

## **Monday Evening Bible Reading Group: March 28: 2 Corinthians 6.14-7.1: Some Notes**

This is a fairly self-contained passage which gets very different treatment in the different commentaries: both as regards why it is here and as regards what it means. For some commentators, it is clearly not part of this letter at all, but part of the lost “harsh” letter. For others, it is a bit letter which Paul or someone else had ready and decided to stick in here, rather than waste it. For yet others, it fits perfectly well...and there are no early texts without it.

For some, it is about the on-going theme of protecting the Corinthian Church from false prophets, only pretending to be genuine Christians. For others, it is about church membership, but about excluding compromisers. For yet others, it is a repeat of what 1 Corinthians says about marrying non-believers. For yet others, it is stating the then obvious difficulty of being a Christian where so much of ordinary everyday life involved paganism: jobs, social encounters, civic activity, etc.

If you have the time, it is worth looking at the cluster of Old Testament references that Paul calls on to support what he is saying about our close relationship with God – rescued from slavery, rescued from sin, rescued from exile, rescued from death; and about healthy and unhealthy human partnerships. The search will take you to: 2 Samuel 7:12-14, Ezekiel 37.27, Jeremiah 31.9, Isaiah 52.11, Ezekiel 20.34, Leviticus 26.32, Leviticus 26.12.

As we know both from the Old Testament and from divisions recorded in the story of the Early Church, the special son/daughter relationship with God could be narrowly racist: we are the chosen people, and want nothing to do with other races who were not chosen. In fact both inter-marriage and mixing religions happened a lot – quite often with very bad results, e.g. Solomon’s multiple wives and the “gods” they brought with them. Or Manasseh bringing an idol into the Temple. Paul’s approach is racially (and gender) inclusive. If you are signed up with Jesus, you are God’s chosen child, whatever your nationality or social status. It is striking that when he calls Christians (all Christians) temples of the Lord, the Temple language he use is that which describes the inner sanctuary, the Holy of Holies. Follow back on the quotes and the terminology, and you see gentile female Christians rated alongside King David’ Heir and the Inner Sanctuary which only the male High Priest got to visit. THAT close to God!

In today’s secular society, on the whole we don’t face the challenge of having to mess with paganism; though, for example, we do see reported dilemmas such as air hostesses not being allowed to wear a cross; jobs requiring work on Sunday mornings; bakers being asked to bake a gay marriage celebration cake where their understanding of the Gospel excludes gay marriage; doctors being asked to support abortion where their understanding of the Gospel makes this murder. You will be able to think of other examples.

As regards a Christian marrying a non-Christian (which Paul was clearly against, though not necessarily against a marriage continuing after one partner converted to Christianity), the relaxed view is "s/he goes to church on Sundays while I go to golf. So what?" I express no view; but note that one partner a Christian and the other not is quite common. Mutual respect seems to bridge the gap. Unless things have changed, the wife of the Archbishop of York is not a Christian.

In terms of business or voluntary sector partnerships, I think there are many virtues in a partnership between people of different faiths, or of faith and no faith.