

Do Not Be Bound Together With Unbelievers
2 Corinthians 6:14-16
Part Two

Saving faith produces a radical transformation in respect to every aspect of a person's being. Christians, as we have already seen in **2 Corinthians 5:17**, are new creatures in Christ for whom **“the old things [have] passed away; behold, new things have come.”**

When we place our faith in Christ, we are no longer the same people we used to be and neither are we in the same kingdom.

When we exercised faith in Christ we were transferred from Satan's kingdom, the kingdom of darkness, to Christ's kingdom, the kingdom of light. Let me read for you **Colossians 1:13-14** and see if this is not so. **“For He [God the Father] rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”**

Because we as believers have been transformed into new creatures and transferred to a new kingdom, we need to exercise great care when relating to unbelievers lest those relationships become the avenue through which our devotion to Christ is undermined, our service to Christ is hindered, or our attachment to the body of Christ is diminished.

The danger of unmonitored relationships with unbelievers is highlighted by Paul in **2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1** in his carefully structured, closely argued, theological rich climax of his apostolic defense that he had begun all the way back in **2 Corinthians 2:12**.

So now let me read this climax for you. **“Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? (15) Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? (16) Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, ‘I will dwell in them and walk among them; And I will be their God, and they shall be My People. (17) Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate,’ says the Lord. ‘And do not touch what is unclean; and I will welcome**

you. (18) And I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to Me,' says the Lord Almighty. (7:1) Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”

Clearly Paul, I believe, in these verses was highlighting for the Corinthians the importance of giving due diligence to monitoring their relationships with unbelievers so that they in spite of having been called to reach out to the unsaved as ministers of reconciliation might remain in a safe and protected place.

So, what is the question that we are now seeking to answer as we have begun to examine this carefully structured climax? What are the basic elements of the carefully structured climax of Paul’s apostolic defense in 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1?

Last week we considered the first element. So, what was it? The first element was Paul’s command to “not be bound together with unbelievers” (2 Corinthians 6:14). And where do we find this command? We find this command in the very first part **2 Corinthians 6:14** where it says, **“Do not be bound together with unbelievers.”** This is the command.

So, what exactly would constitute us being bound or yoked together with an unbeliever? We should consider ourselves “bound” or “yoked” to an unbeliever when our relationship with them is undermining our devotion to Christ, hindering our service to Christ, or diminishing our attachment to the body of Christ.

And this is exactly what happened to me, as I shared with you last week, when I transitioned from high school to college. I became bound to an unbelieving college friend. And this is something that can easily happen to any believer if they are not careful.

So now let me ask you this question. When Paul gave this command to the Corinthians, to not to be bound together with unbelievers, who did he specifically have in mind? Did he have in mind unbelievers in general or a specific group of unbelievers in particular?

When Paul commanded the Corinthians not to be bound together with unbelievers he was specifically thinking in terms of his opponents within the church, who though professing to be Christians, proved otherwise by what they said and did.

We as believers will hopefully take this to heart for the simple reason that becoming bound to any unbeliever is a dangerous thing. The most dangerous thing by far is to become bound to an unbeliever within the church who professes to be a Christian but who opposes the truth. And hopefully this is something that came alive for us last week as we considered the example of the German Protestant Evangelical Church that imploded from within as professing Christians within the German church bound themselves together with false teachers within the church who were fostering the beliefs of Nazi party.

So, what was the first element of Paul's carefully structured, closely argued, theologically rich climax of his very lengthy apostolic defense? The first element was a command for the Corinthians not to be bound together with unbelievers.

We are now ready to continue our examination of Paul's very carefully structured climax of his apostolic defense. So, what was the second element of that defense?

The second element is a group of five rhetorical questions; each anticipating a negative answer, which Paul believed, supported his command to "not be bound together with unbelievers" (2 Corinthians 6:14-16c). So now let us go back to **2 Corinthians 6:14** and read the command one more time, but this time we will continue to read beyond the command in order to see how Paul, through the use of five rhetorical questions, supported the command that he had just given.

"Do not be bound together with unbelievers [there's the command and now here comes the five rhetorical questions]; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? (15) Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? (16) Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God."

So why did Paul provide these five rhetorical questions? Paul provided these five rhetorical questions, each one anticipating a negative response, in order to support the command that he had just given. And how do these five rhetorical questions support the command? They show the absurdity of believers becoming bound together with unbelievers and why such a thing, if it were to happen, would of necessity undermine our devotion to Christ, hinder our service to Christ, and diminish our attachment to the body of Christ. And what is my hope for this message? My hope is that the absurdity of us putting ourselves in a position with an unbeliever that we might become bound to them will come alive for us and that we might act accordingly.

So, what is the first rhetorical question? The first rhetorical question that Paul asked was, what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness (2 Corinthians 6:14)? And what did Paul believe should have been the answer to this question? He believed that the answer should have been there is no partnership between righteousness and lawlessness.

Righteousness and lawlessness are obviously opposite of one another. “Righteousness” speaks of obedience to God’s Law, and “lawlessness” speaks of disobedience to God’s Law.

Before I became a Christian people thought of me as a nice guy. But I was lawless. Not because I robbed banks, but because my life was about me. I did what I wanted, when I wanted, the way I wanted. The Law of God required me to give myself up to Him, but I wasn’t doing that and as a result I became a slave of lawlessness. But as believers that certainly should not be true of us, since we through faith in Christ have been made the righteousness of God in Him, according to **2 Corinthians 5:21**, and because we’ve been made the righteousness of God in Him we should by the way we live our lives prove ourselves to be slaves of righteousness rather than slaves of lawlessness. And this is what the Scriptures teach.

According to Romans 6:19, before we were reconciled to God we were slaves of lawlessness, but after we were reconciled God expects us to be slaves of righteousness.

And if we are presently by the way we are living proving ourselves to be slaves of righteousness, there is no way that we should ever put ourselves in

a position to be bound together with an unbeliever. Why? **“For what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness?”** They are mutually exclusive. They are incompatible. If we get too close we are asking for trouble.

So, what is the second rhetorical question that Paul asked to support his command not to be bound with unbelievers? The second rhetorical question that Paul asked was, what fellowship has light with darkness (2 Corinthians 6:14)? And what did Paul believe should have been the answer to this question? He believed that the answer should have been there is no fellowship between light and darkness!

There is no greater antithesis in the natural world than between light and darkness. And it is this fundamental antithesis that Paul pointed to in this verse in order to support his command that believers should not be bound together with unbelievers.

Unbelievers, the slaves of lawlessness, live in darkness. They are totally unable to see anything clearly. They think that living their lives to please themselves is a good thing, but it is not. But they can't see it. Why? They can't see it because they live in darkness.

It is out of the domain of darkness that sinful man needs to be delivered so that he might be transferred to the kingdom of Christ according to Colossians 1:13.

And hopefully this has happened to us. Hopefully we by the grace of God and through faith in His Son have been delivered from darkness so that we now can see clearly what we could not clearly see before, that Jesus is the Christ the Son of the living God and that we must come to Him by faith embracing Him as our Lord and Savior so that we might find life.

If we, as believers, have been delivered from the domain of darkness and transferred to the kingdom of Christ, if we have gone from a place where we could not see to a place where we can see, then let us as those who can now see never put ourselves in a position to be bound together with an unbeliever. Why? **“What fellowship has light with darkness?”** There is none. They are mutually exclusive. They are incompatible. If we get too close we are asking for trouble.

So, what is the third rhetorical question that supports the command? The third rhetorical question that Paul asked was, what harmony has Christ with Belial (2 Corinthians 6:15)? And what did Paul believe should have been the answer to this question? He believed that the answer should have been there is no harmony between Christ and Belial.

The first two rhetorical questions focused on the radically different natures between believers and unbelievers. But now Paul in this third rhetorical question does not focus on the radically different natures between believers and unbelievers, but rather Paul now focuses on the rulers of their respective kingdoms and the lack of harmony between those rulers.

So who is “Belial?” Though this is the only reference to “Belial” in the New Testament, we know based on other extra-biblical texts of that time period it was a name associated with Satan that was used to connote Satan’s personal opposition to God.

Because Satan is personally opposed to God, which is connoted in his name “Belial,” any harmony between them is impossible, and any harmony between their respective citizens should be considered unthinkable.

If we as believers have been delivered from Belial’s kingdom, the kingdom of darkness, and transferred to the kingdom of light, let us therefore as citizens of the kingdom of light, which is Christ’s kingdom, never put ourselves in a position to be bound together with an unbeliever. Why? **“What harmony has Christ with Belial?”** There is none. Satan is the enemy of Christ and is identified in the Scriptures in **1 Peter 5:8** as our adversary.

So, what is the fourth rhetorical question? The fourth rhetorical question that Paul asked was, what has a believer in common with an unbeliever (2 Corinthians 6:15)?

This fourth question sums up the previous three thus reinforcing the obvious, which is believers and unbelievers spiritually have nothing in common. But it also serves to transition to a new thought. Not only should believers not become bound together with unbelievers because they spiritually have nothing in common, but it is flat out sacrilegious. And this leads us to the fifth question.

So, what is this fifth rhetorical question? The fifth rhetorical question that Paul asked was, what agreement has the temple of God with idols (2 Corinthians 6:16)?

What is Paul talking about here? When Paul used the word “temple” (NAOS) he most likely was referring not to the general temple complex, but to the Holy of Holies where God’s presence was manifested. So now we come to a very important question.

How was Paul able to identify the Corinthians with the Holy of Holies? Paul was able to identify the believers in Corinth with the Holy of Holies because the Spirit presently indwelt them as recipients of the new covenant message (1 Corinthians 3:16).

Do we believe this? Do we believe that when people respond to the new covenant message, or in other words the gospel of Christ, that the Holy Spirit comes to them and indwells them and they, being indwelt by the Holy Spirit become God’s temple? Hopefully you do because it is the truth. God doesn’t need a stone temple in which to manifest Himself. He has His church to manifest Himself in.

Paul made this very clear to the Corinthians in **1 Corinthians 3:16** when he said to them, **“Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?”** He made the very same truth clear again in **1 Corinthians 6:19-20** when talked about how they, the Corinthians as the temple of God through their immorality had in fact linked the temple of God to prostitutes.

This is the same thought that we see Paul carrying forward in **2 Corinthians 6:17**. However in this case he was not telling the Corinthians that they through their immorality were linking the temple of God to prostitutes, but rather he inferred that if they somehow became bound together with unbelievers they would be introducing idols to God’s temple. And why would Paul be able to say this? He would be able to say this because they themselves having exercised faith in Christ and having received the Holy Spirit were God’s temple.

And how would they introduce idols into God’s temple? Idols represent what we worship. Idols can be literal idols made of wood, stone or clay or

they can be figurative idols, the people or things that we allow to control us, which was certainly the case in Corinth by virtue of the fact that they were bowing down in essence to false teachers who were teaching the doctrine of demons based on **1 Timothy 4:1**.

So, what did Paul think of this? This of course for Paul was sacrilegious. It was an unthinkable. It was absurd. And he showed the absurdity of it by saying, **“for what agreement has the temple of God with idols.”** And what of course is the answer? There is no agreement.

False Gods, idols, and everything for which they stand, whatever or whoever that might be along with all their lies are like a group of people who are able to sit together, talk together, vote together and not clash and for a very simple reason they are all under the control of Satan, the prince of the power of the air and the ruler of darkness. Of course they will agree but if we introduce those false gods, those idols to God’s temple by becoming bound to an unbeliever there will be no agreement, for that is where the Spirit of God dwells. This is why becoming bound to an unbeliever is not only absurd but it is even sacrilegious.

We have been sent into this world with the gospel of Christ. And as we come into contact with this world and develop relationships with people in this world we need to be careful lest perchance we become bound together with an unbeliever.

And I know that such a thing can happen so quickly if we are not careful. Therefore we need to look at unbelievers through the eyes of God and see them as God sees them. We must see them as they actually are.

For if we look at them through our eyes only we will only see how cute they are, how smart they are, how much fun they are, how popular they are, but if we look at them through God’s eyes we will not only see how desperate they are for the gospel of Christ but also see how potentially dangerous there are to us if we are not careful.

Therefore if you have reason to believe that you are presently bound to an unbeliever or in danger of becoming bound to an unbeliever you must immediately take steps to change that relationship even if it means that you bring that relationship to an end. Now I will even take it a step farther. If you have reason to believe that another believer or believers have reason to

believe that you have become bound with an unbeliever or are in danger of becoming bound with an unbeliever you must immediately take steps to change that relationship and if necessary bring that relationship to an end.

And why would we do this? Because God has commanded us, **“not to be bound together with unbelievers”** And why would He command such a thing? He has answered that question this morning. **“For what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? (15) Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? (16) Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God.”**

May we by the grace of God understand the stark contrast that exists between the unbeliever and the believer and that we might live accordingly.