

2 Corinthians 6-7

- 1) Paul warns in chapter 6 against being “yoked” together with unbelievers (6:14). His warning is grounded on a collage of quotations from the OT:
- “I will live with them” (16) is either Ezek 37:27, the end of the dry bones passage, where God says he will sanctify his people, or is from Lev 26:12, which says God will live and walk among Israel *if* they are obedient. This is the language of the presence of God’s Holy Spirit.
 - “Touch no unclean thing” (17) quotes Isa 52:11, a prophecy of return from exile / salvation, exhorting Israel to purify themselves in preparation for the Lord’s deliverance. This is followed in Isa 52:13+ by the messianic servant song which uses imagery eerily descriptive of crucifixion.
 - The quote in 6:17 ends with the phrase, “and I will receive you”, which is actually taken from Ezek 20:34, where the context is gathering Israel for God’s *wrathful judgment* due to its idolatry, and other sins Israel has picked up from the nations where it is dispersed. (See also Ezek 22:20; 20:41.)

In these OT passages, what sort of purity is being called for? (Read Isa 52:1-12.) Is the purity alluded to in these OT passages accomplished for Christians by Christ’s sacrifice or is there something more required?

Paul warning draws upon a series of parallels:

Paul’s Parallels (6:14-18)		
Believers	should not be yoked with	unbelievers
Light	has nothing in common with	darkness
Righteousness	should not fellowship with	wickedness
Christ	has no harmony with	Belial [Satan]
A believer	has nothing in common with	an unbeliever
The temple of God	has no agreement with	idols
We, sons and daughters of the Almighty, temple of the living God	should purify ourselves from	everything that contaminates body and spirit

It has been suggested that the “unbelievers” are the false apostles who have inveigled themselves into the Corinthian congregation (in keeping with the general 2 Cor context). Others read this passage as a warning against intermarriage, since “yoked” echoes Lev 19:19 which symbolizes the prohibition against mixed marriage (cf. Deut 7:3; 22:10; Ezra 9:12; Neh 13:25), or against pagan worship, given the mention of idols and Belial (cf. 1 Cor 10:20). Which do you think Paul has in mind? Is your answer something that contaminates both “body and spirit” (7:1)?

- 3) Like Jesus, who declared all foods clean, Paul saw impurity as originating from within; purity comes from one’s thoughts (Phil 4:8) and heart (1 Tim 1:5; 2 Tim 2:22). (As a result, one person’s conscience may be dirtied by a behavior which doesn’t trouble another’s; Rom 14:14-15.)

Paul was concerned for the purity of the church, which is why he strongly urged pure behavior (Rom 13:13-14; 1 Tim 5:22; Tit 2:5; see also 1 John 3:1-3), or joining in the sins of others (1 Tim 5:22), and especially sexual sin,

which is unique among sins in its relationship to one's body (1 Cor 6:18). Paul also warned that even one impure member in a body of believers can contaminate the rest (1 Cor 5:6-7; 13).

The Corinthians were vulnerable to characteristically Roman sins: participation in pagan rites, sexual sin, classism (rich Christians sharing the love feast before the poorer ones have even arrived), etc. We, however, don't tend to fall for orgies or temples; most of our interactions with unbelievers are at a professional or polite social level, at work or across the backyard fence. Does our cultural insulation mean we are immune to the danger Paul's warning about? Is there really any danger of quenching the Spirit (1 Thess 5:19) or hardening our hearts (Eph 4:18; Heb 3:8)? Is there anything we need to corporately repent of?

- 4) "I will be a Father to you" (18) echoes language used of God's people at various times (Isa 43:6, Jer 3:19, etc.), but the best match is with the messianic prophecy where God promises David an heir (2 Sam 7:12-14). Where 2 Sam has David's heir as the son of God, Paul's changed the wording to make the Corinthians the "sons and daughters." Wright (p. 72) says about this passage,

This passage was, in fact, a favorite quotation in the early church, highlighting the fact that the messiah, the coming king from the line of David, would be God's own son in a special way. But Paul has made two crucial moves in re-reading the text. First, he has opened it up so that what was promised to the coming king is now promised to all God's people. Second, he has made it clear, in doing so, that the word "sons" needs to have "and daughters" added, in case anyone thought the promise was for men only, not for women as well...

Does this mean that Paul is simply playing around with the text, making it mean whatever he wants? Not at all. Remember what he said in chapter 1: all God's promises find their "Yes" in the messiah, the anointed one... because God has "anointed" us too (1:20-21)! It is part of Paul's most basic understanding that what is true of the messiah is true of all his people, and that this is expressed in the fact that God's people have all been "anointed" with God's own Spirit.

What promises of God for the Messiah are also for the Corinthians?

- 5) In chapter 7 Paul gives us a model of correction. We can infer that in Paul's sorrowful letter he called them to discipline "the one who did the wrong" (7:12). This may be one who spoke out against Paul and refused to back down. The majority of the Corinthians followed through and held the man accountable (2 Cor 2:1-8). Amazingly, Paul (and the Spirit) managed to produce in them a "godly sorrow" (*metanoia*) rather than the "worldly sorrow" (*metamelomai*) which "brings death" (7:10-11).
- What's the difference between these two sorrows? Can you think of examples of each from your own experience or observations of others? (Think perhaps of the sorrow of Peter and Judas after Jesus' death.) Is *metanoia* sorrow without regret?
 - Based on Paul's example, what are the signs that you are falling into *metamelomai*? When this happens, what can you do to transform it into *metanoia*?
 - Describe Paul's tone and technique. How does he hold them accountable without alienating them?
- 6) We are halfway through the letter and Paul's already gone from crushing anxiety (7:5; 1:8) to unbounded joy (7:4). What was stressing him out, and what prompted this transformation of outlook? Paul's Christian maturity is not one of serene detachment; he survives his dramatic altitude changes by regularly dumping his stress on God. Is his model universal or does he just happen to have an emotional personality? Did James and Stephen exchange glances when Paul listed prayer requests?