

WORD OF CHRIST INTERNATIONAL CHURCH
POSITION PAPER

Topic: Marrying Unbelievers

INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT

We must agree that Scripture is our final authority in settling questions of faith and practice. But when born-again, Spirit-filled Christians, following proper biblical principles, come to reasonable but differing interpretations; we do well not to become dogmatic in support of one position. We affirm the inerrancy and authority of Scripture and we desire to know for certain what God expects of us. When we come to a sure understanding of His divine Word, we are committed to declaring and obeying those clear instructions.

In the following position paper we address one of many topics that have raised a fair degree of discussion, and, at times, arguments among the brethren. It is not our intention to fuel these arguments but rather to state our position based on our earnest understanding of the Scriptures. With this said, we also exercise caution in not stirring unnecessary strife or division among the brethren, and have made every reasonable effort to base our positions on Scripture, not personal opinion or conjecture. We respect and love our brothers and sisters who hold alternative interpretations on issues that are not critical to our salvation or standing before God.

MARRYING UNBELIEVERS

We hold that the Bible explicitly prohibits a believer from entering into any serious relationship or marriage with a non-believer. One of the first references to this is found in Deuteronomy 7:3, 4. Here the children of Israel were admonished not to marry the children of Canaan because "they would turn your sons away from following me, to serve other gods." Also after the exile of Israel, Nehemiah pointed out to the remnant (the surviving children of Israel) that the great King Solomon was led astray by his relationship with women who served other gods (Nehemiah 13:26, 27).

It is not only the Old Testament that teaches against this but also the New Testament. Paul says emphatically that believers are only to marry "in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 7:39), in other words to marry only another believer. He goes on to show that it is utterly contrary to Christ's teachings to be involved in a serious relationship with unbelievers. Though Paul does not explicitly mention the topics of dating and marriage in 2 Corinthians 6:14-17, it clearly has meaning for such relationships. In this passage Paul points out that we should not be united with, or bound to *persons who are contrary to Christ*. Throughout Paul's practical admonitions are echoes of Old Testament passages calling on Israelites to be separated from outsiders who did not recognize the God of Israel (Leviticus 26:12; Isaiah 52:11, Ezekiel 20:32-34).

Not only should Christians avoid marrying non-Christians, 1 Corinthians 5:9-12 would seem to indicate they also should not become involved with people who say they are Christians but do not live godly lives. The underlying principle here is two fold. First, we belong to God and are called to glorify Him in every aspect of our lives (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). Secondly, wrong relationships can produce wrong behaviors, wrong standards, and wrong values (1 Corinthians 15:33). Recognizing this truth we oppose the practice of marrying unbelievers.

"MISSIONARY MARRIAGES"

Some Christians believe that if they enter into a serious relationship, including marriage, with an unbeliever, they will get them saved. We call these relationships 'missionary marriages', and do not approve of them. The Bible clearly warns against such approaches, as Paul writes in 1

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Corinthians 7:16 ... "for how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?"

In its ideal form the goal may seem pure, but such practice is biblically flawed and presents the Christian with certain risks. At stake are the Christian's personal testimony as well as his/her own physical and spiritual well-being. Many who have involved themselves in such dating practices have unexpectedly found themselves caught in an unhealthy relationship, one without God at the core. Although there have been instances where unbelieving spouses have been won to the Lord, many Christian spouses have either been restricted in their faith or tragically fallen away from Christ as a result.

CONCLUSION

Clearly the biblical rule of 2 Corinthians 6:14 forbidding yoking with non-believers suggests that dating to evangelize is not a practice for committed Christians. The biblical imperative for all Christians is to date only those who are likewise committed to Christ.

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