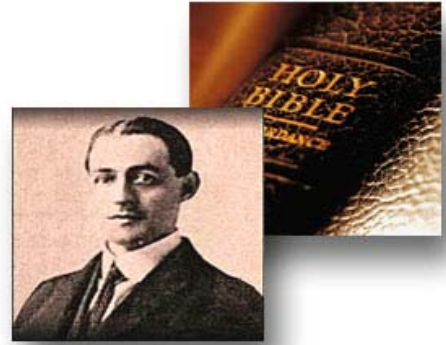


A Call to Separation

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NOTE: Scripture references have been updated from KJV to ESV



"Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?" (2 Cor. 6:14-18).

This passage gives utterance to a Divine exhortation for those belonging to Christ to hold aloof from all intimate associations with the ungodly. It expressly forbids them entering into alliances with the unconverted. It definitely prohibits the children of God walking arm-in-arm with worldlings. It is an admonition applying to every phase and department of our lives—religious, domestic, social, commercial. And never, perhaps, was there a time when it more needed pressing on Christians than now. The days in which we are living are marked by the spirit of compromise. On every side we behold unholy mixtures, ungodly alliances, unequal yokes. Many professing Christians appear to be trying how near to the world they may walk and yet go to Heaven.

"Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers." This is a call to godly separation. In each dispensation this Divine demand has been made. To Abraham Jehovah's peremptory word was, "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house." To Israel He said, "You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you lived, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you. You shall not walk in their statutes." (Lev. 18:3) And again, "And you shall not walk in the customs of the nation that I am driving out before you, for they did all these things, and therefore I detested them." (Lev. 20:23) It was for their disregard of these very prohibitions that Israel brought down upon themselves such severe chastisements.

At the beginning of the New Testament we are shown the forerunner of Christ standing outside the organized Judaism of his day, calling on men to flee from the wrath to come. The Savior announced that, "The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out." (John 10:3) On the day of Pentecost the word to believers was, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation." (Acts 2:40) Later, to the Christian Hebrews Paul wrote, "Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured." (Heb. 13:13) God's call to His people in Babylon is, "Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues" (Rev. 18:4).

"Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers" This is God's word unto His people today. Nor does it stand alone. In Rom. 16:17 it is said, "I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them." In 2 Tim 2:20 we read, " Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable." 2 Tim. 3:5 speaks of those "having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power," then it is added, " Avoid such people." What a word is that in 2 Thess. 3:14, " If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed." How radical is the admonition of 1 Cor. 5:11, "But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one."

"Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers." We are fully persuaded that it is disregard of this commandment, for command it is, which is largely responsible for the low state which now obtains so generally among Christians, both individually and corporately. No wonder the spiritual pulse of many churches beats so feebly. No wonder their prayer-meetings are so thinly attended; Christians who are unequally yoked have no heart for prayer. Disobedience at this point is a certain preventative to real and whole-hearted devotion to Christ. No one can be an unshackled follower of the Lord Jesus who is, in any way, "yoked" to His enemies. He may be a truly saved person, but the testimony of his life, the witness his walk, will not honor and glorify Christ.

"Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers." This applies first to our religious or ecclesiastical connections. How many Christians are members of so-called "churches," where much is going on which they know is at direct variance with the Word of God—either the teaching from the pulpit, the worldly attractions used to draw the ungodly, and the worldly methods employed to finance it or the constant receiving into its membership of those who give no evidence of having been born again. Believers in Christ who remain in such "churches" (?) are dishonoring their Lord. Should they answer: "Practically all the churches are the same, and were we to resign, what could we do? We must go somewhere on Sundays," such language would show they are putting their own interests before the glory of Christ. Better stay at home and read God's Word, than fellowship that which His Word condemns.

"Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers." This applies to membership in Secret Orders. A "yoke" is that which unites. Those who belong to a "lodge" are united in solemn oath and covenant with their "brother" members. Many of their fellow-members give no evidence of being born again. They may believe in a "Supreme Being," but what love have they for God's Word? what is their relation to God's Son? "Do two walk together, unless they have agreed to meet?" (Amos 3:3) Can those who owe their all to Christ, both for time and eternity, have fellowship with those who "despise and reject" Him? Let any Christian reader who is thus unequally yoked get from under it without delay.

"Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers." This applies to marriage. There are but two families in this world: the children of God, and the children of the devil. (1 John 3:10) If, then, a daughter of God marries a son of the evil one, she becomes a daughter-in-law to Satan! If a son of God marries a daughter of Satan, he becomes a son-in-law to the devil! By such an infamous step an affinity is formed between one belonging to the Most High and one belonging to His archenemy. "Strong language!" Yes, but not too strong. And oh the bitter reaping from such a Sowing. In every case it is the poor Christian who suffers. Read the inspired histories of Samson, Solomon, and Ahab, and see what followed their unholy alliances in wedlock. As well might an athlete, who attached to himself a heavy weight, expect to win a race, as a Christian to progress spiritually by marrying a worldling. Oh what watchfulness in prayer is needed in the regulation of our affections!

"Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers." This applies to business partnerships. Disobedience at this point has wrecked many a Christian's testimony and pierced him through with many sorrows. Whatever may be gained of this world by seeking its avenues to wealth and social prestige, will but poorly compensate for the loss of fellowship with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ. Read Prov. 1:10-14. The path which the disciple of Christ is called to tread is a narrow one, and if he leaves it for a wider road, it will mean severe chastenings, heartbreaking losses, and perhaps the forfeiting the the Savior's "Well done" at the end of the journey.

We are to hate even the "garment"—figure of our habits and ways—spotted by the flesh (Jude 23), and are to keep ourselves "unspotted from the world." (James 1:27) What a searching and sweeping word is that in 2 Cor. 7:1, "Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." If any occupation or association is found to hinder our communion with God or our enjoyment of spiritual things, then it must be abandoned. Beware of "leprosy" in the garment. (Lev. 13:47) Anything in my habits or ways which mars happy fellowship with the brethren or robs me of power in service, is to be unsparingly judged and made an end of—"burned." (Lev. 13:52) Whatever I cannot do for God's glory must be avoided.

"For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols?" How explicit and emphatic are the terms used there! No excuse whatever is there for failing to understand the terms of this exhortation, and the reason with which it is supported. "Fellowship, communion, concord, part, agreement" are so plain they require no interpreter. All unions, alliances, partnerships, entanglements, with unbelievers are expressly forbidden to the Christian. It is impossible to find within the whole range of Holy Scripture plainer language on any subject than we have here. Righteousness, unrighteousness; light, darkness; Christ, Belial—what have they in common? What bond is there between them?

The contrasts presented are very pointed and searching. *"Righteousness"* is right doing; *"unrighteousness"* is wrong doing. The unerring and only standard of right doing is *"the Word of Righteousness."* (Heb. 5:13) By this alone is the Christian's life and walk to be regulated. But the worldling disregards and defies it. Then what "fellowship" can there be between one who is in subjection to God's Word with one who is not? "Light" and "darkness." God is light (1 John 1:5) and His saints are "the children of light." (Luke 16:8) But the children of the Wicked One are *"darkness."* (Eph. 5:8) What communion, then, can there be between members of families so dissimilar? *"Christ"* and *"Belial"*—what concord can there be between one to whom Christ is everything, and one who despises and rejects Him?

"For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people."

How blessed is this! First, we have the exhortation given, "Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers"; second, the reason adduced, *"For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness?"*; third, the inducement proffered. This is a divine promise, and it is striking to note it is a sevenfold one: 1) "I will dwell among them," 2) "and walk among them," 3) "And I will be their God," 4) "And they shall be My people," 5) "And I will receive you," 6) "And will be a Father to you," 7) "And you shall be My sons and daughters."

"I will dwell among them," is fellowship; *"and walk among them,"* is companionship; *"and I will be their God,"* is relationship. First, in them, then for them; and *"if God be for us, who can be against us?"* (Rom. 8:31) *"And they shall be My people,"* is ownership, acknowledged as His. *"And I will receive you,"* means being brought to the place of experimental and conscious nearness to God. *"And will be a Father to you"* means "I will manifest Myself to you in this character, impart to your hearts all the joys of such." *"And you shall be My sons and daughters"* means, that such godly separation from the world will afford demonstration that we are His *"sons and daughters."* Compare Matt. 5:44.

"Says the Lord Almighty." This is the only time the divine title *"Almighty"* is found in all the twenty-one Epistles of the New Testament! It seems to be brought in here for the purpose of emphasizing the sufficiency of our Resource. As another has said, "Let any Christian act on the Command of separation given in 2 Cor. 6:14-17, and he will find his path so beset with difficulties and so tending to arouse the hostility of all, that if his eyes are not kept fixed on the Almighty God who has thus called him out, he will surely have a breakdown." But let it be noted that these promises are conditional, conditional on obeying the preceding exhortations. Yet if the heart lays hold of this blessed inducement, then obedience to the command will be easy and pleasant.