



“What knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?” (I Corinthians 7:16).

### **Living With a Non-Christian**

**Central Truth:** The Christian can influence an unbelieving spouse for Christ.

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*“Thou shalt not plow with an ox and an ass together”* (Deuteronomy 22:10). Why did God place that statement in the Holy Scriptures? He wanted to protect the animals. They are not matched in size or in gait. Being yoked together would work a hardship on both. But what does that have to do with a study on “Living With a Non-Christian”? It is a practical illustration of the command God gave in II Corinthians 6:14: *“Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers.”*

God required strict segregation in marriage among the ancient people of Israel. But their segregation was based on religion rather than race or culture. God strictly forbade intermarriage with people who did not worship the God of Israel. Ezra, *“a ready scribe in the law of Moses”* (Ezra 7:6), required the men of Israel who had married pagan wives to divorce them (Ezra 10:19). That is how serious God is about mixed-religion marriages. Your children and grandchildren need to hear that.

### **Why Are There So Many Mixed Marriages Today?**

Some Christians marry non-Christians in willful disobedience to the will of God. Second Corinthians 6:14-16 is very clear that there is a division of spirit in such a mixed marriage. The Christian and non-Christian have as much in common as righteousness and unrighteousness, light and darkness, Christ and Satan, a believer and an infidel, or the temple of God and idols.

Think about that!

Many marriages are based more on physical appearance, personality, status in society, and financial security than on the guidelines from God. No wonder the number of divorces is equal to the number of marriages. “*Can two walk together, except they be agreed*” (Amos 3:3)? God's blessings are on the marriage which joins a man and a woman in Him.

**Some Christians marry one they thought was a Christian but was not.** Each should make sure about the other's relationship with Christ before a serious dating relationship occurs. Careful marital counseling, which should precede any commitment to marriage, will determine each partner's relationship with God. Only when one is convinced that the other is truly devoted to Jesus should marriage be considered.

Sometimes two non-Christians marry and one is converted to Christ afterwards. Thus they become unequally yoked. In such an instance, the Christian should consider the non-Christian partner a private “mission field” and work toward that mate's conversion to Christ. A believing partner “sanctifies” the unbelieving partner by bringing him or her under the influence of Christ in the believer's own life (I Corinthians 7:12-14). The unbelieving partner can be led to Christ by the Christian lifestyle of the believer (I Peter 3:1). Set that as your goal if you are married to a non-Christian.

### **Are There Bible Examples of Mixed Marriages?**

The Bible records several occasions when a God-fearing person married one who did not share his commitment. Problems always followed.

**Moses** married Zipporah, whose father was the prince of Midian. She did not understand his commitment to God, however. When he left Midian to deliver Israel from bondage in Egypt, she took a sharp stone and circumcised her son. Casting the foreskin at Moses' feet, she said, “*A bloody husband art thou to me*” (Exodus 4:25). The Septuagint records her words as, “*The blood of the circumcision of my son hath stopped me.*” She disappears from the pages of sacred history.

**Hosea** married Gomer, a lovely young woman who was enamored with the gods of Jeroboam. For a while their marriage was good. Then she became a prostitute who roamed the streets of their city, selling her body. Only God knows the pain Hosea bore; however, God knew, for Israel had prostituted herself by turning from Him to other gods. Even though Hosea purchased Gomer from the slave market and returned her to his house, their marriage was scarred forever.

**Solomon** took three hundred women as his wives (many of them taken to seal a treaty between his nation and another country). Beside them he had seven hundred concubines, most of whom were pagans. He built temples for their gods on a hill near Jerusalem, a place that is called “the hill of shame” to this day. And here is the tragic outcome of his mixed marriages: *“It came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God”* (I Kings 11:4). That is the consequence of marriage to a mate who does not share your faith in God. Beware!

### **Why Is a Mixed Marriage Forbidden?**

A mixed marriage causes a breach between husband and wife. One is spiritually alive; the other is spiritually dead. One is concerned with the things of God; the other is concerned with the things of the world. They live by two different standards. The lifestyle of one contradicts that of the other. God's prophet asked the question, *“Can two walk together, except they be agreed?”* (Amos 3:3). Of course they cannot. So for the sake of harmony in the home, both should be Christians.

A mixed marriage is an affront to the holiness of God. *“Ye shall therefore be holy, for I am holy”* (Leviticus 11:45). If you mix pure water and impure water, what happens? Is the impure water made pure in the mixture? No; the pure water is made impure. That is why Paul insisted that a Christian must live like a Christian. If an unbelieving partner is content to live with a Christian partner, they should continue together. But if the unbeliever is unwilling to live with the Christian, he should be permitted to leave; a believing brother or sister is not under bondage to the marriage covenant under such cases (I Corinthians 7:12-16). Be holy to God in your marriage relationships.

**A mixed marriage has a bad influence on the children.** Read Nehemiah 13:23-27. Children were born to Jewish men who had married women of Ashdod, Moab, and neighboring pagan countries. Their children could not speak the language of the Jews and did not worship the God of Israel. It is impossible to keep the influence of a non-Christian parent from having power over his children. For the sake of children yet unborn, keep your marriage Christian. A mixed marriage puts unnecessary pressure on each partner. It is like running a three-legged race; neither is free. To give in to the desires of the other violates your own convictions. To expect harmony in such an arrangement is an exercise in futility.

## **What Burdens Are Associated With a Mixed Marriage?**

There are ideological difficulties: goals and standards are not the same. There are influential difficulties: the non-Christian mate is a constant downward pull on the Christian. There are spiritual difficulties: the Christian knows that the one he loves is not going to heaven. There are social difficulties: one may become jealous of another who has a devoted Christian partner. There are mental difficulties: one may fantasize on his problems instead of enjoying the blessings of a Christian marriage, disturbing his peace of mind. There are personal difficulties: one may experience pride in feeling superior to his non-Christian partner.

Who would expect a marriage to be happily blessed of God under such circumstances? Make your marriage Christian.

## **What Can One Do to Correct a Mixed Marriage?**

First, drop any thought of leaving. The Christian has no right to divorce the non-Christian as long as the non-Christian is willing to maintain the marriage (I Corinthians 7:12, 13). Next, settle any sense of guilt that “I married outside the will of God and am living in sin.” Not so. Commit your situation to God and receive His forgiveness (Romans 8:1).

Then, do not put God between you and your mate by neglecting him, making him feel you choose religion over him, making church the basis of an argument, resenting your mate for not being a Christian, or by assuming responsibility for your mate's unbelief. On the other hand, be the best mate you can be: Godly, loving, faithful, affectionate, a willing sexual partner, and cooperative in all of his activities except those which God has specifically forbidden.

Instead, set as your goal in life to lead your mate to Christ as I Peter 3:1-7 teaches you to do. Do not try to “talk” your spouse to faith, for that causes friction. Live your testimony day after day through all circumstances. Make the spouse's life a joy and relate your action to your obedience to God. Pray that God will bless your partner, meet your personal needs, and increase your love. Use your best efforts to reflect the spirit of Christ and wait upon God to call your mate to Christ.

Never let church activities come between you and your mate. Participate in them as much as you can, but remember that your supreme loyalty is to Christ, not to the church. It is important that you attend church, but it is more important that you lead your mate to faith in Christ. Church attendance is one way you can testify of your faith, of course. Neglect of the

church is a sure witness to your mate that Christ is not very important in your life. But you must use sanctified common sense, as God gives you the ability to discern, regarding your church and your non-Christian spouse.

Respect your mate, even in the state of unbelief. Your loved one is made in the image of God. Concentrate on the good qualities you see, and magnify those points of strength in your thoughts.

But all the while remember this: unbelief is a choice, and each person is responsible for his relationship with Jesus Christ. If you are filled with the Holy Spirit in daily affairs, God will use that to speak to the heart of your loved one. God will do the convicting of sin and the calling to Christ. You cannot. Live and speak the testimony of Christ in appropriate ways, and God will certainly do His part.

Never rest content until your partner in marriage is saved. The best way to correct a mixed marriage is to lead your partner to faith in Jesus Christ.

Do you feel sorry for a person with an unbelieving mate? What a built-in mission field that person has! Paul was chained to a pagan soldier twenty-four hours each day. The result was that there were “*saints . . . in Caesar's household*” (Philippians 4:22). It can happen in your home, also!

### **Questions for Discussion**

1. Why do we call the marriage of a Christian and a non-Christian a “mixed marriage?”
2. What does Deuteronomy 22:10 have to do with a mixed marriage?
3. Why are so many Christians involved in mixed marriages?
4. How did Solomon show the problems in a mixed marriage?
5. Why does God forbid us to enter purposefully a mixed marriage?
6. What effect does a mixed marriage have on the children?
7. Why is guilt often felt by the believing partner in a mixed marriage?
8. How is the unbelieving mate “sanctified” by the believer?
9. How can an unbelieving mate be brought to faith in Christ by the believing partner?
10. What can you do to make your marriage more Christian?