

SERMON TITLE- "Unequally Yoked"

TEXT- 2 Corinthians 6:14-18

PREACHED AT- Neighbourhood Church

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Family Service

The Text

Do not be 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? 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. 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." "Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you." "I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty." 2 Corinthians 6:14-18

Why does Paul say this?

Remember the context- How does living as Kingdom people actually work out "on the ground" where we are living? Paul has explained some incredible things to the Corinthians so far-

-we have a new beginning

-we are reconciled with God

-we have been given the ministry of reconciliation

This is all very good- but when we get up in the morning- how does our life look differently, because of all this? That, after all, is the proof of the pudding.

To this point in his letter, Paul has mixed theology with encouragement. He loves the people in this church. He has seen them through ups and downs. This really is a letter that is about life in the real world.

We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians, and opened wide our hearts to you. We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us. As a fair exchange—I speak as to my children—open wide your hearts also. 2 Corinthians 6:11-13

You can see a transition taking place here. Paul is now going to tackle another topic.

Paul is now speaking to this church as a parent with real concerns. He is going to get right to the point- and he does.

Do not be 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? 2 Corinthians 6:14

So now Paul gets very practical and makes a blunt- "Do not" statement.

Why does he go to this place?

I suggest that it is because of a very real problem- the problem of God's people

getting tied into destructive places.

There were things in the world of the Corinthian church that were just bad. Paul uses the words “wickedness,” “darkness,” and “Belial” or the devil.

There is no grey area here. These are things that we just must not get involved with. And yet, the reality is- somehow God’s people are not immune to getting involved with evil.

So what kind of “evil” is Paul talking about? More importantly what kind of evil is a danger to us?

As I thought of something that we all agree is evil, I thought of “bullying.” Everyone agrees that it is evil- and yet it remains something that we are not immune to getting involved with.

So, I thought that might be a good thing to use as a way of understanding Paul’s stern warning.

Last time when we did our Family Service the Jr Youth helped me out by letting me video tape their answers to the questions-

1. When have you started a fight with someone?
2. Why did you do it?

I thought the video worked very well- so I thought I’d do it again. This time I asked the Sr Youth to help me- and they were very helpful. But they had a far tougher question- it was- “Can you tell me of a time when you saw someone being bullied?”

They described bullying very well- and they also gave a few fragments of actual stories. But it was Colin who told the bullying story that jumped out to me and I thought that in this case I would just get him to tell it live-

Colin’s story-

Bullying happens all the time and we know that it is terrible.

But why do people bully? There are 2 pieces to it-

1. We want to feel superior to someone else
2. We want to run with the “right” crowd

There is a mechanism at work in humans and in animals that is terrible to watch. When I was growing up we had a lot of chicken farms and every chicken farmer knew that there would be one chicken in a flock that would be turned on and pecked to death.

Unfortunately that is also something that we recognize in people. This is a natural human response.

So what is the solution?

#1. Recognize It As Evil

When we describe bullying and when we link it to the chickens in the chicken coup everyone agrees that it is evil. One of the insightful things that was observed by the Youth Group was- “when a young person actually commits suicide everyone wants to say nice things and show how they weren’t part of the bullying. But things weren’t that simple in real life.”

So true!

The first thing we need to recognize is that treating people with dignity isn’t just a nice idea- this is a command that Jesus gave those who want to follow Him.

Jesus, by His example and by His teaching commanded us that we are to reach out

to those that society calls outcasts.

This is not just a nice idea to resurrect when something bad happens and everyone wants to look like a hero- this is a way of living that the Bible repeats from the beginning to the end.

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. 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." 2 Corinthians 6:15-16

Bottom line- there is terrible behaviour that God's people must not be part of. We need to separate ourselves from it. No matter how popular it is- it is evil.

Not many people would argue with this teaching- and that is part of the problem. It is a problem because it can cause the real challenge to be missed.

And how does the problem show itself? In the most extreme situations a whole society gets involved in terrible behaviour. The most well know example was the Jewish genocide of WW 2. And when it happens we all wonder, why.

And what is the challenge? When we actually have to choose between going with the crowd- that we want to fit in with- and standing up for the "right" thing, most of the time or at least far too often, we go with the crowd.

We need to learn how to stand up for what is right- especially when the "crowd" doesn't agree with us.

#2. Stand Up To The Crowd- Protect Your Conscience

Now there is something that needs to be clarified here- the "crowd" can sometimes be a single person- someone that we want to please and be near.

What is the signal of a problem? I believe it is our conscience. The Bible talks a great deal about the importance of our conscience. For example the Book of Hebrews says-

. . . let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience . . . Hebrews 10:22

A guilty conscience is the sign that something is wrong and a clear conscience.

Now a conscience is something that needs to be trained. There are people who don't feel guilty about things that they should feel guilty about. There are people who think that it OK to steal or to tell lies as long as it isn't too big a deal. They would agree that stealing things that people will miss or be upset about, is wrong, is bad. But I'm sure you have heard people trying to justify stealing or lying. If they really believe their explanation- and many do- it shows a conscience that has not been properly trained.

On the other hand there are times when people feel guilty about things that are not wrong.

I talked to a person who was raised in a JW church. I had invited him to come to church. He found it very hard and felt very guilty about it. It was painful to watch because his conscience really bothered him.

Like the person whose conscience had not been trained to see that stealing is always wrong- his conscience needed to be trained not to see going to church as wrong.

But one of the things that the Bible warns us about is protecting our conscience. In his previous letter to the Corinthians, Paul had warned them about protecting their conscience-

But if anyone says to you, "This has been offered in sacrifice," then do not eat it,

both for the sake of the man who told you and for conscience' sake — 1 Corinthians 10:28

A very important principle, Paul told them, is protecting the conscience. The conscience does need training- but don't mess with it. You can screw things up.

Our conscience is a gift from God that is designed to help us discern what the right and wrong courses of actions are.

The training that is going on in many schools, teaching people what a terrible thing bullying is- is an example of training the conscience of children in schools.

But there is one more thing that goes with that- and this is where Paul really makes his point bluntly.

"Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you."

"I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty." 2 Corinthians 6:14-18

#3. Choose The Right Crowd

Jesus had a way of being able to go anywhere and do anything. He was able to do this because His conscience and His determination to follow that conscience were matched and linked.

The rest of us can't assume that. When I was going to SS there was a song that we sang. It went like this-

Oh Be Careful Little Eyes

Verse 1

Oh be careful little eyes what you see

Oh be careful little eyes what you see

For the Father up above

Is looking down in love

Oh be careful little eyes what you see

Verse 2

Oh be careful little ears what you hear

Oh be careful little hands what you do

Oh be careful little feet where you go

It is a very good song with a very good message. We need to be careful. We need to be careful because of 2 things-

1. The Crowd We Choose Reflects Our Values.

We don't have as clear an understanding of what is good and evil as we should have. On our very own the temptation of evil things does get to us. It is easy to spot a bullying spirit out there but bullying rises from the inclinations of people just like you and me. We like to rise up in the ranking of our image and we often do this by putting other people down.

We need to be careful about how our conscience and desires have been trained and the reality of the friends we choose is- that they reflect our desire.

The people that we choose to be with are a reflection of our values.

This combines with a 2nd problem-

2. The Crowd Will Lead Us

We are very often prepared to go along with the “crowd” for the sake of fitting in. Very often we join a crowd that has values different from our own. We want to be liked. We want to be part of the team. This causes changes to take place in us.

First, the things we enjoy start to shift to match the crowd. When I was growing up smoking was not seen as being as dangerous as it is today and smoking was just what the “crowd” did. No one liked smoking at first, but you would keep trying until you did. Soon, smoking became pleasurable. The crowd changed what we like.

This can happen to the good as well. Those people who exercise together do things that they would not enjoy alone- like running until they are really tired. But when they get together they encourage each other and eventually exercise becomes something they enjoy.

The crowd will change what we like and what we don't like.

So what is the lesson here? Choose the crowd that takes pleasure in the things of God. Separate yourself from the crowds that love bad things and join with the crowds that love good things.