

Good morning brothers, sisters, and visitors. Well, it's been several months since I have been before you in this pulpit. And on these occasions when Brother Blair is traveling or preaching at another church – as is the case today – I truly enjoy the privilege to come before you and bring a message. As Blair, the other elders, and Brother Jeff just a couple of weeks ago have acknowledged before, we are always *more blessed* to study and prepare for the message than the congregation is to receive the unsearchable riches of Scripture, and this week has been no exception for me.

However, as we are usually in the midst of the series of expositional preaching -- as we are now enjoying 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter with Brother Blair -- it is always a challenge to present a clear, crisp, edifying presentation of Biblical truth that both fits in the flow of the current expositional series and that can be covered meaningfully in one stand-alone message. And that is my opportunity before you this morning. Let's get right to it, shall we?

Now I want to start with a fundamental promise and axiom, a fundamental truth, that has been proven over the history of the church: The more you examine the Scriptures as a believer, the more amazing the consistency, harmony, and profound power of the Gospel is unveiled before your eyes. I sincerely hope that this is true in your walk with Christ as well. If not, one of my primary goals this morning is to demonstrate this foundational truth to you this morning, and to encourage you in your own study and meditation in God's Word.

Hopefully you will recall that just a few weeks ago we were studying the following passage in 1<sup>st</sup> Peter, please turn with me to 1 Peter Chapter 2:4-8:

4 And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is [i]choice and precious in the sight of God, 5 you also, as living stones, [j]are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 6 For *this* is contained in [k]Scripture:

“Behold, I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious corner *stone*,  
And he who believes in [l]Him will not be [m]disappointed.”

7 This precious value, then, is for you who believe; but for those who disbelieve,

“The stone which the builders rejected,  
This became the very corner *stone*,”

8 and,

“A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense”;

for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this *doom* they were also appointed.

Now as we studied this passage a few weeks ago, we were exposed to one of the most basic and one of the most foundational doctrines of the Bible. In this passage, Peter was calling

these scattered aliens in a positive manner to “come to Him” who is “precious in the sight of God”. In this fashion, the apostle Peter was describing the positive side of our sanctification – to be drawn ever closer to the perfect Christ, to rely completely on His work and His Grace, and proclaiming a few verses later (verse 9) the reason for this calling,

“9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for *God's* own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10 for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

So as I just mentioned, this instruction to these scattered aliens is *the positive instruction* on how to live “if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord” (verse 3), “coming to Him” (verse 4). In verses 11 and onward, Peter continues to provide affirmative direction on how to live as “God's own possession”, as we are continuing in our study of 1<sup>st</sup> Peter with Pastor Blair.

Now this morning, I thought I would continue to concentrate on our being made more holy (sanctification), but take us to a completely different epistle, written to a particular church (rather than several believers scattered abroad), and which addresses sanctification from a different perspective. Indeed what we're going to learn in the text this morning is a cornerstone in all Christian understanding and all Christian conduct. We're going to be identifying a principle today that is expounded by the apostle Paul that has far-reaching and crucial implications for our usefulness, for our obedience, and for our blessing.

Let's turn to 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians chapter 6. And we won't have a lot of time introducing this Book or this passage – that will have to wait for a time that we might study the letters to the Corinthians in more detail. I want to get right into the principle here because it is so very, very important in context of our current study in 1<sup>st</sup> Peter. Turn back with me to 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians chapter 6 verse 14. Let me read the paragraph again that follows from verse 14, “Do not be bound together with unbelievers, for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness or what fellowship has light with darkness, or what harmony has Christ with Belial – ” that is a name for Satan – “or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? 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. Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate,’ says the Lord, ‘and do not touch what is unclean and I will welcome you. And I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to Me,’ says the Lord Almighty.’ Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”

Now this tends to be the most familiar portion of Scripture found in 2 Corinthians. The statement that begins verse 14 may be one of the most oft-quoted portions of this marvelous epistle. It says, “Do not be bound together” – you may recall the KJV phrase “unequally yoked” – “with unbelievers.” And that is the principle which is so foundational, so much a cornerstone of Christian living that we have to give our attention to it very, very carefully. As with all of Scripture, we do not want to be flippant about what Paul was instructing for the Church at Corinth.

Now just at first reading it is clear from this passage that the apostle Paul identifies two opposing worlds, two opposing realms or spheres or kingdoms or dimensions of life. One is described and characterized by righteousness, light, Christ, believers and the presence of God. The other is characterized, or described as lawless, dark, satanic, occupied by unbelievers and the presence of idols. Two societies, two realms which stand utterly different, utterly distinct, and completely incompatible. And the apostle says there is no possibility for people in these two kingdoms to be bound together in common work, no partnership, no fellowship, no harmony, no commonality and no agreement does or can really exist.

No one is capable of living with integrity in both worlds. Some people try unsuccessfully, but the realities are simply inharmonious. One is old; the other is new. One is earthly; the other is heavenly. One is deadly; the other is life giving. One is material; the other is spiritual. One is filled with lies; the other is all truth. One relishes in the unclean and the other strives for purity. And Paul’s message in this text is intended to make it very clear to all Christians that there is no possibility of living in both or shuttling back and forth.

You say, “Why does he address that here?” Answer, because the Corinthians were endeavoring to live in both or at least to run back and forth between the two. They had come to Christ. In chapter 5 in verse 17, the apostle Paul had stated that “If any man is in Christ he is a new creature. The old things passed away, behold new things have come.” Salvation is called newness of life, and the Corinthians had entered into that newness. They had come to the new and the heavenly and the life giving and the spiritual and the true. They had come into the kingdom that is characterized by righteousness, light, Christ and the presence of God. And there was no possibility of having a relationship of any intimacy with what was old and earthly and deadly and material and filled with lies, what was lawless and dark and satanic and idolatrous. They had been made pure and they could have no further fellowship with what was impure. That’s Paul’s message and the Corinthians needed to hear it. Why? Because by many issues that he addresses in both 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians demonstrates they were moving back and forth between the two incompatible, incongruous realms.

Like the Thessalonians of whom Paul says, “You turned to God from idols,” 1 Thessalonians 1:9, the Corinthians had come to serve the living and the true God from idols, but they didn’t make a clean break. They had been wooed back into the old idolatry, back into the old pagan culture

because it was so pervasive and so dominant, and it was so on display and so woven into the fabric of their life, family life, social life, community life. Corinth was dominated above the city by an acropolis, a high mountain on top of which was the temple to the false deities which engaged itself in pagan ritual and worship and priestess prostitution. This temple not only was the center of that religion, but from it disseminated its religious viewpoints and ideologies through the entire culture of Corinth. It was a part of everything in life. Holidays, festivals, celebrations and so forth. And it was a constant pull to the Corinthians to fall back into those old patterns. And they did.

This is just one reason why the letters to the Corinthians were longer than the letters to the Thessalonians – have you ever wondered about that? -- one reason for the length of the letters to the Corinthians was simply the need for more admonishment, reproof, and correction. And there was really no possibility of any agreement, any harmony, any partnership, any fellowship with that old kingdom. They were allowing themselves, because of the influence of their culture, to get sucked back into the forms of their old idolatry. On a side note, does this possibly remind you of many in the modern American church?

And to make matters worse, into their midst had come false teachers who brought a mixed-up, eclectic kind of religion that took Christianity, Judaism and the most popular forms of pagan idolatry and melted it all together to form a false and satanic and damnable heresy which had had a great influence in the Corinthian church to the degree that some of the Corinthians had even turned against Paul in favor of these false apostles and lying teachers who had come with their doctrine of demons, their satanic concoction.

Once again, does this sound something like our culture, sadly within the modern American church? These are some of the reasons that I tend to agree with a pastor that I heard on the radio over 20 years ago in Indiana, who often stated that 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians could easily be taught as “1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> Americans”. Because it’s very much like modern American Christianity today, that seeks to blend Christianity with popular culture, wants to make Christianity more popular, less different, more palatable, less offensive, less narrow, less exclusive in the world. And the result of it is that true Christianity and the purity of God’s Word gets corrupted by compromise, and the church can become useless and shameful and blasphemous in mocking the truth.

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And so the Corinthians were trying to link Christianity with this new stuff, and even to link Paul with these false apostles, and such was an absolute and utter impossibility. And more than just being impossible, it was frighteningly damaging, as we will see. So Paul has to address himself to this problem in Corinth. It was there when he wrote the first letter, 1 Corinthians, to them. And so Paul makes a direct statement in verse 14 that is the command, the mandate, the standard and the principle which is expounded in the rest of the text. It is this, “Do not be bound together with unbelievers.”

That is a classic call by the apostle to separation from unbelievers. And, in fact, that is the greatest challenge that you as a Christian have, and me, too. Not to be bound together with unbelievers is our greatest challenge. To live a separated life is a tremendous challenge, particularly in a culture which is bombarding us with all of the elements of paganism. But It is not only our greatest challenge brothers and sisters -- it is our greatest source of joy and usefulness when we obey that command, if we indeed "have tasted the kindness of the Lord".

The people of God cannot form intimate relationships with those who don't belong to God. All relationships like that are superficial. You cannot make a meaningful relationship with an enemy of the gospel. They live in a different world with a different and completely hostile and antagonistic leader.

So now we must consider what does that mean? What are the implications of that? Well first of all, the term "bound together" is well translated as "unequally yoked" in the KJV because it comes from a Greek term that can have that implication. In fact, the Greek term, *heterozuge*, can be used of yoking up in a common effort. Paul draws this analogy, however, not from the usage of the Greek term but from a concept back in Deuteronomy 22:10. Here, when God was laying out prescriptions for the conduct of His people, He instructed them that they were not to plow with an ox and a donkey yoked together. And the reasons for that are obvious. Those two animals have two different natures. They don't have the same gait, they don't have the same disposition or instincts, they don't have the same strength. Completely different natures. You can't yoke them up and expect a straight furrow. And so, Paul is borrowing from the Hebrew analogy of the Old Testament, and as well, borrowing from some of the Greek usage of that very term because it does mean to be yoked differently, to be involved in a common enterprise linked together. And to have to do the same thing in perfect harmony is an utter impossibility if we are talking about a believer and an unbeliever. Do not allow yourself to be bound together in a yoke with an unbeliever. Now that opens up all kinds of possibilities. What in the world does Paul mean when he says, "Don't be bound together with unbelievers?" Have you ever struggled with this command? We absolutely need to understand this, because the implications have profound significance for our lives after salvation.

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Now, someone is going to come along (as they have many times in church history) and say, "Well look, in the purest and truest sense it's really calling you to the monastic life style." That what it's calling you to is that you should do like those monks of centuries ago, put on some dirty clothes and find a cave and stay there till you die. And you know, just stay up there and get dirtier and dirtier and read the Scripture and contemplate your navel and don't

let anybody influence you. Just isolate yourself. This was the misinterpretation of this that was behind what has been termed the “monastic mentality”.

And some of us in a more modern environment might not go as far as monasticism, but might take the approach to declare the following, what it really means is you better be sure that you:

- buy your home from a Christian real estate agent,
- buy your car from a Christian car dealer,
- buy your insurance from a Christian agent,
- invest in only Christian mutual funds,
- you’ve got Christian neighbors,
- you find a Christian butcher,
- and on and on and on...

Where do we draw this line here? How far does this go? What about a partnership? What about being on a team? What about working together with someone? What about recreating together with them? What about a common business? What about a partnership? What about a limited partnership? What about dating? What about marriage? What about...what about? Where do we draw the line here? What are we talking about? Are we supposed to go out of the world? Well that’s kind of hard because the great commission says go into the world and preach the gospel to every creature, right? So we’re not supposed to go out of the world.

In fact, look what Paul said to the Corinthians. They would understand that statement in the context of what he had already said to them. So let’s go back to 1 Corinthians and see how Paul defines what he means by that. And he sets some very clear parameters so that we don’t have to be confused. First Corinthians chapter 9 verse 19 really sets it up. “Although I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all that I might win them more.” Now Paul is saying, “Look, I’m free from all men, in one sense. I have been catapulted into the kingdom of light. There are no encumbrances in this world, but I have made myself consciously and purposely a slave to them all for evangelistic purposes.” So Paul didn’t want to pull out of the world. He was anything but a monastic. I mean, he was in the middle of everything. He was in the middle of every crowd there was. He was like Jesus; he created crowds. He went where the sinners were for the purpose of evangelism. So he says, verse 20, “To the Jews I became as a Jew that I might win Jews, to those who were under the law as under the law, though not being myself under the law, that I might win those who are under the law.” He became a Jew and to those fastidious law-keeping Pharisees, he even followed their path, if need be, to win them.

And to those who are without law, Gentiles, verse 21, he “became as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, that I might win those who are

without law. To the weak I became weak that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men that I may by all means save some, and I do all things for the sake of the gospel that I may become a fellow partaker of it," another way of saying that I might have partners in this deal, I want to win people to Christ.

So it's quite apparent that Paul didn't leave the world. He didn't run from it. He got right in the middle of it for the purpose of leading people to the knowledge of Christ. He is not calling for isolation. There's no place for isolation from unbelievers. If God wanted us isolated from unbelievers, He would have saved us and instantly catapulted us into heaven. He's not calling for isolation. In fact, we are mandated to intersect with the unsaved all the time. Now let's follow this and see where Paul really sets his limits.

Let's begin by going back a little further into 1 Corinthians at chapter 5. Somebody now might want to say, "Well, I'll tell you right now, I want to limit my association with worldly people. I'm just not going to associate with the worst riff-raff; I just want to stay away from that. Is that where I draw the line?" Well, 1 Corinthians 5:9, "I wrote to you in my letter – " previous to 1 Corinthians he had written them a letter – "I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people." And if you stop right there somebody is going to say, "That's it, there it is, that's the proof, I'm not going to associate with them."

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But, Paul continues in verse 10, "I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world." I'm not talking about unregenerate immoral people or covetous or swindlers, or idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world. And the implication would be to do that would be what? Sinful, wrong, shirking your responsibility. I don't want you to go up in a cave. Paul says, "No, no, I'm not talking about not associating with immoral people in the world, – " verse 11 – "I'm talking about associating with so-called brothers who are immoral, covetous, idolaters, revilers, drunkards, swindlers."

Paul was not inspired by the Holy Spirit to write about immoral people in the world, he's talking about immoral people where? In the church. You've got to deal with those people. They'll pollute the fellowship. They're like leaven. You've got to put them out, you've got to turn them over to Satan, you've got to deal with them, don't eat with them. If they're heretics, admonish them a few times and then dismiss them. Verse 12, "For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church? But those who are outside God judges."

Paul's concern is those who are outside, who "are going to fall into the judgment of God," and we need to reach them with the gospel. So whatever it means not to be joined together or unequally yoked with unbelievers, it doesn't mean that we are to cut ourselves off from sinful unbelievers. Then we would have to go out of the world. And going out of the world would

defeat the very purpose for which God has left us in the world, and that is to go into the world and preach the gospel to every creature. So at this point, can we all agree on that?

Now I know what somebody else is going to say, "I know what it means. It means that if you're married to an unbeliever, you get to get a divorce. You've got to get rid of them because, after all, if you can't have any kind of fellowship at the most intimate level, how can light have any fellowship with darkness? How can you have a marriage that honors God? So dump that unsaved partner as soon as possible. Find yourself a nice Christian guy, nice Christian lady." Is that what it means?

Turn to 1 Corinthians 7, 1 Corinthians 7 verse 12, "Paul says to the rest, I say not the Lord – " please understand what that means, it does not represent a divine disclaimer as some have claimed. All he's saying here is "I'm not quoting Jesus anymore." He is inspired by the Holy Spirit to say what he said. Paul's words here are still the truth of God, but he is no longer drawing from the teaching of Jesus. So he says, "If any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever and she consents to live with him, let him not divorce her." And the same is true in verse 13, "A woman who has an unbelieving husband and he consents to live with her, let her not send her husband away."

Because it might have been a natural implication of the teaching and all things being new and entering into the kingdom and into the light from the darkness, and having a new master, namely Christ, and realizing that you no longer could have the kind of intimate relationship that you now have in Christ, some might think the right thing to do would be to dump that person and find a Christian so you could really fulfill life. But the Bible says no, absolutely not. God hates divorce, any kind.

So what does it mean? It doesn't mean dump your unsaved spouse. It doesn't mean cut yourself off from all the bad people in your society. What does it mean? Where are the limitations to be drawn?

Well, we've already seen some of the limits that the Corinthians would have understood. Let me take you further to something they would well have understood. Paul has one thing in mind, folks, one thing in mind. The Corinthians were all messed up with false teachers teaching them a corrupted religion, corrupted by paganism. And if that weren't enough, they were surrounded by a culture of the lost steeped in paganism. To "Corinthianize" meant to go to bed with a prostitute. That's how identified their city was with wickedness. And what the apostle is saying to them is, "You cannot link up with false teachers and false apostles and false religion. That is the issue." That is the issue.

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Let's go to back to 1 Corinthians again, chapter 10 this time. And I want to show you this because it's so important to understand the issue here. Paul starts the tenth chapter of 1

Corinthians with an illustration about Moses and the children of Israel, how there was tremendous solidarity at first in the Exodus. They were all brought collectively under the cloud; they all passed through the sea; they were all immersed into the leadership of Moses. They all had the same spiritual food, the manna from heaven, the water. They all drank that same spiritual drink. They were all cared for by God.

But later in verse 5, God wasn't well pleased with them. You remember why, because they got involved in idolatry. Verse 7, "Do not be idolaters as some of them were," and it tells about their idolatry, reminding us that they sat down to eat and drink and stood up to play, defining their idolatry. And they acted immorally, 23,000 of them had to be killed, destroyed by serpents, a terrible, terrible tragedy. Here was the story, follow this. Children of Israel collectively in Egypt. God comes and works a work of redemption. They're brought out of Egypt. They are now a redeemed people. They come into the wilderness, they're headed for Canaan. They get into the wilderness and they start to worship in an idolatrous fashion. They make a golden calf. They fall into wicked immorality and idolatry and they all die in the wilderness.

Why? Though they had been liberated out of captivity, they had gone through the redemptive provision of God. Instead of remaining pure, they went back to paganism. Where did they learn about a golden calf? You tell me. Where did that come from? Egypt. They went back. It's exactly what the Corinthians were doing, going back to idolatry, and with it that horrible immorality with those temple priestesses. So in verse 14, after that illustration, Paul says to them, "My beloved, flee from idolatry." Don't go back.

And then he tells them why. "Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ; is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ? And since there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread." Look at the nation Israel. Are not those who eat the sacrifices sharers in the altar?" Again he's talking about we're one people. We're all one people, we've all been redeemed.

Yet what was happening with the Corinthians? Look at the end of verse 20, "I do not want you to become sharers in demons." You can't just casually go back to that. "You can't drink –" verse 21 – "the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You can't partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. What do you want to do –" verse 22 – "provoke the Lord to jealousy like Israel did?" Do you think you're stronger than He is? It's the same warning.

When Paul then says, "Do not be bound together with unbelievers," he is calling for separation...listen carefully...at the religious, really the **spiritual**, level. That's what he means. You can't play with false religion. You can't yoke up true teachers and false teachers. You can't take true Christianity and link it to a false, damnable demonic lie. You can't do that. You have to separate yourself from all of that.

For instance, in 1 Timothy chapter 1, Paul, in verse verses 19 and 20, “Keeping faith – ” hold on to the faith – “and a good clear conscience which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith. Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have delivered to Satan that they may be taught not to blaspheme.” Paul had to go into that church and literally throw out the false teachers who were teaching blasphemous heresy, who were shipwrecking people’s faith. He turned them over to Satan. You can’t allow that in the church. You can’t link up with that.

Over in chapter 4, he talks about hypocritical liars seared in their own consciences, who teach the doctrines of demons and are energized by deceitful spirits. In chapter 6 verse 3 he says, “When anybody like this comes along with a different doctrine that doesn’t agree with sound words, the words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the doctrine conforming to godliness, he is conceited, understands nothing, has a morbid interest in controversial questions, disputes about words, operates out of envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicion creates constant friction. They’re men of depraved mind, deprived of the truth.”

The point is to have nothing to do with them. Verse 20 of that same chapter, chapter 6, “Avoid worldly and empty chatter, avoid the opposing arguments of what is falsely called knowledge which some have professed and gone astray from the faith.” Listen. Satan’s number one assault on the church is to infiltrate with error. To get in the church and teach lies, error, bad theology, to bring in subtle syncretism with other religions, to bring in stuff that sounds good on the surface but it is doctrine of demons. That’s how he operates. And he had done it in Corinth and Paul says you can’t do that. It is disastrous.

What it says about Satan is everything. That’s always been his approach. He doesn’t want to *fight* the Church; he wants to what? He wants to *join* it. When he fights the church it explodes and the blood of the martyrs becomes the seed and seal of the Church and its growth. Yet when he joins the church it dies. So he always wants to get involved in it. And witless, reckless, undiscerning believers take it for the latest evangelistic strategy and embrace it. What folly. It’s not an evangelistic strategy, it’s slow suicide. Unbelievers and believers cannot be yoked in common spiritual enterprise. Truth and error cannot go together. They are opposite in nature; they are pulling in opposite directions; they are headed toward opposite goals; they are motivated by opposite desires, and they’re controlled by enemy kingdoms.

What we’re talking about here is any linking together with an unbeliever in any religious or spiritual enterprise. That’s what we’re talking about. We’re not talking about where you bank; you can rest easy. We’re not talking about you should quit your job cause you work with non-believers. We’re not talking about Christians pulling out of society because we don’t have a Christian government. We’re not talking about leaving your neighborhood. We’re not talking about any of that. We’re talking about a spiritual enterprise, worship, ministry, evangelism.

Religious cooperation between the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of light is ridiculous. Why would we want to give Satan access to any part of the work of God?

The heathen who do not know Christ, who do not have a genuine place in the kingdom of God cannot join the enterprise of the church. Many of them will be completely pagan on the outside and easy to spot. Yet often the ones you have to watch for are the most religious; the ones most subtly like Christians. Satan is wily, covert, subtle and crafty. As are many positions we take in this little Church, it is not popular to take this particular viewpoint, but it's fairly safe because it's in the Bible – and as such I feel very comfortable there, and I hope you do as well. There's no place for compromise.

That is the issue. Pagan religion, false teaching ruins those who listen to it. It leads to ungodliness. It spreads like gangrene and it upsets the faith of people. Paul directed all of that to Timothy and warned him to warn the church. The issue then is religious cooperation, religious compromise with false teachers and with heresy and error. Listen, we simply can have nothing to do with the people involved in that when they are so involved. And yet, through the years much of the American church has continued to do this. Sometimes it's called *cooperative evangelism* where an evangelist will come into a city and bring together Christians and non-Christians (even though they often call themselves "christian"), those who believe the Word of God and those liberals who would openly deny the Word of God, in a common "evangelistic" enterprise. That is in direct violation of what this text is teaching. Yet it happens all the time in common efforts at "evangelism".

Sadly it also happens in educational institutions – including seminaries – where those institutions that would claim to be Christians would have on their faculty those who believe the Word of God, those who were born again, and those who are not. And they are illegitimately linked together in a common spiritual enterprise, to the detriment of the church, to the debilitation of the believers and the false assurance of the unbelievers. True Christians have to separate from unbelievers in matters related to ministry, teaching and worship. And when I say teaching, I'm talking about teaching that relates to God and His truth.

So Paul establishes that principle firmly. And in response to that initial principle we find in verse 14 he gives us four reasons, or four primary motives for following this mandate. And I mentioned during the introduction, in order to contrast with our study in 1<sup>st</sup> Peter, where the apostle Peter was coming mostly from a positive outlook, I want to approach those motives in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians passage from a negative perspective, if I might. And we will just look at these briefly:

1. To be bound together with unbelievers in any spiritual effort is, number one, **irrational**. As we shall see, it simply does not make sense. And to make this point of the sheer nonsense of such a common enterprise with unbelievers, he asks four rhetorical questions, each of which

demands a negative answer. Here they come, verse 14, “For what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or Satan? Or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?” And the answer to those is negative. Righteousness and lawlessness have no partnership. Light and darkness have no fellowship. Christ and Satan have no harmony. And a believer and an unbeliever have nothing in the spiritual realm in common.

It is obvious that you can't make opposites the same. And those are all opposites. Those four rhetorical questions set in place the utter ridiculousness of Christians and pagans working together in some spiritual enterprise, engaging in some worship, or being involved in the dissemination of, supposedly, divine truth.

Here is a survey of Scriptures to anchor this principle into your mind:

- Matthew, verse 23, Christ condemning the Pharisees – “like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. Even so, you too outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.”
- First John chapter 3 in verse 4, “Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.” But verse 10, “By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious, anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother.”
- John 8:12, Jesus makes a very clear distinction. “I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life.” Light referring to righteousness, darkness referring to lawlessness.
- In Acts 26, when Paul was commissioned and called into ministry he was told that he was going to bring a light and open the eyes of the Gentiles that they might see the light. Ephesians 5 talks about that, the kingdom of light. Colossians 1, “We've been translated out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son which is a kingdom of light.”
- Peter even writes about this marvelous kingdom, this kingdom of light. It says in 1 Peter 2:9 that, “He has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light.”
- First John 1 says, “We walk in light not in darkness.”
- Unbelievers, sad to say, are the children of Satan. “They walk according to the prince of the power of the air – ” Ephesians 2:2 – “according to the spirit who works in them who are called the sons of disobedience. They are lawless, disobedient subjects to Satan who walk in a kingdom of darkness. There can be no harmony with them.

Any attempt to get together in a denomination, any attempt to get together in an association, any attempt to get together in some kind of a ministry of evangelism, a campus ministry, a crusade, any kind of event like that, an attempt to get together in a school setting, an

educational environment, and supposedly be able to commonly move toward one goal is ridiculous with unbelievers. Any attempt at fellowship in common spiritual life with unbelievers is ridiculous, damaging, and falsely reassuring to that unbeliever. And notice that Satan disguises himself; let me remind you of 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 11. He disguises himself as an angel of light; works in false religion, his messengers are disguised as angels of light. He crawls into the religious garments and tries to perpetrate his religions, and he sucks believers into compromises with those false religions, including Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Roman Catholics or whatever other heresies and errors are abounding, you cannot partner with those people in a common spiritual enterprise.

It's sad to think about it. Churches are filled with unbelievers. And this attempt is going on all the time to make this kind of mutual believer/unbeliever partnership work. It is an abomination to God. And because that is so, it is always ineffective. It is usually disastrous. Remember what Pastor Blair has mentioned several times in this pulpit: that other pastors are telling him over and over again that they have figured out what was wrong with their churches. Half his board are saved, and the other half aren't. I can't imagine a worse scenario. How damaging to the witness of the American church.

2. It is not only irrational for believers to be bound together with unbelievers, more importantly it is blasphemous. It is **blasphemous**. Look at verse 16, where Paul makes his second major point, "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.'" The issue here is an issue of sacrilege. All false religion is demon worship.

Now, remember an idol is nothing. You can carve an idol out of wood. You can make an idol out of stone. You can make an idol out of silver; you can make one out of gold. You can do whatever you want to paint one on a wall. You can form one out of marble, whatever it is. When you're done with it, it's nothing.

But the religion and the ideology that it stands for is the teaching of demons. It is lies from the pits. It is the doctrines of demons coming from seducing spirits. So that what happens is demons impersonate the idol, and you worship a demon in the idol, though you don't know it. It is a demon who creates the religion, who conducts the relationship with the worshiper. It is demon communion. And when you go to the table you go to the table of demons. And when you go to the idol, you worship a demon. All the gods of the nation are demons, the Old Testament says, because demons impersonate the idols that men create under their stimulation.

And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? The answer. None, none. You can't mix devil worship and the worship of God. It can't be mixed. Christianity is completely and

totally separate from every form of idolatry. Here are some more Scriptures, this time two terrifying examples from the Old Testament:

- 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 21 verse 1, “Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king, and he reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem. And his mother’s name was Hephzibah. And he did evil in the sight of the Lord, according to the abominations of the nations whom the Lord dispossessed before the sons of Israel.” What did he do? What were the abominations of the nations who used to be in the land? Idolatry. And what did he do? He brought back all the idolatry. He brought back all the abominations that the Lord had dispossessed, as you can read about in this section of 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings.
- In Ezekiel chapter 8 in verse 3, “ ‘The Lord stretched out the form of a hand and caught me by a lock of my head,’ says Ezekiel. ‘And the Spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven and brought me in the visions of God to Jerusalem.’ ” Now God pulls him up out of earth, puts him up in the sky and gives him a vision. And his vision is of Jerusalem to the entrance of the north gate of the inner court. That’s in the temple, where the seat of the idol of jealousy, which provokes to jealousy was located.” God takes him up in a vision and shows him that an idol has been put in the inner court of the temple. And verse 4 says, “The glory of the God of Israel was there.” So alongside the glory of God is an idol. “ ‘And He said to me – ’ in verse 5 – ‘Son of man, raise your eyes now toward the north.’ I raised my eyes toward the north, and behold to the north of the altar gate was this idol of jealousy at the entrance right by the altar. And He said to me, ‘Son of man, do you see what they’re doing? The great abominations which the house of Israel are committing here that I should be far from My sanctuary.’ ” I’m going to have to leave because they’ve brought an idol. But I’m going to show you even greater abominations.’ ” ... The passage continues to describe increasing abominations up to Verse 16, where what does he find? “Twenty-five men with their backs to the temple of the Lord, turning away from God and worshiping the sun, prostrating themselves toward the sun,” an old activity of Egyptian worship. They were committing abominations. Finally in verse 18, “Indeed, I shall deal in wrath.” And He did and destroyed them all and destroyed that temple.

There is no compatibility between the temple of God and idols. That’s the point. Listen, pagans don’t mind joining with Christians in religious activity. They often love it. But we can’t allow it. We cannot allow it. We cannot join with unbelievers in worship or ministry or any enterprise that involves God, nor can we invite them to join our enterprise. And it is because of the sacrilege of it. What agreement has the temple of God with idols? You can’t bring idols into the temple of God. You can’t take the temple of God and put it in an idol temple. And here’s the point. “For we are the temple of the living God.” He’s talking about us individually.

And then he confirms it by a mosaic of Old Testament texts. “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.” And by the

way, that mosaic of Old Testament texts is the blending together of statements made in Leviticus 26:11 and 12, Jeremiah 24:7 and Ezekiel 27 and 37. He is just taking what is the Old Testament teaching and sort of pulling it together in a mosaic and summarizing it, and saying God says He will dwell in His people and walk among them and be their God and they'll belong to Him.

3. To be bound together with unbelievers is also **disobedient**. It is not just irrational and blasphemous; it is disobedient. And verse 17 makes that abundantly clear because it says, "Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate," says the Lord, "and do not touch what is unclean." So here you have a direct command. So someone who links up with false religionists is in direct disobedience. "Therefore" - is a very important link - "since you are the temple of God, since God walks in you, since you are His own possession," as verse 16 says, in effect, "therefore make a clean break."

Realizing that you are personally indwelt by the living and almighty God, realizing the unspeakable grace and privilege of constant communion and power from the resident Holy Spirit, the sovereign One who lives in you leaves you no alternative but to obey your King. And your King says separate, separate. No other option can even be considered. God has expressly commanded this and the command is right here in verse 17. Paul says, "I am speaking for God Himself and telling you come out from their midst and be separate and do not touch what is unclean."

The same thought, in fact in some ways the same words, are expressed by the Old Testament prophet, Isaiah. Turn back to Isaiah chapter 52. Paul knew, certainly, this Scripture well, and it is a suitable companion. In fact, it may well be that Paul had it in mind when he wrote that 17th verse. In Isaiah 52:7, the prophet Isaiah is given revelation from God regarding the coming salvation. He talks about "How lovely on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news" - the gospel - "who announces peace and brings good news of happiness, who announces a salvation and says to Zion, 'Your God reigns!'" In other words, how wonderful it is when someone will come and preach the gospel.

"Listen," verse 8, "your watchmen lift up their voices, they shout joyfully together for they will see with their own eyes when the Lord restores Zion. Break forth, shout joyfully together, you waste places of Jerusalem, for the Lord has comforted His people. He has redeemed Jerusalem. The Lord has bared His holy arm in the sight of all the nations that all the ends of the earth may see the salvation of our God." So we know what he's talking about. He's talking about a time when God is going to send the Savior, and the gospel will be preached and Israel will be saved.

Now verse 11, "When that happens," he says, "depart, depart, go out from there, touch nothing unclean. Go out of the midst of her, purify yourselves." And there is a very similar, if

not a parallel, if not even what Paul has in his mind, the passage that he is building on, as it were, in 2 Corinthians chapter 6. And what is it saying? It's saying, "Look, when salvation comes, make a clean break. Come out of your old idolatrous patterns; come out of those idolatrous habitats." No more idolatrous feasts and festivals and meals and celebrations. You make a clean break.

Ephesians chapter 5 reiterates basically the same principle. Obviously those in Ephesus were coming to Christ out of the same kind of pagan backgrounds and needing to make a very clean break. And in verse 6 of Ephesians 5, Paul talks about people who deceive with empty words, people who are nothing but the sons of disobedience on whom the wrath of God is going to come. And he says to the Ephesians in verse 7, "Do not be partakers with them." Don't partner up with those who are engaged in those false religions. "You were formerly darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light." And verse 10, "Trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord, do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret."

4. Disobedience to this command is also an act of **ingratitude**. Last point, it is ungrateful. Verse 1, and this is another poor chapter break – please recall that the chapter and verse additions to Scripture were neither in the original texts nor are the inspired. "Chapter 7" should really begin at verse 2. Nevertheless, Verse 1 says, "Therefore having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." This is a great verse. Blair could take this verse and preach for six months on the doctrine of progressive sanctification. But I'm not going to start that this morning.

Paul is giving us the final motive for obeying the command, the final motive for separating from unbelievers in religious association. And the final one is, clearly, because of God's promises. Therefore...where we always want to inquire what is it "there for", because it is a consequence of all that has just been said. "Therefore, having these promises let us cleanse ourselves." In other words, he's not appealing to command here, he's appealing to promise.

There are commands; he appealed to them earlier. Verse 14, "Do not be bound together with unbelievers." Verse 17, "Come out from their midst and be separate and do not touch what is unclean." And we are to obey those commands out of a healthy regard for God's chastening if we don't. But he goes beyond commands to promises, "having these promises, beloved." Promises then become the final motive. Promises should elicit love, gratitude, thankfulness. We should be so overwhelmed at such generosity, such gracious privilege, such mercy, such grand blessing.

After all, when we read that we are the temple of the living God and God says, "I will dwell in them and walk among them and I will be their God and they shall be My people." And when

God says, "I will welcome you, I will be a father to you and you shall be sons and daughters to Me," those are the promises of which he speaks, having these promises that God will dwell in us, walk in us, be our God and we'll be His people, that God will embrace us and be our Father and we will be His children.

There are seven separate statements in those two verses, verse 16 and 18, that speak of promise. When we understand those promises, beloved, how can we do less than cleanse ourselves from all defilement? Much like the section of 1<sup>st</sup> Peter where we are studying now, this is an appeal to goodness, God's goodness, mercy. It is also no different, really, than that most notable and familiar of all such appeals in Romans 12 where Paul says, "I urge you to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice." He's calling for separation there, too.

On the basis of God's sovereign love, His predestined purpose, on the basis of God's gospel call, on the basis of justification, on the basis of God's regeneration in your life, on the basis of God having granted you the Holy Spirit and giving you an inheritance with the saints so that you're a joint heir with Jesus Christ, on the basis of God's gift, or the promise of heaven, eternal life, the hope of eternal life, assurance. On the basis of all of that, all those mercies, mercy meaning you don't deserve any of them. On the basis of all of that, can't you at least live a separated life? If you can't, it is blatant ingratitude.

Just to bring this full circle this morning, listen to what Peter says; because Peter makes the same appeal. This is a powerful portion of Scripture that we have yet to encounter with Pastor Blair, 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 1:3. "Seeing that His divine power – " God's divine power – "has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness." We should just cherish that statement. "He has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. By these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises in order that by them you might become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust."

Here is God, through our knowledge of Jesus Christ, by God's own glory and excellence, He has given to us precious and magnificent promises in the gospel that have made us partakers of the divine nature and have caused us to escape the corruption that is in the world. God has been so merciful and so gracious. Now, for this very reason, he says in verse 5, "Apply all diligence in your faith and supply moral excellence." Start to live the life, he says. When you've received all these magnificent promises how can you possibly do less than to respond in obedience?

That's exactly what we have in this text of 2 Corinthians that we have examined together this morning. He couldn't say it any more directly than he said it. "Having these promises, beloved." "Beloved" is a term of endearment from Paul to the people but it also sets the boundaries for who's in on these promises. Only the beloved of God, only those accepted in

the beloved, who is Christ. Paul likes to use that term. He used it twice in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians, twice in 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians to refer to the believers. It is an expression of tender affection, but notice it is also a way to set the limits on the promises.

Those of us who are the beloved, who have received the promises, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. How can we do anything less -- out of sheer gratitude? The fact that we are given such amazing mercies, such amazing promises should be so compelling that we can only respond with gratitude.

Amen and Amen. Let's pray.

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