

Unequally Yoked Together, 2 Corinthians 6:14 ff. (final version)

Does the following passage forbid Christians to marry non-Christians? And why did God give us this command? The context, from **NIV**:

*14 Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? 15 What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? 16 What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people." 17 **"Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you."** 18 "I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty." 1 ¶ Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.*

All Christians must follow this command: *"Do not be yoked together with unbelievers."* But why did God give us this command? Because God knows the harm done by close association (being yoked) with unbelievers (1 Corinthians 15:33) and because God loves us His commands are always best for us!

I) Definitions of: "do not be," "unequally yoked" and "unbelievers"

"do not be" I'm giving detail attention to this two word Greek phrase (Μη γινεσθε, from v. 14) because it is very important to the understanding of the whole context, especially verse 17. It is translated variously as:

ASV - Become not yoked with others —unbelievers, for

KJV - Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for

NIV - Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For

RSV - Do not be mismated with unbelievers. For

Christians **should not enter** into any type of **yoked** relationships with unbelievers. The reasons are given by the following words through verse 16.

"unequally yoked"

The Greek word translated *unequally yoked* is ετεροζυγουντες. This is the only verse where this word is used.

In English we sometimes take a noun, like *jail*, and use it as a verb by adding a suffix i.e. *jailed*. That is exactly what the Greek did in this case. The Greek for the noun for *yoke* is ζυγος. By changing the ending we get ζυγουντες, meaning *yoked*, the prefix ετερο means odd or unequal. Therefore we have, ετερο-ζυγο-υντες means "unequally yoked".

Yoked means "confinement or restriction of action by being tied to something." *Unequally yoked* means two unequal things tied together, in our case, the Corinthians (or any Christian) and **un**believers!

Definition of unbelievers

Since a believer is one who has a **positive conviction** something is true, then an unbeliever is one who does not have a **positive conviction** something is true or real. Once the object of the belief is defined, we are all believers or unbelievers. In our text the object of the belief is the Gospel of Christ.

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In every other example in the N.T., the group defined as *unbelievers* are persons who have not accepted The Gospel of Christ as being true. We, therefore conclude *unbelievers* in **our** text means the same thing. The Gospel is defined by the New Testament in Galatians 1:6-9, Romans 1:16, 16:25-26 and 2 Timothy 3:16-17, etc.

The very next word in verse 14 is *for*. It is used to express *cause, continuation or to explain* what precedes.

II) Reason for the command:

	<u>RELATIONSHIP</u>		<u>CHRISTIANS DESCRIBED AS:</u>		<u>UNBELIEVERS DESCRIBED AS:</u>	
For:						
What	fellowship (partnership)	has	righteousness	and	iniquity (lawlessness)?	Or
What	communion (fellowship)	has	light	with	darkness?	And
What	concord (harmony)	<u>has</u>	Christ	with	Belial? (the devil)	Or
What	portion (part)	<u>has</u>	a believer	with	an unbeliever?	And
What	agreement	<u>has</u>	a temple of God	with	idols?	

For: we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people." -- Compare 1 Corinthians 3:16.

To summarize: Being yoked with unbelievers is forbidden **for** there is no common ground between the two groups, **for** believers are God's temple and God walks with them and they are His, and unbelievers are not!

There are two groups, Christians and unbelievers, any yoked relationship between the two is forbidden.

What relationships can be included in this command for Christians *not to be unequally yoked*? Many may be considered/debated, but no one can eliminate marriage from this prohibition because marriage is the most "yoked" of all human relationships.

What did Jesus said about marriage in **Matthew 19:4-6**

"Haven't you read that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' [Genesis 1:27] and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? [Genesis 2:24] 6 So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."

Add to this Paul's description of marriage in **Ephesians 5:20 ff.** and we get a clear understanding of the expression "they are no longer two, but one." How could becoming one with an unbeliever in marriage be acceptable to God when no other yoked relationship with an unbeliever is acceptable?

III) What can we learn from the instructions to widows in 1 Corinthians 7:39?

A wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives; but if her husband dies, she is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord. (NKJV)

This is very plain. Any widow may marry anyone she wishes, but only if he is a Christian. I have never heard a creditable alternative to this simple understanding. This one verse has a great deal to do with our understanding of 2 Corinthians 6:14. It would be totally inconsistent to allow the first marriage with an **un**believer and yet limit the second marriage only to a Christian. This verse adds weight to all the information given above and provides unity and closure on the Bible teaching on this subject.

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IV) Conclusion

We have proven beyond a reasonable doubt Paul is here commanding Christians not to marry non-Christians!

Some have asked: "If you sin and become yoked to an unbeliever, what then?" If a Christian marries an unbeliever they **are truly** married! **Then** they must follow God's law for married couples when only one is a Christian, 1 Peter 3:1-7, 1 Corinthians 7:8-16.

V) Some Objections answered.

In all my years of discussing this subject I have only heard two objections to the conclusion just stated:

- 1) "I know several people who are Christian today, because they, as a non-Christian, married a Christian.
- 2) Verse 17 "come out from among them." This would contradict other passages on remaining married.

1) I, too, know godly Christians who were **unbelievers** when they married a Christian. We must thank God for every soul saved!!! Praise God for His love for us and His desire and ability to work for good in all things for those who love him, Romans 8:28.

But we must be logical, the fact that a soul is saved following an action in violation of our passage in no way effects the actual teaching of this passage.

2) Repeating verse 17: "***Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you. 18 I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.***"

It is said 2 Corinthians 6:14 does not include marriage because if marriage is included then "we are told here (v. 17) to leave our spouse" which contradicts other scriptures which tell us to remain married to our spouse, Matthew 19:4-9, 1 Corinthians 7:12-14, etc. This position is not correct for two reasons:

First, Verse 17 is a general statement about **all** relationships where Christians are **yoked** with unbelievers. This verse (like all other verses in the Bible) is to be followed without exceptions **unless** other **scriptures** exist that specify an exception to this generalization.

As always we must read all the verses, in context, on a given subject before reaching a conclusion. 1 Peter 3:1-7 and 1 Corinthians 7:8-16 give us many details about a Christian being married to a non-Christian and give us the only exception to the general rule to "come out from any yoked relationship with unbelievers and be separate."

Second, the objector recognizes the truth that verse 17 is telling all Christians who are yoked to unbelievers to come out from that relationship and touch no unclean thing. But, at the same time, the objector says it is acceptable to God to become one, through marriage, with the same unclean thing we are not supposed to touch! Which falsely accuses God of total inconsistency.

In reality, God condemns the action of marrying a non-Christian for the same reason He condemns all other **yoked** relationships with unbelievers but applies different rules of separation to this one relationship of being yoked **in marriage** with unbelievers. We know this **only** because of 1 Peter 3:1-7 and 1 Corinthians 7:8-16.

"Please dear God give us a greater love for the truth, so that the curse of 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12 does not befall us!"
Submitted in Christian love, eagerly seeking any comments, questions or criticisms. Cliff Baird