

“SANCTIFIED”

- 2 Corinthians 6:11 - 18 -

by Pastor Tim Dodson
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2 Corinthians 6:11-18 *Corinthians! We have spoken openly to you, our heart is wide open.*

You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted by your [own] affections. Now in return for the same (I speak as to children), you also be open. Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them And walk among [them]. I will be their God, And they shall be My people." Therefore "Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you." "I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the LORD Almighty."



6:11-13

These letters to these believers in Corinth already are known as arguably the most intimate writings of Paul in scripture. And that being the case, I believe these words in 11-13 are perhaps the most loving and affectionate of the whole of his Corinthian letters. Paul calls upon these brothers and sisters to open their hearts to him, his message, and ultimately to God. He had spent a lot of ink thus far challenging them to expand their thinking, their passions, and commit themselves wholly to Christ without reservation. They were now at a crossroads of decision on these matters both individually and corporately as a church.

Were they willing to embrace a real and practical life of sanctification? Would they “set themselves apart solely for Christ and kingdom?” Would they actually *live out their faith*, or would it merely remain an intellectual position? Would it remain an ideal or become a lifestyle? Would they commit themselves wholly to the God who breathed life into them? To Christ who gave them abundant life? To begin with, the people of the church in Corinth had to be able to open their hearts not only to God, but to Paul, and to each other. We would like to believe that Christianity is only that singular relationship with God but scripture would strenuously argue with you on that aspect. The evidence is clear: our faith is expressed horizontally in the dynamic of the local church body as *well* as vertically with Christ. That is not some small caveat of obscure scripture. It is the whole of the New Testament!

Would they now trust Paul in the difficult matters he had so challenged them by? After all, He had taught them openly and honestly. He held back no good thing, even if the message was difficult. He could have soft peddled the facts in order to receive in greater reception from them, but withholding the truth is the practice of hurt and clearly not of God. He once asked some other believers essentially the same question: Galatians 4:16 “*Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?*” The answer to that question is clearly “yes” in many cases.

How I know both that feeling and that question! Many people through the years have told me they loved me and supported me...that they were firmly planted in this church and in God, only to chuck it all when they were confronted with the truth on some matter. That is what is occurring with this pastor...Pastor Paul. He had already addressed this in the previous verses. He spoke of the burden of ministry and the loneliness of pastoral service. He said in verses 4-8: “*In everything we do, we show that we are true ministers of God. We patiently*

endure troubles and hardships and calamities of every kind. We have been beaten, been put in prison, faced angry mobs, worked to exhaustion, endured sleepless nights, and gone without food. We prove ourselves by our purity, our understanding, our patience, our kindness, by the Holy Spirit within us, and by our sincere love. We faithfully preach the truth. God's power is working in us. We use the weapons of righteousness in the right hand for attack and the left hand for defense. We serve God whether people honor us or despise us, whether they slander us or praise us..."

I think I would fall gravely short of being able to claim the same, but I **do** understand. And what did Paul receive in return for that sacrifice and commitment? He goes to say that *"We are honest, but they call us impostors. We are ignored, even though we are well known. We live close to death, but we are still alive. We have been beaten, but we have not been killed..."* And despite the failure of those around him to respond in Christian love, he...still remembering that he ultimately serves Christ, can still say *"Our hearts ache, but we always have joy. We are poor, but we give spiritual riches to others. We own nothing, and yet we have everything."* Every staffer that has come on board in this fellowship has been warned and prepared for what was ahead. Clearly some still did not hear it, but the caution was expressed just the same. To stand in this roll one must have the skin of a rhino. Some have wearied and threw in the towel. The ones that did not can echo the words of Paul.

I do not see Paul herein being defensive, just "matter of fact." If they failed to know all of God's promises and blessings, it was not because **he** had failed them in any way. Rather, it was because **they** failed to trust him and love him as he loved them. Paul was not asking for respect without earning it, or trust without proving himself worthy. He had literally poured himself out to and for these believers. He had proved himself. He continued to love them and he was simply asking them to reciprocate...he was seeking their fair love in return for the commitment he had made to them. If that was hard then, I would dare say it is even harder in our generation of hyper self-involvement and me-first social dynamic. Unity and faithfulness has never been a more rare commodity as it is in today's greater church. We have let the world in and the world now so often controls the way we interact. Such is wrong. Such is sin. And if we as a greater church are to survive and thrive, **it must cease.**

This was and is the heart of every 'called pastor' in light of his love for the flock. All that Paul had endured, he had endured for them. They had been the beneficiaries of all of his faithfulness, truthfulness, and all the pains he had gone through. He spoke to them as his children. He loved them like his own children. He didn't want their gold or silver. He just wanted their love.

The Moffat translation reads: *"O Corinthians, I am keeping nothing back from you; my heart is wide open for you. Restraint?—that lies with you, not me. A fair exchange now, as the children say! Open your hearts wide to me."*

6:14-15

Paul is not changing subjects here, but rather is expounding now on his point...on just how they might express their love towards him as well as God. He had "greased the skids" of the conversation, and now was laying it all out there. We have read the past text wherein Paul expressed the surety of false teachers and false prophets who would come in amongst them; that there would be those who would attempt to lure them away from the truth of the gospel and lull them into a false doctrine of experiences and comfort, or even legalism and ritual...and the reality still exists today.

Staying true to his reputation for delivering tough things to hear, he goes on to warn them now of those who would go so far, if possible, to steal their very souls! Corinth was full of all sorts of vice and evil, as well as religious zealots with false paths to God. So is Menomonie and the world at large. If you forget that reality you stand in grave danger.

Paul calls upon the believers to separate themselves from these who would taint their objective and distract them from their priorities. Light and darkness cannot exist at the same time and place. We are called to be in the world...and that is crucial to our witness. Salt can have no effect unless it is out of the shaker. But the other side of this issue is the critical fact that a Christian cannot commune with an unbeliever. We are simply traveling different roads.

The practical impact of this directive is far reaching. It affects our dating and marriage, belonging to secret societies, partnerships in business, our families and even our friendships. Once again, this does not mean we are to move off to a deserted island someplace, physically or spiritually. Indeed we must continue to answer the call to share the gospel to the ends of the earth! But we are not to “fellowship” (vs 14) with the world. If we are practically *like* them, perhaps it is because in truth we *are* them.

This is an incredibly hard directive for many of us! In fact, this is often our Achilles tendon...the realm where we simply say no to God. We must remember however that everything Paul told these believers was not meant to control them or take away anything that is of God and ultimately a blessing, but rather because he loved them. Satan’s greatest plan, *his ultimate scheme*, is to render the church powerless by blending together the world and the believing body. For in doing so we are effectively watered down and thus without a real power and influence to effect anything! How many of us have been led off the path of faith by one who came under the guise of a perceived friend?

6:16

If this verse referred to only the little statues that grace the homes of a few, we might feel this does not apply to us. But the scriptural subject of idols run much deeper than that! Anything and everything that hold priority over Christ and kingdom is an idol, and unity with the world is sure to bring its idols into our lives. Idols manifest as money, pleasures, material possessions, our jobs, even a girlfriend or boyfriend. It can hunting and fishing...TV...sports, hobbies, even our feelings and emotions. The biggest and greatest is the almighty idol of *ME*. Anything that comes between us and our God, our service to Him or our worship of Him, is an idol. One cannot help but quickly hearken back to God’s “Big Ten,” which calls us to “have no other gods before me.”

We are told in more than one place in scripture that we are God’s temple, that He literally lives inside of us. So when we link up with the world beyond that which He would have us, we drag Him into our idolatry and spiritual adultery. This is the God we are to follow! A God who lives inside of us and walks among us.

Moses dealt with this same issue coming out of Egypt...out of the biblical picture of the world and sin. Exodus 33:16 says "*For how then will it be known that Your people and I have found grace in Your sight, except You go with us? So we shall be separate, Your people and I, from all the people who are upon the face of the earth.*"

We would fail this issue if we did not pause to emphasize the most overt and obvious of these issues which is in our practice of dating and marriage. I have witnessed this train wreck innumerable times. One scenario is the situation where a young woman or man tries to “spiritually date” someone. They are clearly not a born again believer, but “hey, they are coming to church with me, so it will be ok.” Ya...right up until the marry you or at least bed you. We try so hard not to call this what it is: SIN. Overt and clear opposition to God’s direction and the spirit of being a Christian. At its core.

There just is to be no such unity between a believer and an unbeliever. That may just make you mad, but I am simply telling you what is in scripture. Once again... “*Am I now to become your enemy because I tell you the truth?*” There should be no common ground if you are a believer. So if you think you have it, then this is more than just an overt sin. It is a very real sign that maybe the reason there is no problem in that relationship is because there is no conflict...no conflict because you aren’t really a Christian. Perhaps I should just introduce you to some of these marriages...where one is a believer and the other isn’t and let them stand in witness to the mess this issue causes.

The next problem is not emphatically stated herein, so there is no biblical mandate, but I will warn you just the same. Uniting with someone who *says* he is a Christian...and may actually be one, but is not where you are spiritually, in faithfulness, maturity, and direction of life, will hold its own heartbreak and difficulty. That person has the potential to...on a human level, **make you or break you**. If this is your situation you are in just such an idolatrous situation...you have placed someone on the earthly level between God and you and what He wants you to do in this life.

I once was in a counseling situation with a guy who was seeking marriage with a young lady who was very dear to me for many years. He told me *point blank* that he was not in love with her but hoped that that love would develop over the years of their marriage. I told this young lady what he said, and she blew up...adamant that this man was a great Christian and when she confronted him on the matter he flat out lied that he had said such a thing. She kicked me to the curb, married the man and split town. He was going to take them both to the mission field. He didn't. No surprise there. She just wanted to be married so bad, that it was more than *him* being an idol...*marriage itself was an idol*. So the danger isn't just marrying a *non-christian*, but yoking yourself to one who isn't where you are and moreover where you are going in life and calling.

I had a conversation with another young lady who struggled enormously in this area over years. I warned her that Satan would eventually give her what she wanted and he did. She ultimately surrendered her faith and her witness and embraced the immediate desire at the expense of her eternity. She's gone now, and I fear like a vacuum, she will take everyone around her with her and the cost of her sin will reverberate through the lives and generations in her wake. It has rightfully been said that "Sin will take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you want to pay."

6:17-18

Paul has brought us to the spiritual mountaintop here. Because of this incredible relationship we have with our Creator, we are therefore called to "separate" ...to stand, walk, and live separate from the world. Where have we lost our way on this issue? Again, this is absolutely *not* a call to embrace an Amish lifestyle or to "shun" the unredeemed. It is a call to *see* different, live different, think different, BE DIFFERENT. To be salt in a rotting world, and light in a dark realm. I acknowledge that to walk "in the world but not part of the world" is a razor thin line and requires serious focus and commitment or it will be a fight you will lose. It is imperative that we stay connected to the vine every moment and run every decision and action through the sieve that is Jesus Christ and His kingdom.

I realize that it can be a hard thing to adopt *in many cases* a new family...one that actually walks in Christ. I am not here today to soft-peddle that often enormous challenge. But Christianity is not meant to be easy, nor make your life easier. The path Jesus led us down was hard *to say the least*, and He is clearly calling us to "pick up our cross and follow Him." Let me be honest with you: The fact is, most folks will simply not heed this message today. The things I have emphasized will often just be rejected. And certainly that is your choice. I'm not here to judge and condemn you. I am here...as Paul was then, to warn you of what is up ahead, and save you from pain and loss. I may be despised for doing so...but so was Paul in many cases, as was Christ Himself. But they put out the warning just the same, and they did so because they loved. And I do the same today.

We all must choose our lane in this life. What will be yours?