

Open Your Heart to God!

2 Corinthians 6:11-7:1

O Corinthians! We have spoken openly to you, our heart is wide open. You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted by your own affections. Now in return for the same (I speak as to children), you also be open. Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? 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."

Therefore "Come out from among them and be separate," says the Lord. "Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters," says the LORD Almighty. Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

In Christ Jesus, whose admonitions and promises both proceed from a heart filled with love for us all, dear fellow redeemed:

"Don't cross the street without looking both ways!" "Don't talk to strangers!" "Don't touch the stove—you will get burned!" Every parent has no doubt said one of those things, if not something similar. Why? We admonish our children because we love them and do not want them to get hurt! Along with such admonitions, however, good parents will regularly remind their children of their love and affection—in effect, promising to be there for them. Those admonitions and expressed promises, both of which flow from parental love, help children feel secure and safe.

"Beware of false prophets!" (Mt. 7:15) "See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ!" (Col. 2:8 NIV) "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him!" (1 Jn. 2:15) Why do Jesus and His apostles give us these admonitions? They do so because God loves us and wants to protect us from harm. God assures us in His Word time and time again of His unending love for us, and He promises to be with us—to protect and provide for us. These admonitions and promises both proceed from His heartfelt love for each of us.

In our text, Paul shares with us several admonitions and promises originally extended to the Corinthian Christians but which apply equally to us. Even as Paul appealed to the

Corinthians to “open” their hearts to him as he shared with them God’s truths, so I would urge each of you: **OPEN YOUR HEART TO GOD!** Obey His commands and rejoice in His promises!

I. Obey His commands

The Corinthian congregation was a troubled congregation! They were divided into several opposing groups. Some of their members were openly involved in immoral activities. Others were participating in pagan religious rituals, assuming that since idols were not real, such participation was meaningless. Highly gifted members of the congregation were lording it over those with lesser gifts. Wealthy members were excluding the poor from their religious celebrations. People were getting drunk when celebrating the Lord’s Supper. Worship services were disrupted as different members vied for the right to address the congregation. False doctrine, including a denial of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead, was being suggested and proclaimed.

Paul, in both his two epistles, addressed these issues. Underlying many of these problems were two forces: the pagan Greek culture, which dominated Corinthian society and unfortunately negatively influenced the members of the Corinthian congregation, and several false teachers within that congregation who were attempting to undermine Paul’s ministry.

Consequently, Paul begins our text by appealing to the members of the congregation, many of whom he knew very well, for they had come to Christ through his missionary efforts. He writes, “O Corinthians! We have spoken openly to you; our heart is wide open. You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted by your own affections. Now in return for the same (I speak as to children), you also be open.” Far from being weak and insincere, as his opponents claimed, Paul points out that he and his partners had always spoken openly to the Corinthians and had only their best interests at heart. Their concerns and uncertainties, Paul stated, were not because of anything he had said or done but because their attitudes had been negatively influenced by the deception and dishonesty of others.

Now, however, was the time for the Corinthian Christians to act and to remedy their sad situation! “Open” your hearts, Paul appealed to them, and do what was needed to restore and preserve their spiritual welfare. What were they to do? Paul stated: “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God.”

Paul uses a marvelous picture here to describe what the Corinthian Christians were no longer to do, but it is a picture we perhaps do not understand today. In Old Testament times, God had warned His people not to yoke together two different types of animals. For instance, if a farmer wanted to plow his field, he should not yoke an ox and a donkey together. Why? Because to do so would endanger the animals and frustrate the work. An ox is large, heavy, and slow, while a donkey is small, light, and quick. They would not be able to pull a plow with any sort of even, joint effort, and the smaller animal could easily be hurt. Years ago, here in America, it was important to have a matched team of oxen or horses to pull a wagon or a plow. Paul used this picture to illustrate the spiritual danger to any Christian being united with an unbeliever. To go with an unbeliever and participate in the worship of a Greek idol—a worship that frequently involved drunkenness and fornication—was contrary to the will and law of God. “What fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness?” There could be no agreement between the temple worship of an idol and the worship of the one true God! Beyond that, Paul was warning the Corinthians no longer to listen to the false teachers who were attempting to undermine his ministry and share with them teachings contrary to Scripture. “What communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial (another name for Satan, who promotes all false doctrine)?” Far from participating with them and being influenced by them, Paul admonished the Corinthians: “Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean!”

My dear friends, we need to apply this admonition in our day! While we do not have temples to Zeus or Apollo in our communities, we are surrounded by an increasingly secular culture based on the principles of humanism. Humanism is a religious philosophy that discounts the concept of God and substitutes in its place the will and desires of men. Man becomes the measure of all things. Matter is declared to be the only thing that is real. Forget about eternal life, for this life is the only thing of which we can be assured. Consequently, the concept of absolute truth, as found in the Bible, is denied. Truth becomes relative, and the tolerance of every opinion becomes the highest value. The worst possible transgression is to judge someone else’s words or actions as inappropriate and sinful! Therefore, if a woman wants to abort her unborn child, it is her decision and no one else’s. No one should suggest there is anything wrong with that! If a man wants to live in a relationship with another man as he would with a wife, it is purely his decision. No one should suggest that this is immoral. After all, who is God to impose His will on man? Such thinking dominates many of the institutions of our country today and influences us all in many ways! Such thinking has deep roots in the schools and universities of our land, in the corporate culture of our country, in the entertainment industry, and increasingly within many Christian churches.

God commands us through Paul, “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers.... Come out from among them and be separate!” Paul is not suggesting that we end all outward associations with people who do not believe as we do, but he is saying that we ought not buy into a culture that suggests religion is of no real value, become involved with a religious community that suggests all religions are the same, or welcome into our midst and support those who teach false doctrine. Out of love for God and concern for our own souls, I urge all of you to **OPEN YOUR HEART TO GOD!** Obey His commands!

II. Rejoice in His promises

Rejoice in His promises! Paul now repeats some of God’s most precious and comforting promises. He takes them from the Old Testament Scriptures and applies them to us. He writes, “As God has said, ‘I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people.... I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the LORD Almighty!’”

At the beginning of time, God established marriage and the Christian family when He brought Eve to Adam and then gifted them with children. Today, despite all the problems that sin can cause to arise, we still recognize family as one of God’s greatest gifts. Even those among us who have faced family troubles still recognize the blessing of family. God, in order to emphasize His great love for and closeness to us, identifies Himself as our heavenly Father. He calls us His children—His sons and daughters! He promises to be with us and never forsake us!

Satan will try to get us to disobey God’s commands and to forget His promises! He will attempt to impress us with the world and to instill within our hearts a deep desire for the riches and recognition of the world. He will attempt to fill our hearts with fear—fear that if we turn away from the world, we will miss out on so many opportunities, or we will be disliked, ridiculed, or even persecuted. But the promises of God, which reflect His perfect love for us, serve to “cast out fear” (1 Jn. 4:18). We do not have to fear when we obey God’s commands, for He will remain with us and bless us. We can rejoice in those promises, for God will never lie to us and will always keep His promises—preserving us throughout this life and giving us everlasting life!

Permit me to provide an example. There was a gentleman who worked for Answers in Genesis at the Creation Museum. His name was Buddy Davis. He began his career in Nashville as a country singer. He worked with some of the big names and was on track to achieve his dreams. But as he became more successful, he realized that the lifestyle of many Nashville greats did not reflect his Christian faith. He decided, out of love for his Lord, to leave Nashville. He took up taxidermy and became fascinated with the whole

subject of dinosaurs. He continued writing and playing music on the side as an enjoyable pastime. As it happens, he met Ken Ham, the founder of Answers in Genesis, who invited him to put his skills as a taxidermist to use by sculpting dinosaurs for the Creation Museum and his musical skills to use by creating albums of religious folk music stressing the creation truths of Genesis. He became more successful and fulfilled than he ever dreamed he might be. He obeyed God's commands, and he is now enjoying the fulfillment of God's promises, having died and gone to be with his Lord this past year!

My dear friends—**OPEN YOUR HEARTS TO GOD!** Obey His commands! I assure you that you will never regret being faithful to your God. Rejoice in His promises! God is faithful and will remain with you to bless you each day until He chooses to take you home to heaven! Amen.

—**Pastor Paul D. Nolting**

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