

“Be Not Unequally Yoked ...”

“... with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with iniquity? or what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Beliel? or what portion hath a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement hath a temple of God with idols? for we are a temple of the living God; even as God said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them, and I will be their God and they shall be my people. Wherefore, come ye out from among them and be ye separate saith the Lord, and touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you, I will be to you a Father and ye shall be to me sons and daughters saith the Lord Almighty” (2 Cor. 6:14-18).

Unequal yokes with unbelievers are clearly forbidden by the Lord. There are five contrasts here to show the incongruity of such yokes. There can be no fellowship between righteousness and iniquity: when righteousness has fellowship with iniquity (wickedness) it ceases to be righteousness. His second question was “What communion hath light with darkness?” There can be no sharing together of light and darkness; light dispels darkness or else darkness displaces light, but both are so opposite to each other it is impossible for light and darkness to exist side by side. Next he asks, “What concord hath Christ with Belial?” “Belial” is obviously a reference to the devil and means a worthless one. “Concord” or harmony is impossible between Christ and the devil; they have opposite goals in everything they do. He then asks, “What portion does a believer have with an unbeliever? what agreement hath the temple of God with idols?” Again, the obvious response is “None”.

What does the prohibition of an unequal yoke involve — all association between believers and unbelievers? When Paul commanded this same church to withdraw from an adulterous brother, he commanded they should not “eat with them”. Still he explained, “I wrote unto you in my epistle to have no company with fornicators, not at all meaning with the fornicators of this world, or with covetous and extortioners or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of this world” (1 Cor. 5:9-10). Clearly it is not association that Paul forbids in his five contrasts in 2 Corinthians 6. The sinner the Corinthians was not to eat with was a brother who was (is) a fornicator, or covetous, idolater, reviler, drunkard or extortioner. The “eating” that was forbidden was the carrying on of social relationships which would thereby allow the sinful brother to conclude he was still in good standing with the church. The “eating” in this social contact was not sinful, per se: but it was forbidden between brethren and one from whom they had withdrawn because of the implications a sinful brother might draw from the continued social association with other brethren. But there is no such implication when a believer eats with an unbeliever. The five contrasts of 2 Corinthians 6 were all designed to show that Christians were never to be in any relationship that caused them to sin or to be in a situation in which they seemed to condone sin because of the yoke they had with an unbeliever.

Some apply the forbidding of an unequal yoke with an unbeliever specifically to a marriage union between a Christian and non-Christian. We would never deny the problems that are certain to arise when a Christian marries a non-Christian, nor the

forfeiting of the joy and bonding that naturally comes when both mates are Christians and “joint heirs of the grace of life” (1 Pet. 3:7); yet the command concerning the unequal yoke of 2 Cor. 6:14-18 is one in which the yoke MUST be broken and from which one MUST come out. I have never met any brother who contended that 2 Cor. 6:14-18 forbids the marriage between a believer and unbeliever to insist that when a believer does marry an unbeliever, he must divorce the unbeliever. To the contrary, when Paul wrote these brethren, answering questions about marriage, he dealt with this very problem: believers married to unbelievers. What did he instruct in such a case? He instructed that when a believer was married to an unbeliever and the unbeliever was “content to dwell with him,” the believer was to remain married to the unbeliever (1 Cor. 7:12f). I know that some explain these instructions as those given to an individual who was an unbeliever when he married but later heard the gospel and obeyed it and his mate did not. This is highly probable (although not a necessary inference); but granting such to be the case, would the Lord’s instructions be any different if one was a believer when he married an unbeliever?

It seems to me that the key to understand 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 command that believers are not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers is the word “unequally”. The apostle does not forbid unions between believers and unbelievers, business associations, work places, etc., but he does forbid an unequal yoke between believers and unbelievers: a yoke in which the believer would be compelled to sin or else consent to some sinful action.

Because God said, “I will dwell in them and walk in them; and I will be their God and they shall be my people” (a frequent statement from the Old Testament), He urged, “Come ye out from among them and be separate saith the Lord and touch no unclean thing ...”

The only way to prevent believers having a portion with unbelievers is that when an association (yoke) causes the believer to do something sinful or seemingly to agree to a sinful thing, is that the believer come out from the association or yoke he is in. The yoke has become an unequal one.

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