

Tough Topics: Unequally Yoked to an Unbeliever

What Does God's Word Say?

2 Corinthians 6:14-18 (Lexham English Bible with my emphasis)

14 Do not become unevenly yoked with unbelievers, for what participation is there between **righteousness** and **lawlessness**? Or what fellowship does **light** have with **darkness**? 15 And what agreement does **Christ** have with **Belial**? Or what share does a **believer** have with an **unbeliever**? 16 And what agreement does the **temple of God** have with **idols**? For we are the temple of the living God, just as God said,

“I will live in them and will walk about among them,
and I will be their God and they will be my people.” (Lev. 26:11)

17 Therefore “come out from their midst
and be **separate**,” says the Lord,
“and **do not touch what is unclean**, (Isaiah 52:11)

and I will welcome you,
18 and I will be a father to you,
and you will be sons and daughters to me,” (2 Samuel 7:8)
says the all-powerful Lord.

Notes:

v.14 “unevenly yoked”. A singular usage in the NT. A derived noun is used in Deuteronomy 22:10. See also Leviticus 19:19 for a similar image.

v.15 Belial—transliterated from the Hebrew for “worthless man”. See Proverbs 16:27 and 1 Samuel 25:25. While it could be a proper name, in the OT this is a name for someone who is *base, crass, cruel, and foolish*.

Questions

1. What comparisons does Paul make? What is Paul's answer to his (rhetorical) question?
2. What is the strongest argument or the final comparison?
3. In the citation from Isaiah 52:11, what is meant by being “separate” and touching “no unclean thing”? What does this have to do with the topic Paul is addressing?

N.B. Paul also says in 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 and 6:19 that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, whom we have from God.

1 Corinthians 7:10-16 (Lexham English Bible with my emphasis)

10 To the married I command—not I, **but the Lord**—*a wife must not separate from her husband*. 11 But if indeed she does separate, she must remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife. 12 Now to the rest I say—**not the Lord**—*if any brother has an unbelieving wife and she consents to live with him, he must not divorce her*. 13 And if any wife has an unbelieving husband and he consents to live with her, she must not divorce her husband. 14 For the unbelieving husband **is sanctified** by his wife, and the unbelieving wife **is sanctified** by the brother, since otherwise your children are unclean, but now they **are holy**. 15 But if the unbeliever leaves, let him leave. The brother or the sister is not bound in such cases. But God has called us in peace. 16 For how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?

N.B. To understand the phrase, “not the Lord” one must read it *in the context of verse 10*. Paul is citing a command of Jesus and going on to add a further note. Paul wants to make clear that this didn’t directly come from Jesus, but it would be a misinterpretation to discount what Paul says as “his opinion”. In other words, Jesus doesn’t address the exact situation of someone coming to faith in a marriage and the other not. But Paul does!
Justin Martyr here.

Questions

1. What does Paul mean by “sanctifying/making holy/purifying” the other? How might that play out in a real-life situation?
2. In what circumstance would Paul permit a separation?

1 Peter 3:1-6 (Lexham English Bible with my emphasis)

3 In the same way, wives, be subject to your own husbands, **so that even if some are disobedient to the word**, they *may be won over without a word by the conduct of their wives*, 2 when they see your respectful, pure conduct. 3 Let your adornment not be the external kind, braiding hair and putting on gold jewelry or putting on fine clothing, 4 but the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is highly valuable in the sight of God. 5 For in the same way formerly the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves by being subject to their own husbands, 6 like Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose children you have become when you do good and are not frightened with respect to any terror.

Questions

1. What might Peter mean by “even if some are disobedient to the word”?
2. How might the husband be won over by their wives? What tactics are employed?

Note: I think the principles works both ways, but Peter is working within the God-created distinctions between male and female.

What is our response to the Word of God?

The Takeaways

- God *condemns* marriage of a Christian to an unbeliever.
- If one finds oneself in this situation, God *can* use it to bring the other to faith.
- However, the Christian should not debase oneself through this union. If the spouse **refuses to convert**, steps must be taken to preserve one’s faith.
- God DOES NOT advocate divorce, but He does not advocate apostasy or a debased life. Hard steps and tough choices.

Practical Steps to Take

- *Who we date matters greatly.* Who we *allow* our children to date (and how they date) matters greatly. There is a lot at stake.
- Very often, spouses might find themselves in “unequal” situations. This might not be unbeliever/believer, *but could be one who attends worship and another who believes generally, but doesn’t want to go to worship.* Think of a spectrum. In these cases, the believing/active spouse **MUST** encourage, exhort, pray for, model, and re-engage. What is NOT acceptable is to adopt a “live and let live” approach, **which will be disastrous for both parties.**
- **Choices we make matter.** Choices with time, and money, and focus tell a story. There are three books: **The Good Book**, the **Check Book**, and the **Date Book** that reveal *what we love the most* and *where our heart is*.