

In 1954, a pastor named Bob Munger wrote a short but powerful booklet called *My Heart, Christ's Home*. Munger likens our lives to a home with many rooms. When Jesus enters our life, he wants to make it his home; a place where he's not only welcome but where he's master of the house. And so, Munger pictures a person inviting Jesus into their heart and showing him around the different rooms. Each room represents a different area of his life.

First, he leads Jesus into the study or library, which is a picture of the mind. This is the control room of the house because everything flows from our thought life. Then they go into the dining room. This is where the man's appetites and desires are fulfilled. Next, they go into the living room, the room where Jesus wants to meet him every day, so their friendship might grow. Then they go into the workroom where he uses his gifts and talents. Next, they go into the recreation room where he has his fun. He wasn't really comfortable inviting Jesus to participate in the some of the things he did there. Finally, there was a small closet upstairs where, behind lock and key, he had some personal things he didn't want anyone to see, especially Jesus. It smelled really bad in there! But eventually, he surrendered the key to that closet. In fact, it wasn't long before he was signing the entire title of his house over to Jesus.

I want you to imagine you're inviting Jesus into one particular room of your life, and that's the room where your relationships take place. In most houses, that's the family room. One of the certainties of life is we're always forming, maintaining, and sometimes even ending relationships. Relationships are vital to our life from the cradle to the grave. A tiny baby may get fed and changed, but she withers emotionally without affection from others. Parents know how important this area is and keep an eye out for who their kids hang out with. In the business world, the most successful people aren't always the smartest but are those who are emotionally intelligent and do relationships well. And we know the church isn't just about a bunch of people worshipping God; it's also about people relating together with love and affection. In so many ways, relationships define our lives. And this is a room in our house the Lord Jesus insists on being a part of.

We've been studying Paul's second letter to the Corinthians. The Corinthians were struggling in this area. They'd invited Jesus into their lives and yet hadn't welcomed him into this particular

room. There was no room for him there. It kind of reminds me of the Christmas story where there was no room for Jesus to be born in one of Bethlehem's inns. The Corinthians had no room for the Apostle Paul. He'd loved them and brought the Gospel to them, but they were shutting him out. And so, in 2 Corinthians 6, Paul addresses this issue. He starts by dealing with his own broken relationship with them.

Open Wide Your Heart

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. vv. 11-13

Paul is being open and vulnerable. He says he's spoken freely with them. In fact, back in verses 3-10, he listed 28 things that characterized his life and ministry. He's an open book. His affection, love, and concern was such that he got a bit carried away. That's what happens when we care deeply for people. We speak openly with them. We bare our hearts. That's exactly what he says, *"We've opened wide our hearts to you."*

We all need relationships where we open our hearts wide to others. This ought to be true in our church experience. There should be a warmth and affection for one another. There should be openness and vulnerability. Church isn't about sitting in a cold, frigid room, staring straight ahead. It's about relationships; it's about pursuing others in love.

But love must be reciprocated. The Corinthians were withholding their affection from Paul. He uses a word that means their hearts were too crowded for Paul. He had room for them, but they had no room for him. He wanted to give them a great big bear hug, but they preferred a cold handshake.

You see, when our hearts are open to the wrong relationships, we'll tend to be closed to the right relationships. As we'll see in a moment, they formed friendships with unbelievers and had no room left for Paul. I've seen this happen all too often. We begin to be influenced by a person, a group, or a way of thinking, and all of a sudden, all we see are the flaws in those who follow Christ. We begin to distance ourselves from them. We become cynical. All of a sudden, they're all hypocrites, or they're all too narrow, or they're all in denial. So we close our hearts to the very people we ought to welcome; they're crowded out of our lives.

So Paul makes this heartfelt appeal to them, *“Open wide your hearts...”* And notice what he says, *“as a fair exchange.”* In other words, it's a fair trade. He calls them “my children” because children owe that to their parents. Paul was their spiritual father. He cared for them in a fatherly way and wanted them to care for him. “I've opened up to you in love, and now that love should be reciprocated.”

Have you ever had one of those conversations where you ask all the questions, and the other person asks you nothing? It kind of leaves you feeling empty! Healthy relationships require a fair exchange. It takes two to dance. We talk about the need for unconditional love, but the truth is love can't really grow if it's not reciprocated. A genuine bond is only created in the give-and-take of love. We all know what it feels like to open up to someone only to have them respond coldly. We may continue to love them, but that relationship won't grow unless there's a fair exchange.

There are husbands and wives who'd die for a fair exchange with their spouses. Perhaps you're the one holding back. It's so interesting to me that when Paul addresses husbands in Colossians, he says to them, *“Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them” (Col 3:19)*. Embittered husbands withhold their love. Paul says you need to get over that. She's reaching out and opening her heart to you, and you need to respond. Open your heart. It's a fair exchange. Or perhaps it's your husband who's reaching out to you, but you don't trust him, and you push him away. Maybe it's time to forgive and open up your heart.

Perhaps you are a son or daughter, and you've emotionally cut off your parents. They're dying to reconnect with you on a deep level. But you won't let them in. Maybe you have a good reason. They could have been better parents. But maybe it's time to let that go. Open up your heart. It's a fair exchange. It might even be someone in your friendship circle or small group. They've opened up to you, but you're holding back. Maybe your guard is up because you've been hurt in the past. You're nice and polite, but it's not an exchange. Open your heart to them. We can't be intimate friends with everyone, but holding back and shutting people out who genuinely care for us is wrong, especially in God's family.

And if you're the one reaching out and opening your heart and longing for that like exchange, keep doing it. C.S. Lewis has a helpful bit of advice on this:

To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will continually be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to keep it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully around with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your own selfishness. But in that casket, safe, dark, motionless, and airless, it

will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, and irredeemable. The only place outside heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers and perturbations of love is hell.

As hard and hurtful as it can be, climb out of that coffin. Open your heart to others. That's what Paul is doing. He's reaching out in love and vulnerability to the Corinthians. And it's with this love he goes on and implores them to come clean from the relationships crowding him out.

Come Clean From Bad Relationships

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? Or what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. 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.” And, “I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.” Therefore, since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God. 6:14–7:1

The city of Corinth was permeated with the worship of idols. Much of the food available at the markets was dedicated to idols. Many social functions were held in one of the two temples in Corinth, much like a community center today. One of those temples was dedicated to the worship of a sex goddess named Diana. Many business opportunities involved a connection with idolatrous practices. Living in a city like that presented challenges for the Christ-follower. What to participate in and what to avoid. Some in that church were still involved with people and practices that compromised their walk with Christ. So Paul issues three commands that all have to deal with coming clean.

Don't be yoked together

First, in verse 14, he says, *“Do not be yoked together with unbelievers.”* When he speaks of a yoke, he's using a metaphor from farming. A yoke was a wooded frame placed over the neck of two animals so they could together pull a plow or a cart. The yoke forced the two animals to work as one. Paul may have been thinking of two verses from the Old Testament. In Deuteronomy 22:10, God told the Israelites told not to yoke together an ox and a donkey. This may have been because an ox was considered clean and a donkey unclean. Or it may have simply been because it was downright cruel. To be yoked together required that the two animals shared the same stride. If they didn't, they'd be miserable. And then, in

Leviticus 19:19, the same word is used when the Israelites were commanded not to mate two different kinds of cattle. Breeding, like yoking together, was so intimate a thing that it required likeness, compatibility.

Paul is saying to avoid relationships with unbelievers where you're yoked together in this way. He's not talking about every day, casual contact and relationships with unbelievers. He's talking about intimate bonds. Does this mean I only go to a Christian auto mechanic? No! Does this mean I can't make friends with my unbelieving neighbors? No! Jesus sent us into the world to be salt and light. In chapter 5, he said that we're ambassadors for Christ. And Jesus was called a "*friend of sinners*." His harshest critics were the Pharisees, who prided themselves on separating from sinners. That's not what Paul is talking about here.

He's talking about relationships where we're yoked together in a close and intimate fashion. A yoke isn't easily broken. There's a kind of permanence to the relationship, a lack of freedom to move on if you have to. Yokes constrain us to walk together with someone in such a way our behavior is affected. When you're yoked together with someone, what they do will always affect what you do, whether you like it or not. So if you have a close friendship or business partnership with someone, it may constrain you from doing what the Lord wants you to do or require you to do things the Lord doesn't want you to do. That is an unequal yoke.

The most obvious area where this applies is marriage. I'm not talking about those already married to an unbeliever. If that's you, the Bible clearly says stay committed to your spouse (see 1 Cor. 7). In fact, being a Christian ought to make you a better wife or husband. But this does apply to those of you who aren't married. A marriage is a yoke. When you're married, you're not free to pick up and leave. You will be affected by that person's behavior and expectations. Your loyalties will be divided. I've been married for over 42 years, and I can tell you, you'll become more like that person you're married to over time. You might even start to look alike! I thank God I married someone whose walk with Christ I admired! But I can tell you that you'll be literally pulled in two directions if you marry an unbeliever, and it will be painful, not just for you, but for them.

I know this sounds harsh and narrow. Maybe you've met someone who seems like the perfect match for you. He may even treat you better than some of the Christian guys you've dated. And you begin to think, "He's such a great guy. He's open to talking about Jesus. If we get married, he'll come around." But God's word says to not do it. And I'd add that's no way to go into a marriage—with an agenda to change your spouse. Chances are you'll drive him further away.

Come out from them and be separate...touch no unclean thing

The second command is to "*Come out from them and be separate... touch no unclean thing*." This is a quote from Isaiah 52:11, where God spoke to the Jews in exile in Babylon, telling them to come out from there and return to Jerusalem. They weren't to bring any unclean things they'd acquired in Babylon. They were to make a clean break.

This is simply telling us what to do if we've been yoked with unbelievers. Except in the case of marriage, separate. Come out from them. The words Paul uses call for an immediate and decisive break. Don't waste any time. Don't wait around until everyone is on the same page. Yes, be sensitive and courteous to those you've been yoked with, but they may not understand, and they might be hurt or even angry.

It's interesting, in the early church, candidates for baptism had to go through a rigorous process of being examined by church leaders before getting baptized. They were asked about many things; one of them was what their work was. Again, the Roman empire was steeped in Roman religion with a myriad of gods. And if you were in a job that somehow supported traditional Roman religion, you were expected to separate from that job to get baptized. There were obvious things like prostitution or gladiatorial combat that were off-limits. But there were other less obvious things like actors playing roles that taught Roman religion or teachers who were expected to teach children the ancient myths. So, in some cases, church leaders required new believers to quit their jobs to be baptized. Again, this sounds extreme to us, but it illustrates the importance of coming clean. Everything—our relationships, work, and hobbies should be consistent with our faith.

Purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit

The third and final command comes in verse 1 of chapter 7. Paul tells us to "*purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit*." Notice he says to purify ourselves. No one can do this for us. God won't even do this for us. This isn't talking about forgiveness; it's talking about consecration. God cleanses us from the guilt of sin, but we still have to be intentional in dealing with the filth in our lives.

Francis Fenelon was a French Roman Catholic archbishop, theologian, poet, and writer who lived in the late 1600s. He once wrote, "You must violently resist the tides of the world. Violently give up all that holds you back from God. Violently turn your will over to God to do His will alone." Far too often, we want to just kind of dabble with sin, but God's word says deal with it ruthlessly.

From what? Notice Paul says, "*everything that contaminates body and spirit*." That includes certain relationships and more. We're talking about both outward acts and the inward thoughts and attitudes. We can be contaminated by an attitude or thought as

well as an action. I think of a parable that Jesus told regarding two sons. The younger son defiled himself in the body as he took his early inheritance, left his father's house, and partied until it was squandered away. But the older son was different. He stayed home and did all the right things, but he was proud, self-righteous, and envious of his brother. He even resented his father. That's defilement of spirit. We have to deal with both outward and inward defilement.

And when we do that, we'll be "*perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.*" The Bible says we are already holy because he's made us holy in Christ, but this holiness needs to be perfected. This holiness is made visible and real as we live in God's presence with reverence.

So we've looked at three commands that all have to do with coming clean from relationships and practices that keep the Lord from having complete control of our family room. But the question is, why? I mean, what might compel me to do what Paul says here? There are two things.

Two Compelling Reasons To Come Clean

The first thing has to do with who we are in Christ (our identity). Look again at verses 14-16 and notice how Paul grounds these commands in our identity in Christ as individuals and as a community. He asks five questions:

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? Or what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols.

The obvious answer to all five of the questions is none! These are all moral opposites. Moral opposites can't have fellowship, harmony, or agreement. They're distinct.

Then he applies this to us. Who are we? He says, "*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.'*" This is who we are! By his grace, we're his temple. That is true of us as individuals. We're the home in which Christ lives! And, yes, he wants access to every single room.

It's also true of us as a church. As a community, we're the temple of the living God. That's not talking about a building, but a people gathered together in Christ's name. The Living God resides among us. He's our God, and we're his people. We belong exclusively to Him. We have a whole different set of values.

We're a distinct and alternative community called out from the world, and any relationships that compromise our relationship with Him have to be ended.

Not only does he tell us who we are in Christ, but he also reminds us of the promises of God. Look at the end of verse 17 and then into verse 18. He says if you do these things, "*I will receive you. And, I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.*" Sometimes when we know we have to make a clean break from something or someone, we wonder what we'll be left with. We fear not just being left out but being left alone. But God's promise is, "*I will be a Father to you...*" That's a promise. That's why he says in 7:1, "*Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves.*"

You see, our problem isn't that we want too much; it's that we settle for too little. God promises the intimacy of a Father's love, but we settle for something far less. He spreads a banquet before us, but we settle for junk food. You see, in making these hard choices about relationships, we have to remember he'll never abandon us, and we'll experience an intimacy with him as our Father that far surpasses anything the world can offer. God says to us, "I want to be a Father to you, a tender, loving Father to you, but I can't do it while you give all your affection to something else." So break the yoke and experience the goodness of God.

I think C.S. Lewis said it best in his book *The Weight of Glory*.

It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We're half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.

This passage is a call and an offer for you to stop making mud pies in a slum, to end those relationships and practices that crowd your heart and keep you from the infinite joy of intimacy with Jesus and his followers. God is inviting you to a holiday at sea. Don't settle for less. God is calling you today to open up your heart and let him make his home in every room of your life.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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