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## THE UNEQUAL YOKE



### *Introduction*

Today, many who desire to attain a purer and more elevated discipleship have an indescribable feeling of sadness and heaviness. The spiritual tone of society is excessively low, its aspect dim, and its spirit so enfeebled, that one is often tempted to despair because of a lack of true and faithful witness for an absent Lord. All this is even more deplorable when we remember the commanding motives by which it is our special privilege to be actuated. Whether we look at the Master whom we are called to follow – at His faith that justifies us<sup>1</sup> – the path we are called to tread – the end we are called to keep in view – or the hopes by which we are to be animated – we cannot help but believe that if all these were entered into, modern-day Christians would no doubt exhibit a more ardent discipleship. "The love of Christ," says the apostle, "constraineth us." This is the most powerful motive of all. The more the heart is filled with Christ's love, and the eye filled with His blessed Person, the more closely we will seek to follow in His heavenly track. "The light of the body is the eye; if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light" (Matt. 6:22); likewise, in Luke 11:34 we read, "The light of the body is the eye: therefore when thine eye is single, thy whole body also is full of light." His footmarks can be discovered only by a single (good) eye; and unless the will is broken and the flesh mortified, we will fail in our discipleship and make shipwreck of faith and a good conscience.

Having received salvation<sup>2</sup> as the fruit of Christ's agony and bloody sweat, His cross and passion, nothing can be more basely selfish than to keep as great a distance from His sacred Person as we can without forfeiting our personal safety. Even in the judgment of human nature, this is deemed a character of selfishness worthy of unmingled contempt; but when exhibited by one who professes to owe

his present and everlasting all to a rejected, crucified, risen, and absent Master, no language can express its moral baseness. When one's action expresses this statement: "Provided I escape hell-fire, discipleship matters little," we should rush to the very opposite point of the compass; and say, "Provided Jesus Christ is glorified, my personal safety matters little." Would to God that this was our sincere utterance today; but it appears that "all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's" (Phil. 2:21). We need a band of separated and consecrated followers of the Lamb, each one bound to the horns of the altar by the cords of love – a company, like Gideon's three hundred of old, able to confide in God and deny the flesh. How the heart longs for this. Today, it seems that many "church" leaders – preachers, elders, deacons, teachers, etc. – are bowed down beneath the chilling and withering influence of a cold and uninfluential profession. May God help each of us to stand up and become "an army of one" for Christ; one who earnestly breathes after a more vigorous and whole-hearted testimony for that One who emptied Himself and laid aside His glory, so that through His precious blood-shedding we might be raised to companionship with Him in eternity.

Among the numerous hindrances to a thorough consecration of heart to Christ, "the unequal yoke" occupies a prominent place. The Apostle Paul used the illustration of an uneven yoking to teach us an important lesson.

Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people." Therefore "Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the Lord Almighty" (2 Cor. 6:14-18, NKJV).

The same principle would apply to a bull and a camel; and, as you can see here, the camel and the bull that are plowing together look very uncomfortable. The yoke linking them together – intended for two animals of similar size and strength – makes both beasts suffer (the camel and ox from the book, *La Tierra Santa*, 1830).



Normally, a farmer would not impose such a hardship on his animals. But if he did not have two bulls, he might yoke together two animals he had available. Apparently, this is what the farmer in the above camel and bull illustration decided to do. Because of the difference in their size and weight, the weaker animal would have to struggle to keep up the pace, and the

stronger would have a greater burden.

The same moral principle expressed by the Apostle Paul above, also existed under the Mosaic economy.

You shall not sow your vineyard with different kinds of seeds, lest the yield of the seed which you have sown and the fruit of your vineyard be defiled. You shall not plow with an ox and a donkey together. You shall not wear a garment of different sorts, such as wool and linen mixed together (Deut. 22:9-11, NKJV; see also Lev. 19:19).

The above Scriptures will suffice to set forth the moral basis of an unequal yoke. With full confidence, it may be asserted that no one can be an unshackled follower of Christ who is "unequally yoked." "Come out . . . and I will receive you . . . you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the Lord Almighty." In other words, "Get your neck out of the unequal yoke, and I will receive you, and there shall be the full, public, practical manifestation of your relationship with the Lord Almighty."

Here the idea is evidently different from that set forth in James: "Of his own will begat he us, by the word of truth." And also in Peter: "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God which liveth and abideth forever." And again in 1 John: "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed on us, that we should be called the sons of God." So also in John's gospel, "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name; which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." In all these passages, the relationship of sons is founded on Divine counsel and Divine operation, and is freely given to us on the basis of Mark 16:15-16; whereas, in 2 Corinthians 6, it is based on getting out of an unequal yoke.

Thus, in the 5<sup>th</sup> chapter of Matthew we read,

But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you, and persecute you, "that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (vs. 44-45, NKJV).

Here, sonship is the practical establishment and public declaration of the relationship, and its moral influence – the sons of such a Father act in such a way. In short, we have the abstract position or relationship of sons founded on God's sovereign will and operation; and we have the moral character consequent upon and flowing out of this relationship that affords just ground or basis for God's public acknowledgment thereof. God cannot fully and publicly own those who are unequally yoked together with unbelievers. If He were to do so, it would be an acknowledgment of the unequal yoke. God cannot acknowledge "lawlessness," "darkness," "Belial," "an unbeliever," "idols," or anything "unclean." How could He! Therefore, one yoked with any of these is morally and publicly

identified with them and not with God. By so doing, we put ourselves into a position that God cannot own; but if we withdraw ourselves from that position – if we “Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord” – if we take our neck out of the unequal yoke – we can be received and owned as “sons and daughters” of God.

This is a solemn and searching principle for all who feel that they have unhappily gotten themselves into such a yoke. They are not walking as disciples, nor are they publicly or morally God’s “sons and daughters.” God cannot own them. Their secret relationship is not the point; but they have put themselves thoroughly off God’s ground. They have foolishly thrust their neck into a yoke that, because it is not Christ’s yoke must be Belial’s yoke; and until they cast off that yoke, God cannot own them as sons and daughters. No doubt, God’s grace is infinite; no doubt, God’s grace can and will meet the repentant soul in all its failure and weakness; but if we aspire to be received by God, then we must not “touch what is unclean;” we must cast off the unequal yoke, if it can be cast off; but if not, we must bow our heads beneath its shame and sorrow, looking to God for deliverance.

There are four distinct phases in which "the unequal yoke" may be contemplated: domestic, commercial, religious, and philanthropic. Some may be disposed to confine 2 Corinthians 6:14 to the first of these; but while it certainly includes marriage, it also means that Christians should not make alliances of any kind with unbelievers. The words are, “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers.” The Apostle Paul does not specify the character or object of the yoke, so we are warranted in giving the passage its widest application, bringing its edge to bear directly on every phase of the unequal yoke.

#### *Domestic Yoke*

Let us first briefly consider the domestic or marriage yoke. What pen can portray the mental anguish, the moral misery, together with the ruinous consequences, regarding spiritual life and testimony flowing from a Christian's marriage with an unbeliever? Perhaps nothing is more deplorable for a Christian than discovering too late that he/she is linked for life with one who does not love and trust Jesus Christ – whose thoughts and feelings are not spiritual. One desires to serve Christ; the other refuses the Savior; one breathes after the things of God; the other sighs for the things of this present world; one earnestly seeks to mortify the flesh with all its affections and desires; the other seeks only to gratify these very things. Like linking a sheep and goat together, the sheep longs to feed on the green pasture in the field, while the goat craves the brambles growing in the ditch. The sad consequence is that both are starved. One will not feed on the pasture, and the other cannot feed on the brambles, and thus neither gets what his/her nature craves. It is highly possible that by superior strength the goat will succeed in forcing the unequally yoked companion to remain among the brambles, there to languish and die.

The moral of this seems plain enough. The goat generally succeeds in gaining the upper hand. In most instances, the worldly partner carries the point. In cases of the unequal marriage yoke, almost without exception, the Christian is the sufferer, usually evidenced by the bitter fruits of a bad conscience, depressed

heart, gloomy spirit, and desponding mind. What a heavy price to pay for the gratification of some human affection, or the attainment of some paltry worldly advantage. Actually, a marriage of this kind is the death-knell of practical Christianity. How can one be an unfettered disciple of Christ whose neck is in the marriage yoke with an unbeliever?

An Olympic runner might as well expect to win gold by attaching a heavy weight or another body to his/her person. Surely it is enough to sustain one body, without attaching another. There has never been a true Christian who did not find abundant work endeavoring to grapple with the evils of one heart, without being burdened with the evils of two. Without a doubt, the man who foolishly marries an unconverted woman; or the woman who marries an unconverted man, is burdened with the combined evils of two hearts; and who is sufficient for that? We can count on the grace of Christ for the subjugation of our own evil nature; but we certainly cannot count on that grace in reference to the evil nature of an unequal yoke-fellow. If we have yoked ourselves ignorantly, the Lord will meet us on the ground or basis of full confession, with entire restoration of soul, but in the matter of discipleship we cannot recover.

The consequences of an unequal marriage yoke bears mainly on our discipleship, because our entire character and experience are deeply affected thereby. It is unlikely that one can strike a more effectual blow to a prosperous Christian life than by assuming an unequal yoke. Christianity and worldliness are antithetical, as diverse as righteousness and wickedness, or light and darkness. The very fact that a Christian would chose to be unequally yoked reveals that spiritual decline has already set in; the lamp of discipleship and testimony fading out. If it does occasional give a faint glimmer, it only serves to point out the unhappy and gloomy position, and the appalling consequences of being "unequally yoked together" with an unbeliever.

Yes, an unequal yoke influences the life, character, testimony, and discipleship, of a child of God. But, it also has its moral effect in the domestic circle. Here, too, the consequences are truly melancholy. How could they possibly be otherwise? Two people coming together in the closest and most intimate relationship, with tastes, habits, feelings, desires, tendencies, and objects diametrically opposite. With little or nothing in common, they can only grate on each other. If the unbeliever should demonstrate acquiescence, because of excessive amiability, or hypocrisy, what is it worth in the sight of the Lord, who judges the true state of the heart? On the other hand, if the believer should go with the unequal yoke-fellow, it will be at the expense of discipleship, and the consequence is a condemning conscience in the sight of the Lord, leading to heaviness of spirit, perhaps even sourness of temper, not commending the grace of the Gospel, and losing the unbeliever for Christ. Such is dishonoring to God, destructive of spiritual prosperity, subversive of discipleship and hostile to domestic peace and blessing. It produces estrangement, coldness, distance, and misunderstanding; or, if it does not produce these, it is likely to lead to a forfeiture of the Christian's discipleship and good conscience, both of which one may be tempted to offer as a sacrifice on the altar of domestic peace. Thus, whatever way we may chose to look at it, an unequal yoke leads to deplorable consequences.

Sadly, it also has serious effects on children. They are likely to flow in the current with the unconverted parent – “And half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and could not speak the language of Judah, but spoke according to the language of one or the other people” (Neh. 13:24, NKJV). In an unequal yoke, there can be no union of heart in the training of children; no joint and mutual confidence in reference to them. One parent desires to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord; the other desires to bring them up in the principles of the world – the flesh. As they grow up, the children are likely to lean toward the side of the latter. In short, it is an unseemly, unscriptural, and vain effort to plow with an "unequal yoke" or to "sow your vineyard with different kinds of seeds" – it will surely end in sorrow and confusion<sup>3</sup>.

Before turning from this part of our subject, let us consider a few reasons that generally actuate Christians regarding entering into the unequal marriage yoke. We all know how easily the human heart persuades itself of the rightness of any step it desires to take, and how Satan furnishes plausible arguments to convince us of its rightness – arguments the moral condition of the soul causes us to regard as clear, forcible, and satisfactory. The very fact that we would think of such a thing proves our unfitness to weigh the solemn consequences of such a step with a well-balanced mind and spiritually-adjusted conscience. If the eye were single<sup>4</sup> (that is, if we were governed only by one good object: the glory and honor of the Lord Jesus Christ) we would never entertain the idea of putting our necks into an unequal yoke; and, consequently, we would have no difficulty or perplexity about the matter. A runner, whose eye is focused on the crown, will not be troubled with any perplexity regarding whether to stop and pick up a hundred pound weight. Such a thought would never cross the mind of such a one. In fact, a thorough racer would have a distinct and almost intuitive perception of everything that would likely hinder running the race.

If it was this way with Christians in the matter of unscriptural marriage, it would save a world of sorrow and perplexity; but such is not the case. The heart gets out of communion with God, and becomes morally incompetent; and when in this condition, Satan gains easy conquest, and speedy success in his wicked effort to induce the believer to yoke with "Belial" – with "lawlessness" – with "darkness" – with "an unbeliever." When the soul is in full communion with God, it is entirely subject to His Word; it sees things as God sees them, calls them what He calls them, and not what the devil or his carnal heart calls them. In this way, the true believer escapes the ensnaring influence of a deception that is frequently brought to bear in this matter: a false profession of religion on the part of the person the believer desires to marry. This is a common situation. It is easy to show symptoms of leaning toward the things of God; and the heart is treacherous and base enough to make a profession of religion in order to gain its end; and not only so, but the devil, who is "transformed into an angel of light," will lead one to this false profession, in order to effectually entrap the child of God. Thus it comes to pass that Christians allow themselves to be satisfied, or at least profess satisfaction, with an evidence of conversion that under any other circumstance, would be regarded as lame and flimsy.

But, in most cases, experience soon opens the eyes to reality. Often the Christian soon discovers that the profession of belief was a vain show, that the

heart was actually in and of the world. Who can detail the bitter consequences of such a discovery? – the anguish of heart; the bitter reproaches and cuttings of conscience; the shame and confusion; the loss of spiritual power and blessing; the forfeiture of peace and joy; the sacrifice of a life of usefulness. Who can describe all these things? The Christian awakes from a delusive dream, and with open eyes views the reality of being yoked for life with what the Holy Spirit calls “Belial.” It is not an inference, or a deduction arrived at by a process of reasoning; but a plain and positive statement of Holy Scripture. Thus, the Holy Spirit reveals how the matter stands regarding one who, for whatever motive, reason, or false pretence, enters into an unequal marriage-yoke.

We earnestly, solemnly, and affectionately entreat anyone considering entering into such a yoke to first pause, and weigh the matter in the balance of Holy Scripture, before moving forward on such a dangerous and fatal path. Be assured that if you take the step, then, eventually, your heart will most likely be assailed by hopeless regrets, and your life embittered by sorrows. This is why we say let nothing induce you to be yoked with an unbeliever. Are your affections engaged? Then remember this: they cannot be the affections of your “born again” heart; but are rather of the old or carnal nature, which we are called on to mortify and set aside. Therefore, you should cry to God for spiritual power to rise above the influence of such affections – to sacrifice them to Him. Are your interests concerned? Then remember that they are only your interests; and if promoted and allowed to grow, Christ's interests will be sacrificed by yoking with “Belial.” Furthermore, they are only your temporal, and not your eternal interests. Actually, the interests of the believer and those of Christ should be identical; but, if a member of His body is linked with “Belial,” it is plain that the Lord's interests, His honor, His truth, His glory, must inevitably be sacrificed. This is the true way to look at the question. What are a few hundreds, or a few thousands, to an heir of heaven? "God is able to give thee much more than this." Are you going to sacrifice the truth of God, as well as your own spiritual peace, prosperity, and happiness, for a little gold that vanishes when used? God forbid. Flee from it, as a bird from a snare that it sees and knows. Stretch out the hand of genuine, well-braced, whole-hearted discipleship, and slay your affections and interests on the altar of God and then, even though there will not be an audible voice from heaven to approve your act, you will have the invaluable testimony of an approving conscience and an ungrieved Holy Spirit – ample reward for the most costly sacrifice you can make. May the Spirit of God give power to resist Satan's temptations.

It is hardly needful to remark that in cases where conversion takes place after marriage, the complexion of the matter is materially altered. For example, there will then be no smiting of conscience; a variety of particulars are modified. Still, there will be difficulty, trial, and sorrow. But, in this case, one can far more happily bring the trial and sorrow into the Lord's presence; and, the soul that makes full confession of its error and failure, He is ready to forgive, restore, and cleanse from all unrighteousness. This should greatly comfort the heart of one who has been brought to the Lord after marriage. Moreover, to such the Spirit of God<sup>5</sup> has given specific direction and blessed encouragement in the following passage:

If any brother have an unbelieving wife, and she think proper to dwell with him, let him not put her away: and if any woman have an unbelieving husband, and he think proper to dwell with her, let her not put him away (for the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband, else were your children unclean, but now are they holy) for what knowest thou, O wife, if thou shalt save thy husband? Or what knowest thou, O husband, if thou shalt save thy wife? (1 Cor. 7:12-16).

### *Commercial Yoke*

We now briefly consider “the unequal yoke,” in its commercial phase, as seen in business partnerships. Any close alliance with a non-believer in business, recreation, marriage, or any other kind of union, means nothing but disaster for the Christian. An old illustration: Two men went in business together; one had the money, and the other had the experience. After awhile, the one who had the experience had the money, and the one who had had the money had the experience. With a little distortion, this is a good example of partnership with an unbeliever.

Though perhaps not as serious an aspect of the yoke as that which we have just been considering, this will, nevertheless, be a positive barrier to the believer's testimony. When a Christian is yoked with an unbeliever for business purposes – whether that unbeliever be a relative or not – the child of God virtually surrenders individual responsibility. Henceforth, the acts of the firm become the Christian's acts, and it is simply out of the question to think that a worldly business can be encouraged to act on heavenly principles. They would laugh at such a notion, because it would be an effectual barrier to the success of their commercial schemes. In carrying on business, they will feel perfectly free to adopt a number of expedients that would be opposed to the spirit and principles of the kingdom in which the Christian lives, and of the Church in which the child of God forms a part. Thus, the Christian will constantly be placed in a most trying position. The child of God may seek to influence or Christianize the mode of conducting affairs; but will be compelled to do business as others do, and there is no remedy save to mourn in secret over such an anomalous and difficult position, or else to resign at great pecuniary loss to family. Where the eye is single (good), there will be no hesitation regarding which of these alternatives to adopt; but getting into such a position reveals the lack of a single or good eye; and being in it argues the lack of spiritual capacity to appreciate the value and power of Divine principles that would infallibly bring one out of it. One whose eye is single or good will not yoke with an unbeliever for the purpose of making money. Always remember that the direct glory of Christ can never be gained by a positive transgression of Divine principle.

This makes it simple. If it does not glorify Christ for a Christian to become unequally yoked commercially, then it must further the designs of Satan. There is no middle ground; that it does not glorify Christ is clear, for His Word says, “Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers.” This principle cannot be infringed without damage to the testimony, and forfeiture of spiritual blessing. True, the conscience of a Christian who transgresses in this matter may seek relief in

various ways; may have recourse to various subterfuges; may set forth various arguments to persuade itself that all is right. The conscience may speak to the mind and say, "Personally, we can be very devoted and very spiritual, even though we are yoked with an unbeliever." But, when brought to the test of actual practice, this will be found fallacious. A servant of Christ will be hampered in many ways by a worldly partnership. If not by open hostility to serving Christ, then by the enemy's secret and constant effort to damp the Christian's ardor, throwing cold water on spiritual things. The child of God will be laughed at and despised – continually reminded of the effect that spiritual enthusiasm and fanaticism produces in reference to business prospects. Using one's time, talents, or pecuniary resources for the Lord's service brings on a Christian the pronouncement of fool – being reminded that there is no place for God in the workplace; that the true and proper way for a commercial person to serve the Lord is to "attend to business, and nothing but business;" and that it is the exclusive business of preachers to attend to religious matters, because they are set apart and paid to do so.

Although the Christian's renewed mind may be convinced that this reasoning is flawed; although the child of God may be convinced that this worldly wisdom is but a flimsy, threadbare cloak, thrown over the heart's covetous practices; yet, who can tell how far the heart may be influenced by such things? Human nature becomes weary of constant resistance. The constant current becomes too strong, and we gradually yield to its action, being carried along on its surface. For a time, conscience may have some death-struggles; but, gradually the spiritual energies are paralyzed, and the sensibilities of the new birth become blunted, causing a lack of response to the cries of conscience, thus ending an effectual effort to withstand the enemy. When the worldliness of the Christian's heart joins itself with opposing influences from without – the outworks are stormed, and the citadel of the soul's affections are vigorously assaulted; until finally the child of God settles down in worldliness, exemplifying the prophet's touching lament,

Her Nazarites were purer than snow, they were whiter than milk, they were more ruddy in body than rubies, their polishing was of sapphire: their visage is blacker than a coal; they are not known in the streets; their skin cleaveth to their bones; it is withered, it is become like a stick (Lam. 4:7, 8).

The person once known as a servant of Christ; a fellow-helper in the kingdom of God; making use of resources to further the interests of the Gospel of Christ, is now known only as a plodding, keen, bargain-making icon of business, of whom the apostle might well say, "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present age."

Perhaps nothing induces the Christian to yoke commercially with unbelievers more than the habit of seeking to maintain two characters: one Christian; the other business. This is a grievous snare. In point of fact, there can be no such thing. We must be one or the other. A Christian must demonstrate Christianity; and if it cannot demonstrate itself there, then we should not be there. One who continues in a sphere or position in which the life of Christ cannot be manifested will soon possess nothing of Christianity except the name – outward form without

inward power – a shell without the kernel. We should serve Christ not merely on Sunday, but from Monday morning to Saturday night. We should not only be servants of Christ in the public assembly, but also in our place of business, no matter the circumstances. But one whose neck is in the yoke with an unbeliever simply cannot be a proper servant of Christ. How can the servants of two hostile masters work in the same yoke? One might as well attempt to link the sun's meridian beams with the darkness of midnight. It simply cannot be done. This is a very important matter. If you are thinking of going into partnership with an unbeliever, we encourage you to reconsider, though it may promise great worldly gain. To do so will likely plunge you into a mass of spiritual trouble and sorrow. To do so means that you are going to “plow” with one whose feelings, instincts, and tendencies are diametrically opposed to your own. How will you ever get on? The unbeliever wants to make money – to gain profit – to get on in the world. On the other hand, the Christian wants (at least should want) to grow in grace and holiness – to advance the interests of Christ and His Gospel on the earth, and to push onward to the everlasting kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. The unbeliever's object is money; your object is Christ: The unbeliever lives for this world; you live for the world to come; the unbeliever is engrossed with the things of time; you with those of eternity. How, then, could you ever be on common ground with an unbeliever? Your principles, motives, objects, and hopes, are opposed. How can you have things in common? Surely, all this needs only to be looked at with a single and good eye, in order to be seen in its true light. It is impossible that any one whose eye is filled and whose heart is occupied with Christ could ever yoke with a worldly partner, for any object or project whatsoever. So, before taking such a tremendous step; a step fraught with potentially awful consequences; a step fraught with danger to your eternal best interests, we encourage you to take the whole matter into the Lord's sanctuary and weigh it in God's sacred balance. Ask Him what He thinks of it, and then, with a well-adjusted conscience, hearken to His reply in the sacred, inspired, and Holy Scriptures. It is plain and powerful: “Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers.”

But, if you are already in the yoke, we pray you will be able to disentangle yourself. However, we know of a surety that it is easier to get into a wrong situation than to get out of it. A partnership of years cannot be dissolved in a moment. It must be done calmly, humbly, and prayerfully. One can dishonor the Lord as much in getting out of a wrong situation, as by getting into it. Therefore, if your conscience tells you that you are wrong for being in partnership with an unbeliever, then be honest and frank when explaining that you can no longer continue. Having done that, your place is to use every exertion possible to conclude the business affairs in an upright, straightforward, and business-like manner. By so doing, the adversary will have no occasion to speak reproachfully of your good. Rashness, headiness, and high-mindedness, must always be avoided when acting for the Lord, defending His holy principles. If we get entangled in a net, or involved in a labyrinth, it is not by bold and violent plunging that we extricate ourselves. No; we must humble ourselves, confess our sins before the Lord, and then retrace our steps in patient dependence on that grace which not only can pardon us for being in a wrong situation, but can lead us forth into a right one.

Also, as in the case of the marriage yoke, the matter is modified by the partnership having been entered into prior to conversion. This does away with much of the sorrow of heart and defilement of conscience connected with being unequally yoked, and also affects the mode of escape. The Lord is glorified by and assuredly accepts the moral bent of the heart and conscience when its path is in the right direction. If we judge ourselves for being wrong and the moral bent of the heart and conscience is to get right, God will accept that, and surely set us right. But if He sets us right, He will not allow us to violate one truth while seeking to act in obedience to another. The same holy and inspired Word that says, "Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers," also says, "render, therefore, to all their dues" – "owe no man anything" – "provide things honest in the sight of all" – "walk honestly toward them that are without." If we have wronged God by getting into partnership with an unbeliever, we must not wrong the unbeliever getting out of it. Profound subjection to the Word of God<sup>6</sup>, by the power of the Holy Spirit, will set everything right; will lead us into straight paths, enabling us to avoid dangerous extremes.

### *Religious Yoke*

In glancing for a moment at the religious phase of the unequal yoke, we do not desire to hurt the feelings of anyone by canvassing the claims of the many varied denominations. Such is not our purpose. The subject of this brief study is of sufficient importance to prevent its being encumbered by the introduction of other matters. "The unequal yoke" is our theme, and commands our attention.

In looking through Scripture we find many passages setting forth the intense spirit of separation that should characterize the people of God. Whether we direct our attention to the Hebrew Bible – God's relationship and dealings with His earthly people, Israel; or, to the New Testament – God's relationship and dealings with His heavenly people, the Church; we find the same truth prominently set forth: separation of those who belong to God. Israel's position is stated in Balaam's parable, "Lo, the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned amongst the nations." Their place was outside the range of all nations of the earth; and they were responsible to maintain that separation. Throughout the entire Pentateuch<sup>7</sup> they were instructed, warned, and admonished regarding this; and, throughout the Psalms and the Prophets we have the record of their failure in the maintenance of this separation, which brought down on them the heavy judgments of the hand of God. This brief study would swell into a large volume were we to attempt a quotation of all Scripture where this point is put forward. Therefore, we take for granted that your serious Bible study is sufficient to render such quotation unnecessary. Look up these words in your Bible Concordance: "separate," "separated," and "separation." They will suffice to lay out the body of Scripture evidence on this subject. Balaam's parable just quoted, from the Book of Numbers, is the expression of God's thoughts about His people Israel: "The people shall dwell *alone*." The same is true in reference to God's heavenly people, the Church – the body of Christ – composed of all true believers. They, too, are a separated people.

Let us now briefly examine the basis of this separation. There is a great difference between being separate on the basis of what *we are*, and of what *God is*. The former produces a Pharisee – the latter a saint. One who says to a fellow-

sinner, "Stand by yourself, I am holier than you," is simply a detestable and hypocritical Pharisee; but if, in His infinite condescension and perfect grace, God says, "I have brought you into relationship with Myself in the person of My Son Jesus Christ, therefore be holy and separate from all evil; come out from among them and be separate;" one is bound to obey, and obedience is the practical manifestation of a saint's character – a character the child of God has, not because of anything in self, but simply because God has brought the Christian near to Himself through the precious blood of Christ.

Let us be clear about this. Pharisaism and Divine sanctification are two very different things: and yet they are often confounded. Those who contend for the people of God to be separated are constantly accused of setting themselves above their fellow-men, of laying claim to a higher degree of personal sanctity than is ordinarily possessed. This accusation arises from not attending to the distinction just referred to. When God calls on His people to be separate, it is on the basis of what He has done for them on the cross; where He has set them, in eternal association with Himself in the person of Christ. But if we separate ourselves on the ground or basis of what we are in ourselves, it becomes a senseless and vapid assumption. God commands His people to be holy on the ground or basis of what He is: "Be ye holy, for I am holy." Evidently, this is a very different thing from "stand by yourself, I am holier than you." Since God brings people into association with Himself, He has a right to prescribe what their moral character should be, and they are responsible to answer thereto. Thus we see that the most profound humility lies at the bottom of a saint's separation. There is nothing so calculated to put one in the dust as the understanding of the real nature of Divine holiness. False humility springs from looking at ourselves. In reality, such humility is based on pride – pride that has never observed its own worthlessness. Some imagine that they can reach the truest and deepest humility by looking at self, but it can only be reached by looking at Christ. The more God's glories strike the eye, the humbler we shall be, is a just sentiment founded on Divine principle. Only the soul that loses itself in the blaze of Christ's moral glory is truly humble. It is only when we find ourselves in the presence of infinite excellence that we are really humble.

Therefore, a child of God should refuse to be yoked with an unbeliever for any reason, simply because God commands separation. Carrying out of this principle in matters of religion involves trial and sorrow; because it will be termed intolerance, bigotry, narrow-mindedness, exclusiveness, and such like; but this cannot be helped. Provided we keep ourselves separate on a right principle and in a right spirit, we may safely leave all results with God. No doubt, in the days of Ezra, God's people must have appeared excessively intolerant by refusing the co-operation of the surrounding people in building the house of God; but they acted on Divine principle by refusing.

Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the children of the captivity builded the temple unto the Lord God of Israel, then they came to Zerubbabel, and to the chief of the fathers, and said unto them, Let us build with you; for we seek your God as ye do; and we do sacrifice unto him, since the days of Esarhaddon, king of Assur, which brought us up hither.

This might seem to be an attractive proposal – evidencing a decided leaning toward the God of Israel; but it was refused, because at heart the people were uncircumcised and hostile.

But Zerubbabel, and Jeshua, and the rest of the chief of the fathers of Israel, said unto them, Ye have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God; but we ourselves together will build unto the Lord God of Israel. (Ezra 4:1-3)

They would not yoke themselves with the uncircumcised – they would not “plow with an ox and a donkey” – they would not sow their “vineyard with different kinds of seeds, lest the yield of the seed which you have sown and the fruit of your vineyard be defiled” – they kept themselves separate, even though, by so doing, they exposed themselves to the charge of being a bigoted, narrow-minded, illiberal, uncharitable people.

We also read, "And the seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers, and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers" (Neh. 9:2). This was not sectarianism, but positive obedience. Their separation was essential to their existence as a people. They could not have enjoyed Divine presence on any other basis or ground. Thus it must always be with God's people. They must be separate, or else they are both useless and mischievous. God cannot own or accompany us if we yoke ourselves with unbelievers for any reason, on any ground, or for any project. The difficulty is combining a spirit of intense separation with a spirit of grace, gentleness, and forbearance – to maintain a narrow circle with a wide heart. This presents a real difficulty. Since the strict and uncompromising maintenance of truth tends to narrow the circle around us, we will need the expansive power of grace to keep the heart wide, and the affections warm. If we contend for truth without grace, we will only yield a one-sided and unattractive testimony. On the other hand, if we try to exhibit grace at the expense of truth, it will prove to be only the manifestation of a popular liberality at God's expense – a most worthless thing.

No really Divine and heavenly project or object can be gained by an infringement of God's truth. In other words, the means are not sanctified by the end; but both means and end must be according to the principles of God's Holy Word. To Jehoshaphat, recovering Ramoth-Gilead out of the hand of the enemy may have appeared a very worthy project; and, moreover, he might have appeared a liberal, gracious, popular, large-hearted man, when, in reply to Ahab's proposal, he said, "I am as thou art, and my people as thy people; and we will be with thee in the war." It is easy to be liberal and large-hearted at the expense of Divine principle; but how did it end? Ahab was killed, and Jehoshaphat narrowly escaped with his life, having made shipwreck of his testimony.

Jehoshaphat did not even gain the object for which he unequally yoked himself with an unbeliever; and even if he had gained it, it would have been no justification of his course<sup>8</sup>. Nothing can ever warrant a believer yoking with an unbeliever; and, therefore, however fair, attractive, and plausible the Ramoth expedition might seem in the eye of man, it was, in the judgment of God, "helping

the ungodly, and loving them that hate the Lord" (2 Chr. 19:2). The truth of God strips men and things of the false colors of expediency, presenting them in their proper light. It is an unspeakable mercy to have the clear judgment of God regarding what is going on around us: it imparts calmness to the spirit and stability to the course and character, saving one from that unhappy fluctuation of thought, feeling, and principle that so often tags us unfit for the place of a steady and consistent witness for Christ. If we attempt to form our judgment by the thoughts and opinions of men, we will surely fail spiritually; for they will always judge according to outward appearances, and not according to the intrinsic character and principle of things. Provided men can gain from what they conceive to be a right object or project, they care not about the mode of gaining it. But the true servant of Christ must do the Master's work on the Master's principles and in the Master's spirit. The true believer is not satisfied to reach the most praiseworthy end, unless it can be reached by a divinely appointed road. The means and the end must both be Divine. For example, it is most desirable to circulate the inspired Scriptures – God's own pure, eternal Word; but if it could only be circulated by yoking with unbelievers, then we would refrain. Why? – because to be unequally yoked with unbelievers is against inspired Scripture, and children of God are not to do evil that good may come.

But, blessed be God, His servants can circulate His precious Word without violating the precepts contained therein. We can scatter the precious seed everywhere, without joining with those whose course and conduct proves them to be of the world. The same may be said in reference to every object or project of a religious nature. It can and should be gained only on God's principles. One may argue that we are told not to judge; that we cannot read the heart; that we are bound to hope that all who would engage in such good works as Bible translation, distribution of tracts, and aiding missionary labors, must be God's people; therefore, it cannot be wrong to link ourselves with them. There is hardly a passage in the New Testament more misunderstood and misapplied as Matthew 7:1 (NKJV): "Judge not, that you be not judged." In the same chapter we read, "Beware of false prophets . . . You will know them by their fruits." How are we to "beware," if we do not exercise judgment? Again, in 1 Corinthians 5 (NKJV) we read, "For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? But those who are outside God judges." Here we are distinctly taught that those "inside" come within the immediate range of the Church's judgment; and yet, according to the common interpretation of Matthew 7:1, we should not judge anybody. Therefore, that interpretation must surely be unsound. Those on the "inside," we are to judge. "Do you not judge those who are inside?" On the other hand, we have nothing to do with those who are "outside," except to present the pure and perfect, the rich, illimitable, and unfathomable grace that shines with unclouded effulgence in the death and resurrection of the Son of God.

All this is plain enough. As people of God, we are told to exercise judgment toward those professing to be "inside;" we are told to "beware of false prophets;" we are commanded to "try the spirits:" and how can we do all this, if we are not to judge at all? What, then, does our Lord mean, when He says, "Judge not?" Surely He means just what the Apostle Paul, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, says, when he commands us to "judge nothing before the time, until the Lord

come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the heart: and then shall every man have praise of God" (1 Cor. 4:5). We have absolutely nothing to do with judging motives – that is God's jurisdiction; but we are to judge conduct and principles; that is to say, the conduct and principles of those professing to be "inside." In point of fact, those who say, "We must not judge," actually exercise judgment themselves. The moral instincts of the divine nature within a Christian virtually pronounce judgment regarding character, conduct, and doctrine; and these are the very points that are placed within the true believer's range of judgment.

The main point of consideration here is this: in matters of religion, a Christian should exercise judgment regarding those with whom he/she is yoked. Working in yoke or in harness with an unbeliever violates a direct command of the Holy Spirit. This may be ignorantly done; and if so, the Lord's grace is ready to pardon and restore; but if we persist in disobedience after being warned, we cannot expect God's blessing and presence, no matter how valuable or important the project or object we may seek to attain. "To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams."

#### *Philanthropic Yoke*

We now briefly consider the philanthropic phase of the unequal yoke. Some may say,

I agree that a Christian should not mingle with unbelievers in worship or service of God; but I think we can freely unite with them for the furtherance of projects of philanthropy – such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, providing hospitals, caring for the sick and infirm, places of refuge for the homeless, the fatherless and widows; in short, for the furtherance of everything that tends to promote the amelioration of our fellow-creatures, physically, morally, and intellectually.

At first sight, this seems fair enough; for we may be asked about helping a person by the road-side, to perhaps fix a flat. Certainly we should help our fellow-man; but if we were asked to become a member of a society of unbelievers for the purpose of fixing flat tires, we should refuse – not because of superior sanctity, but because God's Word says, "Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers." This should be our answer, no matter the object or project proposed by such a society. The servant of Christ is commanded "to be ready to every good work" – "to do good unto all" – "to visit the fatherless and the widows in their affliction;" but this is to be done as the servant of Christ, and not as the member of a society or committee in which there may be unbelievers, i.e., infidels and atheists, and all sorts of godless people. We must never forget that all of God's philanthropy is connected with the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is the channel through which God will bless and elevate us, physically, morally, and intellectually.

But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of

regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior (Titus 3:4-6, NKJV).

This is God's philanthropy. This is His mode of ameliorating man's condition. The Christian can be yoked with those who understand its worth, but not with any others.

People of the world know nothing of this, and care not for it. They may seek reformation, but it is reformation without Christ. They may promote amelioration, but it is amelioration without the cross. They wish to advance, but Jesus is neither the starting-post nor the goal of their course. How can a Christian yoke with them? They want to work without Christ, the very One to whom we owe everything. Can we be satisfied to work with them? Can we have an object or a project in common with them? If someone comes to us and says, "We want your co-operation in feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, founding hospitals, feeding and educating orphans, improving the physical condition of our fellow mortals." But, you know that a leading rule of the society is that the name of Jesus Christ is not to be introduced, because it might lead to controversy. In other words, they believe that since the society is not religious, but undividedly philanthropic, the subject of religion must be studiously excluded. Thus, infidels, atheists, and all sorts of unbelievers, can happily yoke themselves to move the glorious machine of philanthropy forward. What should be our answer to such a request? The fact is, words fail one attempting to reply to an appeal so monstrous. How can a Christian even consider benefiting mortals by the exclusion of Christ? God forbid. If a certain philanthropy sets aside that blessed One, Jesus Christ, then away with that philanthropy, because it assuredly is not God's – "He shed it on us abundantly through Jesus Christ." Satan always seeks to leave the Son of God out; and when he gets people to do that, he allows them to be benevolent, charitable, and philanthropic.

Actually, such benevolence and philanthropy should be termed malevolence and misanthropy, because how can one more effectually exhibit ill-will and hatred toward people, than by leaving out Jesus Christ, the only One who can truly bless them, both for time and eternity. What is the moral condition of a Christian who could take his/her seat at a board meeting or on a public platform, on the condition that Jesus Christ must not be introduced? Does it not demonstrate that the plans and operations of unbelievers are of sufficient importance? – so much so that for the purpose of carrying them out, the child of God is willing to throw the Master overboard. Let us not mistake matters. This is the way to view the world's philanthropy. Unbelievers can sell an ointment and give the proceeds to the poor, while pronouncing it waste to pour that ointment on the head of Christ. How could a Christian consent to this? How could a child of God be yoked with such? Should a Christian seek to improve the world without Christ? Should we join with unbelievers to garnish a scene that is stained with our Master's blood? Peter could say, "Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk." Peter healed a cripple by the power of the name of Jesus; but what would he have said if asked to join a committee or society to alleviate cripples on the condition of leaving out the name of Jesus Christ? It requires no great stretch of imagination to conceive his

answer. He healed the cripple only for the purpose of exalting the name of Jesus – setting forth its worth, its excellence, and its glory. The object of the world's philanthropy is the reverse – setting aside the holy name of Jesus Christ.

### *Conclusion*

Therefore we say, “Shame on the Christian who purposely enters into an object or a project where Jesus Christ is shut out.” May we go forth in the energy of love to Jesus, and by the power of His name, do all the good we can; but let us not yoke ourselves with unbelievers, seeking instead to counteract the effects of sin by not excluding the cross of Christ. God's grand object is to exalt His Son – “that all should honor the Son even as they honor the Father.” This should also be the Christian's primary goal and object. To this end we should “do good unto all.” But, if we join a society or a committee of unbelievers in order to do good, then it is not “in the name of Jesus” we act. This should be enough said for every true and loyal heart. God has only one way of blessing men – through Jesus Christ. As with Pharaoh of old, when the hungry Egyptians flocked to his presence, his word was, “Go to Joseph;” so God's word today is, “Come to Jesus.” Yes, for soul and body, time and eternity, we must go to Jesus; but unbelievers do not know Him; therefore, what has the Christian to do with such? How can we act in yoke with unbelievers? The child of God does so only on the ground or basis of denying the Savior's name. Some do not see this; but that does not alter the case for those who do. We should act honestly, as in the light; and, even though the feelings and affections of the new born Christian may not be sufficiently strong to lead away from yoking with the enemies of Christ, still, the conscience should bow to the commanding authority of God's eternal Word, “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers.”

May the Holy Spirit clothe His own Word with heavenly power, and make its edge sharp to pierce the conscience, so that the saints of God may be delivered from everything that hinders “running the race that is set before them.” Time is short. The Lord Himself will soon be here. Then, in a moment, many an unequal yoke will be broken; many a sheep and goat will be eternally severed. May we be enabled to purge ourselves from unclean associations and unhallowed influences, so that when Jesus returns we may not be ashamed, but meet Him with a joyful heart and an approving conscience.

(Unless otherwise noted, King James translation used)

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### *Footnotes:*

<sup>1</sup> By understanding Paul's long sentence in Romans 3:21-26, we understand the Gospel, all of Romans and the Bible. The 1885 English Revised Version changed “the faith of Christ” to “faith in Christ” in Romans 3:22; Galatians 2:16, 2:20, 3:22; Ephesians 3:12; and Philippians 3:9. In his book, *Commentaries on the Old and New Testament*, James Burton Coffman concludes that the KJV is a correct translation of all these verses, a fact confirmed by the total agreement of the Emphatic Diaglott in each case. James Macknight, Adam Clarke, as well as other older commentators, also agree with the KJV translation of these verses – “the faith of Christ,” like the “faith of Abraham” in Romans 4:16. We asked a full-time minister serving a large church, about whether he believed that to be saved one had to believe in the “faith of Jesus Christ” to which he wrote: “God provides righteousness to those who believe. If through the faith of Jesus – everybody would be saved.” We asked the same question to a university Bible professor, who expressed a view of modern translations held by many today. He wrote: “Both ideas . . . are biblical . . .” However, we also presented the question to an

elder of the church, who wrote: "The believer's faith causes him to respond to that perfect justification which is and was brought by Christ in His obedience to God's will of offering His son as the perfect atonement for all mankind (sins)." We concur with the elder and older commentators, as well as Coffman, whose commentary on this verse is a scathing rebuke of many modern-day professors and preachers. Coffman points out that we should stay with the KJV in this verse, because changing it represents the same tampering with the Word of God which resulted in the monstrosity of changing "the righteousness of God" to "a righteousness" (Rom. 3:21 & Rom. 1:17). He writes: "the true Scriptural justification by faith has absolutely no reference to the faith of stinking sinners, but to the faith of the Son of God. The only end served by this change was to bolster the faith only theory of justification." He further writes: "the true grounds of justification cannot ever be in a million years the faith of fallible, sinful people, would appear to be axiomatic. How could it be? The very notion that God could impute justification to an evil man, merely upon the basis of anything that such a foul soul might either believe or do, is a delusion. Justification in any true sense requires that the justified be accounted as righteous and undeserving of any penalty whatever; and no man's faith is sufficient grounds for such an imputation. On the other hand, the faith of Jesus Christ is a legitimate ground of justification, because Christ's faith was perfect." In the absolute sense, only Christ is faithful – "Faithful is he that calleth you" (1 Thess. 5:24). Only He is called "the faithful and true witness" (Rev. 3:14). The faith of Christ was also obedient; a perfect and complete obedience, lacking nothing. Therefore, we conclude that the sinless, holy, obedient faith of the Son of God is the only ground of justification of a human being – Christ only is righteously justified in God's sight. How then are we saved? We are saved "in Christ," having been incorporated into Him – justified as a part of Him. Our study prompts agreement with Coffman's conclusion that faith is not the ground of our justification; it is not the righteousness which makes us righteous before God. The "faith of the Son of God" is the only basis for our justification, and that faith is definitely included in the "righteousness of God" mentioned in this verse. Even the righteousness of God through faith of Jesus Christ shows the principal constituent of God's righteousness. In conclusion, God's righteousness is the righteousness of Jesus Christ – His absolute, intrinsic, unalloyed righteousness – implicit in His perfect faith (mentioned here) and His perfect obedience (implied). The contrary notion that God's righteousness is some imputation accomplished by the sinner's faith is unfounded. Any righteousness that could commend itself to the Father and become the ground of anything truly worthwhile would, by definition, have to be a true and genuine righteousness. That righteousness was provided by the sinless life of the Christ, summarized in this verse as "through faith of Jesus Christ," the idea being much clearer in the KJV, "The righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ." We concur with Coffman on this subject, including his final conclusion, ". . . the word believe in this verse refers to sinners' faith (believer's faith) which is no part of God's righteousness at all, but, like baptism, is but a mere condition of salvation – being neither more nor less important than baptism."

<sup>2</sup> For more information on salvation, see [God's Salvation](#) in A Religion Library section of StudyJesus.com.

<sup>3</sup> There are many cases in which people are united, who, though they cannot exactly be said to be "unequally yoked," are, to say the least, badly matched. Their tempers, tastes, habits, and views, are different; and, in some cases, so different that instead of maintaining a desirable balance (which opposite tempers, if properly arranged, might do), they keep up a perpetual discord and conflict, to the sad derangement of the domestic circle, and the dishonor of the Lord's name. All this might be obviated if Christians would only wait on God, and make His glory more their object than personal interest or affection.

<sup>4</sup> It is important for the Christian to bear in mind the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, "If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light." When we are perplexed as to our path, we have reason to suspect that our eye is not single; for assuredly, perplexity is not compatible with a "body full of light." We frequently pray for guidance in matters that, if the eye were single, would have no need of pray. To pray about something concerning that the Word of God is plain about is the mark of a rebellious will. Sometimes we seek God's will, desiring to know how to act in circumstances in which it is not His will that we should be found in at all. It is a common thought: wanting to enjoy the consolation of God's direction in a path that we have chosen for ourselves. Be assured that, if we are near enough to God, we will have no trouble knowing His will. However, the opposite of "if thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light" is "whence it is certain that if the whole body is not full of light, the eye is not single." One might say, "That is poor consolation." But it is a rich consolation for those whose sole desire is to have a single eye and to walk with God.

- <sup>5</sup> For more information on the Holy Spirit, see [God the Spirit](#) in A Religion Library section of StudyJesus.com.
- <sup>6</sup> For more information on the Word of God, see [God's Word](#) in A Religion Library section of StudyJesus.com.
- <sup>7</sup> For more information on the Pentateuch, see [The Pentateuch](#) in Additional Resources section of StudyJesus.com.
- <sup>8</sup> The unequal yoke proved a terrible snare to the amiable heart of Jehoshaphat. He yoked himself with Ahab for a religious object and, notwithstanding the disastrous termination of this scheme, we find him yoking himself with Ahaziah for a commercial object, which likewise ended in loss and confusion; and, lastly, he yoked himself with Jehoram for a military object. Compare 2 Chronicles 18; 20:32-37; 2 Kings 3.