

YOKED TOGETHER

This is a test. A method of equalization. It will be conducted in this fashion. One of the partners will stand high on a chair. The other will stand on the floor beside the chair. They will clasp hands, tightly, as befits those who are preparing to face any adversity together, united as one forever. Unfortunately, the two cannot accomplish much while on two separate levels. So, upon our mark, both will pull sharply. Ready! Get set.....

God's response to the concept of people who are not equal being together was pretty direct. His instructions to the Israelites preparing to enter the promised land were grim. A summary of these instructions would be; "Go into the land and possess that which I have promised you. But when you do, don't mix with any of the inhabitants of the land. Don't talk with them. Don't socialize with them. Don't have them for friends, neighbors, husbands, or wives. Don't even keep their animals or possessions. In fact, Israel, my desire to keep you for myself is so strong, I will make this commandment. When you enter the land where I want you to dwell, kill every living thing in your path. Spare nothing. Even the children and animals must die. You are a people that I have separated unto myself. Keep it that way." Israel knew by then to take Him seriously. They had brought a remnant of Egypt with them the first time around. This mixed multitude had brought their gods, their unbelief, and their homesickness for Egypt with them. The faith of the whole people was diluted and their commitment weakened. When they faltered, not only did they perish in the wilderness, but some of the heirs of the promise also died with them.

We know that this Old Testament narrative makes God seem awfully, well, jealous! That's because He is. He said He was a jealous God. He views the church in the wilderness and the church in the New Testament as His bride. If we have His Spirit in us, He has joined Himself to us because we made vows to Him. Serious ones! To have and to hold from this day forward, in sickness, in health, until death unites us completely. He wants us to walk with Him in unity. To keep ourselves pure for Him. Even in this arrangement, it is important that the covenant partners be equally yoked. He is God. He can be nothing but holy. So we are also commanded to be holy.

It is interesting that God does not view marriage as a threat to His sovereign right to our love. Paul notes that it is better to remain alone, if possible, in order to stay focused on the work of the Kingdom. Yet, God said, knowing well His own loneliness for a companion, that it was not good for a man to be alone. So, a "completer" was made for Adam. Joined in holy matrimony, in a husband and wife relationship, the man and woman become one in their souls and in the eyes of God. In this way, a competitor is not brought into the relationship between the man and his God. Rather, the man is simply made more complete and the bride of Christ becomes richer. This assumes, of course, that after the two become one flesh, that new person is still married to Christ.

There is a real danger in being unequally yoked. If we marry an unbeliever and try to fit them into our yoke, the results are often painful. If a pair of oxen pull a load together, they will only travel as fast as the weaker of the two. The point of a yoke is to combine the strength of the two and thereby make the load lighter for both. But if the pair is pulling in different directions with different goals, the strength of both is negated. Nothing is accomplished by either and both are destroyed in the process.

The same thing happens if we become one flesh, but have two distinct and separate sets of dreams, goals, and desires. In James 1:8, we are told that a double minded man is unstable in all his ways. How can we dedicate ourselves to the service of God when half of who we are refuses to join with the body of Christ? When, in the exchange of souls, our partner brings enmity against God into our combined flesh? There is a chain of authority that governs the marriage relationship under God's

plan. This is the children being subject to the wife, who is subject to the husband, who is subject to the pastor, who in turn is subject to God. It works well if everyone in the chain understands the protection and peace it affords. The responsibilities inherent in that authority structure do not change when a part of the chain is not willing to be in subjection to God. It simply becomes a nightmare to implement. We quickly find that the worldly concept of authority to which we may have joined ourselves has little interest in God's concept of authority.

Really though! All you are contemplating is a "date" with an unbeliever for a little fun. They are not committed to God quite like you are, but what harm can come from it? After all, you are not discussing marriage. The worst that you see happening is that you might cheat your date's future spouse out of a small piece of your date's heart and defraud them to a certain extent. Here is where the choice occurs. Here is where your commitment to God comes into play. Certainly, your date will not share your views on what is good, pure, or holy entertainment. Nor, in today's world, is it likely that they will share your ideas on purity or proper conduct on a date. If the physical part of the relationship escalates by mutual consent, or even not by consent, and a child is conceived, the choices are grim. Enter into a lifetime commitment with an unequal and probably unwilling partner, leave your dreams and goals behind for the twenty years needed to raise a child alone, adopt the baby out and pray for time to ease the pain and still the unanswered questions, or have the baby killed. This is arguably a pessimistic outlook on casually taking the Spirit of God within you into intimate proximity with a sinful nature. Even if none of this happens, if you desire to eventually join with another in marriage, and serve Christ as one body, it is a good idea to keep company only with those whom you would be willing to marry. After all, you might "fall in love" with them.

Let us be a little more optimistic. There is a chance that through your love and your example you will win the unbeliever to Christ. This is what is usually given as a justification for seeking fulfillment outside the body of Christ. We have talked with many pastors, watched many lives, and read many accounts in the scriptures. The results are inevitably the same. If the believer willingly enters into the relationship with the unbeliever, it is usually the unbeliever who wins the struggle. Lot fellowshipped with Sodom and his daughters who married outside the promise, died with the city. Samson was blinded well before they put his eyes out. Examples of these relationships abound. But the saddest example in the Bible is that of Solomon. Secure in the blessings of God, he sought out and married strange women that served other gods. From that point on, his writings record a steady decline in his relationship with God. Note the joy of the lovers in the Song of Solomon, his allegory of the relationship between God and His bride. Observe his regrets as he instructs his children in the Book of Proverbs. Most important, weep for him as he acknowledges the bitterness, futility, and emptiness of his life in Ecclesiastes. I don't know how far he allowed his wives to lead him into idolatry, but neither do we find it recorded that any of them turned to the worship of Jehovah.

Gravity has an interesting way of bringing things, spirits, and people down. Did Solomon hope to introduce the women he loved to the love of Jehovah? Probably! Do any of us, when we are walking in the power of the Holy Ghost, dream for a minute that choosing to give our affection to an unbeliever might cost us our relationship with God? Probably not! Yet, God commanded us to not be unequally yoked for the same reason He gave the command to the children of Israel. In the test of the chair, is it likely that the one living or standing on a higher level will succeed in pulling the one below up? Or is it more likely that the one on top will descend to the level of the lower half of the partnership?

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What do you think about God's instructions to the Israelites regarding possession of the land? Would a loving God demand such a thing?
2. When ten spies communicated their fear and unbelief, millions died never seeing the promise of God fulfilled. If you knew it might cost you your promised land, would you seek out conversation with unbelievers? Associate with them? Play with them? Marry them?
3. How do you feel about a wife or husband having total control and possession of you? Is that concept biblical? How does it compare with current attitudes toward marriage?
4. If God has committed to you and you have committed yourself to a relationship with Him, to what extent do you think He will go to keep you? What might He do to other would be lovers? If you start to leave Him, what might He do you? What are some of the things He did to try to keep Israel faithful?
5. As you consider marriage, would you prefer that your intended partner has kept themselves pure for you? Do you think they might be hoping the same thing?
6. If two are to become one flesh, and they will eventually, yet they serve different masters, which half of the union will probably dominate, the carnal or the spiritual? Why?
7. Have you ever been in a three-legged race with your leg bound to your partner's? Ever tried then to go in opposite directions? Is that a fair example of being yoked in a relationship or marriage with an unbeliever?
8. Is it possible to just have fun with someone on a date with no romantic entanglement occurring? Is it possible to just have fellowship together for the sake of fun without calling it a date? If it is, isn't it possible to have the same fun without separating from the group and doing the activity alone as a couple?
9. How important do you think "falling in love" is to a good marriage?
10. If you have ever fallen in love and survived it, do you think the choices you made while under the influence were wise?
11. Of all the believers that you have known to become involved in relationships with unbelievers, what percentage of them have won the unbeliever to a relationship with Christ? What about the reverse?
12. If you could enter into a relationship with anyone on earth that you chose, is there any one person you would choose, knowing that by doing so, you would then spend eternity away from God?
13. Knowing the percentages, why would you choose to gamble with your eternal home by becoming yoked unequally?