

Confession #8:

We've Been Slack in Our Separation

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Text: 2 Corinthians 6

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Series: Confessions of an Imperfect Church

Introduction: Open your Bible to 2 Corinthians 6. We are in a series entitled “Confessions of an Imperfect Church”. The title of our message is “We’ve Been Passive in Our Purity”.

God tells us throughout the Bible, “Be holy for I the Lord am holy” (**Lev. 20:7; 1 Pet. 1:15**).

Holiness Definition

Holiness means to be set apart for a special purpose.

Wedding Dress

You don’t wear a wedding dress to a funeral. It would be totally out of place. If you go to see your mechanic at the shop and his **face** and **hands** are all **greasy**, and he’s wearing a tuxedo, something is wrong!! A tux is reserved for a wedding.

In the same way, a Christian is always to be dressed in holiness. It is out of place for a Christian to put on the RAGS of sin again.

Corinthians not acting holy

Paul had come to Corinth preaching the new birth and the transforming life that is in Christ. But now there were some very **worldly teachers** within the church and they were compromising the Gospel.

They were saying it was ok to live like the world and be a Christian. These false teachers had **allowed serious immorality** to go on in the church. Paul had written a strong letter to them and urged them to repent, which they did. Yet the teachers in the church were becoming more bold in their opposition of Paul since the letter was written. They claim that he’s insincere and self seeking.

An immoral spirit was spreading in the church like leaven. A worldliness, a slovenly compromising spirit was creeping into the Corinthian church. Practices current in the sensual city of Corinth, usages which had once been discarded, were again being taken up by some followers of the Lord Jesus. The false teachers were not calling for separation, so Paul would.

Paul makes a strong appeal to the Corinthians believers to separate themselves from heathen attitudes and practices, and behave as the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty.

It’s the same in our day. Most churches are not taking the Gospel to the world. They are bringing the world into the church.

We need this Scripture in 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 probably more today than the Corinthians needed it then! Let's read it...

2 Corinthians 6:14–18 (ESV) — “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.”

2 Corinthians 7:1 (ESV) — “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.”

What we have here, of course, is a warning against blurring the distinction between Christians and non-Christians, between the gospel and the message of the world. There must be a **distinction** between the Lord's people and the world.

Paul lived in a day when the line was being blurred between Christians and the world. John's words are similar to Paul's...

“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world. 17 And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.” - **1 John 2:15–17**

As Christians...

- I. We are called to be separate in our purpose, vs. 14a, “Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers”.

What Paul is talking about is the issue of a believer connecting up with a non-believer in a spiritual enterprise. The Corinthians had hooked up with the false teachers, who were preaching a watered down, man-centered Gospel.

A. An illustration of different purposes.

The illustration Paul uses is from **Deuteronomy 22:10** (ESV) — “You shall not plow with an ox and a donkey together.” God gave that law to His people of old not because He cared so much about **farming**. It was an illustration for **living!** Believers and unbelievers have a totally different purpose for living. The unbeliever is living for the here and now.

The LAW

- § The law said **beards** could not be rounded. You couldn't wear your beard like I'm wearing mine. You had to let it grow out straight and squared.

- § The law said **fabric** could not be mixed. You people with cotton and polyester blends, you would not be welcome in church. You could not worship God that way in the Old Testament!
- § And when you were **farming**, you could not mix animals in your harness.

God not concerned about Grooming, Fashion, Agriculture

Now, do you think God is **concerned** about **grooming**, and **fashion** and **agriculture**? No, He's teaching a lesson. He wants his people to be different from the world. They are SET APART for His special use.

Animals of Different Natures

Paul says in **verse 14a**, "Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers". We have different purposes because of our **nature**. We are going in two different directions.

Since a pig has a **pig's** nature, it associates with other pigs in the mud hole. Since a sheep has a **sheep's** nature, it munches grass with the flock in the pasture. The Christian possesses a **divine** nature (2 Peter 1:3–4), and therefore he should want to associate himself only with that which pleases the Lord.¹

—Warren Wiersbe

Christians have a different purpose and are going in a totally different direction than the world.

B. A **clarification** of purpose. Now this doesn't mean we should go live in cloisters and monasteries. We "**are in the world but not of the world**".

So when Paul says in **verse 14a**, "Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers", he clearly is not saying that Christians shouldn't have anything to do with non-Christians.

- § Jesus said in **John 17:15** (ESV) — "I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one."
- § Jesus was called **a friend of sinners and tax collectors** (**Luke 7:34**). We are to be friends with sinners, but we are not to partake of their lifestyle. Psalm 1:1 (ESV) — "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers".

C. A **description** of the unconverted false teachers: Man-centered manipulators. Their purpose is to please self at all costs. The Christian's purpose is to please God at all costs. The false teachers in Corinth were wolves. You can always detect a wolf because they are always thinking about self and not the sheep. The false teachers in Corinth were man-centered manipulators.

¹ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (2 Co 6:11). Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books.

§ Man-centered.

- They were **commending themselves** with letters of recommendation. Paul said, “You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all” (2 Cor. 3:2).
- They were “**proclaiming themselves**” (2 Cor. 4:5). Paul said, “we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake.”
- They were more concerned about their rhetoric than the Redeemer. They were promoting self instead of Christ! People were perishing, but they didn’t care as long as they were popular. As long as they had a crowd they were willing to manipulate. And manipulate they did...

§ Manipulators.

- Manipulated the Word of God.
 - § The false teachers **willing to use God’s Word for their own personal promotion**. Paul said, “we are not, like so many, peddlers of God’s word” who selling out the Gospel for their own popularity. They were just using the Gospel for their own sordid gain and personal promotion.
 - § The false teachers were willing to “**tamper with God’s word**” (2 Cor. 4:2). They were watering it down or changing it to suit what people want to hear.
 - Manipulated the Corinthians. They didn’t care to lay down their lives or to confront their sins. Paul does.
- 2 Corinthians 12:20-21** “For I fear that perhaps when I come I may find you not as I wish, and that you may find me not as you wish—that perhaps there may be quarreling, jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder. 21 I fear that when I come again my God may humble me before you, and I may have to mourn over many of those who sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual immorality, and sensuality that they have practiced.”

Paul says vs. 14a, “Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers”. Paul is telling the Corinthian saints to stop connecting up with a non-believer in spiritual enterprise.

Like an ox and a donkey, saints have a different **purpose** than unbelievers.

II. We are called to be separate in our practice, vs. 14b-15, “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?”

Five Rhetorical Questions

Christians have a different way of living than unbelievers. We are **lights** in the darkness. We are **salt**, called to preserve the world from it's corruption.

Paul gives **five rhetorical questions** that show us we need to practice a different way of living now that we know Christ.

The Christian Life is both Positive and Negative

Back in **2 Corinthians 5:17**, Paul said, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” There is a massive positive in the Christian life. We are new in Christ. We are one with God. We are renewed. But there are also the negatives of Christian conversion, what is embraced by the great Biblical word 'repentance.'

- § There are things we now turn our backs on.
- § There are places we no longer go.
- § There are beliefs that we do not hold, all the negatives.

These are absolutely vital, quite indispensable to any Christian integrity. I cannot understand a group of professing Christians who go from the church right back into the world. In Christ, we have broken the harness that joined us to the world. We have a new Lord indwelling us who lives in us and walks with us! Our life is completely different!

A. Our **standard** is different. “For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness?”

The Christian says with the Psalmist:

- § **Psalm 119:97**, “Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day.”
- § **Psalm 19:14**, “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.”

The Christian has a **partnership** with righteousness. We want to “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness...” (**Matthew 6:33**).

The Christian is enthusiastic about doing **God's will**, and not our own will. “Not my will but thine be done” is our cry! But the unbeliever doesn't care about God's will unless it lines up with his own will. An unbeliever does what he pleases with no regard that one day he will stand before God! He is lawless!

- § **Lawlessness** is simply doing what I want to do. That's the standard of the world. A Christian has “been crucified with Christ”. We say with Paul, “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (**Galatians 2:20**).
- § The Prophet Ezekiel says in **Ezekiel 36:25–27** (ESV) — “I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my

Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

- § A Christian has no partnership with lawlessness. The standard is now what pleases God. “Our aim” is always: “to please God”. We desire to have a partnership with God in promoting His glory. We want His righteousness to reign in our hearts and in the earth. We want “His will to be done on earth as it is in heaven”.
- § So our **standard** is different. We want God’s will – His righteousness, not our own, which is lawlessness and rebellion and witchcraft.

B. Our friendship is different. “what fellowship has light with darkness?” “God is light and in Him is no darkness at all” (**1 Jn. 1:5**).

Paul is not saying we should become monks and nuns and forget about evangelizing the world. He’s saying don’t partake of their ways. Remember Jesus’ prayer before He was crucified?

- § He says to his Father, “I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one” (Jn. 17:15).
- § Paul’s says especially, we are to have no fellowship with those who say they are believers but keep living like the lost. He says, “I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people— 10 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. 11 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. 12 For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? 13 God judges those outside. “Purge the evil person from among you.” (1 Cor. 5:9-13).

So what’s the answer to Paul’s question? “what fellowship has light with darkness?”
NONE!

We no longer have fellowship with the world. What fellowship can those who’ve known such light enjoy with those who live in darkness?

The **light** has come on! We could never go back to the way we used to live. The light is now shining in our hearts. We are no longer living in blind lust for sin.

We desire to be with the saints. We love to spend time praising God and we form our lives around Christ’s church. The epicenter of our lives is formed around our service to Christ.

C. Our master is different. “What accord has Christ with Belial?”

The word *accord* gives us our English word “symphony,” and it speaks of beautiful music that comes when the players are reading the same score and obeying the same

leader. What chaos we would have if each instrumentalist played his own tune in his own way!²

There is no harmony, no symphony with the Christian and Belial. We have ONE Master, and that is Christ. **Matthew 6:24**, “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.”

From the beginning he has wanted to bring DISCORD to the Body of Christ. He is always the one that destroys the “unity of the Spirit with the bond of peace”. The healthy Christian should always want unity with Christ.

Satan Stirs Up Strife

Illustration: There are times when Kristen and I are playing beautiful music together. Her on her violin, and I on my guitar. Sometimes Katie will join in and Jill as well singing “Holy, holy, holy” or some other song. Then all the sudden, Evan will sneak into the room and start pounding on the piano. What discord! The beautiful harmony immediately stops. That’s what Satan does. He stops the flow of unity.

Whenever a person begins gossiping or complaining, they are playing out of tune and following the old master and deceiver. Our Master loves unity. He prayed in **John 17:21-23**, “that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22 The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one. 23 I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.”

God says sowing discord is an “abomination” to him. He hates it (**Proverbs 6:19**).

God Loves Unity

We read in **Psalm 133:1-3**, “Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity! 2 It is like the precious oil on the head, running down on the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down on the collar of his robes! 3 It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion! For there the LORD has commanded the blessing, life forevermore.”

This harmony comes from Christ. We are to be “eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3).

In Phil. 2:2, Paul says, “complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. 3 Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,”

Unbelievers don’t care about discord. But there is no harmony with Christ and Satan. Satan is always the one who brings disharmony.

² Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (2 Co 6:11). Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books.

D. Our future is different. “what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever?”

Things in Common

The believer and unbeliever have many things in common:

- Believers and unbelievers share a common humanity
- We all have a conscience, and the law are written on our heart
- We are all made in the image of God
- We all have an aesthetic sense, an intelligence, an ability to speak and comprehend language
- We are all born and we all die
- But that's where it ends.

Things Not in Common

Unbelievers don't have in common an experience of regeneration, a love for Jesus Christ, a walk with God, a submission to the Bible and the hope of glory. They do not share Christ as their solid Rock and foundation.

The Christian is building on the rock, while the unbeliever builds on the sand.

The unbeliever does not possess a common conviction of sin.

The unbeliever is storing up treasures on earth while the believer is storing up treasures in heaven. Their hearts are in different places - for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

The unbeliever has no hope of eternal life, and so unbelievers live for what is on this earth. On the other hand, the believer's portion, or inheritance is not on this earth. We are always looking for the future. We are looking for that which is eternal.

Different Future: Mike K. and “Marcel Gates”

Illustration: Now of course a Christian has something totally different than a lost person. We have a different portion, or future inheritance.

Now if we were to go back to the 1980s and let's imagine that there's a guy there who's founded a company— let's call him “Marcel Gates” and he has an idea for a new operating system.

Now if Mike Klikas knew then about the future of Microsoft, where do you think he would invest his money?

In the same way, we know that which is eternal will last forever, and all that is earthly will perish.

The believer has NO PORTION with the unbeliever!

E. Our worship is different. “What agreement has the temple of God with idols?”

The Christian's epicenter is to worship and adore Christ.

III. We are called to be separate in our passion, vs. 16b, “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.”

God has made our body and our soul His temple. A temple is for worship! We are to worship only Him. We are to have an all consuming love for Him.

Couches are made for...

What would happen my kids when they were swimming decided to take the living room couch and use it as a diving board into their pool?

REX...

Last week we had a pet funeral. Rex, my daughter's guinea pig died. The whole neighborhood gathered. We dug a grave in the back yard. We said our eulogies of the life of Rex the guinea pig. We held hands and prayed.

Now getting a pet funeral together is no small task. My daughter had made a casket out of a shoe box. But I had to move Rex from his cage to that casket. What if I were to take a spoon from the kitchen and use that to move his body? Then I were to use that same spoon to dig the hole for the grave?

I wouldn't be able to use that spoon again. Next time you are at our place we'll have cheerios in honor of Rex. You wouldn't want to use any of my spoon or any silverware for that matter! Why because a spoon has a special use.

So it is with us. We have a special use. We are God's temple.

IV. We are called to be separate in our pursuits, vs. 17-18; 7:1, “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.”

2 Corinthians 7: 1 (ESV) — “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.”

We are to pursue holiness!

Doctor surgery

A doctor who wants to pursue a surgery cannot defile himself. He has to wash his hands a certain way. He cannot even touch anything that is not sterile.

A. God's promises to be near to those who are pure...

Verse 18:

- § 17b, “I will welcome you,” – something God does...
- § 18 and I will be a father to you, and – something God is...

§ **you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty.”** – something we shall be!

B. What should our pledge of purity be?

Ceremonial Law

God says to us, “**touch no unclean thing**”. Paul is quoting the ceremonial law. In the OT you could not touch a dead body and then come to worship. You could not eat pork. All of this was unclean.

The Christian is to have nothing to do with sinful things. We have been crucified with Christ. We are DEAD to sin.

1. We should pursue purity in our **church** – ecclesiastical separation (vs. 17a), “**Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord**”.

This means we need to be willing to separate from those who do not teach the Gospel or who begin to compromise the Gospel with worldliness.

Do not join a church that will not practice church discipline. Do not join a church that adopts worldly practices to draw a crowd. Do not join a church that doesn't teach their people to lovingly confront sin in the congregation according to Matthew 18.

2. We should pursue purity in our **choices** – personal separation (vs. 6:17b-7:1). “**...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.”**

2 Corinthians 7: 1 (ESV) — “**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.”**

§ **Body = every defilement of body and spirit**

Our Body is the Temple of the Holy Spirit. We cannot do things that defile it. Fornication, pornography and uncleanness are not allowed. Drunkenness is prohibited. Using your lips to lie is prohibited. Put off these things. Put off gossip. Put off foul language. Put off raging words. Put off all these things.

§ **Soul - every defilement of body and spirit**

Put off bitterness and brewing anger.

Put off covetousness

Put off lust

Put off wrong thoughts – fear, lust, etc. REFOCUS your thoughts on Christ

Put off pride and haughtiness and selfcenteredness
All these things defile the spirit

Conclusion: Holiness of life is the substance of salvation. It is that for which we are saved. If we are in Christ Jesus and he is in us, shall we not walk like Christ Jesus?

One thing about my children: they all look like me. You know their mine from a mile away. And because I try to be a good father I spend time with them, and they act like me.

God is a good Father. And if you are His child, you are going to desire to be like Him!

Remember you are a special vessel for his use. **You don't take the Bible or the American flag and use it to start a fire!** In the same way, you were made to love and worship the Lord in holiness. Dedicate yourself to Christ, and cleanse yourself from all defilement of body and soul, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord.

Then we may approve ourselves to have God as our Father and ourselves to be his sons and daughters.