

Fact Sheet for “Unequally Yoked” 2 Corinthians 6:14-17

Pastor Bob Singer
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Solomon once wrote... “The wise person has his eyes in his head, but the fool walks in darkness.” (Eccl. 2:14a) Having knowledge and the wisdom to know what to do with it gives you confidence in moving forward, because you can see and you know where you’re going. If you don’t pay attention to God’s Word you easily end up making foolish decisions. If you don’t understand God’s Word then you won’t have confidence using it.

We’re dealing with a very often repeated verse today (2 Corinthians 6:14a). I’ve heard this repeated over and over again. The application most often made from this verse is, “Don’t marry an unbeliever!” I’ve also heard it used to warn about business partnerships with unbelievers. Here’s the problem. The context of this verse is not about marriage or business. Is the verse being used as a proof text? Is it being applied incorrectly? If those questions are left unanswered in your mind then you won’t be able to use this verse with confidence. Today we are going to explore this verse in its context. And... you will find that its application to marriage, to business, and to a host of other situations actually fits. You will also see how to not misapply this verse. Let’s back-up a little from verse 14 and begin in verse 11. Paul writes...

¹¹ ¶ We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians; our heart is wide open. ¹² You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted in your own affections. ¹³ In return (I speak as to children) widen your hearts also.

First, I want you to notice something subtle. Only rarely did Paul name his readers in a letter. When he did it was with emotion. Consider two other examples (Gal. 3:1; Phil 4:15). And now here he mentions the Corinthians by name.

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What hampered the Corinthians from having a wide open heart towards Paul? The answer... rival suitors vied for their affection and allegiance. Paul pointedly describes them in chapter 11. They were false prophets (11:2-4). They were unbelievers (11:13-14). Paul continued...

^{14a} ¶ Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers.

And Paul emphasizes this in the five following statements.

- (1) ^{14b} **For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness?**
- (2) **Or what fellowship has light with darkness?**
- (3) ¹⁵ **What accord has Christ with Belial?**
- (4) **Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever?**
- (5) ^{16a} **What agreement has the temple of God with idols?**

Notice the contrasts in these five statements (righteousness / lawlessness... light / darkness... Christ / Belial... believer / unbeliever... temple of God / idols).

Belial – Occurs only here in the NT, but 15 times in the KJV OT and 22 times in the Hebrew. The word in Hebrew means worthless, and it is often used in that sense. Later “Belial” became another term for Satan. They were unbelievers! The Corinthians were listening to them, adopting their viewpoints, making unrighteous choices, and pulling away from the apostle Paul and his teaching. He asked what

partnership, what fellowship, what accord, what portion, what agreement should a believer have with an unbeliever?

What is an unequal yoke? The following explanations are from www.gotquestions.org.

A yoke is a wooden bar that joins two oxen to each other and to the burden they pull. An "unequally yoked" team has one stronger ox and one weaker, or one taller and one shorter. The weaker or shorter ox would walk more slowly than the taller, stronger one, causing the load to go around in circles. When oxen are unequally yoked, they cannot perform the task set before them. Instead of working together, they are at odds with one another.

And these are two fine applications described on that website.

Of course, the closest alliance one person can have with another is found in marriage, and this is how the passage is usually interpreted. God's plan is for a man and a woman to become "one flesh" ([Genesis 2:24](#)), a relationship so intimate that one literally and figuratively becomes part of the other. Uniting a believer with an unbeliever is essentially uniting opposites, which makes for a very difficult marriage relationship.

The "unequal yoke" is often applied to business relationships. For a Christian to enter into a partnership with an unbeliever is to court disaster. Unbelievers have opposite worldviews and morals, and business decisions made daily will reflect the worldview of one partner or the other. For the relationship to work, one or the other must abandon his moral center and move toward that of the other. More often than not, it is the believer who finds himself pressured to leave his Christian principles behind for the sake of profit and the growth of the business.

When a Christian becomes yoked to an unbeliever, whether by marriage, by business partnership, by friendship, by religion, by politics, or by anything else... where both need to move together in the same direction... then the believer can be drawn into clearly unbiblical paths.

Consider interfaith prayer meetings. Consider destructive friendships. Consider politically correct, but not biblically correct, groups.

^{16b} **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.**

Ex. 29:45; Lev. 26:12; Jer. 31:1; and Ezek. 37:27

¹⁷ **Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing (Is. 52:11); then I will welcome you,¹⁸ and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty."**

2 Sam. 7:14; 1 Ch. 17:13; Is. 43:6; and Hos. 1:10

^{ESV} **2 Corinthians 7:1 ¶ Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.**

Review 6:11-13. Paul now comes back to those words in 7:2.

² ¶ **Make room in your hearts for us. We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have taken advantage of no one.**

A good application of [this passage](#)... Avoid unequal yokes with unbelievers, particularly when you would rethink your commitment to holiness.

A bad application of [this passage](#)... Avoid yokes with believers simply because they don't agree with you, particularly when that won't change your view. That would be to stretch this passage beyond what Paul meant.

Knowing this passage in its context will help you move forward with wisdom and confidence in applying it.