

Unity & Division 3: Our Relationship with Unbelievers

(10/19/25)

Please turn to *Romans 12:14-21* and *2 Corinthians 6:14-18*

LAST WEEK: when do we divide from other Christians?

- Heretical teachings and lack of repentance.
- Heresy is any teaching that denies, waters down, or changes the essential and fundamental pillars of Christianity: the Gospel itself, the Trinity, Jesus as God and the only Savior, Salvation by grace, the Bible as God's Word.
- Heresy is also any teaching that denies, waters down, or changes what God calls sin or what He calls righteous. If He said it was morally wrong thousands of years ago in the desert, it's morally wrong now. If He said doing this or that was a righteous thing, it's still righteous today.
- CONCLUSION: any church, ministry, or Christian group who teaches something heretical as truth: leave immediately.
- Non-essential teaching are things like end times, rapture timing, prophecy and tongues, etc. Christians should be able to 1) agree to disagree or 2) prayerfully and Scripturally reconsider their positions.
- My opinion: we should only consider leaving a church if we disagree on lots of non-essential issues and each person needs to decide for themselves what that is.
- If another Christians sins against us, Jesus said speak with them privately and bring the matter up to them.
- Figure out if it was truly sin or perhaps a miscommunication or misinterpretation.
- Even if it was one of those things, we can still care enough about each other to be compassionate and reconcile.
- If it was sin, then we must repent. We hurt a fellow brother or sister in Christ, and we grieved God our Father Who is both watching and listening.
- The Holy Spirit within us is urging repentance and reconciliation, not denial and defensiveness.
- If we repent, we GAIN a brother or sister!
- If there's a lack of repentance within a church, for sins specifically committed against you, then it's time to leave.

TODAY we ask the question: ***when is the right time to be/stay unified with unbelievers and when is the time to divide from them?*** This might have been a 2-part sermon, but I'm going to cram it into one.

Let's start off with how we're supposed to **treat** unbelievers:

[Rom 12:14-21 ESV] 14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. 16 Live in harmony with one

another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. 17 Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. 18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. 19 Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” 20 To the contrary, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.” 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

- If possible: live in harmony and peace with unbelievers. *It's not always possible.*
- Spend time with the broken and the hurting to minister to them.
- If unbelievers curse at us, sin against us, and do evil to us—we don't do it back.
- What DO we do back? We bless them. Respond to their evil with good.
- What about justice for US???
- God will take care of that. More on that in a moment.

Question: **what “good” does it do to respond this way? If they sin against us, and we bless them in return...why should we???**

Verse 20: in 1st century middle eastern society, there was an act people would perform to show they were repenting and paying for a sin they committed. It was an act of self-punishment. The sinner would wear a fire-resistant basket on their head, put a few hot coals in it, then walk around town. The hot coals would singe the top of the man's head, making him quite uncomfortable. His penance was over and his sins paid for when the coals burned out.

Unfortunately for him, the top of the basket was OPEN allowing members of the community to *ADD coals to his basket*, prolonging his pain and time.

Christian believers need to make a choice of what we want for unbelievers:

- **Divine revenge/justice:** is when we desire God or “karma” to give the unbeliever who sinned against us their due: eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth.
- **Repentance and maybe Salvation:** is when we want the unbeliever to be properly convicted of their sin, for a Godly sorrow to come upon them that they might be Saved.

None of us can serve two masters: if we want one of these two things, we don't want the other.

We have God the Holy Spirit living inside us and unbelievers don't. **Where does our goodness come from?** Whether we restrain ourselves from doing evil, or perform an act of kindness, *what is the Source of said self-control and righteousness?* What—or Who—is the inspiration to avoid sin and do good?

Our “natural” old self inclination is indulging in sin not restraining ourselves from it.

Our “natural” old self inclination is doing good for ourselves and not for others...and most certainly not on an enemy.

The only Person urging and inspiring us to do otherwise is the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ living within us...which unbelievers don't have.

When we desire, hope for, declare, and perhaps even take action for **“karma”** we're acting like the unbelievers who have no God inside them.

- We're reacting just like anyone else who doesn't know Jesus and hasn't been changed by Him.
- When we take pleasure in seeing an enemy “get theirs” what spirit do we think is inspiring our joy?

[Luk 9:51-56 NKJV] 51 Now it came to pass, when the time had come for Him to be received up, that He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem, 52 and sent messengers before His face. And as they went, they entered a village of the Samaritans, to prepare for Him. 53 But they did not receive Him, because His face was [set] for the journey to Jerusalem. 54 And when His disciples James and John saw [this], they said, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?" 55 But He turned and rebuked them, and said, **"You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. 56 "For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save [them]."** And they went to another village.

When John & James ask Jesus to **incinerate the Samaritans for rejecting Jesus, was it the Holy Spirit encouraging this BBQ?** Jesus pointed out that they were operating from a different SPIRIT than He was. The One Jesus was flowing from wanted people to repent and be Saved.

[Luk 5:29-32 NKJV] 29 Then Levi gave Him a great feast in his own house. And there were a great number of tax collectors and others who sat down with them. 30 And their scribes and the Pharisees complained against His disciples, saying, "Why do You eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" 31 Jesus answered and said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. 32 **"I have not come to call [the] righteous, but sinners, to repentance."**

People tell me all the time Jesus hung out with sinners and that's true...*to share the good news with them and call them to repent and be Saved*. Now we segue into part 2 of today's message:

[2Co 6:14-18 ESV] 14 Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? 15 What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? 16 What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 17 Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, 18 and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty."

This is NOT a call for you to divorce your unbelieving spouse. I'm not covering that today. If you're struggling with whether to do that or not, go home after church, open your Bible to 1 Corinthians 7, and read the entire chapter.

These verses are used for marriage, but they're talking about all relationships.

If you were a farmer plowing a field back in the 1st century you had an ox who did the heavy lifting. Your plow had two handles and you walked behind it and "steered" where you wanted the ox to go. The ox had a yoke put around its neck, attached to the plow, so he could pull it. If you could afford it, you bought a second ox and upgraded your yoke to a double to accommodate both pulling the plow. Not only was it less wear and tear on the oxen, but things got done faster.

Here's where things got tricky: **the second ox needed to be the same size as the first one.** You couldn't have one of them huge and muscular, and the other one scrawny. If that were the case, 2 things would happen: 1) the big ox does most of the work and 2) the plow went around in circles to whichever side the big ox was on. (You need to go in a straight line.)

If you had 2 different sized oxen on your yoke, others would see this and point out that they were *"unequally yoked."*

Paul says not to have “fellowship/partnership” with unbelievers...what do those words mean? First let's define what they DON'T mean.

- They don't mean never spend time with them.
- They don't mean never talk to them, be friends, or associate with them.

The word fellowship/partnership in the Bible means be in communion with down to the spirit/core level.

You're already have fellowship with any believer because, as was preached 2 weeks ago, we all have God the Holy Spirit living inside of us. One Father, one faith, one baptism, etc. The Lord has already created a bond, in the spirit, between all His kids.

Paul is telling us **not to try and create our own spiritual bond with an unbeliever** and look at his examples:

- Righteousness (the Holy Spirit) vs. lawlessness (another spirit).
- Light (Jesus) vs. darkness (the devil).
- Christ vs. Belial (Satan).

Last week I told you about *Oprah Winfrey* raised in a Southern Baptist Church. *She went out into the world and yoked herself with it.* The result was the good teaching she was raised with was corrupted and even abandoned by her, and she embraced the dark teachings of demons.

The lesson for the first century church was **King Solomon** who started out a mighty man of God. Then he started to marry literally hundreds of **unbelieving wives—he yoked himself with them**—and they turned him away from the faith. Next thing you know the man gifted with the greatest wisdom was worshipping idols and making sacrifices to false gods.

Let me make it simple: **if you find that the unbelievers in your life** are 1) inspiring you to believe things contrary to Scripture and 2) encouraging or triggering you to live a lifestyle of sin, then you're unequally yoked and it's time to say goodbye.

That's why Paul uses the word **“unclean”** and quotes from the OT. Under the OC, if any “unclean” thing touched you or you it, YOU became “unclean.” Think of someone with Covid sneezing on you. What would you do? *You would SEPARATE from the Covid infected person* then immediately wash your hands, if not take a shower to try and avoid getting sick.

Being in fellowship with an unbeliever is like having a sick person cough all over you: **you run the risk of become “unclean” in your beliefs, thoughts, words, and actions.**

I was a newborn believer back in 1997 and it was also the same year I took over the tree farm. I had a large crew of men back then and I thought I would earn their respect if I acted and talked like them. I came home from work one night and Becky pointed out that I was cussing a lot...and I was. I realized my desire to yoke myself to the crew caused them to influence me, even though I was a believer and none of them were.

Nowadays if I'm around unbelievers, whether they work for me or not, **I remain (in my spirit) separate.** I'm there to let the Holy Spirit influence THEM to repentance, salvation, and righteousness in Christ! *I won't yoke myself to them lest I be tempted toward what they believe and how they live.*

Let's sum up the entire sermon on our relationship with unbelievers:

- Live peaceably with them, when possible.
- If it's not possible, and we've truly tried, then we part.
- We don't take or desire revenge: if we're still declaring or invoking "karma" we're not being inspired by the Holy Spirit, but a different one.
- We don't rejoice when vengeance happens to them.
- We bless and do good to them: including enemies.
- We desire for them to repent and be Saved.
- We share the Gospel to them and call upon them to repent and be Saved.
- We can spend time and even be friends with them.
- The time to part is if we're being negatively influenced by them, vs them being positively influenced by us.
- Let's be the salt and light of this world to unbelievers. Remain separate from them in our hearts, and inspire them toward the Light of Christ.