



2 Corinthians 6:11-7:1
Why Be Holy?

Summary: Christians sabotage themselves spiritually by choosing to be involved with things and people that pull them away from God.

This morning is probably going to hurt. I'm warning you upfront. I said it last week too and we're taking attendance this week to see who's missing because they wanted to avoid it.

Just joking of course.

But seriously, do not expect this morning to be comfortable. Instead, expect that you will sense the prompting and the conviction of the Holy Spirit as we discuss the need for holiness in our lives and that it will be a personal struggle for you to yield and surrender.

You see, here's what's going to happen – we will hear the words of Scripture, we will hear the call to holiness and purity and some of us will say, "I'm not sure that's for me." Or, "But it's different in my situation." We're going to encounter hard things that call us to grow and change, we're going to experience the conviction and guidance of the Holy Spirit, and in response many of us are going to be tempted to throw up old, familiar excuses, the ones we love because they keep us comfortable.

You might write off the call to purity and holiness as being too serious or legalistic or old-fashioned and impractical, but whatever your excuse, you'll miss another chance to grow. Another chance to finally deal with that thing you've grown so cozy with and used to. And here is the unavoidable and uncomfortable truth: if you want to be closer to God, you're going to have to move farther away from some things and some people whose values, opinions, and attitudes are out of line with God, and that often means making some hard changes in your life.

We jump back into 2 Corinthians and find Paul warning Christians that they are sabotaging themselves spiritually. Read with me:

2 Cor 6:11 O Corinthians! We have spoken openly to you, our heart is wide open. **12** You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted by your *own* affections. **13** Now in return for the same (I speak as to children), you also be open.

14 Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? **15** And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? **16** And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said:

*"I will dwell in them
And walk among them.
I will be their God,
And they shall be My people."*

17 Therefore

*"Come out from among them
And be separate, says the Lord.
Do not touch what is unclean,
And I will receive you."
18 "I will be a Father to you,
And you shall be My sons and daughters,
Says the LORD Almighty."*

7:1 Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

Do you see what Scripture says? Sometimes Christians sabotage themselves spiritually by choosing to be involved with things and people that pull them away from God, making their own flesh and spirit filthy. Meanwhile, God is reaching out directly, and through His people, to reverse the drift – there is more, so much more that God is offering to them, but they have to let go of some things in order to experience it.

If you're taking notes this morning, I want to point out two aspects of the problems and then four things we can do about it. So, first two aspects of the problem. When we hold on to or remain connected to the wrong things and people we sabotage 1) our relationship with God and His people and 2) our own spiritual growth.

You only have so much time, energy, and attention to give in life, and if spending most of it over there, in your connections with those things and those people, you don't have much left to spend over here. Look with me again at

2 Cor 6:11 O Corinthians! We have spoken openly to you, our heart is wide open. 12 You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted by your *own* affections. 13 Now in return for the same (I speak as to children), you also be open.

What is sabotaging the relationship between Paul and the Corinthians? What is weakening the relationship between and God? What is restricting things? Their *own affections*. Paul says, I'm laying it all out there for you, but you're giving me the cold shoulder in return. Why? Because your heart is turning toward other things and they're drawing you away from where you should be.

Anyone ever see this happen? Anyone ever watch someone's life completely turn around because they were drawn away by something or someone else? Their *own affections*, their

own desires, for the wrong things or the affection or approval of the wrong people led them away from God and His people.

This is the story of the Prodigal Son, isn't it? And it's the story of some of us as well. Our heart, our mind, our time and our attention keep getting pulled away by other things that promise to bring us joy, make us satisfied and fulfilled, solve our problems, increase our social standing, or make life better.

It's not that you want to give up on God, it's just that you want to have this thing too. But you feel a sense of conviction. You're not sure about it. Or you flat out know you shouldn't do it, but you still want to. You still want to have that thing, or that person, or that activity in your life and so, you have to choose – will you be connected there or will you be connected to God, because the whole point of our passage this morning is you can't actually do both. Which way is your life going to go?

Imagine a woman gets married to a good man. They've got a great relationship, a couple of good looking and rowdy toddlers and she's got pictures of their family all over the house – from when they were on vacation, from their honeymoon, from last Christmas with the kids dressed up, oh, and she's got some pictures of her old boyfriend hanging up too – a few 8x10s in really nice frames mixed in around the house. He was such a great guy and they had some really good times together, she just can't bring herself to take them down yet.

What would you do or say if you were her husband? How much do you think her holding on to the past is affecting their relationship today?

Well, according to Scripture you're the bride of Christ, so how much stuff are you still holding on to from the things you used to do and the people you used to be connected to? Or, maybe you're not pulled down by the past, you're looking around today. It's not pictures of an ex-boyfriend and memories of what was, it's pictures of a co-worker or neighbor and dreams of what could be. You're living with God, you're actually here in church this morning, but you're looking out the window, across the fence, at the neighbor's house and a part of you is wishing you could be over there.

Christian, who and what is there in your life that needs to go? What connections need to be severed for the sake of growing in your relationship with God? Who and what do you need to be shutting out, and who and what do you need to be inviting in?

There is a sense in which we are all as close to God as we want to be – many of us know the next step we should take in our lives spiritually, we know what's holding us back, we know what needs to change, but we're just not ready or don't want to. We're comfortable. The problem is: when your heart, mind and soul are filled with someone or something else, there's less room for God. You can't grow in two directions at once.

Well, we said this desire to be connected with the wrong things and people sabotages our relationships with God and His people, it also sabotages our own spiritual growth.

We talk a lot about the connection between spiritual fitness and physical fitness because it's a useful illustration. Think about a high-level performer – whether we're talking NFL or NHL, Formula 1 or Swimming, Special Operations or Ballet – you look at anyone who is at the absolute peak of their competitive field and they're paying attention to what goes into their body. They're paying attention to how they rest. They're making all sorts of self-limiting choices for the sake of performance gains. They realize there are things that other people enjoy but they simply cannot have or do, if they want to keep their position at the apex of performance.

Well, what about spiritually? If you want to grow in your relationship with God, you're not going to be able to keep doing whatever you want, however you want, with whomever you want and expect God to understand.

1 Cor 15:33 Do not be deceived: "Evil company corrupts good habits."

When you insist on holding onto the things, the values and opinions, and the people God is telling you to give up, those things and people will slowly guide you away from Him.

You see, you have to remember this is written *to the church*, to people who would say they are Christians, it is written to us – not people out there - and it's telling us to watch out for what we are connected to, influenced by, partnering with.

Because the problem is, these Christians were so well integrated, so well connected to, their non-Christian surroundings, it was difficult to sort them out. They are **yoked** with unbelievers. They are in **fellowship**, they are in **accord**, they are in **communion** and taking **part** with non-believers. Notice in verses 14, 15, and 16 you have pairs that are joined together. But they don't belong together. They should not mix.

I want to really draw your attention to that because we live in a time when experts and others speak of an epidemic of loneliness. We're simultaneously more connected and yet more isolated than ever before in human history and it has created a stunning rise in mental health issues and damaging behaviors. We are made for connection – it's a basic fact of the Christian world view. In the beginning God created man and said what? It is not good for man to dwell alone. And so, He made woman. Again, you can debate in your head all day long about how you don't need people, you're an introvert, you're fine without company – that's what you say. God says, *it's not good for you to be alone*. You need other people in your life and they need you in theirs.

The question is, *who* will be in your life? Who and what will *you* be connected to, associated with, part of? Because, there are two categories in the world: things and people that please God and things and people that do not. Who and what you are connected to matters.

Look with me at the list we have. The first will be familiar to anyone who has dated or married because that is often the context you hear this in

14 Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers.

This yoke is not the center of an egg, that's spelled differently. This is the beam that goes across the necks of two animals and hooks them together so they can do more work. Well, Scripture says, you should not be locked into a partnership with an unbeliever and again, this often comes up in terms of marriage.

It is wonderful and good when two Christians get married. That is God's best plan. But, marriage is given to all of humanity, and so even when an unsaved man and woman are married, it can still be good, an evidence of common grace.

What is not good is when a Christian knowingly marries a non-Christian. Things may seem OK at first. They get along. They enjoy some of the same things and people. They feel the spark. But, they don't share the same convictions deep down at the rock bottom of life. And so, sooner or later, often in a very big or very important decision, they will clash and their differences will be exposed. They may figure it out, but it almost always feels to one or both like they're just shy of a great relationship. For other couples, it feels like living out the punishment for a bad decision for the rest of your life.

So, the question naturally arises, if I married a non-believer, or we were both non-believers and then I became a Christian, should I go ahead and get a divorce? And the answer is, no. Back in 1 Corinthians Paul says

1 Cor 7:12 But to the rest I, not the Lord, say: If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her. 13 And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him.

That whole part about "I, not the Lord, say" means Paul was not quoting Jesus directly, but if you read to the end of the chapter, you discover that this doesn't mean we can write it off and say, oh, well, that was just Paul's opinion on things. This is still inspired Scripture, whether we like it or not and it's not meant to be easy or comfortable, it's meant to be God's standards given to us.

For this reason, I've heard some singles say that it's better to be single, lonely, and unhappy today than married, lonely, and unhappy for the rest of your life. Be cautious about where you look for friends and dates. Don't pair up with someone you think is a really great guy or gal and say 'they'll eventually come around.' Wait for them to come around and then marry with no regrets.

I've said all that about marriage because this verse is so commonly associated with it, but remember that's not the only point of the passage. It's saying so much more about the impossibility of connecting certain things, notice:

**For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness?
And what communion has light with darkness?
15 And what accord has Christ with Belial?**

Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever?
16 And what agreement has the temple of God with idols?

The point is that certain things are fundamentally incompatible. Imagine trying to run a 5k with a sandal on one foot and a cowboy boot on the other. You're not going to go very fast and you might not even go very far. There are things that just don't work well together or belong together. There are things that will keep you from experiencing all God has for you.

When you read Scripture, you find this pattern everywhere - God is calling people to come away from the things and people of this world and be separate for and with Him. God called Abraham (Genesis 12) out of Ur, He called Lot out of Sodom (Genesis 19), He called Israel out of Egypt, and gave them a whole list of laws that would ensure they lived and worshiped in a way that was distinct from the other nations. Today He calls the church to be separate, and one day Jesus will return and call us home.

So, you're either one of the people responding to the call to come out, or you're part of the crowd that those people are being called out of. These are the only two options. There are the righteous and the lawless, those in the light and those who love darkness, those who are believers and those who are unbelievers, those are the temple of God and those who worship idols. If you're in the group that has responded to the call of God, you need to be aware of the being too cozy with the group knowing that is going to try to pull you away from the holiness and purity that God desires in you by urging you to appreciate, value, pursue, tolerate, and approve of things that God condemns.

But, let's not just talk about the way the things and people of this life pull us away from God, let's also make sure we notice the divine initiative and the heart of God. He doesn't just sit idly by and let it happen. He invites us into deeper and deeper fellowship, offering to heal more and more of our wounds, offering to teach us new ways to live, giving us a purpose and an identity, a reason to live each day and the spiritual strength to do it. Look at the reason we're given for separating ourselves from the things and people we should not be connected to:

2 Cor 7:1 Therefore, *having these promises* [present tense, all the things we've read about in chapters 5 and 6] *let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.*

In other words, since God is initiating, let us respond. We should consecrate and cleanse ourselves BECAUSE we have these promises, because God is offering Himself to us.

So what do we need to do? Well, notice, we - Christians - are urged to cleanse ourselves (Paul is including himself in the **us**) let **us** cleanse both the flesh and spirit - the outside and inside of our lives, the sins that are external and obvious and those that are internal and hidden - grudges you hold, anger, lust, wrong perspectives and prejudice. This is not easy. It's not automatic, and it's rarely ever a 'one and done.' It's a process. It's a commitment. It's a choice to prefer holiness, purity, connection with God over the things and people of the world.

But, if you want to let go of these things or slip out of the grip they have on you, here are four important things for you to do:

1. Get serious about holiness – let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

This is going to take actual effort on your part, you can't just pray all the change in – you're going to have to do real things, get rid of real things, stop interacting with real people, confess real sin, start new habits, make real change. You need to get rid of the things that make it easy for you to sin.

Heb 12:1 Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

I've shared with you before the story of a man preparing to climb Mount Everest who cut the tags out of all of clothing just to save a few more grams when hiking. What if you went after the sin and temptations in your life with that sort of zeal?

And as you do, go after causes, not just symptoms. Ask, what's at the core here? What's driving the temptation? A lock just keeps an honest man honest; guard rails just keep you from slipping of the cliff, you can always get around or over them if you want to – the question you want to get after is: why do I want what I'm chasing?

2. Get serious about your heart and what it desires

Proverbs 4:23 Guard your heart with all diligence, For out of it *spring* the issues of life.

Look at the things and people in your life and ask: Is this leading me closer to God or farther away? Don't just ask is it OK, ask *does it please God?* Does your heart, and your desires, accurately reflect God? Or do you need some work done in there?

3. Get serious about influencing others instead of being influenced

You might ask – well, does this mean we need to live separate lives in private little Christian communities and not have any contact with the rest of the world and the answer, of course, is No. Jesus came into the world to reach us. Scripture says He was **holy...undefiled, separate from sinners** (Hebrews 7:26) but also **a friend of tax collectors and sinners** who got invited to parties (Luke 7:34).

In an earlier letter Paul told the Corinthians you can have dinner with your non-Christian neighbors (1 Cor 10:27). The call to avoid being unequally yoked is not a call to abandon friendliness, hospitality, and basic decency. The problem is only when we're influenced more than we're influencing. So, like a physician, take personal precautions while treating

patients to prevent becoming infected. Be honest about the affect things and people have on you and ask God for help that you might do a better job of reversing that flow.

4. Get serious about strength.

Remember, this whole conversation has one goal – to pull you away from the things and people who are you pulling you away from God. So, invite Him into the effort. Confess what is happening. Tell him about the fact that you desire things you shouldn't desire. Tell Him about the fact that at times you don't desire Him as much as you desire other things and people. Be honest, be open, be real. But also, be ready to change.

One of the best ways you can grow stronger in your walk with God is to get into God's Word and get God's Word into you.

Ps 119:9 How can a young man cleanse his way?

By taking heed according to Your word.

10 With my whole heart I have sought You;

Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments!

11 Your word I have hidden in my heart,

That I might not sin against You.

Jesus told the disciples they had been cleansed by His word in John 15:3 and Paul would later compare the love men should have their wives to the love that Christ has for the church saying

Eph 5:25 ... Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, 26 that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, 27 that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

Christian, if you want to grow, get into the Word and get the Word into you. Have some sort of daily time reading Scripture and praying. Download an audio Bible on your phone and listen to it. Get into a Bible Study like the Turn Aside studies we have starting next month.

You need to get certain things *out* of your life, but don't just leave the space empty, fill it with other things, good things. You need to form new habits, new patterns, new desires. You need fellowship, you need connection, but you need it with the right things.

So, here's what hard about this morning. There's probably room for each us to grow in these things. There's room for each of us to sever ties with things that are holding us back or slowing us down, keeping us weak in our walk with God.

But the truth of the matter is most of us want to avoid complete surrender. We like having some of God in our life, and some of these other things too. We want God to help us achieve our goals desires and leave us alone with our freedom.

But God says you can't keep going that way. You can't keep hedging your bets, splitting your efforts. He's a jealous God. He offers all of Himself to you, will you offer all of yourself to Him? Can He ask you, or tell you, to cut any connections so that you can you can come closer to Him?

Church, God is reaching out to us, calling us in closer, offering us more. We're each as close to Him as we choose to be. So, take a look at your life and consider – are you where you want to be, and if not, what is it that's holding you back?

Almighty God is reaching out to you, is there anything in your hands that is keeping you from taking hold of His?

Let's pray



Sermon Application and Discussion Questions

2 Corinthians 6:11-7:1 Why Be Holy?

Summary: Christians sabotage themselves spiritually by choosing to be involved with things and people that pull them away from God.

- Where and how have you seen people drawn away from God?
- What have you given up or severed your connection with in order to grow closer to God?
 - Did it all happen at once, or have there been stages of surrender?
 - What have you learned along the way?
- Why is it so hard to let go of the things that influence us? Why do Christians still struggle with a desire for the things and people of this world?
- What kind of problems arise when you are unequally yoked? Outside of marriage, how could this situation arise in your life?
- Review the following verses. What do you learn about the importance of Christians being separated for God and living differently? What is the separated life like?
 - Romans 12:1-2
 - Romans 16:17-20
 - Colossians 3:1-2
 - 1 Timothy 6:10-11
 - Titus 2:14
 - 1 Peter 4:3-6
 - 1 John 4:6
- According to 2 Corinthians 6:16 we are the temple of God. Review the following verses. What do you learn about the importance of the Temple being clean and holy?
 - 2 Kings 21:1-9
 - 2 Kings 23:3-25
 - Ezekiel 8:1-18
 - John 2:13-17
- If a friend asked you “Is it OK for a Christian to do this_____?” How would you go about answering the question?