

THE CHRISTIAN & THE CHURCH (13)

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Review.

We have been looking at “**Unity in the body of Christ and certain sins**”. The first sin we dealt with was idolatry. Last Lord’s Day we began dealing with the sin of the unequal yoke. I was able to complete the exposition of Paul’s five questions. Today, my goal is to focus on application. I want to briefly review what we looked at before seeking to complete this study of the unequal yoke. If you were not here last Lord’s Day, I would encourage you to get the CD and listen to the sermon. Today’s brief review will be filled with many gaps. Please turn to *2Cor.6:14-18*. (read).

We began by making it clear what Paul is not dealing with. Paul did not set before us any policy for withdrawal from the society for fear of spiritual and moral contamination. We saw in Jesus and Paul a policy of involvement in the society or culture without any compromise of neither the integrity of the faith nor the lowering of the high standards of Christian morality. Compromise is easy. Compromise is going with the flow. Compromise is cowardly. It takes Biblical integrity, trustworthiness and courageousness to live without compromise in a sin infested world.

Christians in the world must be like the water lilies that are usually found growing in murky stagnant waters. The dictionary says that when you compare something to a lily, you are comparing it to the beauty, delicacy and purity of the lily. When you look at a pond filled with lilies, you do not look at and admire the dirty pond. You look at and admire the beauty and purity of the lilies. A Christian who pursues a godly life in this sin infested world without compromise is comparable to the lily.

Secondly, we sought to define the unequal yoke. An unequal yoke is the formation of alliances or relationships with non-Christians that puts you in a position to compromise the integrity of the Christian faith in general and the gospel in particular and to lower the holy standards of Christian spirituality and morality. If you can remain in or walk away from any alliance or relationship without compromising your Christianity you are not in an unequal yoke relationship. If you cannot remain in or walk away from any alliance or relationship without compromising your Christianity you are in an unequal yoke relationship. I want you to note also that if any relationship or friendship with a non-Christian is having a corrupting influence over you and / or is negatively impacting your growth in Christ and testimony, you are in an unequal yoke relationship.

I want to take this a step further : if any relationship or friendship with a professed Christian is having a corrupting influence over you and / or negatively influencing your spiritual growth in Christ and testimony, you are in an unequal yoke relationship. This was one of the problems in the Corinthian church : the relationship of members with false teachers and the corrupting influence the false teachers were having upon these members. Paul wrote in *1Cor.15:33* "Do not be deceived : Bad company corrupts good morals." Paul's command means, "*Stop deceiving yourselves and stop it now.*" Note carefully who is deceiving who : you are deceiving yourself. The verb "**corrupts**" points to that which is always true. What is always true? "**Bad company corrupts good morals.**"

The questions arise : why is it that the publicans and sinners did not corrupt Jesus? Why is it that the immoral idolatrous Gentiles did not corrupt Paul? In His dealings with the publicans and sinners, Jesus was in charge. Jesus was setting the standards. Jesus was doing the influencing. In his dealings with the immoral idolatrous Gentiles Paul was in charge. Paul was setting the standards. Paul was doing the influencing. At no time did Jesus or Paul compromise and lower the holy standards they had set and were requiring of

others. Jesus was accused of being the friend of publican and sinners but no one could have accused Jesus or Paul of compromising or lowering the holy standards they had set and were requiring of others.

At no time did Jesus or Paul relinquish control of their relationship with those they were seeking to influence and become their followers. To become a follower of those you are seeking to influence is to put yourself in a position to compromise with the ungodly values and lifestyles of these people. Let me say that it is always the Christian who is guilty of compromise. To compromise is to contradict and lower your high and holy moral standards. In your dealings with the non-Christian you are seeking to lift his spiritual beliefs and moral values to another level. For this reason the non-Christian cannot say to you : *“I compromised for you, why can’t you compromise for me?”* Whenever you lower your spiritual and moral standards to lift the non-Christian, you are compromising.

In the Corinthian setting the false teachers were in charge. The false teachers were in control of the relationships that were formed. The false teachers were setting the standards and doing the influencing. And the Christians were doing the compromising. The principle is the same when your non-Christian friend is having a corrupting influence over you. Your non-Christian friend is in charge of and controlling the relationship that is formed with you. Your non-Christian friend is setting the standards and doing the influencing. And you, the Christian, is doing the compromising.

In *1Cor.15:34* Paul wrote, “Become sober-minded as you ought, and stop sinning; for some have no knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame.” Paul’s verb “become sober-minded” compares these spiritually deluded Corinthian church members to being in a drunken stupor. Paul’s command, “become sober-minded”, is forceful. His command rings out like three shots from a gun : *“Snap out of it.” “Do the right thing.” “And stop sinning.”* Now note this : keeping company with these false teachers was in itself a sinful action that must be stopped. Why? The known goal of these false teachers was to corrupt the Corinthians and lead them astray.

Doing the right thing meant they had to end their relationship with the false teachers.

In the same manner when you keep company with a non-Christian friend whom you know will have a corrupting influence on you and lead you astray, that is a sinful action that must be stopped. Doing the right thing means you must bring an end to your relationship with this non-Christian friend. Paul closed the verse with the declaration, "I speak this to your shame." In other words, "*Shame on you!*" When you allow professed Christians to corrupt you, "*shame on you!*" When you allow your non-Christian friends to corrupt you, "*shame on you!*"

In our study we examined Paul's command, "do not be unequally yoked together." We saw Paul's command is rooted in the fact that the Christian has taken up and is wearing Christ's yoke. (*Matt.11:28-30*). The yoke says you are a bond-slave of Christ and you are living under His authority. The unequal yoke places you in bondage to the godless value system of the non-Christian.

When we came to Paul's five questions we saw that they set forth the radical nature of the spiritual and moral divisions that exist between Christians and non-Christians. Christians are believers, righteousness, light, Christ, temple of God. Non-Christians are unbelievers, lawlessness, darkness, Belial (Satan), idols. We saw that righteousness does not share in any common purposes, goals and activities with lawlessness. There is no fellowship between light and darkness. Light is supposed to dispel darkness. When darkness overwhelms light it means that the light is dying.

We saw there is no harmony or symphony between Christ and Satan. Christ and Satan cannot be pictured as playing sweet music together in harmony because they are both diametrically opposed to each other. We saw that believers have no shared commitments with unbelievers. The believer is committed to seeking first God's kingdom and His righteousness. The believer is committed to obeying the will of God and bringing glory to

God. These are not the shared commitments of the unbeliever.

Finally, we saw that there can be no pact nor common cause between the temple of God and idols. God hates idolatry and everything related to idolatry. God has even forbidden the people to worship Him with the aid of idols, graven images, religious figurines or pictures. I made it clear that you may have to do some house cleaning because if there are idols in your life, then there are idols in the church. If you have created any common cause with idols then you have also created common cause between the church and idols. If you have created an unequal yoke relationship with idol worshippers then you have also created an unequal yoke relationship between the church and idol worshippers.

The Sin Of The Unequal Yoke (continued).

With this review and additions we come now to continue our study. Paul asked, “what agreement has the temple of God with idols?” But before you could ask Paul, “*What do you mean by “the temple of God”?*”, Paul declared, “For we are the temple of the living God.” It is of interest to note Paul’s language here. “**Living**” is set in contrast to the idols that are lifeless objects. A similar contrast is set up in *1Thess.1:9* where Paul said the Thessalonian believers “turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.”

A third example of this contrast is found in *Acts 14:15*. When Paul confronted the practice of idolatry in the city of Lystra, he declared to the people, “[we] preach the gospel to you that you should turn from these vain things to the living God.” “**Living**” is set in contrast to “**vain things**”. “Vain things” is a reference to their idols and it describes their idols and their worship of these idols as empty, useless and worthless.

“We are the temple of the living God.” The word **“temple”** is the Greek word **naos** that was used to refer to the inner sanctuary or holy of holies in the Jewish temple. The holy of holies is the place in the temple where God’s glory dwelt. Paul is saying that we, as a body of believers, are the temple of the living God. We are the holy of holies, the place where God dwells. This truth was taught to the Corinthians during Paul’s ministry among them. Paul re-emphasized this truth to them in **1Cor.3:16**. Paul asked, “Do you not know that you are a temple (**naos**) of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” **“Do you not know”** says to them, *“What’s the matter with you? This is a truth you were already taught and that you ought to know.”*

Now, what we are as a body of believers we are also individually. Using the same formula Paul asked the Corinthian Christians in **1Cor.6:19**, “do you not know that your body is a temple (**naos**) of the Holy Spirit who is in you?” 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 a temple of the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit dwells in you. Every Christian in this church is a temple of the Holy Spirit. And together, we are the temple of God. These two facts are intimately and inseparably connected. The one cannot exist without the other.

We live in an age of sinful individualism. This sinful individualism is growing and it has spread to the church. The Bible does not destroy the integrity of your identity and personality as an individual. The Bible upholds the integrity, dignity and importance of your identity and personality as an individual. But the Bible does not support sinful individualism. Your individual identity must be seen within the larger context of the church as the body of Christ and as the temple of God. You cannot exist as a Christian apart from your intimate and inseparable connection to the body of Christ. I have said it and I will say it again : there is no Christianity and no salvation outside of the church.

Your life and conduct as a Christian is your private business. But this privacy means only one thing : you will stand before the Lord God alone in the final judgment to answer for your Christian life and conduct. There is a bigger picture that our privacy is subservient to but which we all try to deny and escape from. That bigger picture is the church, the body of Christ. You cannot escape from it because you are inseparably joined to it. Your denial of the bigger picture does not change the reality unless your denial is proof that you are not a Christian. The bigger picture says your life and conduct as a Christian is also the business of the church because you are intimately and inseparably connected to the church. Whatever you do impacts you either positively or negatively. But whatever you do also impacts the church positively or negatively.

When you form an unequal yoke, you have also formed an unequal yoke with Christ and with the church. When you establish partnership with lawlessness, you have also established a partnership of lawlessness with Christ and with the church. When you establish fellowship (*koinonia*) with darkness you have also established a fellowship (*koinonia*) of darkness with Christ and with the church. When you establish harmony or symphony with Satan you have also established harmony or symphony between Satan and Christ and between Satan and the church. When you establish common commitments with an unbeliever you have also established common commitments between the unbeliever and Christ and the unbeliever and the church. When you establish a pact or common cause with idols and the demons that lurk behind them you also establish a pact or common cause between idols and Christ, between idols and the church, between demons and Christ and between demons and the church.

You must understand that as a Christian you are not an individualist and cannot be an individualist. Christian individualism is a heresy. Christian individualism is a satanic lie. Whatever you do, whether good or bad, whether honoring to God or dishonoring to God, whether glorifying to God or blaspheming to God, impacts you, impacts Christ, impacts Christ's body, the church, and impacts the Holy Spirit who lives in you. *Eph.4:30* says, "do not grieve the Holy Spirit." *1Thess.5:19* says, "do not quench the Spirit."

If you form an unequal yoke that is your private business but that is also Christ's business and that is also the church's business. If you form an unequal yoke that is also a church discipline matter. The nature of the church discipline will depend on the nature of the unequal yoke that is formed. In other words, the nature of the unequal yoke that is formed will determine whether you are put on discipline or excommunicated. I want to clearly warn that if you form an unequal yoke with idols you will be excommunicated.

I want to spend a few more minutes here on this sin of individualism in the church. In the parable of the vine and branches in *Jn.15:1-11* Jesus took a clear stand against this sin of individualism in the church. In this parable the branches are the members of the visible church. The vine is Jesus. In *vs.5* Jesus said, "I am the vine, you are the branches." At the heart of this parable we find an emphasis on unity in the midst of plurality. The branches exist on the vine individually but without individualism. The branches are dependent on the vine for life and sustenance.

If any branch is separated from the vine, what will happen? That branch will dry up and die. In *vs.6* Jesus made it plain that branches that do not abide in Him dry up and they are gathered and cast into the fire and burned. The drying up of the branch is the picture of death. In other words, what will happen to the professed Christian who wants to practice individualism? He could find himself facing spiritual death and the fire. This fire is no ordinary fire. This fire is the judgment of eternal fire. **Leon Morris** noted that we must be in no doubt as to the ultimate and horrific fate of the dried branch.

Let me expand the imagery. The church is the body of Christ. The imagery of the human body is used in *1Cor.12* to explain how the church functions. Now if any organ is separated from the body, what will happen to that organ? It will die. The organ cannot live apart from the body. In the same way the one who claims to be a Christian cannot spiritually survive and live the Christian life disconnected from the body.

Let us use the imagery of the temple or building. Go home and take out a brick from the wall in your house. Take it out carefully without breaking it. Now, is that brick a part of your house? No! It may be a perfect brick. But that's all it is : a perfect brick. It is only when this brick is joined to the other bricks in the house that it becomes a part of the house. There are many professed Christians today who are like this brick : they are not an intimate and inseparable part of God's temple, God's building, God's dwelling, God's house. (*Eph.2:20-22; 1Pet.2:5*). In other words, they are not joined to Christ. They are not a part of Christ. They may seem to have all the characteristics of those who are intimately and inseparably joined to Christ. But they are not joined to Christ. And they are on their way to hell and do not know it.

Now let me point the application in another direction. The church is the body of Christ. *Heb.10:25* says we are not to forsake our own assembling together. What happens when you are missing on the Lord's Day? Sometimes your absence is genuinely legitimate and unavoidable. But there are those times when your absence is by deliberate choice, inexcusable and sinful. Very sadly, in the modern church it is often a light matter for many to be absent on the Lord's Day. There are various reasons why church members treat absence from church on the Lord's Day as a light matter. One reason has to do with the world's mindset and its corrupting influence on church members. So often you hear people saying to you, *"Fifty-two Sundays in the year. What is the big deal in missing church for one Sunday?"*

Is our gathering together as a church on the Lord's Day some kind of traditional religious practice instituted by church leaders? Or is our gathering together as a church on the Lord's Day the Lord's revealed will for us? There is no command in God's word that says, "Thou shalt gather as a church every Sunday." But the precedent practice of the N.T. church established by the Lord's apostles carries the same weight as a direct command. We have seen in past studies how the church gathering on the Lord's Day

became a spiritual and moral practice. We have seen the warning in **Heb.10:25** against failing to assemble with the church. We have seen that the context of this warning was persecution that could have resulted in imprisonment, loss of property and even death. The modern Christian is absent very often because of selfish individualism. He is absent because he is tired or because it is raining. The frivolous reasons are endless. He is not absent because he is facing imprisonment, loss of property or death. **Heb.10:25** is saying to us that the excuses of imprisonment, loss of property or death are not good enough to justify your absence from the gathered church on the Lord's Day.

Now Brethren, when we gather here as a church on the Lord's Day, in keeping with the Lord's revealed will, we are gathered to meet with and worship the Lord Jesus Christ. He promised in **Matt.18:20** to be here with us when we gather together. When we gather to meet with Him we are also gathering to meet with Him in fellowship with one another. On the Lord's Day you cannot meet with Christ, who is the Head, apart from His body. Now before you rush to, "*Pastor, what about...?*", let us deal with the norm and establish the norm before seeking to apply the norm to the abnormal. The norm is that on the Lord's Day you must find yourself in the Lord's house with the Lord's people worshipping the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, I indicated already that some absences from church on the Lord's Day are void of spiritual and moral compromise and genuinely legitimate and unavoidable. But Brethren, when you are missing on the Lord's Day, regardless of the reason, it does not change the fact that a part of Christ's body is missing, that a part of the temple or sanctuary of God is missing, that a member of God's household is missing, that a living stone in God's building is missing.

If you love God's household as you ought to, you will sit at His table conscious that someone you love is missing. If you love Christ's body as you ought to, you will worship conscious that a part of you is missing. When you are missing at an important family meal

the household must sit at the table but it will never be the same as when you are there. The same is true every Lord's Day. The members of Christ are gathered with Christ but there is an empty seat. The members of the divine family are gathered with the Heavenly Father but there is an empty seat. This is the Biblical reality of what it means for us to be Christ's church and God's household. When you are missing, you are missing and it is never the same as when you are present.

Now Brethren, I want to ask : is this teaching regarding the unequal yoke unique to the N.T.? The answer is an emphatic **"NO!"**. I want you to turn with me to the following sampling of passages. Pay close attention as I read them because I will read them without comment : **(read) *Exod.34:12-17; Deut.4:10-19; 7:1-5; 12:29-32.***

Now turn to ***Psa.1.*** **(read)**. The warning in this opening psalm is very simple : do not form an unequal yoke with the non-Christian. Why? The lifestyle of the non-Christian is to be avoided, not emulated. The three verbs, "walk, stand, sit", describe a life immersed in and focused on association with all that is opposed to God. But the order of the verbs indicate a gradual descent into evil, in which one walks alongside evil, then one stops and takes a stand with evil, and finally one takes up permanent residence in the company of the wicked. The verb **"stand"** has more of the sense of **"taking a stand"** with or for something. The verb **"sit"** conveys the idea of dwelling or taking up residence in a place. **Derek Kidner** noted that the three verbs *"draw attention to the realms of thinking, behaving and belonging, in which a person's fundamental choice of allegiance is made and carried through."*

Establishing an allegiance with the wicked to live under their counsel, values and principles is set in contrast to delighting in the word of God and obeying the word of God. God does not want you to be unequally yoked together with non-Christians. God does not want you to establish allegiances with non-Christians. Instead He calls upon you to live a life of godly separation from the world. He wants you to be in the world but not of

the world. Your godliness must be rooted in His word. God's promises of blessings are directed towards those who live a life of Biblical and godly separation from the world. Let us return now to **2Cor.6** and take note of the promises made there.

Instead of forming unequal yoke relationships, God's command to you is "come out from their midst and be separate." (**2Cor.6:17**). A literal translation is "come out from among them and separate yourselves." The second command, "separate yourselves", reinforces the first, "come out." Both commands call for a single unrepeated action. The Greek word translated "midst" or "among" emphasizes the totality of the separation. (**Harris**). I want to emphasize that the separation is spiritual and moral. As the temple of God, as the special dwelling place of God on this earth, you must be holy. If the separation is secondary and physical, then as Paul said, you will have to go out of the world. (cf. **1Cor.5:10**).

The point here is that when you realize that a relationship is becoming or will lead to the formation of an unequal yoke you need to take single unrepeated action : **come out ... separate yourself**. There is no room here for : let me try again and see what will happen and if the worse comes I can always walk away. The commands call for single unrepeated action. Walk away and do not behave like Lot's wife and look back.

The promises in **2Cor.6:14-18** are in two sections. And I want you to note that Paul's five questions in **vss.14-16** are matched by seven promises. The seven promises are :

- 1). "I will dwell in them."
- 2). "*I will walk among them.*"
- 3). "I will be their God."
- 4). "*They shall be My people.*"
- 5). "I will welcome you."
- 6). "*I will be a father to you.*"
- 7). "You shall be sons and daughters to Me."

The first four promises in *vs.16* are made to us on the basis that we are the temple of God and have no relationship or dealings with idols. *Vs.17* begins with a command introduced with the word “therefore”. “**Therefore**” points back to all Paul said from *vs.14*. The idea is that on the basis that you are yoked to Christ and have not formed an unequal yoke, you must come out and separate yourself. Inherent in the idea of holiness is the idea of separation : separation unto God and separation from all that is opposed to God. In *vs.16* the promises focus on the temple motif. In *vs.18* the promises focus on family of God motif. **Harris** noted, “*Christians are not only God’s temple and God’s people but they are also individual members of His family.*”

The contextual teaching regarding the unequal yoke actually ends in *2Cor.7:1*. (**read**). Note the word “therefore”. The word “therefore” points you to all that was stated before. The “therefore” is also reinforced by the words “having these promises”. The verb “having” tells us that we continually have these promises given to us in *vss.16-18*. The promises form the basis for another set of commands that re-emphasizes the call to holiness.

“Let us cleanse ourselves” focuses on the need to maintain purity. **Harris** says the idea is “let us cleanse ourselves by keeping clear of...” “**Defilement**” points to religious defilement that comes from associating with idols or worshipping other gods. Note the clear emphasis : “all defilement”. The word “flesh” refers to our physical body. Paul’s point is that any association with idols and / or worshipping idols defiles us in our body and spirit. It defiles our whole being just like sexual immorality defiles our whole being. It makes us morally unclean and unfit to worship the true and living God. **Harris** wrote, “*The urgent call to avoid both physical and spiritual defilement restates the earlier entreaties to repudiate unholy alliances and to reject the pagan way of life.*” The failure to repudiate these unholy alliances jeopardizes your exclusive devotion to Christ.

We have in this verse the “**put off ... put on**” principle. We are to cleanse ourselves. And then we must “perfect holiness”. The verb calls on us to be continually perfecting holiness. The verb “**perfect**” means to bring to completion; to bring to its intended goal. It does not mean to become perfect. The motivation for obeying these commands is “the fear of God”. The sphere or context for obeying these commands is “the fear of God.” “**The fear of God**” is reverential awe for God and holy dread of God. Those who do not fear God bring upon themselves the wrath of God.

Now in closing I want to clearly state : the God who revealed Himself to us in the Bible is the only true and living God. (*1Thess.1:9*). How do we identify this true and living God? *Jn.17:3* tells us that the only true God sent Jesus Christ into this world. We will come back to this in a moment. In *Isa.44:8* God asked, “Is there any God besides Me?” And He answered, “I know of none.” In *Isa.45* we find the following :

Vs.5, “I am the Lord, and there is no other.”

Vs.6, “*I am the Lord, and there is no other.*”

Vs.14, “there is none else, no other God.”

Vs.18, “*I am the Lord, and there is none else.*”

Vs.21, “there is no other God besides Me,... There is none except Me.”

The world says that all the gods from the religions of this world are the same god. That is a satanic lie from hell. There is only one God. In *Isa.42:8* He said, “I am the Lord, that is My name.” His name in the Hebrew language is “**Yahweh**”. This name has been translated in the English as “**LORD**”. Now let us draw some lines here. The only true and living God is the LORD. All the other gods in the many religions of this world, regardless of their names, are false gods and idols.

The second line is this : the only true and living God has revealed Himself to us through the Bible alone. Every other religious book in this world that claims to be holy scripture is

false. If the religious book is false then the religion it has established is false.

The message of the only true and living God for you is this : “Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God and there is no other.” (*Isa.45:22*). There is only one God who saves sinners. There is only one God who forgives sins. This God forgives sins and saves sinners through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. If you want your sins forgiven today and you want salvation today, turn to the Lord Jesus Christ and ask Him to forgive your sins and save you. Lift up your heart to Christ in prayer right now, right where you are seated, and ask Him to forgive your sins and save you. Let us bow before Him.