

THE CHRISTIAN & THE CHURCH (12)

June 29, 2008.

Review.

In our last study we looked firstly at **“the importance of unity”** in the church and secondly, at **“the dangers of disunity”**. Then we began to look at **“Unity in the body of Christ and certain sins”**. I indicated that we will deal with three sins under this section of our study : idolatry, sexual immorality and the unequal yoke. We had time to cover the first sin, idolatry.

I want to begin this morning by briefly reviewing what we covered under the sin of idolatry. Please turn to *1Cor.10:14-22*. (**read**). I began by setting before you the context of religious syncretism in Paul’s day and Paul’s total rejection of such syncretism. The God Paul presented to both Jews and Gentiles demanded exclusive loyalty. In the passage before us Paul argued against any participation in idol worship or in eating things sacrificed to idols. The Bible is very clear on this fact : those who worship idols worship demons. Paul declared to the Corinthian Christians, **“I do not want you to become sharers in demons.”** (*vs.20*). I do not want you to establish the bonds of fellowship with demons because you cannot be aligned with Christ and aligned with demons.

In *vs.21* Paul declared in very strong language, **“You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons.”** We noted the repetition of **“cannot”** which tells us that both acts are absolutely incompatible. We saw that both logically exclude each other. We saw that one will be destroyed if you try to do both. The one that will be destroyed is your ***koinonia*** with Christ and His body.

Now Brethren, I want you to clearly understand that the sin here is very serious. To become involved in the table of demons is to involve Christ and His body, the church, in your sin. The judgment that comes from the Lord for this sin is serious. We are not dealing here with going to the supermarket or meat shop and buying meat that is described as **“halal”**. We are not dealing with you stopping and buying various sweet delicacies. We are talking about your attendance of religious festivals, be they public or family oriented. We are talking about your direct or indirect participation by sharing in and eating the things offered during the ceremonies or after the ceremonies. Staying away from the actual ceremony and then going and eating hours later does not exempt you from the sin Paul described. **Garland** noted that Paul associates the eating of food offered to idols with idolatry even if the Christian eating this food has no intention of bowing down to serve idols.

Taking this uncompromising stand against idolatry may result in you losing family ties and the benefits of such family ties; losing friendships; losing business relationships and profits and such like things. But losing these things do not compare to losing your soul. Jesus asked in **Matt.16:26**, “what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” Jesus is saying that all the wealth of this entire world does not compare in value to the worth of your soul.

The early Christians understood this very well. And so they chose to lose their homes, their businesses and even their lives because of this stand against participating in idol worship. Christians down through the centuries have also chosen to lose wealth and properties and even their lives for refusing to participate in idol worship. Christian young people in various parts of our world today are being thrown out of their homes and even murdered for refusing to obey their parents and enter into arranged idolatrous marriages.

People who compromise say to me, “*Pastor, you do not understand.*” I want to assure you that I fully understand the sacrifices, the price, the pain and the loss. But I want to add that I fully understand also that compromisers are cowards. I fully understand also that compromisers love idolatrous loved ones, relatives and friends and the things of this world more than they love Christ. I fully understand also that compromisers “have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in [their] striving against sin.” (*Heb.12:4*).

There are people who will say to you, “*If you can’t come to my church or my religious function and you can’t share in the hospitality I have provided, then I can’t come to your church.*” What do you do then? What you do then is pray. The most important step you can take in the work of evangelism is prayer. You can give yourself to prayer and even fasting for such people. My Bible reading on Wednesday morning was *Matt.19*. In this chapter we find the account of Jesus’ encounter with the rich young ruler. When the young ruler walked away rejecting Jesus’ command, the disciples were astonished and asked Jesus, “Then who can be saved?” And Jesus’ answer was, “With people this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.” (*vss.25-26*). You are praying to the God who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all you can ask or think. (*Eph.3:20*).

Unity In The Body Of Christ & Certain Sins. (contd).

Well, with this review we come now to continue our study of the remaining two sins and how they affect the body of Christ. And I want to begin with **the sin of the unequal yoke**. Please turn to *2Cor.6:14-18*. (**read**).

Let me begin by making it clear what Paul is not dealing with here. **Philip Hughes** noted

that it would be a serious mistake to conclude that Paul is condemning all contact and involvement with non-Christians. Paul is not advocating a kind of Christian isolationism that quickly leads to the formation of a closed Christian sub-culture.

In *1Cor.5* Paul dealt with the excommunication of sexually immoral members of the church. One of Paul's points is that the members of the church must not associate with, have fellowship with or even spend social time with any member of the church who has been excommunicated for sexual immorality. The Corinthian believers misinterpreted what Paul said and began withdrawing from the society at large. Paul's response was, "I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; I did not at all mean with the immoral people of the world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world." (*1Cor.5:9-10*).

Paul's whole manner of life and ministry was a denial of any policy of total withdrawal from the society for fear of spiritual or moral contamination. Paul's life demonstrated the Biblical pattern of fitting into a society or culture without in any way compromising the integrity of the faith he was preaching or lowering the high standards of Christian morality. Paul's example must be coupled with Jesus' example. In *Lk.15:2* the Pharisees and scribes accused Jesus of welcoming sinners and eating with them. In *Matt.11:19* Jesus was described as the friend of tax-gatherers and sinners. But I want you to note : Jesus influenced their lives. They did not influence His life. He led them into the paths of righteousness. They did not lead Him into the paths of lawlessness. The same was true of the apostle Paul.

The simple fact is this : to win sinners to Christ you have to get among sinners. But getting among sinners to reach them for Christ is no excuse for doctrinal or moral compromise. In the words of Jesus, we are to be in the world but not of the world. (*Jn.17:11, 14; 15:19*). In *Jn.17:15* Jesus' prayer to His Father on behalf of His disciples is, "I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from

the evil one.”

But unlike Jesus and Paul we tend to fail too often in compromising with the world, in compromising the integrity of our faith and the high standards of Christian morality. Then our solution to this spiritual and moral failure is to withdraw from the world and condemn any who is not withdrawing and practicing this kind of unbiblical separation from the world. The solution is not unbiblical separation from the world. The solution is developing Biblical integrity in spirituality and morality and maintaining such Biblical integrity uncompromisingly. The solution is to become trustworthy courageous men and women with regards to our faith in Christ and the outworking of that faith before a watching world.

So what is this unequal yoke Paul is dealing with here? In the passage before us Paul is dealing with the formation of alliances or relationships with non-Christians that put you in a position to compromise the integrity of the gospel and to lower the holy standards of Christian spirituality and morality. Paul is dealing with the formation of alliances or relationships with non-Christians that, sooner or later, will bring your Christian values into serious conflict with their non-Christian values and force you into a position of having to compromise or face the negative consequences. These alliances or relationships may be in the form of a legal and binding contract or covenant or it may be in the form of bonds of friendship.

Let me illustrate. As is already known, this kind of alliance is formed through marriage. This kind of alliance is formed through joint ownership in a business venture. This kind of alliance is formed by becoming a member of secret societies. This kind of alliance may be formed by becoming a member of social activist group or a political party. This kind of alliance may be formed by becoming lifelong intimate friends with the unsaved. This kind of alliance may be formed between a Christian and his unsaved parents because the Christian does not want to lose his inheritance benefits. Pastors are often guilty of

forming this kind of alliance with members of the church because, for whatever reasons, they do not want to lose such members. I think these examples should have made the point.

With these thoughts in mind let us turn our attention to the text before us. Paul wrote in *vs.14*, “Do not be bound together” or “Do not be unequally yoked together.” Paul’s verb sets before us the picture of two animals in a double harness. Such animals were normally used for plowing the fields. My experience with this picture is seeing two animals in a double harness pulling a cart. The clear understanding was that you did not harness together two different animals, for example, like an ox and a horse. If a farmer did that, he was in for a rough day in controlling them and getting his work done.

As a Christian you have taken up and you are wearing Christ’s yoke. Turn to *Matt.11:28-30*. (read). In the N.T. the concept of the “**yoke**” signifies bondage or submission to authority of some kind. As a Christian you are Christ’s bond-slave. The apostles described themselves and others as “**bond-slaves**” of the Lord Jesus Christ. (*Rom.1:1; Col.1:7; 4:7; Jas.1:1; 2Pet.1:1; Jude 1:1; Rev.1:1*). As Christians we are the bond-slaves of the Lord Jesus Christ. I do not want you to minimize what it means to be a bond-slave. Christ is your **kurios** and **despotes**, that is, your Lord and Master. (*Rom.10:9; Jude 1:4*). We live in submission to the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. We obey Christ. We serve Him. We live in keeping with the spiritual and moral standards He has revealed to us. Your marriage, your home, your work, your business, your role in the society, must all be placed under the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ and lived out in keeping with Christ’s spiritual and moral standards. Every aspect of your life and conduct, however small or big, whether public or private, must be lived out in keeping with Christ’s spiritual and moral standards.

As a Christian, when you form an unequal yoke, what you have done is placed yourself into a double harness with a non-Christian. You have added to your life and placed

yourself in bondage to the value system of a non-Christian. You have added to your life and placed yourself under the authority of the godless spiritual and moral standards of a non-Christian. By common grace standards a non-Christian may have some good moral standards. But the problem here is that the non-Christian is not committed to the God the Christian serves. The non-Christian is not the bond-slave of Jesus Christ. And his moral standards are not rooted in Biblical revelation and spirituality. His moral standards may be rooted in family values, in cultural values or in his own private opinions. This is why, from a Biblical standpoint, the non-Christian's spiritual and moral standards must be described as godless.

This is the position Paul took when he described the Jews who were rejecting Christ. Turn to **Rom.10:2-3**. (**read**). Remember, the Jews were not pagans. The Jews had the O.T. scriptures. But their knowledge was not based on an accurate interpretation and understanding of the O.T. scriptures. This is what made their zeal for God wrong and useless. It was not based upon the knowledge God revealed to them. It was based on a self-knowledge that pretended to be God's revealed knowledge. Jesus said it was a self-knowledge that invalidated the revealed word of God. (**Matt.15:6**). Their wrong knowledge was peculiarly manifested in two points : **(1)** they did not know about God's righteousness, that saving righteousness that come to us through Christ, and **(2)** they set about to established their own standards of righteousness for salvation and daily life. Regardless of whom you are, God describes your own standards of righteousness as filthy rags and rubbish. (**Isa.64:6; Phil.3:8**).

"Do not be unequally yoked" is a negative command that says, *"If you are doing it, stop it and stop it now. And don't ever do it again."* Here is a course of action that is clearly prohibited by God and that the Christian must flee from. **David Garland** wrote, *"Paul has in mind an alliance with spiritual opposites, and the image of harnessing oneself to someone who is spiritually incompatible evokes images of spiritual disaster. Those who bear Christ's yoke cannot share it with others who*

deny Christ. Those who harness themselves together with unbelievers will soon find themselves plowing Satan's fields."

In the past the Bible divided the peoples of the world between Jews and Gentiles. The divisions were radical and clear-cut. But the Jews would often blur the divisions as they became unequally yoked together as a nation with the Gentiles. This provoked God's wrath and judgments fell. Finally, God cut them off and they were deported into Assyria and Babylon. With the establishing of the new covenant in Christ, the Bible now divides the world between Christians and non-Christians. In the verses before us Paul has set forth the radical nature of this division and identification.

The Christians are described by the following words : believers, righteousness, light, Christ, temple of God. The non-Christians are described by the following words : unbelievers, lawlessness, darkness, Belial, idols. Paul asked five questions that set before us the radical incompatibility between Christian and non-Christian values and the total incongruity of permanent intimate fellowship between believers and unbelievers. Paul's five questions are :

- 1). "What partnership have righteousness with lawlessness?"
- 2). *"What fellowship has light with darkness?"*
- 3). "What harmony has Christ with Belial?"
- 4). *"What has a believer in common with an unbeliever?"*
- 5). "What agreement has the temple of God with idols?"

The answer to each question is an emphatic **"None whatsoever!"**.

Let us examine in some more detail what Paul has written. In the first question the word "partnership" refers to a relationship involving shared purposes, common goals and activities. The question is : *"What sharing in common purposes, goals and activities belong to righteousness and lawlessness?"* In **1Jn.3:4** John defined sin as lawlessness. Actually, John's definition is reversible. So we can properly say : sin is

lawlessness or lawlessness is sin. This means sin is the willing violation of God's laws. And lawlessness is the willing violation of God's laws. When people sin you hear them say, *"I did not mean to do that. I did not intend to do that."* On the other hand God says your sin is a willful violation of His law.

The non-Christian is described with the word "lawlessness". In *Tit.2:14* Paul told us that Christ "gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds." For this reason the Christian is described with the word "righteousness". So the questions that must be asked are : *As one whom God has constituted and declared to be righteous, what partnership do you have with one whom God has declared to be lawlessness? What common goals, purposes and activities do the Christian's works of righteousness have with the non-Christians works of lawlessness?* And the answer is : none whatsoever!

In the second question the word "fellowship" is ***koinonia***. In the Bible darkness is a metaphor for everything that is evil. Now note carefully the Biblical descriptions of the non-Christian. Non-Christians are darkness (*Eph.5:8*); in darkness and of darkness. (*1Thess.5:4-5*). They love darkness. (*Jn.3:19*). They live in the domain of or under the authority of darkness. (*Col.1:13*). They walk in the darkness, that is, they conduct their lives in keeping with the principles of darkness. (*1Jn.5:6*).

Jesus declared, "I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." (*Jn.8:12*). *1Jn.1:5* says, "God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all." Now note carefully the Biblical descriptions of the Christian.

The Christian is light in the Lord. (*Eph.5:8*). The Christian's ***koinonia*** is with God who is Light. (*1Jn.1:6*). The Christian has been delivered from the domain of darkness.

(*Col.1:13*). *1Pet.2:9* says you were “called out of darkness into His marvelous light.” The Christian must “lay aside the deeds of darkness.” (*Rom.13:12*). Christians must “walk as children of light”, (*Eph.5:8*), that is, they must conduct their lives in keeping with the principles of the Light, the Lord Jesus Christ. The Christian must “not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness.” (*Eph.5:11*). The verb “participate” comes from ***koinonia***. The Christian must not establish bonds of fellowship with the unfruitful deeds of darkness. “Do not participate” is a negative command that says : *“If you are doing it, stop it and stop it now. And don’t ever do it again.”*

Note carefully what John says in *1Jn.1:5-6*, “God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship (***koinonia***) with Him and yet walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.” If we say we have fellowship with God who is Light, then we cannot conduct our lives under the authority of darkness or in keeping with the principles of darkness. If we are doing so then, John says, “we lie”. We are lying when we say that we have fellowship (***koinonia***) with God who is Light.

The Christian is in fellowship with Christ who is the Light. His ***koinonia*** is with Christ. The Christian is in fellowship with God who is Light. His ***koinonia*** is with God. ***Koinonia*** with Christ excludes all other fellowships that are opposed to Christ. In the context, ***koinonia*** with Christ, who is the Light, excludes all ***koinonia*** with darkness. How then can a Christian enter into an unequal yoke ***koinonia*** with darkness? To do so would raise serious concerns and questions about your claim to have fellowship with Christ who is Light and with God who is Light. John put it very bluntly when he said you are lying and you are not practicing the truth.

This brings us to the third question : “What harmony has Christ with Belial?” The name “**Belial**” appears several times in the O.T. and only once in the N.T. Commentators are agreed that, Belial is another name for Satan. We may also phrase

Paul's question : "Do Christ and Satan agree on anything?" The word "**harmony**" speaks of a mutual agreement or a joint decision. The Greek word is **symphonesis** from which we get the English word "**symphony**". So we can ask : "*What symphony is there between Christ and Satan?*" In other words, can you picture Christ and Satan playing music together in sweet harmony?

The name "**Belial**" is an O.T. concept that was used to describe wicked men. Eli's sons were described as "worthless men" or "**sons of Belial**". (*1Sam.2:12*). Eli's sons were guilty of repeatedly desecrating the worship of the Lord in the temple. In *Deut.13:13* the sons of Belial are those who seduce the people to worship idols. In *Judges 19:22* homosexuals are described as sons of Belial. In *1Sam.1:12-17* Eli mistakenly charged Hannah with drunkenness. In her response to Eli, Hannah said to him, "do not consider [me] as a worthless woman", that is, as a daughter of Belial. For further study of this concept you can look up the word "**worthless**" in an exhaustive concordance.

In the context of *2Cor.6*, the question we must ask is : *how can there any harmony or symphony between Christ and Satan?* The answer is there cannot be any symphony between Christ and Satan because they stand diametrically opposed to each other. They have no common ground between them that would permit any kind of association of harmony or symphony. An interesting point here is that the name "**Christ**" may also refer to the body of Christ as it does in *1Cor.12:12*. But whether this possible interpretation has a strong basis is beside the point. The Christian belongs to Christ. He is a member of Christ. And so the question can and must be asked : how can there be any harmony or symphony between the Christian and Satan or the followers of Satan? To become unequally yoked together with an unbeliever is to say that you, as a Christian, do have harmony or symphony with Satan.

Paul's fourth question is : "what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?" The word "**common**" also means "**share; portion**". One commentator translated this

question : “*what shared commitments belong to the believer along with the unbeliever?*” The primary issue here is that the believer’s interests and concern must focus on the will of God and the glory of God. (*1Cor.10:31; Jn.17:4; Matt.7:21*). In *Matt.6:33* Jesus said His disciples must “seek first [God’s] kingdom and His righteousness.” This primary issue emphasizes the essential incompatibility that exists between the believer and the unbeliever. The unequal yoke will provoke serious conflict between the believer and the unbeliever because they have no shared commitment in this primary issue of seeking first God’s kingdom and His righteousness, of seeking and doing the will of God in order to bring glory to God. In such a conflict it is the believer who always ends up compromising.

The final question brings us full circle to the issue of idols and, by implication, demons. Paul asked : “what agreement has the temple of God with idols?” The word “**agreement**” speaks of a pact that joins persons in a common cause. As long as the Israelites obeyed the Lord and followed Him faithfully, their temple was entirely free from any graven images or idols. Today graven images have been given the more acceptable name of “**religious figurines**”. God hates idols and any form of idolatry. The first commandment prohibited idolatry. The second commandment prohibited the worship of the true God with the help or use of idols or graven images or religious figurines. (*Exod.20:1-6*). The Roman Catholic church has merged the first two commandments into one in an effort to justify the presence and use of graven images or religious figurines in their places of worship. And they have divided the tenth commandment into two commandments.

The Bible is very clear on the fact that the Lord God absolutely abhors idolatry. His pronouncements of judgments against idolatry and His repeated outpourings of judgments on idolaters are clearly recorded in Scripture. *Rom.1:18* declares that “the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.” And the primary sin that is focused upon in this section of *Rom.1* is idolatry.

Wicked men and women refused to glorify God. Instead they worshipped and glorified idols. They gave thanks to idols. The Lord has made it clear with repeated emphasis that He will not share His glory with idols. (*Isa.42:8; 48:11*).

Christians are described as those who have turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God. (*1Thess.1:9*). Paul's clear command in *1Cor.10:14* is "flee from idolatry." John's final words in his first epistle is, "Little children, guard yourselves from idols." (*1Jn.5:21*).

Brethren, there is no common cause between God and idols and the demons that lurk behind the idols. They are diametrically opposed to each other. They are sworn enemies. Idolatry actively wages war against God. But there is coming a final day when the Lord will finally destroy every last vestige of idolatry on this earth. This is why there can be no agreement, no pact, no common cause between the temple of God and idols.

Now what does Paul mean by "the temple of God"? Paul declared in his very next sentence, "For we are the temple of the living God." We, who turned from dead idols to serve the living God, we are the temple of the living God. We, as a body of believers, are the temple of the living God. This truth was clearly taught to the Corinthian church. This is why Paul asked the Corinthians with a sense of frustration, "Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (*1Cor.3:16*).

Now what we are as a body of believers we are also individually. Paul asked in *1Cor.6:19*, "do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you." Note the repetition : "do you not know...? Do you not know...?" In other words, what is the matter with you Corinthians? Now note : as a corporate body of believers we are the temple of God and God's Spirit dwells in us. As an individual Christian you are the temple of the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit dwells in you. These two facts are intimately and inseparably connected. The one cannot exist without the

other.

Are there any idols in your life as an individual believer? If there are idols in your life then there are idols in this church. Have you created any common cause with idols? If you have created any common cause with idols you have also created common cause between the church and idols. Have you created an unequal yoke relationship with idol worshippers? If you have then you have also created an unequal yoke relationship between the church and idol worshippers.

Now Brethren, I am not finished dealing with this point of the unequal yoke. But I must close here. I trust you have begun to get a sense of how serious these matters are for your personal life and for the church. May God give you the grace, wisdom and discernment to carefully think through these things and make applications to you life. You may need to make changes. You may need to restructure some of your relationships. Before you do, please seek counsel. I do not want you to misunderstand these truths as the Corinthians did and make foolish decisions in the name of obeying Christ.