

Introduction

II Corinthians 6.14 *“Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers; for what fellowship hath righteousness with lawlessness?”* NKJV

“Don’t become partners with those who reject God. How can you make a partnership out of right and wrong? That’s not partnership, that’s war.” The Message

A recent survey of graduation college students asked about student opinion regarding marriage. Almost 93% stated they wanted a marriage that would last a lifetime; however few thought that it was possible in our culture. Statistically, more and more Christians have bought into the idea that a lifetime marriage is something of the past and have accepted “marriage for this season” as an acceptable life decision. Pre nuptial agreements and cohabitation supports this “maybe I do” position because the couple acknowledges up front that this relationship may not work and presupposes failure at some point in time.

The fact is that over 70% of all married couples have cohabitated or lived together before marriage.¹ The reason most given for cohabitation is to find out if the relationship will work before the commitment is made for the relationship to work. **What our culture does not realize is that the**

commitment to make a relationship work IS the reason a relationship works. That is why successful cohabitation is rare. Only one in five of cohabitating couples are still together after five years. The Bible view is in direct opposition to cohabitation.

There is a direct relationship between the marriage commitment and God’s commitment to us. In speaking of the marriage relationship, the apostle in writing to the Christians at Ephesus said, *“This is a great mystery but I speak concerning Christ and the church.”*² In other words the apostle is telling us that the mystery of marriage and how it works is in direct correlation to the way that Christ relates to the church. This relationship is called “covenant” because it is unconditional. Covenant goes beyond commitment to loving and caring no matter what. God sees marriage as a “death do us part” commitment. Yokes are a picture of what the Marriage and Family Kingdom is all about.

¹ Reference: United States Center For Disease Control and Prevention, *“Cohabitation, Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the United States (Series 23, Number 24)*

² Ephesians 5.32 KJV

A yoke is an implement used to connect two entities together for the purpose of meaningful work. We are most familiar with a yoke of oxen which physically connects two oxen to pull something like a wagon or plow. In the case of marriage, it is two people yoking up for the purpose of serving God.

In Scripture yokes are metaphorically viewed as:

1. A tool to get the most out of two working together
2. An implement of slavery

As a young man, I had the privilege of working on a working tourist ranch. Since we lived some fifty miles from the nearest town, we sought to fill our days with other activities and in my case, to learn what being a cowboy was all about. We had a real stage coach on the ranch that we would give rides pulled by a team of six horses. I learned how to handle a “six up” with skill and spent many a pleasurable afternoon playing the role of Cowboy Ron.

We had been on the ranch for about a year when someone got the idea to bring an authentic covered wagon out of our museum area and train a pair of oxen to carry tourists out over the prairie for a real Wild West experience. The ranch wrangler worked with me to do the training. That experience was to forever shape how I would approach marriage relationships.

First of all, we had two fully grown oxen who (1) were lazy and not used to work, (2) completely independent and (3) stubborn as an ox; in other words, just like most of us. From the first moment the two oxen were put in the yoke the war began. I wanted them to go one way and each of them wanted to go another way. They didn’t want to go when I wanted to go and they certainly didn’t want to stop when I wanted them to stop. Then, if one would stop and the other would drag him along until he got tired and then they would bite and try to kick each other.

Amos 3.3 *“How can two walk together unless they be agreed to do so.”* NIV

Here is the essence of the failure of marriage in our society. Before two people can walk together, they must agree to walk together. The verse is not saying that we have to agree on everything for that is impossible. No two people will always agree on everything much less total agreement between a man and a woman. **Men and women were not made to think and act alike.**

Genesis 2.18 *“And the Lord God said, “ it is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him.”*

God saw that it was good for man to not be alone and created a helper that was suitable for him. The Hebrew words for “helper suitable” is ***azer K’negdo*** (transliterated). Azer or ezer means much more than merely an assistant or an aid; it is more like a war partner or an ally. *K’negdo* literally means **opposite**. **Our perfect helper is one whose strengths are in agreement to our weaknesses and lets those differences be the strength of their success.**

A successful marriage emerges from its strengths not its weakness. A marriage headed for failure optimized its weaknesses. A marriage headed for success optimizes its strengths.

Going back to the mystery of marriage and the church, in I Corinthians 12 the apostle explains *“There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operation of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. But, the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the*

profit of all.” This also is the way marriage works. A husband and wife have different gifts that are intended for the good of the whole marriage. **Again, focus on your strengths!** God intended us to stay in the yoke because of our differences.

Jesus asks us, *“Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and my burden is light.”*³ This is not a yoke to burden but to unburden. It is a picture of Jesus carrying the bulk of the load for us. In the case of marriage, it is the picture of what every Christian man must be for his wife and every Christian wife for her husband.

³ Matthew 11.29, 30

Assignment

List the ways that you and your partner are alike and give a short example:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____

List the ways that you and your partner are different and give an example:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____

Can you think of some ways that this may be difficult for you?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____