

UNEQUALLY YOKED

"Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial [Deut. 13:13]? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God....Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." – 2 Cor. 6:14-18.

THIS command, not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers, is very generally quoted with reference to the subject of marriage. And it is properly so applied, being a general principle applicable in a variety of cases. But the Apostle is not here referring to the marriage bond, but to the bonds of friendship and communion, which should be sacred among the saints, and which should not exist between believers and unbelievers. Through this and the preceding chapter he has been discoursing about the doctrine of Christ. He has been preaching the gospel of redemption and resurrection, and of the privilege of being new creatures in Christ, and showing that, having by faith received the blessed gospel, we are ambassadors for Christ and co-workers together with him in making it known to others; and that as such we should be faithful to our commission, and under no circumstances allow the truth to be mixed with error. The idea is not that the saints should be unkind or unneighborly to the unbelieving: on the contrary, they are to be kind to all men, to the thankful and to the unthankful, to the believing and to the unbelieving (Luke 6:35; Gal. 6:10); but it is that they should not be friends in the sense of having communion and fellowship.

To be "*yoked*" together with another signifies more than a mere passing friendliness or neighborly kindness. It signifies an intimacy, a companionship, a fellowship of spirit. If two are bound together with the same yoke, they must of necessity walk together; and if they cannot agree to walk together, they must sever the yoke, whether it be a literal wooden yoke, or a yoke of friendship. Friendship is more than a passing kindness, and never exists without some bonds of fellowship. With a loyal and faithful Christian the bonds of fellowship or friendship can be none other than those of a common faith and hope. He has renounced the world with its ambitions and aims, has lost its spirit, and has received instead the spirit of Christ with all its new and heavenly aspirations and hopes; consequently, if he be true to his profession, those earthly things can no longer constitute bonds of fellowship with him: he cannot submit to be yoked with those who are of the world. He has also renounced all the vain philosophies of human invention and has taken for his guide, and has found his delight in, the infallible Word of divine truth; consequently, if he remain true to his profession, the theories and speculations of men can constitute no bond of fellowship with him; for he has no sympathy with them. And, further, his commission as an ambassador for Christ (2 Cor. 5:20) not only precludes the possibility of fellowship on those terms, but it also arrays **[R1588 : page 308]** him, as a defender of the faith once delivered to the saints by the Lord and the Apostles, in opposition to every other form of doctrine.

The Apostle's questions are therefore significant: "What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness?" None whatever: the man who is righteous cannot approve or agree with the unrighteous; they cannot walk together, either under the one yoke or the other, and they naturally drift apart, because there is nothing to hold them together. "And what communion hath light with darkness?" Can the natural light and darkness abide together? No more can the light of truth in one heart and the

darkness of error in another draw them together in fellowship and sympathy. They are repellent and not attractive forces. They cannot assimilate. The light may come where darkness reigns and chase it away, and then there can be communion in light; but when the darkness opposes the light, and instead of giving place to it, seeks to overwhelm it, there can be no communion except the light suffer an eclipse and go out in darkness.

And "what concord [what harmony] hath Christ [the body of Christ, the true Church] with Belial [with those who say, "Let us go and serve other gods" – See Deut. 13:13]?" Those who agree with and fellowship such, have not the spirit of Christ, and are none of his, no matter how loudly they profess to be. "Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel," an unbeliever? Is there any bond of fellowship there? "And what agreement hath the temple of God [the Church, the body of Christ] with idols?" Can the spirit of God and the spirit of idolatry dwell in the same heart? God will not share his temple with another. We must be wholly devoted to him, or we are not acceptable to him. Therefore, every other idol must be banished from our hearts, Christ alone enthroned, and only his true and loyal subjects fellowshiped.

"Wherefore, come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean, and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."

How explicit and positive is the command, and how blessed the promise to the obedient. Every word of the command is full of significance: –

The first word – "Wherefore" – calls up the forceful argument preceding; *i.e.*, in view of the fact that it is impossible to serve two masters or to have the spirit of Christ, and still have fellowship with the opponents of Christ; in view of the fact that we must either be true and loyal to him, or else be none of his –

"Wherefore, come out from among them [from among the enemies of Christ, whether the avowed or the deceitfully cloaked, who, although professing to be light-bringers and truth-seekers, love darkness better than light, because their hearts are not right; whose conduct shows that they do not love the Lord and the truth, and who only seek to entice the faithful away from the narrow path which God has marked out]; and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean."

To be separate does not mean to be friends and companions, or to be in fellowship on any grounds. It means that we are to make a clean-cut division between ourselves and all the unclean, the impure in heart, as manifested by their disloyalty to the truth, and thereby to God, its great Author; and that this separation is to be so marked that the disfellowshipped one will be sure to know it, and that none can mistake our obedience and loyalty to the Lord and his truth. There is to be no trifling or half-way obedience in this matter; for we are not only to be separate in spirit from the enemies of the Lord, but we are not *to touch* the unclean. As the Apostle elsewhere says, we are to "avoid them" – to have no part or lot with them.

It is only on these conditions that we have the Lord's promise – "And I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you; and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." We are thus brought face to face with the alternative of making a definite choice between the Lord and his truth on the one hand, and the enemies of the Lord, whether open or covert, on the other. The command is, "Choose ye this day whom ye will serve." There is no neutral ground; and no half-way **[R1588 : page 309]** compliance can realize the blessed promise – "And I will receive you," etc.

It is the spirit of the world, and not the spirit of Christ, which considers such a separation from the ungodly and the apostate a

hard service. The loyal heart cannot admit to its communion and fellowship those who have not the same loyal disposition. What would be the natural conclusion of a husband, if he saw his wife, who professed loyalty and devotion to him, making a special friend or companion of his enemy, either secret or open? or of the wife whose husband found pleasure in fellowship and communion with one who is an enemy to her, or who in any way treats her with discourtesy or disrespect? And should we not be equally loyal to our heavenly Bridegroom and our heavenly Father? and equally sensitive and quick to discern the opposing spirit which seeks to undermine and destroy the faith and loyalty of God's elect? Would not true loyalty and devotion count the injury or the blessing done to a friend as done unto us? So the Lord views the matter when he says, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it *unto me.*" (Matt. 25:40.) And so also the Psalmist teaches, saying, "Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate thee? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee? I hate them with perfect hatred: *I count them mine enemies.*" – Psa. 139:21,22.

To thus come out from among the unclean, and to be separate from all the deceitful, as well as from the open, workers of iniquity, may often leave us quite alone in the world; but the truly loyal heart will *prefer* to be alone with God, rather than to have the friendship of those who are untrue to him. Even if the Scriptures had nothing to say on the subject, such would be *natural* to a devoted heart.

It is therefore all in vain that some testify of their love to God while they keep company with his opponents. Their actions speak louder than their words. It is in vain also that they urge the plea of charity when the Lord says, "Be ye separate, and touch not the unclean." [R1589 : page 309]

Many, and very plain and positive, are the warnings of the Word of God against the "evil communications" that "corrupt good manners." (1 Cor. 15:33.) The Apostle Paul's counsel (Acts 20:28-30) to all the elders of the Church was, "Take heed, therefore, unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the holy Spirit hath made you overseers, to feed the Church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood: for I know this, that after my departing shall *grievous wolves* enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of *your own selves* shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them." And Jude said, "Beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ, how that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own desires. These be they who separate themselves [from the truth and its spirit], sensual [minding earthly things, and gratifying the ambitions and tastes of the old nature], having not the spirit. But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying with a holy spirit [a spirit of loyalty and devotion to God], keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." – Jude 17-21.

Thus we are put on guard against the enemies of the truth, and it is made obligatory upon all the faithful to be on the alert against them, and to be prompt in discerning and in dealing with them, so that the flock of Christ may be spared. The Apostle Paul grows very earnest in urging this matter, saying, "Now *I beseech you*, brethren, *mark them* which cause divisions and offences *contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned*, and *avoid them*: for they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own desires; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple [of those not on the alert for the encroachment of error]." (Rom. 16:17,18.) Again, says the same Apostle (2 Tim. 2:16), "*Shun* profane and vain babblings; for they will increase unto more ungodliness."

No, says the ungodly policy of this evil day of compromises and of disloyalty to "the faith once delivered to the saints," we cannot walk by this strict rule: we dare not recognize [R1589 : page 310] and admit the real character of a wolf in the sheep-fold, if the wolf be attired in sheep's clothing; we must accept his professions, notwithstanding his words and his actions to the contrary. We cannot believe that *of our own selves* – right in the midst of the company of the consecrated – any will arise to "pervert the truth" and to "draw disciples after them;" and we dare not "mark" any as such, and "avoid them," or "shun their profane and vain babblings," as the Apostle suggests, for it would be uncharitable, unloving.

Of late we hear a great deal in favor of a broad-minded charity which gives loose rein to the enemies of the doctrines of Christ – a charity which can affiliate with every form of belief or unbelief; that makes no claims of superiority for one religion over another, be it heathen or Christian or antichristian; and that freely fellowships all and bids all God speed, utterly heedless of the Word of the Lord which says, "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God," and "If there come any unto you and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed; for he that biddeth him God speed is *partaker of his evil deeds.*" – 2 John 9-11.

The warning here is not against those who never knew the truth, but against those who have known it and have been blessed by it, and who have afterward turned away from it; of whom the Apostle Peter speaks, saying, "If, after they escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning [they are worse than those who have always been of the world]. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the

holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according the true proverb, "The dog is turned to his own vomit again, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire." Why do they do so? Because the dog and the sow nature and disposition are there still, and only wait for opportunities and circumstances to prove it. So also says John: they that go out from us – who desert the truth and its interests – do so because they were not of us (2 Pet. 2:20-22; 1 John 2:19), because the old fleshly mind and disposition are still there.

The love or charity which goes out toward the enemies of the cross of Christ – those who have been once enlightened by the truth and have turned away from it – is not the right kind of love. We are commanded to "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world," and told that "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John 2:15); and, again, "***This is love, that we walk after his commandments.***" – 2 John 6.

"And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God." – Gal. 6:16.
