

2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1
Isaiah 52
Psalm 74

“What Is True Holiness?”

May 1, 2016

Isaiah 52 is speaking of the return from exile.

Isaiah reminds us of how God had rescued Israel from bondage in Egypt –
and how God delivered Jerusalem from the oppression of Assyria.

Isaiah has already told Hezekiah that the day will come
when Jerusalem will go into exile in Babylon.

But here Isaiah comforts Jerusalem with the promise that God will restore them.

And when you leave Babylon, when you are restored to the Promised Land,
do not be afraid – do not think for a moment that you are in any danger!

“The LORD has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations,
and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.”

And when this happens,
what do God’s people need to hear?
What will we need to do?

“Depart, depart, go out from there; touch no unclean thing;
go out from the midst of her;
purify yourselves, you who bear the vessels of the LORD.”

Paul will tell us that Jesus has brought about the *great* restoration from Babylon.
And so *we* are called to *depart* from Babylon –
to be *separate* from Babylon –
to touch no unclean thing!

Holiness has to do with being *separate* – being *distinct*.
The people of God are *supposed* to be different from the world around us.

I want you to think about the last verse.

“For you shall not go out in haste, and you shall not go in flight,
for the LORD will go before you, and the God of Israel will be your rear guard.”

In other words,
there will be *temptation* to go out in haste.

You may not *feel* very secure!
You may feel like running!

But Isaiah promises that the LORD will go before you.
When God restores his people –
the great day of salvation may not feel all that comfortable!
Israel will have to walk by faith – not by sight!

Our Psalm of response is a song of exile – Psalm 74.

The opening line of the Psalm may seem just wrong:

“O God, why have you cast us off forever?”

Some people think that Psalm 74 should never be sung by Christians,
because on *this side* of the resurrection,
we are never finally forsaken.

We know full well that God never casts his people off forever!

But the OT is equally clear that God never casts his people off forever!

God promised Abraham that in his seed, he would bless all the nations of the earth.

So by that argument, Psalm 74 should never have been written!!

It's true – God will never cast his people off forever.

But sometimes it feels like it.

Remember the dark side of Paul's list in 2 Cor 6 –

“afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots,
labors, sleepless nights, hunger...
through dishonor...through slander...
as dying...as punished...as sorrowful...as poor...as having nothing”

Or in chapter 4 “afflicted in every way...perplexed...persecuted...struck down...
always carrying about in the body the death of Jesus...” (4:8-9)

It's true that by the time Paul was writing 2 Corinthians,

he was more hopeful –

but his description of his anxiety and concern for the Corinthians
make it sound like he could well have sung Psalm 74 from time to time
during this difficult period in his life!

Sing Psalm 74

Read 2 Corinthians 6:1 - 7:4

Our passage is bracketed by Paul exhortations in 6:13 – widen your hearts –
and 7:2 – make room for us

In other words, our passage today is a clear application from last week.

Last week we heard Paul say that the Corinthians had become restricted
in their affections for him and for his traveling presbytery.

Now he identifies one of the ways that this happened.

The Corinthians have become entangled with unbelievers.

We keep hearing about this conflict between Paul and the Corinthians,

but up until this point it hasn't been entirely clear what the issues were.

Now we see that it is one of the central issues that Paul had addressed in 1 Corinthians.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul dealt at length with the problem of idol feasts.

Some Corinthians had thought that they could participate in the sacrificial meals in the “temple restaurants” of Corinth.

This is where patronage happened.

If you wanted to get ahead in Corinth,

then you needed to be connected to the important people –

and you needed to be seen at the big parties and celebrations –

all of which took place in the dining rooms of the temples of Corinth.

Paul says that the alienation of affection between the Corinthians and his traveling presbytery

is due at least in part to the fact

that the Corinthians have been unequally yoked with unbelievers.

When our affections are divided – when we are partly connected to one another,

and partly connected to the world –

the result will be conflict and division.

What sorts of things today compare to the idol feasts of the ancient world?

This was one of the benefits of Christendom – the last 1500 years

in which most of European society considered itself “Christian.”

We didn’t really have to worry about “idol feasts” –

or at least, so we thought!

And today, there is enough of a remnant of Christendom

that there are very few obvious and definite places.

You may never be invited to a dinner at the temple of Zeus,

but you very well may be invited to participate in an idol feast.

In *That Hideous Strength*, C. S. Lewis describes a fictional college,

where the “inner circle” is every bit as idolatrous as the temple of Zeus.

Eating and drinking with them *in their private meetings*

is portrayed as an initiation into the “inner circle.”

There would be nothing wrong with having lunch with one of these fellows

at the local pub –

but to eat and drink with them when they are plotting and planning

to join them – and be part of their inner circle –

that would be to partake of the table of demons.

Many of you have already faced this.

Many more will in the coming years –

that moment of decision when you are faced with the question –

“whose side are you on?”

Will you bow to the pressure to “be one of the in-group”?

Or will you deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Jesus?

1. Do Not Let Your Affections Become Entangled with Unbelievers (6:14-16a)

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?^[b] Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols?*

When you hear “do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers” what do you think of?

Marriage, right?

People regularly apply this to how the Christian should not marry an unbeliever.

And that’s true – but as you can see, Paul is *not* talking about marriage here!

What does it mean to be “unequally yoked”?

A related word is used in Leviticus 19:19 –

forbidding the practice of breeding two different kinds of animals.

Don’t mix animals, seeds, or fabric.

The basic idea is that Israel was not supposed to mix together things that were fundamentally different.

So, in Dt 22:10 – you shall not plow with a calf and a donkey together

The point of all these laws had to do with purity and separation –

maintaining the distinctiveness of the people of God against the Gentile world.

Paul is the apostle to the Gentiles.

The whole point of Paul’s ministry is to show how God has joined Jew and Gentile in *one new man*.

So, if God is joining together Jew and Gentile,

does this mean that all distinctions are obliterated?

No.

There is still a distinction between righteousness and lawlessness

between light and darkness

between Christ and Belial

between a believer and an unbeliever

between the temple of God and idols.

Indeed, Paul argues that the OT holiness code is still useful for helping us distinguish between faith and unbelief.

The two are incompatible.

To put it simply,

Paul and Silas and Timothy, have just been emphasizing
the importance of being open-hearted with one another.
They have just accused the Corinthians of being *restricted* in their affections
toward them and their colleagues.
They have just called the Corinthians to ‘widen their hearts.’

And now they point to the flip side!

You are called to be *yoked* together in the gospel.
And Paul’s five questions help us think about what this means.

Paul is not saying that Christians need to seclude themselves from the world.

Paul is not advocating a Christian *ghetto* –
where Christians isolate themselves from unbelievers –
(this is not a fundamentalist view of separation).
Remember what Paul said in the previous chapter
about the Christian ministry as *ambassadors* for Christ.

The ambassador is a citizen of his home country.
He lives in a foreign land – he lives in the middle of a foreign culture –
but the Christian always lives as a citizen of the heavenly Jerusalem.

We do not live as the *ghetto of heaven*,
but as the *colony* of heaven –
as the ambassadors of a king who has declared his purpose
of conquering all the nations of the earth by his gospel!

Let’s think about how these five questions in verses 14-16
show us what Paul is saying:

For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness?

Remember that “righteousness” in the Scriptures
has to do with how you order your community.
Whether at home, in business, in the neighborhood, the city, the nation –
a righteous community will be patterned after the cross of Jesus.
Righteousness is incompatible with lawlessness.

The word “lawlessness” (anomia) means “without law.”
The law was not intended as a way to obtain life and righteousness.
By the works of the law, no one will be justified.

But that does not mean that Paul is anti-law.
How do you know what *righteousness* looks like?
How do you order your community?
What are the principles – what are the rules – that direct your pattern of life?

If you want to know what righteousness looks like,
look at the Ten Commandments.

Yes, you can summarize the Ten Commandments in the two great commandments:
love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength,
and love your neighbor as yourself.

But if you want a little more detail –
the Ten Commandments summarize God’s moral law very nicely.

Then Paul asks:

Or what fellowship has light with darkness?

The word “fellowship” is the word translated “participation” in 1 Cor 10.

The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ.
What participation has light with darkness?

What is darkness?
The absence of light.

What happens when you mix light and darkness.
You have light.

I think that nowadays we tend to think in terms of white and black.
If you mix white and black – you get grey.

But Paul is not talking about white and black.
He’s talking about *light* and *darkness*.

If you are in a dark room, and you turn on the light,
you are no longer in a dark room!
There is no “participation” of light with darkness.
There is no “middle-way.”

And this casts light on the first contrast as well.
After all, “lawlessness” – a-nomia – is the *lack* of law.
What happens when righteousness is practiced?

There is no lawlessness.

There is a fundamental incompatibility of righteousness and lawlessness –
of light and darkness.

And that fundamental incompatibility is expressed in the third question:

¹⁵ *What accord has Christ with Belial?*^[b]

The word “accord” is the Greek word where we our word “symphony” –
so you might say “what harmony is there between Christ and Belial?”
Belial is another name for Satan.

You will never find Jesus and Satan singing duets together.

Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever?

This gets at the heart of Paul's application of the OT holiness laws to the church.

The fundamental divide in the human race is no longer Jew and Gentile.

The fundamental divide is belief and unbelief.

And in the fifth question this is applied to the question of worship:

What agreement has the temple of God with idols?

What pact – what agreement – what mutual relationship

can be established between the temple of God and idols?

This final question sets up the promises that Paul highlights in verses 16-18.

If you want to understand what it means to be unequally yoked,

this is the place to focus your attention!

Righteousness vs lawlessness

Light vs darkness

Christ vs Belial

Belief vs unbelief

All of those terms may leave you a little uncertain exactly what this means.

But when Paul turns to the temple of God vs. idols,

you start to see how all this applies.

Because Paul does not merely say that we worship God – not idols.

Paul says that we *are* the temple of the living God.

We *are* the sanctuary – the Most Holy Place where God dwells.

God does not say to us, “be holy *so that* I can dwell with you”

Rather, God says “you are my holy dwelling place,

therefore be holy.”

2. Six Promises at the Heart of the Command to Be Separate (6:16b-18)

Paul uses six promises from the OT to make his case for holiness.

There are two sets of three promises –

three promises that focus on the temple –

the promise of God's presence with his people

and three promises that focus on adoption –

the promise to David that God will be a father to his people.

a. The Temple: Three Promises from Leviticus 26:12/Ezekiel 37:27 (v16)

¹⁶ *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.*

Verse 16 draws on one of the most familiar themes in the Old Testament.

Its roots go all the way back to the promise to Abraham –
“I will be their God and they shall be my people.”

But the language of this quotation draws together the language of Leviticus 26
and Ezekiel 37.

And both passages (as well the Abrahamic roots) are essential to Paul’s argument.

In Leviticus, God had commanded Israel to be holy – to be separate from the nations –
and God had promised Israel that he would dwell among them.

The tabernacle in the wilderness – and the temple of Solomon –
exhibited God’s presence with his people – God’s dwelling in their midst.

But as Ezekiel 37 pointed out, Israel had failed.

Ezekiel 37:27 comes right after the Valley of Dry Bones –
a passage that highlights Israel’s lawlessness, unbelief, and idolatry –
and how *only God* can bring Israel back from the dead!

Paul’s point in verse 16 is that *this is what God has done in Jesus!*

We *are* the temple of the living God.

God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself.

Therefore, those who believe in Jesus Christ are joined together –
built together into a holy dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

In the OT, it was a tent made of wood and fabric –
or a temple made of wood and stone.

But now, because the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us,
because God was *in Christ* – personally uniting himself to humanity in Jesus –
therefore, in his death and resurrection,

Jesus has rendered humanity a fit dwelling place for God.

He has cleansed us from our sin.

This is what makes all the difference in the three imperatives from Isaiah 52.

b. Three Imperatives for Holiness from Isaiah 52:11 (v17a)

¹⁷ *Therefore go out from their midst,
and be separate from them, says the Lord,
and touch no unclean thing;*

God kept telling Israel “be holy as I am holy” –

but Israel could never succeed!

Israel kept falling short.

And in Isaiah 52 God said that the day would come when he would once again give that same command to Israel.

In one sense, Isaiah 52 is speaking of the return from Babylon.

And the returned exiles tried hard!

Indeed, the Pharisees of Paul's day were really diligent in their efforts to be holy!

But Jesus pointed out that the Pharisees efforts to be separate –
to touch no unclean thing –
resulted in a complete failure to understand *true holiness*.

What is holiness?

True holiness – true separation – means that the Christian community is distinct.

“Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers” –

do not be bound together with those whose beliefs and practices
are incompatible with Jesus.

In 1 Cor 5:9-11, Paul had said,

“I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people –
not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world,
or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters,
since then you would need to go out of the world.

But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother
if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed,
or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler – not even to eat with such a one.”

So in 1 Cor 5, Paul says that you *can* “associate” with worldly people.

Paul's concern in 1 Cor 5 is that we discipline people who call themselves Christians,
but refuse to live like it (“Purge the evil person from among you” – 5:13).

But here in 2 Cor 6, Paul is not talking about the ordinary associations of everyday life.

Being *yoked together* – partnership, fellowship, harmony, sharing a portion, agreement –
taken together, these are far more intimate terms.

And this is why Paul comes back to the *promises* of God at the end of verse 17 and verse 18

c. Adoption: Three Promises from Ezekiel 20:34, 41 and 2 Samuel 7:14 (v17b-18)

*then I will welcome you,
¹⁸and I will be a father to you,
and you shall be sons and daughters to me,
says the Lord Almighty.”*

Again we see the pattern of salvation that begins with an assertion that only God can save:
We *are* the temple of the living God –
 because *God* was in Christ reconciling the world to himself.
And *because* God has saved us – because God has brought us into relationship with him,
 therefore we are called to holiness –
 a holiness without which no one will see the Lord (Heb)
 and a holiness that results in our eschatological adoption.

If we *are* the temple of the living God,
 then why does Paul speak of adoption as future?

Paul often does this.

In Romans 8, after saying that we *have* received the Spirit of adoption,
 by which we cry, “Abba, father” –
 Paul goes on to say that we wait eagerly for the adoption as sons –
 the redemption of our bodies.

You see, right now, we are adopted *by faith*.
We are not yet adopted by sight.
 At least, as I look around this room,
 I sure hope we’re not!
 Because I see a whole bunch of decaying, corruptible bodies!

Yes, it is true that God has welcomed us – and he *is* our father –
 by faith!

But not yet by sight.

After all, this is why Paul said in 5:16 –
 “From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh.”
 Because if you just go by the flesh –
 if you just look around you with the eyes of the flesh
 then you will conclude that this whole Christianity thing
 is pretty absurd!
 But, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.
 The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

Only the eyes of faith can see that we are children of God.

Now, the fascinating thing is that Paul connects Ezekiel 20
 to God’s promise to David in 2 Samuel 7:14.

God had told David that he would be a father to David’s son –
 I will be to him a father, and he will be to me a son.

But the house of David – just like the house of Israel – had failed.

The common theme in all of these six promises and three imperatives
is that these promises and imperatives had been given to Israel and David –
but Israel and David had failed –
and so been sent into exile.

But God had renewed these promises in Isaiah and Ezekiel (and the rest of the prophets)
promising that the day would come when God would restore Israel and David.

And Paul says that in Jesus, that day has come.

We *are* the temple of the living God.

We *are* the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty (by faith – and we *will be* by sight!).

And so Paul uses these promises to exhort us to greater holiness:

3. Therefore, Let Us Pursue Holiness (7:1)

*7 Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body^[c]
and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.*

Christian holiness is not rooted in a fear of contamination.

Christian holiness is rooted in the fear of God.

Because God has promised – and because God is faithful to his promises! –
therefore we are called to be holy as he is holy.

When Paul says “touch no unclean thing”

he is not thinking like a Pharisee anymore!

In the OT, the unclean contaminated the clean.

In the OT, if a person touched a dead body, he would become unclean.

But what happens when Jesus touches dead bodies?

They come back to life!

What happens when Jesus touches the unclean?

They are healed – they are made clean!

So what does Paul mean by “let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement”?

What does he mean by “touch no unclean thing”?

If you just think about Christian living as a matter of “doing the right thing” –

or “being a good person” –

then you will miss an essential aspect of *holiness*.

Think about how Paul brackets his exhortation to holiness:

after saying in 6:12-13 – “you are restricted in your own affections” –

“widen your hearts” –

he comes back in 7:2,

“Make room in your hearts for us.

We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one,
we have taken advantage of no one.

This call to holiness is embedded in Paul's call for an open, sincere affection
within the church of Jesus.

Think about it.

What does holiness look like – without sincere, open love?

Well, it looks an awful lot like the Pharisees –

a whole bunch of rules

and people beating each other over the head trying to enforce competing rules!

Holiness without love isn't true holiness!

It's legalism!

And on the other side, what does affection, openness, and love look like – without holiness?

It's lawlessness – everyone does what is right in his or her own eyes!

Love without holiness isn't really love at all!

As Francis Schaeffer used to say,

You can counterfeit love without holiness (that's liberalism),

and you can counterfeit holiness without love (that's fundamentalism),

but you cannot counterfeit both holiness and love at the same time –

because you can only bring holiness to completion in the fear of God.

TH 706 – “I will cleanse my heart and ways, ever to his glory living”