

SECOND CORINTHIANS

6:3-7:1

Introduction

A “yoke” was a type of harness which connected a pair of animals to a plow. Yokes were usually made of a wooden beam shaped to fit over the necks of the two animals and were held in place by leather fastening straps. The yoke harnessed the combined strength of the pair and forced the two animals to walk and work together for the benefit of their master.

Farmers would never think to yoke two different animals together. In fact, in the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy God gave a prohibition when He said,

Deuteronomy 22:10 “You shall not plow with an ox and a donkey together.”

This *prohibition* became a common *proverb* which was applied to any situations in which things were improperly paired together. The apostle Paul applied this to the Corinthians, and to all believers, when he said,

2 Corinthians 6:14 Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers...

The Corinthians must have gotten too intimate with unbelievers. It was as if they were “yoked together” with them. This is the opposite of the problem they had earlier, when Paul wrote First Corinthians. In First Corinthians 5:9-11 you read,

1 Corinthians 5:9 I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people.
1 Corinthians 5:10 Yet *I* certainly *did* not *mean* with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world.

They were too *isolated* from unbelievers; then they were too *intimate* with unbelievers! What did Paul want them to do?

What Paul wanted was for them to understand the Scriptural doctrine of **separation**. Separation is a great theme in the Scriptures, but it is often misunderstood. Christians take separation to one of two extremes: *isolation* or *intimacy*.

1. Separation is **not** isolation. You can't go out of the world; you are to be in the world making a difference.
2. Separation is **not** intimacy. Be *in* the world, but not *of* the world.

Perhaps an illustration would help. Paul used the yoke as the illustration. Put on the correct yoke and you will remain in the world but not of the world.

There are two yokes in this chapter. There is the *Lord's* yoke, and there is the *world's* yoke. As you walk and work in this life, you put on one or the other of these yokes. We'll organize our thoughts around these two points: #1 Put On The Lord's Yoke And You Will Experience The Blessings Of Separation, or #2 Put On The World's Yoke And You Will Encounter The Bondage Of Servitude.

#1 Put On The Lord's Yoke And You Will Experience The Blessings Of Separation (6:3-10)

You can never hear the word "yoke" without remembering the words of Jesus, Who said,

Matthew 11:29 Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.
Matthew 11:30 For My yoke *is* easy and My burden is light."

"Rest," "easy," "light." *I like the sound of that yoke!* The Lord **also** used other words to describe His yoke: "take," "learn," "gentle," and "lowly." Those words concern me a little. Taken together these words indicate that you will find "rest for your souls" - spiritual rest – as you discipline yourself to *take* the Lord's yoke and be willing to *learn* how to walk and work with Him as a *gentle, lowly servant*. The *blessing* of spiritual rest is promised; but so are *buffetings*.

"Buffeting" means to *fight, struggle, beat back, harass*. It means to *make progress by blows*. You make spiritual progress by blows as the world harasses you. Blessings come out of buffetings.

Paul wore the Lord's yoke. He knew blessings out of buffetings. Blessings and buffetings alternate throughout these verses. We'll take them as they come.

2 Corinthians 6:3 We give no offense in anything, that our ministry may not be blamed.

The “ministry” was a great blessing to Paul. He considered it a great calling and a high privilege. The ministry brought scrutiny upon his life. He thus sought to conduct himself in such a way as to not “offend” others so that he could not be “blamed” for stumbling them.

If you put on the Lord’s yoke, you will know the blessing of making a difference in people’s lives for time and eternity. But in your walk and work you will be scrutinized and blamed for offending others. You must be willing to subordinate your life to the Lord and eliminate things that stumble others. It’s a yoke people do not like to wear!

2 Corinthians 6:4 But in all *things* we commend ourselves as ministers of God: in much patience, in tribulations, in needs, in distresses,

2 Corinthians 6:5 in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in fastings;

Again you see the blessing of being a “minister of God.” The blessing comes with these buffetings:

1. “Patience” is *endurance*. There were many things Paul was called upon to endure.
2. “Tribulations” is *afflictions*. Paul knew more than his fair share of afflictions.
3. “Needs” are *necessities*. Paul often found himself without the basic necessities of life.
4. “Distresses” are situations in which there seems to be no way out of escape.
5. “Stripes” were the beatings Paul endured for serving His Lord.
6. “Imprisonments” were a constant reality to Paul.
7. “Tumults” means *riots*. Paul caused riots when he preached the gospel – riots in which people sought to kill him.
8. “Labors” has to do with Paul working to support himself as a minister as well as his unceasing efforts as a minister.
9. “Sleeplessness” can be translated *watchfulness*. The idea is that Paul gave up sleep in order to care for the spiritual well-being of others.
10. “Fastings” are not voluntary. It refers to going without food if necessary in order to be available to help others.

Paul is not complaining! He willingly took upon himself the Lord's yoke to *learn* how to walk and work with Him as a *gentle, lowly servant*.

The buffetings brought him the following blessings:

2 Corinthians 6:6 by purity, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by sincere love,

2 Corinthians 6:7 by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left,

1. "Purity" is worthy motives.
2. "Knowledge" is the clear understanding of God's Word.
3. "Longsuffering" is personal restraint.
4. "Kindness" is goodness in action.

Paul was being taught these qualities as he chose to put on the Lord's yoke. So that you don't get the idea that he was doing this through his own effort, he inserts "by the Holy Spirit" and goes on to talk about four additional blessings:

1. "Sincere love," which is produced by the Holy Spirit.
2. "The word of truth" is the proper application of God's Word in the lives of others as you depend upon the Holy Spirit.
3. "The power of God" is the anointing the Holy Spirit puts upon ministry so it can have its supernatural affect.
4. "The armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left" is a summary of all the spiritual protection that surrounds believers who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

Putting on the Lord's yoke led to a series of stark contrasts in Paul's life:

2 Corinthians 6:8 by honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report; as deceivers, and *yet* true;

2 Corinthians 6:9 as unknown, and *yet* well known; as dying, and behold we live; as chastened, and *yet* not killed;

2 Corinthians 6:10 as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and *yet* possessing all things.

You can meditate on each of these contrasts. They are a good summary of your walk and work with the Lord. They are the buffetings you can expect, and the blessings you will experience.

“Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke *is* easy and My burden is light.” I hope you have a better insight into putting on the Lord’s yoke.

Before you decide to pass on the blessings for fear of the buffetings, you need to know your only other option. If you do not put on the Lord’s yoke, **you will put on the world’s yoke**. You *cannot* be un-yoked. But you *can* be **unequally yoked!**

#2 Put On The World’s Yoke And You Will Encounter The Bondage Of Servitude (6:11-7:1)

The Corinthians had tried isolation. After being corrected in First Corinthians, it appears they went to the other extreme and became too intimate with the world. They were yoked with the world and it was an unequal yoke that needed to be broken.

Paul appeals to them:

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

Many of the believers at Corinth despised Paul. For his part he continued to love and cherish them and to desire their spiritual good, the way a father loves his children. Paul was their spiritual father, having led them to faith in Jesus Christ. He challenged them to open their hearts and receive his counsel as his spiritual children.

2 Corinthians 6:14 Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers...

Paul presents a series of contrasts. These are probably things the Corinthians had become intimate with; things that they were “yoked” with in the world. Paul describes their *attitudes*, their *activities*, their *accords*, their *appetites*, and their *agreements*.

Their attitudes:

2 Corinthians 6:14 ... For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness?...

The attitude of a believer is to do the right thing, no matter the cost. The attitude of the world is to get by or get away with whatever you can. It is to be “lawless” if it is convenient and beneficial.

Their activities:

2 Corinthians 6:14 ... And what communion has light with darkness?

Light dispels darkness. But when believers partake in worldly activities that are questionable at best, their light is extinguished.

Their accords:

2 Corinthians 6:15 And what accord has Christ with Belial?...

“Belial” is another name for the devil. An “accord” is cooperation between nations or kingdoms. There can be no cooperation between the kingdom of heaven and the god of this world.

Their appetites:

2 Corinthians 6:15 ... Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever?

Believers and unbelievers do not share common lifestyles. They have different appetites.

Their agreements:

2 Corinthians 6:16 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.”*

You wouldn’t think of bringing an idol into the Jewish Temple. The idea here is that believers individually and corporately are God’s Temple on earth. Thus you can’t co-exist in binding agreements with unbelievers. This verse applies to things like business partnerships and marriage.

Take all these words together and you get an idea of the world’s yoke. The world pulls you toward lawlessness, into darkness, back to the appetites of the flesh, into binding agreements with unbelievers. All of this is under the authority of the god of this world who is seeking

only to destroy you. The world's yoke is a terrible bondage of servitude to sin..

The Corinthians had gone from isolation to intimacy. Both extremes were unScriptural. What should they do? Paul gives them two “therefore’s” which instruct them – and us – about biblical separation. They are “*come out*” and “*cleanse yourself*.”

“Come out”:

2 Corinthians 6:17 Therefore “*Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you.*”

2 Corinthians 6:18 “*I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the LORD Almighty.*”

“Come out” is a definite decision on your part to **not** be intimate with the world. The key is to understand that the world is “unclean.” The world is a place of disease, decay, and death. It is for your good that you decide to not be intimate with the world! In place of disease, decay, and death, God offers you a better intimacy – intimacy with Him as your Father.

“Cleanse yourself”:

2 Corinthians 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.

God has just promised to dwell *within* and *among* you as His Temple on earth; He has just promised to receive you as a Father into His forever family. The world promises you bondage and servitude. It only makes sense to “cleanse yourself from” any intimacy in the world or with unbelievers that would only contaminate your body and soul. Instead, God offers you a progressive “perfecting of holiness” as you walk and work with Him each moment of each new day.

Conclusion

Separation remains a somewhat confusing principle. You want definite answers: Can I work here? Can I go there? Can I date this person? Who do I marry? Christians still tend to go to the extremes of isolation from the world or intimacy with the world.

The yoke is a good way to apply separation in your life. You are in the world, going to work, going to school, going home, and making decisions in all of those places. Which yoke characterizes you at work? At home? At school? Or wherever you find yourself?

If it is the Lord's yoke, you will be experiencing blessings out of buffetings.

If it is not the Lord's yoke, then "come out" and "cleanse yourself."