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Do Not be Unequally Yoked with Unbelievers 6:14 to 7:1

Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers DIG: What arguments did Paul present to convince the Corinthians not to have close partnerships with unbelievers? How are believers to rightfully relate to the unbelieving world? What do dating and marriage have to do with this principle? How can we "strive to be completely holy, out of reverence for God?"

REFLECT: Of the different relationships Paul has in view here, which one(s) apply to you? What does it mean that you are the temple of the living God? What unclean things might affect your body? Your spirit? Is there something contaminating you right now from which you should separate? How can you communicate to others the seriousness of this principle?

Believers and unbelievers live in two opposing worlds.

The principle: Do not be unequally **yoked** (Greek: *heterozugeo*) **together with unbelievers (6:14a NIV).** Actually, the command is even more pointed: *Stop yoking yourselfs to unbelievers.* **Paul** was not merely warning **the Corinthians** about a potential danger, but instructing **them** to stop an action already in progress. The command appears to come out of the blue. Has **Paul** not been lobbying strenuously for **the Corinthians' affection**? Had **he** not just asked **them**, as **his children**, to **open wide their hearts to him** (**to see link click Bh – The Characteristics of Love**)? Moreover, **he** resumes **his** lobbying efforts in **7:2: "Make room for us in your hearts,' he** repeats. Then what are we to make of **6:14** to **7:1**?[160] It seems that **Paul** is talking about being **yoked** together in a permanent arrangement like marriage, a business partnership, and the like. **Paul** is content to state a general principle that needs specific application under the guidance of **the Ruach**.

Believers and **unbelievers** live in two opposing **worlds**. In Messiah's Kingdom, **believers** are characterized by righteousness, light, and eternal life. In Satan's kingdom, **unbelievers** are characterized by lawlessness, darkness, and spiritual

death. The saved and the unsaved have different affections, beliefs, principles, motives, goals, attitudes, and hopes. In short, **they** view life from totally opposing perspectives.

Consequently, relationships between **believers** and **unbelievers** are at best temporary and external. We must keep a light touch on this **world**. We may enjoy family ties, work at the same job, share in business relationships, live in the same community, experience the same hobbies and pastimes, and even agree on certain political and social issues. But on a spiritual level, **believers** and **unbelievers** are in two completely different **worlds**. Dating and marriage between **a believer** and **unbeliever** would certainly be a legitimate application of this principle.

It should be obvious that **believers** cannot live in both **worlds**. **The apostle John** clearly indicated that when **he** wrote: **Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world – the cravings of the natural man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does – comes not from the Father but from the world (1 Jn 2:15-16). James** expressed that same reality in the forceful words: **You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God (James 4:4).** And **Paul** urged **believers not be conformed to** the standards of **this world (Rom 12:2).**

*Dear Heavenly **Father, Your** awesome **love** is wonderful! **Your love** is not a privilege to bask in, but a joyful opportunity to show **You** how much **You** are **loved**. How important it is to realize that **Your** gift of **righteousness (Romans 5:17)** cannot be taken for granted**. Your** offer of **love** requires a **loving** response back to **You**, as **You** demonstrate by **Your** words: **I never knew you, depart from Me (Matthew 7:23). You** speak those words to those who look good outwardly, but their heart does not follow the greatest commandment **– love ADONAI your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength (Matthew 22:37-38).***

*Receiving **the righteousness of God (5:21)** is so very wonderful! **It** is a relationship gift; receiving **the Ruach** as a life partner who **lovingly** guides and teaches us. Receiving this gift requires a break from old relationships and habits that are displeasing to the new **Lord** of one's life. Though it is a great joy to have **the Lord** constantly by one's side **(Hebrews 13:5),** effort is needed to rearrange one's life to accommodate the new **loving Partner.***

The Corinthians had struggled greatly to make a clean break from the idolatrous and immoral lifestyle of **their** past. Despite having professed faith in **Messiah** and becoming part of the church, **some** in the congregation were still clinging to elements of **their** pagan religion. And though, like **the Thessalonians**, **they** had **turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God (First Thessalonians 1:9), they** still failed to make a clean break from **their** previous lifestyle. The lure of their former paganism, which permeated every aspect of **their** lives in **Corinth**, had proven too hard to shake, as **First Corinthians** makes clear.

Making matters even worse, **the false apostles** who claimed apostolic authority (see **Af – The Problem of the False Apostles**), brought with **them** a quasi-believing syncretism of gospel truth (see the commentary on **Romans As – Paul's Gospel**), Jewish legalism and pagan mysticism. **They** were eager to stay connected to **the Corinthians'** former behavior, to make **themselves** more popular, thereby, more prosperous.

So, **Paul** gave this mandate to **separate**.

However, as **he** did earlier in **his** discussion about **eating** a meal at an idol temple, **Paul** assumed that **believers** would socialize with **their** pagan friends and families. Clearly this is not a ban against all association with **unbelievers. He** encouraged the believing spouse to stay with **the unbelieving** spouse as long as possible **(First Corinthians 7:12-13). He** assumed **believers** would shop **in the market (First Corinthians 10:25),** and encouraged **them** to **eat** at a pagan's home if **they** were invited and **wanted to go (10:27).** But **he** did want **the Corinthians** to be able to distinguish **themselves** from the pagan society around **them** and live accordingly.

Paul drew **his** analogy from **Deuteronomy 22:10**, where the Torah commanded **the Israelites, "You are not to plow with an ox and a donkey yoked together" (22:10).** One is stronger than the other, and one will work harder and tire very fast. **The ox** was clean, and **the donkey** unclean. It would be impossible for such a mismatched pair to plow together effectively. **Paul** uses this passage in a figurative way: **the believer** has been cleansed, while **the unbeliever** refused to be cleansed. What business did **they** have under the same **yoke**? You guessed it. None! It will always be **the unbeliever's yoke**, namely **the yoke** of unbelief. Contrary to that, **Yeshua** said: **My yoke** of faith **is easy and my burden is light (Matthew 11:30). The unbeliever** would laugh at the suggestion of **his** taking on faith's **yoke**; yet, strange to say, instead of equally refusing **the unbeliever's**

yoke, many **a believer** accepts **it** upon his neck and even imagines that he can still retain his **yoke** of faith.

Foolishness.

Paul uses few words to paint this picture; but they speak volumes. They strike at the heart of the whole danger that threatens **believers**. They drive home a timeless principle. What a picture: **a believer** with **his** neck under **the unbeliever's yoke**! Why pull **the plow** of the **unbeliever's** lack of faith? That **yoke** breaks the necks of those who bear **it**. **Yeshua Messiah** delivered us from it. How could we possibly think of going back to that dreadful **yoke**?[162]

The principle of, **"Do not be** unequally **yoked together with unbelievers" (6:14a NIV)** is then backed up by **five rhetorical questions** which underline its importance, each of which assumes a negative answer: "None whatsoever!" They serve to stress the radical incompatibility of intimate relationships between **believers** and **unbelievers (First Corinthians 10:21)**.

Question one: For what do righteousness and lawlessness have in common (6:14b NIV)? In this first question **the inner quality** of **believers** and **unbelievers** is placed side by side. It is **righteousness** that determines its opposite, **lawlessness**, and not the reverse. **Paul's** progression is orderly: first faith and unbelief, and now **righteousness** and its opposite. **The righteousness** of the believer is that which **he** has by faith, the imputed **righteousness** of **Messiah** (see **Bf – Fifteen Words of Hope**). Due to **Ha'Shem's** verdict of acquittal, this *inner quality* belongs to **the believer**. But **the unbeliever** has no such acquittal, **his** *inner quality* is entirely **lawless**. **God hates all who do evil (Psalm 5:5).** All **the unbeliever's righteousness are like filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6).** Therefore, it is impossible that **they** have anything in common.

Question two: What fellowship can light have with darkness (6:14c NIV)? From the attributes of **righteousness** and **lawlessness** we are taken back to **the powers which produce them**. Just as **lawlessness** is the absence of **righteousnes**s, **darkness** is the absence of **light**. Like **their** attributes, **they** exclude each other by **their** very nature; where one is, it drives out the other. **God is light, and there is no darkness in Him at all (First John 1:5).** This **light** has entered **the believer** and makes **him a child of light (Matthew 5:14; John 12:36; Ephesians 5:8),** and so **the believer walks in the light (John 12:35-36; First John 1:7).** Its opposite is **darkness** which is the fruit of **the**

Adversary, **his** demons and the world. **In the beginning YHVH separated light from darkness (Genesis 1:4),** and this separation can also be seen in the spiritual sense. **For you used to be darkness; but now, united with the Lord, you are light (Ephesians 5:8).** Out of this spiritual **darkness, God** has **called believers into His wonderful light (First Peter 2:9). Light** brings life, **darkness** is death.



Question three: What harmony can there be between the Messiah and Belial (6:15a)? This question advances to the contrasting **personal rulers** that are behind the qualities and powers. The question is: do these ever agree? No! **Messiah** has transferred all of **His righteousness** to our spiritual bank account at the moment of faith (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Bw – What God Does For Us at the Moment of Faith**). **He has become wisdom for us from God, and righteousness and holiness and redemption as well (First Corinthians 1:30b).** As **the Messiah, He** is our **Prophet, High Priest,** and **King** (see the commentary on **Hebrews Ai – The Superiority of Messiah to the Prophets**)**.** The term **Belial** is actually a Hebrew word that has been transliterated into Greek and means *worthless.* In the TaNaKh this term is like *son* or *daughter.* **In later Jewish writings, the term was used as a proper name for Satan (see the book of Jubilees i.20). Paul** used this term in this way.[163] **Messiah** came to destroy the works of **the Devil**; that is **His** agreement with **him**.

Question four: What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever (6:15b)? This advances us to **the personal subjects** involved. **The believer** is the one who is **justified by faith (Romans 3:28),** at **peace with God (Romans**

5:1), and assured of eternal salvation (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Ms – The Eternal Security of the Believer**). **The light of the Sh'khinah glory of God in the face of Messiah** has **shined in his heart (4:6); he no longer lives as the pagans live, with their sterile ways of thinking (Ephesians 4:17),** but **keeps pursuing the goal in order to win the prize offered by God's high calling in Yeshua Messiah (Philippians 3:14). The unbeliever** has the very opposite of this. **He** has **already been judged (John 3:18)** and **will not see life but remains subject to God's wrath (John 3:26). He** is **not included among Messiah's sheep (John 10:26b), he will not enter God's rest (Hebrews 3:18-19);** indeed, **he will be condemned (Mark 16:16)** and **hurled into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:15).** As subjects of **their** respective lords, what do **they have in common**? Nothing! These two differ at every point. What one has, the other has not.[164]

Question five: We reach the climax in this final question. **What agreement can there be between the temple of God and idols (6:16a)?** All false religion is, in the final analysis, deceiving **spirits and things taught by demons (First Timothy 4:1; Deuteronomy 32:17; Revelation 9:20)**, and hostile to **ADONAI** and **His Word**. There can be no **agreement between the temple of God and idols.** The TaNaKh graphically depicts the disastrous consequence of attempting to mingle **idolatry** with the worship of **the One true God**.

First Kings 12:25-33 illustrates the folly of **Jeroboam**, the first king of the northern kingdom of **Isra'el**. **He thought to himself, "If these people go up to offer sacrifices at the Temple of ADONAI in Jerusalem, they will give their allegiance to their LORD. After** the place of worship from **Jerusalem** to **Dan and Bethel**; changed **the priests** of worship from **the Levites** to **all sorts of people;** changed the date of worship of **Sukkot** from the seventh to **the eighth month**. This eventually resulted in the fall of the Northern Kingdom in 722 BC.

Second Kings 21:1-9 describes the reign of **Manasseh**, the most wicked of all the kings of the southern kingdom of Judah. **He did evil in the sight of ADONAI** by bringing **idolatry** back into Judah. Specifically, **he rebuilt the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed; he erected altars for Ba'al and made an Asherah pole, as Ahab king of** the northern kingdom of **Isra'el had done. He worshiped all the hosts of heaven and served them by building altars in the house of ADONAI.** And if that wasn't bad enough, **he** put **an idol** in **the Temple itself**. That horrible insult to **YHVH** provoked **His** devastating judgment on the nation **(Second Kings 21:10-15).**

First Samuel 4 and 5 record another incident that illustrates the incompatibility of the true **God and idols**. **Isra'el was at war** with **the Philistines** had **lost four thousand men** in one skirmish. Dismayed at **ADONAI's** failure to help **them** in battle (which was due to **their** sin and apostasy), **the Israelites brought the ark from Shiloh.** Thinking **themselves** invincible, **they** fought **the Philistines** again and lost **30,000 men** and **the ark. The** triumphant **Philistines** brought **the ark** to **the temple** of **their god Dagon**. The next morning, much to **their** surprise, **they** discovered that **the idol** of **Dagon** had prostrated **itself** before **the ark**. **They** put **the idol** back in **its** place, only to have the same thing happen the next day – but this time **Dagon's head and hands** were **cut off**. The message was clear, **the** true **God** has no rivals.

Ezekiel 8 further demonstrates that reality. **ADONAI** took **Ezeki'el** (who was exiled in **Babylon**) by means of **a vision** to **Jerusalem** to witness **idolatry in the Temple**. Shockingly, **the** apostate **Israelites** had carved idolatrous graffiti **on the walls of the Temple**. Not only that, but **women** were worshiping **the god** of fertility **Tammuz**, and **about twenty-five men** were worshiping **the sun** with **their backs** to the Most Holy Place. **God's** reaction was to promise judgment: **Therefore, I will deal with them in My anger; I will not look on them with pity or spare them. Although they cry in My ears, I will not listen to them (Eze 8:18).** Rather than share **His** own **Temple** with pagan **idols, ADONAI** chose to abandon **it (Eze 10:18)**. The result was the catastrophic fall of **Jerusalem** (see the commentary on **Jeremiah Gb – The Destruction of Solomon's Temple on Tisha B'Av in 586 BC**). **Paul's** fifth rhetorical question provided a transition to **his** citing several verses from the TaNaKh.

The reason: **Paul** repeatedly symbolizes both the individual believer **(First Cor 6:19)** and the Congregation of **believers (First Cor 3:16-17; Ephesians 2:22)** as **the temple of God** with **the Ruach** dwelling within **(6:16b)**. **Peter** also uses **the "living temple"** analogy **(First Peter 2:5)**. As we begin to understand **the Tabernacle** and **Temple** as the dwelling place of **YHVH**, we can see how apt this metaphor was to describe **the believers**. Just as **the Ruach** dwelt in **the Tabernacle** and **Temple**, so too **His Spirit** had come to dwell in **believers**.

Understanding this, we can better appreciate the significance of the First Century Shavu'ot. On the anniversary of the day on which **ADONAI** had entered into a covenant with **Isra'el** at Sinai, **the believers** gathered together in **the Temple**, **the Dwelling Place of God**. There, in **the Temple** courts, **the Spirit of God** descended just as at Sinai and came upon individuals. **The believers** became

dwelling places, **little tabernacles** inside of **the Temple itself**. This is a good picture of **the People of God**. We are **temples** within **the Temple**, members of **His Body**.[165]

Having reminded **the Corinthians** that **they were temples of the living God, Paul** introduces an extended quotation from Scripture to substantiate what **he** has said. Although the quotation consists of several texts from the TaNaKh, **Paul** introduces **it** as if **it** were a single quotation, without identifying the specific verses in which **it** was found.[166] These passages bear every sign of having been chosen to address specific dangers of **idolatry** that lie at the heart of **Paul's** distress with **the Corinthians** and the cause of much of **their** conflict.[167] **As God** said: **I will house Myself in them, . . . and I will walk among you. I will be their God, and they will be My people (Second Corinthians 6:16c; Leviticus 26:12; Exodus 6:7; Jeremiah 31:33, 32:38; Ezeki'el 37:27).** As **the temple of God**, **the people of His B'rit Chadashah**, **His precious possession**, and **His dwelling place**, **believers** cannot join forces with false religion. To be so **unequally yoked** for the purpose of serving **God** has always been unacceptable and blasphemous.[168]

The result: On the foundation thus laid, **Paul** makes **his** appeal. But in a most striking manner **he** clothes it in words from the TaNaKh as though **God Himself** is addressing **His** readers.[169] **Therefore, ADONAI** says: **Go out from their midst; separate yourselves.** Just as it was inconceivable that **idols** would be brought into **the Temple of God** (see **Question five** above), so it is impossible for **the temples of God,** members of **the** holy **congregation (First Corinthians 1:2)** to go to, or share in the cultic worship of **idols** in **Corinth (First Corinthians 10:14-22** and **8:10-13)**, **idolatry (First Corinthians 5:10-11, 6:9, 12:2; Galatians 4:8, 5:20; Colossians 3:5; First Thessalonians 1:9),** or the fornication – either casual or cultic – with which it was often associated **(First Corinthians 10:7-8, 6:15** and **18),** were utterly abhorrent to both **God** and **Paul**; **believers** were to have no direct association with **them**.[170]

The thought of this verse points back to **Isaiah 52:11**, where **God** commanded **His people, "Don't even touch** (Greek: *hapto*, referring to *a harmful touch*) **what is unclean" (6:17a). Believers,** like the time of **Isra'el's** national salvation (see the commentary on **Isaiah Ix – ADONAI Will Lay Bare His Holy Arm**), must make a clean break with all false religion to avoid its contaminating influence **(Second Timothy 2:16-17). The children of light** must **not have anything to do with the deeds produced by darkness. They** must be concerned with **pleasing the**

Lord, not sinful mankind **(Ephesians 5:5-11).** The Church's goal is not to make **unbelievers** feel comfortable and non threatened. On the contrary, it is to make them feel uncomfortable with their sins and threatened by **God's** judgment and the terrors of hell that they face.[171] **Yeshua Himself** said: **Do not fear those who kill the body but are powerless to kill the soul. Rather, fear the One who can destroy both body and soul in Gei-Hinnom (Matthew 10:28).**

Then I Myself will receive you, which is based on **God's Word** given to the people in exile through another prophet in exile, **Ezeki'el (Ezeki'el 20:34** and **41).** Through **Ezeki'el, ADONAI** promised to welcome home and **receive His people** from the Gentile nations in which they were dispersed. Through the words of **the apostle Paul** – who is citing **Ezeki'el** – **ADONAI** is calling **His people** out of the cultic **uncleanness** of the Gentiles. **He** promises to **receive them** as **they** come out.[172] Not only that, **God** declares: **I will be your Father, and you will be my sons and daughters, says ADONAI-Tzva'ot" (Second Corinthians 6:17b-18; Second Samuel 7:14, Isaiah 43:6).** As **believers**, we are adopted into the family of **God (Galatians 4:1-7** and **6:10; Ephesians 1:5; First Peter 1:23** and **4:17; First John 3:9).**

Paul now concludes the appeal **he** began in **6:14**. **Therefore, my dear friends, since we have these promises, let us purify ourselves. The promises** refer to **God's** assurances of **His presence (6:16)** and **fellowship (6:17b-18)** to those who obey **Him**. This obedience requires **purification**, which here implies **separation from everything that can defile either body or spirit,** and from every person who pollutes **the truth (2:17** and **4:2). Paul** encouraged **the Corinthians** to **strive to be completely holy, out of reverence for God.**[173] In the whole letter we find what **7:1** again reveals. **Paul** joins **the Corinthians** to **himself, "Let us purify ourselves." He** does not pose as a saint who rebukes **them** because **they** are unclean. But like all great leaders, **he** won **them** over by doing **himself** what **he** asks **them** to do. Leading, as it were, by example. The hearts of **the Corinthians** must have been stirred when **they** read those words.