

Why You Shouldn't Marry Or Date An Unbeliever

"Be Ye Not Unequally Yoked Together With Unbelievers ..." 2.COR 6:14

The "Fellowship" of Darkness and Light

At first glance it may seem that an article such as this is unnecessary - that anyone who loved God could not possibly consider spending their whole life married to someone who didn't! This, unfortunately, is not the case. I receive letters daily from women who are desperately trying to serve God in a full and complete way, but are unable to do so, because their husband loves and serves the world.

I am addressing this article to Christian women in particular, because in my counselling experience, they seem to make this mistake much more frequently than men do. However, the problems and the principles I will be talking about can obviously be applied to any Christian thinking of marrying (or for that matter even dating) someone who doesn't love Jesus with all of their heart. (This article is not for those of you who were first married and then became a Christian at a later date. Even though as a result, you may now be married to someone who is not following Jesus... it was not a choice you made since becoming a Christian. This article is for single Christians who still have the "dating" and marriage question ahead of them.)

Missionary Dating

I am not exactly sure who came up with the term "missionary dating", but I love it because it so appropriately paints the picture. Imagine this - a young girl, full of zeal for God, goes to a remote tribe of natives somewhere to evangelise the lost. She ends up having a **special**

burden for the chief's handsome young son. He seems interested in God, and so she starts spending quite a bit of time with him in hope of winning him to the Lord. Then, before you know it, her friends at the Missionary Society receive a postcard saying that she is getting married and won't be coming back. Was he converted? Well, not really - but she has full confidence that he will be shortly. Meanwhile, she is happily getting ready to set up house-keeping in his hut - full of idols (which, of course, she wouldn't think of worshipping) and dreaming of the wonderful future they will have together. If you heard of a situation like this, what would you think about this girl's chances for real happiness - or her professed love for the Lord? Her actions certainly seem to contradict the very things she says she believes in.

I think it is safe to say that every marriage starts out with a simple date. Many Christians are deceived when it comes to this. They feel all right about dating an unbeliever, just as long as it doesn't "get too serious". They may think, "Well, one or two dates can't hurt anyone. Besides, maybe I can lead him to the Lord. I just want to have some fun right now, but when it comes to settling down, I will definitely **marry** a Christian." Then lo and behold, the next thing they know, they have "fallen in love" and are desperately trying to rationalise their relationship and their upcoming marriage, to themselves, to their friends and to God. I say this - any Christian foolish enough to **date** an unbeliever is foolish enough to **marry** one!

Decisions for Life

Marriage is the biggest and most important decision you will make after your decision to follow Jesus. And as I said before, all marriages start out with a "first date". One of the main problems is that too many Christians approach the idea of dating with far too casual an attitude. They have adopted the world's view on this, instead of God's. There is no such thing as "playing the field" when it comes to Christianity.

Sure it gets lonesome sometimes, but remember, every date has the potential of becoming a lifelong relationship. Spending time with the wrong person is opening yourself up to becoming emotionally involved to a point where it is not always so easy to turn and walk away. Once you have given your heart and your emotions to someone, you will be surprised at how difficult it is to have the desire to take them back - even if you know you should. Here is part of a typical letter I have recently received from a young Christian girl. She has already been counselled and encouraged to do the right thing, but I wanted to share her predicament with you:

"I am 16 and the daughter of missionaries here in the Middle East. I've had a really close walk with the Lord, and He has been good to me in so many ways. But I met a guy at school. He is not a Christian, and we have been going out for over three months. At the time, I believed it was fine, unless we married, which of course I have no intention of doing because he isn't a Christian. But lately I have spoken with someone who told me it was wrong, and that I should never have gone out with him in the beginning.

This evening he came over while I was listening to the new tape of Keith's. Afterwards we were talking, and he laughed at all the 'weird Jesus, and dumb Christian songs' that I listen to. I let him know that I was hurt by the way he laughed about the name of Jesus, and now I really feel bad inside because of it, and I feel we should end our relationship. But it is very hard because we really like each other a lot, and I am afraid my witness will all go down the drain if we break up. I am really asking the Lord for wisdom now. If you have a few spare minutes you could remember me in your prayer." - Kept Anonymous

Don't wait until it is too late. The time to ask Jesus for wisdom is **before** you start a

relationship - not after. It is much easier than you think for your heart to overrule your conscience. Once your own desires are demanding priority, your zeal to put God first starts to quickly fade away. Your emotions are a powerful thing, and if you don't control them, they will control **you!** (JER 17:9)

Unequally Yoked

"Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers..."

2.COR 6:14

In the Bible, Jesus (and here, Paul) gave many illustrations using agriculture and animals as examples, since these were common things to everyone in that day. So what does it mean to be unequally yoked? Picture if you will, two oxen tied together at the neck by a wooden crosspiece so they can pull a plough. They are two animals of the same species who have been joined together to do a specific job. They have been carefully trained to respond to the same commands, and once they are united, they are considered to be a team. A wise farmer picks two animals of similar size, strength and temperament because he knows they will work the best together. If one of them needed to be whipped before he would move, and the other one was terrified at even the sight of a whip, it would seem unwise to tie them together and expect them to work as a team.

One "team-mate" would frantically be trying to run away, while the other one would stubbornly be refusing to budge. In fact, if two like this were joined together, it seems that disaster might be at hand - with possible damage to the equipment, hurt and confusion to the "team-mates", and of course, the work would never get done.

Our beloved Jesus is the wisest and most loving "Farmer" in all the universe. He knows that we would never be happy if we were bound to someone who was pulling us in the opposite direction from where we wanted to go. Our life would be one continual tug of war, and we would never be able to get on with the work that we were called to do. That is why He commanded us to marry *"only in the Lord"* (1.COR 7:39). If we are going to serve God in our marriage, then both partners must be in agreement about the job that needs to get done, how it is going to be accomplished and **who** they are going to be taking their orders from. It is really very simple. I guess that is why it constantly amazes me that so many

choose to ignore God's wisdom, thinking in vain that "it will all work out fine in the end."

The Dating Game

I think it should be becoming increasingly clear to you that dating is not to be done lightly - nor without God's approval! This doesn't mean that you have to feel called to marriage with someone before you can spend any time together - but you must be able to see the qualities of a sincere lover of God in this person, and the fruit of their faith should be evident for all to see. If they pass this most crucial test, you still must seek God to see if it is all-right to take the time to get to know this person better. You should seek the Lord privately on this - that is, **not** with the person you are interested in. That way, if God says "No", no one will be hurt. I am assuming you have already spent time with this person in group situations, but a deeper relationship should only be entered into **if** and **when** the Lord gives you His express permission. If you are afraid to hear a possible "No" from God, then you are not seeking **His** will, but your own. This should be an immediate danger signal that something is wrong, and you shouldn't make a move until you get your heart right with the Lord.

Does all that sound a little strict to you? Well, just ask someone who has chosen the wrong mate due to a lack of patience, counsel and prayer. They will tell you that they wish someone would have told them the same things I am now telling you. So many are bound in miserable, unhappy marriages because they ignored Jesus and let their own desires drown out the voice of God. They have learned their lesson the hard way, and now it is too late for them to turn back and start over. Marriage is forever. Once a mistake is made, you can't turn around and say, "We got married out of God's will, so now we will just get a divorce!" It doesn't work that way. The Bible tells us that if our unbelieving mates consent to remain with us, then we must not send them away (1.COR 7:12-13).

Why even put yourself into the position of possibly making the wrong decision? Since God's Word commands us not to be "unequally yoked" it is foolish and openly rebellious to even consider it. You will be headed towards almost certain disaster if you lean to your own understanding instead of trusting God and taking Him at His Word.

Values, Goals and Motivations

When I became a Christian, my whole life was turned upside-down. I could no longer deal with things in the same way that I had before, because God's way was different. Everything changed. I made an abrupt "about-face" and had to sit down and re-evaluate every aspect of my life. One of the first things I noticed was that my reasons for doing things had changed. I was motivated by a love for God and a desire to please Him, instead of my own selfish desires. As I drew closer to God, He revealed His heart to me, and I found that some of the things that had meant a lot to me were no longer important. And other things, on which I had put little or no value, began to sparkle and shine like jewels. My eyes looked towards eternity, instead of focusing on the temporary things of this world. I truly think my heart would have been broken if I had not been able to share my excitement, joy, and love of God with my most beloved here on earth - my husband.

Lack of True Intimacy

"...for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?"

2.COR 6:14

When it comes right down to it, someone who loves Jesus just doesn't have that much in common with someone who doesn't. Sure, you may enjoy the same hobbies, or be engaged in the same type of work - but when it comes to the things that **really matter**, you will be miles apart. In a marriage, when that first rush of excitement wears off, you will find yourself yearning for the true intimacy and oneness that can only be experienced with someone of "like mind". You will be unfulfilled and strangely lonesome in this closest of all partnerships if, due to different beliefs, you cannot experience true intimacy. Neither of you would be able to share the deepest longings of your heart with each other, because your whole basis of looking at life - your very reasons for living would be totally different. Your hearts and lives could never be truly united because there would be no common bond to draw you together and keep you together.

When I speak of marriage, I am speaking of a lifelong commitment to love, honour, cherish and obey - till death do you part! How could you even consider making such a deep and binding commitment to someone who doesn't love Jesus? As a Christian, you have the

Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit to govern your life. But the Bible tells us that those without Jesus have the world, the flesh and the devil to direct theirs. These are the very things we as Christians are told to overcome (1.JN 2:14-17). How can you hope to overcome that which you have married, committed, and submitted your life to?

Marry Now - Reform Later

Many Christian girls seem to be pacified by the fact that their unbelieving boyfriend doesn't seem to object to their Christianity. Even though he doesn't believe like she does, he seems extremely tolerant and even goes to church with her sometimes. He really is a very nice guy, and his biggest vice is drinking a few beers with the boys while watching football. She figures if she marries him, they will have a lot more time together, and then she can really "work on him" and get him saved. Sadly enough, she will find that it's not as easy as she thought it would be. Eventually, her husband's acceptance of her Bible Studies and Christian friends starts to wear thin, and the tension between them begins to take its toll on their marriage. Most girls do not realise that if they are not strong enough to resist the temptation of marrying an unbeliever, they probably aren't strong enough to ever win him to the Lord!

"Conversions" of Convenience

Sometimes in order to marry a Christian girl, a fellow will "make a commitment" to Jesus because he knows he has to. He will start going to church just to make her happy. In fact, he may even be sincerely trying to "get into it". But if it is not a decision arising from seeing his own need for God, then it is meaningless and will be short-lived. His "commitment" usually starts to fade some time **after** they get married - when it's no longer necessary for him to put his best foot forward.

I never trust a "conversion" of this type, and I consistently tell all those I counsel to let this fellow prove his commitment on his own. That is, to follow Jesus not by his girlfriend's side, but to get to church or Bible Study on his own steam, **not on a date**. If he proves to be sincere, growing, and **firmly** planted in Jesus; **then after several months**, she can start to pray and seek the Lord about the possibility of entering into a deeper relationship. The problem is, most girls don't have the patience to

test the fruit. As soon as "Mr. Right" even looks like he is about to utter a sinner's prayer, she is off picking out towels, dishes, and bridesmaid dresses.

The Second Law of Thermodynamics

In science, the Second Law of Thermodynamics essentially states that as time passes, anything that is left on its own will deteriorate. Things left on their own will not be built up, but they will eventually break down. In other words, as time goes by, things get worse, not better - and a life, left on its own without God, **will** get worse. You never know what is around the corner. People who have married "occasional drinkers" have later found themselves married to alcoholics a couple of years down the road. You can't judge the future by the present circumstances when you are dealing with someone who has chosen to go his own way in life. If you have the Lord, you should be able to expect growth and maturity. If you don't have the Lord, you won't know what to expect. This isn't the old "marijuana leads to heroin" story of a few years back, but **sin** does lead to **more sin** - and a life that is not willingly yielded to Jesus and guided by His loving hand could end up **anywhere... doing anything!**

Competition

I think one of the hardest aspects of a marriage where the partners are unequally yoked is the feeling of competition between them. However subtle or unspoken it may be, the competition is felt. As a believer, your values and ideals will constantly be challenged as you live out your day-to-day life. The unbeliever will always be trying to prove (consciously or unconsciously) that he is just as happy as you are, without having any so-called "religious experience"... and you will, of course, want to show him that actually **you** possess the greater peace and fulfilment through knowing God. You will have no spiritual leadership or support during times of trials, and your faith will be undermined, not encouraged. And eventually, as the competition grows stronger, your mate will probably get tired of competing with your friends, your church, and your God for your attention and your love.

Compromise

A believer, when put in this position, is many times tempted to compromise her faith in order

to maintain a peaceful marriage. She can no longer serve the Lord in an open and free way, because if she does, her marriage may fall apart. What a terrible spot to be in! When you start to compromise, your walk with God becomes weak and under-nourished. You will be guilty for your lack of obedience to God, which will tend to push you even further away from Him than you already are.

After a while, frustration sets in for both of you because neither one is really free to do the things that make you happy. **You** don't have someone to love Jesus with, and **he** doesn't have someone to love the world with. He doesn't enjoy your friends and activities, and you don't really enjoy his. You are longing for someone to share your joy in Christ - and he is getting different types of longings. He may even start to think that if you won't go out and have his kind of fun, maybe he'll find someone else who will! As you can imagine, in a situation like this, the pressure really starts to build.

Because you are both being held back from the things you want to do, bitterness and resentment enter into the picture, putting an even bigger distance between the two of you and causing more problems. In many situations, once the resentment does set in, the unbelieving mate just may have learned enough scripture from you to hurl it like tiny bullets of truth to pierce your heart. After all, the Bible is true. And even though he may not believe it, he knows that you do - and he may love to see you crumble under conviction, condemnation or confusion from his attacks upon you and your faith. The Word of God is a powerful tool... even in the hands of the unrighteous.

You may think I have painted an unrealistic picture of the ruin of a marriage, but I have read hundreds of letters - all full of the "same story". It's almost impossible for a marriage like this to survive (and they usually don't) unless the believer compromises his or her faith almost to the point of having none. So it's not only the probable **death of a marriage** I am talking about, but a possible **spiritual death** as well. I believe that's why the Bible gives us such a strong warning against a union of this kind.

The Proper Balance

Usually, those who want to hang on to their "right" to continue on in the same way with

their old friends and their old lifestyle say, "But, I'm not supposed to isolate myself and associate only with Christians!" Well of course you're not. We are the "salt of the earth", seasoning the world with the love of Jesus (MATT 5:13,16). The world and the people in it need Christians. How else will they ever find out about the only True Love that exists? But you mustn't ever forget that although we are **in** the world, we are never to be a **part** of it. We must always be careful to keep our eyes on the Lord and immediately flee any situation that may cause us to stumble and fall away from our heavenly calling (2.TIM 2:22).

Too many Christians use the excuse of "winning their friends to the Lord" to keep one foot in the world, and so themselves remain partakers of worldly pleasures. God knows our hearts. If your friends or associates are causing your love for God to "cool off", it is far better to sacrifice that friendship, than to sacrifice your relationship with Jesus. **No relationship on earth** is more important than your relationship with your Father in heaven. If you are not strong enough to resist temptation, then admit it and stay **away from it**. Don't worry about "your witness". If you fall away after knowing and preaching the truth, your only witness will be a bad one anyway!

Children

One thing people don't usually think about when they first get married is having children. Usually it is the furthest thing from your mind as you're walking down the aisle. But somewhere down the line, you will probably want to start a family. But what is "a family"? Is it the mere presence of children that qualifies you as a family, or is it something else? A family unit as I see it consists of a group of people bound together by love, a sense of loyalty and a sincere desire to see each other reach their fullest possible potential and purpose in God. Most traditionally, it consists of Mum, Dad and some kids, although it can be larger or smaller according to circumstance or the leading of the Lord.

One thing for sure, where there is no unity, there can be no "family". Sure you can all live under one roof, but a common dwelling place does not make a family. In an unequally yoked marriage, there will only be confusion and chaos in the home. Without the common bond of love for Jesus, there can be no unity. If the parents do not agree on how to raise their

children, the children will raise themselves. If the parents have different standards for their children in the areas of discipline, responsibility, and acceptable behaviour and attitudes, then the children will play one parent against the other to get their own way - and the parents will end up arguing over the results. Of course, the children are the real losers in these battles, although they may not realise it at the time. A home like this will be in constant turmoil, and will be a very unhappy place for all who live there, parents and children alike.

If there is no agreement in the home about who God is, and what our response to Him should be, then it is very difficult for children to learn how to know and love Him. If our children are getting a different message from each parent, they will constantly be confused and forced to "take sides".

The greatest factor in our children learning about God is through the example we set for them. Children usually transfer their feelings and impressions of their earthly father over to their idea of who God is. If their father is a righteous man and exercises Godly judgment balanced with love and encouragement, then their image and understanding of God will most likely be good (EPH 6:4, COL 3:21). If he is unfair in his judgments or antagonistic or indifferent to God, then they will have a hard time (even as an adult) seeing God's true nature and character.

What an unfair burden to put on a tiny child. It will not only cost him his memories of a happy and peaceful childhood - but in the end, it may cost him his very soul. Let's not even think of putting ourselves, not to mention our innocent children, through such pain and unhappiness as to bring them up in a household of strife and confusion.

If you are thinking of marrying an unbeliever, do you have the unrealistic expectation of raising your children for God when you can't even submit something as important as your marriage to Him? I would say that the prospect is highly unlikely, at best.

Conclusion

Those Christians who enter into marriage with an unbeliever will never experience the full-

ness and richness of marriage as God intended it to be. They will never enjoy true intimacy or the blessing of a family united by the common bond of Jesus' love. In fact, instead of experiencing that common bond (or 'bonding') of love, they will experience the 'common bondage' of frustration and discontent that may lead to separation or divorce. For True Love is only possible when you know God, and when you can have His unselfish, uncompromising love for others, putting them above yourself. All else pales in comparison to the real thing. Don't be foolish. Don't settle for anything less than God's very best for you. If you are called to marriage, God has a perfect partner for you. But beware, the enemy is a matchmaker too.

Trust the Lord, walk in obedience, and He will meet your needs in His way and in His timing. Lean to your own understanding and insist on your own way and watch out - you just may get what you are looking for! You may also live to regret it. Trust God. He will never lead you astray.

In closing, I want to say that if you are now in a relationship with an unbeliever, or if you have been in the past (while professing to be a Christian), I think you'd better examine your heart before the Lord. If you can find peace and contentment in a relationship with someone who doesn't love God, then you must ask yourself how much **you** really love Him. After all, if you find you have more in common with those who walk in darkness... it may be because you are both walking down the same path! (1.JN 1:6-7; JN 3:21)

Don't deceive yourself. A sincere lover of God would never knowingly be joined to a lover of the world. Don't even think about submitting your life in marriage to a godless partner, **that is, unless it won't bother you to live a godless life.** Please pray about all that we have talked about and be quick to respond to the things God has spoken to your heart. I love you very much, and I pray that you will reach the highest potential possible in Christ Jesus as you obey Him in all things. May God bless you as you seek Him.

by Melody Green