



This is the third and final message from Genesis 24 on the topic of marriage and dating. I hope that it has been helpful for both young people and parents. The first principle I want to address this morning is the topic of being equally yoked. I have found that when Christians give advice on marriage and dating, this is one of the Big Two topics that are addressed. Parents and churches say to their teens—don't have sex before marriage and don't marry an unbeliever. That's about all I was ever told as a teenager. These are obviously important truths, but they are hardly the entire picture and by the time we are done, we will have covered 13 principles. I have already covered the principle of purity so let's move on to the principle of being equally yoked.

#### 8. Equally yoked

As we know, it was extremely important for Abraham to obtain a wife for Isaac from among his own relatives. Verses 2-4 detail Abraham's command to his servant.

*He said to the chief servant in his household, the one in charge of all that he had, "Put your hand under my thigh. <sup>3</sup> I want you to swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and the God of earth, that you will not get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I am living, <sup>4</sup> but will go to my country and my own relatives and get a wife for my son Isaac."*

The Israelites were commanded to marry fellow Israelites, not for the purity of their race or the purity of their culture but for the purity of their faith. The New Testament equivalent to this command is found in 2 Cor. 6:14-15.

*Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?*

In his second letter to the believers in Corinth, Paul gave a dire warning against participating in feasts that were offered to idols. If your own conscience was clear and no one else was offended, then it was acceptable to eat meat sacrificed to idols, because it was just a piece of meat, but it was unacceptable to eat at the pagan temples where food was served. These temple feasts were part restaurant and part pagan church service but the bottom line was that if the believers attended the feasts, they were participating in the worship of Satan. Belial is another name for Satan. Of course you and I would not attend a satanic worship service, but we have to remember that most of the Christians in Corinth were former pagans and they had attended these feasts all of their lives without realizing they were actually worshipping Satan.

Look again at the command in verse 14. *Do not be yoked together with unbelievers.* Now, notice how this is explained using four different comparisons.

*For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common?*

*Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?*

*What harmony is there between Christ and Belial?*

*What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?*

Righteousness	Wickedness
Light	Darkness
Christ	Belial (Satan)
Believer	Unbeliever

Unless you are really old or you have an Amish background, you have probably never yoked together a pair of oxen. This analogy is so helpful because even without any experience, we can see what will happen if two oxen are not “equally yoked”—not only will they not work together, which is absolutely necessary when pulling a plow through the hard ground, but they will work against each other. They will compete with one another and essentially cancel out their efforts. In the same way, righteousness and wickedness are opposed to each other. Light and darkness cannot be yoked together. Christ and Satan are the chief enemies in the entire universe. We understand the first three comparisons, but we falter on the fourth. To the question, “What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?” we are likely to answer “Plenty!” We both root for the Packers. We both have families, children and grandchildren. We both go to work every day, we grow gardens in our backyards, our kids play sports together, etc. We have endless things in common with unbelievers. In fact, we are commanded to love unbelievers, so we tend to stumble over what it means not to be equally yoked with them.

You can debate the various ways that this prohibition should be applied, but there is one area about which there is no debate—marriage. It is always sinful for a believer to marry an unbeliever. I will prove it to you using logic and Scripture. Logically speaking it must be wrong because marriage is the strongest kind of human relationship possible. Parents can be extremely close to their children in an emotional sense, but there is no relationship with a greater bond of commitment than the sacred covenant of marriage. It follows then that if this is the strongest bond in a human relationship, then it is clearly a yoking together. Further, if one partner is a believer and the other is not, then that marriage has yoked together a believer and an unbeliever.

Now let me demonstrate this from Scripture. The most obvious example in the OT is that of Solomon. 1 Kings 11:1 says that “Solomon...loved many foreign women...” How many foreign women did he love? He loved 700 wives and 300 concubines, to be exact. By becoming yoked together with these foreign women he was also exposed to their plethora of foreign gods and this turned his heart far from the Lord. The next four verses of 1 Kings 11 makes this painfully clear. *They were from nations about which the LORD had told the Israelites, “You must not intermarry with them, because they will surely turn your hearts after their gods.” Nevertheless, Solomon held fast to them in love. <sup>3</sup> He had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines, and his wives led him astray. <sup>4</sup> As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father had been.*

If Solomon had been the only one affected by his unbridled lust, it would not have been that big of a deal. But unfortunately, his sinful actions filtered down through the entire nation. The foreign wives brought foreign gods and great idolatry. This caused the people to abandon the Lord and the Lord in turn abandoned them. First he divided them into two nations. Three hundred years later the northern kingdom was carried off into exile never to be seen again and a hundred years after that the southern kingdom was carried into captivity in Babylon for 70 years. Because we humans are hard headed and slow to learn, it wasn't long after they returned to Jerusalem following their 70 years of captivity that they again began to marry foreign women. Listen to how Nehemiah described this.

*Was it not because of marriages like these that Solomon king of Israel sinned? Among the many nations there was no king like him. He was loved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel, but even he was led into sin by foreign women. Must we hear now that you too are doing all this terrible wickedness and are being unfaithful to our God by marrying foreign women? (Neh. 13:26-27)*

We tell young people that they should not marry an unbeliever because it will harm their faith. While this is true, such advice misses the bigger picture. Was Solomon's faith harmed by marrying unbelievers? Of course, but who else was harmed? The entire nation was harmed. Multiple generations of people over hundreds of years were harmed by his choice to become unequally yoked. It's no wonder Nehemiah was so utterly shocked and disgusted that his fellow Israelites would choose such a path after so many centuries of suffering. Nehemiah responded to this problem with a flurry of righteous anger. He beat the men and pulled out their hair and called down curses upon them. He was angry, and rightly so.

If you marry an unbeliever, you don't just harm yourself, you harm the generations of your children and grandchildren that follow after you. The gospel most often spread through families, therefore, marrying an unbeliever will diminish the spread of the gospel. If you marry an unbeliever, you are more likely to be drawn away from the faith, which means that you will not pass on your faith to your children and they will have nothing to pass onto their children. This goes much further than just your own personal faith—the decision to marry an unbeliever can have consequences for generations. This is why Abraham's dying wish was to get an appropriate wife for his son. The promise depended upon it. Solomon, in all of his wisdom, did not see this. You and I must be able to see it.

But some will still object to this command and say, "Well what about the fact that many believers who marry unbelievers are eventually able to lead them to saving faith?" This is what is known as "missionary dating." First of all, it's a horrible excuse for ignoring the clear command of Scripture and doing whatever you want to do. Second, it is nothing but an argument from pragmatism. In other words, just because it has "worked" in the past does not justify our blatant disobedience. Should I sit in a bar and get drunk so that I can witness to unbelievers there? Should I sell drugs on the street in an effort to evangelize the other drug dealers and drug addicts who buy from me? Just because God in his mercy allows your sinful decision to result in the conversion of a husband or wife does not make it right. Pragmatism must never trump principle.

I want to point out one final verse from this chapter to prove the point about the importance of believers only marrying other believers. The key is verse two but it needs to be in the context of verses 3-4. This time as I read it, use your imagination and picture this scene.

*He said to the chief servant in his household, the one in charge of all that he had, "Put your hand under my thigh. <sup>3</sup> I want you to swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and the God of earth, that you will not get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I am living, <sup>4</sup> but will go to my country and my own relatives and get a wife for my son Isaac."*

This is an ancient custom of which we know little, but one thing we do know—when Abraham asked the servant to put his hand under his “thigh,” he did not mean his leg. All scholars and commentators agree that “thigh” was a euphemism for something much more personal.<sup>1</sup> I will spare you more detail than that other than to emphasize how important this was to Abraham. Your own personal faith as well as the spread of the gospel for generations depends upon the right decision.

We have a few more points to cover but these will go more quickly.

9. Strong Character—We are not given a detailed character study of Isaac and Rebekah but we do see hints in the narrative. Rebekah came from a wealthy family with servants of her own, nevertheless, what was she doing when Abraham’s servant appeared? She was gathering water at the family well. Moreover, she offered this complete stranger a drink of water and offered to water all of his camels. Do you know how much water a camel can drink at one time? They can drink at least twenty gallons and if you multiply that amount times the ten camels of the servant, you see that Rebekah would have been very busy serving this stranger from a foreign land. What do you call it when you have a love for strangers? It is called hospitality. The New Testament word that is translated as *hospitality* literally means “a love of strangers”. But that is not what we usually mean by hospitality, is it? It usually means that we like to have people over for a meal and share in some fellowship together. Of course that is really important, but it is not what the Bible means by hospitality. Hospitality was embedded into the Hebrew culture. Do you remember when the two angels visited Lot in Sodom? They planned to spend the night in the open city square, but he insisted that they stay with him. This culture of hospitality is still a foundational part of Middle Eastern culture to this day.

Here is a good test for determining someone’s level of hospitality—how do they treat the cashier at Walmart? How do they treat total strangers that they encounter throughout the day? This simple little test can reveal a great deal about a person’s character. In this setting, you will know good character when you see it, but here is a way to test a person’s character even further. If they don’t seem to treat strangers well, are they open to receiving feedback on their behavior? Are they teachable? A truly humble and teachable person will thank you when you draw their attention to things like this but a person who is not teachable will reject your offer to help. Here is one thing that I have learned in my brief life—it is nearly impossible to teach an unteachable person to be teachable. The character of every very person who you might think about marrying will need lots of work. That is simply the human condition. If you think you have stumbled upon the perfect boyfriend or girlfriend, you are greatly deceived and headed for a huge disappointment. But if the person is humble and teachable and genuinely wants to grow, then you have found a true treasure.

If you do the “cashier test” with a prospective mate, let me give you a dire warning. If the other person speaks kindly to the cashier and then as you walk out of the store they begin to degrade the cashier—they speak harshly about they were wearing, how they looked, what they said, etc, then here’s what you need to do—run! This kind of gossipy, back-stabbing behavior is a poison that will slowly kill your relationship and you would do well to run away and not look back.

That is a quick picture of Rebekah’s character. Isaac’s character is revealed in his work as a shepherd. Like the great King David, Isaac got his start out in the fields caring for the flocks. David faithfully shepherded the flocks of his father and by doing so, was prepared to become the shepherd of a nation of people. Is the one to whom you are considering marriage a hard worker? Will this man be able to provide for your family’s needs? I didn’t ask whether or not he will make you wealthy, but can he provide for you? Hospitality, hard working—these are fundamental issues of character and integrity. Character is more important than how compatible you are with the other person. Character is more important than looks and appearance. Character is more important than most things than young people look for in a husband or wife.

10. Companionship—The very last phrase of this chapter is very interesting: *and Isaac was comforted after his mother’s death* (67). This must be an important detail because the author used it to bring the long chapter to a conclusion. Obviously, Isaac had loved his mother and had felt loved by her. I take this phrase as a demonstration of the principle of companionship. Sarah had been the most important female figure for Isaac’s whole life and when she died, Isaac lost his mother and his most important female companion.

After Adam named all of the animals, why did the Lord create Eve out of Adam’s rib? The animals were created because it was not good for Adam to be alone. However, the animals were not suitable companions for Adam so Eve was specially created as his wife. Companionship was and still is one of the most important aspects of marriage. Adam was alone and needed a wife. Isaac was alone and needed a wife. Some are called to a life of singleness, but the rest of us need the companionship offered by a husband or wife. In regard to this principle of companionship, the question to ask yourself is not merely “Can I get along with this person for the next 50-60 years?” but rather “Can I see myself serving the Lord alongside this man or woman for the next 50-60 years?” If marriages and families are incubators for spreading the gospel, are you reasonably certain you can do this well with the one you are considering marrying?

11. Patience—How old was Isaac when he married Rebekah? Two weeks ago I told you that he was between 70 and 75 years old. Not only was I wrong but not one person caught my mistake. Genesis 25:20 plainly states: Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah.” How then did I obtain an age of 70-75? It happened because I depended too much on the commentaries. I use two leading, evangelical commentaries and both of them hold to the opinion that in this chapter, Abraham was on his deathbed and may well have died while his servant was away. If Abraham had died, that means Isaac would have been 75 years old when he married Rebekah. It wasn’t until after I preached that message that I stumbled upon the statement in 25:20. Frankly, I am not sure why both commentators drew the conclusion they did in light of the clear statement in the next chapter.<sup>2</sup> I think they are wrong, which means that I was wrong two weeks ago.

This is an important lesson for all of us. First, it reminds me not to be too dependent upon other people's opinions, even if they are evangelical scholars. Second, it reminds you—if you needed reminding ☺—that I will make mistakes. I strive to speak only the truth as found in the clearest teaching of Scripture, but I am obviously very fallible. Thankfully this mistake did not a major doctrinal issue and did not harm anyone's faith. Third, it is a reminder to be alert to things like this. Over one hundred people heard me say that Isaac was 75 years old when he got married and not one of the hundred people caught my mistake. Please know that I want you to search the Scriptures and hold me accountable in my teaching.

Even though Isaac was 40 and not 75 on his wedding day, we can still see the principle of patience in the story. Forty was about double the age when men typically got married in ancient Judaism. Isaac was patient and did not rush into marriage with one of the beautiful young girls living near him. His son Jacob was about fifty years old when he married Rachel, but if you recall, part of the reason for his delay in marriage was due to the fact that he had to work for Laban for seven years to earn the right to marry Rachel. "So Jacob served seven years to get Rachel, but they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her." This brings new meaning to the NT phrase, "Love is patient." Love which results in marriage for a lifetime must be patient. More people have made choices due to impatience than for most other reasons. You fear growing old or you decide to settle for less than your ideal because you fear that the "right" person or the best person may never come your way. Marital love must be patient.

12. The second to last principle is romantic love. Some of you are thinking, "Finally!! I thought you would never get to this principle!" How many noticed the tremendous romance in the relationship between Isaac and Rebekah? The great romance between these two is summarized by their wedding day: "Isaac brought her into the tent" (67). What happened to the flowers and romantic candlelit dinners? What happened to the expensive, elaborate weddings with white dresses, tuxedos and food? Where is the extended honeymoon to sandy beaches? At first glance, it appears as if Rebekah hopped off of her camel and walked directly into Isaac's tent. Where is the romance in that?!

There are obviously many details that were skipped by the author. I am sure that there was some sort of ceremony or ritual but we don't see any evidence of what we would call romantic love. Not that romantic love is wrong. Isaac's son Jacob worked for a total of fourteen years to earn the hand of Rachel in marriage. As I read a minute ago, this seemed like no time at all because he loved her so deeply. Ladies, doesn't this sound romantic—that a man would sacrifice so much just to be with you? I see hints of romance in Isaac's story as well. When I read verse 57 before, I intentionally skipped the second half of the verse. "Isaac brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah." This was no ordinary tent—it was Sarah's tent, his deceased mother. As Isaac's wife, Rebekah served as a type of replacement for Sarah. To be living in her tent would have been a mark of great honor. To use our umbrella analogy again, Isaac literally brought Rebekah under his family's umbrella—the actual tent of his mother.

One additional thing we learn from this last section is that marriage becomes official when it is consummated. This shows us again why purity and chastity before marriage is so vital. Each violation results in a type of marriage to the other person. In 1 Corinthians chapter six, Paul taught that sexual immorality causes one to become "one flesh" and "one body" with the other

person. Sexual immorality is a type of marriage and divorce and the more it happens the more devastating it will become.

13. Pursue Christ For the average teen or young person, dating is like a hunt for big game—you pursue the prize at all costs until the trophy is in hand. You pursue the next boyfriend or girlfriend as if your next breath depended on it. I would hope that the rest of the principles we have covered would prevent you from doing that, but if not, let me be very clear. Don't pursue a boyfriend or girlfriend. Don't pursue a husband or wife. Pursue a quality relationship with Christ and a quality husband or wife will follow. You may or may not be getting a lot of support and instruction from your parents, but whether or not you are, you can help one another in this process. Since so many of you live your life through facebook, so why not use facebook to help one another? So many front pages of young people that I see have the little piece of info—"Sally is in a relationship with Joe." When you see this, I dare you to ask them about their relationship. Ask them if they are pursuing their boyfriend or girlfriend or if they are pursuing Christ. Parents, if you have realized that your umbrella is need of repair, that's a good thing—at least now you know where you stand and what you need to do. This is the second most important decision that a person will ever make.

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<sup>1</sup> "Thigh is undoubtedly a euphemism for genitalia." Hamilton, Victor, *The Book of Genesis: Chapter 18-50*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, © 1995, p. 139.

<sup>2</sup> Although, there are good textual reasons to believe that Abraham had died or was near death. 1. The opening of chapter 24 reads like an end of life summary: *Abraham was now old and well advanced in years, and the LORD had blessed him in every way.* 2. This opening description does not sound like a person who is still 35 years from his death, which Abraham would have been if Isaac was married at 40 years old. 3. Gen 24:36 states that Abraham has given "everything that he owns" to Isaac, which could assume a near death promise of inheritance. 4. If Jacob was born 15 years before Abraham died, why is there no mention of their meeting? 5. When the servant returned home, he referred to Isaac as "my master" which had previously been a title reserved for Abraham. Nevertheless, the clear statement in 25:20 overrides all of these textual questions and affirms that "Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah." I think that the commentators allowed textual uncertainty (i.e. the five reasons listed above) to obscure textual clarity (i.e. Gen. 25:20).