

LIGHT SOURCE

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Marriage and the Christian

Look Before You Leap

by Rev. James G. Witt III

Look before you leap is good advice, especially the leap called "marriage." God's people believe in careful looking. We have a high regard for what marriage is: a God-established, life-long union of a man and a woman for their mutual welfare and happiness. We have a deep concern that our marriages work, and work well.

One question deserving a long and hard pre-leaping look is this: "Should I enter into a spiritually mixed marriage?" In other words: "Should I, a believer in Jesus Christ, a disciple who accepts His teaching, adopts His lifestyle, and shares in His mission, marry someone who does not?"

Some downplay the matter of religious differences in marriage and consider them to be of little importance. They are mistaken. The tried-and-true axiom, "What a person believes determines how he behaves," is especially true in marriage. Belief guides behavior in marriage or in anything else.

As we consider the question of a

spiritually mixed marriage, we do well to consider some key Scriptural points to guide us in forming our answer.

God Permits Mixed Marriages, But He Does Not Promote Them

Marriage is a matter of this life only and is not exclusively for Christians. God does not prohibit us from marrying a non-Christian or a person who believes in Christ

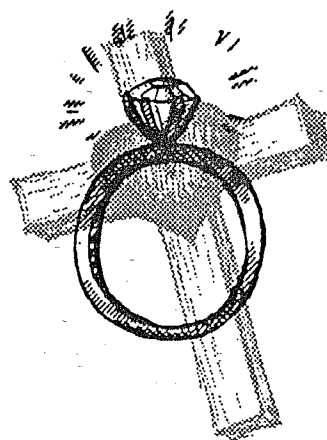
God can use such a marriage to help an unbeliever come to faith in the Savior (*cf.* I Corinthians 7:16; I Peter 3:1-2). I have seen this happen a number of times, and what a joy it is when a person finds a Savior as well as a spouse!

While God permits spiritually mixed marriages, we must also say that He does not promote them. His urging that we marry "in the Lord" (I Corinthians 7:39b) is more than good advice. Christians involved in spiritually mixed marriages face some potentially harmful challenges to their spiritual life.

A Mixed Marriage Increases the Risk of Faith Damage

A Christian involved in a spiritually mixed marriage runs a special spiritual risk. It's easy to see why. Spouses can have a great influence on each other for spiritual good, but also for spiritual harm. All too often the influence a spouse has turned a believer away from Jesus and the Christian faith. God's commands

but holds to false beliefs. A spiritually mixed marriage can work. The couple can enjoy God's gifts of loving companionship, sexual happiness, and children.



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Interfaith Relationships: Looking Before You Leap

to His Old Testament people not to marry unbelievers or those of a different faith (Deuteronomy 7:3-4) can serve as a warning to us. Is it wise to enter into a relationship that will lead us to be indifferent toward or defect from our Savior, who loves us and gives us more than any spouse ever could? The tragic spiritual outcome of a man like King Ahab is a pointed reminder that it doesn't profit a person to gain a beautiful/handsome, wealthy, powerful, talented, but ungodly spouse and lose his own soul. Consider the risk!

A Mixed Marriage Lacks the Christ-In-Common Factor

A spiritually mixed marriage will lack a vital ingredient, a common faith in Christ and all he teaches.

"God has designed marriage so that it works best when He is an active partner in it"

Cecil Myers once said: "Successful marriage is always a triangle: a man, a woman, and God." God has designed marriage so that it works best when He is an active partner in it, graciously ruling in the hearts of both husband and wife, enabling them to pattern their relationship after the loving relationship of Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5:22-31), and helping them express Christ-like forgiveness, love, sacrifice, and service towards each other.

God cannot be an active partner in a marriage when one of the spouses rejects Him. That spouse will have no desire *and no ability* to have a Christ-centered marriage. In the case of marriage to a Christian who holds to false teachings, the strength of the Christ-in-common factor is impaired.

A 1980 U.S. Census report sheds some interesting light on how active involvement in God's Word on the part of married couples affected marriage stability. The report stated:

"Although nationally one out of three marriages ends in divorce, those who have church weddings and attend church regularly beat the odds by one in 50. But of the couples who have married in the church, attend regularly, and have family worship, one in 1,105 ends in divorce."

Having Christ and His Word in common not only adds stability to a marriage, it also adds much satisfaction. This satisfaction flows from the God of perfect love working in and through the other partners of the marriage triangle. When thinking about a spiritually mixed marriage, consider well what will be lacking.

A Mixed Marriage Adds to the Difficulty of Training Christian Children

One of the great challenges of any Christian is to train his/her children to be faithful followers of

Jesus Christ. It's not easy. It's difficult when both parents are faithful followers themselves. It magnifies in difficulty when one parent is not a follower of Christ or holds an erroneous form of Christianity. A study conducted several years ago bears this out. A church wanted to know how the church attendance of parents affected their children in later life. The discovery:

"If both Dad and Mom attend church regularly, 72% of the children remain faithful. If only Dad attends regularly, 55% remain faithful. If only Mom attends regularly, 15% remain faithful. If neither attend regularly, 6% remain faithful."

Children who grow up in homes where the parents are not united in the Christian faith can become confused and uncertain as to what should be believed, and in the process, jeopardize their soul's salvation. When contemplating a marriage partner, consider the spiritual welfare of your children.

Whom will I marry is a question each has to answer for himself/herself. It's a big question with many important issues to consider. I hope this article will help you in thinking through the very important issues of a spiritually mixed marriage. I close by offering a prayer that God bless you richly in your marital looking, leaping, and especially in your landing.

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