

Believers in the World
2 Corinthians 6:14–19

Please turn to 2 Corinthians 6. Today we will talk about believers in the world. We have put our trust in the Lord Jesus, so what is our relationship to those who do not believe? How should we view them? How should we understand them? And how should we treat them?

Our basic text will be from 2 Corinthians 6, but this will be more like a topical sermon, because we'll look at some other Scriptures as well. I want to map out some key truths about our relationship to the world. Let's begin with 2 Corinthians 6:14.

1 What Does a Believer have in Common with an Unbeliever? – 2 Corinthians 6:14–16a

Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial (Satan)? Or what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God.

This sermon was not part of my fall sermon plan, but I read this text a few weeks ago and these five questions startled me. I could hardly believe them. Let's read the five questions again:

What do righteousness and wickedness have in common?

Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?

What harmony is there between Christ and Belial (Satan)?

Or what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?

What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols?

I thought, what is Paul talking about? We're not that good, are we? Unbelievers are not that bad, are they? Listen to the four things believers represent: righteousness, and light, and Christ, and the temple of God. Unbelievers are on the side of wickedness, darkness, Satan, and idols. For Paul, that's why believers have so little in common with unbelievers.

Really? This is not how I see believers and unbelievers. I don't see such a strong contrast. The real problem with these questions is that in our society they are unacceptable. It is judgemental to talk about believers and unbelievers this way. It is so unloving. That all makes sense to me. It is not how I normally think.

I'm just reading the Bible to you. Don't make this about Ed Neufeld. You have a right to know what the Bible says. The Bible includes these surprising questions. I'm trying to figure them out. What is there in the Bible that explains this?

Let's turn to back 1 Corinthians 1, back to the first sermon in this Corinthian series. 1 Cor. 1.

2 Sanctified in Christ Jesus, and Called Holy Ones – 1 Corinthians 1:2

[Paul writes this letter] *To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours:*

“Sanctified in Christ Jesus” means “made holy in Christ Jesus.” To be sanctified in Christ Jesus, and called to be his holy people, are two ways of saying the same thing. Being sanctified means being set apart and made holy.

Called to be God’s holy people is not something we achieve. It is not a goal. In verse 1 Paul said he was called to be an apostle, but he did not achieve that. God just made him an apostle. It was a gift. To be called holy people is a gift.

But how did we become holy? I have here a cup of about ten pens. I will use them to show you how God makes us holy. God moves in us with his Spirit so that we say, “Lord Jesus, save me from my sins. I want to follow you.” God calls us with his Spirit, and we say “yes.” In some way, we have all done that.

Now I’m taking three pens out of the cup. I’m separating these three from the rest. God separated us from the rest by moving in us with his Spirit so that we would say, “Lord Jesus, save me, I want to follow you.” That’s how God separated us. So I’m holding these three pens. Now these belong to me. I separated them from the rest, and made them mine.

God separates us from the rest and makes us his. So I put these chosen pens here in my shirt pocket, under my vest, close to my heart. That’s what God does to us when we call on the Lord Jesus. That makes us holy. Once we’re in God’s pocket, we are holy, completely holy.

This is all incredibly good news, that through Christ God has done that with us. We here are in that pocket of his. The best thing that could happen to any human has happened to us. Our good fortune is indescribable. Thank you, Father God; thank you, Lord Jesus; thank you, Holy Spirit.

The challenge is that we still live with the other pens in that cup. How will we do that? How will we live holy lives while we are with those who are not? Answer: don’t be unequally yoked with them. Deuteronomy says, don’t plow with a donkey and an oxen yoked together. They are made too differently, they walk differently, so don’t take them together. Don’t be unequally yoked.

Don’t join yourself to them. Don’t partner with them. Don’t covenant with them. Next Sunday we will covenant with each other. That’s a good thing, that the ones that belong to God would covenant with each other, not with unbelievers.

But now we can understand Paul's questions a little better. He's talking to believers, those who called on the Lord, and God put in his pocket and made holy. That's why God considers us righteousness, and light, and Christ, and the temple of God. God uses strong language to stress how different we are from unbelievers. That all happened because we called on the Lord.

God made us his. That's why Paul can ask, *What do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial (Satan)? Or what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols?*

Turn now to Leviticus 18. We'll spend some time on the beginning of Leviticus 18.

3 Believers in the World: Don't Do what They Do – Leviticus 18:1–4

The rest of Leviticus 18 is a list of sexual sins, but the first four verses are wider than that. The first four verses cover all the ways we do what God says rather than what the world does.

The LORD said to Moses, "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'I am Yahweh your God. You must not do as they do in Egypt, where you used to live, and you must not do as they do in the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you. Do not follow their practices. You must obey my laws and be careful to follow my decrees. I am Yahweh your God.'

Where do we live, my brothers and sisters? Where do we live? We live in Egypt, and we live in Canaan. God led Israel into Canaan, which was as bad as Egypt. God led his people into a corrupt place. God was clear about that before they got there.

In some ways, our society is becoming more like Egypt and Canaan. That is true. This alarms us. The problem is not that our society is becoming more openly immoral, although in some ways it is. The problem is that we not used to being separate, being different that those around us.

The world has always been a corrupt place. Peter in Jerusalem, on the day of Pentecost, tells the crowd, *"save yourselves from this corrupt generation."* Those people lived in a corrupt generation. Paul tells the Philippians, *"be blameless and pure, children of God in a warped and crooked generation."* The Philippian believers lived in a warped and crooked generation, just like Egypt and Canaan.

We're surprised at the immorality of our society. The Bible is surprised that we're surprised. What did we expect? It's always been like this.

Why do we act differently than the Egyptians and Canaanites? Why? Because our God is *Yahweh*. This instruction begins, *"I am Yahweh your God."* And it ends, *"I am Yahweh your God."* Our behaviour is not tied to a particular view of morality, or a set of commands.

It is tied to a particular God who has a name. That Yahweh is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. That means he's our God too. He is a living and personal God. He is why we don't do what they do.

To what exactly does God call us? "*Don't do as they do. Do not follow their practices.*" He does **not** tell us to improve Egypt or Canaan. God never called his people to make unbelievers better people. Just don't do what they do. We have enough trouble with that.

Will we want to do all those forbidden things? Of course we will. We will want to do as they do, especially when they say it is okay, and we see them doing it. God's holy people have all kinds of temptations, strong temptations. We always have. Jesus himself was tempted in all these ways. God says, "don't do it, walk away, do not follow their practices." Some of it will attract us, and it will be a fight. Count on it. God condemns no one for their temptations.

4 Believers in the World: Associate with Unbelievers – 1 Corinthians 5:9–13

Verses 9–10: *I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people— not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world.*

"Not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy, or swindlers, or idolaters." Believers are free to associate with unbelievers like this. They will live next door to us, they will be in our classrooms and sports teams. They will work with us in our work place. They will visit with us, and we will visit with them. This is all fine with God.

"*If it is possible,*" God tells us, "*as much as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.*" (Romans 12:18). Live peacefully among people who do what God forbids us to do. Peter wrote, "*respect everyone.*" This is important. Everyone gets respect and courtesy. If at all possible, live at peace with everyone. Everyone gets respect and courtesy.

But, don't yoke yourself to them, don't partner with them, don't make covenants with them, don't bind yourself to them. And don't do what they do, don't follow their practices. Our God is Yahweh. He is a personal living God, he is not a set of rules, and we obey him.

Verse 11 - *But now I am writing to you that you must not associate with anyone who claims to be a brother or sister but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or slanderer, a drunkard or swindler. Do not even eat with such people. What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside.*

"*What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church?*" Judging those outside the church is not our business. They may be as bad as we think. Leave it alone. It is not our business. Peter said, "save yourselves from this corrupt generation," but he did not describe that generation. He'd said enough. Going on was not his business. God will judge the world.

Paul tells the Philippian believers to shine like stars in a warped and crooked generation, but that's all he says about that generation, and goes on to encourage the believers. Don't judge those outside. God will judge those outside. We have our hands full taking care of what happens inside.

What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside.

5 I will Come to You, so You Come out from Them – 2 Corinthians 6:16–18

Let's go back 2 Corinthians 6, and we will look at the end of that chapter. We get another picture here of believers in the world. This is strong covenant language, and it shows us how God loves his people. 2 Corinthians 6:16.

Remember that all this from 1st and 2nd Corinthians was to a church that lived far too much like the world around them. This is how God spoke to them, and how he speaks to us.

We are the temple of the living God. That's the starting point. We, the believing congregation, the sacred gathering, are the temple of the living God.

Here is what God will do: *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."* That's what God will do. [again]

Then God tells us how to respond: *"Therefore, Come out from them and be separate," says the Lord. "Touch no unclean thing."* That's what we do. Come out from them and be separate, touch nothing unclean.

Then God tells us more of what he will do: *"I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters," says the Lord Almighty.*

God has a dream home, and it is to live in the middle of his people. *"I will live with them and walk among them."* That's God's first choice, his dream home. It is hard to believe.

Can you feel the movement in these covenant lines? God comes to us to live with us and walk among us. He moves into us. So we move out from them. God says to us, "you are my people, I've separated you and made you mine, now I'm coming to live with you. And you need to come out from them, and be separate from them. I came to you, so you come out from them."

How should it show? Don't do what they do, don't follow their practices, rather obey me. Don't join yourself to them, don't partner with them, don't bind yourself to them. Live peacefully and kindly among them, respect them all, but don't do what they do, and don't bind yourself to them.

As near as I can tell, from reading 1st and 2nd Corinthians, by God's grace we're doing better than that church was doing. I'm not teaching you these things because I think we have a particular need to sharpen up, although reminding ourselves of these things is always a good idea. I'm teaching this because those five questions contrasting believers with unbelievers surprised me. I tried to understand, and this is where it took me. It's good to understand these things.

Next Sunday we covenant with each other. We are covenanting with each other to come out and be God's separate people. We covenant openly to remind ourselves and each other that we want to be God's people and live in his ways. Amen.

PRAYER: Father, thank you for moving in us with your Holy Spirit so that we would call on you. Thank you for picking us up out of our dark place, and bringing us into your kingdom of light. Thank you for making us holy, and making us your treasure. How did such things ever happen? Thank you, Father God; thank you, Lord Jesus; thank you, Holy Spirit. Amen.

BENEDICTION: May God himself, the God of peace, make us holy through and through. May our whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls us is faithful and he will do it. Amen. Go in God's peace to love and serve the Lord.