

Covenant Promises and Purity

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Preacher: Jesse Kincer

[0 : 00] So good to see you guys today. I am in a quite a joyful mood, so I don't know how this is going to come out in the sermon. I feel a little bit honoring and cheeky for whatever reason, but we're going to have some fun today. If you're new with us, we are continuing on in a series through 2 Corinthians. And so we are probably a little more halfway through our series. We're going to be in 2 Corinthians chapter 6. If you've got a Bible, you can turn there, whether that's through pages in a physical Bible or on your phone. You can get to it. If you don't have either of those things, don't worry. We also are going to have the verses on the screen behind me. We've got a lot to get through, so we're just going to jump right into the passage. So 2 Corinthians 6 verse 14, it says this, do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial?

Which is another word for Satan or the devil. Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God.

As God said, I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them. And I will be their God and they shall be my people. Therefore, go out from their midst and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing. Then 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. And since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of the Lord. This is God's word. So we must remember when we're reading God's word, we are reading originally something written to people in a specific context. This is a letter written by the Apostle Paul, or we could even say through the Apostle Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, to send it to a church in Corinth, a group of believers that were meeting in a particular location and in a particular city.

And so it's a little bit helpful to get some context in Corinth, which we have done in previous sermons. But really for what this passage is getting at, it's helpful to understand how devoutly religious a city was, that city was, that city of Corinth. They were devoutly religious to their own gods and goddesses. They had a temple to Aphrodite, which was the big goddess, kind of the patron goddess of that city. And so they worshipped at her temple. And they would worship through various ceremonies.

One involved prostitution. So you would go to the temple and your worship involved sleeping with the temple prostitutes. And there were sacrifices that were made to the gods and goddesses as well. The other forms of their cultic worship was observing festivals throughout different times of the year.

[3 : 03] And they would also, to be a good Corinthian, you would have trinkets of little idols and shapes of these gods in your home of which you would pray to and keep in front of you. And you would offer, when you'd have a meal, you would offer your food to them and ask them to bless that food.

So in return, and why they did all this is because they believed their gods and their goddesses would bless their devotion. They would bless their worship that they were giving them through various means.

It means like for, in some ways, it would give them victory in war. Others, it would result in plentiful harvest. That's what they were going after. And for others, it would be protection from sickness and also fruitfulness in bearing children. And all this worship, all this devotion to these gods and goddesses in Corinth was not just for your own personal benefit as an individual or for your family. It was actually an expectation that was put on you. To be a good Corinthian was to live for the glory of the Roman Empire. And that was what it meant to be a good citizen. And so the level of devotion to those gods and the level of devotion to the Roman Empire was kind of like what you would expect to find between two spouses in a good marriage, right? I mean, they were like all in, all the time, willing to do whatever it takes. And that idea isn't far from the truth in many ways, which is why Paul starts out this passage with the statement, do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. So in a place like Corinth, where the pressure is to conform to what is going on, what are Christians called to do? How are they called to live? And so one thing Paul is getting at his men, hey, Christians in Corinth, take stock of what you are married to in your life.

Now, I'm not talking about who you're married to. He's not getting at like, consider who your spouse is. Although this verse should give Christians a very strong reason not to marry someone outside their faith. There's real wisdom in that. And I don't have time to really go into that. That's like a total different kind of sermon. And so I'm going to skip over that. But what am I going to do? I'm writing a blog to be released this week so you guys can read more on that. Because I do think that's an important thing to consider. And there's very real reasons why you should push pause if you are a single person that feels called to marriage to refrain from entering into such an important relationship with someone that's not of your faith, that doesn't believe in Jesus, and isn't a Christian. But for the context that we're seeing this, not being yoked to an unbeliever is actually much broader than marriage. And it's primarily not about marriage. To understand Paul's intent, what we have to do is we need to step back and consider that word yoke that he uses, right? He's using a word picture here. He's using a metaphor to help us understand something. And when we think of a yoke, we think of a wooden apparatus like this picture up here that go around the necks of two oxen that kept them bound together. And so you could either plow a field with one ox, or you could pull a cart with one ox, or you can up your ox power, right? It's kind of like think of horsepower for your car. It's like, hey, you know, I got a two ox power cart. You can pull a heavier load.

You could go farther with them. They could do more work together as they shared that load. And so that's what yokes were about. And that's what yokes were for. And that's what Paul's introducing to us. Now, here's a fun fact about yokes. They were made to couple two of the same animals. And in fact, in Deuteronomy 22 verse 10, God gives this very strange instruction to the people of Israel. And he says, do not plow with an ox and a donkey yoke together. He's like, thou shalt not do that. And you're just like, well, that's a weird one. You know, like what's the big deal? And so literally like from that, and you have to understand Paul is a guy that is rooted in Old Testament, right? Especially those first five books of the Bible, he would have had Deuteronomy memorized.

[7 : 20] And so no doubt when he brings up this word yoke, he has this in mind. And so when we start 2 Corinthians 6.14, don't be unequally yoked to unbelievers, we could finish it with, for what partnership has an anki, an oxen, wow, I just made up a new word. An anki is literally, it's not someone from the hills of West Virginia. It is a connection of an ox and a donkey, apparently.

I don't know. For what partnership has an oxen with a donkey, right? So Paul is using this yoke metaphor to drive home a point, because yokes brought two animals in union to do the same work, to walk side by side. They were no longer individuals, they had to work together. They had to be of the same mind, of the same purpose, doing the same thing. And an ox and a donkey are fine apart from each other. They could be in the same corral just fine. They could live in the same barn and there not be any problems, but they couldn't be yoked together. And spiritually, this is true. Paul brings out the fact that believers yoked to unbelievers will always be unequally yoked. And he isn't suggesting we try to figure out how to be equally yoked with believers.

He's not going that way. He's like, hey, you're unequally yoked with unbelievers, so let's try to figure out how we can make that yoke work. No, he's not saying that. He is saying, you are two different animals, and you need to realize that, which is the whole point of these five statements which follow verse 14. It says at the end, it says, for what partnership, in verse 14, it says, what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? See, Paul isn't trying to get us to find some common ground with unbelievers here. What he's doing is he's drawing very clear distinctions. He's saying unbelievers are under a yoke that is built for them, but you, Christians, you, Jesus followers, you are under a totally different yoke that is built for you. See, the figurative use here throughout the Bible of yokes, when you talk about like, God would talk about yokes in a spiritual sense, figurative spiritual sense, and they are always used to represent authority. Who was over you? So God talks about bringing Israel out from under the yoke of Pharaoh, under the yoke of Egypt, right? When he delivers them out of Egypt, he's saying, I'm pulling you out from under that yoke. I'm pulling you out from under that authority that was enslaving you. And later on, when God disciplined Israel for their continued disobedience and idolatry, he would put them under the yoke of the king of another kingdom, literally in his prophets. His prophets would come and say, I am putting a new yoke on you because you refuse my yoke.

And it's going to be a heavy yoke. It's going to be a yoke of iron. And what that, what God was trying to do there and what he was getting at is that he was showing them that you're going to be under the yoke of a new king and another kingdom, which meant submission and observance to their rules, their customs, their value, and their way of worship. And God did this to show his people that they were different animals. He was trying to get their attention because he couldn't.

He couldn't. As they were continuing in disobedience and continuing in sin and idolatry and unrepentant, finally, he's like, okay, fine. I'm going to put you under another yoke and you're going to see how different of an animal you truly are. And God would warn them and do all that. And then he would discipline. And that discipline would work because Israel would wake up. They would wake up under that yoke. They would wake up under that exile. They'd wake up under the oppression of another king and kingdom. And they would turn back to God who would deliver them. And often, and sometimes the language he would use is, I'm casting off that yoke now. I'm casting off the yoke of your oppressors.

[11 : 45] It's part of God's deliverance. I'm pulling you out from under that authority that I put you under because you refuse my authority. The Bible repeatedly tells us. And one of the continued themes, one of the continued themes is that you and I are going to be under a yoke of some kind. You and I are going to be married to something. What is it? And here's a little test for our hearts to find out kind of like today, what does that look like? What kind of yokes have we put on? And I want to give you this little test of our hearts.

There's three questions here. So what is the thing in your heart? What is the thing you can't imagine losing or living without so that to not have it would foster a bitterness you feel entitled to?

Here's another question for our hearts. What are you willing to attain through even unwise or sinful means? And here's another diagnostic. What has your allegiance so that you revile or distance yourself from those in opposition to it? So think about those questions with regards to various things in our lives. Family, love and romance, politics, that is a big one. Career, a specific kind of lifestyle we feel entitled to. It's easy. The point I'm trying to draw out here, it's easy for our hearts to become attached and united, married to things in a way they shouldn't because they promise us the good life.

Now I want to push pause and step back and say, look, are any of those things that I mentioned bad in and of themselves? Well, no. Family's good. Like love isn't a bad thing. Romance isn't a bad thing.

Career, having a political perspective. None of the, all those things, if you have those things, that's a good and fine. The problem isn't that you have them. The problem comes when they have you.

[13 : 49] That's a big difference because they will change you. But the same goes when God has you, right? The same goes when God has you. If you are married to him, if you are yoked to him, he will change you.

And this is what we're getting at at the second part of verse 16. It says, For we are the temple of the living God, as God said. I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore, go out from their midst and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing. Then 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.

See, what God is getting at is God doesn't change his yoke to fit you. He changes you to fit his yoke. You get that? See, he makes us a totally different animal to what we were.

That old yoke that we were under before Christ, before knowing him, before salvation, it just doesn't fit well anymore. It just doesn't fit us anymore. And these verses that talk about who we are in God, like they're proving the point. They're proving God's point. You are a different animal.

And in fact, these verses that Paul writes, what Paul is doing, he is going back into the Old Testament prophets, and he's drawing out a few statements that the prophets had made in connection with a new covenant that God was going to do. Jeremiah 31 verse 33 says this, For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord.

[15 : 37] In days to come, God is promising this to Israel. In the context in which Jeremiah was written, things are not going good for Israel, right? Israel is besieged. Israel is in exile. Israel is scattered.

Israel is under another nation's authority and rule because of their lack of allegiance to God and his law to live aligned and in accordance with the old covenant. And so things happen. And so now Jeremiah, and God's speaking through Jeremiah, is promising God is going to do a new thing. He's giving them hope. He's like, look forward. There's something is going to happen. I'm going to do a new thing that you have not seen. And he says this about this covenant that God is going to make. I will put my law, where? Where? Within them. I will put my law within them. I will do what? Write it on their hearts.

And I will be their God and they shall be my people. God is speaking to his people and he's promising them this like better new relationship, this promise, this covenant agreement he is going to do. And the big change, the big change was that the law of Moses, right, wouldn't exist outside of them anymore, right? The law that came from Sinai with all its commands and all its rules and all its statutes, he wasn't going to do away with them, but he was going to take that from being external reality, which diagnosed their problems and pointed out the problems of their heart. And what he was going to do, was going to move it from the outside into the inside of their hearts. That is what God is promising to do with them. He's going to tattoo it on them. And he goes on through another prophet, Ezekiel, to reveal the extent of what this heart change was going to look like, why we are totally different animals. Ezekiel 36 says this in verse 26, same promise about a new covenant coming. I will give you a new covenant. And a new covenant I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers and you shall be my people and I will be your God. And these are beautiful promises. And this shows us some, this is the challenge of the gospel. This is the challenge of the good news, even though it's good news. Because it takes all the power out of our hands. The problem of fitting into God's yoke for you is that you, it's not an external thing about you that you can change. It's not a matter of going to the plastic surgeon to get some stuff tucked and adjusted and changed and, or going to the gym and bulking up so you could fit into this new yoke. That's, that's not how this is going to work.

It's an internal change that has to happen. It's an internal transformation that has to happen. See, we didn't need heart medicine to fix our, fix our sick hearts. Our hearts were dead.

Heart surgery wasn't going to fix the problem. We needed new hearts, which means that God had to step in. He had to do what you and I couldn't do and give us new hearts. And in this way, we can come under God's yoke. The internal part, the heart that fits under the yokes, now we fit into it. Not because of anything we've done, but because of what God has done for us. And here's the other beautiful thing.

[19 : 22] When God does that, when God gives us new hearts, when he shapes and molds it and he gives us a new, puts it in there, inside our hearts, is that he's, his promise is he's going to come and dwell in us.

Right? That is a beautiful, beautiful promise. Paul's reference to these Old Testament prophets about the new covenant that was coming is why he can confidently say, we are the temple of the living God because he knew Jesus died. Paul knew that. That happened in his day and age. He saw the Holy Spirit coming and indwelling believers and working in their lives. And so he could say with confidence, we are living in the new covenant age, guys. We are living in that reality.

The old is gone, the new has come. We don't have to wonder about that. God has given us new hearts. He has made us his temple just like he promised he would. And he sent his spirit to dwell in us. It's our reality. Now, it's important to think about and understand the role of temple in Israel's life and how God used it throughout the history of Israel and why he's calling us temples all of a sudden.

So, when Israel occupied the land, they built a temple and God's presence dwelt there. It was proof that he was with them and among them and abiding with them. And they were his people. It was proof of that. And then one of the realities of in all of their disobedience, when Israel would be punished by God and removed from their land, the temple would get destroyed. So there was three different temples.

There was Solomon's temple, right, that got destroyed. And then Israel came back and they built another temple. And then they fell back into the same old bad practices and that temple got destroyed. And then there was a third temple that they built, right, which was the temple that was existed in Jesus's day. Those were physical temples and it was the place where Israelites, good Israelites would come and they would worship because God dwelt there.

[21 : 36] And the temple had to exist there and had to be a unique set-apart place because God is a holy God and he cannot dwell in the midst of an unholy people. And unlike the old covenant temples, in the new covenant, God isn't relying on us to build him a temple. He's come and he's built a temple made with his own hands in us and we are his temple. So God does this, he does the impossible.

So this new covenant wouldn't fail to do what the old covenant could never accomplish, what the old covenant can never hold on to. See, God's people in the old covenant, they had to hold on to the old covenant by keeping its laws and rules to earn their righteousness. But here's the beautiful thing and the different thing about the new covenant, it holds on to us. We don't have to hold on to it, it is holding on to us. And this new heart that God gives us means that we have new affections, new desires, a new will that worships and fits God's yoke. And now everything we do, what is common to us and normal to us, it's now directed towards God. And this is the way the gospel works. And in theological terms, it's called indicatives and imperatives. You have like indicatives and then you have imperatives. And I'm going to geek out on you, but trust me, it's going to be good. And you're going to walk out and be, thank you, Jesse, for geeking out on us.

Okay. Indicatives are who you are because of what God has done. Okay. Indicatives are who you are because of what God has done. The example from these verses is, it says, we are a temple of the living God.

God, we know from Jeremiah and Ezekiel, that means that we have a new heart, which God has done and his spirit dwells in us. And then it also says later on, Paul says, and I will be your father. You are, you shall be sons and daughters. And that is what we are. That is what we are. We see that all over the place in the New Testament. The apostle John writes in 1 John 3, behold, what manner of love the father has lavished on us that we could be called the children of God, sons and daughters of God.

And that is what we are. That is the promise. That is the reality. That's the indicatives that we live in who you are because of what God has done. And then out of that come the imperatives. So God first says, I need you to know who you are. And then because of who you are, here's some commands.

[24 : 08] Imperatives are what you do. In the gospel, imperatives are what you do because of who you are, right? Not to become what you need to be. See the difference there? So think about this.

Birds can't bark, but they can fly. The indicative there is the bird. It is what it is. The imperative is flying. Fish can't walk, but they can swim. Indicative is the fish is a fish. That's what they are. And because of what they are, that's what they do. They swim. So what is it that you and I, as Christians, what are we called to do? Because we are saved. We are in Christ. We are God's temple.

We are his sons and daughters. What do we then do? Since we have these promises, indicative, beloved, let us, imperatives, cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of the Lord. See the gospel movement there. Do you see the gospel movement there? It goes from identity into being what you are. What we do flows out of God's promises.

Promises of how he's made us. It's who we are now when we are given a very specific command in these verses. And it's God's promises. What he's done in us, enable and empower us to purity. That's what they do. This is an undeniable call and command towards holiness in this verse. We cannot get away from this, which is a lot more than just putting your 1990s promise ring back on. Because we have a new heart and Holy Spirit in us. We are enabled and empowered to live a life that reflects the nature and character of Jesus Christ. And as we do that, what we do is we reflect him. We not only bear witness to the world around us, they see Jesus in us and through us, but in turn, it glorifies him.

He gets glorified in how we live. Like I pointed out before, we were talking about birds and fish. Because of who you are, certain things are natural and others unnatural. It's natural for birds to fly.

[26 : 35] It's unnatural for them not to. It's natural for fish to swim. It would be very unnatural if fish sank like rocks. And for the Christian, the bend towards holiness is now natural. Which also means the bend towards sin isn't. And the statement, no doubt, that statement I just made right there, that might be setting alarm bells off for some of us in the room. Because we know that, well, hey Jesse, I still sin.

What I'm not saying is that Christians don't sin and that we don't get tempted to sin. What I am saying is that it is no longer natural to the new heart. And so when Christians sin, we testify and we could say that's like we just don't revel in that sin. We feel conviction in our hearts. We say like, oops, that was wrong. I shouldn't have done that. We feel the guilt of that sin. And we know we have sinned against God and against others. And so what that makes us do, that feeling of conviction, what it is doing, it is making us, it's giving us the desire and it's compelling us to move into confession and repentance, right? And that is what is natural to Christians. I think it was Luther that said famously, birds fly, fish swim, Christians repent. That's what we do. It is natural to us. And the heart of the Christian, and the reason we do that is for when we sin, we want to be cleansed. And we know that to be cleansed, it's through repentance. And it's not a cleansing that comes from us. 1 John 1, 9 says if we confess our sins, here's the promise, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Now, I want to say this, the call to holiness is not less than confessing and repenting. It is that, but it's also more. It's also doing what comes natural to the new heart and the Holy Spirit, which is to obey God's law. Why? Because it's tattooed on our hearts.

That's what God promised he was going to do. His laws are tattooed on your hearts. It's moved in. So now our hearts naturally agree with the law of God, right? And in case you're wondering if I'm promoting legalism here, I know loving God's law doesn't turn us into legalists.

Legalists believe that obedience earns your righteousness. That is not how the gospel works. We have to get back to indicative and imperatives. The gospel says we obey because we are already righteous. See the difference there? And grace is not against effort. It's just against earning.

You and I cannot earn righteousness. We are righteous in Christ and his righteousness, that transformation in who we are, it makes us love his laws. It makes us want to obey them.

[29 : 47] And that's an important thing for us to reckon with. Think about this. A teacher came up to Jesus and said something like, hey, explain all the laws and the prophets. And Jesus said, yeah, I could sum them all up. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, your mind, your soul, and your strength. And love your neighbor as yourself. That is the summation of God's law. And remember, Jesus said he did not come to abolish the law. What did he do? He said he came to fulfill it because we could not. You and I cannot fulfill God's law. But thanks be to Christ who has done it for us and is working it out in us. We don't look to the law for salvation, but we look into it because it guides us on how to love God and others more. And as we grow in those two things, we are perfecting holiness. And so the ESV, I feel like it did a very clumsy translation of this phrase because the ESV renders it bringing holiness to completion, which makes it sound like we can kind of reach perfection of holiness in this life. It's funny because every other translation renders it as perfecting holiness. And I think that helps us understand it a lot better. Because we shouldn't take that phrase to mean we are going to be able to achieve sinless perfection in this life.

Think about this. If Stephen Curry says he shoots four hours a day because he is perfecting his shot, we wouldn't walk away thinking that he meant that one day he is going to make all the shots and never miss one ever again. We know that's not a possibility. Same with us. We are called to be perfecting holiness by practicing it, which means that we are increasingly hitting the mark more often than missing it. And perfecting holiness means we are devoted to growing in it, which is becoming more and more like Jesus. That's pretty much it, guys. And we don't do it to achieve salvation or to hold on to the new covenant. We do it because our new nature makes it natural for us to love God and honor him.

And enjoy him and love others. And we do that in the fear of God. We do that in this new love of honor and reverence for our Father in heaven and our King Jesus. If I could have the band come up, a few ways that I think we can respond to what God has written in 2 Corinthians here. And I want to say this, if you are here and you're listening and you're not yet a Christian, I want to remind you again and appeal to you to hear me. You cannot earn salvation. You cannot earn righteousness. You cannot hold on to those things. I hope you heard today that, man, we are saved. Your salvation, your freedom from feeling the conviction and guilt and shame of sin that you're carrying comes from being saved by grace, God's grace, that he freely offers to every single person. And that comes through faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. He is the Savior who came to earth, who died for our sins. His body broken, his blood shed on a cross to set us free from the condemnation of sin that you live under.

That's what he did. And you take hold of salvation through believing in his work, not yours, and confessing that although you are a great sinner, he is a greater Savior. That's the good news of the gospel to you. And I want to invite you in a moment to respond, if God is leading you that direction, to respond in a prayer for salvation. And I want to say to those who are listening here in the room or online, if you're already a Christian, I want to ask us, honestly, what are you living for?

What are you living for? What are you married to? What are you unequally yoked to in this life? I want to ask us, how are you intentionally living to perfect holiness in yourself?

[34 : 26] So often we think about how that can work out for others, and we neglect the beam in our own eye. How are we intentionally living to perfect holiness in our own life? And I want to say this, this is not about shame and condemnation. This is the good news of God's grace. He calls us all the time to repent and turn from our sin, to turn from the things we put our false hope in and build our lives on, and to come back to a better hope and a stronger and sure foundation. And the promise when we do that is he will forgive us, and he will restore us, and he will cleanse us. I want to say, maybe you're here and you're kind of caught up in a sin that you feel powerless against as a Christian. And as strong as you feel that sin is, he is more powerful. And he gives you himself, the Holy Spirit, to fight with you, and he gives you his people, his brothers and sisters, to come alongside you and fight with you.

And with those two things, right, his truth, his presence, his power, his people, we have all we need to win the war. You have all you need to win that battle. But you got to step in to those realities.

You cannot do it on your own. You cannot do it in isolation. You cannot do it on your own strength. I want to give us a moment now to respond. It's a sobering message, I know, but God is good, and he loves you just as you are, and he loves you so much that he wants to come, and he wants to heal, and he wants to mold, and he wants to change. That's what he's about. That's what growing in holiness is about. And we're going to quietly just close our eyes and in silent prayer, do some business with God as the Holy Spirit has been leading you today. We're also going to have for you that if you were here and not yet a Christian, and you're wondering, man, what kind of prayer do I pray for this salvation? We're going to have a prayer that's up here that you can read and pray to yourself.

So let's go for it, guys. So let's go for it.

So let's go for it.

[37 : 20] So let's go for it.

and say, my friends here in this room that I am a great sinner and I need you. I need you. And yet I rejoice in your promises that I know are true, that I am a temple and your spirit dwells in me.

I am a son and daughter and you are my father. And nothing can make those things untrue.

We thank you, Lord, for the work that you are doing in us and everything that you have begun in our hearts. I pray over my friends in this room and me as well that you would bring what you have started to completion.

Amen.