

6:14-7:1 Be Separate, part 2

When we started looking at this text last week, I mentioned that it is really profound in what it says and what it implies. The application of this passage—or lack of application—will have momentous results in your life personally and in the life of the church.

One of the things that distinguishes churches like ours from many other kinds of churches is the application of this passage. For our church and churches like ours, separation from unbelief and error is a significant commitment. Sadly, for many other churches, separation is a non-issue; many churches simply do not apply these verses in any meaningful way.

We need to heed this warning about the dangers of improper alliances. This text is not merely a warning about such mismatched partnerships; it prohibits them.

Last time we considered the first two points about biblical separation from this message:

- I. .14a Separation prohibits improper partnerships. We are not to be unequally yoked together with unbelievers.
- II. .14b-15 Separation recognizes distinctions/contrasts. This set of five opposites shows us that believers don't have anything in common spiritually with unbelievers.

Let's go on in the passage to see that

- III. .16b Separation recognizes spiritual realities.
 - A. Believers are under the authority of God's Word.
 1. Note the words here, "as God has said..." Paul is quoting from the OT, using this passage as an authority.
 2. These words typically introduce a quotation from the OT. But the following words are not from a single passage. The quote here is from a variety of OT sources—Lev, Isa, Ezek, 2 Sam. This is a combination or accumulation of passages. E.g.,...
Leviticus 26:11–12 I will set My tabernacle among you, and ... I will walk among you and be your God, and you shall be My people.
 - B. .16b Believers are the temple of the living God.

1. The temple of God was the place of God's dwelling. God was present among his people in the holy of holies in the temple. That place is no longer the place of God's dwelling.
 2. Christians are the temple of the living God. Every individual is indwelt by the Spirit of God, and every legitimate body of Christ also enjoys God's presence. God dwells among his people, not in a physical temple or tabernacle.
- C. "I will dwell in them." The HSp indwells every believer and every legitimate church. In the person of the HSp, God dwells in his people; we are the temple of the living God.
- D. God walks in/among them.
- Moses tells us that God walked about in the camp of Israel as they were in the wilderness.
- Deuteronomy 23:14 For the LORD your God walks in the midst of your camp, to deliver you and give your enemies over to you; therefore your camp shall be holy, that He may see no unclean thing among you, and turn away from you.*
- Enjoying God's presence and walking with God is directly connected with holy living. If we want to enjoy God's presence with us, we must separate ourselves from what is unclean.
- E. God is their God and they are God's people.
1. This last statement is especially profound because it is repeated throughout the entire Bible. I take the statement to be a summary of God's entire purpose and plan of salvation—"I will be their God, and they will be my people." That expresses God's overall intent in saving his people. The entire Bible is an outworking of this goal.
 2. God makes this statement repeatedly to the nation of Israel. If they would obey his commands and avoid sinful behavior, he would be their God, and they would be his people.
 3. That intent now passes from Israel as a nation to all believers in Jesus. Believers in Jesus are now the people of God, and the church is the house of God.

4. This statement—“I will be their God, and they shall be my people”—expresses God’s continuing plan. God wants to enter into a relationship with people whereby they recognize him as God, and he recognizes them as his people.

Can you affirm that the true and living God is your God and that you are one of his people? You can say that only if you’ve repented of sin and trusted in Christ.

If you are a Christian, then you can be confident that God dwells with you and walks with you. He counts you as one of his people. That’s a great promise and a great privilege, and it also brings the obligation of holy living. You can’t walk with God in defilement and moral corruption.

IV. .17 Separation requires practical steps.

A. Come out from among them

Isa 52:11 seems to be the source of this quote:

Depart! Depart! Go out from there, Touch no unclean thing; Go out from the midst of her, Be clean, You who bear the vessels of the LORD.

This verse pertains to Israel leaving Babylon after the 70 years of captivity. But the principle can be applied to the church. Just as the the Israelites were to leave behind anything that might compromise their purity, so the we must repudiate moral uncleanness of any kind.¹

1. We cannot be separate from something if we are in the middle of it, if we are participating in it. Separation requires that we come out of any relationship that would bring us into any improper or inappropriate alliance or partnership.
2. Personally, that means that we might have to sever relationships that would constitute an unequal yoke with unbelievers. We must get out of them. Separation requires that we get away from people, places, and pastimes that would associate us with evil. We must get rid of anything that would defile us or compromise us.

¹ Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Milton Keynes, UK: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.; Paternoster Press, 2005), 508.

3. As a church, it means that, if we were part of a compromised denomination, we would have to get out of it. We don't want to be in an association or denomination that would link us up with false teaching or immoral conduct.

The proper thing to do in cases where spiritual corruption and compromise exist is to come out from among them; sever those partnerships/affiliations. When something becomes impure and defiled, our response must be that we don't touch it; we strive to remain pure; we separate ourselves from what would defile us.

Along with coming out, we must

B. .17 Separate yourselves

1. The word here means "to mark off, to distinguish, to set aside." To be separated means that we set ourselves aside from any associations or partnerships that would defile us or connect us to error and sin. We get out of that unequal yoke. We set ourselves aside from sin and to God.
2. We don't want to be associated with anything that is contrary to the Bible, godliness, or righteous living. We must avoid anything that would defile us or bring us into contact with error or evil.

Obviously, we can't avoid sin and error altogether. But we can avoid partnerships and affiliations that would compromise our testimony or reputation individually or as a church. We have to be careful about our associations and partnerships.

Some people say that this separation applies *only* to unbelievers. But I would suggest that the principle applies more broadly than that. The Bible commands us to separate ourselves, when necessary, even from other professing Christians if they are living disorderly, teaching false doctrine, or creating strife and division.

But that's not all; he further explains what he means

C. Do not touch what is unclean.

1. The word "unclean" describes anything spiritually impure or defiled. Any kind of sin or error could be described as unclean.

Quote: Everything in body and spirit that is contrary to our righteousness in Christ, to the light, to Christ, to faith, to ourselves as the living God's sanctuary—these, everyone and all, are “unclean,” from these be so separated by God as not even to touch them.²

2. To not “touch” what is unclean would mean that we have nothing to do with it. We don't accept it, tolerate it, or endorse it, we don't participate. We disconnect from it. Maybe we can't clean up or fix what is unclean, but we can certainly avoid it.

1 Thessalonians 5:22 *Abstain from every form of evil.*

3. How do we know if something is unclean/impure?
 - a) We have a standard to judge such things—the word of God. God himself tells us the difference between good and bad, righteous and unrighteous, holy and defiled. Follow the standard of God's word.
 - b) And we also use our own conscience; we have an inner sense of right and wrong which we should not ignore. Don't violate your conscience.
4. If something is morally impure or spiritually in error, we should not have anything to do with it.

Ephesians 5:11 *And have no fellowship (partnership) with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them.*

The commands here tell us what God means by being separated: come out, be separated, and don't touch anything unclean. In particular, we separate ourselves from unbelievers and their evil influence. But on occasion, we also have to separate ourselves from professing believers who are doctrinally faulty, living disorderly, or causing divisions.

- V. .17end-18 Separation results in blessings.

Note *three blessings* promised to those who separate themselves:

- A. .17 end God will receive you. That is, God will welcome you. I.e., you will be well-pleasing to God; God will approve of you.

² Lenski, 1089-90.

When we separate ourselves from sin and unto God, we can enjoy a deeper sense of communion with God. Our walk with God improves when we separate ourselves from this evil world.

Deuteronomy 23:14 *For the LORD your God walks in the midst of your camp, ... therefore your camp shall be holy, that He may see no unclean thing among you, and turn away from you.*

The implication here is that *lack* of separation is displeasing to God. God is displeased when his people are associated with evil and error. If we want to please God, we must avoid sin and error.

B. .18a God will be a father to you. Paul had described believers as the temple of God, and now he describes us as the family of God. God is a father to his children.

C. God will recognize you as a son/daughter. Cf. vs. 16end.

So we are the temple, we are God's family, and we are individual sons and daughters. We are part of a larger community in which God dwells and walks.

One of the marks of genuine salvation is a willingness to be separate from sin, i.e., to live a holy lifestyle. If we want to enjoy a close, personal walk with God, we must remain separate from sin. If we want to enjoy the presence and blessing of God in our lives, then we must pursue holiness.

VI. 7:1 Separation requires progressive holiness (sanctification).

A. "Let us cleanse ourselves"

1. The proper response to these great and precious promises is that we live righteously; we cleanse ourselves from defilement and error. We dare not persist in unequal yokes or in sin and error.

2. The grammar here suggests a clean break with a sinful lifestyle. We cannot persist in sin and think that we can walk with God.

B. If we are God's children, we must cleanse ourselves from defilement of flesh and spirit.

1. The word "filthiness" means "stain, pollution, defilement." The word speaks of moral filth and defilement. Those who are defiled/filthy in this way are not suited for worshipping God.

2. Flesh and spirit—speaks of sins we commit with the body and sins we commit with our spirits/minds. Some sins require the body, while other sins reside primarily in the mind/thoughts.

3. We should be pursuing a life of both inner and outer holiness, godliness in both attitude and action. This is an urgent call to repudiate both sins of the body and sins of the spirit; both physical, external sins and spiritual, internal sins.
- C. We cleanse ourselves by fulfilling/completing holiness in the fear of God.
1. The basic idea of holiness is separation or uniqueness. God is utterly separate from sin in his being/person. If we are going to be holy, we are going to have to be separate from sin.
 2. Holiness has both negative and positive elements.
 - a) The negative part is cleansing ourselves from anything that would defile us; it's avoiding sin.
 - b) The positive part is pursuing holiness, hungering and thirsting after righteousness.

Holiness requires that we turn away from sin and toward God. We separate *from* sin and separate ourselves *unto* God.

3. "perfecting/completing"
 - a) Nobody is going to achieve sinless perfection on this side of heaven. He's not talking about becoming sinlessly perfect.
 - b) The word means "bring to completion, to achieve a goal." And the verbal idea here is in the present tense, meaning that it is an ongoing process. We are always striving for the goal of turning away from sin and living in greater holiness.
 - c) Separation from sin is a means of achieving completion or maturity in our devotion to God. We pursue spiritual maturity through cleansing our body and spirit from anything that would be defiling.
 - d) This is a process that we must be involved in actively, not passively. We cleanse ourselves from the defilement of past sin, and then we strive toward higher levels of holiness in our personal behavior. We don't just wait for it to happen; we strive after it; we pursue it.

- e) And how do we pursue that goal? Through coming out from among them and being separate, through not touching the unclean thing, and through cleansing ourselves from anything that would defile us physically or spiritually.
4. We do this “in the fear of God.” Reverence for God should motivate us to forsake sin and pursue holiness. A holy awe and dread of God should inspire separation from sin and holy living.

Christian separation is somewhat of a balancing act. We must live among unbelievers, but we must avoid defiling ourselves with sin. We must be friends of sinners like Jesus was, yet not participate in sin with them. We must be salt and light in this world, but yet prevent the world from forcing us into its mold. We must be in the world but not of the world.

Perhaps the key thing to remember here is that separation from sin is a requirement for a close, personal walk with God. If we want to draw near to God, then we must *not* be yoked together with unbelievers; we must not touch the unclean thing. Our aim should be that we cleanse ourselves from all defilements and pursue a life of holiness. Holiness demands that we avoid partnerships, alliances, linkages, or relationships that would associate us with unrighteousness. “Come out from among them and be separate.”

That’s required for us personally, and it’s also required of us as a church. As a church, we must avoid defiling contact with sin, error, and corruption. If we want to be well-pleasing to God, then we have to be separated from this ungodly world.

I hope that you have experienced what it is like to have God acknowledge you as one of his children—“I will be their God, and they shall be my people...you shall be my sons and daughters.” Are you among the people of God? Are you a child of God by faith in Christ? If you are not, I urge you to settle that today. ...

If you are a child of God, I urge you to come out from among them, separate yourself, and touch not the unclean thing. Have you ever dedicated yourself to the Lord in this way? Have you made an intentional decision to separate yourself from sin and pursue a life of holiness? I urge you to do so if you have not. I urge you to rededicate yourself to a life of holiness if you have been slack in that regard.