

# **The unequal yoke (1)**

## Introduction

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No one who sincerely desires to attain, in his own person, or promote in others, a purer and more elevated discipleship, can possibly contemplate the Christianity of the present day without an indescribable feeling of sadness and heaviness. Its tone is so excessively low, its aspect so sickly, and its spirit so enfeebled, that one is, at times, tempted to despair of anything like a true and faithful witness for an absent Lord. All this is the more truly deplorable, when we remember the commanding motives by which it is our special privilege ever to be actuated. Whether we look at the Master whom we are called to follow – the path which we are called to tread – the end which we are called to keep in view – or the hopes by which we are to be animated – we cannot but own that, were all these entered into, and realised by a more simple faith, we should, assuredly, exhibit a more ardent discipleship. “The love of Christ,” says the apostle, “constrains us.” This is the most powerful motive of all. The more the heart is filled with Christ’s love, and the eye filled with His blessed Person, the more closely shall we seek to follow in His heavenly track. His footmarks can only be discovered by “a single eye;” and unless the will is broken, the flesh mortified, and the body kept under, we shall utterly fail in our discipleship, and make shipwreck of faith and a good conscience.

Let not my reader misunderstand me. It is not, here, by any means, a question of personal salvation. It is quite another thing. Nothing can be more basely selfish than, having received salvation as the fruit of Christ’s agony and bloody sweat, His cross and passion, to keep at as great a distance from His sacred Person as we can, without forfeiting our personal safety. This is, even in the judgement of nature, deemed a character of selfishness worthy of unmingled contempt; but when exhibited by one who professes to owe his present and his everlasting all to a rejected, crucified, risen, and absent Master, no language can express its moral baseness. “Provided I escape hell-fire, it makes little matter as to discipleship.” Reader, do you not, in your inmost soul, abhor this sentiment? If so, then earnestly seek to flee from it, to the very opposite point of the compass; and let your truthful language be: “Provided that blessed Master is glorified, it makes little matter, comparatively, about my personal safety.” Would to God that this were the sincere utterance of many hearts in this day, when, alas it may be too truly said that, “all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ’s.” (Phil 2:21) Would that the Holy Ghost would raise up, by His own resistless power, and send forth by His own heavenly energy, a band of separated and consecrated followers of the Lamb, each one bound, by the cords of love, to the horns of the altar – a company, like Gideon’s three hundred of old, able to confide in God, and deny the flesh. How the heart longs for this! How the spirit, bowed down at times beneath the chilling and withering influence of a cold and uninfluential profession, earnestly breathes after a more vigorous and whole-hearted testimony for that One, who emptied Himself, and laid aside his glory, in order that we, through His precious bloodshedding, might be raised to companionship with Him in eternal blessedness.

Now, amongst the numerous hindrances to this thorough consecration of heart to Christ which I earnestly desire for myself and my reader, “the unequal yoke” will be found to occupy a very prominent place indeed. “Be ye not unequally yoked together [*eterozugountes*] with unbelievers: for what partnership [*metoch*] has righteousness with unrighteousness [or rather lawlessness – *anomia*]? and what communion [*koinonia*] has light with darkness? And what concord has Christ with Belial? or what part has a believer with an unbeliever [*apistou*] And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God has said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be

my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, says the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father to you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty." 2Cor 6:14 –18.

Under the Mosaic economy, we learn the same moral principle. "Thou shalt not sow thy vineyard with divers seeds: lest the fruit of thy seed which thou hast sown, and the fruit of thy vineyard, be defiled. Thou shalt not plough with an ox and an ass together. Thou shalt not wear a garment of divers sorts, as of woollen and linen together." Deut 22:9–11; Lev 19:19.

These scriptures will suffice to set forth the moral evil of an unequal yoke. It may, with full confidence be asserted that no one can be an unshackled follower of Christ who is, in any way, "unequally yoked." He may be a saved person, he may be a true child of God – a sincere believer, but he cannot be a thorough disciple; and not only so, but there is a positive hindrance to the full manifestation of that which he may really be, notwithstanding his unequal yoke. "Come out ... and I will receive you ... and ye shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty." That is to say, "Get your neck out of the unequal yoke, and I will receive you, and there shall be the full, public, practical manifestation of your relationship with the Lord Almighty." The idea, here, is evidently different from that set forth in James: "Of his own will begat he us, by the word of truth." And also in Peter, "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God which lives and abides for ever." And, again, in 1 John: "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called the sons of God." So also, in John's gospel, "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name; which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." In all these passages, the relationship of sons is founded upon the divine counsel and the divine operation, and is not set before us as the consequence of any acting of ours; whereas, in 2. Corinthians 6, it is put as the result of our getting out of the unequal yoke. In other words, it is entirely a practical question.

Thus, in Matthew 5, we read, "But I say to you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; in order that [*hupos*] ye may be the sons of your Father which is in heaven; because he causes his sun to rise upon the evil and the good, and sends rain upon the just and the unjust." Here, too, it is the practical establishment and public declaration of the relationship, and its moral influence. It becomes the sons of such a Father to act in such a way. In short, we have the abstract position or relationship of sons founded upon God's sovereign will and operation; and we have the moral character consequent upon and flowing out of this relationship which affords just ground for God's public acknowledgment thereof. God cannot fully and publicly own those who are unequally yoked together with unbelievers, for, were He to do so, it would be an acknowledgment of the unequal yoke. He cannot acknowledge "darkness," "unrighteousness," "Belial," "idols," and "an infidel." How could He! Hence, if I yoke myself with any of these, I am morally and publicly identified with them, and not with God at all. I have put myself into a position which God cannot own, and, as a consequence, He cannot own me; but if I withdraw myself from that position – if I "come out and be separate" – if I take my neck out of the unequal yoke – then, but not until then, can I be publicly and fully received and owned as a "son or daughter of the Lord Almighty."

This is a solemn and searching principle for all who feel that they have unhappily gotten themselves into such a yoke. They are not walking as disciples, nor are they publicly or morally on the ground of sons. God cannot own them. Their secret relationship is not the point; but they have put themselves thoroughly off God's ground. They have foolishly thrust their neck into a yoke which, inasmuch as it is not Christ's yoke, must be Belial's yoke; and until they cast off that yoke, God cannot own them as His sons and daughters. God's grace, no doubt, is infinite, and can meet us in all our failure and weakness; but if our souls aspire after a higher order of discipleship, we must at once cast off the unequal yoke, cost what it may; that is, if it can be cast off; but, if it cannot, we must only bow our heads beneath the shame and sorrow thereof, looking to God for full deliverance.

Now, there are four distinct phases in which "the unequal yoke" may be contemplated, viz., the domestic, the commercial, the religious, and the philanthropic. Some may be disposed to confine 2. Corinthians 6:14 to the first of these; but the apostle does not so confine it. The words are "Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers." He does not specify the character or object of the yoke, and therefore we are warranted in giving the passage its widest application, by bringing its edge to bear directly upon every phase of the unequal yoke; and we shall see the importance of so doing, ere we close these remarks, if the Lord permit.

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