

**November 2009 Q & A:**  
**Is It Wrong for a Christian to Marry a Non-Christian?**

Franklin Church of Christ  
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**Introduction:**

As has become our tradition, today is a fifth Sunday. We use today to have a congregational meeting, but prior to that, we use our lesson time to address questions that have been submitted by our members or guests. I do not have this particular lesson because I believe I have all the answers, but because I believe the Bible will provide us with answers to the questions we need answered in order to glorify God. Additionally, I am not answering this question in order to short circuit your own study. I hope if you ask a question, you will study on your own to learn God's answers and simply use what I share here as a jumping off point.

Today's question is: "Is it wrong for a Christian to marry a non-Christian?"

This is a tough question and I know that opinions vary and emotions run deep on this one. I want to remind you that our goal is to say what the Bible says and not try to make the Bible say what we want.

**Discussion:**

- I. Clearly, the Bible speaks of Christians married to non-Christians.
  - A. **Acts 16:1** demonstrates Timothy's believing mother was married to a Greek. The implication is that he was not a believer.
  - B. **I Corinthians 7:12-13** demonstrates Christians were married to non-Christians as Paul taught them not to divorce unbelieving spouses if they were content to live in the marriage.
  - C. **I Peter 3:1-2** demonstrates sisters married to men who did not obey the word and how, through continued submission, they might win their husbands without a word.
  - D. The Bible provides examples of and talks about Christians married to non-Christians. It is not condemned in these passages. In fact, those in this situation are specifically told to remain in this situation.
  
- II. No authorization is given to leave such marriages.
  - A. In **Matthew 19:9**, Jesus explains that whoever divorces his wife and marries another, commits adultery. He provides only one exception. If the person divorced their spouse for sexual immorality, then the new marriage is not adultery. The necessary inference of this is that the divorce is only lawful if for sexual immorality. It is not lawful to divorce a spouse simply because they aren't a Christian.
  - B. This highlights what we noticed moments ago in **I Corinthians 7:12-13**. Not only are Christians not authorized to divorce a spouse simply because they are not a Christian, they are specifically commanded to stay with them.
  
- III. But what about **II Corinthians 6:14-18**?
  - A. Many Christians turn to **II Corinthians 6:14-18** to claim the Bible says it is sinful for a Christian to marry a non-Christian. The text says, "Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers." Certainly, if you are talking about marriage and then come to this passage it seems to apply. However, we must not rip this passage out of its context to make it say what we want.
  - B. Notice **II Corinthians 6:17**. This passage says regarding the unequal yoking that the right response is to separate and come out of the midst of them. If this passage is talking about marriage, then we have a contradiction. **I Corinthians 7:12-13** says very clearly that a Christian is not to separate from a non-Christian when they are married. The only conclusion is **II Corinthians 6:14-18** is not talking about marriage.
  - C. What is the passage talking about then? Notice the surrounding verses, as if bookending this section. **II Corinthians 6:11-13**: "We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians; our heart is wide open. You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted in your own affections. In return (I speak as to children) widen your hearts also." Notice also **II Corinthians 7:2**: "Make room in your hearts for us." Between these bookends of "make room for us," Paul says, "Don't be yoked with unbelievers." He is starting the thematic point he makes in the latter half of this letter encouraging the Corinthians not to submit to those who are teaching a different gospel and are disparaging Paul. Paul is asking the Corinthians to close their hearts to unbelievers who pose

as apostles and open their hearts to him and the true apostles. Read **II Corinthians 10-12**, they are filled with this same sentiment. Notice especially **II Corinthians 11:12-15; 12:11-13**.

D. As Paul makes this point, he quotes from **Isaiah 52:11-12**, a prophecy of Israel and Judah's release from captivity. They were told to depart and get away, not touching any unclean thing. Paul adopts that point for these Christians who had been set free from paganism. They were coming out of captivity, he didn't want them to submit to it again by yoking themselves with teachers who were not apostles and were not Christ's. What good would it do to become a Christian if they turned around and went right back into their past errors.

IV. But wouldn't you say it is unwise for a Christian to marry a non-Christian?

A. Sometimes when I'm talking with those who say it is a sin for a Christian to marry a non-Christian, they follow up with this question. Let me say that my answer to this question doesn't change things. Even if we all agree that it is unwise, that doesn't make it a sin any more than eating chicken fried steak is a sin though many would suggest it is unwise.

B. Is marrying a non-Christian unwise? All things being equal, I admit, I believe a Christian marrying a non-Christian is not the wisest course. **I Corinthians 15:33** says bad company corrupts good morals. In many cases, a non-Christian spouse has led a Christian away from God.

C. Having said that, my experience has been that marrying someone who is a Christian doesn't insure faithfulness. I've heard of Christians who became atheists after marriage and atheists who became Christians. Not to mention that Christian divorce rate is in lockstep with non-Christian divorce rate. Further, I've known faithful Christians to marry faithful Christians and then one of them turns to error and leads the other away as well. The fact is, making a rule up that declares marrying a non-Christian as a sin is simplistic and doesn't deal with the real issues.

D. The real issue is not whether it is a sin to marry a non-Christian. The real issue is that whoever you marry, you are responsible to fulfill your role as husband or wife until one of you dies and you are responsible to maintain your relationship with God no matter what they do.

E. Sadly, many parents, thinking they can manipulate their kids into faithfulness by making them marry the right person, have resorted to making up rules for God. Give your children wise counsel, but do not make up rules for God even if you are only doing so to try to protect them. There is a well-known group of people in the New Testament who did that; they were called Pharisees.

### **Conclusion:**

Is it wrong for a Christian to marry a non-Christian? I believe the Bible's answer is "No." What is wrong is for a Christian to shirk his or her responsibility in a marriage, leave the marriage or turn his or her back on God.

Again, I don't claim to have all the answers. If there is some passage or Biblical principle you believe I have missed, feel free to talk to me about it. If you have a question you would like to be discussed at some time, please feel free to let me know by dropping it in the box outside my office or e-mailing it to me.