



**2 Corinthians 11:1-4**  
**The True Gospel**

Summary: Scripture tells the story of people wandering away from God and God patiently calling them back.

From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible communicates a consistent message: people who know God often wander away from Him. From Adam and Eve eating forbidden fruit in the Garden, to the nation of Israel adopting the idols and worship of surrounding cultures, to the early church losing sight of its first love for Jesus, the message of Scripture is not just that people who *don't* know God need to meet Him, it's also that people who *do* know Him often drift away. We are unfaithful spouses committing divine infidelity and rebellious children insisting we know what's best. It is an absolute miracle that God so patiently endures us all.

Listen as Paul grieves this tendency to drift in the church that he loves:

**2 Corinthians 11:1** Oh, that you would bear with me in a little folly—and indeed you do bear with me. **2** For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present *you as* a chaste virgin to Christ. **3** But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. **4** For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or *if* you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it!

When we drop back into 2 Corinthians this morning, we find Paul fighting for the faithfulness of the church he loves. If you have been with us lately, you remember he's also defending himself and his message. You remember Corinth was a happening place, a vibrant city in the ancient world. It was like the LA, New York, or London of it's day. It was a place where people were looking to be impressed.

You remember this is ancient Greece, during the Roman Empire. It's where we get the Olympic games and philosophical giants like Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. It's where the foundations of democracy were developed – we have senators today because the founders of this nation borrowed the concept from Rome.

All that to say – the Corinthians noticed impressive people – physically impressive, intellectually impressive, people who looked good, who spoke well, and were powerful personalities. But Paul didn't fit that mold. And as a result, there were some in and around *the church* who questioned his role and his message.

There were some, *in the church*, who wanted an impressive leader with an impressive message and if they couldn't find it in Paul, they would look for it somewhere else. The problem is, Paul was reflecting and repeating what He had learned and experienced in Christ, so looking for something more 'impressive' was leading people to compromise the essential foundations of the faith.

In light of our passage this morning, I want to focus on four things: the possibility of spiritual drift yes, but also, the possibility of spiritual purity, the need to preserve and defend that purity, and finally, the love of Paul for these people.

Let's start with the possibility of spiritual drift. Again, this is a major theme of Scripture, notice Paul even anchors his concern for Corinthian Christians in the historical experience of Adam and Eve in the garden. God is telling us: humanity's fundamental flaw is that we often choose our own selfish desires over building and preserving our relationship with Him.

The Bible tells us, God created the world and everything in it, and said it was good. Then He created mankind and set them in this idyllic, beautiful, productive, lush, environment. There was no COVID, no politics, no hurricanes, no stress. They had God, they had each other, and literally, everything was right in the world. And yet, *under those conditions*, they were tempted to do the one thing that God said not to do.

I need you to get this set in your mind: Adam and Eve knew God - intimately, personally, they had experienced nothing but good from Him, and yet, *they* were led to question His motives and integrity and seek their own self-interest, trusting that, while they knew *exactly* what He had said, they could make better choices on their own, form their own opinions, come to their own conclusions. They choose self over relationship with God.

Those of you doing the current Turn Aside study in Exodus will shortly be studying the way this pattern repeats in history. The people of Israel are enslaved in Egypt. God sends Moses to tell Pharaoh, 'Let My people go, let them come and worship Me.' And what does Pharaoh say? No.

So, to make it clear that Moses isn't just some wackjob weirdo walking out of the desert looking to start a revolution and form his own empire, God authenticates the message with miracles and then plagues. It's obvious to Pharaoh: God is speaking. And Pharaoh, who *knew what God wanted*, choose to stick with his own way of doing things.

So, he got into a power struggle with God. And you know how that turns out. So, eventually, the people of Egypt are set free from hundreds of years of slavery. You would think they would be grateful; they would be ecstatic; they would be overflowing with trust in God and willing to do whatever He said. And you would be wrong.

Once they leave Egypt, these people who had been saved and delivered by God in a way that was so spectacular, so evident, so miraculous begin to grumble and complain about their circumstances *while God is leading to the Promised Land*. They have wants and desires,

and God isn't meeting them so they go looking somewhere else. They turn their back on the God they *clearly knew*, because there's still something inside of us – the Bible calls it the flesh – that has its own ideas and wants to explore other options.

It all comes to a head in a passage you'll be looking at in the new year. While Moses is up on the mountain receiving from God the Ten Commandments and other guidance for how this newly independent nation should live and worship, the people grow impatient. They assume God and Moses have left them on their own and they turn to Moses' brother Aaron and say, 'You make some new gods for us' and he does – two golden calves to worship.

I'll draw your attention to it again: this was all done *by people who knew God*. Who had just *personally* experienced miraculous encounters with Him. They knew He was real; they knew He was active; they knew He was at work in their lives. And they choose to go in a different direction.

Fortunately, God was patient with them. And though it took some time and some remedial training, He eventually led them into the Promised Land – a land described as “flowing with milk and honey.” That sounds weird to us today, but it's like saying, 'I'm taking you to a place with a Whole Foods on every corner and it's all affordable and accessible. You're going to live the good life.'

But, not long after showing up the people start looking around at the stuff their neighbors had and thinking, 'Hmmm, I might like some of that. Look at how they do things, maybe we try that.' And I hope this starting to sound a little repetitive by now (because it is) these people, *who knew God*, and knew that God was doing them good, blessing them, providing for them in real and tangible ways, meeting their needs, *these people* said, 'Yeah, let's see what we can learn from our neighbors about how to live and worship.'

And eventually, these people *who knew God* so clearly, plainly, and evidently wandered away from Him in pursuit of their curiosity or desire for other ways to live. Sadly, this often led them into times of pain, hardship, and loss, so God sent prophets to call them back to where they should be and how they should live. This cycle goes on for generations repeating the same pattern but always trending in a downward direction leading a little further away from God than they went last time. That's the Old Testament.

Finally, God sends His Son, Jesus to call the people back to right living and worship. They were wandering, they were drifting, they were going astray, chasing their own ideas about life, and God, in His marvelous, mysterious, majestic, mercy bent down to reach out to them *again*.

And what happened? There was a mixed reception. Why? This should sound familiar to some of you who have been here the past couple of weeks – Jesus and His message weren't that impressive. He wasn't going the direction some people wanted to go. He wasn't talking about the things that mattered to them. He wasn't advocating their ideas for how to fix the situation or how to live. And, listen to this – although they clearly knew what He was saying

and they could not refute the miracles He had done, they didn't like His message and so they resisted and rejected Him. He wasn't what they were looking for.

But, I've got to ask the question – if Jesus isn't what you're looking for, are you looking for the right thing?

And church, when I ask that question, I'm talking to us. I'm not just trying to evangelize the lost. I'm trying to communicate to the church, the people of God, His holy family, people who would say, yes, I know God. OK, good, but are you following Him? Are you learning and accepting His way of life and worship?

Because, even those people who accepted Jesus, who received His message and who followed Him, eventually began to drift.

It's either depressing or encouraging, depending on how you look at it, but it's the God's honest truth – most of the New Testament is composed of letters written to individuals or churches giving guidance and correction, either telling them to fix this or that or watch out for this or that, much like the prophets of the Old Testament.

The New Testament opens with the four gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, they're biographies of Jesus telling us who He was and what He did to establish the church by offering Himself as a sacrifice for our sins and then raising from the dead to offer us a new life, the chance to be born again and live and worship differently. The gospels tell us how Jesus established the church.

Then you have the book of Acts which gives the early history of the church telling us how it grew and spread, and then everything from Romans to Revelation is essentially *a repair manual for the church* - warning of what could go wrong, or diagnosing what already has, and pointing us back to Jesus.

Church, let that sink in – the rest of the New Testament is pointing us, *who already know Jesus* back to Him because we, *the people who supposedly know God*, have experienced God, had an encounter with God, made a declaration that we want to live for, follow, and worship God, are capable of, perhaps even prone to, going off course.

Church, we need to be called to Jesus, and then called back over, and over again.

This is why the history of the church is filled with such spectacular failures, compromises, and tragedies. It's because people, *who know God*, get distracted and start to drift or wander away in search of something more impressive, or something that meets their felt needs, or something that lines up better with their personal thoughts about how things are and how they should be.

Now this causes all sorts of problems for theologians whether professional or amateur because it brings up questions like, 'Well, if they wander that far away from Jesus, were they ever really saved in the first place?' I'm not here to wade into that argument this

morning, but I'll simply say this – whatever the final diagnosis, the symptoms and the prescription are the same: if you're moving away from God, you need to come back through Jesus – whether it's for the first time or the next time. We all need to be moving closer and closer to God through Jesus allowing Him to shape and mold our lives while resisting the temptation to slip away in pursuit of what we think or feel is better. That is the problem that Paul faces in Corinth, and it's the problem we continue to face today.

One of the hymns we sing regularly is Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing. It was written by Robert Robinson in the year 1758 when he was 22. I want to point out two things about that – first a bit of sidenote but, he was 22 – which should be tremendously encouraging and inspiring to you young people. You could be creating things, right now, that will be a blessing to the church for centuries.

Which is the second thing I want to point out – when we sing this song, we're joining our voices to something the church has been singing for longer than our country has existed. If you are a Christian, you are part of something older than America – you are part of something global and historic, something ancient and strong. But also, something that recognizes it's weaknesses and vulnerabilities, singing in the words of that beloved hymn:

Oh, to grace how great a debtor  
daily I'm constrained to be!  
Let thy goodness, like a fetter,  
bind my wandering heart to thee:  
prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,  
prone to leave the God I love;  
here's my heart, O take and seal it;  
seal it for thy courts above.

We continue to sing that song centuries after it was written because we recognize, it's true. We are prone to wander – somewhere in our hearts and minds is the voice of an adulterous spouse or a rebellious child suggesting other possibilities than living for, following, and worshipping God.

And yet, consider all He has patiently done for us. I said I wanted to focus on four things this morning. The first was possibility of spiritual drift (I think we've done that), but the second is the possibility of spiritual purity which I'd like to dig into now.

Paul says in verse

[2 For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.](#)

Now here is where knowing your Bible will blow your mind. Paul is concerned about the Corinthians being seduced by other, more seemingly impressive messages and messengers. He wants them to remain faithful, pure, theological virgins waiting for their wedding with Christ in heaven. But, I think if you were there in Corinth when this letter first arrived and

was read out loud to the congregation, you'd have probably heard a little chuckle, snicker, or giggle at this point, or perhaps seen a tear or two begin to form in the corner of someone's eye.

Why? Because chastity and virginity are not how anyone would have described life in Corinth.

Turn with me back a few pages to 1 Corinthians 6 and notice this.

**1 Corinthians 6:9** Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators (that's people having sex before marriage), nor idolaters, nor adulterers (that's people who are married having sex with someone who is not their spouse), nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.

Now, I know that in our current cultural moment there's a word in there that's shocking. There's a category that some want to rush in and say, no, not that one, not any more. But if you do that, you're missing the point because that one cultural hot button is surrounded by a whole bunch of other behaviors and Scripture is speaking *against them all*.

And that's nothing new. Scripture always has spoken against anyone defining their own sexual ethic. Scripture has always been super clear – God defines the appropriate boundaries of sexual expression and that has always been that sexual intimacy is a gift, from God, reserved for one man and one woman together in a committed relationship for life. That is God's design. That is God's plan. That is God's best.

But what have we been saying this morning? That according to Scripture the history of humanity is the history of people *who are aware of God* choosing to do their own thing their own way instead of seeking and following Him. The push to not only permit, but to celebrate and promote all kinds of sexual identities and behaviors is not new or progressive. These things have *always existed* in the hearts and minds of human beings, along with all the other sins listed here.

But notice this: *none of these behaviors are singled out*, they are lumped together as equally wrong. When it comes to biblical sexual ethics, the question is never who or what are you attracted to? The question is always, *whose authority are you under?* Who or what gets to say yes, you should do that, or no you shouldn't do that? We all have sexual ethics, the question is where did you get yours from, and do they align with what God has said, or are you doing your own thing? If so, you need to repent, *no matter what form or direction your sexuality takes*.

So, all of these behaviors were known to the people of Corinth. But, and this is important, *this is not who or what they were anymore*. Look with me at the very next verse:

**1 Corinthians 6:11** And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.

Church, this is a cause to rejoice! Because these are the people Paul is calling **virgins betrothed to Christ** back in 2 Corinthians. People who had once been defined by their sin have now been **washed, sanctified, justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God**. They had been changed. They are no longer what they had been, and their conversion was not simply a minor touch up, it was a complete and thorough overhaul. Which is why I said when they heard 2 Corinthians read, there may have been some chuckles and quiet tears as they remembered what they had once been, and who they now were.

And friend, the same could be true for you. If you have not come to Christ, you need to know, there's nothing that can hold you back, nothing that can disqualify you, nothing you have done, or said, or experienced that could ever disqualify you – Jesus shops on the marked down shelf all the time. That's where He found so many of us. There is nothing, and I mean, nothing that is unique to you that makes you a problem He can't solve.

You need to know, and those of who have turned and trusted in Christ need to remember, that we can be converted, changed, renewed, and seen by God in a completely new manner than how He found us. He can see you as a **chaste virgin** again. That should shape the way you view yourself and the way you view others.

Now, that doesn't mean you won't occasionally struggle with the things that used to lead you away from God. Some people do experience a total and complete break from the past. Suddenly they don't crave a drink any more. Suddenly they have control over their sexual desires. Suddenly they find their heart completely satisfied. But not everyone, and not always. You can be set free, but eternal vigilance really is the price of freedom politically and spiritually as well.

So remember, Paul is writing to people who have stories of how God showed up in their lives, people who have been set free, forgiven, and transformed, and he's telling *them*: make sure you don't fall for some other version of Jesus, or the spirit, or some other gospel.

The fact is, we share this critical weakness with those who have known God throughout the ages – we are prone wander, Lord I feel it, prone to leave the God I love. Theologically, virgin purity is given to us, restored to us, entrusted to us, but like physical virginity, it must guarded, defended, cherished, and chosen.

So, where is your heart today? Are you completely caught up and satisfied in Christ, or are you chasing after other lovers? Are you faithful and true or promiscuous and open? Are you presentable as a chaste virgin, or is that something you need to become?

Well, I said we wanted to focus on four things this morning: first, the possibility of spiritual drift, second, the possibility of spiritual purity, third the need to preserve and defend

purity, and now finally, the love of Paul for these people – these spiritually weak, terribly tempted, waffling Christians – in other words, people just you and me.

Notice, Paul who has been speaking with, writing to, and caring for these people for so long, patiently walking them through all kinds of spiritual failures and missteps and wanderings, keeps encouraging them, warning them, calling them back to truth and reminding them of the power of the gospel even if he doesn't seem or sound very impressive while he does it.

Church, as a pastor, I have to tell you, I didn't expect this section of Scripture to have the effect that it's having on me, but I just can't help seeing the love and affection Paul has here for the church.

It would be so easy for him to write them off – 'I'm not good enough for you? You want someone impressive? Fine! Go find them. Follow them. Do your thing, your way. I've got other places to go, other people to see.' But he doesn't.

He patiently, persistently, pleads with them to follow Jesus and to reset their thinking and expectations accordingly. To change their values and desires. To grow spiritually and be transformed.

It's an important model for me as a pastor, but also for you as a small group leader, a youth worker, a teacher in children's ministry or AWANA, a parent, a friend. May God give us all the kind of love and compassion we see exhibited in Paul for the people we lead and serve.

And, may we remember where Paul got it from – our lord Jesus Christ.

Paul knew what it was like to be faithfully pursued by Jesus, to be won over by Jesus. To be loved by Jesus even though he was unworthy. When Paul said [and such were some of you](#), he could include himself in their number. Jesus found Him in the middle of his hate and rage, called him to repentance, and totally transformed him. Now here he is, unimpressive Paul reflecting the image and love of Christ anchored in the gospel message he has personally received.

I want you to walk out of here this morning remembering four things:

1. History is the story of people who know God resisting Him, but
2. It is also the story of God making it possible for us to turn back and be made pure through the sacrifice of Christ,
3. That once that happens, our purity must be guarded, cultivated, and cherished
4. That someone loves you enough to tell you these things, even when they're unpopular, because that person has also been touched by Christ.

And, I guess, I would add one final thing – I'm so glad I get to be that person for you. I love you church – you beautiful, chaste, virgins looking forward to the coming of Christ, I'm jealous for you with a godly jealousy.

Let's pray.



## Sermon Application and Discussion Questions

### 2 Corinthians 11:1-4 The True Gospel

Summary: Scripture tells the story of people wandering away from God and God patiently calling them back.

- How did you prepare to present yourself to your spouse at your wedding?
- Read Revelation 21:1-11. What do you learn about the identity of the church?
- Read Ephesians 5:25-33. What do you learn about Christ's love for the church and how should that be reflected in our marriage relationships?
- What do you do to prepare yourself spiritually for your coming union with Christ?
- Of the four points made in this sermon, which stood out to you the most and why?
  - The possibility of spiritual drift
  - the possibility of spiritual purity
  - the need to preserve and defend purity
  - the love of Paul for these people
- Read Galatians 1:6-9. What do you learn about Christians turning toward another gospel? Is this an isolated experience in either Corinth or Galatia?
- What other Jesus', spirits, and gospels are shared today?
  - Where do distracting or tempting voices come into your life, voices that call you away from the purity and simplicity of the gospel?
  - What helps you minimize their distractions?
- Review the list of sins in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10. Why is this list so controversial today? Which sins on this list have been more or less tolerated, permitted, or endorsed at times in history?
- Why is important that Paul declares "and such were some of you?"
  - What kind of transformation has God brought into your life?
  - What transformations were easy, spontaneous and durable?
  - What transformations are difficult, slow, and require vigilance?