

Last week, we were talking about “*Being the new creation that we are*”... We were talking about “holiness”, and about how God is sanctifying us (He is making us more holy).... But we also talked about how **we** have a part to play in this. Paul is **appealing** to the Corinthian church, “Not to take the Grace of God in vain”...

We are the temple of the Living God. God lives inside of us – That’s His promise.

And Paul says to them 7:1 **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.**

Now, I’m going to remind you of the illustration I used last week. (**not** because I think you’ve forgotten it, but because I think it’ll help us again today).

I used the illustration of taking a farm dog, and turning it into a house dog. *I don’t know what it is about dogs – I don’t understand how something with such a sensitive nose, can love the most putrid things... If a dog can find a rotting kangaroo carcass (or any rotting carcass) out in the paddock, it’s as happy as Larry. It will roll in it, and cover itself in the putrid stench, and it’ll be quite satisfied...*

But if you want to take that farm dog out of its natural environment, and turn it into a house dog, you’ve gotta put it in a tub of hot soapy water and scrub and scrub and scrub , all of the putrid stench out of its coat...

And that's a bit what it's like for us to be saved... We were putrid with sin, but we've been washed clean by the blood of Jesus. By the grace of God, we've been made holy... But to take the grace of God in vain, is for us to go back sinning again...

It's like that freshly scrubbed, cleaned, and blow-dried dog, going outside and finding a dead goanna to roll in...

*You see, the Dog's nature hasn't changed... Its desire **isn't** to be fluffy clean. No matter how clean the dog might be – it still wants to find something that stinks, so that it can roll in (and become one with it), so that it stinks too... The dog remains the same creature it always was, and it's still wired to desire the putrid...*

But for Disciples of Jesus (for those who in Christ), our story is very different to that. Paul tells us (5:17) that we are a new creation.

In Christ, our transformation is so profound, that we're not just changed a little bit, so that we're a little bit better behaved. We become a new creature – a new creation. And even our desires change.

Our old desire **was** for things that would make us putrid with sin. But now that we're "in Christ", we don't want to do those things anymore. We don't want to have any part of that anymore. Our **new** desire, is to **leave behind** those things that defile, and to live righteously (to please God).

We mightn't always achieve that – we mightn't always live righteously, But that's our desire isn't it – to honour God.. – to

7:1 cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.

Righto, so that's a re-cap from last week... But there was a section (last week) that I didn't spend much time on, because we're going to cover it today... It's still the same theme as last week – being the new creation we are. But Paul gives us an instruction on how “holiness” requires some kind of separation...

So, if you don't mind, I'm going to read the Bible reading today.

2 Corinthians 6:14 – 7:1

¹⁴ Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? ¹⁵ What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? ¹⁶ 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.

17 Therefore go out from their midst,
and be separate from them, says the Lord,
and touch no unclean thing;
then I will welcome you,
18 and I will be a father to you,
and you shall be sons and daughters to me,
says the Lord Almighty."

7 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.

....

Righto:

Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. What does
that mean?

*Back in the day... Not back in my day, but back in my father's
day, and my grandfather's day, to plough a paddock, was
done with a beast of burden... You would pull a plough with
either a Bullock or a draft horse. In some countries they
might use a mule... And if you needed a bigger tractor, you
just joined them together:*

- *2 bullocks to pull a plough, or a wagon, or whatever; or*
- *2 draft horses; or*
- *2 mules...*

And if you needed a bigger tractor, you'd add – 4, 6 bullocks.
When God called the Prophet Elisha, he was ploughing with

12 yoke of oxen... Now, that's a big tractor (back in the day)...

So you could hitch more and more beasts of burden together, to get a bigger tractor... But what you **couldn't** do, is mix-&-match... You couldn't hitch a bullock together with a mule... They're not matched (you see), and they don't work well together. And in fact, the Law forbid it:

Deuteronomy 22:¹⁰ You shall not plough with an ox and a donkey together.

You see, "Being unequally yoked", **isn't** about putting a big bullock with a smaller bullock. (immature / mature). It's about being matched with an entirely different species (don't put them together).

Alright, so let me give you the modern equivalent:
Let's talk about pulling scrub:

Some of our locals will know this, but some people listening in on the podcast or the video may not know what scrub pulling is. In Queensland (out where we live), vegetation needs to be managed, so that the grass can continue to grow...

Every now and then, city folk might hear on the news some alarming figure (that the environmentalist tell them) of how many Ha or how many km² (of trees) are being cleared in a week or a year, and they quickly do the calculations and they go "Oh, within a decade there won't be a tree left standing.... And they start to panic."

*No need to panic folks – trees re-grow. And the land that you hear that's getting cleared today – (what the environmentalists **don't** tell you), is it's already been cleared (4 or 5 times in the past)... Every now and then, the trees and shrubs get so thick that the grass can't grow underneath them, so you bring the dozers in and pull the scrub, and it'll be good for another decade or 2, before the regrowth needs to be dealt with again...*

So, what does pulling scrub look like? Well, ideally, 2 large Bull dozers (These days most people will use a D10 or a D9), are linked together with a very large chain, and they drive along and knock over the regrowth as they go.

(Here's a little video clip if you've never seen it before. Komatsu?)

Righto, you might've noticed that those 2 dozers weren't the same size. Ideally they'll be a similar size, but a big dozer can still work with a smaller dozer. You just can't get too carried away, or the big dozer will end up pulling the little one backwards...

*Alright that's our modern equivalent of being “**equally** yoked” – 2 bull dozers linked together with chain to do a job...*

*What you can't do, is this:
D10 approx. 700hp
The Ferrari 812 Superfast (789 hp)*

Alright, maybe that's a bit silly. What about this one? That Kenworth's 625hp. Could we harness it to the D10 with a scrub chain???

No. Why not? Because they're different species, and they don't work well together...

And when Paul says “**Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers.**”, it's because disciples of Jesus and the people of the world, are a different species... A child of God, and a child of the devil, are an **entirely** different creature...

Now, in this day and age, where nobody wants to be offended, and in fact, many believe it's their right to not be offended, a statement like that, is frowned upon...

“Oh you Christians,

- *you're so elitist –*
- *you're so black & white –*
- *you're so judgmental... ”*

But unless we can grasp this reality – unless we can grasp the biblical and spiritual truth, that there are 2 types of people in the world – children of God and children of the devil,,, And unless we ‘**get**’ that and **understand** that, and **accept** that, then we're not going to understand what this passage is about...

Before you were born again – before you gave your life to Jesus, you were a child of the Devil. There **is** no neutral ground – we're either **for** Jesus, or we're against Him...

But when you were born again, you became a **new** creation. You're not the same anymore. Jesus Christ is not only our

Saviour – He is our **Lord**. And He deserves our entire **allegiance**...

Paul uses the terms:

- Partnership;
- Fellowship;
- Accord;
- Portion; and
- Agreement.

What partnership has righteousness with lawlessness?

The Greek word μετοχή (metochē) *refers to a partnership, a sharing of common goals or activities*ⁱ.

What are the common goals of righteousness and lawlessness??? There **are** no common goals... Whether it be a marriage partnership, or whether it be a business partnership (or any other kind of partnership), your goals will be very different to an unbeliever's goals.....

If a Christian, whose goal is “righteousness”, tries to partner with someone who rejects Christ, they're going to be constantly torn, because their partner will have different goals...

Let's talk about marriage – Do not be unequally yoked in marriage – don't even consider partnering with an unbeliever in marriage:

One of the greatest privileges and one of the greatest responsibilities in a marriage (God willing), is to bring up

children... And as disciples of Jesus, our greatest desire – our greatest goal, is to see our children come to faith in Jesus... But way too often, a Christian man (or **more** often, a Christian woman), ignores this simple (and wise) instruction of God (don't be unequally yoked), and they start dating someone who's not a Christian... And then they marry them. And they believe it's not going to be a problem...

But their goals are the opposite, (and their activities are the opposite)... The Christian's desire:

- is to worship God; and
- grow in the faith; and
- they want to see their partner come to faith; and
- they want to see their children come to faith...

But their partner's hoping that 'this Jesus thing' is just a fad that their partner's going to grow out of'...

And the Christian's hopes and dreams, are for their children to make Christ their everything, while the unbeliever hopes for carnal things for their child, like excelling in sport; or academia; or to just be popular & well-liked... The last thing they care about, is whether they come to faith...

The goals and activities of righteousness are very different to the goals and activities of lawlessness...

When it comes to partnership with unbelievers, Be separate...

What **fellowship** has light with darkness?

I love "fellowship". κοινωνία (koinōnia) (fellowship) is a close union – a brotherly bond...

You know, these days (outside of the church), the word “fellowship” doesn’t get used very much... But ‘fellowship’, is one of the things that I love most about being a Christian – “fellowship”... A close union – a brotherly bond... I can meet a Christian for the first time ever, and we have this instant connection – this instant bond... They’re like a brother to me (or a sister).

Every time that we’ve moved towns, the first thing we do, is we find a new church to fellowship with... People we’ve never met before, have us over for dinner, and they’re like close family...

Last year, Robyn and I went to Sydney to visit some family (who aren’t Christians), and while we were there, we met a few different people, who we’ve never known before, but they are brothers and sisters in Christ... And 2 different groups of people, we had meals with them, and we had fellowship (went to church)... And I want to get to know them more (and I miss them), because they’re so far away... Fellowship...

But what close union – what brotherly bond has light with darkness??? None... We’ve been called out of the darkness, and into the light. And, you’ll probably discover, the longer you’ve been a Christian, the less you have in common with your old friends... Why is that? It’s because they are living in darkness, but you’ve been called out of the darkness...

What **accord** has Christ with Belial?

Interesting word this one: συμφώνησις (symphōnēsis)
(sounds like symphony, doesn't it), and that's exactly what it is:

means "to agree, to be in harmony or concord with." Lit. it may denote the "harmonious sound" of many musical instruments

Alright, what agreement? What harmony is there, between Christ and Belial? (Satan)

Nothing. Christ and Satan are diametrically opposed to each other. And some people will try and tell you, "*It doesn't matter what religion you are – we're all worshipping the same god.*"... **Rubbish...** The Lord our God (YHWH) reveals Himself as the One True God – there are no others. And the only way to God, is through Jesus Christ...

The worship of other gods, is the worship of demons – Satan receives their worship... And our God is a jealous God. It is right to worship God and God alone. There is no accord; there is no harmony, between Christ and demons...

As you know, I used to be a minister in a certain denominational church. And in that church (at a denominational level), they conducted what they called "inter-faith dialogue" ... Now that sounds ("sus" ... bordering on) OK – talking with other faiths... But at every Synod meeting, we would hear again, about how they would have an inter-faith worship service, where Muslims and Hindus and various Christian denominations and Buddhists and Jews and all other types, would come together to worship together, and to pray together ,, And they would tell us how wonderful it was...

And my Spirit would groan... What harmony – what accord, has Christ with Belial?

And I suspect that more and more, we're going to see pressure being exerted for some kind of joint worship, or joint prayer in a public setting... We're seeing it in the cities now. It isn't happening out here yet...

I suspect out here in the bush, the first thing's going to be trying to mix Indigenous spirituality in with Christianity...

But joint worship and joint prayer, is something that we can never do. **Be separate...** It doesn't matter what your faith background is; or what culture you come from, if it includes some kind of spiritual practice / worship / prayer, that isn't of Christ, then there's no harmony between that, and your new Christian faith... Be separate. Come out of it. Be separate.

We've got to remember that Corinth was a particularly heathen sort of a place. Most of the Corinthian church had to leave behind their idolatry and their worship of other gods. And they willingly left it, to follow Jesus.

Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever?

That's like, what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?

Well, the only thing we have in common, is our past, and our need of a saviour... But when we look forward to the future; when we look forward to our inheritance – to what we have in

Christ, a believer shares in “glory” and “eternity”... But an unbeliever awaits judgment.

And the only way for us to share the portion that we have – to share the glorious future we’re looking forward to, is for us to share the **Gospel**. We share the Gospel now, with our unbelieving friends, so that they can become believers too. And **then** they can share in the inheritance of glorious eternal life. But until they turn to Jesus, our portion is nothing alike...

Be separate...

What agreement has the temple of God with idols?

What agreed upon arrangement is there, between the temple of God and Idols? Well obviously, idols / idolatry / the worship of other Gods, is an abomination to God – they have **no** place in the temple...

And then Paul goes on to explain that we **are** the temple of the Living God, and so there’s no place for idolatry in us. There’s no place for dabbling in other religions or alternative spirituality... Don’t get drawn into:

- New Age mysticism; or
- indigenous spirituality; or
- alternative therapies that are actually based on other religious practices...

Be separate...

You see:

Because God makes His home with us – Because He is our God and we are His people:

- ¹⁷ Therefore go out from their midst,
and be separate from them, says the Lord,
and touch no unclean thing;
then I will welcome you,
¹⁸ and I will be a father to you,
and you shall be sons and daughters to me,
says the Lord Almighty."

Because we are in the presence of a Holy God, it is right for us to separate from the unholy...

But in what way do we do that?

Well, I think it's obvious that he's talking about separation in terms of:

- Partnership;
- Fellowship;
- Accord;
- Portion; and
- Agreement.

But when we start thinking about "separation", today's Bible reading's a **really** good example of why it's **really** important to have a bit of a grasp of the **whole** of the Bible, and not just to take little bits of it on its own... If we were to take today's Bible reading all on its own, we'd probably decide to set up for ourselves, a Christian commune out in the scrub somewhere, so that we'd never have to come across "Those

pesky non-Christians who might happen to make us unholy.”
But that’s not at all what it’s talking about...

You might remember that Jesus used to have a few interactions with the Pharisees. The Pharisees were the separated ones. That’s what it **meant** to be a Pharisee – to **be** a separated one. And we know how well the Pharisees and Jesus got on, don’t we – Not very well at all ...

And in fact, Jesus used to get criticised by the Pharisees, for **not** being separate.

Matthew 9:10 And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples. ¹¹ And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” ¹² But when he heard it, he said, “**Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.** ¹³ **Go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’ For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”**

You see, in today’s reading, we’re being told to be separate, but we know from Jesus, that being separate, doesn’t mean “being absent”. Separation **isn’t** “isolation”...

Another way of putting it, is “Be **in** the world, but not **of** the world – Don’t be **tyed** to the world”...

How are we ever going to share the good news of Jesus, if we separate ourselves off from the world...

Now, Christians have tried to do this throughout history:

- Convents and cloisters where people shut themselves off from the world;
- People live in Christian communes;
- Some churches set up:
 - Christian schools;
 - Christian shops;
 - Christian hospitals;
 - Christian superannuation;
 - Christian holiday spots...

And effectively, they cut themselves off from the world;

- The Amish cut themselves off from other communities, and from technology;
- Some groups claim their independence from government...

But that's not what we called to do...

The lesson for today, is ¹⁴ Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers.

That means, "Don't be **tied** to unbelievers – don't be **hitched** to unbelievers"... We are nothing alike... :

- We should mix with unbelievers, but don't be partners with unbelievers;

- We should be acquainted with them, and even be friends with unbelievers, but we're not in fellowship with unbelievers in the way that we are with our brothers and sisters in Christ. We're not tied to them – we're not yoked to them.
- When it comes to other religions or spiritualist stuff, be friendly to those who are caught up in it, and share the good news of Jesus with them (to try and help free them from it). But that's where the relationship ends. There is no harmony between Christ and other gods;
- There is no harmony – there is no agreement between your faith and any other kind of spirituality...

Don't be unequally yoked, but **do** be present. How do we draw the line, though, between being present, and being yoked??? Well, let's put it this way: *An ox and a donkey can share a paddock, and they can graze in that same paddock... But when they're yoked together, they depend on each other in a whole new way. They have to work together, in one unit. They have to go in one direction, and have one goal...*

So, in what kinds of relationships **do** we get hitched together, or yoked together?

Well, I think the most obvious one is marriage. It begins with "courtship"... The marriage relationship, is like no other. It is an inter-dependant hitching together – yoking together – even joining together... And when a Christian starts dating a non-Christian, no good can come of it.

As one preacher said, “If you marry a child of the devil, you’re always going to have trouble with your father-in-law.”

But we can be yoked together in:

- business partnerships; or
- working relationships – Employers today sometimes require the staff to sign contracts that limit their religious freedom / religious expression;
- Or we could even be yoked together in very close friendships...

And from a church perspective, we should consider:

- how we do or don’t connect with other religions
- whether we do or don’t receive Government funding that probably has strings attached... Some churches are having trouble with that now, with their hospitals/schools (for instance), where they receive government funding, and now they can’t choose for themselves who they will or won’t employ...

That’s just a few examples...

The presence of God is wonderful isn’t it??? And since we have the promise that He will be with us, **let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.**

Let’s pray,

*Lord, for some of us, we have gotten too close to the world,
and we have tied ourselves in some way, to unbelievers...
Lord, we ask for Your forgiveness,
and we ask that You would help to free us from these ties that
shouldn't be...*

*But Lord, for some of us,
we've been absent from the world –
we've done more than separate –
we've isolated ourselves from unbelievers... *
*God, forgive us for not loving the world as you love the
world...*

Lord, we ask that You would help us to honour You in this way

- *To be yoked to You;*
- *And to our Brothers and Sisters in Christ;*
- *And to **not** be yoked to unbelievers.*

- *Lord, help us to not isolate ourselves;*
- *To be present in the world;*
- *To love those who don't yet know you;*
- *And to love them enough to share our faith with them.*

*Lord, help us to live holy.
Help us to be the new creation that we truly are.
We ask these things in Jesus' Name, Amen.*

ⁱ Harris, M.J., 2005. *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: a commentary on the Greek text*, Grand Rapids, MI; Milton Keynes, UK: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.; Paternoster Press.