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Grace Bible Church NorthWest
 Biblical Separation 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1

Introduction: “Well, what do we do now?” As we transition to another “New Year”—I find it rather difficult to be very optimistic . . . at least on the “grand scale” of things. This is not (merely) due to my latent natural pessimism (not to say cynicism)—nor is this (simply) due to my premillennialism—I think it’s simply my relentless realism! Perhaps some folks will think this “non-optimism” is unwarranted. In fact, it seems to run counter to a number of real life, existential circumstances. After all, as of this date (see in the heading above) the economy seems to be recovering (consumer confidence is high) . . . my family is intact and happy . . . my church family is “generally” well (some are in the throes of trials . . . some are rejoicing in the blessing of the LORD . . . for most of us it’s “situation normal” . . .) And, of course we are all one year nearer to the return of Jesus! So . . . what’s not to be optimistic about?

Well, frankly, there’s actually quite a bit to be *un*-optimistic about (especially if one follows the “news”!) But to put it succinctly: We are living in a culture that is destroying itself at an alarming rate!

Briefly . . . while our capitalistic economy does appear to be recovering, it seems there are a lot of people who wish it were not (as incomprehensible as that might sound!) Over half of the millennials think socialism would be a better system!¹ Every American enjoys the benefits of the capitalistic system, but as much as one third of them do not actually contribute to the system or are working to undermine it!

Furthermore, while my family is doing well . . . there are a lot of people that think my family is “too patriarchal”! And there are some who want to eliminate the “nuclear family” and replace it with “a village.” They want to redefine “marriage” away from the traditional (biblical!) definition (one man and one woman in a life-long monogamous relationship).¹ And add to that the on-going “moral revolution” that fosters a degrading morality (see the movies and TV), continues apace even while the same people (in movies and on TV) decry the “abuse,” “harassment,” and “assault” of some (women who put themselves in a vulnerable position seeking fame and money) by others (men who prey on vulnerable women!)

And even if *our* church is doing well, it seems “*the* church” (and I’m thinking of the so-called “evangelical church”) is moving (rushing!) headlong into compromise, worldliness and apostasy . . . (And, yes, I would have said that ten years ago . . . but even then, I would have never envisioned what I see happening these days!)¹

In fact, things have become so bad that some authors are saying “western culture is crumbling” (Anthony Esolen, *Out of the Ashes*), that the culture we are living in is like the condition after a “Great Flood” has swept everything “high, fine, or true” away (think—morals, think—arts [music, painting], think religion; what’s left? Moralistic Therapeutic Deism; or American Civil Religion; or “none”) (Rod Dreher, *The Benedict Option*), that the culture has reached a “tipping point” or “turning point” very much like that which led to the fall of the Roman Empire / culture and the beginning of the [so-called] “Dark Ages.” (Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*). And who can argue with all that? So . . . yeah, not optimistic.

Well, what are we to do? Beloved, I must tell you virtually ALL of my preaching to you is the answer! In such a time as this we must Preach the Word! We must Preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ! Live the Gospel of Jesus Christ! Hope (for time and eternity) in the Gospel of Jesus Christ! I must tell you the only thing that keeps me from utter despair is Faith in Jesus Christ! Life in Jesus Christ! Love for Jesus Christ! Hope in Jesus Christ! So . . . we Preach Jesus Christ! (cf. 1 Cor. 2:2; 2 Tim. 4:1-5). And in the

¹ I could substantiate the points I make here but decided not to. There’s no point in giving you links to news items, blogs, websites that will only make you more pessimistic . . . as they did me!

mean time . . . <we “keep [ourselves] unstained by the world” (James 1:27d).> The greatest dangers we face in this crumbling, drowning, corrupting culture are (1) to lose our first love (cf. Rev. 2:4)—to think less on Jesus Christ (= love Him less, = serve Him less, = love and serve self more [in a word, sin]) and (2) to be co-opted by the world (= to be double minded [cf. Jas. 1:8], = to try to have faith without works {faith w/o faithfulness} [cf. Jas. 2:14-26], = to try to be a friend to the world *and* a friend to God [which will not work—cf. Jas. 4:4]; = “to love the world and the things in the world” [cf. 1 John 2:15ff]). All my preaching (especially from Matthew!) has been / is intended to prevent the loss of—in point of fact it has been to foster and increase—our love for Jesus Christ. This is a message about (# (2) above) . . . it’s about not being co-opted by the world. I want us to think about this from one passage in Paul’s Second Letter to the Corinthians—2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1.

First, we need to understand the Context . . . (so I will give you the briefest background study to this letter and this context . . .) Then, we will look at the Main Exhortation (in 1 Cor. 6:14a) and see how Paul explains it.

Transition / Context: Paul had a complicated relationship with the Corinthian church. The church had been founded in his second missionary journey (cf. Acts 18:1ff) and he stayed there to teach and disciple them for over a year and a half (cf. Acts 18:11). But the Corinthians were Greeks and many of them were enamored with Greek philosophy. So they tried to combine Greek philosophical ideas with the gospel of Jesus Christ—never a good thing! (See especially 1 Corinthians chapters 1, 2; 15). The church also allowed the immorality of the culture to get a foothold in the church (cf. 1 Cor. 5:1ff). And added to that false teachers came to Corinth and tried (and in the minds of some persons in Corinth succeeded) to undermine Paul’s apostolic authority.

To counter these developments Paul wrote several letters (one or more of which we do not have). This led his opponents in Corinth to attack Paul even more directly. So in addition to correcting false doctrine he had to defend his apostolic authority. However, (skipping over some of the story) it seems that the true believers in Corinth finally began to respond positively to Paul’s admonitions, instructions and doctrine (cf. 2 Cor. 7:5ff) and it was after these positive developments that he felt free enough to exhort them again (cf. 2 Cor. 6:11-13) to keep them falling back into the errors that had caused the problems to begin with. One area where they needed this exhortation was in the matter of separation—which is what he addresses in this passage—2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1. (If they had practiced this separation earlier they might have avoided some of the problems that developed in that church.)

Application: Let me be clear: The culture around us is very definitely crumbling, drowning, corrupting and the evangelical church’s lack of separation [indeed, lack of separation by any individual professing believer (!)] from that culture will lead to, well, crumbling, drowning, corrupting in the church. (I know, I know—this sounds alarmist, harsh, “fundamentalistic,” [“legalistic?”], narrow-minded, “not-fun,” mean-spirited, ungenerous, un-progressive, reactionary, arrogant, etc. etc. But, Beloved, it’s just common-spiritual-biblical-sense. Proverbs 6:27-28 asks: “Can a man take fire in his bosom / And his clothes not be burned? / Or can a man walk on hot coals / And his feet not be scorched?” To ask it is to answer it. Separation is not an option. Let’s see why.

Outline: In this text, Paul answers Three Questions [look for the brackets]. There is One Main Exhortation—**Do not be bound together with unbelievers** (6:14a) and then Paul explains and develops that with a series of rhetorical questions (making a comparison) (6:14b-16a). He then cites some OT Scriptures to motivate the Corinthians to be separate (vv. 16b-18). He concludes with a final/summary exhortation (7:1).

[What is Biblical Separation?]

One Main Exhortation—**Do not be bound together with unbelievers** (6:14a)

The first question is: What sort of “binding” does Paul have in mind here? Some have understood this in fairly specific ways—Christians must not be “bound” in marriage to unbelievers—Christians must not be bound in “business” to unbelievers—Christians must not be bound in “societies” (Elks, Moose, Shriners, etc.). There are good points to be made for each of these . . . but there are qualifications for each one as well; for instance, Paul instructs these very Corinthians that a believing husband/wife should not necessarily separate from an unbelieving wife/husband (see 1 Cor. 7:12-16; cf. 1 Pet. 3:1). There is nothing in Scripture to say that a believer and an unbeliever cannot work together in business, or that a believer cannot work for an unbeliever (cf. 1 Pet. 2:18; Eph. 6:5-8).

But even beyond that, it seems that (in this context anyway) Paul is not trying to give us a list of specific acceptable / unacceptable associations. The expression **Do not be bound together** (μὴ γίνεσθε ἑτεροζυγοῦντες / *ma ginesthe heterozugountes*) is literally “do not become unequally yoked.” The image, of course, is that of two beasts of burden “yoked” together for some agricultural work (plowing, threshing, pulling a wagon or cart). The Law, in Deut. 22:10, prohibited the yoking together of two different kinds of animals (e.g. ox and donkey) as this would create a hardship for both animals. Paul may have had that Law in mind—or maybe he’s just using the image in a common-sense sort-of-way. In either case, we get the point. Paul is not saying we are to “never-in-any-way” be yoked to unbelievers . . . but when it comes to matters of “religion” . . . in the “spiritual realm” (cf. MacArthur, *2 Corinthians*, 246), believers must not be bound together with any “false religion.”

Application: But that said (!!) . . . we need to recognize that today “false religion” takes many different forms. For instance, author and sociologist Christian Smith (in his book *The Scared Project of American Sociology*) demonstrates that the so-called “science” of sociology is actually a “sacred project” (aka: a religion!). The Amazon blurb for his book notes “Sociology appears on the surface to be a secular, scientific enterprise—its founding fathers were mostly atheists. Its basic operating premises are secular and naturalistic. Sociologists today are disproportionately not religious, compared to all Americans, and often irreligious.” However, “Counter to popular perceptions, contemporary American sociology is and promotes a profoundly sacred project at heart. Sociology today is in fact animated by sacred impulses, driven by sacred commitments, and serves a sacred project.” In other words, sociologists want to think of themselves (and others to think of them) as non-religious, secular scientists (that is neutral “truth seekers”) but they are in fact committed to a “sacred project” (aka “a religion!”); and the doctrines of that “sacred project” (aka “a religion!”) are progressive (liberal), Marxist, anti-Christian

doctrines.² So . . . a person cannot be a committed Christian and a practicing sociologist (as sociologists themselves define their work) because that inevitably involves them “as sociologists” in a competing “sacred project” (aka “a religion!”). And that goes for any number of other “-ology’s and -ism’s.” (E.g. “environmentalism” is another “sacred project”—much of “feminism” is a “sacred project”—virtually the whole of the “political left” is an ideology [Marxism, socialism, political correctness] which is also a “sacred project.”)³

So . . . again . . . believers must not be **bound together** with any “false religion.” (See MacArthur, 2 *Corinthians*, 246-47) [GET THE BOOK < >](#)

Paul elaborates on what “unequally yoked” means with these five rhetorical questions.

Five Rhetorical Questions: **For what . . . or what . . . or what . . . or what . . . or what . . . ?**

Paul mentions 5 Ways of Association: (which we are to avoid with the “world” . . .)

partnership (μετοχή / *metoche*) . . . The term is basically a synonym of the next term (“fellowship” *koinonia*) but has a more “hands-on” connotation. The noun is used in Luke 5:7 where Simon (Peter) calls his “partners” (μετόχοις / *metochois*) to help him pull in the nets that were miraculously filled with fish. In Ephesians 3:6 Paul uses a related term “fellow partakers” (συμμέτοχα / *summetcha*) to describe how Gentiles also enjoy the blessings of salvation. This is a concrete, even physical association. It’s a “locking of arms,” a “holding of hands” sort-of association.

fellowship (κοινωνία / *koinonia*) . . . This very familiar term has the connotation of “sharing.” It has the idea of sharing “mutual interests,” or having a “common life” together.

harmony (συμφώνησις / *symphonias*) . . . The English word “symphony” comes from this Greek term. It has the idea of “being in agreement with,” or even “playing along with.” Just as a symphony orchestra must be “on the same page” of the music to perform well, so this word has the notion of “being on the same page; playing the same tune.”

² “If we had to characterize American sociology’s sacred project in brief, therefore, we might say that it stands in the modern liberal-Enlightenment-Marxist-social-reformist-pragmatist-therapeutic-sexually liberated-civil rights-feminist-GLBTQ-social constructionist-poststructuralist/ postmodernist ‘tradition.’” “American sociology as a collective enterprise is at heart committed to the visionary project of realizing the emancipation, equality, and moral affirmation of all human beings as autonomous, self-directing, individual agents (who should be) out to live their lives as they personally so desire, by constructing their own favored identities, entering and exiting relationships as they choose, and equally enjoying the gratification of experiential, material, and bodily pleasures.” (Christian Smith, *The Sacred Project of American Sociology*, 10, 7-8) In other words, sociology sees its sacred purpose as the promotion and legitimizing of the immoral revolution that is corrupting our culture! It’s a false religion! So just keep that in mind when you hear that someone has done a “study” of some sort . . . they have an agenda—they are pushing a “sacred project.”

³ What makes a “set of ideas” a “sacred project” (aka: a religion)? Just three features: (1) a view of God and the transcendent; (2) a means of “salvation”; (3) a view of where life or history is going. Take the “sacred project” of “environmentalism.” For “environmentalism” (1) is “the earth is “god” (and there is no other world beyond this one = naturalism); (2) “clean up the planet” (e.g. stop global ~~warming~~, ~~climate change~~, weather by using “renewable (?) energy” (among other things); (3) utopia! Polar bears thrive! I could do this for “feminism” and “Marxism” and the others. Ideologies are inherently “sacred projects.” Well, all of that is enlightening . . . but we need to get back to the text . . .

in common (μερίς . . . μετὰ / *meris . . . meta*; lit. “in part with”) . . . This is generic and has the notion of “commonality” of outlook.

agreement (συνκατάθεσις / *sunkatathesis*) . . . This term is synonymous with (συμφώνησις / *symphonias*); it has the notion of “holding the same opinion.”

All together . . . these terms describe associations in which people work, think and play alike; they have the same opinions, the same goals, the same ideas, the same ends and they engage in the same activities that reinforce the way they think and what they do. There is camaraderie, cooperation, commonality, comradeship. This is not merely “live and let live” but “live like they live.” All of this . . . Paul says is NOT ACCEPTABLE for believers with unbelievers. In work for the Lord, in the service of others, in evangelism, in social services, especially in matters of doctrine and worship and spiritual life . . . none of these associations with the world / unbelievers is acceptable for a Christian who would be true and faithful . . . or for a church that would be sound and unwavering. Why is that so? Well, . . .

Notice that . . .

Paul lists 5 Incommensurate Associations:

#1 is **righteousness** with **lawlessness** . . . The contrast here is not “absolute” but “relative”—that is, “**Righteousness** characterizes believers (Rom. 4:7; Eph. 2:10; Titus 2:14; Heb. 8:12; 10:17) because Christ’s righteousness has been imputed to them (2 Cor. 5:21; cf. Rom. 5:19; 1 Cor. 1:30; Phil. 3:9) and because they are born of God and have a new nature, which is made righteous (Rom. 6:19). Unbelievers, on the other hand, are characterized by **lawlessness**

#2 is **light** with **darkness** . . .

#3 is **Christ** with **Belial** . . .

#5 is **the temple of God** with **idols** . . .

But it’s #4 that Paul is illustrating by these others! Namely, **a believer with an unbeliever** . . . The point should be obvious! Standing alone this association may not seem so obviously incommensurate . . . but in this list, well, it should be!

It’s simply and obviously impossible and irrational—the 5 Ways of Association are just not possible between , **a believer and an unbeliever**

Just looking at Associations #’s 1, 2, 3, and 5 it’s obvious that they are “mutually exclusive!” AND SO IS #4 “The children of God have nothing in common with the children of the devil.” “As God asked in His maxim to a wayward Israel, ‘Can two walk together unless they are agreed?’(Amos 3:3 NKJV).” (MacArthur, *2 Corinthians*, 250)

[Why should we do Biblical Separation?]

Transition: However, Paul was as aware then as we are now that to dis-associate in this way from unbelief, from the “world,” from all that is familiar, attractive, easy-going, (progressive, generous, etc. etc.) will seem to these Corinthians (and many evangelicals today!) to be . . . well, un-familiar, un-attractive, (again-) harsh, (un-progressive, un-generous, etc. etc.) So . . .

Paul adds some Motivations—these Motivations have to do with our special relationship to God.

~We are His Temple (6:16b), which means we enjoy His special Presence (6:16c,d). This quotation from the OT is actually an allusion to a number of OT texts—Lev. 26:11-12; Jer. 24:7; 31:33; Ezek. 37:26-27; Hos. 2:2-3. This is an image picked up in several NT texts as well (cf. 1 Pet. 2:5; Eph. 2:22). While it is

true that each individual believer is “indwelt” by the Spirit and as such his/her body is “a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in” him/her (cf. 1 Cor. 6:19) the idea here is corporate. Each individual believer is a part of the temple—one of the “living stones” (cf. 1 Pet. 2:5) that make up the “spiritual house—one of the components of the “holy temple” (cf. Eph. 2:22) that is a “dwelling of God in the Spirit.” (To mix the metaphor, individual believers are members of one “Body-of-Christ”—see 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4.) It’s in this corporate existence / experience that we especially enjoy the blessings of His Presence and fellowship (see Eph. 4:16). Application: We are to “get” from being the church what we think we’d get from those other associations! And we have the added blessing of worship, service, fellowship with Jesus!

~We are His subjects, which means we have His command to be separate (6:17). This is a quotation of Isaiah 52:11(cf. Rev. 18:4). What could be clearer? He is the LORD! He calls us to be separate! “Why do you call Me Lord, Lord and do not do what I say?” (Luke 6:46). (More below)

~We are His children (6:18), which means we have His promise of blessing. This is also an allusion to a number of OT texts (2 Sam 7:8, 14; 1 Chron. 17:13; Jer. 31:9; Isa. 43:6; Hos. 1:10). What greater blessing can there be than to be a child of God!? “These passages hold out the promise that God will act as true Father to those sons and daughters who identify themselves with Him. But identification with God requires repudiation of unworthy associations which spiritually contaminate.” (Homer A. Kent, Jr., *Heart Open Wide; Studies in II Corinthians*, 104-05)

In short, whatever we desired from, thought we’d get from, thought we needed from any association with the world we already have in, with, from Our Father . . . Who just happens to be **the Lord Almighty!**

[How should we do Biblical Separation?]

This is the thrust of Paul’s OT quotation of Isaiah 52:11.

COME OUT (v. 17a) BE SEPARATE (v. 17b) TOUCH NOT THE UNLCEAN THING (v. 17c)

In other words, both in standing and morality, in position and behavior “Be holy for I am holy” (1 Peter 1:16!

Transition: But now . . . Paul needs to drive this home . . . so **Therefore** . . . (7:1), that is, based on these Motivations (**these promises** . . .) Paul defines how to “do” biblical separation . . .

NOTE: He calls them **Beloved** (cf. 10:14; 15:58) and he includes himself in the exhortation . . . **let us**. He’s NOT being harsh, or mean-spirited but loving and humble!

1). Negative—**cleanse** (καθαρίσωμεν / *katharisomen*) **ourselves from all defilement** (μολυσμοῦ / *molusmou* **of flesh and spirit**. This is NOT “legalism”—this is sanctification as it must be! If it defiles—contaminates, corrupts, diminishes—it must be “cleansed”—washed off, scrubbed off, scrapped off! This is repentance and repudiation! “Cleans your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.” (James 4:8)

2). Positive—**perfecting** (ἐπιτελοῦντες / *epitelountes*) **holiness in the fear of God**. The flip side is, after the defilement is “washed off” the “purity is put on.” The idea is not that we become “perfect” (the term has the notion of “complete” but that we are always, in everything pursuing this “completion.” Dr. Kent notes, “The present participle [ἐπιτελοῦντες / *epitelountes*] does not indicate that the process will ever be completed in this life, but only that we must continually be engaged in that process.” (Kent, *Heart Open Wide*, 105)

In brief, biblical separation starts “with us”—it begins “in us”; it’s not in the first instance about our “external associations” . . . those are indicators of our “internal condition.” If one is drawn to “lawlessness” and “darkness” and “idols” it only shows the contents and focus of the mind, the desires of the heart, the bent of the will . . . all that must change! Fill your mind with God’s thoughts . . . re-orient your aspirations to God’s desires . . . bend your will to His will! (By the way, YOU cannot do that—the Spirit must do that through you! Ask Him! Get into the Word of God and let Him!)

Those Motivations are only effective when there is an internal, personal and genuine **fear of God**.

Conclusion: But . . . there is no “fear of God” in the culture around us . . . so we get what we have. What is the righteous to do?

We need Wisdom! Proverbs

The Call of Wisdom

- ²⁰ Wisdom cries aloud in the street,
in the markets she raises her voice;
²¹ at the head of the noisy streets she cries out;
at the entrance of the city gates she speaks:
²² “How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple?
How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing
and fools hate knowledge?
²³ If you turn at my reproof,
behold, I will pour out my spirit to you;
I will make my words known to you.
²⁴ Because I have called and you refused to listen,
have stretched out my hand and no one has heeded,
²⁵ because you have ignored all my counsel
and would have none of my reproof,
²⁶ I also will laugh at your calamity;
I will mock when terror strikes you,
²⁷ when terror strikes you like a storm
and your calamity comes like a whirlwind,
when distress and anguish come upon you.
²⁸ Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer;
they will seek me diligently but will not find me.
²⁹ Because they hated knowledge
and did not choose the fear of the LORD,
³⁰ would have none of my counsel
and despised all my reproof,
³¹ therefore they shall eat the fruit of their way,
and have their fill of their own devices.
³² For the simple are killed by their turning away,
and the complacency of fools destroys them;

³³ but whoever listens to me will dwell secure
and will be at ease, without dread of disaster.”

The Value of Wisdom

² My son, if you receive my words
and treasure up my commandments with you,
² making your ear attentive to wisdom
and inclining your heart to understanding;
³ yes, if you call out for insight
and raise your voice for understanding,
⁴ if you seek it like silver
and search for it as for hidden treasures,
⁵ then you will understand the fear of the LORD
and find the knowledge of God.
⁶ For the LORD gives wisdom;
from his mouth come knowledge and understanding;
⁷ he stores up sound wisdom for the upright;
he is a shield to those who walk in integrity,
⁸ guarding the paths of justice
and watching over the way of his saints.
⁹ Then you will understand righteousness and justice
and equity, every good path;
¹⁰ for wisdom will come into your heart,
and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul;
¹¹ discretion will watch over you,
understanding will guard you,
¹² delivering you from the way of evil,
from men of perverted speech,
¹³ who forsake the paths of uprightness
to walk in the ways of darkness,
¹⁴ who rejoice in doing evil
and delight in the perverseness of evil,
¹⁵ men whose paths are crooked,
and who are devious in their ways.