

BELIEVERS SHOULD MARRY BELIEVERS

Series Title: Believers Should Marry Believers

Topic: Religious concerns when choosing a mate

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Message #1: BELIEVERS SHOULD MARRY BELIEVERS

Bible Verses: 2 Corinthians 6:14 – 7:1

Introduction:

People all over the world are becoming more familiar with beliefs, cultures and customs from faraway places. TV, radio, the Internet and other **mass media** expose us to new ideas and customs. **Modern transportation and communication** help people who live in distant lands to meet each other and exchange ideas.

This increased contact between different kinds of people has made people open to new religious ideas and practices. One of the signs that the members of the world's religions are more accepting of each other is the growing number of people who are marrying people who belong to a different religious faith. Buddhists, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Christians, atheists—many of them are marrying each other. Is this a good thing?

What does the Bible say about intermarriage between two people of different religions? The Apostle Paul was one of the great Apostles (missionaries) of the ancient church. Here is what he said about the relationships Christians have with unbelievers:

Explanatory Notes:

Some important Bible verses on Holiness and Separation from the world (from the CEV translation):

Romans 12:2:

Don't be like the people of this world, but let God change the way you think. Then you will know how to do everything that is good and pleasing to him.

Ephesians 4:17-24 (see also Colossians 3:1-10):

As a follower of the Lord, I order you to stop living like stupid, godless people. Their minds are in the dark, and they are stubborn and ignorant and have missed out on the life that comes from God. They no longer have any feelings about what is right, and they are so greedy that they do all kinds of indecent things.

But that isn't what you were taught about Jesus Christ. He is the truth, and you heard about him and learned about him. You were told that your foolish desires will destroy you and that you must give up your old way of life with all its bad habits. Let the Spirit change your way of thinking and make you into a new person. You were created to be like God, and so you must please him and be truly holy.

James 4:4:

You people aren't faithful to God! Don't you know that if you love the world, you are God's enemies? And if you decide to be a friend of the world, you

*Do not be yoked (tied) together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and **Belial****? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? 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."*

"Therefore come out from them and be separate," say the Lord. "Touch no unclean thing and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters," says the Lord Almighty.

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.

2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1, NIV

Paul uses **four word-pictures** in these verses to illustrate the vast difference between believers and unbelievers.

1. WILL YOU AND YOUR SPOUSE PULL TOGETHER OR PULL APART?

The first picture is of an unequal yoke. Paul says, "Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers." A yoke is a harness that is tied to the necks of a pair animals so that they can plow together. But if two different-sized animals are yoked together, the larger animal will be faster and stronger than the smaller animal. They will pull apart instead of pulling together. The animals will go in circles instead of a straight line, and their work will not be done.

Paul says that close spiritual relationships (such as marriage) between believers and unbelievers are like the harmful, inefficient decision to put different-sized animals in a yoke. **They will only go in circles.** They will not cooperate or work well together. The result will be disappointing and even disturbing.

make yourself an enemy of God.

1 Peter 1:14-18:

Behave like obedient children. Don't let your lives be controlled by your desires, as they used to be. Always live as God's holy people should, because God is the one who chose you, and he is holy. That's why the Scriptures say, "I am the holy God, and you must be holy too."

You say that God is your Father, but God doesn't have favorites! He judges all people by what they do. So you must honor God while you live as strangers here on earth. You were rescued from the useless way of life that you learned from your ancestors.

1 Peter 2:8-9:

You are God's chosen and special people. You are a group of royal priests and a holy nation. God has brought you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Now you must tell all the wonderful things that he has done.

1 Peter 4:3-5:

You have already lived long enough like people who don't know God. You were immoral and followed your evil desires. You went around drinking and partying and carrying on. In fact, you even worshiped disgusting idols. Now your former friends wonder why you have stopped running around with them, and they curse you for it. But they will have to answer to God, who judges the living and the dead.

1 John 2:15-17:

Don't love the world or anything

God desires that marriage be a blessing to both partners. He wants our marriages to be harmonious and efficient. By forbidding marriage with unbelievers, God seeks to protect us from harm and offer us the gift of a more united and enjoyable partnership.

2. WILL YOUR MARRIAGE MIX THINGS THAT DO NOT BELONG TOGETHER?

The second word-picture is about the danger of mixing things that don't go together, things like oil and water. Paul points out four sharp contrasts between believers and unbelievers.

- A. **First**, he calls the behavior of Christians 'righteousness' and the behavior of non-Christians 'wickedness.' Of course not every Christian lives as they ought to live. And of course not every unbeliever is as evil as they could be. But Paul expects Christians to be distinct in their moral lives because the Holy Spirit has begun his work of transforming them and making them holy.
- B. **Second**, Christians live in the light of God's truth but non-Christians walk in the darkness of spiritual ignorance.
- C. **Third**, Christians follow Christ but non-Christians ultimately follow Belial (Belial was a name used for Satan in biblical times).
- D. **Finally**, Christians believe the good news of Jesus, whereas non-Christians do not believe the gospel.

By using these contrasts Paul emphasizes that believers and unbelievers are **opposites**. They are "like night and day" or like "oil and water"—they don't belong together. So they shouldn't form the kinds of close, binding relationships that deny the vast spiritual differences between them. Marriage is one of those relationships, because in marriage two people become one. But how can two become one if they are completely different in their beliefs, values, behavior and eternal destinies?

3. WILL YOUR MARRIAGE HELP YOU TO LIVE

that belongs to the world. If you love the world, you cannot love the Father. Our foolish pride comes from this world, and so do our selfish desires and our desire to have everything we see. None of this comes from the Father. The world and the desires it causes are disappearing. But if we obey God, we will live forever.

3 John 11:

Dear friend, don't copy the evil deeds of others! Follow the example of people who do kind deeds. They are God's children, but those who are always doing evil have never seen God.

A biblical example of the negative consequences of marrying an unbeliever:

"As Solomon got older, some of his wives led him to worship their gods. He wasn't like his father David, who had worshiped only the LORD God." (1 Kings 11:4).

A true, sad story about a woman who married an unbeliever:

Mark Twain [a famous American writer from the late 19th century] was not a Christian, nor did he claim to be when he began courting (dating). Olivia Langdon came from a professing Christian family that would not allow their daughter to marry an unbeliever. Twain pretended to be a spiritual seeker who needed the support and prayers of Olivia's family in order to clean up his life.

AS GOD'S TEMPLE?

The third word-picture Paul uses is about buildings. He reminds the Corinthian Christians that they are God's holy temple. The city of Corinth was filled with giant and beautiful temples to pagan gods. These temples were very popular. The people of the city regularly worshiped in these temples. But the Christians in Corinth only met in private homes.

Paul tells these small, humble groups of believers, "You might not have a large temple. But you yourselves are the temple of God! God lives in your hearts. He is present when you worship together."

Since believers are God's temples, joining them in marriage to people who worship other gods is like bringing idols of other gods into a temple dedicated to the true God. It is disrespectful and offensive to God.

4. WILL YOUR MARRIAGE HELP YOU TO BE SPIRITUALLY CLEAN?

The last picture Paul emphasizes is that sin is like dirt. Dirt leaves stains on pure and spotless garments. In the same way, sin puts ugly stains on our souls. Paul says, "Touch no unclean thing....let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit."

We know that if we do not take care to be physically clean, we will become ill. That is why we wash our face and hands regularly and take good care of our bodies. If we get dirty, we wash ourselves.

Jesus has cleansed us by his blood. He has washed our spirits and made us spiritually clean. Jesus warned us that certain teachings and practices are stains that make us dirty and cause us to become spiritually ill.

Paul knows this. He knows that our closest friends and family members have the greatest power to tempt us to sin. But Paul wants us to "keep clean" so that we can bring joy

Twain wrote to his mother after the engagement, "My prediction was correct. Olivia said she never could or would love me – but she set for herself the task of making a Christian of me. I said she would succeed, but that in the meantime she would unwittingly dig a matrimonial pit and end by tumbling into it – and look! My prediction is fulfilled."

Influenced by Olivia's prodding, Twain presumably converted. Olivia's family then permitted the marriage. But was Twain's conversion an illusion? His religious feelings that he expressed in love letters to Olivia disappeared as soon as they were married. After their wedding, Twain ridiculed his wife's beliefs and her devotion.

Soon Olivia's faith dimmed. Eventually she forsook her faith in Christ altogether, and a deep sorrow deluged her life. Mark Twain loved Olivia, but he broke her spirit. He later said, "Olivia, if it comforts you to lean on your faith, do so." But she sadly replied, "I cannot. I do not have any faith left."

It is easy to let our feelings cloud our minds and deceive us into thinking that we can convert non-Christians through a romantic dating relationship or a marriage. But often the reverse occurs. The unbeliever causes the believing partner to stumble in his or her faith. If we truly care for our spiritual health and for the conversion of unbelievers, we will be cautious about whom we date and whom we seek to marry. We will not allow ourselves to be fooled by manipulative persons like Mark Twain.

to God and enjoy the clean life that God offers us. So Paul warns us to separate ourselves from any person that threatens to contaminate and infect our lives with sin.

Conclusion:

Friends, we ought to love unbelievers. We ought to befriend them and show mercy and kindness to them. We ought never reject them or hate them. God made each of them and he loves them very much.

But God calls everyone to believe in him. He expects everyone to follow his Son, Jesus. God sets apart as his own everyone who believes in Jesus. We belong to him. We have seen that when believers marry unbelievers they have many problems and they offend God. Guide your steps with this wisdom! Guide your children's steps with this advice from God's words! Avoid the troubles that come with intermarriage. Discover the many blessings that God showers us when we believe in Jesus and do what he wills.

[Prayer]

Message #2: GOD SET US APART FOR HIMSELF

Bible Verses: Exodus 19:3-6, 1 Peter 2:9, CEV

In our last message we saw that God tells believers to marry other believers. He tells them not to marry members of other religions. The apostle Paul used four word-pictures to describe marriages between believers and unbelievers.

- He said such marriages are like when farmers use tie two animals of different sizes with a yoke (harness) to plough with. The animals will only go around in circles.
- Paul also described such marriages as a mixture of things that don't belong together. Believers and unbelievers are too different from each other. They should not be married.
- Paul also said believers are God's holy temple. Marrying an unbeliever would be like introducing a false god into the temple of the true God.
- And Paul also said that unbelievers are spiritually

But, don't many unbelievers live good and moral lives?

Dutch theologian and statesman **Abraham Kuyper** balanced two important teachings with regard to the way Christians ought to think about unbelievers.

The first teaching was called **Common Grace**. This teaching is that God gives many blessings to both believers and unbelievers. For example, Jesus says, "God makes the sun rise on both good and bad people. And he sends rain for the ones who do right and for the ones who do wrong" (Matthew 5:45). Common grace also includes the good qualities unbelievers possess: All people retain the image of God in them, even if that image is severely disfigured and distorted by sin. They are capable of demonstrating many good qualities and virtues. They can also be very skillful and intelligent.

Kuyper's other teaching was about '**Oppositeness**.' This teaching is that believers and unbelievers are two different kinds of people. **Believers** are born again. We are different. We have different beliefs and practices than other people. We have a different eternal home. We belong to the church and we are citizens of the kingdom of God. **Unbelievers** are spiritually lost. They are not born again. They do not share Christian beliefs or values. They do not have the Holy Spirit living in them. Their future is different from our future if they do not put their faith in Jesus Christ. They belong to the world, the kingdom of Satan.

unclean. Believers that marry unbelievers become spiritually contaminated.

Paul’s emphasis on the differences between believers and unbelievers repeats a teaching that runs through the whole Bible. God did not want his people to worship other gods. God wants his followers to be **holy** – set apart from the rest of the world for the purpose of worshipping and serving him with complete devotion.

When God formed the nation of Israel this is what he told the people:

You saw what I did in Egypt, and you know how I brought you here to me, just as a mighty eagle carries its young. Now if you will faithfully obey me, you will be my very own people. The whole world is mine, but you will be my holy nation and serve me as priests.

Exodus 19:3-6, CEV

The Apostle Peter used similar words to describe the Christian church:

“you are God’s chosen and special people. You are a group of royal priests and a holy nation. God has brought you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Now you must tell all the wonderful things that he has done.”

1 Peter 2:9, CEV

God sets people apart from the rest of the world so that they will serve and worship him. God knew that if one of his followers married a person who worshiped idols, he or she would be tempted to worship those idols also. So he has always told them not to marry people from nations that worshiped false gods.

But this teaching raises an important question: What should be our relationship with unbelievers? Do we need to run away if we see an unbeliever coming near us? Must we form separate Christian communities so that

Common Grace emphasizes our similarities to unbelievers, what we have in common.

Oppositeness emphasizes our differences. If we keep these two doctrines in true perspective, they will help us to be balanced in our relationships with unbelievers:

The idea of Common Grace helps us:

- To appreciate the good in unbelievers.
- To learn from the wisdom God gives in common to all. All truth is God’s truth, no matter through whom he speaks.
- To find common ground in our work and political relationships.
- To avoid a rash attitude that rejects unbelievers and the good that they do.
- To avoid thinking we are superior to other people just because we are Christians. The truth is that we are all sinners. The difference between Christians and non-Christians is not that we are better, but that our sins have been forgiven.

The idea of Oppositeness helps us:

- To recognize that the church is distinct from the world.
- To evaluate the ideas of unbelievers cautiously, in the light of God’s Word.
- To remember to be holy – to live as “a chosen people. You are a kingdom of priests, God’s holy nation, his very own possession. This is so you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the

we will never come in contact with non-Christians ever again? No, of course not. We have the sacred obligation to take the good news of Jesus to unbelievers in the hope that they will become Christians too. In a different letter the Apostle Paul admits that it is impossible to avoid non-Christians altogether. He writes,

In my other letter I told you not to have anything to do with immoral people. But I wasn't talking about the people of this world. You would have to leave this world to get away from everyone who is immoral or greedy or who cheats or worships idols.
1 Cor 5:9-13, CEV

Jesus ate with sinners without becoming a sinner. Our goal should be to become like him. We should always show genuine Christian love and interest for people who don't have the joy of knowing Jesus like we do.

But a person who marries an unbeliever has lost sight of his or her Christian identity. We are followers of Jesus Christ. We are the temple of the living God. We are called to shine as the light of Jesus in the darkness. We are called to be pure and holy. When we join in an intimate, spiritual union with someone who doesn't worship our God, we mix two things that do not belong together. Persons who try to do this will never achieve the strong spiritual bond that God intended for marriage.

In addition, many practical problems arise for people who marry persons outside the faith.

- Many unbelieving spouses lead the believer away from the Christian faith. Just as one person can't serve two masters, so one married couple can't serve two gods faithfully.
- Many unbelieving spouses make it difficult for the believer to attend church or practice the faith.
- When children are born, parents often disagree about which religion they will raise their children to believe. Consequently their children suffer personal and spiritual losses and become confused about God.

darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9).

- To emphasize evangelism and remember that all people are spiritually lost without Jesus.
- Not to overemphasize our similarities with unbelievers. We are different and we should not be ashamed to be different (Romans 12:2).

Someone listening to your message may already be married to an unbeliever. They may be thinking, "What about me? It's too late for me to change my mind. Should I divorce my unbelieving mate? Or should I stay with my spouse?" You can encourage them with good news from the Bible. In 1 Corinthians 7 the Apostle Paul writes,

If your wife isn't a follower of the Lord, but is willing to stay with you, don't divorce her. If your husband isn't a follower, but is willing to stay with you, don't divorce him. Your husband or wife who isn't a follower is made holy by having you as a mate. This also makes your children holy and keeps them from being unclean in God's sight.

If your husband or wife isn't a follower of the Lord and decides to divorce you, then you should agree to it. You are no longer bound to that person. After all, God chose you and wants you to live at peace. And besides, how do you know if you will be able to save your husband or wife who isn't a follower?

This is a great comfort and encouragement to believers who

- Their marriage also affects their relationships with their extended families and with the entire community. Marriage is not just a 'private' choice. It is a decision that affects our relationships with the many people around us.

CONCLUSION

If you are considering marriage with someone who does not share your religious beliefs, I urge you not to bring trouble on yourself by disobeying God and marrying outside of the Christian faith. I urge you to discover all the goodness God meant for your life. **God has a better plan for you. He wants to see you marry:**

- someone who shares your deepest convictions
- someone who shares your desire to do God's will
- someone who will pray with you and pray for you
- someone who will agree with you about the religious instruction of your children
- someone who will attend worship with you and give glory to God
- someone who will read, study and obey the Bible with you
- someone who loves Jesus as much as you do
- someone who will understand love as Jesus does and will love you with the love of Jesus

It is my hope that if you are considering marriage, that you will marry a person through whom God blesses you in these many ways.

are married to unbelievers.

Why?

- It tells them that even if they made the wrong choice of marrying an unbeliever, there is hope. If they have become Christians after they married, but their spouses have not, there is hope. He will transform their marriage. These believers shouldn't view their marriages as evil relationships which anger God. Rather, they are relationships in which believers can be faithful to God and have a sanctifying effect on their families.
- It also tells them that if they are pressured into a divorce by their unbelieving spouse for religious reasons, they don't need to worry that their divorce is a sin that will deprive them of God's blessing.

No matter what wrong choices we make, we are never beyond the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. We can't undo the past, but we can turn to him for forgiveness for the past. And he gives us hope and guidance for the present, too!