

I first came to know Stephanie Chang, our children's minister, when she was in high school and I was leading Oasis. Since then she has become my colleague and we have grown much closer together. We are transparent with each other and we know each other's families. Back then I couldn't have foreseen that we would become so close, but this is the kind of closeness that all of us should share in church. It's impossible to be that close to everyone, but we should have brothers and sisters in church with whom we can be transparent and vulnerable. We shouldn't need to put on a façade at church. This kind of church, filled with openness and closeness is what Paul describes in 2 Corinthians 6. Previously, Paul told the Corinthians how open he was toward them. He pleaded with them, reassuring them that his intentions were pure, and his ministry was right. Though others, who preached a different message, accused Paul, he demonstrated that his ministry was genuine by reminding the Corinthians of how much he suffered for them. His motives were pure because he gained nothing for himself, yet served with love and truth (vv. 3-9).

In vv. 11-13, Paul begs the Corinthians for intimacy. He wants them to be as open with him as he was with them. First, in these verses Paul demonstrates what the posture of Christian relationships should be. They are built on hearts and mouths that are open. When I led Oasis, the students that I was closest to were the ones with whom I talked through a situation, the ones that opened up to me. I wasn't always able to give advice. In ministry we are not trained to be therapists. But when they opened up to me and shared with me, they demonstrated that they trusted me, and that built a closer relationship. It's not easy, but we must be willing to share and trust each other to get closer. Second, in the original Greek the possessive pronoun "our" in v. 11 is plural, but the nouns "heart" and "mouth" are singular. With this choice of wording, Paul emphasizes that he and his associates are of one mind and one message. So if you feel this church is where you belong, then let's commit to each other for the long term. But if you find another church where you think you belong, then by all means form close relationships there, as long as they preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. Open up your heart somewhere, whether it's here or another church. We preach the same message, just as Paul and the other apostles did.

Verse 14 is often quoted out of context as a reason for not marrying non-Christians. But so far in 2 Corinthians marriage has not been mentioned at all. This passage can be applied to

marriage, but it is primarily about relationships in church and the connection we have with believers. Paul wants the Corinthians not to connect with unbelievers at the expense of the relationships in the body of Christ. He uses the illustration of animals on a plough. If two different types of animals share the same yolk, the plough will not go straight because they will each walk at a different pace. Paul further asks five slightly hyperbolic questions that show why connections with unbelievers cannot replace those we have in church. First, Paul asks about the difference between the righteous and wicked. Christians have moral values defined by God, whereas unbelievers do what is right in their own eyes. Second, he talks about light and dark. Christians see the truth clearly, but unbelievers are blinded by Satan. Third, Paul asks what harmony there is between Jesus and Belial (another name for Satan). Those who belong to God are dissonant with those who belong to the world; they do not sing the same song. Fourth, what do believers and unbelievers have in common? The emphasis should be on the word “have” rather than “in common,” or better yet the phrase should be translated as, “What do believers and unbelievers share?” Unbelievers cannot share in the promises, comfort, hope, and destiny of believers. Fifth, Paul asks what agreement there is between idols and the temple of God. This reminds us of 2 Kings 21, which describes how Manasseh, the king of Judah, sinned greatly by building altars to idols in the Temple. There is no room for connections with unbelievers that edge out those in church. In vv. 16 and 18, God says that we are His and He is ours. Our response to this is not to comingle with the unbeliever (v. 17). This separation is restated in 7:1. We must view the relationships in the body of Christ as more important than those with unbelievers, since we share a common faith, work, and hope. This is not to say we should isolate ourselves from the outside world, but we must remain separate as we go out amongst them. They must see that we are different. We should not be influenced to join with them, but they should be influenced to join with us, to experience for themselves the unity we have in Christ Jesus.