Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Separating from Unbelievers, Part 2
Scripture: 2 Corinthians 6:14-16
Code: 47-45

We return, this morning, to 2 Corinthians chapter 6 and to this tremendous foundational principle that the Apostle Paul has laid down in the words, "Do not be bound together or unequally yoked with unbelievers." Very familiar phrase, by the way, a very familiar command and one that has certainly been widely quoted among Christians, but often misunderstood and more often violated to the detriment of believers and the church. Here is one of those foundational doctrines, one of those cornerstones for Christian living and ministry that is absolutely essential.

Now I want us to look back at this text and I want to read it again because I want to set it in your mind. "Do not be bound together with unbelievers for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial? Or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God, just as God said, `I will dwell in them and walk among them and I will be their God and they shall be My people. Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate,' says the Lord, `and do not touch what is unclean and I will welcome you and I will be a Father to you and you shall be sons and daughters to Me,' says the Lord Almighty. Therefore having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

Now as I pointed out last time, this passage identifies two opposing worlds. The terminology is clear. One of those worlds is marked by righteousness, light, Christ, believers, and the presence of God. The other is marked by lawlessness, darkness, Satan, unbelievers, and the presence of false gods. And these two worlds are utterly different and distinct, so much so that they are mutually exclusive. They cannot work together in common partnership, they cannot fellowship together, they are not in harmony with one another. One is old, the other is new. One is earthly, the other is heavenly. One is deadly, the other is life giving. One is wicked, the other holy. One is built on lies, the other is all truth. One perishes and the other lives eternally.

Paul then is making it clear that believers can't live in both worlds. Certainly John said this in his first epistle, 1 John, when he clearly identified this disparity between the two worlds with these familiar words, "Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." Mutually exclusive worlds. You can't be in both at the same time.

Then in James we read in chapter 4 and verse 4, "You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God. Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God." And later in verse 8 he says, "Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double minded." People trying to live in two different worlds.

In Romans chapter 12, of course that very, very familiar passage that begins the exhortation part of Romans, "I urge you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God which is your spiritual service of worship, and do not be conformed to this world." Make a clean break.

When a person becomes a believer they are transported out of one world into another. And shuttling back and forth is absolutely unacceptable. And that is precisely what the Corinthians were trying to do. Having named the name of Christ, identified with Him, come into the church, they were still hanging on to their own idolatry, their old pagan ways. They had come to Christ out of idolatry, as it says in 1 Thessalonians, they had come to serve the living and the true God from idols. But they didn't make a clean break. They had been wooed back into the old idolatry, back into the old pagan culture because it was so pervasive, and so dominant and it was so on display and so woven into the fabric of their life, family life, social life, community life. Corinth was dominated above the city by an acropolis, a high mountain on top of which was the temple to the false deities which engaged itself in pagan ritual and worship and priestess prostitution. This temple not only was the center of that religion, but from it disseminated its religious viewpoints and ideologies through the entire culture of Corinth. It was a part of everything in life...holidays, festivals, celebrations and so forth. And it was a constant pull to the Corinthians to fall back into those old patterns. And they did.

Additionally, the false teachers had come in and they had brought a quasi Christian syncretism and eclectic religion which took Christianity, a little bit of Jewish legalism, and some pagan religion and melted it all together and offered it as the truth. And that compromise had found its way into the Corinthian church and found an audience and some of them were listening and believing and accepting it.

You see, the false teachers wanted to make Christianity more popular, less demanding, less distinct, less narrow, less offensive, less different, less exclusive so they'd get more people in on it, so they could get more money, which is always what false teachers want. And so here is the Corinthian church new and fresh and being assaulted by pagan religion around it. You couldn't separate the social life from the religion, you couldn't separate the historical life of that village in terms of its patterns from the religion. That village that became a city bore all of the signs of the religion that moved in its growth. It was a full-blown pagan system down to the very core. And it was hard to sort it out. To be involved at all in the life of the culture was to be involved in the paganism, unless you made a very clean break. The Corinthians didn't do it. And as I said, then add to that the confusion of the false teachers and you can understand why Paul says to them, "Don't be unequally yoked with

unbelievers."

It's very much like modern Christianity today, by the way, that seeks to blend Christianity with popular culture, wants to make Christianity more popular, less different, more palatable, less offensive, less narrow, less exclusive. And the result of it is that true Christianity in the purity of God's Word gets corrupted by compromise and the church can become useless and shameful and blasphemous in mocking the truth. For believers there can be no compromise. We cannot engage ourselves with unbelievers in any spiritual enterprise. That's the issue. "Do not be bound together with unbelievers," that is he command that sets this text in motion. And it is an unmistakable call to believers to separate from unbelievers. No one could miss that that's what it's saying. The question is, what does it mean?

And as I said last time, it is essential to understand what it means but first of all what it does not mean. Paul is not saying, cut off all contact with non-Christians. He's not saying that because we have to reach them with the gospel. That is not the issue. He's not saying don't evangelize the unconverted, don't confront people in false religions. He's not saying that. We must do that.

Secondly, he is not calling for complete isolation on the part of the church. We are not to become isolationists. We are not to be monastics. We are not to go hide somewhere and pull apart from the world. Quite the contrary. We are to find unbelievers and love them and be their friend and set a model of spiritual example for them.

Furthermore, he is not saying you are to divorce your unsaved partner, or to sever all unsaved contacts...all contacts, I should say, with unsaved people in your family. He is also not saying that you can't work or play or do business or be engaged in common earthly enterprise with unbelievers. He's not saying that, of course you can. What he is saying is you cannot link up with unbelievers in religious causes...or religious enterprises. You cannot go to their worship and become a part of it, you can't make them a part of the Kingdom of God. You can't engage them in anything that involves ministry, teaching, or worship. Where there is ministry, teaching and worship there has to be absolute separation.

So he's referring in actuality to harnessing up believers and unbelievers in any common religious, spiritual enterprise. The two cannot be yoked together anymore than an ox and an ass can pull a straight furrow when under the same yoke, as Deuteronomy 22:10 forbids. But that is precisely what the Corinthians were doing. They were going to the feasts that were involved with the idols and they were trying to still befriend the people in the world and in their families and in their society by attending and being involved in idol festivals and such compromise is intolerable.

At the same time they had invited into the church forms of pagan religion and that was equally intolerable. There can be no harmony, no fellowship, no partnership, no participation between believers and unbelievers in any religious enterprise. That is the issue. Pagan religion, false teaching

ruins those who listen to it. It leads to ungodliness. It spreads like gangrene and it upsets the faith of people. Paul directed all of that to Timothy and warned him to warn the church.

The issue then is religious cooperation, religious compromise with false teachers and with heresy and error. We can have nothing to do with the people involved in that when they are so involved. And we can allow them to have nothing to do with enterprises that involve the advancement of the Kingdom of God. And yet through the years the church has continued to do this. Sometimes it's called cooperative evangelism where an evangelist will come into a city and bring together Christians and non-Christians, those who believe the Word of God and those liberals who would openly deny the Word of God in a common evangelistic enterprise. That is in direct violation of what this text is teaching.

It happens all the time in common efforts at evangelism. It happens in educational institutions where those institutions that would claim to be Christians would have on their faculty those who believe the Word of God, those who were born again, and those who are not. And they are illegitimate linked together in a common spiritual enterprise to the detriment of the church, to the debilitation of the believers and the false assurance of the unbelievers. True Christians have to separate from unbelievers in matters related to ministry, teaching and worship. And when I say teaching I'm talking about teaching that relates to God and His truth.

So Paul fixes that principle. And that, by the way, was a brief review of the first message. But in response to that initial principle he gives us five reasons, or five motives for following this mandate. And I want to approach those motives from a negative perspective...if I might. To be bound together with unbelievers in any spiritual effort is...number one...irrational, irrational. The point that Paul is making here is one of congruity. It is one of simple reason. And to make this point of the irrationality of such a common enterprise, he asks for rhetorical questions, each of which demands a negative answer.

Here they come, verse 14, "For what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or Satan? Or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?" And the answer to those is negative. Righteousness and lawlessness have no partnership. Light and darkness have no fellowship. Christ and Satan have no harmony. And a believer and an unbeliever have nothing in the spiritual realm in common. That is axiomatic. An axiom is a self-evident truth that doesn't need proof. And that is obvious. It is obvious that you can't make opposites the same. And those are all opposites.

Those four rhetorical questions set in place the irrationality of Christians and pagans working together in some spiritual enterprise, engaging in some worship, or being involved in the dissemination of supposedly divine truth. Let's look at each question briefly.

Question number one, "For what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness?" Partnership is metoche, it's the only place it's used in the New Testament, it's really a synonym for the word koinonia which means partnership. It means a common sharing together, the common engagement in a common effort. And obviously righteousness and lawlessness can't join hands in the same enterprise. Righteousness is that which pleases and honors God. Lawlessness is that which displeases and dishonors God. Righteousness is doing what is right. Lawlessness is doing what is wrong. Believers are classified in the Bible as righteous, the righteousness of Christ has been imputed to us. We learned that back in chapter 5 verse 21 that we might become the righteousness of God in Him, in Christ. God has covered us with the righteousness of Christ which includes the forgiveness of sins.

On the other hand, unbelievers are lawless, unrighteous. Their sins are not forgiven. There is no possible partnership for those two very opposite categories.

What about unbelievers? In what way are they lawless? Well it simply means they do not abide by God's law. They violate it. They rebel against it. And they disobey it. And the Bible characterizes unbelievers as lawless. They will be damned to eternal punishment because they are lawless, because they are unrighteous, because they violate God's law and there is no possible cure for that violation because they do not come to the Savior who alone provides forgiveness. So they die, as Jesus said, in their sins and are punished eternally.

Jesus classifies them that way. For example, in Matthew 7:23 He says to those who claim to know Him, "I never knew you, depart from Me," and here's His characterization of those to be judged, "you who practice lawlessness." The pattern of their life is an ongoing, constant, uninterrupted, violation of God's law, God's command, God's will and God's Word.

In Matthew 13 and verse 41, again we have a judgment scene in a parable Jesus is teaching. And He says, "The Son of Man will send forth His angels and they will gather out of His Kingdom," verse 41, "all stumbling blocks and those who commit lawlessness and will cast them into the furnace of fire. In that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Again, those who are set for eternal judgment are described as the lawless.

In the twenty-third chapter of Matthew, again Jesus is directing His words at the Pharisees because they are hypocrites and the scribes. He says, "You're...in verse 27...like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. Even so, you too outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness." Lawlessness...it is lawlessness that damns, it is lawlessness that condemns. It is said of Jesus in Hebrews 1:9 that He loved righteousness and hated lawlessness.

Unbelievers then are damned because no matter what they claim, what they may or may not claim, Lord, Lord, or whatever, they are lawless. That is the distinguishing characteristic of the pattern of their lives. It is an ongoing incessant and constant violation of God's law.

On the other hand, "There are the righteousfor whom obedience to God's law is the pattern of life." Certainly in 1 John that is made abundantly clear. First John chapter 3 and verse 4, "Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness and sin is lawlessness." But verse 10, "By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious, anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother."

An unrighteous person practices lawlessness, that's an unbeliever. Verse 7, "Little children, let no one deceive you, the one who practices righteousness is righteous." So on the one hand you have those whose life pattern is the practice of lawlessness, on the other whose life pattern is the practice of righteousness...they have no partnership, no partnership. We have received an imputed righteousness and then by virtue of our new creation, regeneration and the new birth, we have been given a new disposition and a new nature which loves the law of God and desires to follow and obey that law and hates sin. We are the righteous and they are the lawless. We cannot be engaged in a common enterprise. In fact, in Titus Paul says that the Lord Himself in saving us has taken a people, redeemed them from every lawless deed and purified them for Himself and made them zealous for righteousness.

There's no harmony. Those who have had their sins forgiven cannot partner up with those who haven't. Those whose passion is righteousness cannot partner up with those whose passion is lawlessness in any common spiritual enterprise. And it doesn't help God. It's not a clever way to achieve His purposes, it is a violation of His Word. As he says inthe first epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, "You cannot have the table of demons and the table of the Lord." You can't go to both.

Now there are points of contact, I admit that. But there's no partnership in any spiritual enterprise. And that would include marriage, by the way, just as a footnote, since marriage for a believer is a very spiritual enterprise, according to Ephesians chapter 5, it is a demonstration of Christ's relationship to His church.

Second rhetorical question, what fellowship has light with darkness? You don't have to be very bright to understand that these two are mutually exclusive. Where you have light you don't have dark, where you have dark you don't have light. This is a common biblical contrast. Jesus used it a number of times, particularly in the gospel of John, a familiar one in chapter 8 and verse 12, Jesus makes a very clear distinction, "I am the light of the world, He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness. but shall have the light of life." Light referring to righteousness, darkness referring to lawlessness. They are mutually exclusive. Nothing is more incompatible than light and dark, one dispels the other.

In Acts 26 when Paul was commissioned and called into ministry he was told that he was going to bring a light and open the eyes of the Gentiles that they might see the light. Ephesians 5 talks about that, the kingdom of light. Colossians 1, "We've been translated out of the kingdom of darkness into the Kingdom of God's dear Son which is a Kingdom of light."

Peter even writes about this marvelous kingdom, this kingdom of light. It says in 1 Peter 2:9 that, "He has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light." First John 1 says, "We walk in light not in darkness." No partnership, mutually exclusive. I mean, that's obvious.

Now, those two questions then have to do with our nature. Believersare righteous and we walk in the light. Unbelievers are lawless and they walk in the darkness. There is a very natural incompatibility. We're so utterly different there can be no common intimacy in the realm of the spiritual...none. Any attempt to get together in a denomination, any attempt to get together in an association, any attempt to get together in some kind of a ministry of evangelism, a campus ministry, a crusade, any kind of event like that, an attempt to get together in a school setting, an educational environment and supposedly be able to commonly move toward one goal is ridiculous. Any attempted fellowship in common spiritual life with unbelievers is ridiculous, damaging and falsely reassuring to that unbeliever.

Now, as he comes to the third rhetorical question he moves from the difference in our nature, righteousness and light as over against lawlessness and dark, to the difference in our leaders. And his question in verse 15 is: "What harmony has Christ with Belial?" And now we move to the idea of the personal power, the personal ruler of each kingdom. And believe me, there is an absolute, fundamental, eternal, antagonism at the highest level of the Kingdom of light and righteousness as over against dark and lawlessness. And that is the difference between Christ and Satan.

And they are not engaging in any common enterprise. Everything the Lord Jesus Christ would do, Satan would want to prevent. Everything Satan would do, Christ will judge. Christ has no partnership, no fellowship, no commonality with Satan. And you have to understand that an unbeliever, John 8:44, is a child of the devil and a believer is a child of God and the two cannot work together. That's why Paul said to them, "You can't go to the table of demons and then come to the table of the Lord." You can't go to some idol feast and sit there and worship an idol. Realizeverse 20 of 1 Corinthians 10, that the things which the Gentiles sacrificed they sacrificed to demons. And I don't want you to become a sharer in demons. You can't engage in any false form of religion. That's a compromise.

Light has no fellowship with darkness. Righteousness has not partnership with lawlessness. And Christ has no harmony with Belial. By the way, the word "harmony," sumphonesis, from which we get symphony. It's not just a musical term, it means to come together in a common cause. Belial is an old, old term used for Satan. Sometimes it's translated with an "r" at the end, Beliar. It comes from ancient

times, it's used in the Old Testament a number of places with the phrase "sons of Belial who are worthless ones." In the intertestimental period, in the Dead Sea Scrolls we find the term "Belial" used to refer to Satan who is the utterly worthless one. It's a good title for him, the worthless one, as over against Christ who is the worthy One. There can be no partnership between the worthy One and the utterly worthless one.

That epithet for Satan is suitable, especially in this kind of contrast. And by the way, that's the only place it's used in the New Testament. He is the ultimate worthless one who will be thrown on the trash pile of hell. He cannot be in harmony with the utterly worthy One who is exalted in the heaven of heavens. And unbelievers, sad to say, are the children of Satan. They walk according to the prince of the power of the air, Ephesians 2:2, according to the spirit who works in them who are called the sons of disobedience. They are lawless, disobedient subjects to Satan who walk in a kingdom of darkness. There is no harmony.

And notice that Satan disguises himself, I remind you of 2 Corinthians 11 again, he disguises himself as an angel of light, works in false religion, his messengers are disguised as angels of light. He crawls into the religious garments and tries to perpetrate his religions and he sucks believers into compromises with those false religions. I don't care what your talking about, Mormons, whether you're talking Jehovah's Witnesses, Roman Catholics or whatever other heresies and errors are abounding, you cannot partner with those people in a common spiritual enterprise.

The fourth rhetorical question at the end of verse 15 goes back to sort of just cover all the ground, "What has a believer in common with an unbeliever?" To put it another way, what has faith to do with non-faith? They're by very definition mutually exclusive. If you believe this and you don't believe this, then there's no common ground because believing in the gospel and the Word of God is a totally life-dominating faith. The faithful and the faithless have nothing in common. Their ideologies are mutually exclusive. No spiritual enterprise can be attempted with the view to success that involves such a mingling.

Amos 3:3 gives the same axiom. How can two walk together unless they be agreed? Our beliefs, all of them, our values, our principles, our motives as Christians are completely contrary to all the values, principles, beliefs and motives of the unconverted. We may play together, work together, socialize, build together, study together, but as soon as we move into worship and ministry and the teaching of divine truth, that becomes utterly impossible.

It's sad to think about it. Churches are filled with unbelievers. And this attempt is going on all the time to make this kind of mutual believer/unbeliever partnership work. It is an abomination to God, it is ineffective, it is disastrous.

I remember a pastor saying to me one time, he figured out what was wrong in his church. Half his board were saved, and the other half weren't. I can't imagine a worse scenario.

So, first of all, then, it is irrational to attempt to be unequally yoked with unbelievers. It should be obvious to anybody who can think that this is mutually impossible to bring these two realms together. Secondly, and we're moving up a step higher here. It is not only irrational for believers to be bound together with unbelievers, it is sacrilegious...it is sacrilegious. And I'm just going to cover this point, this morning, and give you the remaining ones next time.

It is sacrilegious...look at verse 16. Here is the fifth rhetorical question but it makes this second point, "Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God just as God said, `I will dwell in them and walk among them and I will be their God and they shall be My people.'"

The issue here is an issue of sacrilege. All false religion is demon worship. Listen, now remember an idol is nothing. You can carve an idol out of wood, you can make an idol out of stone, you can make an idol out of silver, you can make one out of gold. You can do whatever you want to paint one on a wall. You can form one out of marble, whatever it is. When you're done with it, it's nothing. But the religion and the ideology that it stands for is the teaching of demons. It is lies from the pits. It is the doctrines of demons coming from seducing spirits. So that what happens is demons impersonate the idol and you worship a demon in the idol, though you don't know it. It is a demon who creates the religion, who conducts the relationship with the worshiper. It is demon communion.

And when you go to the table you go to the table of demons. And when you go to the idol, you worship a demon. All the gods of the nation are demons, the Old Testament says, because demons...demons impersonate the idols that men create under their stimulation. And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? The answer...none, none. You can't mix devil worship and the worship of God. It can't be mixed. Christianity is completely and totally separate from every form of idolatry. There's no hope of commonality.

Now this is a very, very important issue. Go in your Bible for a moment, and we'll probably not get too much pass this but I want to direct you to 2 Kings chapter 21. And then one other Old Testament passage or two and that will make the point. Second Kings 21 verse 1, "Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king, and he reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem, and his mother's name was Hephzibah. And he did evil in the sight of the Lord, according to the abominations of the nations whom the Lord dispossessed before the sons of Israel."

What did he do? What were the abominations of the nations who used to be in the land? Idolatry. And what did he do? He brought back all the idolatry. He brought back all the abominations that the Lord had dispossessed.

"He rebuilt the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed; he erected altars for Baal and made an Asherah," that's a statue to a female deity, "as Ahab, king of Israel had done, and worshiped all the host of heaven," worshiped the stars and the gods that supposedly were in the stars. "Served them, built altars in the house of the Lord of which the Lord had said, `In Jerusalem, I'll put My name.'" Can you imagine this? He put altars in the temple...he put altars to false gods in the temple in Jerusalem where God said, "I'll put My name."

"He built altars," verse 5, "for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the Lord." Right in the courtyard of the temple he built altars to false gods. "Made his son pass through the fire," and the worship of Molech involved baby sacrifice in a fire, he did that. "Practiced witchcraft, used divination, dealt with mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the sight of the Lord, provoking Him to anger. He then set the carved image of that Asherah, that female deity which he had made, in the house of which the Lord said to David and to his son Solomon, `In this house and in Jerusalem which I have chosen from all the tribes of Israel, I will put My name forever.'" He put it in the temple. Idols in the temple.

Down in verse 9, "Manasseh," it says, seduced them to do evil more than the nations whom the Lord destroyed before the sons of Israel." You know what? They were worse idolaters than the nations God destroyed. And verse 10, "The Lord spoke through His servants the prophets saying, `Because Manasseh, king of Judah, has done these abominations, having done wickedly more than all the Amorites who were before him, and also made Judah sin with his idols; therefore thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, Behold, I am bringing such calamity on Jerusalem and Judah that whoever hears of it, both his ears shall tingle and I will stretch over Jerusalem the line of Samaria, the plummet of the house of Ahab...that's measuring it out for destruction...I will wipe Jerusalem as one wipes a dish wiping it and turning it upside down. I will abandon the remnant of My inheritance and deliver them into the land of their enemies and they shall become as plunder and spoil to all their enemies because they have done evil in My sight and have been provoking Me to anger since the day their fathers came from Egypt, even to this day.'"

There is one thing that God will not tolerate and that is this, idols in His temple...idols in His temple. The ultimate affront, the ultimate insult, the ultimate blasphemy to God, you cannot bring an idol into God's temple, nor can you bring God into an idol temple. That's why you Corinthians can't go to the idol festivals, you can't take yourselves who are the temple of God into an idol temple...anymore than you can bring an idol into God's temple.

One other illustration. And indeed this is a remarkable and profoundly interestingly illustration. First Samuel chapter 4--1 Samuel chapter 4. The Israelites are fighting the Philistines. In verse 2, "The Philistines drew up in battle array to meet Israel. When the battle spread, Israel was defeated before the Philistines who killed about four thousand men on a battlefield." The Philistines were

victorious...Philistines, by the way, being the ancient name of Palestine. They were the people who were there when Israel came into the land, a pagan, idolatrous people. They engaged in numerous battles. Here is one that Israel lost. Four thousand of their men lie dead on the battlefield.

Verse 3, their response, "When the people came into the camp, the elders of Israel said, `Why has the Lord defeated us today before the Philistines?'" We don't understand this. We're supposed to be the people of promise, the land is supposed to be ours, why did we lose? Obviously they were engaged in sin. So they decided they were going to fix their problem very simply. "Let us take to ourselves from Shiloh the ark of the covenant of the Lord that it may come among us and deliver us from the power of our enemies."

Here's their plan. The ark of the covenant which was that little box with the poles running through it and the cherubim on the corners, on the sides facing each other, which represented the presence of God. It was to be in the Holy of Holies and between the wings of the cherubim the glory of God rested as evidence of God's presence among His people. It was the most sacred possession they had, the representation of their God.

So they said, "Our problem is we lost because God's not here, so somebody go get God." Failing to understand the omnipresence of God and having reduced their religion to superstition, some committee got together and made a plan and so in verse 4, "The people sent to Shiloh and from there they carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord of hosts who sits above the cherubim and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas," Eli was the high priest, "were there with the ark of the covenant." So it came back accompanied by the sons of the high priest. And here comes the ark, and, boy, are the people excited.

Verse 5, "It happened as the ark of the covenant of the Lord came into the camp, all Israel shouted with a great shout so that the earth resounded." There was this tremendous shout and scream that went up when that thing came into the camp, because everybody was saying, "God is here, God is here, we'll win, we'll win, we can't lose."

Verse 6, "When the Philistines heard the noise of the shout they said, `What does the noise of this great shout in the camp of the Hebrews mean?'" I mean, their first reaction was they just got four thousand of their people killed, what are they so excited about? "Then they understood...spies obviously...that the ark of the Lord had come into the camp. And the Philistines were afraid. They said, `God has come into the camp.' And they said, `Woe to us. Nothing like this has happened before, woe to us.'" Well why did they do that? Cause they knew the reputation of the God of Israel. "Who will deliver us from the hand of these mighty gods? These are the gods who smote the Egyptians with all kinds of plagues in the wilderness." Listen, the word had traveled, they were still expressing their polytheistic bent by pluralizing God. But they were afraid because they had heard of what happened in Egypt. And, of course, they figured that like their own god, he was confined to the

form in which they had made him and so as long as he wasn't there they were okay but when the little box showed up, they were in deep trouble. The superstition was on both sides.

And then came the general's pep talk, what's he going to do? So he does what every general does, gives a pep talk, verse 9, "Take courage and be men, O Philistines, lest you become slaves to the Hebrews as they have been slaves to you, therefore be men and fight." Go get 'em, guys. Can't worry about that box, you just got to go fight.

So the Philistines fought, he was a convincing guy, I guess. And look what happened. Israel was...what?...defeated. What? How can that be, we have God? We have the box. "Every man fled to his tent, the slaughter was very great for there fell of Israel thirty thousand foot soldiers." Thirty thousand is a lot of death. And that wasn't the worst of it. Get this, verse 11, "The ark of God was taken." They not only killed thirty thousand and maybe the other four thousand should be added to that, thirty-four thousand foot soldiers and perhaps others as well, but they took the box. And then to make matters worse, Hophni and Phinehas died, or depending on your perspective, to make matters better cause they were two wretched boys. "And the sons of the high priest are dead and God's gone." The Philistines got Him.

You say, "That's a real problem for Israel." No, Israel already was in trouble, that is a real problem for the Philistines. Now they have God on their hands. Well let's find out what they did. Go to chapter 5.

Well what would you think they would do? Well, since they were polytheistic and they believed in many deities, they did what you would expect. "The Philistines took the ark of God and brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod," one of their cities and several of their cities are mentioned here, up the coast to Palestine.

" The Philistines took the ark of God and brought it to the house of Dagon and set it by Dagon." Now what's a house of Dagon? That's a temple to their main god...their main god is Dagon. And that was their deity, obviously they were a seacoast people. It had something to do with pacifying the fishing enterprise and the threats of the sea and etc. And so they just assumed, "Well look now, we not only have Dagon, we've captured this powerful God that wiped out the Egyptian army. We're...our invincibility is guaranteed." So they just took the ark of God and put it in the house of Dagon because obviously they couldn't have a place prepared for the ark of God. They probably had a discussion about how they were going to go about doing that.

Verse 3, "When the Ashdodites arose early the next morning," and surely when they got up they came to the place of Dagon to thank Dagon for their great victory and when they did, "Behold, Dagon had fallen on his face to the ground before the ark of the Lord."

Wow! What happened? All of a sudden they come in there and Dagon is dumped over, bowing down to this little box. And they must have thought there was a localized earthquake or something, this thing was probably made out of stone...fallen off its platform and now it's down prostrate before this box.

"So they took Dagon and put him in his place again. Dusted him off and set him back up. And when they arose...verse 4...early the next morning, behold, Dagon had fallen on his face to the ground before the ark of the Lord again, only this time the head of Dagon and both the palms of his hands were cut off on the threshold and only the trunk of Dagon was left."

Now he's been decapitated. And his hands are cut off. And there's just a stump of a human form lying there with a head rolled off and two hands lying there. And they got the message. Don't pick that thing up again.

You cannot bring idols into the house of God and you cannot bring God into the house of idols. You understand that? That is a principle that is clearly illustrated here. By the way, the hand of the Lord was heavy on the Ashdodites, God didn't just deal with Dagon, He dealt with them for their blasphemy. He ravaged them. What does that mean? He sent a mice plague and the mice brought what would be like the Bubonic death, the Black Death, the Black plague, thousands and thousands of people died because of this plague. And the ones who didn't die got tumors.

Well it didn't take the people in Ashdod long to figure out they ought to get rid of this box. And so they had a meeting in verse 8 and said, "What do we do?" And they said, "Well let's send it to Gath," it doesn't say much for your love toward those people. Gath was another Philistine city from which a big man came by the name of Goliath. So they sent the ark to Gath and when they brought it there, verse 9, the hand of the Lord was against that city with great confusion. He smote the men of the city, both young and old, so that the tumors broke out on them. And then they sent the thing to Ekron, the next city, and it happened when it came there the Ekronites cried out, "They brought the ark of the God of Israel to us, to kill us and our people." And so they had another meeting and they said, "What are we going to do? Send the ark of God of Israel, let it return to its own place," verse 11, "that it might not kill us and our people, for there was a deadly confusion throughout the city, the hand of God was heavy there and the men who didn't die from the plague by the mice...which is explained in chapter 6...were smitten with tumors and the cry of the city went up to heaven.

Death, plague, disease, tumors all over the place because God will not be brought into the temple of idols. You get the picture? The Greek and Roman pantheons had lots of deities, many idols, adding idols was a common practice in a polytheistic religion. It is intolerable to God. It is not possible in Christianity.

I want to show you one other Old Testament text and that is Ezekiel chapter 8. And this is a very important text because it demonstrates how God feels about confusing the temple of God with idols. In Ezekiel chapter 8 and verse 3, "The Lord stretched out the form of a hand and caught me by a lock of my head, says Ezekiel. And the Spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven and brought me in the visions of God to Jerusalem. Now God pulls him up out of earth, puts him up in the sky and gives him a vision. And his vision is of Jerusalem to the entrance of the north gate of the inner court, that's in the temple, where the seat of the idol of jealousy, which provokes to jealousy was located."

God takes him up in a vision and shows him that an idol has been put in the inner court of the temple. And verse 4 says, "The glory of the God of Israel was there." So alongside the glory of God is an idol. And He said to me in verse 5, "Son of man, raise your eyes now toward the north. I raised my eyes toward the north and behold to the north of this altar gate was this idol of jealousy at the entrance right by the altar. And He said to me, `Son of man do you see what they're doing? The great abominations which the house of Israel are committing here that I should be far from My sanctuary." I'm going to have to leave because they've brought an idol.

But I'm going to show you even greater abominations. Verse 7, "He brought me to the entrance of the court. When I looked, behold a hole in the wall. He said, `Son of man, now dig through the wall.' So I dug through the wall and behold an entrance. And He said to me, `Go in and see the wicked abominations that they are committing here.' And I entered and looked and behold every form of creeping things and beasts and detestable things with all the idols of the house of Israel were carved on the wall all around." They had carved and etched idols all over the walls of the temple.

"And standing in front of them were seventy elders of the house of Israel with Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan standing among them, each man with his censer in his hand, and the fragrance of the cloud of incense rising." Here were some non-Levites functioning as priests, some false priests of the false religions of the false idols that had been carved all over the temple.

Verse 12, "He said to me, `Son of man, do you see what the elders of the house of Israel are committing in the dark, each man in his room of his carved images? For they say the Lord doesn't see us, the Lord has forsaken the land.' And He said to me, `You will see still greater abominations which they're committing.' He brought me to the entrance of the gate of the Lord's house which was toward the north and behold, women were weeping for Tammuz," that's Baal worship. "You'll see even greater things," verse 15. Verse 16, what does he find? "Twenty-five men with their backs to the temple of the Lord, turning away from God and worshiping the sun, prostrating themselves toward the sun," an old activity of Egyptian worship. They were committing abominations.

In verse 18, "Indeed, I shall deal in wrath." And He did and destroyed them all and destroyed the temple.

There is no compatibility between the temple of God and idols. That's the point. It is impossible to bring the two together. It is more than that, it is irrational, it is more than that, it is sacrilegious, it is blasphemous to attempt to do that.

Listen, pagans don't mind joining with Christians in religious activity, they love it. But we can't allow it. We cannot allow it. We cannot join with unbelievers in worship or ministry or any enterprise that involves God, nor can we invite them to join our enterprise. And it is because of the sacrilege of it. What agreement has the temple of God with idols? You can't bring idols into the temple of God, you can't take the temple of God and put it in an idol temple. And here's the point. "For we are the temple of the living God." He's talking about us individually. "What? Know you not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which you have of God, you're not your own, you're bought with a price." Christ lives in you, we know that from what the Apostle Paul says. That is true individually. We are a spiritual house individually. The Spirit lives within us. The Spirit of Christ, the living God dwells in us. We are His temple. He lives in a temple not made with hands. He lives in our new creation, our new nature. We are His temple. That is true individually, that is true collectively. The church is a spiritual house, a spiritual building which houses the Spirit of God. So 1 Corinthians 3:16 and 17 indicate and Ephesians 2:22.

So we are the temple of God. And then he confirms it by a mosaic of Old Testament texts. "Just as God said I will dwell in them and walk among them, and I will be their God and they shall be My people." And by the way, that mosaic of Old Testament texts is the blending together of statements made in Leviticus 26:11 and 12, Jeremiah 24:7 and Ezekiel 37 and 27. He is just taking what is the Old Testament teaching and sort of pulling it together in a mosaic and summarizing it and saying God says He will dwell in His people and walk among them and be their God and they'll belong to Him. We are the temple of the living God. I love the fact that He is called the living God as over against the dead idols. That's a common expression with Paul in contrast to dead idols. He uses it in Romans, 2 Corinthians, Thessalonians and 1 Timothy.

Any joining to unbelievers is putting idols in the temple of God, or putting the temple of God in an idol temple. It is blatantly, overtly, intolerably sacrilegious.

And he confirms it with that little phrase, "Just as God said." And if you do that, you are openly, flagrantly assaulting what God has said. That mosaic of Old Testament passages summarizes a great truth and that great truth is that we are the temple of God, we are the people of His covenant, we are His own precious possession, we are His dwelling place and we cannot join with idols. Any unequally yoking for the purpose of serving God is misconceived, it is irrational and it is sacrilegious.

And we need to understand that. That is foundational to our Christian experience. Three more points but we'll have to wait for those.

Father, we thank You for Your Word being so clear to us with regard to this. And we know that You'll help us to apply these things. You will give us the insight as we move through life to make application where application needs to be made. But, O God, we grieve for the many times when this principle is breached and believers do what is unthinkable and irrational and what is more than that, sacrilegious and blasphemous. Forgive us for such compromises. May the church always be the church so pure and may it engage itself only in that worship honors and glorifies Your name and may it separate itself from all unbelievers, no matter what they claim, in any spiritual effort of worship, teaching or ministry. Keep us pure that we might be powerful and that we might honor the One true and living God and Your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, for we pray in His name. Amen.

Available online at: http://www.gty.org
COPYRIGHT (C) 2014 Grace to You
You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright).