

# Life Together

*Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?  
If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him.  
For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.  
(1 Corinthians 3:16-17. ESV)*

*And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same  
image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.  
(2 Corinthians 3:18. ESV)*

## **Do Not Be Unequally Yoked**

**February 21<sup>st</sup>, 2016**

**2 Corinthians 6:14-18**

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### **Introduction:**

Good morning! Open your Bibles to 2 Corinthians 6:14; that's on page 967 in your pew Bibles. I want to get right into it this morning; I don't think this text requires a great deal of introduction and what introduction is required can be supplied along the way. Hear now the Word of the Lord:

<sup>14</sup>Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? <sup>15</sup>What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? <sup>16</sup>What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people." <sup>17</sup>Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, <sup>18</sup>and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty." (2 Corinthians 6:14–18 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

Verse 14 of this passage is probably the most frequently cited verse in all of 2 Corinthians, however it is frequently cited out of context and it is occasionally recruited to causes that would not likely be supported by the Apostle Paul. Happily for us, this is not the only place in the New Testament where the issue of our association with unbelievers is addressed. Paul himself says a great deal about this very matter in his previous correspondence with the Corinthian church and therefore I think we will be helped this morning if we begin actually by deciding what Paul certainly does not mean here when he says that Christians must not be unequally yoked with

unbelievers.

Given what Paul says in his other writings I think we can be very confident that his command for us not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers does not mean:

### **What does this command NOT mean?**

#### **1. It does not mean that we should never socialize with immoral unbelievers**

We know that because of what Paul already said to the Corinthians back in 1 Corinthians 5:9-11:

<sup>9</sup>I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—<sup>10</sup>not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world.<sup>11</sup> But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. (1 Corinthians 5:9–11 ESV)

So clearly in Paul's first letter to these same folks – which we don't have, the letter we call 1 Corinthians is actually the second letter that he wrote – he told them something similar to what we have here in 2 Corinthians 6:14. They obviously misunderstood that to mean that they were not to associate with immoral unbelievers generally and so Paul in 1 Corinthians 5:9-11 is eager to correct that. He says emphatically: “Not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world – That is not what I meant. I meant that you shouldn't associate with so-called CHRISTIANS who are sexually immoral. If I had meant all immoral people generally, you would have to leave the world – and Jesus told us to go into the world to make disciples so that would be me contradicting Jesus and I am definitely not going to do that. No, no, no – what I am saying is that you should associate with sexually immoral unbelievers for purposes of evangelism and you should not associate with professed Christians who are unrepentant in their sexual immorality.”

That's what Paul said in 1 Corinthians and so whatever he is saying here we expect should harmonize with that. Christians should have some friends who are unbelievers AND since they are unbelievers it can be safely assumed that these friends will be sexually immoral – why wouldn't they be? Unbelievers don't wake up every morning concerned to obey God in all things. They have a different way of deciding right and wrong and we aren't to reject people

because they don't delight in God's law – that isn't even possible until after they've been saved and filled with the Holy Spirit. Therefore the clear teaching of 1 Corinthians 5 is that we SHOULD be in association with sexually immoral unbelievers for the purposes of evangelism and Gospel outreach.

Secondly, given what Paul said elsewhere, when he tells the Corinthians not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers he must not mean that:

## **2. It does not mean that believers should divorce their unsaved spouses**

Paul already addressed that very question in 1 Corinthians 7.

<sup>12</sup> if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. <sup>13</sup> If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him.... For how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife? (1 Corinthians 7:12–16 ESV)

Paul is very clear here that as long as the unbelieving spouse is content to live with a Christian, then the Christian should by all means stay in the marriage and attempt to win the spouse for Christ. Therefore, whatever Paul means in 2 Corinthians 6:14, he does not mean that believers should divorce their unsaved spouses.

Now, just because this verse is so often cited in support of Christians not marrying non-Christians, let me clarify that while Paul is not saying that here in 2 Corinthians 6, he does say it elsewhere. In 1 Corinthians 7:39 Paul addresses believers who are unmarried. To such a person he says:

she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord. (1 Corinthians 7:39 ESV)

So if you are single, or if your spouse has died, obviously you can marry whomever you want but ONLY IN THE LORD. You can only marry a Christian. The Bible does teach that – just not in 2 Corinthians 6:14.

Thirdly, I think we can be very confident that Paul is not saying that:

### **3. It does not mean that believers should refuse their civic responsibilities**

Occasionally someone will ask me whether paying taxes puts us in a position where we become unequally yoked with unbelievers. Think about it, if you pay taxes in Canada, your taxes are used to pay for abortions and may soon be used to pay for physician assisted suicides – is your act of paying taxes a violation of what Paul says here? Answer: No. Jesus said:

“Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” (Matthew 22:21 ESV)

Very much in line with that, the Apostle Paul said:

Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed. (Romans 13:7 ESV)

Before you object that our government is doing sinful things with our tax dollars you may wish to recall that the government in Paul’s day would soon be feeding Christians to the lions – that also is a very bad thing. Nowhere in the Bible does it say that you should only pay taxes to a government that operates on Christian principles. Nowhere in the Bible would you find such a government. Jesus and Paul both paid taxes to governments that were at least as corrupt and sinful as ours – and likely far more so. Whatever Paul means in 2 Corinthians 6:14 he does not mean that we should refuse to pay our taxes.

Lastly, given what Paul has said elsewhere on this matter I think we can be very confident that he doesn’t mean that:

### **4. It does not mean that believers can only work with or for other believers**

It can’t mean that because in 1 Corinthians 7 Paul said to these same people:

<sup>21</sup> Were you a bondservant when called? Do not be concerned about it. (But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity.) <sup>22</sup> For he who was called in the Lord as a bondservant is a freedman of the Lord. Likewise he who was free when called is a bondservant of Christ. <sup>23</sup> You were bought with a price; do not become bondservants of men. <sup>24</sup> So, brothers, in whatever condition each was called, there let him remain with God. (1 Corinthians 7:21–24 ESV)

Since everybody needs Jesus, Paul says, then it follows that every work situation is an

opportunity for Gospel mission. Since you are in fact already free in Christ and headed for a glorious inheritance, don't be too concerned about your present work situation. If your boss is a jerk – great news! Jerks need Jesus! Praise the Lord! Now, Paul says, if an opportunity presents itself to become free and to improve your situation, by all means take it, but don't be too concerned about it. Nowhere in the Bible does it say that you can't work at McDonalds if your manager is a drug smoking, potty mouth adulterer. The Bible would look at that as an incredible opportunity. Drug smoking, potty mouthed adulterers need Jesus! What a happy circumstance for you, evangelistically speaking.

Now of course, we would want to be very cautious about being co-equal partners with unbelievers in a business venture because we couldn't be sure what motivations we would become subject to – but that is not the primary focus of this passage – rather that would fall under the category of general wisdom; we have verses for that, the Bible says:

Can two walk together, unless they are agreed? (Amos 3:3 NKJV)

Common activity requires common beliefs – everybody knows that but that is not what Paul is focused on here.

So what is he saying? Having boxed in our interpretive efforts by reference to other things Paul said elsewhere we are now prepared to ask the question:

### **What is Paul commanding here?**

Let's go back and look at the text. The structure of this passage is very straightforward. There is a command given in the first part of verse 14 that is then supported by 5 rhetorical questions and a final encouragement knit together from several Old Testament citations. The command in verse 14 borrows some imagery from the Old Testament. In Deuteronomy 22:10 God says:

You shall not plow with an ox and a donkey together. (Deuteronomy 22:10 ESV)

Those are two very different animals; they have two very different temperaments and if you try and yoke those two animals together you are going to get nothing but chaos! That was the

original expression. It becomes a symbol, in the Bible, for the deadly danger of idolatry. It pops up again for example in Numbers 25:3. There the Bible says:

<sup>1</sup> While Israel lived in Shittim, the people began to whore with the daughters of Moab. <sup>2</sup> These invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. <sup>3</sup> **So Israel yoked himself to Baal of Peor.** And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel. (Numbers 25:1–3 ESV)

Here we see the agricultural metaphor coming to symbolize a dangerous attraction to foreign religious and sexual practices leading them away from God and into death and ruin. That is what Paul is saying here in 2 Corinthians 6. Beware of deceitful and beguiling influences that would lead you away from God and into idolatry and sexual immorality.

Put simply:

### **1. He is calling upon Christians to practice rigorous spiritual and moral separation**

Look at everything Paul says after the verse we are so familiar with – listen to it again and notice whether the emphasis is on who you should marry, who you should work with, who your should socialize with, who you should pay taxes to OR whether it is about your singular devotion to God through Jesus Christ. Listen and decide:

<sup>14</sup> For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? <sup>15</sup> What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? <sup>16</sup> What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God (2 Corinthians 6:14–16 ESV)

Remember the over-arching theme of this whole letter. Paul is concerned about the influence and authority of false teachers who are threatening to lead the Corinthians away from Christ and into death and ruin. Listen to the language he uses at the end of this letter, he says:

<sup>2</sup> I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. <sup>3</sup> But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. <sup>4</sup> For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough. (2 Corinthians 11:2–4 ESV)

Paul's great concern is that the Corinthians are too promiscuous when it comes to their spiritual devotion to their husband Jesus Christ. You want to sleep around, spiritually and physically, Paul says. You want an open marriage – but that isn't the sort of relationship I am trying to facilitate.

Listen, think of it this way, Paul is saying that his ministry is about getting us connected to the saving work of God in the person of Jesus Christ. He is like a bridesmaid – he is on one arm and the Old Testament prophets are on the other arm. Together they are trying to lead us to the real Jesus and all along the aisle way there are false voices – false teachers – deceitful lovers calling us away from the narrow path and into death and ruin. You need to SHUT THEM OUT, Paul says. That’s what this is about.

As NT scholar Mark Seifrid writes:

Paul’s admonition is not a general statement against association with unbelievers or pagan idolaters (which in Corinthian context amount to the same persons). It is specifically directed against his adversaries in Corinth.<sup>1</sup>

Paul will say about these people:

<sup>13</sup> For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. <sup>14</sup> And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. <sup>15</sup> So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds. (2 Corinthians 11:13–15 ESV)

These false teachers work for Satan – that’s what Belial means. Knowingly or unknowingly these false teachers are working for the devil. They want to get you off track and away from God’s salvation in the person of Jesus Christ. If you link arms with these people – if you yoke up with them, if you’ve got them on one side and us on the other, the prophets and apostles – you will end up in chaos. You will be torn apart and you will dragged down into ruin.

Paul’s words are not just prescriptive, they have also proved prophetic. Last week there was an article on the Religious News Service called “Conservative And Progressive US Evangelicals Head For Divorce”<sup>2</sup>. The article said that Evangelicalism is about to fracture into two camps – it is literally being pulled apart – and the reason is because there are now huge disagreements within Evangelicalism related to issues of human sexuality.

Now, let me ask you, where did these new ideas come from? Do these new ideas come from the Bible? Did somebody find a verse that the rest of us overlooked? Is that where these new ideas

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Seifrid, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 289.

<sup>2</sup> <http://davidgushee.religionnews.com/2016/02/12/conservative-progressive-evangelicals-divorce/?platform=hootsuite>

come from? Or have they come in from the outside?

You know the answer, they came from outside. They are the views that are dominant right now in our culture. They were sneaked inside the church through false teachers who said they spoke for Jesus but who have led us into conflict and confusion. They have yoked us to a new Gospel leading us in contrary directions and they are about to pull the whole church apart. That is exactly what Paul is telling us to avoid in this passage.

There are other voices in the church and on the internet and in the Christian bookstore that all say they believe the Gospel but they are deceitful workmen, they are false teachers and they want to lead you away from the real Christ and into immorality, lawlessness and ruin. Beware! Watch out! Unhitch and stand clear! That's what Paul is saying here.

So in our last few minutes together, let me turn the corner and address some issues of practical application. First of all let's consider together:

### **How can we spot false influences and deceitful authorities?**

Paul tells us that these folks disguise themselves as apostles of light – they say that they are Christians. They say that they are writing and speaking for our edification. They don't say on their business cards: "False Shepherd – Deceitful Workman – Agent Of The Devil". They're in disguise, so how do we recognize them? Let me suggest a fairly simple and straightforward strategy.

- 1. Have nothing to do with so called Christian teachers who encourage you to ignore the prophets or the apostles.**

If its true that the church is being:

built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone (Ephesians 2:20 ESV)

... then obviously we don't want to listen to anyone who encourages us to ignore any portion of Holy Scripture. If someone tells you to focus only on the Red Letters of the Gospels and to



downplay everything else – RUN FOR YOUR LIFE. Plain and simple. Knowingly or unknowingly, that person is working for the devil.

**2. Have nothing to do with so called Christian teachers who encourage you to bypass the prophets and the apostles**

I mentioned last week that there is a rise in pseudo-catholic mysticism in the Evangelical world. The book “Jesus Calling” is a classic example of that but so too is the uber-charismatic practice of OVER-emphasizing personal impressions from the Holy Spirit. A true charismatic Christian in the best sense of the term – in the biblical sense of the term – believes that the Holy Spirit speaks through the Scriptures and always in accordance with the Scriptures. Anyone who attempts to untether your experience of Jesus from Holy Scripture knowingly or unknowingly, works for the devil. Run for your life.

**3. Have nothing to do with so called Christian teachers who openly disagree with the prophets and apostles**

I mentioned last week that the whole Red Letter Christianity thing can be traced back to Tony Campolo. It should come then as no surprise that earlier this year Tony Campolo came out and openly disagreed with what the Bible teaches on human sexuality. He said that it is now time for us as Evangelicals to embrace and support homosexual marriage and monogamous relationships. Tony feels fine disagreeing with the Apostle Paul. Tony is ok with disagreeing with the prophet Moses. That’s what happens when you only read the Red Letters. You feel emboldened to disagree with the rest. Have nothing to do with that. Such people, knowingly or unknowingly, work for the devil. Run for your life.

Now, I know that’s heavy stuff and so I want to end with some positive encouragement – that’s how the Apostle Paul ends and so I want to take my lead from him. I want to end by asking a final question of the text:

**What are the benefits to me as a believer in attending to this teaching?**

There is nothing wrong with asking that. We believe that everything true is also life giving. The Bible only asks you to do things that are for God’s glory and for your everlasting good. So let’s

talk about that – what good is there for me – what benefit is there for me in attending to this teaching? I see two benefits spoken of in Scripture. The first is drawn immediately from this text. Paul promises us immediate and increasing intimacy with God through the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

## 1. Intimacy

Look at verses 16-18; I won't read them again but I want you to be looking at them. Paul talks about what God has promised to his people. God promised that he would be with us, that he would be our God. Paul quotes there from Leviticus 26:12 and Exodus 29:45. Now those promises were originally conditional. The citation from Leviticus begins with these words:

If you walk in my statutes and observe my commandments and do them (Leviticus 26:3 ESV)

But of course the Old Testament story is about how God's people never did those things. They couldn't. They didn't obey. And so the Gospel is the story of how God did for us what we could never do for ourselves. Jesus came and walked in God's statutes and observed all his commandments. He unlocked for us all the promises of God – chief among the promise of familiar intimacy with God as Father. That's what Paul is talking about in verse 16. Now look at the first word of verse 17:

**Therefore** go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord (2 Corinthians 6:17 ESV)

That word “therefore” is not in the original Old Testament citation. Paul adds it. He is saying that because of what God has done, and because of who you now are you must be absolutely singular in your spiritual and moral devotion. Be who you are. Be the children you were saved to be – live like a child of the king and you will only grow in your experience of God's presence and fatherly care.

Our intimacy with God through Christ is immediate – but it can also increase as we grow in our singular devotion. You know that. The Bible says:

Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. (James 4:8 ESV)

There is also a well established relationship between our singular and uncontaminated devotion to Jesus Christ and our INFLUENCE with unbelievers.

## **2. Influence**

Listen, I understand that if you follow Jesus – if you build your life upon the foundation of the prophets and the apostles with Christ as cornerstone – I understand that you will be on the outside of contemporary culture. I understand that but I am not concerned about that. On the contrary I think this will make you better at sharing the Gospel. I think this will make you better at calling people out of darkness into marvelous light. Jesus said:

“You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people’s feet. (Matthew 5:13 ESV)

Jesus said that our mission **REQUIRED US** to maintain an obvious difference and distinction from the world. If Jesus is in favour of difference and distinction then who do you think is behind all of these calls for cultural accommodation? Not Jesus. Not the Holy Spirit. Somebody else. Somebody deeply invested in destroying the saving witness of the church.

So unhook from that, that’s what Paul’s saying. You are what you eat and you are who you listen to. Be discerning. Be wise. Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. Be humble and contrite before the Word of God. Be singular and steadfast in your devotion.

be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you,<sup>18</sup> and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me (2 Corinthians 6:17–18 ESV)

This is the promise of the prophets and the apostles and this is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God. Let’s pray together.