't it? But that's what Paul is saying, you see.

Right? Far from backing away from the accusation, he doubles down on it. He says, I am mad. People still talk about Paul this way, don't they?

That he was such an extremist, a fanatic. I mean, the intense suffering he was willing to endure. And he even wants to talk about, he even talks about wanting to share in Christ's sufferings.

That's crazy talk. And the raw emotion in his letters, sometimes he's just dripping with affection, isn't he? And then wanting everybody to kiss each other.

[17:00] And at other times, he's furious, wanting people to emasculate themselves. The absolute demands he makes, the way he speaks with such authority, it's always all or nothing with Paul.

Handing people over to Satan. He wants Titus to rebuke people. And that's not good enough. To rebuke people sharply. Make sure you do it sharply.

All of this looks mad, doesn't it? And Paul says, yeah. And in fact, he's committed to madness for God. And again, this ties back into the whole theme of the letter.

This is not an aside. Paul has been talking about God's excessive comfort. God's overflowing, abundant, extravagant, you might say crazy grace.

The spectacular glory of the new covenant. So Paul's point is that over-the-top ministry is perfectly fitting, given the over-the-top God that we're serving.

[18:05] Brothers and sisters, are you a fanatic or an imposter? But on the other hand, Paul says, if we are in our right mind, it is for you.

This word has to do with being self-controlled, sober-minded, self-disciplined. In fact, it is the perfect word that the Greeks like to use for that concept of nothing to excess.

You know, it's about being prudent. It's about being measured and smart and rational. It tends to come up in lists of qualifications for overseers and elders. Or in contrast to being a drunkard or a reveler.

So I think Paul's point here is that when it comes to the Corinthians, he doesn't just sort of let himself go and act on impulse. He's very serious and responsible, actually.

He uses his authority carefully. He doesn't thrash around like a madman or a bull in a china shop for their sake. Now these two things at first, you see, might seem intentional, incompatible.

[19:10] How can Paul be both mad and measured? Crazy and cautious. But in verse 14, he explains how actually these characteristics both spring from the same source.

You see the logic. He says, for. In other words, we are like this because the love of Christ controls us.

So if you want to understand Paul's life, why Paul is such a crazy guy on the one hand, and so serious and sober-minded and measured and careful on the other, it all comes back to the love of Christ.

And then notice as Paul goes on, it's not that Christ's love controls us in some mystical or mysterious way, right? Or even by the power of the Holy Spirit. You know, that might be true.

But that's not what he's saying here. He says that the love of Christ controls us because it leads us to certain inescapable conclusions. Right?

[20:14] He's talking about the love of Christ for us, which is displayed on the cross, and how that controls us through the power of logic. Right?

So keep reading in verse 14. The love of Christ controls us. See how Paul follows a very tight, careful, powerful argument from the love of Christ displayed on the cross to the necessity of living for Christ.

And that is his explanation for this mad but measured lifestyle. In other words, the question we should be asking ourselves is, is the love of Christ controlling your life?

Can you see how Christ's death for you leads to certain inescapable conclusions that mean you must live for him?

Or as verse 15 puts it, are you still living for yourself? There are two ways to live. Living for yourself. Or living for the one who died for you and was raised.

[21:41] In fact, notice how in verse 15, Paul says, he died for all that those who live might no longer live for themselves. Why does he say, those who live?

Now I take it, he doesn't just mean, you know, everyone alive today, you know, in that usual sense of the word, that that would seem like a rather redundant comment. He's not speaking to dead people or something like that.

No. Of course he means those who have been truly made alive through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Christ's death demands that you and I, assuming we have been made alive through Christ, that we must not live for ourselves, but for him.

Which then leads into verse 16. See, as you walk around St. Lucia or Indrapilly or Tawong or wherever it is that you live or as you go to work or you do your shopping, do you realize that you are always walking among the living and the dead?

Mostly among the dead. You have been made alive, but you live among the dead. So Paul says, verse 16, from now on therefore, we regard or we know no one according to the flesh.

[23:04] Even though we once knew Christ according to the flesh, we know him in that way no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.

The old has passed away. Behold, the new has come. Paul's point is that we used to view the world and evaluate other people in fleshly categories. Like, we used to judge people according to their skin color or their good breeding or their academic achievements, their height or their intelligence. We used to think about their moral performance or religious performance. We used to think about their sense of humor or their sporting prowess or their fashion sense, their bank balance or whatever it may be.

And we even used to judge Christ by such categories. You know, a carpenter from Nazareth. That was a black mark against his name. A troublemaker surrounded by fishermen and tax collectors and prostitutes most of the time.

Guilt by association. Very unpopular in the end. Especially among the people who matter. The political class and the religious elites. He didn't go to the right school, you know.

[24:17] He didn't go to the right university. In fact, I don't think he even went to university at all. Accursed by God in the end from what we could see. See, that's how we used to evaluate people.

Paul says, that's how the fleshly person evaluates Christ. But the Christian person is given new eyes, as it were. Spiritual eyes. So that we judge people not according to the flesh anymore, but using spiritual categories.

And you know, what the spiritual person sees is that none of these things really matter. It doesn't matter what you look like. It doesn't matter how smart you are, how successful you are, how many boards you've sat on, how many businesses you've started, or how many businesses you've accidentally driven into the ground or failed or whatever it is.

What matters is whether you are in Christ or not. Because if anyone is in Christ, new creation. The old has passed away, behold, the new has come.

Right? What matters is not someone's status in the flesh or their position in this age, which is passing away anyway. What matters is whether they are in Christ, whether Christ is their Lord, whether they have His Spirit, whether that precious knowledge of God is in their heart, that treasure.

[25:38] The richest, happiest, most successful person who doesn't have Christ is a poor and empty clay jar in the eyes of the spiritual person. You know, their bank balance might be full, but their hearts are empty.

Their social life might be thrilling, might be alive, but in their hearts they're dark and dead. Not to mention that they're facing the judgment of God. Take pity on these people.

Meanwhile, the poor beggar who belongs to Christ is the richest man in the world. The heir of God, a heart full of treasure and an eternity full of hope.

So, in verse 18, all this is from God who through Christ reconciled us to Himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. 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.

reconciliation. Now, the dynamic here, which I think the sort of doctrinal background that's important to understand this little passage, is that Christ's death is sufficient for all but effective for some.

[26:59] Now, you might have heard of, well, you might not have, that's okay, but you might have heard of the doctrine of limited atonement, which states that Christ's death was only for the elect.

Christ's death was only for the chosen people of God. This is one of the five points of Calvinism, which, just as it happens, we're not formulated by Calvin, but anyway.

For what it's worth, it's the only point that I don't agree with. Some people say that in this passage, whenever Paul uses the word all, he must mean all of the elect, not all people everywhere.

And likewise, that when Christ died, in these little verses here, God was not reconciling every single person in the world to himself, but only all sorts of different people in the world, the elect of every tribe and tongue and nation.

Does that make sense? Okay, but I don't think that's quite right. I don't think that's what Paul is saying. In some ways, I think it sort of makes sense. It's simple. It neatens a few things up.

[28:11] And I think it's an attempt to avoid a much more serious error, which is universalism, okay, which goes pretty much against everything else in this passage, that error, but let alone other parts of the Bible.

But I don't want to fall off either way, actually. If we just follow Paul's argument carefully, I think Paul is explaining what some people have called hypothetical universalism, or simply the idea that Christ's death was really and truly an offer and an opportunity for the whole world to be saved, and every single person in it.

Like an open door, Christ's death opens the door to heaven, a door that is for the whole world to use, anyone and everyone, and it doesn't become more or less necessary or perfect or wonderful based on how many people actually end up using it.

It needs to be open for one person or for 10 million people. Just as the snake was held up in the desert, there was no limit to the number of Israelites that could have looked upon it and been healed.

Or just as the sacrifices that were made on the Day of Atonement, you know, they didn't need to be adjusted based on the fluctuations of the population of Israel. No, they were always sufficient for any number of people who wanted to put their trust in them and in Christ through them.

[29:38] Sometimes people talk about the death of Christ as if it has this sort of quantitative limit. You know, it's about drops of blood that he spilled for his elect. This is unbiblical and ultimately, I think, illogical too.

No, Paul is saying that Christ died for you, for everyone in the whole world. His death was a real and true offer and opportunity for the whole world to be reconciled.

So we don't go around saying to people, Christ died for you, maybe, if it turns out that you are elect, but we'll have to wait and see.

No, Christ died for you. And this puts a demand on your life that you should live for him. Of course, not everyone will and that is determined by God's election.

But all people everywhere are subject to the demands of the cross. You should embrace and appropriate Christ's death for you by faith. That's what Paul is saying.

[30:44] And then, of course, he talks about his role in all of this and our role as well is to be ambassadors for Christ. So God makes atonement through Christ or made atonement through Christ, but God makes his appeal through us.

Now, there is another little translation mistake in verse 20 that I think is worth pointing out. In fact, I say little, but this one is subtle, but it is significant. You see at the end there how the ESV reads, we implore you on behalf of Christ be reconciled to God well, the you there is actually not in the original.

Okay, it's not at all in the original, it's been entirely inserted. And I think it's completely wrong. So as the CSB puts it, Paul actually just says, we plead on Christ's behalf be reconciled to God.

In other words, Paul is not actually pleading with the Corinthians to be reconciled to God, at least not specifically, mostly because they already are. He's just saying that generally speaking, this is the content of the Christian message.

The message we go around sharing with people is be reconciled to God. And the reason people should be reconciled to God is because in verse 21, for our sake, he made him to be sin who knew no sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

[32:17] In other words, it all goes back to Christ's death, the great exchange, that sinless one. It's so striking, isn't it, that he didn't just become a sinner, but he became sin.

And sinful people like you and me, we don't just become righteous in him, we become the righteousness of God. In other words, pure and perfect and spotless, the epitome of righteousness in him.

Okay, so finally into chapter 6. Paul says, working together then, and again, he doesn't actually say working together with him, as the ESV puts it.

I think he means to include the Corinthians as fellow workers. Working together then, the NET puts it like this, now because we are fellow workers, we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain.

For he says, in a favorable time I listen 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. I am reluctant to criticize the translators because they are excellent, but I think the translators here have just done us a disservice because they make it sound like Paul is appealing to the Corinthians to be reconciled to God and he is appealing to the Corinthians to make the most of the day of salvation by being saved themselves.

[33 : 46] But that is not what he means. At least, that is only the half of it. If you want to know what it means to receive the grace of God in vain, you have got to come back with me to 1 Corinthians chapter 15.

Come back to 1 Corinthians chapter 15 with me. We'll pick it up in verse 9. This is the place where Paul uses this language.

He's talking about how Christ appeared to him on the road to Damascus and turned his life around. And then in verse 9 he says, For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

But by the grace of God, I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them.

Though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me, whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believe. But do you see what Paul is saying? Do you see how he uses this language? What would it mean to receive the grace of God in vain?

[34 : 59] It would mean not working hard to preach the gospel. You see how that's the contrast? Right?

By God's grace, Paul worked harder than any of them. He didn't receive God's grace in vain, but he worked hard.

It would mean somehow this grace that has overflowed into your life wasn't bearing fruit in overflowing to others. How could grace arrive at you and yet not transform you into a channel of grace?

Paul sees this as kind of an impossibility that only, I guess, our unbelief or disobedience could stifle. That God would pour buckets and buckets of grace into your life and yet you not overflow?

How would that be possible? Could you hold it all in? No, that's not how the Christian life works.

When comfort overflows to you, when grace catches up with you, when the light of the knowledge of the glory of God fills your heart like a treasure in a jar of clay, then inevitably it shines forth, overflows.

[36 : 16] So at the end of 1 Corinthians 15, Paul says, Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

The work of the Lord is that work of gospel proclamation, reaching the lost, building the church.

Paul wants us all to abound in it, be excessive about this, be fanatical, be over the top, reach the lost, build the church, work together for the greater glory of God.

Are you doing heaps and heaps of gospel work? Are you putting your back into it? Are you toiling and laboring? And I know, by the way, that many of you are.

And maybe you're feeling exhausted and discouraged, but that's the right thing to do, working hard.

Far from grace, sometimes people think grace is a, you know, an excuse to slacken in ministry, an excuse to sit back and cruise and let go and let God or let someone else do the work.

You know, because church is about grace, they think church should be about comfort or comfort in that wrong sense. It's not. No, grace, abundant grace, motivates and empowers abundant work.

[37 : 42] So keep going. And so that's where Paul lands in our passage this morning. Paul is saying that as fellow workers, we must not receive the grace of God in vain or to no effect.

Let it bear fruit in your life. We need to make the most of the day of salvation, not just by taking hold of salvation for ourselves, but by preaching the gospel to others, being ambassadors for Christ. Okay, so time to wrap up. Are you a missionary or an imposter? I don't know about you, but I find that question and I find this passage very confronting. The whole argument which I've tried to lay out for you as faithfully as possible, as well as several specific lines within it, make me feel very nervous like maybe I am one of the imposters.

I mean, if those are the two options, then I'm no missionary. Isn't there a third way to live? Lord, how much time do I spend persuading others?

Which makes me wonder if I really know the fear of the Lord at all. I wonder if you could say that, or if I could say that I really live a mad life for God.

[38:57] Which begs the question, doesn't it? Have I really understood the love of Christ at all? Since it seems to wield so little control over my life. Am I living for Christ or for myself?

Honestly, a lot of the time I think it looks like I'm living for myself. Am I being a good ambassador for Christ? Much of the time, I don't think anyone would know that I was. Am I making the most of the day of salvation?

Or have I received the grace of God in vain? Now, I should say, I don't really want you to feel guilty. I'm not trying to beat you over the head with this.

I want to encourage you. And I do see lots of God's grace at work in our lives and in our congregation. But I also thought that I might offer just a word about guilt in the Christian life and what to do with it.

If you are feeling guilty, maybe rightly or wrongly. First of all, what not to do. Sometimes I hear people talk as if feeling guilty is a bad motivation.

[40:03] In the Christian life, it's always a bad thing and totally inappropriate. And even worse, it's, you know, it's a cardinal sin is to make other people feel guilty. You should never come to church and be made to feel guilty.

Well, I think that's rubbish. When you come to church and as it were, you are drawing near to the living God by listening to his word, of course you should feel guilty.

That's how Isaiah felt, didn't he? When he came into the presence of God. That's how Peter felt when Jesus gave him that extraordinary catch of fish. In Luke chapter 5, he says, get away from me, Lord. I'm a sinner.

I'm a sinful man. When you read your Bible, when you sin in the presence of the saints, when you come to, you come close to the Lord Jesus and all his perfections, get used to feeling guilty.

To put it in another way, our emotions are supposed to be tethered to reality. So when you are guilty, you should feel guilty. In fact, it's very problematic when people do the wrong thing but feel no guilt.

[41:08] Isn't that being a sociopath? Just as it's problematic when people have done nothing wrong but they feel guilty anyway, and again, that's a problem I want to avoid this morning if at all possible.

But we all sin in many ways all the time so frequently feeling guilty is right and good and healthy and normal. Don't suppress it. Don't drive those feelings down into the dark corners of your heart or sweep them under the rug of your life.

Don't stop coming to church or stop reading your Bible or stop hanging out with saintly people who actually rebuke you. And also, just as a personal request, please don't ask me to stop preaching sermons that make you feel guilty because truthfully, I would love to do that and I don't need any more temptations to unfaithfulness.

But what do we do then with our guilt? Well, a friend of mine used to say that guilt in the Christian life is like a train station that we must always pass through but never stop at.

And I think that's a really helpful analogy. So it's right and good when we sin and stumble to feel guilt in response to those things. You know, have your conscience pricked but let it drive you to repentance.

[42:27] And having realized our guilt, we don't need to wallow in it. No, at that point, we need to remind ourselves and remind each other that Christ forgives us and cleanses us.

And Christ has the power to transform us. And we take our sins to the foot of the cross like Pilgrim, you remember, and Pilgrim's Progress and his bundle of sins that are burdened on his back just fall off him.

We take our sins to Christ. Maybe you could picture him there. Drenched in your sin. Think about verse 21. For our sake, God made him to be sin who knew no sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

And Paul is saying that we already are that. Not just that that's what we will become. But in Christ, we are the righteousness of God. My sins are real and I keep doing them. But now, Christ has taken them upon himself.

He's hanging there for me. I can come to God clothed in perfect righteousness, no longer under condemnation, surrounded and upheld by his overflowing comfort and overflowing grace.

[43 : 39] I've been reconciled to God. And now, even if I do it in a sort of failing, flawed, not very frequent way, I want to go out and share that reconciliation with others.

So let's pray. Amen. Loving Father God, thank you for this precious, precious passage. May it embolden us to seek to persuade others, to seek to be ambassadors for Christ, to go and implore people on behalf of Christ be reconciled to you.

We pray, Father, that you'd help us when we are flawed and when we fail and just help us to remember your kindness and grace that covers our sins and help us to live again in the newness of life as your righteousness to go out and be good ambassadors for our Lord Jesus, that others might be saved, that grace might overflow.

And we pray that you would have mercy on our friends and colleagues, our neighbors, our contacts, that your word might and your grace might overflow throughout this suburb and this land, bringing thanksgiving and ultimately bringing glory to you.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.