

## Alliances which should be avoided

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An address given in Edinburgh on Wednesday, April 5th, 1922.

Scriptures read: — 2 Chronicles 18: 1-3; 2 Chronicles 19: 1-3; 2 Chronicles 20: 35-37.

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I have but a few words to say. I wish I could use a sledge hammer, though I am afraid I have only got the kind of hammer that is used to drive in tintacks; but if I had a sledge hammer, I would like to direct a mighty blow on the end of the shaft which I hope has been directed to your hearts and consciences by the Spirit of God. I verily believe that in these days, and probably in all the days of the Church's history, no greater havoc has been wrought amongst the people of God than by *unholy alliances*.

Some of us, who are easy-going, kindly, amiable folk, find it rather difficult sometimes to frame a certain little word, that without any question is the most difficult word for the great majority of people to pronounce, though it only consists of two letters. There are times in every man and woman's history when it costs them more to get that word out pat, and firm and distinct, than any other word in the dictionary, the little word "No."

Have you ever had a time in your history when that little word has trembled on your lips, and you felt as if you could not say it? It was the word that the Spirit of God indicated as the very word to be said. It was the very word evidently that Jehoshaphat ought to have said at this juncture, for he was grievously damaged by his alliances. Today there are excellent Christians, unimpeachable in their piety and in their individual lives, yet entrapped by the devil in unscriptural alliances. He knows that a direct temptation will probably fail, and therefore he works round and delivers a kind of flank attack by means of alliances that will lead them into a false position, rendering their testimony to the Lord practically null and void.

This excellent Jehoshaphat — a man in whom good things were found, for he took away the groves out of the land, he prepared his heart to seek God, and he cultivated individual piety — was weak, he easily yielded and he made affinity with Ahab. Now Ahab, you may remember, was very notorious amongst the Kings of Israel in this respect, that "there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up." Ahab was a man who was out and out for Baal, that is, for the devil, and Jehoshaphat made an alliance with this man.

Do we know anything in modern life amongst the people of God that answers to this picture? Alas, we do, and when we bring someone who is deeply offending in this matter face to face with the Word of God, what does he say? He probably replies, "I am doing it with the very best of motives; I want to help those people. How am I to do it except I get down alongside them?" The argument then is this, that if someone tumbles into a ditch, you tumble in after them in order to help them. Far better to see to it that you get your own feet on the solid rock, and then you may be able to lend a helping hand, but do not think you are going to help them out of the mud by jumping into the mud. That was Jehoshaphat's process, and it was a dreadful failure.

Now, what happened? Why, clearly enough Jehoshaphat did not help — the reverse was the way it worked. Instead of helping Ahab up, Ahab pulled him down. An unconverted man is a man with only

the old fallen nature in him, and you, a child of God, have the divine nature. You may, if you ally yourself with him, put yourself in such a position that the old nature, still in you, is refreshed and revived, and leaping into fresh life, the result is that you fall to a very low level, and you dishonour the Lord. You cannot lift up that man into the life you enjoy, because to begin with he has not got the life that he may enjoy it. Listen to the words out of Jehoshaphat's own mouth; "I am as thou art." He did not say, "Thou hast become as I am, Ahab; I have lifted thee to a higher standard." No, but the very opposite.

God has set before us parables in nature, and there we may find an illustration. The time comes when you pick your apple trees, and you put the apples in a convenient storeroom, and a few days after you carefully look them over. You want to see if even one is showing signs of rottenness as it will have a bad effect on the others. Leave one rotten apple amongst forty good ones, and you will soon have forty-one bad ones; but does goodness work in that way? I have a whole cupboard full of rotten apples. Now, how delightful it would be if you could put just one good apple amongst the rotten apples and they all became good! The greengrocers would soon flourish if they could turn all their rotten apples into good ones by putting one good apple in their midst!

Now, do not ask me to believe, when I see a Christian allying himself with a lot of worldly people, who do not love the Lord, that he is going to make them all good. No, he will run a very serious risk of being himself contaminated; and not a risk merely, for if he persists in this disobedience to the Word of God, he is bound to be contaminated, and end by saying, "I am as thou art" — a terrible confession indeed.

To Jehoshaphat there came Jehu the prophet asking a pertinent question, "Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord? therefore is wrath upon thee from before the Lord." To help a man onward *seems* kind, and kind it is, *if he is on the right road*, but not if he is on the wrong. Now you are not going to help any unconverted man by giving him a push on the wrong road. Fancy a Christian giving a helping hand to unconverted sinners on their way down to the pit! "Shouldest thou help the ungodly and love them that hate the Lord?" Should you go and link yourself up with them and join in their enterprises and despise the line of demarcation that God has made? No, indeed; to do so is of the devil, and not of God. The Word of God calls for the Christian to stand in his own proper character as a child of light, and not a child of darkness. What a wonderful effect would be produced in the Church of God if these exhortations were attended to and Christians everywhere started purging themselves from unholy associations.

One word more. The third Scripture that I read emphasizes the fact that Jehoshaphat sinned in this manner more than once, and God came down in His government upon him. The word of Eliezer the prophet was very definite. He said, "Because thou hast joined thyself with Ahaziah, the Lord hath broken thy works." Oh, how many of us are going to stand before the Lord at His judgment seat, when the day of review comes, and hear a word similar to that? Will it be true of any of us that the Lord will have to say, "You were very zealous in a way; you were very diligent; you ran far and you laboured, but because you linked yourself up with the world, because you were frequently compromising your true character by unworthy alliances, I have broken your works; they count for nothing in My presence"?

The only safe ground is the ground that the Word of God gives us. When you find that grave instruction in the Word of God: "Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers," do not fall to arguing, and reason about it, but rather OBEY it, cost what it may.