

Week 7, 2 Corinthians 6:3–7:1

Hook



Main Point: Believers are called to worship God fully, living lives of integrity and purity.

Current Event Gyms count on their members being double-minded, committing to fitness with their signatures and pocketbooks but demonstrating their apathy with their absence. Many gyms have more members than they can accommodate; low-priced gyms such as Planet Fitness present an extreme example. Around 6,500 members call one of the many Planet Fitness gym locations “home” and yet most of the facilities are designed to accommodate only 300 people. With a model banking on members who won’t actually utilize the gym, advertising and arrangement of the facilities are geared toward clients who wouldn’t be classified as gym rats. Many gyms now feature lobbies that look like hotels or restaurants. Planet Fitness has become creative in attracting and retaining non-gym gym-members, offering monthly bagel breakfasts and pizza dinners.¹ Co-founder of Planet Fitness, Chris Rondeau, addresses the fact that 15 percent of Americans love to work out. “The rest of the industry is fighting over that 15 percent,” he says. “We’re going for the other 85 percent.”² The gym’s business model is built for the 85 percent who claim they want to be the 15 percent and yet remain the 85 percent.

Do you have an unused gym membership? What keeps you from going?

How do you hold or have you held yourself accountable to fitness goals?

¹ <http://www.npr.org/sections/money/2014/12/30/373996649/why-we-sign-up-for-gym-memberships-but-don-t-go-to-the-gym>

² <http://www.businessinsider.com/free-pizza-propelled-planet-fitness-gym-growth-2014-3>

***Are there spiritual disciplines to which you have committed but haven't followed through?
What has stopped you from fulfilling your commitment? What habits could you put into place
that might assist you in accomplishing your goal(s)?***

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Book

Main Point: Believers are called to worship God fully, living lives of integrity and purity.

Text Summary: 2 Corinthians 6:3–7:1 Paul opens with the importance of well-grounded character in Gospel ministry. He spends his time arguing against character obstacles because Christians should not put anything in the way of anyone's coming to faith in Christ. Character matters. Paul then moves to exhorting the Corinthians to separate themselves from the false worship of the culture. Christians can't worship God and false idols. Christians can't attach themselves to pagan worship practices and worship Yahweh. God has no rival and commands total worship from His children. Set yourselves apart, Paul says. Christians must walk in holiness by the power of the Spirit, leaving the ways of the world.

2 Corinthians 6:3–13 [Read]

Sub-Point: Believers' lives can either validate or harm the Gospel message.

Verses 3–7 Paul does not want anything in his character or actions to cause harm to his ministry as an ambassador of Christ (5:20), and so he removes stumbling blocks in his life that might cause harm to the Gospel (v. 1). People would certainly make accusations against him, but Paul desires that these allegations would always be baseless. The apostle wanted his life to be a positive advertisement for the Gospel.³

Instead of harming his ministry as an ambassador, Paul gives testimony to the truthfulness of his apostolic ministry through the way he lives his life (v. 4). And so the apostle returns to the subject of suffering. Paul regraded his suffering not as random problems but as God-appointed hardships that built out his credentials as a true apostle.⁴

So Paul lists his credentials in verses 4–5. Paul endured troubles, hardships, distress, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights and hunger. He did all this through God's empowerment.

Moving to verses 5–6, Paul lists nine inner qualities that are necessary to meet the challenges he listed in verses 4–5. These traits are: purity (practical righteousness), understanding (skill in dealing with others), patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, sincere love, a commitment to truthful speech, reliance on the power of God and an equipping with weapons of righteousness.

³ Murray J. Harris, "2 Corinthians" in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Tremper Longeman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1976), 357.

⁴ Murray J. Harris, "2 Corinthians" in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Tremper Longeman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2008), 485.

The phrase in verse 7, “weapons of righteousness,” has some debate surrounding it. Harris notes two options. The phrase means “either weapons that the God of righteousness provides or ‘weapons that consist of personal integrity (or of the Gospel as the Word of Truth.’”⁵ Kruse connects verse 7 to Romans 13:12 to argue that the weapons Paul has in mind are Gospel presentation and argumentation.⁶ In either sense, Paul calls the Christian to defend the Gospel with various means, including the way we live.

What is Paul’s defense for why the Christian’s life is important for Gospel proclamation?

Why would the culture seek to devalue the Gospel’s message?

Verses 8–10 Nine paradoxes are presented in verses 8–10; these are broken into three categories: the kinds of responses that Paul receives in his ministry, a defense of his ministry, and the results of Paul’s labors.

Kinds of responses that Paul receives in his ministry (8–9a). Honor by some and dishonor by others, some slandered him while others praised him, and the designation of either an imposter or a true apostle.⁷

Defense of his ministry (9b–10a). With opposition such as he faced, Paul found it necessary to present defense. The defense comes by way of more paradoxes: He might be unknown in that some did not recognize the validity of his ministry, but he was known by God; though he was dying he yet lived; and despite beatings (being punished), Paul was not killed. The apostle was able to endure these things through the enablement of the God who sustained him.⁸

Results of Paul’s labor. Verse 10 presents the final paradoxes, the results of his work: Although a life such as his would seem to naturally lead to sorrow, Paul always rejoices. Despite his poverty, he continues to pour into others spiritually, thus making many rich. The apostle may have had nothing in the way of possessions and yet he possessed everything (spiritual blessings).⁹

Have you ever experienced joy in times of sorrow? How?

Paul mentioned paradoxes such as “having nothing and possessing everything.” What other paradoxes have you noticed in the Christian life?

⁵ Harris, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 485.

⁶ Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, 131.

⁷ David K. Lowery, “2 Corinthians,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 570.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 570.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 570.

Verses 11–13 In verses 11–13, Paul’s desire is reciprocity within the church, loving and caring for one another as Christ has done for His Church. But the Corinthians couldn’t reciprocate what Paul was giving. They weren’t, as Paul mentions in verse 13, opening their hearts to Paul. Paul explains this in the coming verses.

2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1 [Read]

Sub-Point: Believers must cleanse themselves from every defilement of body and spirit.

Verses 14–16 Paul desires the Corinthians to open their hearts and not withhold their affections from him. But they were hindered from doing so. Why? They were torn between their father in the spirit (Paul) and his opposition (the persistently rebellious, the false apostles at Corinth). In verse 14, Paul labels these individuals as unbelievers.

The problem was clear. The solution? Separate.

The Church is to separate themselves from these unbelievers. False apostles pose a threat to believers who yoke themselves to them; when yoked, the unbeliever’s choices and direction will strongly influence or control the believer’s choices and direction, just like animals yoked together.¹⁰

These verses can be used to defend the complete isolation of Christians from the surrounding culture, however that’s not what Paul is explaining here. Paul argued against such an idea in 1 Corinthians 5:9–10. However, in context, those who are religious unbelievers have the potential to lead believers astray from “sincere and pure devotion to Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:3).¹¹

The questions in verses 14–16 are rhetorical and designed to help the reader identify the chasm between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan.¹² The name Belial is given to Satan in verse 15; it was a word that translates an Old Testament word that means “worthless person.”¹³ In the Greek, it can be translated as “lawless person.”¹⁴

The answer to all of the questions posed should be “None!” Christians belong to God alone. Semi-loyalty doesn’t exist for the Christian. Verse 16 boils it down to worship. It’s helpful to note that the connection to nonbelievers is not meant to imply day-to-day contact.¹⁵

¹⁰ Crossway Bibles, *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 2231.

¹¹ David K. Lowery, “2 Corinthians,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 570.

¹² *Ibid.*, 570.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 570.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 570.

¹⁵ Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, 135.

What are practices that would compromise a Christian's witness?

What does it mean for Christians to be light to a dark world? How does this look practically?

Verses 16–7:1 The background for the use of “living God” is the Old Testament, notably the God of Israel compared to other lifeless idols.”¹⁶ The promise from God in verse 16 is “a recurring promise from God to Israel (Exodus 6:7; Leviticus 26; Jeremiah 32:38; Ezekiel 37:27.)”¹⁷ In verse 17, Paul quotes Isaiah 52:11. The context from the Isaiah passage was for the Jewish exiles to leave the pagan place of exile in Babylon and return to Judea and Jerusalem.¹⁸ This is what God calls each and every Christian to on a daily basis. We must forsake all attachments that conflict with the worship of God and the identity we have as His children. Christians worship God alone because, as Paul mentions here and in 1 Corinthians 3:16–17, the church constitutes the temple of God.

Yes, God welcomes His children back home, but He calls for their obedience. He commands our separation from the surrounding culture for the sole reason that His glory and His worship will not be compromised. Kruse notes, “What greater incentive could there be to abandon all idolatrous practices than knowing there was a welcome from the Lord Almighty who will treat them as His children?”¹⁹ Because God promises this, we can flee our sinful practices. The use of “body and spirit” in verse 1 of chapter 7 “denotes Christians in their total personality, outwardly and inwardly, in their relations with other people and with God.”²⁰ Again, total, not partial, devotion is God’s command. When Jesus calls the disciples he commands them to drop their nets and follow Him. We must leave everything behind in order to take hold of the life God offers us, forsaking all impurity of our flesh.

What comes to your mind when you think of “impurity of the flesh and spirit?”

Why does God command holiness in His people?

What does it mean to pursue holiness?

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Harris, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 488.

¹⁸ Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, 137.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Harris, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 489.

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Took



Main Point: Believers are called to worship God fully, living lives of integrity and purity.

Current Event: How does someone move from being a part of the 85 percent who do not attend the gym to becoming a member of the 15 percent who frequently exercise? The Mayo Clinic suggests the following tips to keep motivated and commit to the gym:

1. *Set goals* – These should be realistic and achievable, short-term and long-term.
2. *Make it fun* – Find exercise routines that you enjoy.
3. *Make physical activity part of your daily routine* – Incorporate activity into your daily routine.
4. *Put it on paper* – Writing down your fitness goals may help you to work toward meeting them.
5. *Join forces with friends, neighbors or others* – Involving those around you is an encouragement and a reminder that you are not alone.
6. *Reward yourself* – Celebrate your success with things such as a new pair of walking shoes or new music to enjoy while exercising.
7. *Be flexible* – Don't fret if you need a short break; the important thing is to get back on track quickly.²¹

What techniques have you used for motivation to commit to your workout routine?

In what ways does success in becoming healthy require a change of mindset?

What has helped you to become singular in your purpose to honor Christ with your life?

Lesson conclusion: The Christian life is not one of compromise. Paul's exhortation to the Corinthian Christians reminds us that God desires us to be set apart for His purposes alone and for His worship and glory alone. In our own lives, we must be ever watchful, making sure we do not bring any offense to the Gospel's message or its messengers. God has graciously welcomed

²¹ <http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/fitness/in-depth/fitness/art-20047624?pg=2>

us in Christ, therefore we must be His ambassadors to the world proclaiming the Good News found in the Gospel.

Challenge

Worship God alone. Don't let your worship of God be compromised. Stay with your eyes on the King and all His glory. Don't look to the right or the left, no matter the temptation. God commands we worship Him and Him only. Are you doing this in your life? Or are you lured away by the enticement of lesser gods? Jesus says we can't have two masters. Let's evaluate our loyalty and make sure we are obeying Him in this regard.

Let the Gospel be offensive. The Gospel message, by its spiritual nature, is offensive to the present world. Scripture says this is natural. However, the Gospel message must be the only offense. We should not add to that offense by acting sinfully or contrary to the way Jesus commanded. This was Paul's message: remove any character or behavioral obstacle that stands in the way of someone's Gospel acceptance.

Protect God's people. Fight for the protection of God's children. How do you do this? Checking in and investing yourself fully in others' lives. Protect one another's holiness and fight against sin. In this way, we protect God's children from attack and remove footholds of the Evil One. We protect each other from sin as another way to remove obstacles for Gospel conversion.