Who Should We Yoke With?

2 Corinthians 6:14-18

Have you ever tried to do a three legged race with someone who is 8” taller than you?

Or maybe you are the person who has tried with someone who is 8” shorter than you?

Three legged races are hard to begin with, and a huge difference in height makes it even more difficult.

I use this illustration to warm us up for the Apostle Paul’s teaching about being unequally yoked. In other words, Paul is going to instruct the Corinthians about what types of people they should form deeply committed relationships with.

Whether it pertains to business, marriage, commitments to non-profits, or even churches. Paul commands the Corinthians to abstain from being in close lock step with non-believers. In the context of 2 Corinthians 6 Paul is informing Christians that they cannot be deeply linked with idolaters and Christ at the same time. Even if the said idolaters are “church members.” His imagery comes from Deuteronomy 22:10 which says:

10 “You must not plow with an ox and a donkey harnessed together.”

Deuteronomy 22:10 NLT

An ox and a donkey harnessed together would be a hot mess!

Before I go on, I want to clarify, that there are many ways that we can, and should, interact with unbelievers without being “yoked together” with them.

The quick test is this. Before making a binding commitment with someone consider if your connection with them will require you to do things, think things, or believe things that will be detrimental to your faith in Jesus. If so, don’t get connected to them on a deep and binding level.

This really is an obvious truth. Though sometimes we overlook it, because we can lose sight of our directives and desired destination in this life. Consider this lesson from an exchange between Alice and the Cheshire Cat, in Lewis Carroll’s “Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland.”

Alice…‘Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?’

‘That depends a good deal on where you want to get to,’ said the Cat.

‘I don’t much care where—’ said Alice.

‘Then it doesn’t matter which way you go,’ said the Cat.

‘—so long as I get somewhere,’ Alice added as an explanation.

‘Oh, you’re sure to do that,’ said the Cat, ‘if you only walk long enough.’

Or if you would rather take advice from real people, George Harrison once said:

“If you don’t know where you’re going, any road will get you there.”

Another statement we can draw from the same truth is this:

If you are asking someone for directions, they would first need to know where you wanted to end up. When we as Christians choose our traveling companions through life, we should ask ourselves it they are heading in the same direction as we are. I will give you one more illustration and then we will move to the text.

If two people were in Topeka, Kansas and one was heading for Victoria, BC and the other was heading to Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, would they be able to travel together. A person’s desired destination in life dictates who they can travel with. I’ll leave it up to you to figure out whether Christians are heading to Victoria or Ft. Lauderdale, but obviously that isn’t the point. The point is that a Christian cannot make headway toward their destination in life if they are tied to someone who is going in the opposite direction. As Paul wrote:

14 Don’t team up with those who are unbelievers. How can righteousness be a partner with wickedness? How can light live with darkness? 15 What harmony can there be between Christ and the devil? How can a believer be a partner with an unbeliever? 16 And what union can there be between God’s temple and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God said:

“I will live in them

and walk among them.

I will be their God,

and they will be my people.

17 Therefore, come out from among unbelievers,

and separate yourselves from them, says the Lord.

Don’t touch their filthy things,

and I will welcome you.

18 And I will be your Father,

and you will be my sons and daughters,

says the Lord Almighty.”

2 Corinthians 6:14-18 NLT

As Christians, who are yoked with Christ, our destination is the destiny God has planned for us.

Ephesians 2 says:

6 For he raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus. 7 So God can point to us in all future ages as examples of the incredible wealth of his grace and kindness toward us, as shown in all he has done for us who are united with Christ Jesus.

8 God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God. 9 Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. 10 For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

Ephesians 2:6-10 NLT

And in Romans 8 the scriptures say:

29 For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son,

Romans 8:29 NLT

As believers, we are God’s masterpiece and He has pre-destined us to become like Jesus. That is our destination.

And our destination determines our directives in life. Even though we haven’t reached our destination yet we are heading in that direction. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

18 So all of us who have had that veil removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image.

2 Corinthians 3:18 NLT

And as he alluded to in the letter to the Romans:

16 For I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes—the Jew first and also the Gentile. 17 This Good News tells us how God makes us right in his sight. This is accomplished from start to finish by faith. As the Scriptures say, “It is through faith that a righteous person has life.”

Romans 1:16-17 NLT

This set of directives and final destination is completely opposite from the life of a non-believer. As Romans 1 says:

18 But God shows his anger from heaven against all sinful, wicked people who suppress the truth by their wickedness. 19 They know the truth about God because he has made it obvious to them. 20 For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God.

21 Yes, they knew God, but they wouldn’t worship him as God or even give him thanks. And they began to think up foolish ideas of what God was like. As a result, their minds became dark and confused. 22 Claiming to be wise, they instead became utter fools. 23 And instead of worshiping the glorious, ever-living God, they worshiped idols made to look like mere people and birds and animals and reptiles.

24 So God abandoned them to do whatever shameful things their hearts desired. As a result, they did vile and degrading things with each other’s bodies. 25 They traded the truth about God for a lie. So they worshiped and served the things God created instead of the Creator himself, who is worthy of eternal praise! Amen. 26 That is why God abandoned them to their shameful desires.

Romans 1:18-26 NLT

Ours is a life lived for Christ and others, while the non-believer is ultimately living for their own glory and good. It is also logical that if we are yoked with Christ we can’t be yoked with someone who God has abandoned. This is what Paul means when he quotes:

16 And what union can there be between God’s temple and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God said:

“I will live in them

and walk among them.

I will be their God,

and they will be my people.”

2 Corinthians 6:16 NLT

If God is with us and we are with God then we cannot be heading in the same direction as those who have rejected God. Our journey is to be a spent following and imitating Christ.

12 After washing their feet, he put on his robe again and sat down and asked, “Do you understand what I was doing? 13 You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and you are right, because that’s what I am. 14 And since I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other’s feet. 15 I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you.

John 13:12-15 NLT

1 And you should imitate me, just as I imitate Christ.

1 Corinthians 11:1 NLT

6 Those who say they live in God should live their lives as Jesus did.

1 John 2:6 NLT

This is not the journey that lovers of self are on. And if we are too closely connected with them it will create even more division and difficulty in our already difficult lives.

Paul sums this principle up nicely in his letter to the Philippians:

17 Dear brothers and sisters, pattern your lives after mine, and learn from those who follow our example. 18 For I have told you often before, and I say it again with tears in my eyes, that there are many whose conduct shows they are really enemies of the cross of Christ. 19 They are headed for destruction. Their god is their appetite, they brag about shameful things, and they think only about this life here on earth.

Philippians 3:17-19 NLT

This brings us to the application.

If you are a Christian and you are considering forming committed partnerships with people, do it with people who are walking with Christ.

But, what if you have already made commitments to with people who are heading in the opposite direction?

The answer to that is not as easy. If we are talking about marriage, the Bible speaks to it, when Paul writes:

12 Now, I will speak to the rest of you, though I do not have a direct command from the Lord. If a fellow believer has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to continue living with him, he must not leave her. 13 And if a believing woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to continue living with her, she must not leave him. 14 For the believing wife brings holiness to her marriage, and the believing husband brings holiness to his marriage. Otherwise, your children would not be holy, but now they are holy. 15 (But if the husband or wife who isn’t a believer insists on leaving, let them go. In such cases the believing husband or wife is no longer bound to the other, for God has called you to live in peace.) 16 Don’t you wives realize that your husbands might be saved because of you? And don’t you husbands realize that your wives might be saved because of you?

1 Corinthians 7:12-16 NLT

In other words, if you were equally yoked as unbelievers when you got married, and now upon conversion you are unequally yoked, keep your commitment and maybe they will come to know Jesus through your example. I think there could be some exceptions to this if a spouse was so against Christ that they were severely sabotaging the other persons relationship with God.

I think it wise to apply this thinking to other commitments you made before you were a believer. But with a lighter grip. Non-believers don’t have the same goal in life as believers. And so we must evaluate whether our existing connections are derailing us from our Christian directives.

Remember the definition of our purpose in life just doesn’t work in lock step with a person who rejects Jesus and His pattern of life. Before you partner yourself with someone make sure that they believe the following:

So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

1 Corinthians 10:31 NLT

For everything comes from him and exists by his power and is intended for his glory. All glory to him forever! Amen.

Romans 11:36 NLT

19 Don’t you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, 20 for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 NLT

10 For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

Ephesians 2:10 NLT

If you are in Topeka, Kansas you can choose to go toward Ft. Lauderdale or Victoria, BC but if you are going toward one you are going in the completely opposite direction from the other.