

## What to Look for in a Mate

2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1

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One popular dating site makes this intriguing claim: *“What happens when you apply scientific research to dating behavior? A whole lotta love! But this isn’t destiny, it’s deliberate.”*

This site asks subscribers to answer 80 questions to determine “32 Compatibility Dimensions.” No doubt some of these are helpful but there is one dimension more essential than compatible background, age, education, emotional temperament, energy, interests, personality, intelligence, adaptability, ambition, autonomy, altruism, appearance, musical preferences, humor, how you squeeze a tube of toothpaste or whether you root for the Bears or the Packers (well, maybe not more important than that).

Far and away, the most important dimension is spiritual suitability.

Last weekend we celebrated singleness from 1 Corinthians 7 and learned *because singleness is a gift, it is good and should be used for God’s glory*. Today, we’re going to focus on a few verses from Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians in order to gain some insight into what to look for in a marriage mate. Please listen as I read 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1.

***“Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, ‘I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.’ Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty. Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.”***

Here’s what we’re going to discover: *If you’re searching for a mate, make sure there’s a spiritual match.*

## A Relational Restriction (6:14a)

I don't know how Scripture could state it more strongly than it does in verse 14: ***“Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers.”*** This is a prohibition which applies to the marriage relationship as well as to other situations. Literally, we're to *“become not”* yoked. The tense of this verse means to *“stop yoking yourself to unbelievers,”* implying this was something way too common in the Corinthian church.

The idea is not to be “mismated” or “mismatched” by yoking up with someone who is not saved. One paraphrase says it this way: *“Don't become partners with those who reject God.”* The New American Standard reads: *“Do not be bound together with unbelievers.”*

Let me demonstrate with this yoke that hangs over our fireplace. As you can see, because it's made out of wood, it's not very flexible. The idea is to put two animals together in order to increase the pulling power for a plow. The whole design of a yoke is for two to do more work than one can alone, or even two animals pulling two separate plows. In order to get the greatest productivity, a farmer would make sure to yoke only two similar animals together.

The results would be disastrous if two different kinds of animals were in the yoke – that's a good way for the “yoke” to be on you! No doubt Paul had Deuteronomy 22:10 in mind when he wrote these words: ***“You must not plow with an ox and a donkey harnessed together.”*** This wouldn't work for at least two reasons:

- **They were different species.** An ox was much bigger and stronger than a donkey. They were different in temperament and speed as well. Both would suffer in the yoke as the ox would try to pull the donkey and the donkey would struggle to keep up. One would be choked; the other pinched. This unequal yoking would cause pain and discomfort to both because they were at cross purposes. I'm told oxen can't even stand the breath of donkeys and will pull away from them instead of going in the direction they're supposed to go in.
- **They were different spiritually.** According to Old Testament law, the ox was considered clean while the donkey was unclean. The Jewish people were very careful about not mixing the clean and the unclean.

It's really absurd to put two different animals in a yoke. Ray Stedman writes about an unusual experience he had when he was traveling in the Middle East, *"I saw a farmer plowing his field with a camel and a donkey. It was almost ludicrous to watch. The camel was three times the height of the donkey, and its legs were three times as long. It was striding along at a rather slow pace for a camel, but the little donkey was running as fast as it could to keep up...it was cruel."*

I wrote down four reasons the Bible is so adamant about not entering a spiritually mismatched marriage.

- **It's unfitting.** The yoke will chafe and cause friction between the two.
- **It's unfair.** Both will suffer pain and discomfort.
- **It's unfocused.** The two will be out of step with each other.
- **It's unfruitful.** The plowing will be crooked, and the soil will not be tilled deep enough for the seed to germinate and bear fruit.

A believer is not to become hitched to a nonbeliever. We see a similar phrase in Ephesians 5:7: ***"Therefore do not become partners with them."*** Listen to what the Bible says about whether a believing widow should remarry in 1 Corinthians 7:39: ***"A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, **only in the Lord.**"***

This same idea is found in the New Living Translation of Amos 3:3: ***"Can two people walk together without agreeing on the direction?"*** When God says, "don't" and we say, "I will," it won't work like He intended.

Many years ago, one of the most popular TV shows was, *"Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?"* This led to a spin-off called, *"Who Wants to Marry a Millionaire?"*

Here's the plot. A multi-millionaire put together an ad asking eligible women to be his wife. Thousands applied even though they hadn't met him in person, they didn't know his character, and none of them knew anything about his faith. 50 women, one from each state, appeared on TV to parade their beauty and showcase their talent.

Why did they want to marry him? Because he had money. And what was he looking for? A woman with good looks.

Things didn't go so well for the newlyweds. After one week, the marriage between Rick Rockwell and Darva Conger was annulled. It turns out Mr. Rockwell didn't have quite as much money as everyone thought. Plus, it came out his former fiancée had a restraining order against him.

When asked why they got married, Rockwell said he liked the publicity. As for Conger, she said she was in it for the 3-carat diamond ring and the free trip to Las Vegas.

*If you're searching for a mate, make sure there's a spiritual match.*

Let's drill down into our passage to find four filters to use when looking for a mate.

**1. List Character Differences (6:14b-16).** As if anticipating someone might think it's not that big of a deal to enter a spiritually mismatched marriage, we're given five contrasting contradictions in verses 14-16. The orbit of a Christian and the trajectory of a non-Christian are galaxies apart. There is a radical difference between one who knows Jesus and one who doesn't. Flip back one chapter to 2 Corinthians 5:17: ***“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”***

These five rhetorical questions establish key areas of contrast between a new creation and one who is not a Christian. Several verbs are used – *partnership, fellowship, accord, portion* and *agreement*. They all speak of “*something held in common, or something shared.*”

- **Your walk is different.** This has to do with morals. Listen to the first question: ***“For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness?”*** The word “*partnership*” is the idea of a close association. The word “*righteousness*” is also translated as “*just*” and doesn't mean someone is better than others but means we have been given the righteousness of Christ through faith.
- **Your wisdom is different.** This question gets to the topic of truth: ***“Or what fellowship has light with darkness?”*** Believers are in the light, while those who don't know Christ operate in the dark.

- **Your worship is different.** This third question gets to who is the authority in your life: *“What accord has Christ with Belial?”* The word *“accord”* is where we get symphony from. It’s the idea of being in unison or harmony. A Christian and a non-Christian cannot sing to God’s glory or be in holy harmony. *“Belial”* means worthless or *“lewd”* and was used as a synonym for Satan as the absolute enemy of God. A Christian and a non-Christian have *nothing* in common spiritually because they have different Masters.
- **Your worldview is different.** This gets to the idea of salvation. The one who is saved views the entire world differently: *“Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever?”* The word *“portion”* refers to *“sharing or have a part in.”* One is set apart for the Creator and the other lives apart from the Almighty.
- **Your witness is different.** This gets to our purpose in life: *“What agreement has the temple of God with idols?”* The Temple is where God dwelt and was to never be trampled by unholy behavior.

There are huge contrasts between Christians and non-Christians.

- Righteousness vs. Lawlessness
- Light vs. Darkness
- Christ vs. Satan
- Believer vs. Unbeliever
- God’s temple vs. Idols

According to the Bible these are inherent and intrinsic contradictions. These opposites create an impossible situation.

It matters who you marry. Since God dwelt with His people, He wanted them to be totally committed to Him. Now, because of Christ, God not only dwells with His people, He dwells within them. Listen to this stunning statement in the last part of verse 16: *“For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, ‘I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.’”* That’s covenantal language.

What a privilege to have God Himself set up residence in our bodies! He lives with us and walks among us. He is indeed our God and we are His people. As a result, we have the responsibility to live differently.

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The first filter is to list your character differences. The second filter is to make sure you're listening to the commands of God.

**2. Listen to the Commands of God (6:17a).** We're faced with the tough task of obeying God's Word and not following our feelings. That's the rub, isn't it? A person might know what God says, but their emotions have become so entangled with a non-Christian that feelings are often elevated over facts and faith.

According to verse 17, we are special people because God's Spirit dwells within us: ***"Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing..."*** The phrase ***"go out"*** is quite strong and reminds me of what God said to Lot in Genesis 19:15: ***"Up! Take your wife and your daughters from here..."*** Lot lingered, showing it was hard leaving Sodom because there was a lot of Sodom left in him.

This command comes right out of Isaiah 52:11: ***"Depart, depart, go out from there; touch no unclean thing; go out from the midst of her; purify yourselves, you who bear the vessels of the LORD."***

Separation is first and foremost an inner attitude of the heart where we realize we are separated onto the Savior. Because we belong to Him, we're not to attach ourselves to anyone or anything who will pull us away from Him.

The call to be separate draws upon multiple images and passages and fragments of verses from the Old Testament. Here are just a few.

- Exodus 34:12, 16: ***"Take care, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land to which you go, lest it become a snare in your midst...and you take of their daughters for your sons..."***
- Deuteronomy 7:3-4: ***"You shall not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, for they would turn away your sons from following me, to serve other gods..."***

- 1 Kings 11:1-4: *“Now King Solomon loved many foreign women...And his wives **turned away** his heart. For when Solomon was old his wives **turned away** his heart after other gods, and his heart was not wholly true to the LORD his God...”*
- Psalm 106:35-36: *“But they mixed with the nations and learned to do as they did. They served their idols, which became **a snare** to them.”*

I’ve seen too many young people on fire for Christ only to see the flames quickly extinguished by an unholy relationship. You may think there’s nothing wrong with dating someone who is not a Christian because you don’t plan to marry him or her anyway.

This is dangerous for three reasons.

- You might give your heart away and end up in a mismatched marriage.
- You may give something else away you can never get back.
- You may compromise your spiritual commitment and drift away from full devotion to Christ.

There’s a lot of wisdom in Song of Solomon 3:5: *“Do not stir up or awaken love until it pleases.”*

John Piper sums it up well when he says: *“If the choice of a marriage partner still lies before you, settle it in your mind right now never to marry anyone who does not love the Lord Jesus with all his or her heart.”*

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We’ve considered two filters...

- **List your character differences.**
- **Listen to the commands of God.**

The third filter is to lean into your conversion.

**3. Lean into Your Conversion (6:17b-18).** Look at the last phrase of verse 17: “...*then I will welcome you.*” The idea behind “*welcome*” is “*to treat with favor.*” The most important relationship you will ever have is not with a husband or a wife but with God. When we receive Him, He welcomes us, and as John 1:12 says, we “...*become children of God.*” Going again to the Old Testament, Paul quotes Jeremiah 3:18: “*And I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty.*”

The title “*Lord Almighty*” is only used here and in the Book of Revelation in the New Testament. It’s the Old Testament equivalent of Jehovah Sabaoth and means “*all-ruling and all-powerful; the Master.*” If God is your Father, and you are one of His children, then you must not settle for a spiritually mismatched marriage.

Some TV commercials stick in our minds, don’t they? One of my favorites is from a satellite TV company poking fun at those with cable TV. The scene is a suburban neighborhood with a family of settlers living in the middle of the block. Surrounded by manicured lawns, the father is shown in a wagon pulled by an ox over freshly plowed ground.

As the son stands in the dirt, he looks up to his dad and asks, “*Why can’t we have Direct TV?*” The dad answers, “*We’re settlers, son, we settle for things...like having cable TV.*” A neighbor dressed in a business suit appears and quickly heads into his house. The commercial ends with the boy asking, “*So we have to live with lower customer satisfaction?*” The dad nods and says, “*I’m afraid so, Jedidiah...now go churn some butter and make yourself some clothes.*”

Listen. If you settle for a spiritually mismatched marriage you will have lower satisfaction. *Don’t be a spiritual settler.*

God isn’t out to make us miserable in marriage, but for us to have a marriage of intimate oneness. He doesn’t want us to get married and have a spiritual mismatch because He knows it will take us away from Him. Brothers and sisters in Christ, may I appeal to you to find your satisfaction in Him alone? Proverbs 27:7: “***He who is full loathes honey, but to the hungry even what is bitter tastes sweet.***” If your deepest needs are filled by Christ, then you won’t go looking for someone else to fill them. Conversely, if you slip away from your relationship with God, you will become so hungry you may think bitter is better than God’s best.

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- **List your character differences.**
- **Listen to the commands of God.**
- **Lean into your conversion.**

There's one final filter to consider.

**4. Live out your convictions.** Listen to 2 Corinthians 7:1: *“Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.”* The phrase *“let us”* shows this is our responsibility. The word *“cleanse”* means to *“prune away”* or *“clear”* the ground of rubbish.

The word *“defilement”* means that which *“stains and soils.”* It's time to get back on track spiritually, to prune away and get pure again by seeking holiness as your highest aim so your sin stains can be purified. We're to be cleansed not just externally, but internally. It's time to revere God more than your relationship with anyone else. We must work at getting back to what we know is true. Born again believers have a high privilege as sons and daughters of the Heavenly Father and must act accordingly.

If God is supreme, you won't settle for a spiritual mismatch. Conversely, if a boyfriend or girlfriend is more important than God, then it will be easy to allow your emotions to control you. Let me ask you a question. Have you made someone else an idol? Is your relationship with a non-Christian more important than the God who loves you, redeems you, and lives within you?

Here's the principle: *If you're going to get married, marry the strongest Christian you can find and be the strongest Christian you can be for your spouse.*

We could say it like this.

- **What God has joined; we must not separate.**
- **What God has separated; we must not join.**

I want to briefly address those of you who are married to someone who is not a Christian. I know many of you and have great respect for how much you pray and plead for your partner to come to Christ. Let me encourage you in two ways.

- **Don't bail.** 1 Corinthians 7:12-14 urges you to stay committed to your marriage covenant because your influence in the home is providing a holy covering for your family: *“If any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.”* You might not always feel it, but if you are living for Jesus, you are having an impact in your home.
- **Keep believing.** Hang in there and don't lose hope. Listen to 1 Peter 3:1-4: *“Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful and pure conduct. Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear—but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious.”*

### Action Steps

*If you're searching for a mate, make sure there's a spiritual match.*

- **List your character differences.**
- **Listen to the commands of God.**
- **Lean into your conversion.**
- **Live out your convictions.**

Here are some ways to apply this message.

1. **Memorize Ephesians 5:8.** This is our memory verse for the month as found in our Bible Reading Plan: *“For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light.”*
2. **Resolve right now to only marry a believer who loves Jesus.**

**3. Reach out and encourage someone who is in a spiritually mismatched marriage.**

**4. Make sure you are yoked to Jesus.** You might think marriage is the most important decision you can make. Actually, it's the second most important decision. If you have not yet repented of your sins and received Jesus Christ as your Savior, it's time to do so. *Are you ready to take the yoke of Jesus upon you? [Hold up yoke].*

Listen to these words of comfort from Jesus in Matthew 11:28-30: ***“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 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.”***

Are you ready to come to Him right now? Listen to the urgent appeal in 2 Corinthians 6:2: ***“Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.”***

If you're ready to be saved, pray this prayer with me.

*Jesus, I realize I'm a selfish and self-centered sinner. I repent of how I've been living and want to take Your yoke upon me now. Thank You for dying in my place on the cross as my substitute and for rising from the dead on the third day. I come to You, weary and heavy laden, in need of the rest only You can provide. I believe and now I receive You into my life. As my Lord, enable me to follow Your ways, and apply your filters to help me in the decisions of life. If there's anything that needs to change in my life, please change it so I can reflect You to the world around me. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

If you trusted Christ today, tell someone about it and then send us an email at [info@edgewoodbaptist.net](mailto:info@edgewoodbaptist.net).

May God be with you until we meet again.