

***From Corrupting Cordiality to a
Community without Compromise***

2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1

June 24, 2007

I'm not one to spend much time on the titles of the messages I share. I don't try to come up with a clever acrostic very often or three easy to memorize points or anything like that. But the title of today's message is one that sums up what God in His word is calling us to through the passage today, and it needs some explanation.

"From Corrupting Cordiality to a Community without Compromise": what does that mean? Well, it starts with the idea that there can be such a thing as "corrupting cordiality." That's when the church of the living God is **so nice** that it gets **corrupted** in the process.

I've also heard it called "sloppy agape." Agape is the New Testament Greek word for real love. **Sloppy agape** is when we think loves means never having to say anything that might hurt or upset anyone. That's not love.

This was a constant problem of the church in Corinth. They were too nice to rebuke a man who was living with his stepmother. They were too nice to people with disruptive lifestyles, disruptive teachings and disruptive attitudes. Nobody wanted to offend anybody.

Let's say this guy's name was Bill (not a very Greek name, but it will do for the story). Members of the church in Corinth would see Bill and his step mom walking hand in hand. They'd wave and wonder what to do. Even by Greek standards, what Bill was doing was pretty out there. (Greeks has pretty permissive ideas about sex in those days.) But they'd also heard about the Big Ten. I don't

mean college teams, I mean the Ten Commandments. They knew that what Bill was doing was wrong, but they thought it would be kind of mean and unloving to say anything about it. *Maybe if I ignore it, it will go away!*

That's exactly where a lot of the church is today. We kind of know that what someone is doing is wrong, but we just don't want to be mean about it. So we pretend we don't know anything about it. That's loving, right?

Not really. Do know what that's like? It's like seeing a friend of yours in a burning house and saying, "Oh look at the pretty fire! Bet it's nice and cozy in there. Mind if I roast some marshmallows?" That's not love at all.

Ken Hutherson is senior pastor Antioch Bible Church in Bellevue, Washington. He says that the church should be, and I quote, "Offensive, uncomfortable and unstoppable." This is not a way of looking at the church that leaves room for a corrupting cordiality. This is not sloppy agape. This is the real church of Jesus. Offensive at times, yes. Uncomfortable, often. Unstoppable? You bet. That's the real church.

Now, all this only makes sense if you believe that the values of the kingdom of God are radically different from values of the world. We aren't just a little different; we are God's advance party on a mission to overthrow the kingdom of darkness. **We are a lot different.**

The church does not exist just to make our lives marginally less miserable. We're not social workers; we're spiritual revolutionaries. Revolutionaries do not make nice with the adversary. We do not engage in corrupting cordiality. We challenge ourselves and others to live like God's children, all the time. We're

not into Sunday Christianity. We have decided to follow Jesus, all the time, no turning back.

God calls us to be a "community without compromise." Not a mean people, but a devoted people. Not an offensive people, but transformed people. I have often said that the great tragedy of the church in America today is that we are better known for what we are against than what we are for. When I say "a community without compromise", I am not thinking of "no compromise" with the world around. I am thinking of us living lives that do not compromise the radical nature of the gospel of Jesus. When we understand this, we understand that either Jesus is Lord of all in our lives and in our church, or He is not our real Lord at all.

Now, I'm not just making this up. I'm not in management; I'm in sales! As we move along in our series in 2 Corinthians, we'll see that that's exactly what the Lord is calling us to.

I want to read the section of Scripture from today, from 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1:

*14Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? 15What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? 16What 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."
17"Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you."
18"I will be a Father to you, and you will be*

my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."

1Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.

I want to ask some critical questions about the meaning of this passage.

1. What does it mean to be "yoked together" with someone?
2. Who are the "unbelievers" Paul mentions in 6:14?
3. What is the call of God's people that we see here in 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1?

What does it mean to be "yoked together" with someone?

One of the commonest sights in the time of Paul was that of animals yoked together to pull a cart or to plow a field. The yoke is a natural symbol of being closely tied to someone, in a kind of alliance for a common cause. When that association is involuntary, it becomes a symbol of slavery (as "under the yoke of Egypt"). Jesus uses the symbol of the yoke in Matthew 11 as a good thing: "take my yoke upon you, my yoke is easy, my burden is light" (vs. 29, 30).

The Old Testament talks about the unequal yoke as well. Deuteronomy 22:10 commands, "Do not plow with an ox and a donkey yoked together." That "unequal yoke" would be frustrating to both and is again a pretty obvious symbol of the fact that God's way and man's way just don't mix. That leads to the second key question.

Who are the "unbelievers" Paul mentions in 6:14?

In my opinion this is the real key to understanding the message that God has for us today. One way we can read this is that Paul is writing about the idea that Christians shouldn't yoke their lives to non-Christians. One example of that is the idea that Christians shouldn't marry non-Christians. Now, I believe that to be true, but not so much on the basis of this passage.

Another way of reading this says that Christians shouldn't have any close associations with non-Christians, such as close business ties. Taken to the extreme, you get a kind of an Amish thing going: Christians living lives outside of society, avoiding contact, staying "pure" from a distance. Call it living in a Christian ghetto, like Jews were once forced to live in certain sections of cities in Europe.

But how do you square that with the images of witness and presence and service that Jesus gives us? Take for example what He says in Matthew 5:14-16:

14 "You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. 15 No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. 16 In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father."

This is not, to borrow a phrase, living in an Amish paradise. This is living in close contact with non-believers for the sake of God getting glory.

To the same church, Paul echoed the teaching of Jesus. Look in 1 Corinthians 5:9-11:

9 When I wrote to you before, I told you not to associate with people who indulge in sexual sin. 10 But I wasn't talking about unbelievers who indulge in sexual sin, or are greedy, or cheat people, or worship idols. You would have to leave this world to avoid people like that. 11 I meant that you are not to associate with anyone who claims to be a believer yet indulges in sexual sin, or is greedy, or worships idols, or is abusive, or is a drunkard, or cheats people. Don't even eat with such people.

Paul doesn't urge us to separate ourselves from people of the world who do such things. **What he does do is urge us to separate ourselves from people who claim to follow Jesus but who live like the devil.** In **1 Corinthians**, the issue was people who lived like the devil in terms of the way they sinned sexually. In **2 Corinthians**, the issue is the way some taught doctrines that attacked the core of the Christian message while at the same time claiming to be followers of Jesus. In both cases, Paul says you have to draw a line in the sand and say, "No mas! No compromise!"

That brings us down to the third question:

What is the call of God's people that we see here in 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1?

There are three commands Paul gives in this section, all of which mean pretty much the same thing:

6:14: Do not be yoked together with unbelievers.

6:17: Therefore come out from them and be separate

7:1: ...let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.

After the first command, Paul gives us a series of reasons that we should seek to be that community without compromise:

For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? (6:14b)

Answer: nothing!

Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? (6:14c)

Again, the answer is "none." He's thinking of light and dark in moral terms, and he looks to those who are teaching falsehood, the people he's been after since the beginning of the book as "in the dark" in their teaching, and in their way of living as well.

15What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? (15a)

"Belial" is a title of Satan, meaning "Worthless One." That doesn't sound too strong in English, but among the Jewish people about the worst thing you can call someone is "worthless." What harmony is there between Jesus and Satan? None!

What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? (15b)

The worse place to be in spiritually is to claim to be a believer while living like the devil. Remember the conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees? They could talk theology all day without actually knowing God. And Jesus demonstrated that most of the time, they were distorting the real message of Scripture. It was the same during Paul's ministry. There were people living and teaching in ways that dishonored God, all the while calling themselves Christians.

Surprise! It's no different today. When the world denies the gospel of Jesus, I'm neither surprised nor upset. That's what the world does. But when people with titles like Bishop or Reverend or Pastor or Professor of Theology—professing to be Christians—when they deny core Biblical truths, the name of Jesus gets slandered. When learned "Christian" leaders tell us that Jesus is no different than Buddha or Muhammad, I mourn. When professors at renowned seminaries deny that Jesus is God in the flesh or that He rose up from the dead, I grieve, and all of God's children should grieve that. When denominational leaders applaud the advance of sexual perversion and actively slander those who champion the clear teaching of Scripture, it is time to do what Paul does here and sadly call them what they are: "unbelievers." They are **not** simply non-believers: they are active **unbelievers** who use their influence to cause others to stumble and to un-believe.

*16What 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." (6:16)*

Paul uses a special word here for temple: *naos*. There are two words translated "temple" in the New Testament: *hieron* and *naos*. *Hieron* refers to the whole temple complex: the buildings, the courtyards, the whole temple mount.

Naos is also translated temple, but it refers to the actual temple building, the sacred space commanded by God through Moses to be built as God's earthly palace.

Paul says we are the **naos** of God, the dwelling place of God. He wrote 2 Corinthians

in 55 AD and the temple in Jerusalem was still standing (though it would be destroyed by the Romans just 15 years later). What Paul says is radical. He says that **the real temple of God was no longer the temple in Jerusalem, but now it's the new people of God, the people called the church. We are the dwelling place of God on earth.** He lives and walks among **us**. He no longer lives in the temple. Therefore, since God lives among **us**, we are called to a higher standard of living than ever before. **We** are called to be God's holy place on earth.

Look to verses 17-18:

17"Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you."

18"I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."

Here Paul blends together Old Testament passages (as he did in vs. 16) to make his point. A new Exodus has occurred: come out and be separate from unholiness. A new relationship is in place: God as our father and we are His sons and daughters.

He concludes the thought in 7:1. (Remember that chapter and verse divisions were added centuries after the Bible was written. Most of the time, they make sense, but not always. This is a case where the chapter division was just not right.)

Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.

Why do we seek this kind of holiness in our lives and in our life together as a church? It's "out of reverence for God."

We're constantly trying to make the church all about us. Do I like the preacher? Do I like the music? Do I like the class? Do I like the parking? Do I like programming? Well, if it meets everything on my checklist, then I guess it's OK until I find something better.

The way of life Paul describes here is constantly thinking about what's on God's checklist. Isn't God's checklist more important than our checklist? Is He pleased with the worshipful hearts of the members? Is He pleased with their service? Does He delight in their prayers? Does He take joy in their sharing of the message of Jesus? Do they believe with fervency? Are they seeking purity of mind and body? Do they hold one another accountable? Do they love one another? That's real love, not sloppy agape.

We cannot be content with corrupting cordiality. We must press on to be a community without compromise. That is our desire because of our reverent fear of God. We will stand before the judgment seat, the bema of Christ. And we will render an account of how we loved one another. Sloppy agape won't count. It's how we loved one another to a deeper, truer level that matters.

**END
PRAYER**