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## White Paper Lessons

### COVENANT LOYALTY AT WORK 2015-10.1

COVENANT LOYALTY AT WORK  
A SOCIAL-RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF 2 CORINTHIANS 6:14-7:1

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## COVENANT LOYALTY AT WORK

### ABSTRACT

The apostle Paul felt compelled to write to the fledging church in Corinth on how they should conduct themselves as Christians in a culture that was accustomed to idol worship. Believers today face important challenges in regard to the level of engagement they can reasonably have with people who are not loyal to Christ above all things. This study will address this issue through a social rhetorical analysis of the primary scriptural text associated with this question, 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1. Seeing how Paul framed the believer's engagement with the world around them can help us know how to apply this teaching to our social context in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This inquiry can help us discern at what level is it appropriate for Christians and non-Christians to join together in various areas of life, particularly in the arena of work. At the conclusion of this study, a framework for believers in the marketplace on closely they can participate in corporate will be offered.

## INTRODUCTION

Helen met Sam in her executive MBA program. Helen is a successful young partner in an investment firm and new believer in Christ. Sam is in the hospitality business and is looking to gain skills to open a hotel after he completes his studies. Throughout their program, Helen and Sam seem to share similar views on business and the need for the business community to do more to alleviate social problems. Halfway through the program, Sam asks Helen to partner with him to start a hotel that would employ handicapped people who have difficulty finding work. Sam thinks that Helen's finance background would complement his hospitality experience and would make for a successful launch of the hotel. Helen likes the idea, but she recently heard a sermon on not being "unequally yoked" with non-believers. She decides to speak to her pastor about it to get his counsel on the proposed business venture. Helen's pastor begins to explain that Paul is concerned in 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1 that Corinthians may lapse back into pre-Christian practices, such as making work an idol that consumes all of our time or finding our identity and security in work and not in God. Paul is concerned that these new believers may become syncretistic, mixing their new allegiance Christ with the idolatrous practices they were accustomed to before their conversion.<sup>1</sup> In the first century, work and life were not separate spheres of activity they impacted each other. Garland remarks that "In the ancient world, people did not compartmentalize their religious, economics, and social lives, and it is anachronistic to think that they did."<sup>2</sup> Paul wanted the believers at Corinth to be mindful in how they participated in the culture around them. He was not advocating separation from the world, but that their engagement in the world would point the world to Christ.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, Publishing Co., 1962). Allen writes, "Before conversion every one of St. Paul's hearers was born and bred in this atmosphere of superstitious terror (of demons), and even after conversion the vast majority of them were still 'used to the idol' and did not cease to believe in demons," p.28.

<sup>2</sup> D.E. Garland. *1 Corinthians, Baker Exegetical Commentaries on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003, 349). See also Fotopoulos, John. *Food Offered to Idols in Roman Corinth: A Social-rhetorical Reconsideration*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003. Print.

<sup>3</sup> I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. John 17:15-18

Today, we live in a culture that routinely compartmentalizes, we claim the separation of church and state or create for-profit and not-for-profit entities to delineate our religious and non-religious business activities, so as to build a wall between the various sphere of our life. Paul understands that all of life is interrelated. Our participation in the marketplace influences our allegiance and loyalty to Christ. Paul is urging these new believers to settle into their new identity as Christians in a culture that does not embrace its values.<sup>4</sup> What Helen needs is guidance from the word of God as to whether or not to join Sam in this new venture? For this we need to look at scriptures from the lens of socio-rhetorical analysis.

Traditional commentaries and research on this passage have made very good contributions to understanding the historical, theological, and grammatical issues that surround 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1. Historical-grammatical exegesis is helpful to understand “what” is being said, but may not give enough information on “why” it is being said. The socio-rhetorical method of interpretation pays acute attention to the framing of the information under consideration and thereby provides clues as to “why” Paul wrote this passage with such intensity, and can lead us to the ultimate reason for its inclusion in the text known as second Corinthians.

The goal in this paper is to establish that this text in its immediate context is an exhortation for the people of God to jealously guard their covenant loyalty to God in the midst of a world that seeks to undermine God’s rightful place as the true lover of his people. It is when the people of God are devoted to him with their heart, mind, and emotions that they can discern what situations or alliances will impact their covenant loyalty to God.

### **Purpose of Writing 2 Corinthians**

Philip Hughes, in his commentary on 2 Corinthians, posits that the general situation which lay behind its composition was as follows: certain false teachers, who claimed to be apostles, had infiltrated the ranks of the

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<sup>4</sup> Ben Witherington writes, “The Corinthians, or at least some of the more well -to-do Gentile males, had still not understood or accepted the full social implications of being in Christ.” *Conflict and Community in Corinth: Socio-rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Kindle Locations 9472-9473). Eerdmans Publishing Co - A. Kindle Edition.

Corinthian church, and in promoting their own claims they had gone out of their way to discredit Paul and call in question the genuineness of his apostleship. This letter, accordingly, was written largely with the purpose of refuting the accusations and insinuations against him with which these intruders had been poisoning the minds of the believers at Corinth.<sup>5</sup>

It is true that this epistle contains a vigorous defense of Paul's apostleship, but to say that this is the central concern of the letter may be overstated. Paul makes his defense in order to persuade the Corinthians to be loyal to him and his proclamation of the gospel so that they will not be swept away by false teachers, who may be indulging their appetites and not asking them to give up their former way of life as new believers (hence his call for them to be holy). The issue at stake is the Corinthians' loyalty to their newfound relationship with God. It is in view of Paul's concern that his converts follow the one true God that motivates him to write this letter. In writing this letter he makes his case that in view of the fact that he suffered for them, he (and ultimately God) should be upmost in their hearts.

Paul writes this letter as a polemic against the false apostles who are trying to steal his place in the hearts of the Corinthian church that he founded. In 2 Corinthians Paul speaks of what he has done and by doing so casts dispersion on the "so-called" super-apostles (11:5) who talked a good game, but did not appear to have the substance behind their claims to leadership in the Corinthian church. By way of contrast we see the following comparisons Paul uses to distinguish his work as sincere and the "super-apostles" as insincere.

11:16-29, Paul suffered for the gospel, "Did the super-apostles suffer for you?"

12:1-5, Paul had visions and revelations, "Did the super-apostles have visions and Revelations?"

12:12, Paul had the signs of a true apostle, signs and wonders and mighty works, "Did the super-apostles have the signs of true apostle?"

12:13, Paul did not burden them financially, "Did the super-apostles take financial support from the Corinthians?"

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<sup>5</sup> Philip E. Hughes, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1962), xvi.

In every chapter of 2 Corinthians there is a reference to Paul's sacrifice and/or affection for the Corinthians.<sup>6</sup> Paul does this to demonstrate that he, not the false apostles, has paid an enormous price to bring the gospel to them out of love and thereby should be embraced by them.

Paul writes this letter as an impassioned plea to the Corinthians to affirm and accept his place in their midst. The work at Corinth was difficult, made more so because of the work of the "so-called" apostles who sought to make a name for themselves by discrediting Paul's work among them. Ralph Martin posits that "the little cameo of Acts 18:9-11 reveals Paul as a truly human being in need of encouragement and cheer."<sup>7</sup> It is difficult to put into words all that Paul went through to establish this church (though Paul makes a valiant effort in this letter). In addition to all the hardships he endured as an apostle, he writes about "the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches"<sup>8</sup> Paul poured his heart into this church and could not bear the thought of his investment in them being ripped away from him. Martin writes that "Paul enforces a single point: the call to reconciliation involves a whole-hearted commitment and pledge of loyalty to him and his proclamation as the "divine apostle."<sup>9</sup>

Paul writes this letter, especially 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1, to highlight the importance of detachment from the world and attachment to God and his people if believers are to make the switch from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light. Paul is afflicted in order to present the gospel to the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 6:3-13, 7:2-4). He is wondering why then are they closed hearted toward him? The answer lies in their divided loyalties with the things of this world.

### **Context of 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1**

It is Paul's intention to make a third visit to Corinth to clear up the confusion caused by the false teachers in Corinth (12:14). The epistle traces Paul's journey to Corinth to confront his adversaries, who apparently call into question his integrity because he changed his plans to visit with them as he looked for Titus, his fellow worker (1:12-2:13). Next, Paul goes on an extended digression (2:14-7:4), describing his suffering as

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<sup>6</sup> 1:6-24; 2:1-5; 2:17; 3:2,5,12-18; 4:2,7-12,16-18; 5:16-21; 6:4-10; 7:2, 12; 8:20-22; 9:4-5; 10:13-18; 11:5,2-29; 12:1-5,11-13,20-21; 13:3,5-6

<sup>7</sup> Ralph Martin, *1,2 Corinthians, Word Biblical Themes* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1988), 16.

<sup>8</sup> 2 Corinthians 11:28-29.

<sup>9</sup> Ralph P. Martin, *World Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1986), 211.

he worked to establish the gospel among the Corinthians with all sincerity. Paul believes that once the Corinthians recall his labor among them, they will wholeheartedly embrace him.

It is in the context of this digression that our pericope is found. It is clear that 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1 is an abrupt, yet relevant, excursus from the plea that Paul is making in 2 Corinthians 2:14-7:4 for the Corinthians to hold him in high regard. 2 Corinthians 2:14-7:4 is the broader context for our passage of study and is an independent unit inserted between 2 Corinthians 1:1-2:13 and 7:5-10.<sup>10</sup> The insertion of 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1 can be seen in the continuity of 2 Corinthians 6:13 for the Corinthians to “widen their hearts” towards Paul and the admonition to “make room in your hearts for us” given in 2 Corinthians 7:2. As will be discussed, the insertion of this unit is to make clear the connection to covenant loyalty and positive affection and identification with God’s people and ultimately God himself. By inserting a call to not be unequally yoked, Paul is invoking the timeless call on God’s people to be holy.<sup>11</sup> Harris posits, “In all these cases Paul seems to have uppermost in his mind the danger that the Corinthian believers constantly faced of idolatrous associations that would jeopardize their devotion to Christ (see 11:3).”<sup>12</sup>

### **Socio-Rhetorical Analysis of 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1**

Looking at this passage through the lenses of socio-rhetorical analysis, we look for structure and meaning in the composition of the text to give insight into the intended meaning of the passage. As such, “Do not be unequally yoked” is the topic sentence for this unit of scripture, the ensuing questions and Old Testament quotations are meant to form an escalating call “to encourage the Corinthians to sever ties with any form of

<sup>10</sup> Murray J. Harris, *The New Testament Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans, 2005).

<sup>11</sup> In Leviticus 11:45 the connection between what God has done for Israel, “For I am the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God” and the call for the people to separate themselves from other entanglements “You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.” Paul, in listing his sacrifices and affection for the Corinthians in chapter 6 and the whole of Second Corinthians 2 makes the similar argument for the Corinthians to separate themselves from the influence that keep them from embracing him (and by association God). In 1 Peter 1:14-16, the call to be holy is picked up again, “As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.” This citation is particularly relevant to the Corinthians as new converts to Christ; they had to wrestle with old passions that sought to divert their newfound faith in God. Ralph Martin, 1988, p.25 offers the following incite, “Here was a company of Christian people recently won over from pagan and pernicious ways (1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 12:2) and always in danger of relapsing into past habits and vices (2 Corinthians 12:20, 21).”

<sup>12</sup> Harris, 513

idolatry and thus become wide-hearted (6:13) in their affection for him (Paul).<sup>13</sup> Through socio-rhetorical analysis we arrive at conclusions that take into consideration the broader implications of the text than the “atomistic” fixation on the “what” of this independent passage. Instead of looking at our central passage as primarily a call to separate from the world<sup>14</sup>, we can find other equally important and perhaps clearer insight into “why” this passage was inserted into the narrative. Harris writes,

Openheartedness to Paul and full reconciliation with him would be achieved only when they made a total break from paganism. Such a break would demonstrate their reconciliation to God (5:20) and their ongoing receipt of God’s grace with benefit (6:1).<sup>15</sup>

### Textual Analysis

Our pericope begins with

“an *opening* exhortation to separate from unbelievers (14a), which is emphasized by five rhetorical questions (14b-16a) and *middle* statement declaring that believers are a temple of God (16b). Then a catena of Old Testament quotes is adduced to demonstrate the affirmation concerning the temple of God (16c-18). *Finally, a closing statement exhorts the Corinthians to embrace these wonderful promises and to finish the job begun at their salvation, removal from the sinful patterns of the world (7:1).*<sup>16</sup>

Some commentators see “the primary thrust to be a call to separate from unbelievers and their way of thinking. Although primarily true, it does not account sufficiently for the presence of the Old Testament citations in 6:16c-18 and the positive summary of these texts in 7:1.”<sup>17</sup> Socio-rhetorical analysis can help clear the way from those who think this is an unnatural interpolation of a Pauline document into the text at the time of editing or those, like G.K. Beale, who seek to link these citations to Israelite restoration theme of reconciliation in 2 Corinthians 5-7. Looking at this pericope as a whole, the progressive texture of the text can lead to an interpretation that the separation from unbelievers Paul speaks about is in regard to former pagan worship

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 492

<sup>14</sup> The call to be separate from unbelievers was not total. As we see in John 17:15, Christ did not ask the Father to take believers out of the world, but that they would not be contaminated by the evil in the world. The separation has to do with loyalty to God, not isolation from the world.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 492

<sup>16</sup> Gregory K. Beale, “The Old Testament background of reconciliation in 2 Corinthians 5-7 and its bearing on the literary problem of 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1,” *New Testament Studies* 35, 4 (1989): 566. *Italics added by author of this paper.*

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 569



practices that the Corinthians used to walk in, hence the various Old Testament citations to be holy so that God will make his dwelling among them. The progressive analysis of this text sees the Old Testament quotes as part of the escalating rhetoric to implore the Corinthians to stay true to God (and his divine messenger Paul). The progression could be seen as follows:

- A. Separation (14a) =>
- B. Renouncing Syncretism (14b-16a) =>
- C. Believers as the true temple (dwelling) of God (16c-18) =>
- D. Exhortation to continue on to full holiness (7:1)

### ***Open – Warning Against Syncretism***

14 Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? 15 What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? 16 What agreement has the temple of God with idols

Beale states that we should not “make a mismatched covenant”<sup>18</sup>

Paul is saying that just as the yoking together of animals of two disparate species to form a team will result in an incongruous mismatch, so close attachments and intimate association between believers and unbelievers will produce an ill-matched union and total dissonance.<sup>19</sup>

The absence of the word “meris” between believer and unbeliever refers to characteristics and interest peculiar to believers, such as concern for the will and glory of God, not as to necessities of life shared by all humans, such as food, clothing and shelter.<sup>20</sup>

Taken as a whole, these five rhetorical questions form a singular, emphatic statement that believers should not mix any elements of their worship to God and the pagan practices around them. The focus is to be separate from anything that interferes or compromises the Corinthian worship of God, not the total separation from the pursuit of human endeavors in which all engage in.

### ***Middle – God Dwelling Among His People***

The six citations in vv16d-18b are treated as a single quotation introduced by an introductory formula

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 498

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 498-499

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 503

and concluded by a closing formula, rather than by six separate formulas. Therefore, it seems best to describe them with D.A. Koch as a ‘citation combination’.<sup>21</sup>

16b For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

This combination of Leviticus 21:12 and Ezekiel 37:27 speaks to the initiation of the covenant of God with his people as a nation and the restoration of the new covenant and the exile.

17 Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you,

This quotation is a modification of Isaiah 52:11. The point of the exhortation in 2 Cor. 6.17 (and hence all the exhortations in the passage) is that *the Corinthians should practice the implications of the New Covenant situation for their sanctification.*<sup>22</sup> They should not “touch” engage in a relationship where the holy people of God are intimately associated with those not loyal to God.

18 and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty."

This quote comes from 2 Samuel 2:14. God chronicles his care for David in 2 Samuel and his blessing for all the people of Israel, in short he promises to be the father who will place the Israelites into his family. The goal of the recitation of the original covenant, the restoration of the covenant, and the call to practice the implications of sanctification demonstrates our kinship with God.

He took David from a shepherd to a prince (8)

He has been with David wherever he went (9, 15)

He cut off David’s enemies (9)

He will give David a great name (9, 16)

Promise of a permanent place of peace (10 - 11)

David would have a peaceful death (12)

God will rise up David’s offspring to succeed who build God a house (12 – 13)

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<sup>21</sup> James S. Scott, “The Use of Scripture in 2 Corinthians 6:16c-18 And Paul’s Restoration Theology,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 56 (1994): 76

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 84

### ***Close – Bring Your Holiness to Completion***

7:1 Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.

We are called to be a representative people for God (Genesis 12:1-3; Exodus 19:1-15). As a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exodus 19:6; 1 Peter 2:9), the Israelites had to consecrate themselves and wash their garments in preparation for God coming among them. This final admonition is meant to encourage the Corinthians to demonstrate their loyalty to God by not only claiming new life in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17), to go all the way to holiness by removing all potential defilements to their new life, their new loyalty in Christ.

### **Implications of 2 Corinthians on Business Relationships**

The application of this text has received extensive treatment by many, but most notably by William J. Webb and Donald G. McDougall.<sup>23</sup> Webb's work in particular is focused on who is the "unbeliever" (1992a) and what is the referent of the "unequally yoked" (1992b). The "who" and the "what" have dominated the research of this passage. This paper seeks to add a third concern as an interpretative key to this passage, "How does a theology of work impact the discussion as to the meaning of unequally yoked?" The view of work as a job or vocation can alter one's understanding of the work context as a place to meet basic necessities or the environment to express one's vocation as an act of worship to God.<sup>24</sup>

Webb declares that business partnerships "move completely outside the realm of issues discussed in Pauline writing...it is highly unlikely that Paul had business partnerships in mind when he wrote about the unequal yoke."<sup>25</sup> He comes to this conclusion because he cannot see beyond the traditional historical-grammatical approach to biblical interpretation. The socio-rhetorical approach allows a person to apply this passage broadly to any endeavor a person might get involved in. The socio-rhetorical approach supplies the "why" answer to this passage, the "why" being that we must avoid compromising our covenant loyalty to God

<sup>23</sup> William J. Webb, "Who Are the Unbelievers in 2 Corinthians 6:14?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149 (January-March 1992):27-44. William J. Webb, "Who Are the Unbelievers in 2 Corinthians 6:14?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149 (April-June):162-179. Donald G. McDougall, "Unequally Yoked: A Re-Examination of 2 Corinthians 6:11-7:4" *The Master's Theological Seminary Journal* 10/1 (Spring 1999): 113-137

<sup>24</sup> Markow, F., Klenke, K. (2005). The effects of personal meaning and calling on organizational commitment: An empirical investigation of spiritual leadership. *International Journal of Organizational Analysis*, 13(1), 8-27.

<sup>25</sup> William J. Webb, "Who Are the Unbelievers in 2 Corinthians 6:14?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149 (April-June):177.

at all cost. When we are duly loyal to God, we then are duly loyal to the community of God, as expressed by Paul’s plea to the Corinthians to be “open-hearted” toward Paul.

In terms of business and ordinary social kindness, Paul would exhort the believers to be good witnesses.

Paul did not ask his converts to come out of the world. Also we note how Paul became “all things to all men.” Rather, Paul warns against compromising the integrity of the faith.<sup>26</sup>

In the Old Testament Joseph (Genesis 41:37-49), Naaman (2 Kings 5:17-19), Nehemiah (Nehemiah 1:11), and Daniel (Daniel 2:48; 6:13) are examples of people who worked with and were promoted by non-believers. In the cases of Joseph and Daniel, it was their fidelity to their covenant relationship to God that brought about their promotions.

### Conclusion

From this investigation it seems that there is scriptural warrant for working and being promoted in a non-Christian company since we have examples of Christians working for non-Christians (Joseph and Daniel as examples) and being promoted in their organizations. The ability to become a partner in a non-Christian firm and starting a company with a non-Christian are not specifically addressed in the Bible and therefore such relationships should be entered into with caution. A partnership in the technical, legal sense can be problematic because in addition to personal liability for one’s actions, partners are liable for the actions of their partners and employees of the business.<sup>27</sup> A partnership in a limited liability company or one that limits a person’s liability to their own actions may be preferable so that a believer’s personal finances and reputation are not attached to another. Starting a business with a non-Christian requires extreme caution because of the potential for values conflicts, which may place you in a situation that compromises a believers covenant loyalty to God.

Table 1:

Item #	Relationship	Decision	Involvement
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<sup>26</sup> Ralph P. Martin, 1986, 197.

<sup>27</sup> QuickMBA: Law and Business. Retrieved on November 18, 2011 from <http://www.quickmba.com/law/partnership/general/>.

1	Work	Yes	A legal and ethical company is required
2	Promotion	Yes	A legal and ethical company that you believe in
3	Partner	Maybe	A legal and ethical company that you believe in and can advocate for
4	Start a Business	Proceed with extreme caution	A legal and ethical company that you believe in and can advocate for and represents your values

The implication for Helen is that she can enter in business relationship with Sam to open the hotel that will hire handicapped employees, but should proceed with caution. Just like commerce, religion, and politics were not separate domains in the first century Mediterranean world of Paul, the current business climate is not on an island where social, political, and especially religious are mutually exclusive. Helen needs to have discussions with Sam as to the purpose of their business. She needs to clearly articulate that her faith and loyalty to God cannot become compromised for business expediency. These conversations have to happen regularly so that Helen and Sam remain on the same page. Like Joseph and Daniel before her, Helen is free to participate in any business relationship that does not compromise her loyalty to serve the mission of God through her work. Even if Sam does not share Helen's faith, he must be willing to operate a business that is compatible with her Christian values.

### Further Research

The call of this paper is to ask new questions of biblical text. In the realm of business, further qualitative research should be conducted on business partnerships and business creation pairing Christians and non-Christians in order to generate theory on relationships that are not explicitly mentioned in the Bible. The lessons learned from this research can be evaluated in light of the exposition of 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1 and provide a guide to Christians as they engage in the business arena.