

**‘Some things just don’t belong together’**

In the **first eleven verses** of **2 Corinthians 6** Paul began by encouraging the Corinthians to hold on to their faith. He told them that he and his preaching companions had went through a lot so that they could preach the Gospel in order for people to hear it.

He says in **2 Corinthians 6:11-13** **‘We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians, and opened wide our hearts to you. We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us. As a fair exchange—I speak as to my children—open wide your hearts also.’** Paul is appealing for them to show their love for him, as he had shown his love for them when he brought the Gospel to them.

A guy named Bob was in trouble because he forgot his wedding anniversary and as you can imagine, his wife was really angry with him. She told him **‘Tomorrow morning, I expect to find a gift in the driveway that goes from 0 to 200 in 6 seconds and it better be there!’** The next morning, he got up early and left for work. When his wife woke up, she looked out the window and sure enough there was a gift-wrapped box in the middle of the driveway. Confused, the wife put on her robe and ran out to the driveway and brought the box back in the house. She opened it and found a brand-new set of bathroom scales. Bob has been missing since Friday.

Relationships are such a blessing, they can be rich and meaningful, and they can bring us all kinds of joy. There’s a modern-day phrase which says, **‘they wear their heart on their sleeve.’** And it means they’re someone who can easily show their emotions and they don’t care what others think. In many ways, that’s what Paul is doing here in **2 Corinthians 6**, he says we’ve opened our hearts to you guys, so please open your hearts to us.

In fact, he’s going to appeal to them to do this again in the very next chapter. **2 Corinthians 7:2** **“Make room for us in your hearts.”** Paul is wearing his heart on his sleeve and he wants the Corinthians to do the same for him.

Now it’s obvious that the Corinthians didn’t respond to Paul the way he wanted them too, because Paul writes, **‘you are withholding your affection from us’.** Putting it in another way, he says, **‘I have made room for you in my heart, but you haven’t made room for me in yours’!**

Now when it comes to relationships, some things work wonderfully together, and some things don’t. For example, cheese and toast go wonderfully together. Bangers and mash are wonderful together. But then you get things like, Marmite and toast. And the most famous one of all in Scotland, vegetables, well, they just don’t go with anything!

And as we go through our text today, we’re going to see that Paul is going to lay down five illustrations in the form of rhetorical questions to prove that two opposing sides cannot be yoked together to achieve a common goal. And please know that although Paul opens his heart to the Corinthians, that doesn’t prevent him from issuing a stern warning whenever necessary!

**‘Do not be yoked together with unbelievers.’ 2 Corinthians 6:14.** Now this idea of being yoked together may sound foreign to us today, but we need to remember that living in a pagan city such as Corinth was at this time, it was difficult. It was difficult, especially for the Greek members of the congregation, to maintain separation, segregation, from the culture and customs in which they had been brought up.

The Jewish believers wouldn’t have quite the same problem, because they would have been very familiar with the Old Testament quotes which Paul uses. They would be aware of the fact that Mosaic Law said in **Deuteronomy 22:10** **‘Do not plough with an ox and a donkey yoked together.’** The Jews would understand that we’re talking about two very different animals, animals which are different in two quite distinctive respects.

They are different **physically**. The ox is the larger, stronger animal, and this means, that if they were to be yoked together, with a donkey, the greater burden would fall on the shoulders of the ox. And any old-style farmer would tell you the same, these animals don’t belong together. The ox was used for ploughing and the donkey was used for carrying.

And more importantly, as any Jew would know, there is a **religious** difference between them. In the Law of Moses, the ox is designated as a **clean** animal, whilst the donkey is **unclean**. No Jew would ever consider putting the two animals together for **any** purpose, and any Christian Jew would recognise immediately what Paul was saying. The two species, the ox and donkey, simply don’t belong together!

**And what's Paul's point?** The Christian and the pagan don't belong together, believers and unbelievers, don't belong together. You see loved ones, the yoke is something that connects or joins together. The two things that are yoked together generally work together for a common goal. And the Jewish Christians in Corinth would be very familiar with the things that God said He didn't want to be put together.

**'Do not mate different kinds of animals.'** Leviticus 19:19.

**'Do not plant two kinds of seed in your vineyard.'** Deuteronomy 22:9.

**'Do not wear clothes of wool and linen woven together.'** Deuteronomy 22:11.

**'Do not intermarry with them. Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons.'** Deuteronomy 7:3.

As a side note notice that the Law of Moses didn't forbid marriage to other foreigners apart from the Canaanites. We see this happening with Boaz who was a Jew who married Ruth who was a Moabite.

So, the Jews knew exactly what Paul was speaking about, **but what about the Greek Christians who didn't come from Judaism?** Now if you remember Paul had already wrote to them and stressed the need for them to avoid the idolatrous culture of their home city. In **1 Corinthians 10:21** he wrote, **'You cannot sit at the table of the Lord and the table of devils'**.

It appears that some of the Greek Christians hadn't taken Paul's instructions seriously and were continuing to associate with pagan friends and relatives. But loved ones, we can understand why they would struggle, **can't we?** You see, just like God's temple was at the centre of Jewish life for the Jews.

The temple of Aphrodite was at the centre of life for the Greek Corinthians. It was a huge structure and it stood about 1800 feet above the surrounding area and could be seen for miles. People would go and worship there, make their offerings and it was home to around 1000 prostitutes.

And for example, when a friend or a family member celebrated a birthday, it was customary to mark the occasion by offering a sacrifice at the temple. The carcass of the animal that had been sacrificed would be divided into three parts. One part would be offered on the altar to the god of the temple. A second part was kept by the priests for their own use. The third part was returned to the celebrant, who used it to hold a feast with their family and friends, in the court of the temple.

And so, we understand why they would be struggling with Paul's advice. Paul's advice warned that such fellowship was both wrong and dangerous because it not only amounted to a compromise with idolatry, something that's sinful. But it also presented the risk of being drawn back into a world that the Christian had already rejected and abandoned.

Think about it! For someone whose struggling with alcohol, the last place they want to be is in a pub, where alcohol is readily available. For someone who struggling with drugs, the last place they want to be is somewhere where drugs are readily available. For someone whose struggling with pornography, the last place they want to be is home alone in front of a computer, where pornography is readily available. Any alcoholic who's trying to stay sober or any drug user who's trying to stay clean, anyone who's struggling with pornography knows that they need to avoid those places, if they want to stay on track.

Now some people might fool themselves into thinking, I can handle the temptation but loved ones, the truth is they're only fooling themselves. **Why put yourself through that unnecessary temptation? Why put that unnecessary strain on yourself? Why would you risk being drawn back to your old ways?**

**Several elderly nuns were on the second floor of their convent one night when a fire broke out. When the nuns realised the fire was blocking the exit, they took their habits off, tied them together to make a rope, and climbed out the window. After they were safely on the ground, a news reporter asked one of the nuns, 'Weren't you afraid that the habits could have ripped or broke since they are old'? The nun replied, 'Not at all, don't you know that old habits are hard to break!'**

**How many of us here today will admit old habits are hard to break?**

You see, the Corinthians had already rejected idolatry, and everything associated with it. And they were in danger of going back to their old habits. That's why later Pauls going to tell them in **2 Corinthians 6:17** 'Come out from among them. Do not touch the unclean thing and I will receive you'. And we know what that verse means, don't we? The verse implies that failure to obey this law will result in rejection by God. Some things just don't belong together.

And it's at this point that Paul is going to lay down five illustrations in the form of rhetorical questions to prove that two opposing sides cannot be yoked together to achieve a common goal. **2 Corinthians 6:14-16** 'For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? Or what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: 'I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people.'

Up to this point Paul has been writing about moral situations that can't possibly be made to harmonise. And now he points out that there are spiritual forces that are also in conflict. He speaks about 'righteousness' and 'wickedness.' 'Righteousness' has to do with right-thinking, right-speaking, right-doing, being right with God. 'Wickedness' is the complete opposite, it has to do with evil, evil thinking, evil speaking and doing the opposite from what God requires. Righteousness and wickedness cannot co-exist.

Notice he also contrasts 'light' and 'darkness'. He reminds the Corinthians what he reminded the Ephesians. **Ephesians 5:8** "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light." Light and darkness cannot possibly co-exist. We all know that water doesn't mix with oil and Paul is saying, a corrupt style of life can't exist in peace with the way of righteousness. Righteousness and unrighteousness, light and darkness can't work together under the same yoke and achieve a goal together because they have different goals.

And loved ones, please don't fool yourselves into thinking that you can make them work together because you can't. The believer wants to get to heaven, the unbeliever doesn't. The unbeliever doesn't bother about sin, but the believer knows they can't get to heaven if they purposely get involved in sin. Jesus Himself said in **Matthew 6:24** 'No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other'.

Look again at what Paul wrote, and notice that these, 'unbelievers', are those who sit at the table of Demons, who serve 'Belial rather than Christ.' Now Belial means 'worthless', but who are the people whom he calls, 'sons of Belial'? Well, they are the people to whom Jesus once said, 'You have the Devil as your father, and you do his works'. **John 8:44**.

You see, Satan or everything that opposes truth, can't have harmony and agreement with each other so that a common goal be achieved. It's the same principle for 'a believer and an unbeliever.' How can one who walks in light 'share' in the dark deeds and thoughts of the unbeliever and remain in fellowship with God? Paul's rhetorical questions are showing us that two opposing sides can't be yoked together to achieve a common goal, to do so would be termed, 'unequally yoked'.

And notice he also contrasts those who are the 'Temple of God', with those who use the 'Temples of idols'. The word 'agreement', means to sit down together with, to have an alliance with. Paul is quoting from **Ezekiel 37:27** where God says, "My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be my people." In other words, the believer is a temple of God because God dwells within, but the unbeliever doesn't have God.

You see loved ones, there are some things which simply don't belong together. Because when we try to mix and match, we can get ourselves into all kinds of trouble and ultimately it may cost us our salvation.

Hence why Paul goes on to say in **2 Corinthians 6:17-18** 'Therefore, "Come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you." And, "I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty." Paul here quotes from **Isaiah 52:11** and **Hosea 1:10** to further establish the point that a believer can't be yoked to an unbeliever.

God makes His home with the sanctified, those set apart from the world of sin, and it's those who are called His children. Jesus said in His prayer in **John 17:16** "They are not of the world, even as I am not of it." Now remember we're not to physically come away from those of the world but spiritually.

In other words, we don't agree, associate, or even share in their erroneous thinking and practices. As Christians, we shouldn't dress like the world dresses, we shouldn't talk like the world talks, we shouldn't walk like the world walks.

And so, Paul continues and says, **2 Corinthians 7:1** 'Therefore, since we have these promises, dear friends, let us cleanse ourselves from everything that could defile the body and the spirit, and thus accomplish holiness out of reverence for God.'

**What are the promises?** The 'promises' are the indwelling of God, His walking with the Christian, and being known as God's children His people. **And how do we cleanse ourselves from the sins we commit with our body and spirit?**

**1 John 1:6-9** "If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

You see, God wants us to be completely holy, but He also recognises that we will sin. Notice the terms and conditions John lays down by using the word, 'if'. We must walk in the light, we must admit we sin, we must confess our sins to Him. If we don't do these things, then there is no forgiveness available to us.

Now let me finish by asking this question, **does the command, 'do not be yoked together with unbelievers', apply to us today?** Now that may sound like a strange question, but I've heard it being said in reference to anyone in the Lord's church considering marrying someone who belongs to a denominational church.

And so, to answer the question, we need to ask, **what does Paul mean in the context here, when he uses the word, 'unbeliever'?** Remember when Paul wrote this letter there was no such thing as 'denominations', so, he isn't referring to them.

You see, in the New Testament world, they knew only of those who believed in the One True God, and those who didn't. The 'unbelievers' in Bible times, were those who worshipped false gods, the pagans, those who worshipped and served idols.

**Now I personally wouldn't class any member of the denominational world as 'unbelievers'.** They may be members of a different family and in error with their beliefs, teachings and practices and, consequently, in danger of losing their souls, no matter how sincere they are. I have no doubt that an Atheist, without God, may properly be described as an unbeliever. But I don't believe members of a denomination are 'unbelievers' in the Scriptural sense of the word.

I think a word of caution needs to be mentioned when it comes to marrying someone who has no Christian tendencies whatsoever. I hear it over and over again, when a Christian is considering marrying a non-Christian, that the Christian convinces themselves they will eventually win them over. I've also hear, when a Christian in the Lord's church, is considering marrying someone from a denominational church, that they will eventually win them over to the Lord's church.

Now don't get me wrong, I've seen it work, but only after years of spiritual struggling, after years of pain and anxiety does the non-Christian become a Christian. But I've also seen the devastation it causes, where it doesn't end well, and the marriage ends in divorce or the Christian ends up falling away.

And remember if you get married to someone who isn't a Christian, you can't command them to do anything from the Scriptures. They're not Christians and not in God's house, so the rules don't apply to them until they become a Christian. But the commands apply to you and make no mistake about it, you will struggle, **why?**

**Amos 3:3** "Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?" It's one thing to agree to walk the rest of your life together, but it's another thing to agree that heaven needs to be your ultimate common goal. It's one thing to be in spiritual warfare in the world, but it's another thing to be in spiritual warfare in the home.

And my advice to all those of you who are single and considering dating or even getting married to someone who has no Christian tendencies is simply this. Speak to a mature Christian about it, listen to them before you find yourself in a situation which can end badly for everyone involved. And more importantly, you must accept, that some things just don't belong together.