

Is it a sin to marry an unbeliever?

May 22, 2023

Question:

Please, I'd like you, sir, to answer this question. It's also a problem that's come into our congregation and I would like you to please explain to me what the scripture says about this. Our preacher is teaching us that it is a sin to marry an unbeliever. He interrupts everyone claiming to believe otherwise and say they are teaching error.

He uses [Malachi 2:10-11](#) to say that marrying an unbeliever means marrying someone who is godless and it's a sin. (Although to me, [Malachi 2:12](#) showed that God was referring to the house of Israel or Jacob)

Some Christians who also believe this claim that the scriptures say we should not be unequally yoked with unbelievers and that refers to marriage, they claim [II Corinthians 6:14-8](#) was referring to marriage and that [I Corinthians 7:39](#) reinforces this teaching.

He uses this scripture to forbid those who do want to marry unbelievers, and he outrightly interrupts and stops anyone who tries to teach otherwise.

I am a bit confused and would love to understand these scriptures. Please, I need more enlightenment. Thank you, brother.

Answer:

"For the lips of a priest should preserve knowledge, and men should seek instruction from his mouth; for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts. But as for you, you have turned aside from the way; you have caused many to stumble by the instruction; you have corrupted the covenant of Levi," says the LORD of hosts. So I also have made you despised and abased before all the people, just as you are not keeping My ways but are showing partiality in the instruction. Do we not all have one father? Has not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously each against his brother so as to profane the covenant of our fathers? Judah has dealt treacherously, and an abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the LORD which He loves and has married the daughter of a foreign god. As for the man who does this, may the LORD cut off from the tents of Jacob everyone who awakes and answers, or who presents an offering to the LORD of hosts" ([Malachi 2:7-12](#)).

Malachi is a part of the Old Testament and its instructions were for the Israelites. While we are not under that law, it can be used to learn lessons ([Romans 15:4](#)). Israel had returned from captivity, but their priests were teaching a corruption of the covenant. In particular, they taught that it was permissible to marry worshippers of idols. This is the very problem that led Israel into captivity ([Deuteronomy 7:1-4](#); [Ezra 9:1-2](#)). Worse, they were divorcing their legitimate wives in order to marry idolatrous women.

"This is another thing you do: you cover the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping and with groaning, because He no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand. Yet you say, 'For what reason?' Because the LORD has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. But not one has done so who has a remnant of the Spirit. And what did that one do while he was seeking a godly offspring? Take heed then to your spirit, and let no one deal treacherously against the wife of your youth. For I hate divorce," says the LORD, the God of Israel, "and him who covers his garment with wrong," says the LORD of hosts. "So take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously" ([Malachi 2:13-16](#)).

The problem is that the New Testament doesn't forbid the marriage of Christians to certain nationalities. This doesn't mean that marrying a non-believer is an ideal choice. It holds a lot of difficulties because your criteria for making decisions may not match your spouse's criteria.

"Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, "I will dwell in them and walk among them and walk among them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people" " ([II Corinthians 6:14-16](#)).

There ought to be an equality of binding love and concern between brethren. But Paul is concerned that the Corinthians are giving more of themselves to unbelievers and thus are becoming unequally yoked with them. The concept comes from the Old Testament law, which required that oxen and donkeys not be yoked together ([Deuteronomy 22:10](#)).

Some immediately see Paul's warning as it applies to marriage, but Paul has far more things in mind than just marriage ([Ephesians 5:7,11](#); [I Corinthians 15:33](#); [I Timothy 5:22](#)). There is no commonality between believers and unbelievers. Our views are just too different ([I Thessalonians 5:5](#)).

Does this mean it is a sin to marry a nonbeliever? The difficulty is that there are commands given dealing with situations where a believer is married to a non-believer ([I Corinthians 7:12-16](#); [I Peter 3:1-2](#)). Thus, while it should not be sought out, it should be recognized as not ideal, it will happen at times.

See [What does "unequally yoked" mean?](#) for more details.

"A wife is bound as long as her husband lives; but if her husband is dead, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord" ([I Corinthians 7:39](#)).

First note, that this particular passage applies to widows, not single women. The key is understanding what "only in the Lord" means. See [Only in the Lord](#).

The preacher's problem is that he is trying to impose his views without reasoning with those who object to his position. He is not considering that he might be off in what he is teaching.

"The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will" ([II Timothy 2:24-26](#)). This is not accomplished by shouting others down or refusing to hear an opponent's position and addressing it.