

WORLDWIDE CHURCH OF GOD

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**STATEMENT ON MARRIAGES
BETWEEN BELIEVERS AND NONBELIEVERS**

The following statement of the Worldwide Church of God
supersedes all material heretofore published on this subject.



STATEMENT ON

MARRIAGES BETWEEN BELIEVERS AND NONBELIEVERS

Are all marriages between members of the Worldwide Church of God and nonmembers absolutely forbidden? Is it a sin ever to marry outside the faith?

The question of marriage between believers and nonbelievers has recently been highlighted in black Africa, where God is calling many young black men and few, if any, young black women. Is it a sin, in situations such as this, to marry outside the faith? The question, of course, is faced in many areas of the world, including our own college campuses. What if a young couple planning to marry, who suddenly find one beginning to understand the Bible and the other remaining disinterested? And what about students who date on campus--where baptized members freely date nonmembers and occasionally discover they want to spend the rest of their natural lives with each other?

Two verses have generally been cited in counseling instances such as these. II Corinthians 6:14, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers..." and I Corinthians 7:39, last phrase, "...she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord." Are marriages with unbelievers sin?

It has been a recognized practice that marriages are valid when they have occurred before one of the members of the union is converted. Paul, in writing the Corinthians, recognized the validity of such marriages (I Cor. 7:12-16). They therefore are not sin. But this, in itself, does not fully answer the question for those who contemplate such marriages after conversion. Is it an absolute wrong for such marriages to take place after conversion? First, note two situations from Deuteronomy. In chapter 7, verses 3 and 4 marriages with the Canaanite inhabitants of the land are expressly and absolutely forbidden. Yet in Deuteronomy 21:10-14 a case is given of possible marriages with individuals of an enemy nation. The presumption is that the beliefs of the enemy nation are not those of Israel. Yet marriages with captive women in the event of war is permitted. So the rule against marrying outside the faith is not an absolute rule in all instances.

But what of the warning of Paul in II Corinthians 6: "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers"? That this is a general principle is clear. The contrast is between the righteous and unrighteous in their fellowship. Between

Christ and Belial. Between a believer and an infidel. The temple of God and idols. These are all extreme instances and in every case refer to spiritual fellowship and concourse. Paul's statement is not specifically addressed to business relationship or to marriages. That the principle is advisable in business and marriage relationships is certainly true. But it must be remembered that business and marriage relationships even between members of the Church are not necessarily equal. II Corinthians 6:14 should be deeply considered when evaluating any relationship with one of another faith. But it is not given as an absolute rule regulating marriage--which is not even mentioned as an illustration of the principle.

Of primary concern is I Corinthians 7:39--"...only in the Lord." This verse, it must be noted, is addressed to widows. It is not cited anywhere else in this chapter when addressing young men and women, who have never been married, or when addressing men contemplating marriage. It is a cardinal rule of law in the Bible that the male is addressed when referring to both men and women. The tenth commandment is an illustration. The fact that Paul nowhere else set this strict limit--"only in the Lord"--except when counseling widows is important. It is more difficult for them than others, especially if their husbands left them with money, or if there are sexual temptations. They often are more easily taken advantage of.

This is not to say that others should freely consider marrying unbelievers. But it does indicate that there is less stringency in arriving at decisions for marriage than has been thought. In black Africa it is considered that women take the religion of their husbands. For young men in the Church in such a culture, marriage with nonbelievers is not as serious a problem as for widows in the society which Paul addressed. Further, Paul admonished that "it is better to marry than to burn" (I Cor. 7:9). More problems of a far graver nature can arise by denying marriage than by marrying nonbelieving women who are expecting to submit to their husband's religion. And even on college campuses there is far greater likelihood of knowing the nonbaptized person thoroughly as a human being than there is of knowing some members in social situations at annual festivals or in other congregations where one does not regularly attend.

In each instance, marriage should be understood as one of the most serious decisions of life and not hastily entered into.