

Text: 2 Corinthians 6:11-7:1

Title: Perfecting Love and Holiness

Truth: God's household should be filled with love and purity.

Date/Location: Sunday April 26, 2026 at FBC

Introduction

Paul has defended his conduct and ministry toward the Corinthians because there are some there who are upset with him. He branches out to the glories of Christian ministry despite the difficulties of it, the call to be saved, and how Paul's ministry provided plenty of evidence that it was legitimate through his godly responses in many adverse situations, and the ironies that were evident in his work (see the notes on 2 Corinthians 6:3-10).

He is drawing this section of a letter to a close by directly appealing to the Corinthians to respond well to him and to get out from under the influence of whoever is troubling them, undoubtedly some false teachers who are trying to discredit Paul's ministry or drag the Corinthians back into their idolatrous ways.

I. Reciprocal Love, 6:11-13

- A. O Corinthians! The direct address to the readers indicates deep emotion of the apostle Paul. Besides Acts 18:8 which speaks of many Corinthians believing and being baptized, this is the only other text that mentions them by that name. (Six other times "Corinth" appears in the Bible. See also Galatians 3:1.) Paul was really passionate about what he was saying.
- B. Paul says two things that merge into a single instruction.
 - 1. Our manner toward you has been open and loving. Yes, Paul has been direct in what he has said. He has told them what they did wrong, what they needed to change, etc. But direct is not mean or worthy of cutting him off. He has spoken openly to them in order to build them up (1 Cor. 3:10).
 - i. Paul spoke openly. This means that he *spoke*. He did not hide or dissemble or lie or withhold. He did not use the silent treatment on them. It also means that he spoke *freely*, candidly, without constraint. He did not beat around the

bush. He just told it like it is. This was an overflow of his heart.

- ii. His heart was broad, enlarged. This does not mean that his heart was suffering from cardiomegaly as in a heart failure patient. It is a metaphor for warm affection. Imagine a young woman with a heart of genuine interest and care in a young man.
- iii. But the man is closed off because of his own issues, not because of anything she has done. He is not “restricted” by her, but because of himself. She is not at fault, he is. This is the Corinthians’ situation.

2. Your manner toward us has been “restricted,” not by us, but by your own affections. Here is the key to the problem. The problem between Paul and the Corinthians is in their hearts. Do not take this to mean that the problem is never on the side of the pastor, because a pastor’s heart can become jaded and hardened and closed too. But in this case, there were some in Corinth who had bad feelings against Paul. They might *say* they have no hard feelings, but as you know, “saying” is not the final “say.” “Doing” shows what you truly think. Do you see how “you say you have faith, but have no works” is quite the same thing in this sense as saying “you say you are OK with person X, but you have nothing practically to do with person X.”

Something is crowding out or cramping their love for Paul. I think that the verse following this paragraph, 6:14, indicates what this might be—*sin*, and in particular the sin of being unequally yoked with non-Christians and false teachers. Paul is saying “be affectionate toward us...don’t be attached to unbelievers!” Do they have more fellowship with the unbelievers than Paul?!

3. Paul urges: may your manner toward us change to be like our manner toward you—open, reciprocal love, a soft heart, agreeable. No longer be hardened and closed and upset or misunderstanding or angry or puffed up.

“I speak as to children” could indicate that this sort of speech should be unnecessary, that the Corinthians should know

better. A better understanding is that Paul is speaking to them like his children—because they *are* his spiritual children. He is asking them to love him as much as he loves them. How a parent longs for that kind of love, not the selfishness of a child!

- C. Murray Harris summarizes it very well: “ ‘If there are any feelings of constriction or restraint in our relationship...they are on your side, not mine. I appeal to you as my spiritual children [cf. 1 Co 4:14–15]: in fair exchange for my unrestricted affection, give me yours, too.’ Although Paul’s desire was for complete reciprocity in family relationships, he was acutely aware that affection could only be given, not taken.”¹
- D. A one-sided love is not ideal—though better than no love at all! But it sometimes happens—from parent toward a child, or wife toward a husband, or God toward his human creation, a church member toward another, a pastor toward a group in the church, a person toward a leader, etc.

Paul is calling for repentance on the part of those who have anger and hardness of heart toward a brother. They must recognize it and turn from it. Change. Not easy? Sure, because the flesh is never easy to fight off. Think of it this way: is your closed, restricted heart and subsequent conduct toward your brother a demonstration of Christian *love* that reflects the love of *God*? You know the correct answer.

II. Holy Partnership with Christ, 6:14-7:1

- A. What is the Meaning of *unequally yoked*? The word means to be mis-mated. The language brings to mind the humorous mental picture of a large oxen yoked with a much smaller donkey. The mismatch in height, size, weight, and pulling strength make them unsuitable partners in pulling a load. Such a pairing was forbidden in Deut. 22:10, not only for practical reasons, but also because one of the animals was clean and one was unclean. We discern that

¹ Murray J. Harris, “[2 Corinthians](#),” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Romans–Galatians (Revised Edition)*, ed. Tremper Longman III & Garland, David E., vol. 11 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 487.

there are *practical* and *spiritual* consequences of unequal partnership.

In our spiritual lives, the application is that we must avoid forming close attachments to unbelieving people or activities. If you were to violate this, it has *practical* and *spiritual* implications. We are talking about getting married. We are talking about forming a business partnership in a venture with someone who does not share our basic life philosophy in Christ. We are talking about getting close to anything that is unholy and coming under its influence. We are talking about something that your conscience cannot cleanly reconcile with godliness, even after thinking it through and getting counsel about it. How about a job where you facilitate people to disobey God by becoming drunk or wasting their money? God's people must choose better.

B. What does Unequally Yoked *Not* Mean?

1. Some people can get a bit zealous, perhaps if new to the faith, and can get a very idealized vision of what life should be like as a Christian and take a teaching like this where it was never intended to go. For example, being an employee in a company owned by a non-Christian or if you have a non-Christian supervisor is *not* a violation of the unequally yoked teaching. You do *not* need to leave the company! As another example, the Bible mentions servants who have Christian masters, under the assumption that many servants have *non*-Christian masters.² The Bible does not tell those servants to go on strike or to leave. They are bound by prior agreements and debts to continue with the arrangement until it is fulfilled.
2. What about existing family relationships, especially marriage? Being married to an unbeliever is *not* a situation that requires a change. By marrying an unsaved person, you have made a decision that constrains later options. Peter tells us that a wife should be submissive to her own husband, even if he does not

² Some years ago, I preached a three-part series on slavery and the Bible. One important thing we learned there was that Biblical slavery and bond service was most often *not* chattel slavery like we had in the early history of the United States. This fact lessens the apparent paradox of "Christian masters."

believe the Word of God (1 Peter 3:1). If a person has a spouse who does not believe and is content to continue together in marriage, the Christian is not to divorce the non-Christian (1 Cor. 7:10-15). In that case, there is an unequal yoking, but it cannot be undone without great damage to spouses and any children.

3. What about in regard to the world? Paul tells us that if we were to avoid all those who are non-Christians, we would have to leave this world (1 Cor. 5:9-10). So “unequally yoked” cannot mean to avoid all contact with unbelieving people. (How would we evangelize anyone in such a case?)

So, being unequally yoked is not about eliminating all contact with unbelieving people. That is impractical and unwise. It is about not starting new close partnerships. And there are two reasons why this is.

C. Verse 14 gives a first explanation with the word “for.” The Bible gives a number of illustrations here to show things that do not go together, like oil and water. The grammar indicates a question that expects a “no” answer.

1. Righteousness and lawlessness have no partnership in common.
2. Light and darkness have no fellowship. In John’s 1:4-9, recall how darkness hates the light and does not comprehend it.
3. Christ and the Devil have no shared interests. Jesus is the truth (John 14:6). Satan is a liar and the father of it (John 8:44). The same verse tells us that Satan is a murderer, but we know Jesus is the giver of eternal life (John 6:27, 10:28, 17:2).
4. A believer and an unbeliever do not share a part together.
5. The temple of God and idols have no agreement. Should you put an idol into the temple of God? Obviously not. But incredibly, it was done—Ezekiel 8:3-17 tells of many idols in the Jerusalem temple. How abominable!

So, for a Christian, the **first reason you cannot be unequally yoked is that you have very little of substance in common with**

unbelief.³ You do not have enough in common with a non-Christian to become “yoked” together with them.

You can have enough in common with an unbeliever to be co-workers in an office or on a jobsite, or to be working for someone who is not a Christian. But to form a close partnership is out of the question. You have to share more in common together. The closer the connection that you are establishing, the more in common you must share for it to work. If you are contemplating marriage, you are not thinking of co-worker level compatibility or even roommate level compatibility.

D. The **second reason you cannot be unequally yoked with unbelievers is that you are to be holy to the Lord**, yoked as it were to Him. Said in a negative way, you are to be separated from sin. Christians collectively are the temple of God, so if you are a Christian, you are a part of that temple (1 Cor. 3:16-17, 6:19; Eph. 2:19-22; 1 Tim. 3:15; 1 Peter 2:4-5). The temple is where God manifested His presence to Israel in the Old Testament; the church and its people are where God does that today.

Paul loosely quotes three Old Testament passages to support this.

1. In verse 16, he quotes Lev 26:11, 12 about God dwelling among His people. Read Deut. 23:14. The theological principle from God’s holy presence among the Jewish people applies to the church today. God will dwell within and walk among and will be our God and the church will be His people. Not only the Jewish nation will be God’s people, but the church will be too. This idea is repeated throughout the Bible. For example, see Jeremiah 31:33 and Hebrews 8:10. It is the destiny of God’s people to well with Him in the heavenly state, on the new earth, forever in the future (Rev. 7:10, 21:3). That present truth impacts and permeates our current existence. Holiness starts today!
2. In verse 17, he quotes Isa 52:11. Again, the principle applies to the church today as much as to Israel then: be clean, be holy, do

³ Of course, you share in common that you are both humans, and that you live on the same planet, things like that. But those are not enough to support the kind of holy relationship that the Lord is exhorting here.

not be partaking in unclean things. Remember what we said above about existing family relationships, that you cannot rightly just dump them. Marriage existed before salvation in world history, and God takes it seriously even if it was initiated in a less-than-ideal way.

3. In verse 18, he quotes Jeremiah 31:1 and 9 about God being a Father and His people being sons and daughters. This kind of relationship is not one that permits sin to intrude.
- E. This all being the case—these promises that God will be our God, and we will be His people, and God will receive us, and He will be our Father, and we will be His sons and daughters—we need to cleanse ourselves and perfect holiness.
1. To cleanse is just that—clean it up. Repent of it. Confess it. Quit it. Whether the dirtiness of it is external or internal, flesh or spirit, body or mind, clean it out. Catch yourself in any way that you stray into something filthy, and remove that.
 2. Beyond mere removal of dirt, God calls us to perfect holiness, to participate with God in bringing about His purpose for us to be holy. This is godliness. This is *sanctification*.
 3. We are to do this in light of the fear of God. Go back and visit 2 Corinthians 5:9-10 about the judgment seat of Christ. Because we know the fear of the Lord, we persuade people to be ready for that judgment...including ourselves.

The full enjoyment of God's promises will not happen to the extent that we are living in sin.

Conclusion

Take a mental inventory of your life. You may be thinking about some areas where you need to clean out some things and perfect your walk with God. I urge you to follow through on those corrections in light of God's design for us now and in the future. Perhaps you have a chronic case of a closed heart toward some person who has tried to be kind to you. Open your heart to that person and show reciprocal love, or if they will not love you, then extend love like God does toward the unloving.

In this way, God will be honored in your life, and He will be pleased to walk with you, alongside you and be honored to be your Father and have you as a son or daughter.

What if God were writing verses 11-13 to you? God *has* spoken openly to you; his heart *is* wide open to you. But in some way perhaps your love toward him is not reciprocal as it should be. Wherever other affections for worldly things are, this decreases your capacity to love God properly. That is, you are restricted by your own affections, not by God's affections! **Love God!**

MAP

Appendix

When we categorize the teaching of this passage with other passages that refer to similar truths, we put it under the heading of "separation." This idea comes from the word for sanctification, which means to be set apart as saints. We are also being set apart progressively as we grow in Christ such that we are "being sanctified."

This idea of separation in the Bible also covers the entire church body, not just individually. Our passage in 2 Corinthians 6 speaks about separation from **unbelievers**. Romans 15:17 and 2 John 9-11 urge believers to separate from false teachers and their teaching.

Other Bible passages speak about separating ourselves from fellow (professing) **believers**. See Matt. 18:15-17, 1 Cor. 5, and 2 Thess. 3:6-15. While some ignore this unpleasant part of Christian teaching, several clear passages in Scripture do affirm it, and we must heed them because they are given by inspiration of God. Some object that to follow this idea would mean to break the unity of the Spirit, or would demonstrate a lack of Christian love, or would mean that everyone would be disciplined out of the church. Such are simply excuses for not following the clearly revealed truth of God. Both separation and unity are taught in the Bible so they *must* be able to co-exist. Sometimes the most loving thing to do is exercise discipline; sometimes the only way to maintain real truth-based unity is to separate from disobedience.