

Why We Shouldn't Date Non-Christians

Kyle Skaggs examines theological and sociological reasons why it's a bad idea for Christ-followers to date unbelievers.

Should you date a non-Christian? The world tells us, "Why not? You can't help who you are attracted to. As long as you don't force your beliefs on the person you're dating, there won't be a problem." But what do we say? To provide a biblical answer to this question, let's assume that you, the hypothetical Christian single, are dating with the purpose of marriage.

According to the Christian worldview, believers are to seek out a marriage that honors God. We are to leave our parents and join as one flesh with our spouse (Genesis 2:24), being faithful by reserving sex and romantic attention for that one person and only that one person (Exodus 20:14, Proverbs 6:20-35, Matthew 5:27). This way, a marriage that honors God places His will above your own desires. In order to best do this, your marriage needs to be religiously homogamous. In other words, you need to marry another Christian.

The scripture concerning marrying a non-Christian is straightforward. 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 warns against doing it because being unequally yoked will cause us to stumble in our walk with Christ. While there is no verse that explicitly mentions dating non-Christians, what applies to marriage clearly applies to dating as well. Dating is courtship, an intentional step on the road to marriage. How you go about dating will affect how you go about marriage. There are three areas of concern when it comes to dating non-Christians. The first is your personal walk with Christ. The second is loving and honoring your spouse. Third is raising your children as Christians.

Therefore, I find it's good to explore why we are told not to be unequally yoked beyond "because the Bible says so," as well as the practical concerns of courting non-believers. There are some who would argue that it is fine to date non-Christians. Some of the arguments they give are decent. Others are not so good. I will be paraphrasing some arguments I've personally heard. For context, we must first explore why we are told not to marry unbelievers.

When the people of Israel were preparing to enter the promised land, God commanded them multiple times not to marry or intermingle with the people they were being sent to drive out, because God was having Israel drive them out. They were marked for judgment because of their wickedness. The Lord makes the consequences of intermingling with the Canaanites clear:

"...lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and when they whore after their gods and sacrifice to their gods and you are invited, you eat of his sacrifice, and you take of their daughters for your sons, and their daughters whore after their gods and make your sons whore after their gods." (Exodus 34:15-16 ESV)

Again in Deuteronomy, the Israelites were commanded to drive out the nations who inhabited the Promised Land, "...that they may not teach you to do according to all their abominable practices that they have done for their gods, and so you sin against the Lord your God" (20:16-18 ESV).

"So the people of Israel lived among the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. And their daughters they took to themselves for wives, and their own daughters they gave to their sons, and they served their gods. And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. They forgot the Lord their God and served the Baals and the Asheroth." (Judges 3:5-7 ESV)

Yoking with unbelievers creates a stumbling block for you in

your relationship with God, and as you can see from Israel's history, marriage to unbelievers leads to sin because it is the believer who compromises their faith. Take Solomon as an example. He was a man of wisdom and integrity who built the temple in Jerusalem. Like his father David, he disobeyed the Lord's command to Israel's kings not to take many wives (Deuteronomy 17:17). Unlike his father, many of Solomon's wives were foreigners who evidently did not stop worshiping the gods of their homelands, since Solomon was convinced to build altars for those gods. Why did he marry all these pagan women? I can't say. He probably thought he could handle them.

This set Israel on a cycle of idolatry, oppression, and repentance much like the one in Judges.

To this, some might say, "But we aren't living in the Old Testament," or "that applied to the Hebrews in their particular context of taking the Promised Land.". Even later scripture contains the exact same message.

Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? . . . What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty."(2 Corinthians 6:14-18 ESV)

The believer and the unbeliever live in two different realities. One is light, with God revealing sin and calling the believer to be more like Christ, while the other is darkness, with an apathetic attitude towards God's values. The ungodly do not know or care for God's laws. As the believer pulls towards God, the unbeliever pulls away. They do this

because God intrudes more on the relationship as He changes the believer. Over time, the relationship will most likely become strained and bitter. The believer is forced to choose between pleasing God and pleasing the person they are dating. This conflict is amplified after marriage.

This is supported by scientific studies as well. Studies have found that couples belonging to differing religions have more frequent conflicts than those of the same faith.[{1}](#) In South Korea, a study found that Christian couples with similar attitudes towards religion and church attendance reported happier marriages.[{2}](#) The same trend was found in an American study.[{3}](#) Being unequally yoked has negative effects on your relationship with your spouse.

Being unequally yoked affects more than your relationship with God. It affects your children as well. After you are married, your children will be taught conflicting ways to live, which will more often than not lead them away from Christ. "When couples belong to different faiths or have different levels of religiosity, their children cannot easily acquire a shared set of beliefs."[{4}](#)

It also has a negative effect on your relationship with your children.[{5}](#) In a study by George Fox University based on a survey by Knowledge Works, religious discord in heterogamous marriages (marriages between spouses with religious differences) in turn affected the children. Fathers who were more religious than their wives felt less close to their children because of their differing attitudes towards faith. In a study by Petts and Knoester,[{6}](#) school-age children with unequally yoked parents are twice as likely to use alcohol and three times as likely to use marijuana than children with same-faith parents." According to Petts' study, children younger than school age in low income urban homes have been found to experience a negative correlation between their parents' uneven religiosity and positive behaviors. In Bartkowski's 2008 study,[{7}](#) the frequency of parental

arguments over religion is negatively associated with child development at kindergarten age. From these studies, it can be inferred that choosing to marry a fellow Christian will benefit your future children far more than yoking yourself to a non-believer.

Some Objections (Good and Bad)

Two objections I have heard after presenting the scriptural and scientific evidence are “I still don’t think it’s a big deal, because God has told people to be unequally yoked,” and “What if I use dating as an opportunity to witness to them?”

A possible third option is the “I don’t care” response, which is not an objection, because there is no argument being made. It is beyond frustrating, because it makes the conversation meaningless. If you find yourself saying something along those lines at this point in the article, then you’ve already made up your mind.

As a Christian, your first responsibility to nonbelievers is to live a Christlike life, showing the love of Jesus with the intent to introduce them to the Good News of the gospel of Christ. This especially extends to your dating. Christians are told to date and ultimately marry other believers because they are taught that marriage is holy before God.

One objection I’ve heard against what I’ve been saying goes: “But didn’t Hosea marry a whore on God’s command? What if God told me to date this person?” This was an attempt to argue that God’s singular exception justifies courting a non-Christian.

Yes, God did tell Hosea to marry a prostitute. No, it is not the same thing, because the woman Hosea married was a sinner, not a non-believer. First, this argument is too divorced from the context of scripture to be valid. Second, Hosea was a unique individual, one whom God raised up as a prophet. Third,

the purpose of this marriage was to show Israel how they were unfaithful to God when the woman inevitably slept with other men! It was certainly not a good marriage. So unless you're a prophet whom God is telling to use your horrible dating life as an object lesson, you can't say that it's good for you to date a non-Christian.

Missionary Dating: A Lukewarm Fantasy

Speaking of exceptions, there is one scenario people have been using to excuse being unevenly yoked for decades if not centuries: missionary dating. There's this prevailing idea among young Christians that you can date someone for the purpose of sharing the gospel with them.

This is the fiction of missionary dating. It is what Christians tell themselves to justify an unwise decision. First, it attempts to wed (pun intended) two activities that do not complement each other. Courtship involves getting to know someone in order to decide whether you will marry them, while evangelism involves getting to know someone as part of a discipleship process. Dating with the intent to bring someone to Christ tries to reconcile the equal power dynamic of courtship with the mentor-student power dynamic of discipleship. This is not a good plan.

Second, missionary dating leaves you as your date's only window into Christianity. Evangelism can require more than one person ministering to the unbeliever. It is a team effort even when we don't see it. Dating, on the other hand, is more exclusive.

Third, no one can serve two masters. You will love one and hate the other. You will favor either ministry or dating to the exclusion of the other. The temptation to stop ministering in favor of dating is stronger. The consequence of this is that you make compromises as all close relationships do, and present an imperfect picture of God's kingdom. If in your

date's eyes, you live just like everyone else, they will not see what it means to give oneself up to Christ.

When you date someone, always be examining yourself. Pray that the Holy Spirit will reveal the contents of your heart to you. The Lord does not tell us to sin against Him. Anything contrary to what God commands us to do in Scripture is from the devil. To that end, missionary dating can only be effective for those who are able to use wisdom and discernment. It is inadvisable for those who are not spiritually mature. I'm sure Christians have been saved because of missionary dating, but they are few and far between.

Sending the Wrong Message

Finally, choosing to date a non-Christian instead of ministering to them is foolish because of the message you send. When you date someone like this, you are telling them that you either don't care about God or you don't care they are going to hell. It is more important to you that they pour themselves into a relationship with you than it is for them to come to know Christ. On the other hand, prioritizing evangelism and discipleship shows them you want them to share in the kingdom of God.

In conclusion, dating a non-Christian is counterproductive to your walk with Christ. Scripture warns us against marrying non-believers, so why risk falling in love with one? We see time and time again just how easily it can indirectly damage your relationship with God. They do not know your God, nor do they honor Him. The excuses for dating non-believers are logically unsound at worst, and at best cannot stand the test of God's word. Dating a non-Christian will also cause unneeded drama, and should you choose to tie the knot, that conflict will become worse. This will make the lives of your future children needlessly complicated, their development will be hindered because of you and your spouse's fighting, and they

will not be shown what a stable and godly family looks like, nor will you be able to effectively raise them to love and fear God. Missionary dating is counterproductive for both dating and evangelism. The people I know who were successful in it admitted that they went through a lot of unnecessary hardship. It is better to remain as friends at least until they come to know Christ. This shows that you care more for the state of their relationship with God than your own wants, and enables you to minister to them through your relationship.

Notes

1. Meyers, Scott M. Religious Homogamy and Marital Quality: Historical and Generational Patterns, 1980-1997. *Journal of Marriage and Family*,
2. Lee, S. and Lee, M.-J. (2023), Religious Homogamy and Marital Satisfaction in South Korea: Exploring Variations across Religious Groups. *J Sci Study Relig.*, 62: 672-693. doi.org/10.1111/jssr.12861
3. Meyers, op. cit.
4. Kim, Young-Il, and Isaak Swan. 2019. "Religious Heterogamy, Marital Quality, and Paternal Engagement" *Religions* 10, no. 2: 102. doi.org/10.3390/rel10020102
5. Ibid.
6. Richard J. Petts, Parental Religiosity, Religious Homogamy, and Young Children's Well-Being, *Sociology of Religion*, Volume 72, Issue 4, Winter 2011, Pages 389-414, doi.org/10.1093/socrel/srr021. Cited in Kim and Swan, 2019.
7. John P. Bartkowski, Xiaohe Xu, Martin L. Levin, Religion and child development: Evidence from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, *Social Science Research*, Volume 37, Issue 1, 2008, Pages 18-36, ISSN 0049-089X, doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2007.02.001. Cited in Kim and Swan, 2019.

Further Reading: Vaughn R. A. Call and Tim B. Heaton, Religious Influence on Marital Stability, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* Vol. 36, No. 3 (Sep., 1997), pp.

382-392

(11 pages)

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