

Divided Heart

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Preacher: Rev. Aaron Roberts

[0 : 0 0] Well, good evening everyone. Let me add my welcome to Bill's. Fantastic to have you. My name is Aaron. I'm the minister at the service. If you are new, I'd love to meet you after the service. Just come and say hi to me. It won't be awkward.

And if you want to know more about what's going on, it's probably helpful to join a Facebook group. Evening service, St. John's. You'll probably track it down there online. Brilliant. Okay, 2 Corinthians. I am just loving 2 Corinthians.

Absolutely loving 2 Corinthians. I hope you are as well. And I hope you feel like God is speaking to you. I feel like he's speaking to me through it. It's so rich and meaty. It's just wonderful. What a pleasure to preach this book.

So we're looking at 2 Corinthians 6 and the beginning of 7. I'm probably mostly going to focus on 14 to 7.1 there. The main thrust of the passage is verse 14, I believe. And I'll read it to you again. You know this passage.

Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. There you go. Very well known. This is a passage in a chunk of text that has historically been preached very poorly and wrongly a lot.

[1 : 1 9] And I hope not to add my name to that list tonight. I hope I'll be faithful to what Paul has said. But it's tough because... You know, that verse right there, do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers.

I think that's one of the first passages in the Bible I ever learned off by heart. Not on purpose. I just heard it all the time. People would bandy it around quite liberally. And that doesn't mean I think it was used very well.

Well, I think classically, I became a Christian at 17. And I think the classic application was, don't date non-Christians. Because, you know, you'd be unequally yoked, right?

So, I mean, it's quite clear. With the yoking and the unequalness of it. You know. I mean, it's not an unreasonable application, to be fair.

But I think people would have used this to say things like, Christians shouldn't go to the pub. Or join unions. Or go to the movies. Or dance. So the question we have to ask ourselves is, what did Paul really have in mind when he wrote this?

[2 : 2 9] I mean, surely it wasn't social drinking. Surely it wasn't dancing. Surely romance wasn't on his mind. When he talked about this. No, I think he had something far more profound to talk about.

So let's get into it. Okay, don't be unequally yoked. That's the main idea. And I'm fairly positive that's the main idea. Because there are three main imperatives in the stuff, the part of the passage that I'm focusing on.

And an imperative is like a command statement. Do this. And these three main ones in the passage are spread out. The beginning, the middle, and the end. And they are verse 14. Don't be unequally yoked with unbelievers. Verse 17.

Therefore go out from their midst. Be separate from them. That's 17. That's right smack in the middle. And then 7.1. Let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of the Lord.

I think it's saying the same thing three times. That's why I think it's the main thrust of the passage. So, yoked. What does that mean?

[3 : 31] That's probably a good place to start. So, you know two oxen, right? You'll be familiar with oxen. Do you guys learn animal husbandry in this country?

I don't know. Is that like a thing on the curriculum? So, oxen. So, a yoke is like the wooden bit, right? You kind of like put the yoke over their necks. And so, you sort of strap them in and they plow together.

And they pull in the same direction. So, it works. That works because they're the same species. They have the same temperament, same pulling power, etc.

So, being unequally yoked, that's two different things trying to collaborate. So, that's a disaster. Now, our text, this unequally yoked business, this probably refers back to Deuteronomy 22, which says this, Don't yoke an oxen and a donkey together.

So, right in the middle of Deuteronomy, there is this little bit of animal husbandry bit here, right? And you think, why is God concerned with this? He's got the Bible. Why use up precious Bible space to talk about this agrarian issue?

[4 : 47] Well, I think God cares about animals. I think God cares about cruelty. And when you strap two animals together that are not the same thing, and you try and yoke them together and get them to plow a field, it's going to cause one of them pain.

Because one is physically superior to the other. One really knows what to do. It has the right temperament, right? It just doesn't work. So, I think this passage is referring back to that and using it as a picture for Christians.

So, back to our text. Don't be unequally yoked with unbelievers. So, instead of an oxen and a donkey, Paul says, the believer should not be yoked to the unbeliever. So, using this agricultural image, Paul is saying, there are certain types of connections that believers should not have with unbelievers.

Certain types of collaborations because there's a mismatching. And that mismatching will damage us. So, Paul makes this big, don't be unequally yoked statement.

And then he follows it up with why you shouldn't be unequally yoked. You see them. He gives us five, count them, five rhetorical questions immediately after the unequally yoked business.

[6 : 02] And so, he says, verse 14, don't be unequally yoked with unbelievers. And then he says, for what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? What fellowship light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial?

That's another word for Satan. Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple with idols? So, these are rhetorical questions. The unsaid answer to these questions is nothing.

Each time, the answer is nothing. What accord, what common goal does Christ have with Satan? Nothing. So, he uses some fairly serious examples here.

And he's saying that a believer shouldn't join themselves in an inappropriate way with people who don't share their loyalty to Christ. That's what Paul is saying. There you go.

That's basically the sermon. So, the principle is pretty clear, I think. But the application, that's another question, right?

[7 : 05] That's not a slam dunk. So, I'm going to spend the rest of the sermon's application. I think we can draw some basic guidelines here.

So, let's sort of move in that direction, okay? But I'm going to throw out these ideas, and you have to work out how it lands in your life, all right? But so, here's some thoughts. Okay, so, we're not supposed to be unequally yoked with unbelievers.

So, what activities or relationships are banned? That's the big question, isn't it, right? What is he saying? What's he banning? What's he saying? What yoking, you know, should we avoid?

Okay, I think at the start, Paul has a specific situation in mind. He has specific unbelievers in mind, and the specific unbelievers are the false teachers in the church.

So, verse 14, he's talking about the false teachers, I believe. So, you remember these guys came into the church, and they've changed the gospel, really. They're sophists. They're professional speakers. They're rhetoricians.

[8 : 05] They come in, and they're really good at being flashy, and making a point. It doesn't matter what the point is. They just want to make a really good point, and sell their idea really well. So, Paul is saying, Corinthian church, you have yoked yourself to these guys.

You have gone into partnership with these guys. Not all of them, because some of the church has realized that they're mad, but there is still a minority there that are yoked to these false teachers, have joined themselves with them, are partners with them.

And it's a disaster. So, I think at the start, Paul has got that specific thing in mind. But, but, but, but, but, but, but, but, but. Paul moves from a very specific thing at the start to a general thing at the end.

And so, I think he leaves it open with quite a general application at the end of the passage here. That's chapter 7, verse 1. Let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.

Every defilement of body and spirit. That's a fairly sort of comprehensive kind of list there. A fairly comprehensive statement. So, at the start, I think he's talking about the false teachers.

[9 : 13] And at the end, he's saying, now I want you to apply that principle to your whole life. So, again, the question is, what are some examples for us today, right? And what ways can we be unequally yoked?

Now, to answer that, let me just first talk about what I don't think he's talking about. Does that make sense? I want to tell you what I do not think Paul is talking about.

One. I'll just give two examples. Two or three, maybe. First, Paul can't be banning social contact with non-Christians.

Christians are not isolationists. There is nowhere in the New Testament we're called to be that. We're not even supposed to isolate ourselves from the really, really naughty people and naughtiest of people.

Think about Jesus. One of the accusations leveled at him was that he hung out with too many sinners. Now, I think our big problem, my big problem, is that I kind of live in a Christian ghetto. I've got the opposite problem everyone I know is a Christian.

[10 : 15] We need to, we actually need to get out there. I need to work out how to solve this problem. I joined the PAC, which is the Parent Advisory Council at Sadie's School. It's the first year at school I joined the PAC.

And Amy said to me the other day, she goes, we need to get to know all the neighbors. So Amy suggested an alcohol-based solution. I will, this is not being recorded, right?

Yeah. Which was, she goes, let's have a happy hour on Fridays. Every couple of weeks, we'll have a happy hour. And I thought, no one would come. Tons of people turned up. We said, we'll have hot chocolate and some snacks for the kids.

But people, we just had a couple of bottles of wine and some cheese. And we got to know all these people in our neighborhood who our kids go to school with. It was great. We should be rubbing shoulders with people who don't know Jesus.

And we should be intentional about that. So Paul can't be talking about banning contact with unbelievers. Second, he can't be talking about work.

[11 : 16] He can't be saying that Christians should only work for Christians. There are, there are, look, there's a ton of examples of this in the Bible, of believers working in a very secular word.

Joseph and Daniel worked at the highest levels of a very pagan government. And, and they were praised for maintaining their integrity in there.

So it can't be, well, you can't work for non-Christians. Third, Paul can't be talking about a wholesale rejection of culture. And I'll spend a few minutes on this one because this one needs a little bit of unpacking, I think.

How, how do Christians respond to culture? What's our, how do we deal with culture? Throughout history, I think we've done it good and bad, often quite poorly recently.

So I'll give you some examples in terms of popular culture. Okay, so how do Christians respond to popular culture? Unhealthily, I think they do a few things. One, there's total disengagement. So that's, that's the view that, that culture is, particularly pop culture, is polluting and dangerous.

[12 : 29] So complete disengagement with popular culture. Or, what Christians have done is we produce sanitized versions of pop culture and only engage with that.

So that would be, you can only watch Veggie Tales and listen to Amy Grant. I hear she's the latest cool thing in Christian music. And, so that would be one version.

The Christian sanitized kind of, and just kind of engage with that. Another one, another problematic way of dealing with culture is the opposite problem. And that's just the, the, the uncritical consumption.

The mindless consumption of popular culture. Not thinking, but just consuming it. That, that's also problematic. There is a fourth way, there's a fourth way. This is the, this is the good way. This is the healthy way.

And the healthy way is to adopt a stance of critical enjoyment. We shouldn't reject culture. We shouldn't try and live in our own little Christian, isolated, Christianized bubble of culture.

[13 : 30] No, we should, you know, Christians should be the most nuanced of cultural observers. And as we're observing culture, particularly pop culture, we should be looking for expressions of justice and beauty and wisdom in that culture.

We should also recognize the idols and darkness in the culture as well. And we can do that because of the doctrine of common grace. Common grace says this, that God has given gifts, abilities and talents to all people, unmerited.

And so people in the world, Christian, non-Christian, have abilities and talents. And he's done that because it reflects his glory and it beautifies the world which he loves.

So that means the best lawyer in the world is not necessarily a Christian or the best screenwriters or the best painters or the best carpenters or the best teachers. They're not necessarily Christians because God has spread his wonderful gifts like scattered like scattered seeds.

So we should enjoy that. Where God's beauty and goodness exists in culture, even when it's veiled, we should enjoy it.

[14 : 47] We can consume that. Let me finish on Tim Keller. He's great on this stuff. Tim Keller is a Presbyterian minister in New York. He's got this great little, let me just read this short paragraph from him. Each one of us as part and parcel of the broader culture is engaged in the process of contributing to it in some way.

I'll read that sentence again. That's a key one. Each of us as part and parcel of broader culture is engaged in the process of contributing to it in some way. As Christians engaged in the culture but armed with a healthy biblical understanding of sin, we can understand that even Christian produced cultural contributions will contain idolatrous strains since Christians continue to struggle with idolatrous impulses.

Likewise, secular produced cultural contributions will always contain some witness to God's truth. Even angry, overtly anti-God productions with the air of desperation can testify to God's reality.

It's a great movie. I might have used this example before. A movie called Signs, sort of late 90s by M. Night, Shahamahoma. Well, I don't know how to say his name. What is his name? I'm looking at somebody that knows these things.

Shahamah, you know. What's his name? Shahamahoma. Yeah, yeah. He's great. I love this guy. I loved his early stuff. He's been downhill a bit. But Signs was a movie. Mel Gibson, who was a preacher who had lost his faith because his wife had died in a car accident.

[16 : 09] His son had terrible asthma. His oldest son just was kind of an angry guy. He used to play baseball, but he would swing at everything. So he had the record for, what is it when you swing and you miss?

Strikeouts, strikeouts. And he had, go sports team. Yeah. And he had a daughter who was pathological about water.

And so she would fill up water and drink a few sips out of the water glass and then leave the glasses of water all over the house everywhere. Right? So it was a mental problem. Right? And then aliens invade.

So, yeah, it's a true story. And, so the alien was in their living room and they're all in the living room freaking out because he's holding the son who's as asthma and the aliens breathe on people and people die.

And then they work out that water is like acid to these aliens. So, all of these things all of a sudden happen at once, right? The alien breathes on the little boy. He has asthma.

[17 : 14] He's having an asthma attack. His passages are all closed up. Doesn't die. the daughter who's got like, you know, 20 glasses of water around the room randomly where the alien is staying.

So just hold that thought. Mel thinks about his wife dying and one of the last words the wife says is swing away which is what he used to say to, what she used to say to the oldest boy and that's why he always struck out people just swing really hard at everything.

He sees the bat on the wall, picks up the bat, swings at all of his glasses of water in the room. They all splash the alien. Alien dies. Everyone's happy. Man comes back to faith, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. Right. Now, you could sort of go, oh, that's so great.

What great coincidences. Everything's win. Go team. Here's where we see, here's a nuanced observer, Christian observer of that will look at that and go, okay, the narrative of the story is that the brokenness of these people is used in the story of their redemption.

Okay. so they're redeemed by their brokenness. The worst thing about them redeemed that situation.

[18 : 26] And you look at that and you go, this is the story of Jesus. The worst thing that humanity could do to somebody, torture, kill, destroy somebody, nail them to the tree. The worst thing about humanity, God used that to redeem them.

Anyway, that's an example of how we process culture. We don't go, oh, stupid alien movie, don't believe in aliens, Satan, get away, you know. Okay. Okay, where are we in the sermon?

Paul has said, don't be unequally yoked with unbelievers. This does not mean we don't socialize with non-Christians. This does not mean we don't work with non-Christians.

This doesn't mean we reject anything non-Christian, typically non-Christian in culture. No. So what is, those are the things that Paul doesn't mean I don't think. So what is of joint participation is he referring to?

Well, I think he's talking about anything formal or informal. Any connection, and this is the key thing, any connection that forms you as a person, that forms you, he can be talking about that.

[19 : 32] Two examples. One, marriage. Does Paul have in mind marriage? I don't think so, but I think the principle is very applicable. Christians shouldn't initiate, I want you to hear the word initiate.

Christians shouldn't initiate a marriage to a non-believer. Let me give you just one reason, just one reason for that, why that's a bad idea. This is one reason amongst many. My wife and I, let's say we have a disagreement about something.

Let's say, man, we've got this guy up the road, he needs a whole lot of help, he's having some struggles. Can you, let's go help him. Leave me alone, I'm trying to watch The Walking Dead, it's the only good thing in my life, leave me alone, I hate my job.

This is just hypothetical. Because we are equally yoked, we're on the same team, so to speak, right?

She can call me to a higher standard, she can call me to something beyond both of us and pull me into line. And she does, with great regularity.

[20 : 38] Now two caveats with this example, two caveats. Just because it's an emotional one, right? It's a big one. Two caveats. First caveat, if a couple are married and one person becomes a Christian, that doesn't mean that the person who becomes a Christian should divorce their unbelieving spouse, using the argument of being unequally yoked.

No, Paul talks about that in 1 Corinthians 7. I'll read this to you, just, I want you to know this, okay? If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her.

And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. Each one should retain the place in life that the Lord has assigned to him and to which God has called him.

So Paul's rationale is the believer in a mixed marriage has the unique opportunity to influence the believer and, of course, children. second caveat, marrying somebody who is not a Christian, I would not call that a sin.

And the reason I would say that is because we have very precious sisters in the world who do not have a choice who they get to marry and some precious Christian girls who have converted in countries which are developing countries are sometimes forced to marry people not of their faith and we certainly wouldn't burden them with the tag of sinner for doing that.

[21 : 59] Okay, another example. Let's say a business one. I'll leave this one quite short. Business example. Again, I don't think Paul had this particularly in mind but I think the application fits. Let's say you're in a 50-50 partnership with somebody and the other partner forces you into decisions which are contrary to your values.

That's being unequally yoked. You've put yourself in a situation of being unequally yoked. Now, that is not saying only do business with Christians. However, I think what I am saying here is you should be very thoughtful and do due diligence in whom you are entering formal agreements with.

Okay, a little bit of a summary here. Paul says in 7.1, cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit. That's what we're talking about. That means any commitment, any relationship, any practice that negatively impacts your identity as a Christian that must be severed.

That's what he's saying. Let me talk about one more thing for about two minutes before finishing up here. Where does the power come from to do that though?

That's a big call, right? Sometimes you have to make very difficult decisions. Paul is calling us to a higher standard. He's calling us to do difficult things. Where does the power come from to do that? And I think the key is identity and Ross talked about this last week very well in his sermon.

[23 : 20] It's knowing who you are. If you have the passage open, you look at it in front of you there. You see the middle bit there from sort of 16 to 18. It's kind of formatted differently like a song or something, like formatted differently to the rest of it.

That's because Paul is quoting the Old Testament and it's a bit of a, what Paul has done is he's sort of mashed a few Old Testament scriptures together there. And they're quotes from the Old Testament.

they're mostly talking about the Hebrew people returning from exile. And you see there's some, these three I will statements. There are three I will statements.

One, I will make my dwelling among you. Two, I will welcome you. This is God saying this. Three, I will be a father to you and you will be my sons and daughters.

The original one actually said sons, but there we go. Paul, gender inclusive. Isn't that interesting? Sons and daughters. Sons and daughters. So what are these?

[24 : 22] What's the point of all this? Look, some things to notice about this. These are promises of adoption and intimacy. First thing I want you to notice there. Paul is trying to help us get our heads around the great privilege it is to be God's people.

The church is not just another institution. We're not just another institution that just plays a sort of a certain part in the fabric of society. No, we are the family of God. We're the family of God by an act of God.

First thing I want you to know, the great privilege of that. Two, do you see these I will statements here? They bookend, they bookend something. There's I am statements and then we have the central idea of verse 17 which we've talked about a few times.

Place right in the middle and then another I am statement. And the verse 17, remember, it's a call to be separate. That structure, that's not a coincidence. The call of the passage not to be unequally yoked is grounded in who we are.

Who we are, our identity, that is the engine room for making these decisions. Folks, you are sons and daughters of God.

[25 : 36] Sons and daughters of God. So, because of that identity, that means we give up that unbelieving boyfriend or girlfriend even though we'd hoped it would end in marriage.

It means we turn down that business deal that would have made us a lot of money because we know the person that we're entering into a contract with that we're yoking ourselves to does not share our values.

And three, we say no to the person who perhaps invites us to their temple of worship knowing it's going to offend them. We do this because the most precious thing in our life is our identity as sons and daughters of God.

Folks, what a treasure we have in Jesus. And we just don't want to do anything to damage that. That's what the passage is talking about. Amen.