

Equally Yoked

By

Allon Maxwell

*“Do not be mismatched with unbelievers.
For what partnership have righteousness and iniquity?
Or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?”
(2 Cor 6:14-15)*

FOREWORD

We live in a world which Jesus would regard as “like the days of Noah”. (Luke 17:26-30) It was a time when the whole human race had become so wicked that God said *“the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart.”* (Genesis 6:5-6)

God sent a flood to destroy that world. Only Noah walked with God. And only Noah and his family survived. (Genesis 6-8; 2 Peter 3:20)

When I was a youth, marriage was universally considered VERY important. People were expected to marry. People who lived together without marriage were described as “living in sin”. People who went to Church were expected to marry within their denomination. It was especially scandalous for a Protestant to marry a Catholic. Jews became social outcasts if they married “out”, especially to Christians.

Living together without being married was completely socially unacceptable. It made people regard you as less reliable. It could affect your social standing and your employment. There were often double standards in some communities, which allowed men to “sow their oats”, but in the main, sexual purity before marriage was considered important for both boys and girls. That also could affect your employment, especially if a “wronged” girl’s relatives had any influence with your employer! Unchastity was acknowledged by the vast majority as sin. Men expected to marry virgins. Girls who were known to be unchaste often had difficulty finding husbands.

All of that has its foundation in the standards taught in the Bible.

Of course there were many who did commit sin in secret – but they knew it was sin, they had guilty consciences, and they kept it carefully hidden from the public gaze. It was not acceptable for men to openly flaunt their sin, or sully the reputations of girls they had seduced, by revealing their names in public. If it did become public knowledge, it attracted a social stigma. Girls were given labels like “teaser” or “slut”, or “whore”, and boys were called “rakes” or “seducers”, or “womanisers”. Girls who had been seduced were described as “wronged”, and “fallen women”, and “damaged goods”. Girls, who had been seduced under promise of marriage, could sue for substantial damages if the engagement was broken. Mothers warned their daughters to steer clear of known womanisers. And the daughters listened! Landlords would have been reluctant to rent homes to people who wanted to live together without marriage. They were called “defacto marriages”. Children born to such relationships were classed as “illegitimate”, with no “rights of inheritance” unless formally acknowledged by their fathers in a will.

Today all that has changed. What was called “sin” and “forbidden”, is now unashamedly practiced as normal. A very large number of men and women now openly live together without marriage. And parents are both accepting it and even approving it as “normal. Many countries, including our own, now have laws which forbid “discrimination” which breaches the “rights” of those who choose to live together without marriage.

This paper is written to reinforce those old fashioned Biblical values for those who still care enough to believe that God has got it right about marriage. It is important that WE agree with God and get it right for ourselves, before it is too late.

Failure to live by God’s standards for marriage is but one of many sins which, together, are contributing to the destruction of our society, and our environment. We are now irreversibly on the road to the War of Armageddon, which will destroy this current world in war and fire. If we want to survive the fire, we must become like Noah, who God found to be *“a righteous man, blameless in his generation”*. (Genesis 6:9 RSV)

Equally Yoked

*“Do not be mismatched with unbelievers.
For what partnership have righteousness and iniquity?
Or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?”
(2 Cor 6:14-15)*

DECISIONS

The most important decision you will ever make, is whether or not you are going to make a lifetime commitment to follow Jesus, the Son of God. You cannot sit on the fence about this decision. There is no middle ground. You are either committed TODAY – or you are NOT. To postpone this decision TODAY is actually a DECISION TODAY that you are NOT a follower of Jesus TODAY!!!!

When you make your decision to follow Jesus, it comes with some other obligations that cannot be ignored, if you want to be really serious about your commitment. These should be carefully considered, and made part of “*counting the cost*” before you make your commitment. (Luke 14:26-35)

One of those is your choice of a marriage partner. This is the SECOND most important decision you will ever make. If you are a believer, you will want only the VERY BEST for both you and your future wife. (or husband) And that means that you will not only choose a believer to be your wife, (or husband) but you will ask God to help you choose the RIGHT believer for YOU! It follows that if you decide to mate with an unbeliever, you will be REJECTING what God says about this! That is called UNBELIEF!! And it will affect your discipleship in ways which place your salvation in serious jeopardy.

This article is written to help you understand what God wants from you, and why it is important to listen to Him about this.

DOES GOD HAVE A MARRIAGE PARTNER FOR YOU?

Jesus did say that some people are called to remain single “*for the sake of the kingdom of heaven*”. (Matthew 19:12) However that is NOT the normal condition. Only a very few are called to celibacy. Jesus and John the Baptist were amongst them. But the vast majority of Bible characters who are reported as amongst the faithful, were married. God Himself says that it is “*not good for man to be alone*”. (Genesis 2:18) He designed our bodies for marriage. It is the means by which he perpetuates the human race. And consequently, He not only expects that we will marry, but blesses us when we do.

WHERE IT ALL STARTED

Marriage was invented by God at the beginning of time. In the Garden of Eden, He decided that the first man, Adam, needed a companion.

*"It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him."
(Genesis 2:18)*

Eve wasn't just any old helper selected at random. There was no "pot luck" involved! God said that He would make her FIT for Adam. And that means that she was created with unique qualities which made her specially suited to Adam.

STANDARDS

Adam and Eve were "joined by God" in what the Bible calls a "one flesh" relationship. That is the Bible's way of saying that they were to be united in an exclusive sexual relationship, where no third parties were permitted to intrude, either before or after marriage. God sets VERY high standards about this. These standards are designed to ensure the uniqueness of the relationship, and the purity of the bloodline within the family. In other places in the OT, we are told that both men and women are expected to keep themselves sexually pure, until they enter their marriage together as virgins. God regarded this as so important that the Law He gave Moses included a death penalty for those who committed the sin of "*Fornication*". The Hebrew words used are the same as those for PROSTITUTION. It doesn't matter that there is no money involved. As far as God is concerned, a girl who sleeps with a boy before marriage is behaving like a prostitute. And the boy who sleeps with her is treating her like a prostitute.

WHY VIRGINITY IS IMPORTANT FOR THE UNMARRIED

It affects your eternal future! Fornicators will be judged by God. (Heb 13:4) They cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. (1 Cor 6:9-10; Rev 21:8; 22:15)

We live in a generation where almost everybody has forgotten about the importance of this. Most people seem to think that God has got it wrong, and that these restrictions deny them their rightful "pleasures". They are wrong! Terribly, terribly wrong! And ignorant. Sadly, sadly ignorant! If we BELIEVE God, we should understand that these laws are designed to ensure that we get the VERY BEST out of life.

Christians whose marriage is blessed by their unique exclusive relationship, will tell you how glad they are that they waited for marriage before engaging in sex. They have learned that in a marriage where neither has ever had any other sexual partners, there can be a wonderful closeness at every possible level - physical, emotional, and spiritual, that has to be experienced to be fully appreciated. They are thankful to God for the help he gave them to resist temptation, and keep themselves pure before marriage. And now that they experience the benefits of that, they would never want to spoil their God given closeness and togetherness by committing adultery.

GETTING THE SAME DEAL AS ADAM

Anyone who truly believes God will want what He gave Adam – a marriage partner uniquely designed for them by God.

That Old Testament story from the Garden of Eden was recognised by Jesus. And he taught the same moral standards which emphasise God's view of marriage as a unique "one flesh" relationship, which forbids all sex outside marriage.

Christians who know what God says will choose to invite God into their search for a marriage partner. They will want nothing less than their own unique companion, specially selected for THEM by God! And they will pray until they KNOW BEYOND

ALL DOUBT that they have found the one who is His choice for them.

Christians, who have experienced their own personal answers to this prayer, will share their continuing excitement about the blessing it has brought into their lives. Ask them!!

WHAT'S WRONG WITH MARRYING AN UNBELIEVER?

The Old Testament ban on marriages with foreigners was not primarily a racially motivated prohibition. The real issue was religion. The nations they were forbidden to marry were idol worshippers. **And the reason given for the ban was that such marriages would lead the Jewish partner astray from their faith in the one true God, to serve “other gods”.** Even Solomon Yes! Even Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, was led astray, and became an idolater, under the influence of his foreign wives! (1 Kings 11:1-8; Nehemiah 13:26) It was regarded as such a serious matter that in both Ezra and Nehemiah, Jewish men who had married foreigners, were **commanded** to divorce their wives. (Ezra 9:11-14; 10:3; Nehemiah 10:23-26)

OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND

In Old Testament Times, God gave the Children of Israel some very restrictive laws about who they should, and who they should NOT marry!

There is a list of close relatives you cannot ever marry - Your father/mother, stepfather/stepmother, father-in-law/mother-in-law, brother/sister. (Deut 27:20-23)

Priests are told to marry only a virgin, or a widow whose husband had been a priest. (Ezek 44:23)

There was an almost total prohibition against marrying people who were NOT Jewish. (Deut 7:3)

Note however, this last prohibition was not *absolutely* total. There were a couple of marriages in the OT, which did have God's approval, where the wives were NOT Jews. e.g. Rahab, the Canaanite who married Salmon (Joshua 2:1; Mat 1:5) and Ruth, the Moabite who married Boaz. (Ruth 4:13; Matt 1:5) Both are listed as ancestors of Jesus – a high honor indeed! However in both of these cases it is clear that the two women had become believers in the one true God, BEFORE the marriage was contracted.

DIVORCE

Jesus used the Genesis story about the marriage of Adam and Eve to say that marriage is for life, and may not be undone by divorce. (Matthew 19:4-9) That means that remarriage of divorced persons is forbidden. Jesus says that those who do remarry, commit adultery. Christians should not date or marry a divorced person.

NEW TESTAMENT CONFIRMATION

The New Testament also, firmly **COMMANDS** that believers should marry only believers.

“Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?”

And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. (2 Cor 6:14-18)

Note carefully that God makes His promise to be our Father, **conditional** on getting all of this right!

Also note carefully that in the NT Church, ALL believers are PRIESTS! (1 Peter 2:5, 9) And this means that, ideally, NT believers will seriously take into account the OT requirement for the marriage partners of priests. i.e. only a virgin, or a widow whose husband was a priest. (Ezekiel 44:23)

GUIDELINES FOR THOSE WHO ARE PRAYING FOR GOD'S HELP

First you need to settle in your heart, between you and God alone, that you want nothing less than his VERY BEST for your life. If you want God's answer, you need to be absolutely single minded about this. And that means that you will firmly reject all temptation to settle for less. You need to be firm with yourself. That very "nice" unbeliever you want to date is the devil's temptation! Your faith is being tested.

We are not left waiting for a booming voice from heaven to say "this is the one"! God has already given us easily understood standards to apply to our choice.

1. Is he or she a REAL Christian? Not just someone who goes to Church on Sundays, and behaves like an unbeliever the rest of the time.
2. Is he or she someone who is going to have your spiritual welfare at heart? Help you grow spiritually? Does he or she deliberately place temptation in your path? Put pressure on you to sin?
3. Is he or she going to truly "love", "respect", and "cherish" you? Sacrificially? (Ephesians 5:22-33) If a man, is he someone you can trust to be your spiritual "head"? (Verse 23) If a woman is she going to truly give you the respect and obedience that God commands? (Verse 2-24)
3. Do you really worship the same God? Is He saying the same things to both of you? Especially about who he really is; what He wants from you both.
4. Do you share a common belief in who Jesus really is? e.g. is He the Son of God and the Jewish Messiah? Is He equally the LORD of all that you both do? Are you agreed about His teaching – especially about the Sermon on the Mount?
5. Do you discuss your beliefs and faith together? Do you have common goals?
6. Are your beliefs and spiritual values compatible? Do you share the same Gospel, and have the same hope for the "Age to Come"? (e.g. Not Heaven, but the kingdom of God on earth)

7. Can you pray together? Do you pray together?
8. Does he or she pass the “fruit inspection”? (Galatians 5:19-25)
9. Do you attend Church together? Do you worship together in spiritual harmony?
10. If you are already dating, would everything you do meet with God’s approval?

If you cannot answer these questions in confidence that God would approve of your answers, then the person you are asking about IS NOT FOR YOU! And you have a decision to make. Will you put God first?

*“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart
and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind”.*
(Luke 10:27)

MISSIONARY DATING

This is a term often used to describe Christians who start dating non-believers in the hope that they can “convert” them in order to make a marriage possible. They usually seem to think this is OK, as long as they don’t intend to marry them if they are not converted.

All too often I have seen people “convert” under these circumstances, not for love of God, but just so they can get parental and Church approval for their marriage. Of course that is NOT true conversion. It is actually deception! People who do “convert” in these circumstances often backslide.

Another problem is that the close contact of regular dating usually leads to an emotional involvement, which quickly escalates to become stronger than the best “good intentions”. Even if you are dating a **Christian** you do not intend to marry, it is all too easy for one party to misunderstand the intentions of the other, and get themselves seriously hurt. It is better NOT to date at all, even with a Christian, until you have done your praying and are fairly certain that God is giving you the OK.

TEMPTATION

The sex drive is beyond question, one of the most powerful of all human appetites. It is built in to our human nature. God designed it for the perpetuation of the human race. Properly exercised within marriage it is a beautiful part of married life. For the unmarried, it is a temptation to which everyone, men and women alike, will be exposed at some time when they are dating. It must be resisted, and overcome. **Victory is possible!** For those who really do want to overcome, the Bible contains a very positive promise of victory. You will NEVER be tempted beyond your ability to overcome.

There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.

(1 Cor 10:13)

CONCLUSION

God really is on your side! He isn't trying to make things too hard for you. When you choose the **RIGHT** believer to be your marriage partner, you are choosing the **VERY BEST** that God offers! And if that means rejecting an unbeliever you are attracted to, but who cannot possibly be God's choice for you, it also means that your decision **NOT** to marry them, is choosing the **BEST** for both of you!

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

If you do truly love God, how could you possibly consider, even for a moment, spending the rest of your life married to someone who doesn't love God the same way you do, and who rejects the most important things in your life?