

With God Not the World

2 Corinthians 6:11-7:3

Turn to 2 Corinthians 6 please. Let's talk about covenant, and then reconciliation. A covenant is a solemn agreement, a promise of relationship. The best example in our society is marriage, a man and woman make promises of loyalty and kindness to each other. That's a covenant.

Here's how it works with God. God says to us, "If you will be my people, I will be your God." And we say, "You will be our God, and we will be your people." God binds himself to us. You're my people, I'm your God. We bind ourselves to God. You're our God, we're your people. In the OT, it comes out pretty much in those exact words. Deut 26:17-19.

In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul said he was a new covenant minister. This is Paul's picture of being a gospel preacher: it is as if he has a tray, like a waiter or waitress would have, to carry food to a table. Paul has a tray, and on the tray is covenant with God. He goes around offering covenant with God through Jesus Christ. That's what the gospel is.

He goes around saying to people, "God offers you covenant with himself, through faith in Christ. You bind yourself to him, and he will bind himself to you, through Christ. Repent and believe."

And this binding is remarkable. Once people are in covenant relationship with God, he's stuck on them, and he treats them well, because he's bound to them, and they are bound to him. There is NO ONE more committed and generous than our God with his covenant relationships.

Four NT Scriptures record the Last Supper for us. "Do this to remember me" are not the most important words. Two of the four have that, and two do not. The only word of explanation in all four texts is "covenant." "This is my blood of the covenant." The death of Christ brings us to God like this. The Lord's Supper celebrates covenant with God through Christ.

That's covenant. Now, reconciliation. Paul was also a minister of reconciliation. He carries around reconciliation on his tray, like a waiter or waitress, and offers it to people. People have rebelled against God, made ourselves God's enemies. We for the most part are satisfied with this, but God is not. He made a way for us his enemies to come back to him in deep lasting peace.

He did this through Christ. He did not count our sins against us, he put them on Christ, and in Christ we became righteous. And if we trust in Christ, we have deep lasting peace with God.

And Paul was God's messenger, God through Paul *urging* people to be reconciled to God, *pleading* with people, *imploring* people, to be reconciled to God. With all his heart, God wants people to be reconciled, he wants them to be in covenant with him, bound to him and he to them.

That's how Paul describes the gospel that preaches: new covenant with God, and being reconciled to God. So, what is the actual offer here? Think about this. God offers us covenant with himself. He offers us reconciliation with himself, instead of being enemies we have deep lasting peace with God. What is underneath these? What do we get?

What we actually get is God. God himself. God offers himself. God says, "Through my Son, you get me and I get you. We'll be a peace with each other, and bound to each other." = gospel.

Our text today is the conclusion of the "reconciliation" part of this letter (5:11-7:3), so Paul is not quite done yet with the Corinthians being reconciled to God. But this is also the conclusion of a longer explanation of ministry that included new covenant ministry (2:14-7:3), so we will see both reconciliation and covenant in today's Scripture.

Reconciled to **Paul** 6:11-13 The Corinthian church has not been good to Paul, they are a troublesome church, and they are turning away from him (as well as from God). Let's read these verses, and hear the humble love and longing of this apostle to a wayward church:

*6:11 We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians, and opened wide our hearts to you. <sup>12</sup> We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us. <sup>13</sup> As a fair exchange—I speak as to my children—open wide your hearts also.*

Paul is a minister that the church does not want, it's turning from him, and he still has an open heart for them, full of affection, he speaks as to his children, will they not return the same? Can you see that this is also the way God comes to us? This is the way God offers covenant, and reconciliation. Does Paul love that difficult church more than God loves it? Than Christ? No!

Put these words in God's mouth, to an unbeliever, or to a believer that is walking away from God: *I, God and Father of Jesus Christ, have spoken freely to you, and opened wide my heart to you. I am not withholding my affection from you, but you are withholding yours from me. As a fair exchange—I speak as to my children—open wide your hearts also.* Says our God and Father.

But in these verses, it is Paul, speaking to the church he started, which he no longer pleases. And Paul ends this way too. See 7:2-3, where Paul again invites this church to be reconciled to him. He does not apologize, he's done nothing wrong, he loves them and wants them:

*7:2-3 Make room for us in your hearts. We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have exploited no one. <sup>3</sup> I do not say this to condemn you; I have said before that you have such a place in our hearts that we would live or die with you.*

He does not want them to feel condemned, he wants them to make room for him in their hearts. This is also how God comes to us. We have twisted God up to that we often feel condemned, but that kind of accusation does not come from God.

In between 6:11-13 and 7:2-3, Paul urges the Corinthians to be reconciled to God.

Be Reconciled to God, and Separate from Unbelievers 6:14-16

<sup>14</sup> *Do not be yoked together with unbelievers.* In Deut 22:10 God said, “Do not plow with a donkey and an ox yoked together.” Moses’ law has some others like this. Don’t yoke together things that should be separate. So Paul says, “*do not be yoked together with unbelievers.*”

This is covenant language. You are yoked to God, and he to you, you are bound to God, and he to you, so don’t yoke or bind yourself to someone walking away from God. In 1 Cor 5 he tells the same church it is okay to “mix” with unbelievers.

You can eat in their home, or have them in your home, things like that are fine. If you live in the world you’ll often mix with unbelievers, and be friendly, respectful, helpful. But don’t be yoked to them. Why should we not be yoked to them? The answer is five rhetorical questions, the right answer to each is “nothing” or “none.”

*For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Nothing. Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? None.* <sup>15</sup> *What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? None. Or what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? Nothing.* <sup>16</sup> *What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? None. For we are the temple of the living God. (So, do not bind yourself to unbelievers.)*

This is very strong language, my brothers and sisters, it is startling. We do not see the difference between believers and unbelievers in these terms. I don’t. But there are other ways in which the Scriptures support this. It’s a common Biblical call.

“Belial” was not a proper name, but connected with wickedness, and in some circles meant the leader of dark forces. (Qumran).

What kind of unequally yoked together does Paul have in mind? This usually gets preached as believers should not marry unbelievers. That is probably not the problem Paul has in mind, though this certainly applies to marriage. In 1 Cor we learn that the Corinthians were attending meals where pagan gods were honoured, and 2 Cor 6:16 seems to refer to that.

If Paul has a specific situation in mind, that’s probably what it is. But it’s not clear he has anything specific in mind, only that the Corinthian believers as a whole were not separating themselves from unbelievers in the way they should.

In marriage unions, and other ongoing partnerships, let’s not bind ourselves to unbelievers. We are God’s temple. We of course will mix freely with unbelievers, no problem there, but we will not take up a lasting relationship of commitment. That’s part of being bound to God.

To explain why we should not be unequally bound to unbelievers, Paul quotes the OT. This collection of OT quotes, vv16b-18, has three sections.

First, four short lines of covenant promise. *As God has said: “I will live with them / and walk among them, / and I will be their God, / and they will be my people.”*

And God has said, *I will live with you believers at KCC, and I will walk among you, and I will be your God, and you will be my people.* Paul wants the Corinthian church to know that God says these words to them, and if God says it to that church, then God says it to this church.

Second, once we have covenant promise clear, there’s a call from God, what we do since God lives with us, three short lines: (V17) *Therefore, come out from them, / and be separate, / (says the Lord) / touch no unclean thing.* God comes to us, so we come out from them and stay clean.

There is a strong sense of space here. God comes to us, lives with us, walks among us, and in response we come out from them, the unbelievers, and stay separate from them. We cannot have God coming to us and living with us and walking among us if we don’t come out from them and stay apart from them. When we bind ourselves to God, this is what we agreed to. It is covenant.

Third, three more lines of God’s covenant promise to us: *I will receive you.” /<sup>18</sup> And, “I will be a Father to you, / and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.”*

The problem with the Corinthians is that they were not separating. Thus they needed reconciliation. They needed to be reconciled to God because they were living as if they were still a part of the world. Listen to what Paul says to them later in 2 Corinthians:

End of 2 Cor 12:20-21 *For I am afraid that when I come I may not find you Corinthians as I want you to be, and you may not find me as you want me to be. I fear that there may be discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder.<sup>21</sup> I am afraid that when I come again my God will humble me before you, and I will be grieved over many who have sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual sin and debauchery in which they have indulged. (2 Cor 13:5 Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?)*

The Corinthians need to hear this from the Lord: *Come out from them / and be separate. Touch no unclean thing. Says the Lord.* If we are yoked to God, we don’t yoke ourselves to unbelievers. If we are bound to God, we don’t bind ourselves to unbelievers. This is a principle, details not spelled out, I will not give details because I do not know. But: Don’t be yoked to unbelievers.

We sometimes want God to bind himself to us, we like that, but we don’t want to bind ourselves to him. Sorry, people, that does not work. That’s how the Corinthians were operating, and they were in trouble. God binds himself to us, and in fair exchange, we bind ourselves to him. Covenant people do fail God. That happens, we all sin in many ways.

God can work with that, that does not disrupt the covenant. God is not a perfectionist, he was not a perfectionist in OT times, and he is not now. Covenant is not an impossible standard.

Perfection is impossible, but covenant is doable. You regulars in this church, I know you. You're not perfect, and you know that I am not.

But God is in your life, and you have a real desire to live in his ways, and that shows itself every day. You live significantly different lives than those who do not follow Christ. You have been shaped by the call to love God and to love one another. It is clear, even though you and I often fail, that you have a steady urge to love and obey God. That's covenant faithfulness.

The people who pray the Lord's prayer, who daily need God's forgiveness and who daily forgive one another, those are the righteous. Covenant faithfulness is not built around perfection. You and I can steer our lives a fair amount, *and that's the part that God is after.*

Those sins I read from 2 Corinthians 12, if those things were common among us, we also would need to revisit covenant and reconciliation. Corinthians did need this, which is why Paul writes like this to them. Even though we are not living as they were, however, it is good for us to get reminded about how covenant works with God. That's why I'm doing this here.

Let's review: There were four lines of covenant promise from God:

*I will live with you / and walk among you, / and I will be your God, / and you will be my people.*

Then three lines urging our covenant response: (V17) *Therefore, come out from them, / and be separate, / [says the Lord] / touch no unclean thing.*

And then three more lines of God's promise to us: *I will receive you.* /<sup>18</sup> *And, "I will be a Father to you, / and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."*

The call to separate from the world comes not with threats, but comes after a kind promises from God about his care for us. And come before another kind promise.

In summary: "I will live with you, SO you come out from them, AND I will be a Father to you."

These words are from Moses and the Prophets, and Paul applies them to the Gentile Corinthian believers without batting an eye. And these are God's words to Corinth, and also to us today: *As God has said* (v16), *says the Lord*, (v17) *says the Lord Almighty* (v18).

There is no way we can read this here today without concluding that God's voice is saying this to KCC on this very day. "I will live with you, so you come out from them, and I will be a Father to you," says the Lord Almighty.

*7 Therefore, since we have these promises, my beloved friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.*

“*Since we have these promises, beloved,*” Paul begins. He has quoted Moses and the Prophets to a Gentile church, and assumes these are God’s promises to those Gentile believers. And these were God’s promises to that church, they are also God’s promises to us.

*Let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit.* Turn to Mark 7 please. What is it that *contaminates body and spirit*? Jesus has a clear talk with his disciples about what does and does not contaminate a person.

We are polluted and contaminated by our actions. Paul says, *since we have these promises, my beloved friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit.*

The Corinthians are not keeping their part of the covenant, so they need to be reconciled to God. They need to stop being unequally yoked with unbelievers, they need to come out from them and be separate, and leave the unclean things alone, they need to purify themselves from these things contaminate body and soul, and not receive the grace of God in vain (6:1).

God’s call to covenant, and to reconciliation, could not possibly be warmer or kinder than it is. He urges us, encourages us, pleads with us, to leave the world and to come to him. He has spoken freely to us, and his heart is open to us. He does not withhold his affection from us, so let us not withhold ours from him.

*As God has said to us: I will live with you believers at KCC / and walk among you, / and I will be your God, / and you will be my people. Therefore, you believers at KCC, come out from the unbelievers, / and be separate, / says the Lord. / Touch no unclean thing. And I will receive you, / I will be a Father to you, / and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.”*

Amen.