

# “Unequally yoked” and the Doctrine of Christ

## A Synopsis of II Corinthians 6

Paul begins chapter six by exhorting the Corinthians to hold on to their faith. Paul and his preaching companions had endured much that the gospel may be preached and accepted by all who would hear (6:1-11). Paul now calls upon the Corinthians to show forth their love for him as he has shown to them through his preaching (6:11-13). Lastly, Paul commands that the Corinthian brethren be not “*unequally yoked with unbelievers*” (6:14). To establish his premise, Paul lays down five illustrations in the form of rhetorical questions to prove that two opposing sides cannot be yoked together to achieve a common goal.

### Identification of the ‘yoke’:

A yoke joins two things together to form a union. Different yokes are to accompany specified groups. For example, one could not place an ox and donkey in the same yoke because they are two different animals. The same yoke would not fit both animals. The same yoke that binds two in marriage is not to be shared by one of another marriage. The same yoke that binds two in a labor union is generally not shared with the non-union member. Paul’s admonition in II Corinthians 6:14 is that the faithful child of God is not to be yoked with an unbeliever. The picture is that the believer has a different yoke than does the unbeliever. The believer is a different ‘creature’ (cf. II Cor. 5:17) than the unbeliever and thereby cannot be guided by the same yoke.

The yoke under discussion represents a doctrine or way of life. When false teachers in Judea were spreading their false doctrines of the Law of Christ mingled with the Mosaic Law, Peter stood up and said, “*Now therefore why make ye trial of God, that ye should put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?*” (Acts 15:10). The yoke was a doctrine. To the Galatians, Paul again referred to this yoke as a doctrine, saying, “*Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage*” (Gal. 5:1).

### The doctrine of Christ’s association to a ‘yoke’:

Those who abide in the doctrine of Christ are **yoked** together in unity by that **doctrine**. The apostle John said, “*whosoever goeth onward and abideth not in the teaching of Christ, hath not God: he that abideth in the teaching, the same hath both the Father and the Son*” (II Jn. 9). Strict adherence to the teaching of Christ joins one in fellowship with God and others who are abiding in that doctrine (cf. I Jn. 1:5-7). Jesus spoke of the degree of unity among baptized believers in John 17:20-22. Said believers are to be “*one, even as we (the Son and Father) are one*” (Jn. 17:22b). Christians are, therefore, to be of “*one mouth*” and “*speak the same things*” (Rom. 15:5-7 [compared with John 15:7-8]; I Cor. 1:10; I Pet. 4:11) and to be of **one** purpose (Phil. 1:27). Christians are to be of **one** mind and judgment (I Cor. 1:10). Christians comprise **one** body (church) (I Cor. 12:12; 27-28). The oneness that exists among baptized believers is due to all being yoked together by the gospel (or truth) (cf. Jn. 17:17).

There are various bonds that exist in society. The marriage bond, a fraternity bond, and a labor union bond are examples of individuals being drawn together to achieve a common goal. The union that Paul speaks of in II Cor. 6:14-16 is a fellowship (bond or yoke) between man and God and between faithful man with other faithful men. This oneness or union forms a unity and a common yoke that is made possible by the gospel message. We pull together in truth alone.

### **Five illustrations to prove that a yoke is a doctrine (II Cor. 6:14-16):**

Paul used five illustrations with a common denominator word to indicate that unity in doctrine is the yoke subject at hand in II Cor. 6:14-16; i.e., fellowship, communion, concord, portion, and agreement (1901 ASV). Each of these five words is summed up in ‘sharing, association, and agreement’ in the Greek. The unbeliever is not guided by the same yoke as the believer. Two individuals exist and are not sharing, in association, and in agreement in doctrine and practices. Again, they are as two different creatures. The command, therefore, that states that the faithful is not to be “*unequally yoked with unbelievers*” is a commandment that demands Christians to stand faithfully in the one true doctrine of Christ and it alone. To stand in any other doctrine would exemplify an “*unequal yoke with unbelievers.*” Paul has effectively accentuated truth and demoted human reason (cf. 1:12; 2:17; 3:1- all; 4:2-4; 5:7; 6:14-16).

### **Practical application and conclusion:**

Interestingly, the English words “*unequally yoked*” is one word in Greek (*heterozugeo*) and is found nowhere else in the Bible. The Greek word is defined as “to be yoked in unequal partnership with another” (LS 320). “Yoked with a different yoke; used in Lev. 19:19 of the union of beasts of different kinds, e.g. an ox and an ass), to come under an unequal or different yoke, to be unequally yoked, to have fellowship with one who is not an equal” (Thayer 245). “Draft animals that need different kinds of yokes, because they are of different species [i.e., an ox and a donkey]: Lev. 19:19” (AG 314). The context of II Corinthians 6:14 indicates that the ‘**different**’ yoke worn by the believer and unbeliever is a doctrine or manner of life. The true child of God abides in the purity of the doctrine of Christ alone while the unbeliever lives by “fleshly wisdom” (II Cor. 1:12).

Unbelievers have their one ‘yoke’ doctrine that joins them together (Rev. 17:13) as does the believer (II Cor. 13:11). The unbeliever is anyone (persistent erring brethren or alien sinner) who goes beyond the teaching of Christ (II Cor. 6:16b; II Jn. 9). The conclusive admonition is that Christians “*come out of*” and be “*separate*” from other doctrines and practices that are contrary to divine revelation (II Cor. 6:17). Do not associate, share, or be in agreement with erroneous doctrines and practices of men. To do so is to be defiled and unclean before Jehovah God; i.e., “*unequally yoked*” (II Cor. 6:14 – 7:1).