

Participate, not partner * 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1

May 14, 2020 * Langford Community Church * Graham Gladstone

When I recorded my last album, I worked with a sound engineer from Hamilton who recommended that we use a studio in Oakville. Since I lived in Hamilton too, the sound engineer and I would often drive over to Oakville together and we had lots of interesting discussions in the car.

One day, he told me about this job offer that he got – he had been asked to produce the sound for a movie that was being made nearby. Sounds good right? Take a job where you can get. Only problem is, it was a pornographic movie. And the sound engineer was a Christian.

What's he gonna do? Turn down a paycheque and keep to his convictions? Or plug his ears and do the job? (That's kind of hard to do when you're a sound editor).

He made it quite clear that he was NOT going to take the job and that makes him a perfect illustration of what we're looking at today.

2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1 asks us to think about our relationships with the world. How are we, as the people of God, supposed to interact with an unbelieving world? Do we blend in, no questions asked? Do we pick our way through the world's values and keep the good ones? Do we separate ourselves all together and keep a kind of 'spiritual distancing?' Good questions to ask.

Let me read you the passage and then we'll think it through together. 2 Corinthians 6, starting in verse 14.

14 Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. (There it is right there – do not get hitched up in partnerships with people who do not share your commitment to God).

For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common?

Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?

15 What harmony is there between Christ and Belial?

What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?

16 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."

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

18 "I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."

7:1 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 (2Co 6:14-1 NIV).

God dwells within us. He walks among us. And He is committed to being with us as our Father.

In light of that, Paul says, distance yourself from anyTHING that compromises your commitment to Him and make the pursuit of holiness your primary goal.

And right off the bat, Paul says 'that applies to relationships too.' Verse 14 - do not be yoked together with unbelievers. If you're walking with God in one direction and then commit to another person who's walking in a different direction, then it's going to be really easy to compromise your relationship with God and deprioritize what's important to Him.

Now usually, this passage is applied to marriage relationships and that makes sense. If you are committing to live your life with another person, then you want to make sure that they are just as committed to Jesus as you are. Your relationship with Jesus is the fundamental centre of your life and you want to make sure that it is for them too.

But look back at this passage – does it say anything about marriage? No! Yes it says 'yoke' but that's more an agricultural term than a wedding one – two plow animals hitched together pointed in the same direction.

This applies to marriage but not just marriage because Paul is calling us to not be unequally yoked in ANY of our relationships. In our business deals, in our partnerships, in our neighbourhood associations, in our community groups; Paul says 'if something or someone is going to compromise your relationship with the God who loves you, get out.' Don't be unequally yoked to it.

But this now opens up another interesting question. Yes, we want to pursue holiness out of reverence for God and yes we want to make Him our priority but does that mean that we literally 'come out from them and be separate' like verse 17 says?

There are certainly some people who have read it that way, but to be frank, I think that we need to read it in light of what Paul has already said in his first letter – 1 Corinthians 5:9-10 – Paul says – separate yourself from believers who keep on sinning, but not from unbelievers, because in that case, you'd need to leave the world altogether.

(9 I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people--10 not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world (1Co 5:9-10 NIV)).

There seems to be some way in which we as believers participate in the world without partnering with it. Do you see the distinction I'm making? We can't withdraw entirely from the world – and frankly, we're supposed to shine a light to the world, to be bright stars shining in a dark generation – but I think that we can be IN the world without being influenced by it. That is, I think that we participate in the world, without partnering with it.

Where the world's values align with Christ's, we can gladly take part in the good things that people do. The Food Bank, the hospice foundation, the Terry Fox Run, the agricultural society; construction sites and school boards and police services – all of these things we can take part in knowing that they are consistent with God's desire for good in the world.

But where organizations and people depart from God's will, we need to step back and refuse to be yoked unequally to them. We decline to partner with them, because we are first and foremost partnered with God. And yes, sometimes that will be hard. Sometimes it may even cost you a job. But what it may cost will be nothing compared to the reward for your faithfulness to Christ.

Because we are God's people, we participate in the world without partnering with it.