

Kingdom Order for the Family

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2 Corinthians 6:11–7:1 (NKJV) “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.”

Do you find yourself estranged from Christian brothers and sisters with whom you once enjoyed fellowship? Do you find your heart closed to relationships that God has ordained in your life? If so, what has changed?

Paul had founded the church in Corinth on his second missionary journey (Acts 18). Paul invested his life in the believers there and longed to revisit them and enjoy the sweet and loving fellowship they had once enjoyed in Christ. But something had changed and Paul knew it. The Corinthian believers had grown cold toward him and were not as open to him as before. Paul’s heart was “wide open” to them. But their heart was closed shut. They had become “restricted” in their relationship with Paul. While they may have felt that their issue was with Paul alone, Paul made it clear that their issues with him were a direct result of the spiritual compromise in their life. They had become “unequally yoked together” with the wrong crowd.

I have seen how the devil works in the lives of unsuspecting believers. Tragically I have seen people who were on fire for God, humble, and eager to learn, gradually turn cold and indifferent toward their pastor and other godly believers in the church. The often occurs when people allow ungodly and unhealthy relationships to form that alienates and separates them from others. Thus the devil accomplishes his goal of separating vulnerable believers from the teaching, guidance, and protection of godly shepherds and fellow believers who watch out for their soul.

Are your strongest relationships being cultivated outside the church? Do you have a greater sentiment for worldly things than the things of God? Have you built up walls between yourself and godly authorities God has put over you? Do you find yourself avoiding or resisting them? Are you “restricted”? The word for “restricted” means to “be crowded, cramped, in a narrow strait.” The Corinthian believers were “restricted” in their relationship with Paul because they had allowed their affections toward false teachers to crowd him out.

The restriction in their heart was caused by wrong affections. The problem was not that Paul’s affections toward them had changed but that their affections toward Paul had changed. Paul was a faithful apostle in the things of God. However, the Corinthian believers

had formed a competing relationship with false teachers who were intent on alienating them from Paul's input and influence.

The relationships we develop with the wrong people will restrict us from developing and maintaining a proper relationship with the right people. If we make rebellious people our closest allies, then we will find it impossible to be allied with submitted and obedient believers. Wrong relationships will prevent us from being in harmony, in symphony, and in one accord with God-ordained relationships.

God has connected us together for a reason. "Hooking up" with the wrong people will put our life on a different track that leads us away from God's intended purpose for our life. The devil is subtle and tricky. The devil will offer a discouraged and frustrated believer a "shortcut" to fulfillment that leads down a pathway of destruction and loss. Unfortunately, many never see the tragedy ahead until the damage is already done.

Relationships are so important to our future that we must wisely choose our friends. Wrong friendships will even put us at odds with God Himself. James 4:4-5 (NKJV) say, "Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, 'The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously'?" It is our responsibility to make God our Friend. It is also our responsibility to make His friends our friends.

Choosing the right friendships requires selectivity. People who try to make friends with everyone will find themselves having no true friends at all. The reality is that we can't be friends with everyone. We can't go to church everywhere. We can't have several pastors. We can't be accountable to everyone. Therefore we must make sure that the relationships we choose are the ones God has chosen for us. Those relationships follow God's order beginning in the home.

In order to be properly related to the right people, we must avoid anyone who steals our affection toward the right people. Paul warned, "Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers." A yoke is a wooden bar or frame that joins two draft animals together at the neck for the purpose of work. Paul takes this imagery from Deuteronomy 22:10 (NKJV): "You shall not plow an ox and a donkey together." An ox is a clean animal while a donkey is an unclean animal (Deut. 14:1-8). An ox and a donkey have different natures and do not work well together. An ox is strong and cooperative while a donkey is independent and stubborn. In the same way it is wrong for a believer to yoke himself together with the wrong people. Paul listed five reasons that Christians are to avoid wrong relationships. First, we do not share common ground: "What fellowship (shared values and ideals) has righteousness with lawlessness?" Second, we cannot enjoy true Christian fellowship: "What communion (literally, "fellowship") has light with darkness?" Third, we cannot be in agreement on standards of right and wrong: "What agreement has Christ with Belial (the lawless one)?" Fourth, we are heirs of God, not of this world: "What part (assigned share) has a believer with an unbeliever?" Fifth, we cannot approve what the world approves: "What agreement (consenting approval) has the temple of God with idols?"

If you have formed relationships that have "restricted" your ability to form and maintain God-ordained relationships, then break them off now. God said, "Come out from among them. Be separate. Do not touch what is unclean. I will be a Father to you and you shall be My sons and daughters." Choose to be completely devoted to God's purpose. Forsake wrong things that connect you to the wrong people. God has promised that when you break off wrong relationships, He will receive you. Not only that, but He has promised to relate to you as a father does his own son or daughter.

Of course, we will remain “restricted” in our relationship with God and the right people until we take action. Paul said, “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’s promises are before us. So what is restricting you?

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