

Unequally Yoked

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[0 : 00] Now, please turn in the Word of God to hear again fairly familiar words, I think, from 2 Corinthians chapter 6, and we can read again verse 14. Paul's second letter to the Corinthian church, chapter 6, verse 14. And Paul writes there to the Christian church that had so many problems and difficulties in Corinth, who were mixed up about so many issues, and he says to them, do not be unequally yoked, unequally mixed with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness, what accord, what agreement has Christ with Belial, with the devil, with false gods, or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever, and so on.

This evening, I want to ask us who we seek with our lives, who we seek to honour, who we seek to know, who we seek to serve. Do we seek God as the centre of our thoughts and our lives, or do we seek something else?

Let me tell you about a recent holiday. I have a son who's 14, he's great fun to be with, he's really into football, watching it and playing it. And we decided to go on a boys' road trip, so we went away camping for a few days, and we, various parts of the highlands, central highlands, and then went over to the west, to the Loughabar area, and we had some good times together. And one of the things my son was keen to do was to take the steam train from Fort William to Malig. It's one of the beautiful railway routes of the world that tourists like to take. Many of you, maybe some of the older folk, will be old enough to remember when it wasn't pleasure but necessity that took you to catch a steamer at Malig, and you were maybe going by train from Glasgow to Fort William and then on to Malig, or possibly catching the steamer at Kyle, coming off the train and steaming up to the islands to get home. Well, we were doing it for pleasure and we enjoyed it. It was a steam train full of tourists from all kinds of nationalities, and many of them were there because of Harry Potter, because that was the train that was used in one of the films, more than one, and the Glenfinnan Viaduct, a beautiful structure, was featuring in some of the films about the boy wizard. So it was a good trip, and we got to

Malig, and it was at Malig that something very remarkable caught my attention. When we got off the train and went for a walk about and doing our touristy things at Malig, it was a beautiful day, sunny and lovely. It's a busy harbour, lots of fishing boats, lots of pleasure craft, very busy little harbour, and the McBrain ferries come and go from the small isles, from rum and egg and places like that, but they also come from the Isle of Skye. You can take the ferry to Skye. You don't have to drive to Skye. You can still sail to Skye, to Slade, from Malig. And I saw a gentleman and spoke to him at the quay at Malig. He caught my interest.

He was foreign. He was a Frenchman, and he was on holiday and travelling around by himself independently. And he'd come off one ferry and he was waiting for some public transport to go off somewhere else. Nothing very remarkable there, except he was blind. He had a stick, and he had to be helped off one ferry from Armadale, and he was waiting at the quayside. He was using his mobile phone, and I could see that when he used the screen and held it right up to his face, the whole screen on his phone was filled with one number, and he could see one number at a time. He had hardly any sight at all, and yet he was travelling on his own independently.

[5 : 11] And I imagine he was enjoying travelling through the western highlands and islands of Scotland. Quite remarkable. But that man would need a guide. That man, if he wanted to go to the small isles, would need someone to tell him, this is your ferry. You get in the wrong ferry, you go to the wrong island. Several ferries coming in and out all day.

At the platform, at the railway station, there are the Scotrail trains, and then there are the touristy trains. There's the diesel, and then there's the steam. And some are going where you want to go, and some may be aren't.

But if you can't see, and if you can't read, you need a guide. And what moves me to tell you about this man, is that I think very often in life, we imagine that we have all the choices open to us in the

world.

We can do whatever we want. We're independent. We're free. We're strong. We can choose Christ whenever we want.

We can become Christians whenever we want. We can put God away to the back of our lives for as long as we choose. And I don't think that's right at all. When we were in Fort William, my son and I, we had a choice.

[6 : 44] Two platforms, two trains. One going where we wanted to go, and one going in the opposite direction to Glasgow. You cannot board both trains at once. You board one or you board the other. If you want to get to the right destination, you need to be sure that you are traveling towards it and not further away.

The truth about me and the truth about you is that we are very like the French tourists. helpless, helpless, blind, and needing a guide.

And when we think, oh, I can come to Christ anytime I want, the truth is we are sitting in the midst of life, unable to even tell which direction is the right direction.

unable to tell. Because sin has wounded our hearts and our minds and our thoughts. And we hear Christians and we hear your own ministers here, and we maybe even try to read the scriptures, and it is a closed book to us, because we don't have the eyes to see or the heart to understand what is good for us.

Please listen to what Paul has to say to the Corinthians. Because if you are not a Christian, you are in a worse and more precarious position than that stranger to Scotland, who was sitting on a key site, depending on others to tell him, there's your taxi, there's your bus, there's your ferry, let me lead you to it.

[8 : 44] We are more helpless than that man. That man seemed to know what he was doing for all his disability. But until Christ is our savior, we are groping in the dark.

Three things from this chapter tonight. The first is to simply state that God tells you in his word who he welcomes, whom he will welcome to himself.

God tells you whom he welcomes. He welcomes those who believe.

He does not welcome those who hitch their lives and their ideas to unbelief. He welcomes those who believe the gospel, who believe in Jesus, who trust in Jesus.

Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? The two trains going in two different directions.

[9 : 59] You can't board them both at once. You can't believe and not believe. And God welcomes those who believe in his son.

Many, many times in the word of God, maybe more than 50 times, we are told that God is a holy one. The holy one.

And the meaning of holiness, tablo-shawaii area, but the basic idea, I suppose, is that God is different. God is pure. God is separate from what's polluting and dirty and filthy.

All that defiles. God is cut away from all of that. He's different. He's holy. God is a holy one. And I've been thinking with you over the last few services here about the means, through Jesus and his sacrifice, by which God, a holy God, may welcome sinners to the gospel, to the Lord's table, to salvation.

Now, this chapter that we've been reading today tells us, in verse 17, that because God is a holy God, we need to clear out of an unholy world and unholy alliances.

[11 : 24] Therefore, go out from their midst. Be separate from them, says the Lord. 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.

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 God. This passage tells us that holiness matters, and that holiness brings us to heaven, and that not being holy brings us to destruction. And something to do with this business of holiness involves a separation from the things that are anti-God, a separation from the things that are unbelieving and opposed to God.

Now, this is very tricky, because we can really get this wrong, and we can become very foolish in the way we apply a text like this to our lives.

Maybe some of you are already switching off and thinking, oh, here, this is going to be one of those nights where I get told about all the things I need to leave, and all the things I shouldn't enjoy, and

all the people I shouldn't have anything to do with.

[12:45] Well, listen. Listen, and let's see if we don't talk about Jesus and what it means to follow him. Well, I've told you about my recent holidays, so let me tell you what I got up to when I was 15.

A kind of holiday. I used to go in September for several years with many friends from the congregation here to the Scottish Northern Convention, a gathering of Christians in Russia, in Strathpefer in those years, and it was great fun.

There was a youth weekend, a house party, 100, 150, 200 young people from all over the place would get together from a Friday and break up on a Sunday evening and be at services and fellowships and stay together.

It was wonderful. It was a great treat to be involved in that. And I made a friend from the village of Conton near Strathpefer, one of those years, quiet boy with very curly hair.

I got to know him a wee bit, and the next year I went back, he was there again, and he was enjoying the convention and the Young People's Weekend. But, he said, this will be my last year coming to the convention.

[14:09] And he explained that his family belonged to an assembly of Christians that was clothed. And he was going to become a member in it, maybe be baptized, I don't know, but he was going to join that fellowship.

And the moment he became part of that fellowship, he was not allowed to mix with other churches, with other Christians, to go to other meetings. That would be it for the rest of his life.

He would be in that assembly, and assemblies that they were involved with, and nothing else. Do you think that's what Paul has in mind? No.

Do you think that's how we show holiness? Yes. By saying to other Christians, oh, you're not in my church, so I don't want to know anything about you. You don't believe exactly what I believe, or worship exactly how I worship, or read the books that I read, or go to the conferences that I go to. I don't want to know you. I don't want to know you. I don't want to acknowledge you. I don't want to have you in my home. I must separate.

[15:17] Come out from among them and be separate. Oh, that is so opposed to the gospel, because it is so opposed to what Jesus did himself.

Jesus was holy, and cared about the holiness of God, and the holiness of God's name. But he didn't even separate from those who persecuted him.

He kept teaching them righteousness. And he didn't separate from sinners, publicans, tax collectors, drunks, women who were notorious for the men who had been in their lives.

He didn't separate from them. He went to the homes of folk like Zacchaeus, who had been thieves and cheats. And he ate at their tables.

And he loved them. I don't believe we've got separation right if we think it's putting a drawbridge around ourselves, or our congregation, or our denomination, and saying everybody else is wrong, and we're right, and we're down on them, and we don't care what anybody else does or thinks, and we don't pray for anybody else, because we are separate.

[16:38] That's not the gospel. That's not the Christian way. That's not the free church way. It never has been. Not at all. In the history of the free church, if you go back over a hundred years, you'll find it was Thomas Chalmersham, the leaders of the free church, who established movements for Bible societies that were interdenominational for the Evangelical Alliance, and places where Christians who loved the Word of God could cooperate on great matters of shared concern.

So separation is separation from evil. Separation is separation from unbelief.

But separation is not separation from other Christians. We owe it to our enemies to love them and pray for them.

So surely we owe it to our brothers and sisters to love them and pray for them. We're simply following Jesus. And yet these verses about not being unequally yoked mean something.

God tells us who he welcomes. He welcomes those who believe. So what does that verse 14 mean when it says, do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers?

[18:07] Well, I want to suggest to you that right through Scripture, there is a strand of teaching, that there is a certain kind of mixture that God does not like.

There's a way of blending things, sort of mixing things, that is simply not right in God's eyes. The law of the Lord says, you don't yoke together two animals that are very different.

You don't yoke an ox to a donkey, a big, strong, tall, powerful beast with a much smaller animal with a different nature.

You can't plow a straight furrow with two such mismatched animals. You don't, according to the law of the Lord, for the Old Testament people, you don't mix different types of crop in the same field. The way they mix, they may interfere with one another. It may cause a confusion. And that's applied to various areas of life in Israel.

[19 : 11] Because there was a kind of mixing that was wrong in God's sight. But that mixing, when you read the Bible from start to finish, it becomes absolutely clear that the mixing that God hates, that God abhors, is the mixing of his name with what is morally evil and wicked.

It's the mixing of light and dark. It's the mixing of truth and lies. You can't mix certain things. It is impossible.

But mixing with other people is not the issue. Loving other people is not the issue. And we need great wisdom to know how to be faithful followers of Jesus who walked among sinners and was not contaminated by them, but who loved them and served them.

That's the first thing tonight. that God tells you who he welcomes. He welcomes those who believe. He does not welcome those who mix truth and lies, who mix holiness and evil.

The second thing tonight is that God gives clear reasons, explanations for his promise that he will welcome those who are believing.

[20 : 32] He gives reasons for his promise. And I want to suggest that there are at least three reasons that are given in the passage we read today. God gives the reason, first of all, that you cannot mix incompatible things.

Verses 14 and 15 of the passage we read contain five questions. Just look at them. Don't be unequally yoked with unbelievers.

And then here's the first question. What partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Question mark. Question mark. I want you to think, what's the answer to that question? It's what you call a rhetorical question.

He's asking the question to make a point because the answer to the question will be, there is no partnership between what's right and what's wrong in God's sight.

They're opposites. There's none is the answer. And with all five questions, the answer will be the same. None. Nothing. Nothing. Nothing at all. They're light and dark.

[21 : 37] They're different. Completely different. What fellowship has light with darkness? Nothing. What accord? What partnership? What agreement has Christ with the devil?

Belial. None. What portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What does a believer have in common, says the NIV, with an unbeliever?

That's an interesting one. We'll maybe come back to that one. What agreement has the temple of God with idols? None.

The point that's being made is that some things don't go together. They're incompatible. Think about that one day. What portion does a believer share with an unbeliever?

What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? We have believers in Jesus and unbelievers in this meeting tonight. What do you have in common?

[22 : 36] Lots. You go to the same places of work. You go to the same schools. You enjoy the same music, maybe.

You buy the same clothes in the shops. You like the same things when you're on holiday. You enjoy the company of the same friends. You've got a lot in common.

But the point that the Apostle Paul is making here is that spiritually, in terms of your relationship with God, what does a believer have in common with a person who does not believe in Jesus? Spiritually, what do you share in common? Nothing. Nothing at all. And so it's very dangerous to think, well, at least I go to church.

If I go to church and I don't believe, I gain nothing. At least I don't swear. But if I don't believe, I gain nothing.

[23 : 41] At least I'm fairly good living. But if I don't trust Jesus, what do I gain from that? Nothing.

Nothing. Those whom God receives, those whom God welcomes, are those who believe on his Son, who give themselves to his Son, who trust in his Son.

And there is no mixture possible between believing and not believing, trusting and not trusting, because these are trains departing in opposite directions.

These are ways of living that are going in different directions. You get on the wrong ferry, you go to the wrong place. If you believe, you get life from God.

If you don't believe, you have eternal death already. So that's a reason for God's promise.

[24 : 41] Another reason is that you cannot profane God's holy place or holy space. Verse 16 talks about the temple.

What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we, the believers, the church of God, are the temple of the living God, as God has said. And then he goes on to quote from the Old Testament scriptures, I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them and I will be their God.

A holy space, the temple, cannot tolerate an idol being set up in that holy place. The temple of the Lord, imagine going into the temple of the Lord with a wheelbarrow full of idols and things to do with black magic or with superstition or with non-Christian religions, maybe the stone and the wood and the gold idols of the blinded nations.

And you wheel them into the temple of God and you say, we're going to worship God in here, but we're going to worship Bain. We're going to worship God here and we will worship Allah of the Muslims. We're going to worship God here, but we will also accept that non-Christian sects like the Latter-day Saints are just a kind of Christian.

It's all the same. All different names, different paths for the one God. That, my friend, is to profane God's holy space.

[26 : 21] It is the sin of sacrilege. It is defiling the temple. Now the temple today is not a building in Jerusalem. The temple today is the church of the living God, the gatherings of the saints, the very life and body of a Christian is the temple of the Holy Spirit.

You believers are temples of the Holy Spirit and when you come together in a prayer meeting, when you come together in a Bible study, when you come together as the church of the living God for teaching and worship and fellowship, you are God's holy place.

what agreement can the temple of God have with idols? None.

Can we have interfaith worship? No. Will Jesus share our heart and our loyalty with some false gods?

not for a moment. Will Jesus share your heart with the first love of your life which may be your career or your wealth, your job?

[27 : 37] That is to cheapen God. So that's a second reason why God tells us that he makes a promise, if you believe, I'll be your God but if you profane my name, I'm not your God.

You cannot go into God's space with an idol. And the last reason why God gives us this promise, I'll be your God but on the basis of faith, on the basis of trust, no other basis.

The third reason why God gives this promise is that you cannot disobey God without much loss. To turn your back on God is to cheat yourself.

To turn your back on God is to rob yourself. That's why verse 17 and 18 say, quoting the Old Testament, echoing Isaiah 52 here, therefore go out from their midst and be separate from them, says the Lord, touch no unclean thing, then I will welcome you and I will be a father to you and you shall be my sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty.

That's from Isaiah 52. What's Isaiah 52? Maybe some of you remember singing the chorus, how lovely on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news.

[29 : 02] Isaiah 52 says there's good news for God's people and it's marvelous to be the messenger of that good news because it's news of God's peace, it's news of God's salvation, it's news caught off to the people of Isaiah's day, it was news that the exiles and the captives in Babylon were going home to Jerusalem.

Good news. God is saving you from being aliens and strangers in that evil city of idols, Babylon, that city that is opposed to God, Babylon, that city that has its own false gods that it worships, Babylon.

God is going to take you out of Babylon and take you to his holy city, Jerusalem. Oh, what good news, proclaim it on the mountaintops. Oh, what wonderful news.

Kiss the feet of the messenger who tells you it's time to go home to Jerusalem out of Babylon. And now Paul quotes this to the Corinthians because they're living in this world which is so often like Babylon and they're living in a world where for us the TV and the music and the newspapers and the magazines seem to hate God and Christianity and so many of our friends behave as if there

was no God and no day of judgment and Jesus means nothing more than a swear word. Come out of Babylon. Babylon. We're not coming out of our families. We're not coming out of our community. We're not coming out of speaking to our neighbor over the fence.

[30 : 50] We're not coming out of friendly kind relationships with the people at work but we're coming out of the city that persecutes us and hates our God.

We're coming out of the anti-God part of our society that hates Jesus. We're saying no to that and we're saying yes to our God and Savior Jesus Christ.

The Christian life is not about becoming a nun, not about becoming a monk, it's not about becoming strange and weird and queer. The Christian life is not about giving up fun and just being normal. The Christian life is about giving up unbelief and it's about giving up God hating, God rejecting lies and it's about giving up idols, it's about giving up hate, it's about giving up self-centeredness, it's about giving up worldliness that thinks money and all that goes along with a worldly outlook is all that matters.

That's what we're to hate, that's Babylon. You cannot disobey God without much loss because if you stay in Babylon, if you stay in the city marked out for destruction and if you make your alliances with the rebel world and its rebellion against God, if you fail to flee from the city of destruction, you will perish and you will go to hell.

[32 : 28] God says, come out from the world that's going to hell and come into the world that is redeemed.

Come out from the world that hates me and come into the fellowship of God's children who listen to me.

So we saw two main things tonight. God tells you who he welcomes. He welcomes those who believe. He doesn't welcome those who try to mix things that never make.

God gives you reasons for this. He tells you it's incompatible to try and mix light with darkness they don't make. He tells you he is holy and holiness cannot mix with idols and disobeying this will lead to tragedy.

So how shall we finish tonight? The third and last thing I want to say to you is don't even try to divide your loyalties. We have to be clear.

[33 : 42] Am I for Christ or am I against Christ? Am I for life in the Lord and eternal life or am I against life in the Lord?

Am I for the train that is going north or the train that is going south? Can't board both trains. Can't live my life in two directions and if I try I will go mad.

I'm going to believe and not believe. Impossible. I'm going to follow Jesus and not follow Jesus. Impossible. That's what this passage in the word of God is saying.

I need to conclude but let me tell you very briefly what God is not saying in 2 Corinthians 6 and 7. God is not saying if you're a Christian avoid unbelievers.

Don't have contact with unbelievers. That's not the case. That's not what Jesus did. Love and serve unbelievers. If you have friends who were your good friends before you were converted try to keep them.

[34 : 59] If they very sadly don't want to be your friend anymore well that is tragic but try to keep them as friends. Not because you are in agreement but for the same reason that Jesus showed love and compassion to those who were strangers to God's grace.

Now God is not saying here avoid a secular life. A life in the world. As if the only life that mattered was a life that involved some kind of official Christian service.

You have to be ordained. You have to be a minister. You have to be a missionary. You have to be a youth worker. You have to be some kind of pastor of woman. Pastor of this, that or the other. These are all brilliant.

I love to see developments where strong congregations like your own one are able to support various kinds of worker and various kinds of new development.

It's great and it's exciting. But you can serve God in your calling as a teacher, a policeman, working for the bank, working for yourself, working in the building trade, working as a mother, bringing up children.

[36 : 15] You can serve God when you are in retirement. You can serve God if you are unwell and unable to have a paid job. There will be maybe ways that you can use your time and your interaction with other people to the glory of God.

In the Old Testament, Joseph and Daniel rose to the very top of secular employment. In Babylon and Egypt, lands that persecuted the church of God, Daniel and Joseph went to the top. There's no reason why you shouldn't have a job that is serving God but that is secular. No reason at all. God isn't saying the only valid career path for you is to be employed by some Christian agency. And God is certainly not saying unbelievers aren't welcome in Christian homes or Christian meetings. Unbelievers are always welcome. People who are seeking or who are not sure are always welcome.

If you are wanting to know more about the Christian faith and you don't know what you believe, come to church. Come to church on Sundays. Come to church in the midweek. Come to Bible studies.

[37 : 33] Meet with Christians. Get as much of Christianity as you can get and you will be welcome. And nobody will look at you in a funny way and ask what are they doing here?

You will be welcome. The scripture says in the letters to the Corinthians be sure if an unbeliever comes into your meeting be sure that they understand what you're saying. Be sure that they understand what you're doing and why you're doing it.

Make it as intelligible as possible. Otherwise they will think you're mad and they will not understand the way of God. We want people to come into our meetings and say God is really among you.

If you don't yet know God you are welcome in the meetings of God's people. And the last thing I want to say here that God is not saying I'm sorry to even have to mention this but I do have to mention it.

God is not saying to Christian men or Christian women if you have an unconverted husband or wife you can just walk away from them.

[38 : 42] God is not saying that. Don't be unequally yoked is not saying that you have freedom to walk away even from a marriage that can be quite difficult at times.

There are sometimes reasons why a marriage is dissolved and they are always sad and they are usually sinful.

But Paul says in this very letter in 1 Corinthians 7 it is he says to Christian men who have unbelieving wives and Christian wives who have unbelieving husbands if your spouse is content to remain with you in the marriage then you should remain with them and seek to win them for Christ by your example.

by your words, by your love. Who knows what God will do? It's a different matter if you have choice, if you're single. Clearly a verse like our text in chapter 6 there in verse 14 clearly that is saying to us don't walk into an unequal marriage.

Don't enter a relationship that is going to risk great damage to you and to somebody else because you're not in spiritual agreement.

[40 : 05] Paul says to the widows in the Corinthian church who are free to marry he says you're no longer married to your husband who died, you're free to marry anyone but marry in the Lord and that rule applies to young men and young women and not so young men and not so young women if you love Christ and you're free to marry marry in the Lord.

That's Paul's word on the matter but if you're already married do you know what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 7 to Christian men who have unbelieving wives God has called you to peace try to make peace with your spouse that husband that wife who may be difficult to live with who may not understand your faith who may resent the fact that you love Jesus and give so much of your time and effort to Christian things strive for the God of peace to bring peace into your home and into your marriage.

No God is not saying turn your back on people shun people walk away from people so what is God saying in this chapter he's saying be loyal to Jesus put Jesus at the center flee from Babylon the city of destruction to Jesus put Jesus at the very center now I'm finished and we must go home or go to the fellowship but the issue still remains as we come to the end of the service tonight do we go home the way we came to this meeting trying to board two trains going in two different directions or do we go home sure that we believe and that the one we trust for the future is Jesus Christ only you can answer do you believe maybe your prayer needs to be the prayer of somebody else we meet in scripture who said Lord I believe help my unbelief let's pray let's pray verse