

Unequally Yoked

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 6:14

Code: QA196

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Question:

Some people have told me that being unequally yoked is talking exclusively about marriage. Others have said that it applies also to business partnerships and other situations. Could you please expand on this? What does it mean to be unequally yoked and what type of a guideline should I have if it is okay for me to have a business partnership with a non-believer?

Answer:

Well, this is a very important question. Second Corinthians, chapter 6, is what you're asking about. The concept of "yoke" gives you the key. A yoke was something that was put over two animals in a common enterprise.

In 2 Corinthians 6:14, Paul says, "Do not be bound together with unbelievers. For what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness? And what fellowship has light with darkness? And what harmony has Christ with Belial? Or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols?"

The point is that if you are in the same yoke, pulling the same plow down the same furrow — that is, if you are working side by side in the same enterprise, partnering together with an unbeliever — you've got a problem.

Truly, that would refer to marriage because there's no firmer, stronger, more binding yoke than marriage, right? If you go beyond that and ask, "What about a business partnership?" it would depend upon the nature of that partnership. If, for example, there's a limited partnership involving a group of investors and you're one of those investors, that's one thing. A person might put money in a bank; that's also a form of partnership with other people. I don't think that's the issue here.

The issue here is linking up with an unbeliever, side by side, under the same yoke, pulling the same furrow, in the same direction, with the same goals and objectives. Now, that might mean a partnership in a common business — if it is likely that the nature of your partnership will lead to compromising situations down the road when your worldviews collide.

Beyond all that, however, the primary application of 2 Corinthians 6 is with regard to spiritual enterprise. The primary warning is to never link up with an unbeliever in spiritual pursuits.

So the obvious thing, first of all, is to avoid any common spiritual enterprise with an unbeliever (including things like marriage or religious ecumenism). And then secondarily, to be very careful in other areas of life (like business) if you're pulling the same yoke with an unbeliever, because it's inevitable that there will be conflict — since the standard by which you operate is inherently different.

Practically speaking, you will have to make the judgment as to what a particular partnership involves and whether you can be part of it — based on biblical principles, prayer, and godly counsel. The Spirit of God will lead you in that.

The following is adapted from a Q&A that John did several years ago at Grace Church.

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