

Do Not Be Bound With Unbelievers
2 Corinthians 6:16-7:1
Part Three

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.

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 whether those unbelievers are inside or outside of the church lest those relationships become the avenue through which our devotion to Christ is undermined, our service to Christ is hindered, and our attachment to the body of Christ is diminished or even worse.

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**. A climax that was specifically designed to motivate the Corinthians to disengage from his opponents in Corinth who Paul believed though professing to be Christians proved otherwise by what they said and did.

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, especially from those unbelievers within the church that were opposing Paul, who though professing to be Christian, were proving themselves otherwise by what they said and did.

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

Two weeks ago we considered the first element. So, what was the first element? The first element was Paul’s command to “not be bound together with unbelievers” (2 Corinthians 6:14). We found this command in the very first part **2 Corinthians 6:14.**

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 have shared with you, 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, 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 to the Corinthians not to be bound together with unbelievers. And this led us last week to consider the second element of Paul’s carefully structured climax. And what was that?

The second element was a group of five rhetorical questions, each anticipating a negative answer, which Paul believed supported his command not to be bound together with unbelievers (2 Corinthians 6:14-16c). So, what were these five rhetorical questions? These questions, as we discovered last week, are found in **2 Corinthians 6:14** through the first part of **2 Corinthians 6:16**. So let me read these verses for you. **“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?”**

These questions were designed to hammer home the point that the sphere in which believers live and the sphere in which unbelievers live are mutually exclusive, and because they are mutually exclusive we must as believers be careful not to become bound with unbelievers lest in becoming bound with them our devotion to Christ be undermined, our service to Christ hindered, and our attachment to the body of Christ be diminished or perhaps even worse.

Paul, having supported the command not to be bound with unbelievers through the use of these five rhetorical questions, will now seek to support the command in another way. And this leads us to the third element of Paul’s carefully structured climax.

So, what is this third element? The third element consisted of two promises that Paul believed also supported the command “not to be bound together with unbelievers” (2 Corinthians 6:16d-7:1). So where do we find these two promises? We find these two promises in the latter half of Paul’s carefully structured climax beginning midway through **verse 16**.

So now let us read these particular verses. **“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.’”** This is the first promise that Paul referenced. And what was the anticipated response to this promise? Let us now read **verse 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.’”** So does this first promise given in **verse 16** along with its anticipated response in **verse 17** support the

command **“not to be bound together with unbelievers?”** Absolutely, but we are not yet done.

Paul then went on to **verse 18** and provided yet another promise, a second promise. And what was this promise? **“And I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to Me,’ says the Lord Almighty.”** And what was the anticipated response to this promise, as well as the first? Let me now read for you **2 Corinthians 7:1**. **“Therefore, having these promises, beloved, [both the first and the second] let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”** So does this second promise, like the first promise, support the command given to the Corinthians to **“not to be bound together with unbelievers?”** Absolutely? Both of these promises support the command.

Now listen very carefully. We need to understand something. All human behavior is basically driven by what we think is going to happen or what we want to happen in the future. And hopefully this truth will be driven home to us through this morning’s message as we consider these two promises.

So now let us now consider the promises. And what is the first one? The first promise that Paul referenced was a promise of intimacy (2 Corinthians 6:16). So now let us once again read **verse 16**. **“I will dwell in them and walk among them; And I will be their God, and they shall be My People.”** Clearly this promise involved a real possibility of future personal intimacy with God. So where do we find this promise? The promise of future intimacy that Paul quoted in 2 Corinthians 6:16 is a compilation of two Old Testament texts given to the nation of Israel in Leviticus 26:11-12 and Ezekiel 37:27.

So, what was **Leviticus 26:11-12** all about? In **Leviticus 26:11-12**, God was speaking to the nation of Israel and talking to them about a future intimacy that they would be able to enjoy if they were obedient to the Law as given to them through Moses.

Now let me ask you a question. Did God actually believe that they could pull this off? Of course not! He knew who they were. But He provided this covenant in order to humble them and therefore to prepare them in the future to enter into the blessing of the “new covenant” spelled out in **Jeremiah 31:31-34**, a covenant that would be ratified by the blood of His Son and

empowered by His Spirit, a covenant when entered into by faith would result in intimacy; an intimacy that the exilic prophet Ezekiel confirmed would in fact be the future experience of the nation of Israel in **Ezekiel 37:27**.

So, what is Paul's point in introducing this promise of intimacy to the Corinthian church in **2 Corinthians 6:16** when the promises were initially given to the nation of Israel in **Leviticus 26:11-12** and **Ezekiel 37:27**? Paul wanted the Corinthians to know that when they through faith in Christ had become God's temple through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, they were at that moment in time on the receiving end of God's covenantal blessing of intimacy as promised to Israel.

But this covenantal blessing was not without responsibility, which Paul will now highlight for the Corinthians in **2 Corinthians 6:17** as he once again reaches back into the Old Testament. So, what does this verse say? **“Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate,’ says the Lord. ‘And do not touch what is unclean; and I will welcome you.’”** So where do we find these specific exhortations in the Old Testament Scriptures?

The exhortations that Paul quoted in 2 Corinthians 6:17 are based on Isaiah 52:11 and Ezekiel 20:34.

In **Isaiah 52:11** God through the prophet addressed the nation of Israel as if they had already become captive in Babylon even though they at that moment in time had not yet entered captivity. But even so, God was in **Isaiah 52:11** commanding them to touch nothing unclean while they were in that captivity but to patiently wait for the deliverance that He promised would occur according **Ezekiel 20:34**.

So, what was Paul's point here in **verse 17** in using these quotations from these two Old Testament passages? Paul's point was that just as Israel, in light of their covenantal relationship with God with its future promise of intimacy, was not to touch anything unclean while living in captivity in Babylon, neither should the Corinthians, as co-beneficiaries of the blessings of the New Covenant through the indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit, touch anything unclean while living in this world as aliens and waiting for Christ's return to take them to the home that He was preparing for them in glory as He had promised them in **John 14**.

Paul now goes on to a second promise. And what was that promise? The second promise that Paul referenced was the promise of personal adoption (2 Corinthians 6:18). So now let us read **2 Corinthians 6:18** and see if this is not so. “**And I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to Me,’ says the Lord Almighty.**” So where does this promise of future adoption quoted in **2 Corinthians 6:18** come from?

The promise of future adoption that Paul quoted in 2 Corinthians 6:16 was based on a compilation of three Old Testament verses given to the nation of Israel in 2 Samuel 7:14, Isaiah 43:6 and Ezekiel 20:34). **2 Samuel 7:14** was a promise given to David by God concerning the kind of relationship that He was going to have with David’s son Solomon. **Isaiah 43:6** spoke of God’s future gathering together of Israel’s sons and daughters to the land of Israel prior to the Millennial kingdom. And finally **Ezekiel 20:34** referenced how God was going to accomplish this incredible feat by a mighty hand and outstretched arm.

So, what is Paul’s point in introducing this promise of adoption to the Corinthian church in **2 Corinthians 6:16** when the promise of adoption as God’s sons and daughters was based on promises that had initially been given to the nation of Israel in 2 Samuel 7:14, Isaiah 43:6 and Ezekiel 20:34?

Paul wanted the Corinthians to know that when they through faith in Christ had become God’s temple through the indwelling of the Holy, and therefore had become God’s sons and daughters in Christ, that they like Israel were at that moment in time on the receiving end of God’s covenantal blessing of adoption as promised to Israel.

A blessing that we certainly have already begun to enter into but that will not be culminated until the time of our glorification when we according to the promise of God receive our immortal, imperishable bodies. This is made very clear to us in **Romans 8:23**, which specifically tells us that we, as the followers of Christ, are waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. This truly will be a great day for it is on that day that we, the church, will be put on display for all those viewing us to see.

But once again such great covenantal blessings did not come without responsibility. So now let me read for you **2 Corinthians 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.” So in light of these promises that he had just spelled out associated with the New Covenant that the Corinthians became direct beneficiaries of through faith in Christ and the indwelling ministry of the Holy spirit, what did Paul choose to do in **2 Corinthians 7:1**?

Paul, in 2 Corinthians 7:1, in response to the promises they had been given in respect to intimacy and adoption, exhorted them to make a complete break from every form of unhealthy compromise both external and internal.

Paul by this exhortation in **2 Corinthians 7:1** has now widened his focus beyond the one particular issue of “**not becoming bound together with unbelievers,**” which was the specific command given in **2 Corinthians 6:14** to a command that obviously was much more far reaching.

This command is personal. He addressed the Corinthians as “**beloved.**” It was comprehensive, “**let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit,**” and it was also an intimidating command. And why was this? It was intimidating because Paul warned the Corinthians that the pursuit of obedience in respect to this general command in **2 Corinthians 7:1** and certainly the more specific command in **2 Corinthians 6:14** must be done “**in the fear of God.**”

It is really quite simple. God is our judge and the way one responds to Paul’s call to separate from unbelievers and not to become bound to them in our quest to cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit will reveal whether or not one has been reconciled to God.

Paul was not playing around here in this carefully structured, closely argued, theologically rich climax of his apostolic defense.

He wanted the Corinthians to know that if they continued to remain bound together with the false teachers in Corinth, who professed to be Christians but who in Paul’s mind proved otherwise by what they said and did, that it was a very serious thing. In fact, such a serious thing that it would appear Paul put forward the thought that they might not even be true Christians.

And why would he do this? He would do this because to enter into such a relationship and to remain in that relationship was considered by Paul unfathomable in light of who we are in Christ and who they are apart from Christ as we saw in **2 Corinthians 6:14-16**, unfathomable in light of the promises that have been given us concerning a glorious future of intimacy and adoption in **2 Corinthians 6:16-7:1**.

So let us take this message of Paul to the Corinthians to heart. This would mean that we must be very diligent, always monitoring our relationships with unbelievers. And if we have any reason to believe after we have monitored those relationships that our devotion to Christ is being undermined, our service to Christ is being hindered, or our attachment to the body of Christ is being diminished, we must immediately take action to alter the dynamics of that relationship and if necessary to even end that relationship.

And even if we do not see this but are being warned by other brothers and sisters in Christ that they believe we are getting dangerously close to an unhealthy relationship with an unbeliever, we must even then take steps.

So now having said this let me give a warning to all the single young people. If you are presently dating any unbeliever, I believe you have placed yourself in an extremely dangerous position and should immediately take steps to end that relationship.

This should not be shocking that I would say this in light of who we are and in light of the promises that we have received.

May God give us the grace as the recipients of the promises of the new covenant to live in such a way that we might continuously confirm the fact of it by the way we live.