

God's People: Relationships Restored--Hearts Shared (2 Cor. 6-7)

2 Cor. 6:11-7:4, 7:5-16

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Paul's ministry was a ministry of relationships.

Two sections are included into the Scripture text readings above, this lesson will focus on the first of those in 6:11-7:4.

The construction of this section is often unstudied, misunderstood, overlooked.

The method in this study is simply to explore, explain, and apply the text.

The Corinthians' relationship to Paul -- Paul's appeal

11 Our mouth has opened to you, Corinthians, and our heart has opened wide to you. 12 You are not being restricted by us, but you are restricting your own feelings toward us. 13 As a fair exchange - I speak as to my children - open wide your hearts also.

6:11-7:4. Paul appeals to the Corinthians for openness and consistency in their relationship with him. The reestablishment of the relationship with Paul (the goal of Paul's appeals in 6:11-13 and 7:2-4) will require that the Corinthians cease their relationship with Paul's opponents.

6:11-13. Paul's appeal for reconciliation is based on the shared affection between Paul and the Corinthians. Paul's appeal to the Corinthians reflects his commitment to a ministry of relationships (6:3). He is appealing for reconciliation. He describes the affection of the Corinthians toward him and those with him as "restricted." He urges open receptive hearts. The message of these verses can be summarized as follows.

6:11. We are speaking frankly, with open and receptive hearts (our mouth opens to you, our heart has been widened or enlarged).

6:12. You are not hemmed in (restricted, cramped, distressed) by us; you are hemmed in (restricted, cramped, distressed) by your own emotions. (The verb in this verse is not easy to translate in the context. Other options include "restrained" and "closed off.")

6:13. As to children I say, widen or enlarge yourselves as your own fair response and corresponding action, a fair exchange.

The Corinthians' relationship to the false teachers - Paul's appeal

14 Do not become partners with unbelievers. What interaction is there between righteousness and lawlessness? What fellowship between light and darkness? 15 What agreement between Christ and Beliar? What sharing between a believer and an unbeliever? 16 What agreement between the temple of God and idols? For we are a temple of the living God, as God said, I will dwell among them and walk about, and I will be their God and they will be my people. 17 Therefore, come out of their midst and be separated, says the Lord; do not touch any unclean thing and I will receive you. 18 And I will be for you a father and you will be to me sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty. 7:1 Having then these promises, beloved ones, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, completing holiness in reverence for God.

6:14-7:1. The subject in 6:11-7:4 is the relationship between the Corinthians and Paul, a relationship that has become stressed and closed off by the increasing loyalty of the Corinthians to the false teachers. There is no reason to think that the parenthetical insertion changes Paul's subject. What is the connection of this passage with the larger context of 6:11-7:4?

6:14. Paul's appeal for reconciliation contains an element of indignation. The alliance between the Corinthians and the false teachers who were opposing Paul had caused the Corinthians to alter the gospel truth which Paul had preached to them. Through the influence of the false apostles some of the Corinthians had apparently rejected Paul and his apostolic authority.

“Do not become partners with unbelievers.” Another possible translation is, “do not establish unequal connections with unbelievers.” The word for partners (*heterozugeo*, lit. other-yoked) was used of yoking animals of different species. The figurative use of “yoke” in the New Testament best explains Paul’s meaning in this verse. For example, bondservants serve in a yoke, 1 Tim. 6:1; the teachings of the Old Testament were a yoke of slavery, Gal. 5:1; and requiring Gentile circumcision is described as a yoke, cf. Acts 15:10. In Matt. 11:29, the word “yoke” may refer to Jesus’ teachings. According to James Thompson (*Sweet Commentary Series*) the word was used for a team of Jewish scholars sent on a mission. In 1 Cor. 9:9, Phil. 4:3 and 1 Tim. 5:18, Paul uses the concept with reference to ministry. Thompson explains that the word in 6:14 means to be connected with someone in the church who does not share your faith or beliefs.

Since many have misapplied this text, I take a brief detour: Many apply this verse to marriage, but the context forbids such an interpretation. Marriage is not mentioned in the context. The Greek verb tense can be translated “quit being partners.” Applied to marriage, this verse would say exactly the opposite of 1 Cor. 7:12-15, making even a secondary application to marriage doubtful.

The context makes clear that Paul’s instructions are a call for separation from Paul’s opponents, whom Paul calls unbelievers (see 4:4; 11:3; 13:3-5). The call is for separation from teaching described as idolatrous (see 1 John 5:19-21 where the concept of idolatry is applied figuratively to false teaching). In these verses, Paul cites common arguments against idolatry and applies them to his opponents.

6:14-16. Five questions, each using a pairing of unlike things, show that an alliance with those who do not share belief in Jesus Christ and the gospel is unthinkable. There is no agreement between righteousness and lawlessness, light and darkness, Christ and Belial (prince of evil), a believer and an unbeliever, temple worship and idol worship. The pairs are mutually exclusive. Paul’s use of contrasts demands that the Corinthians make a choice.

The last pairing gives Paul entrance to his argument and application. Idolatry has no place in the temple; false teachers have no place in the church. Paul is not referring to the literal temple or to literal idolatry, which is made clear in the statement that Christians are the temple of God. God’s glory dwells in the church (Eph. 3:20-21). That Christians and the church are God’s temple is reflected also in 1 Cor. 3:16-17 and 6:19-20, and Eph. 2:20-22. Paul spiritualizes both the Old Testament idea of temple and the idea that touching or associating with idols defiles a person.

6:16-18. Paul uses a series of Old Testament citations to support his argument. Because the church is God’s temple, God dwells among his people (see Ezek. 37:27 and Lev. 26:11, 12). God’s temple must remain pure and undefiled, totally separated from unbelievers (Isa. 52:11). God’s promise to be among his people applies to those who comply with God’s demand for separation (2 Sam. 7:14).

7:1. Paul’s reference to God’s promises refers to 6:16-18. The present tense, “having these promises,” suggests that these promises of God to his people in the Old Testament still apply to Christians. The purity of God’s temple demands that Christians cleanse themselves of every defilement of body (flesh) and spirit. It is true that uncleanness can enter the human being both physically and mentally, but in this passage the phrase should not be understood as describing two classes of defilement. Rather, Paul uses the phrase with reference to the entire human being. Cleansing oneself (aorist tense) calls for decisive action. Maintaining the purity of God’s temple will not happen automatically or accidentally. In the context, the specific source of defilement is the false teaching of Paul’s opponents. Paul urges the Corinthians to perfect (complete) their holiness. Holiness is attributed to every Christian through baptism (1 Cor. 6:11) resulting in instantaneous salvation and sanctification (1 Cor. 1:30). Holiness is made complete in reverence to God. Holiness requires a commitment to maintain separation from defiling influences.

The Corinthians’ relationship to Paul -- Paul’s appeal restated

2 Make room for us in your hearts. We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have exploited no one. 3 I do not say this to condemn you; I told you before that you are in our hearts

to die together and to live together. 4 Great is my boldness with you; great is my pride because of you. I have been filled with comfort, overflowing with joy in all our troubles.

7.2-4. “Make room” (*choreo*) serves as an antonym to the verb in 6:12 (cramped, restrained, restricted). Paul’s heart was open to the Corinthians; he asked them in return to open their hearts to him.

Paul again describes his ministry among them. The false teachers were charging Paul with corruption and saying that he took advantage of the Corinthians. (Compare 2 Cor. 12:17-18 where Paul answers the same charges). Reconciliation between Paul and the Corinthians required that Paul answer the charges and that the Corinthians quit listening to the false teachers. In his response in 7:2-4, Paul says three things – we have wronged no one (*adikeo*, to treat unjustly, Paul uses the same word in 7:12), we have corrupted (*phtheiro*, to ruin) no one, we have exploited (*pleonekteo*, to take advantage, to defraud) no one. Considering that Paul was encouraging churches to participate in the monetary collection for the poor Christians in Judea, he may have been defending himself against charges of misusing money.

Paul wants to resolve conflict; he does not want to cause more conflict. He assures the Corinthians that he is not criticizing (condemning, judging). Paul affirms that they are in his heart (compare 6:11), so that he will die (aorist tense) with them if necessary and that he will continue to live (present tense) with them (cf. 5:14-15). Paul’s goal in Corinth, as in every place, was the establishment of a mature church. He has great boldness (*parresia*, often translated as “confidence”) in the Corinthians; he is proud of them (see notes at 1:12-14). Comfort (*paraklesis*) and joy in the midst of trouble (*thlipsis*) point back to the first chapter and also anticipate 7:6-13. These two Greek words are used several times in 7:5-16. While many translations use “encouragement” to translate *paraklesis*, in this context “comfort” makes clear the repetition of the word from 1:3-11. In these study notes, “trouble” is most often used to translate *thlipsis*. Paul is overjoyed (abounding without measure) in his troubles.

The spiritual state of the churches was for Paul a matter of pride and emotion (Gal. 4:19; 1 Thess. 2:18-20). The use of “overflowing” (an intensified form of *perisseuo*) is common in Paul’s writings to the Corinthians.