

Distinct From Unbelievers

2Corinthians 6:14-7:1

I shared a couple of weeks ago about a time in my career as an electrician where I had to work out of town and away from home.

One of the challenges to being out of town was being without a vehicle.

When you have your own car you have a lot more control over where you go and when you want to go there.

When you are depending on someone else for a ride you have much less of a say in things.

That was the case working out of town.

There was one van for six guys and to accomplish everything that you needed to in a given day often meant going where the van was going.

That was the case for evening meals. If you wanted to eat you needed to go where the van was going.

For the most part that suited me fine because they ate at fairly standard restaurants most of the time, but there was one evening where it led to a bit of a tense situation.

It was a few weeks in and I had gotten to know these guys a little bit and they had gotten to know me.

They learned fairly early on that I was a Christian and that led to a number of good discussions about the gospel and it also led to an understanding that I would not be joining in some of their after work activities.

One evening after we had supper and everyone got back into the van, the supervisor thought it would be funny if everyone ganged up on me and dragged me into a place of entertainment they knew I would never go into.

It was six against one and at least half of them were bigger, younger, and stronger than me.

With only a second to consider my options I summoned the most serious tone I could possibly summon and said, "Yes, you will get me in there, but you are going to get hurt in the process."

Perhaps with more time I could have come up with a better answer, but they all needed to know that I was serious about staying out of that place and thankfully it worked.

Things like that happen to every believer.

It may look different and some people may experience it on a regular basis where as others may only have to deal with it from time to time, but as we live in the world we will be pressed by unbelievers to join in things that are not good.

Our text this morning begins with a command against such things.

It says here in 2Corinthians 6:14, ***“Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers.”***

As I look at that command my mind wants to jump immediately to application.

Does this mean that Christians are not supposed to marry unbelievers, does it mean a Christian should divorce an unbelieving spouse, what about business partnerships, does it apply to property ownership, or what about a hundred other possibilities?

I definitely think this text has some things to say about those relationships, but if we begin there we are likely looking at the passage upside down.

To look at the passage right side up, I believe we need to begin by asking, “What is the purpose of a yoke?”

A yoke was a common farming implement for thousands of years.

It is essentially a bar, typically made of wood, shaped to fasten around the necks of two animals so that they can work together to pull a cart, a plow, or something else.

In other words, a yoke binds animals together to do something.

If that is the picture that Paul is intending here, and I think it is, then the command is do not be joined together with unbelievers to do unbelieving things.

[That is something that is very easy to do. It is easy to put the relationships we have with unbelieving people above righteousness. In our text this morning, not only are we given this command to **“not be unequally yoked”**, but we are given some very important reasons why we should obey this command. Turn in your bibles once again to **2Corinthians 6:14-17:1** and let’s look together at a few of the reasons God’s Word gives us for this command and then at the end we will turn our attention to how this command might apply to relationships we enter into. The first reason we are given for the command in this...]

Point #1 – Christians must refuse idolatry and immorality. (Verses 14-15)

The LORD Jesus is opposed to evil and so if we belong to Him we must oppose it as well.

Following the command there are a few rhetorical questions that are asked in verses 14-15.

That answer to obvious to each one of these questions. The answer is none.

There is no partnership at all between righteousness and lawlessness.

Righteousness has to do with honouring and loving what God loves and lawlessness has to do with casting aside what God desires and doing the opposite which is immorality.

The two ideas are completely opposed and always working towards opposite goals.

That is not a partnership that is a war between enemies.

The word translated fellowship here is used many times in the New Testament and has the idea of sharing things in common.

When it is used to describe a relationship between people it has the idea of people seeing themselves and all that they have as belonging to each other.

Light and darkness can have no 'fellowship' because they cannot coexist in the same space.

You can be in the darkest of places and light a single candle and all of the sudden the darkness becomes less.

Light can never increase the darkness it always diminishes it. The two share nothing in common.

'Belial' in verse 15 is a reference to the devil.

The word 'accord' there means treaty or agreement.

Is there ever a truce between King Jesus and the Devil? No.

The devil will fight until Christ throws him and everyone else opposed to God in the lake of fire to be tormented for eternity.

Likewise, 'what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever?' None at all.

Saving faith and unbelief like the other examples given here are total opposites.

The portion of an unbeliever is idolatry and immorality.

It is a rejection of God and that is lived out in the actions of unbelief.

Believers and unbelievers are heading in opposite directions, they have opposite desires, and goals.

Because that is so it makes no sense at all for believers to be 'yoked with unbelievers.'

[Just think about being a farmer in biblical times for a moment. You wake up in the morning ready to plow the field and you put a yoke on the necks to two animals and the only thing they do is try to go in opposite directions. Are you going to be able to plow a straight furrow? You probably won't get anything done. Would you keep doing that? Of course not.]

That is the point the LORD wants us to get here.

Believers and unbelievers want opposite things and so it is impossible to bind yourself to an unbeliever for the purpose of doing unbelieving things and have that result in anything good.

This command is very relevant for the church today.

Many people today want to mix Christianity with other religions.

They would have you believe that all faiths are the same and that the important thing is we all get along.

I'm all for religious freedom and I'm all for being respectful and kind, but the Bible is incredibly clear here that we cannot bind ourselves to false religion.

I know of pastors who have opened their churches to be used as mosques and joined in the worship service. I know of pastors who tell people it's ok to mix Christianity with first nation's religion or eastern religion.

Many people today want to validate behavior the Bible says is wrong in the name of being loving towards others.

They will be quick to tell you about how Jesus hung out with prostitutes, tax collectors, and all kinds of sinners, but they will always fail to mention that Jesus called all of those people out of their sin.

Jesus sees people neck deep in wickedness as prisoners of their evil deeds and offers them freedom.

You will never find our LORD encouraging people to wrap another chain around themselves. You will never find Him enabling or encouraging people to do more of what God hates.

[If we are "unequally yoked" that means we have bound ourselves to an unbeliever in such a way as to be working with them in some kind of idolatry or immorality. We have to refuse to do that. The apostle gives us another reason for this command in the next few verses. He helps us here understand why we must refuse idolatry and immorality. It is because...]

Point #2 – Christians strive to put God first. (Verses 16-18)

There are a great number of things in this world that will lead us away from the LORD, we need to say no to them, even if it means saying goodbye to some people because God needs to be our top priority.

The first part of verse 16 asks another question (Verse 16a).

Like the first three questions the answer to this one is none whatsoever.

The mention of the temple here is likely intended to draw our minds back to the temple of the Old Testament.

It was first built under King Solomon to replace the Tabernacle from the time of Moses.

God's intention for both buildings was to establish a place where He would make His presence known and felt among His people.

That is exactly what happens when Solomon finishes the temple.

You can read about it in 1Kings 8. It says there that the priests couldn't perform their duties because the "glory of the LORD filled the temple."

That was a good start, but if you keep reading you will discover that it doesn't last.

It doesn't last because the people of Israel start mixing the religion of the scriptures with false religion. They fail to keep the LORD first in their lives.

If you read all the way up to Ezekiel 10 you will read about a vision Ezekiel has of the glory of God leaving the temple.

That happens because there is no agreement between the temple of God and idols.

What does any of that have to do with us? **(Verse 16b)**

Even though there is no longer a building of timber, stone, and gold, God's temple is still on the earth, it is the church which is made up of all the people who belong to God through faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

God makes His presence known and felt on the earth in believers both as individuals and as a group.

Don't think that the church is any less holy than the temple of the Old Testament.

If the Lord inhabits His people, if He is our God, and we are His people, then He must be first in our affections.

That is the conclusion of **verses 17-18.**

Commentator Colin Kruse points out that this is a quotation from Isaiah 52 calling the people of Israel living in exile in Babylon to leave there and go to Judea.

Paul uses that as a spiritual picture exhorting believers to leave behind worldliness and seek after the LORD.

I don't believe his intention here is to have us move to a cabin in the woods and isolate ourselves completely from unbelievers.

That would be hard to reconcile with everything the Bible has to say to us about pointing other people to Jesus.

What he means is that the people of God have the Lord as their first priority in life and desire to maintain their relationship with God above all others.

[How many of you have ever had to study for a test? Imagine studying for a test that you really wanted to do well on and a friend calls you up and says, "Can I come over and help you study?" and you know they are really going to help you, what would you say? Probably yes. But what if a friend calls and says "Let's go to a movie!" If you really want to do well on the test what are you going to say? You will say, "No." and keep working. In both cases what determines your answer? It is your priority of doing well on the test.]

Being the temple of God, wanting to belong to Him, having Him as our father and being His sons and daughters has a similar effect on us.

If people are wanting to pull us away into godless behaviour we have to say no.

Not because we are self-righteous, but because we have the LORD as our first priority in life.

Many times over the years I have seen people make professions of faith in Christ only to fall away shortly thereafter.

There is a common theme in those circumstances. The theme is that something or someone is more important than the LORD.

They know they should look for another job, but they are more concerned about money than the LORD.

They go back to their unbelieving friend group because they want their company more than they want the LORD.

[This text is saying the Christian has to have different priorities, it is saying “be separate” put God first. Isn’t that what Jesus is driving at when He says, “Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.” We know from the scriptures it is good to love our families, but the LORD has to come first. That brings us to a third reason for the command “Do not be unequally yoked!” Christians must refuse to join themselves to unbelievers to do unbelieving things because...]

Point #3 – Christians see holiness as the goal of the gospel. (Verse 1)

Jesus died to make us right with God so that we would want to get rid of the things in our lives that are killing us and that God hates.

I have found over the years of talking with many people about salvation through faith alone, that it is really common to get the Christian life all mixed up.

Many times I have asked people the question, “How does a person get right with God?”

Most people start off by talking about what they need to do.

They say things like, “I have to read my bible, I have to go to church, I have to be a better person, and other things along those lines.

Those things are all good things, but they can’t make you right with God.

In fact, nothing we can do can ever make us right with God.

Someone will say, “How can that be when the bible says stuff like it does right here in this text?”

There is a lot here about what we need to do to get away from evil.

That is true but we have to make sure we see it in the right order.

None of the commands given here are about making us right with God, the commands are given because we are right with God.

He says, “Don’t be unequally yoked” first because of the incompatibility of believers and unbelievers. Why so incompatible?

Go back to the middle of verse 16 for a moment. Notice what it says there! It says, “We are the temple of the living God.”

It doesn’t say we will become the temple of God by doing all these things.

It is saying we do these things because we already are the temple of God.

That happens by believing that Jesus died to make us right with God and that He is alive fulfilling all of the promises God has made to those who belong to Him by faith alone.

That same line of thinking is picked up here in **verse 1**.

“Since we have these promises!”

The promises of God’s dwelling among us, of being His people, of Him being our Father and we being His children.

He does not say, work to earn these promises, he says believers have them.

Because of who we are and what God has promised commands are given to us.

Here it is to “cleanse ourselves” from “defilement” both physical and spiritual.

In other words work at getting rid of every kind of sin in our lives.

The goal of which is to bring “holiness to completion”.

That means that what we are because of the blood of Jesus, namely perfect in God’s sight, is what God wants us to be in reality and we are called to work at it until we die or Jesus comes and the work is finished.

No one who understands who they are in Christ treats His work on the cross as a permission to do evil.

Instead we see it as every reason to pursue holiness in the fear of God.

That is impossible if we are “unequally yoked with unbelievers”.

There is no way to join ourselves to unbelievers to do unbelieving things and at the same time refuse idolatry and immorality, strive to make God our highest priority, and go after the goal of the gospel.

It’s impossible so God says here, “Don’t do it!”

So now that we can see that this text is talking to us about joining with unbelievers to do unbelieving things, how does it apply to relationships?

I am not going to attempt to provide us with an exhaustive list of what kind of relationships we can or cannot enter into with unbelievers.

That I think would go beyond what is intended in the text.

Instead I want to offer two practical principles that will help us obey the command of the text.

Principle number one, the closer the relationship we have with unbelievers the greater the chance we have of being “unequally yoked.”

Take marriage for example. The Bible is really clear that if you are already married to an unbeliever you need to do all you can to stay in that marriage loving God more than your unbelieving spouse.

The command of this verse is to not join with them in their unbelieving behaviour, but you know what that is really hard because of the closeness of the relationship.

For that reason, if you are single don't marry an unbeliever.

That is a clear application of this text and it is also commanded in 1Corinthians 7 if you are willing to disobey that command it is not going to get easier once you are married.

You can apply that same train of thought to business, your social life, co-workers, to any relationship really. The closer you are the harder it is to “Not be unequally yoked.”

Principle number two is a question. Are you seeking to point unbelievers to Jesus or are they drawing you away?

If they are drawing you away then I would suggest that you are “unequally yoked” and it is time to unhitch so that you can start walking in the right direction.

Listen, there is no shame in admitting your weakness.

It is not a matter of saying you want nothing to do with your unbelieving friends, it is a matter of saying you love God more.

There is no option for the believer. It is inconsistent with our new nature to love and do the same things as unbelievers.

We are a called out people, sons and daughters of God, bought and paid for by the precious blood of Jesus.

We can't be bound to unbelievers to do unbelieving things, we must be different.

“Do not be unequally yoked”, instead be distinct from unbelievers.