



Living Abundantly With Nonmember Mates

*Has God called you but not your husband or wife?
Has it caused problems in your Christian life?
Here's how to make the most of your situation.*

By Neil Earle

It is a familiar sight in God's Church: a woman sitting in the audience during services, valiantly supervising one, two, three or more young children.

Her husband is not an usher or

a deacon. He isn't up taking attendance. He isn't even in the hall. He doesn't attend services in the Worldwide Church of God. He is not a member.

Familiar as well to God's ministers is the one-on-one visit with a man struggling to explain to his wife why

he has to pay three full tithes or why he would like his teenagers to attend a YOU activity.

He, like many men reading this article, is married to a woman who is not a member of the Worldwide Church of God. God has not called the member's mate, and this

strains their family relationship.

Are there any principles that can help us ease the tensions in this touchy situation? Yes, once we gain God's perspective on the matter.

One young woman wrote *The Good News*: "Please, please, PLEASE spell out the rules for women with nonmember mates. When should we obey our husbands instead of God? Am I excused from keeping the Feast and Holy Days? Am I allowed to celebrate Christmas, Easter, Halloween and birthdays just because my husband wants me to?"

"My husband would love it if I'd forget about the Bible and God. Should I make him *that* happy? Somewhere, somehow, I feel like I'm missing a page of instructions."

While one article can't answer every question in detail or cover all the countless, awkward problems that arise in this area, we can drink in the basic guidelines from God's Word.

Christian life a struggle

"Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you" (I Pet. 4:12).

Let's get our bearings as we approach this important subject. As Christians we are up against the satanic system of this world (Rom. 12:1-2). Paul plainly described the Christian life as a fight — a struggle (I Tim. 6:12).

Jesus said that only those who are violent with themselves — with their attitudes, with their past way of viewing things, with their former attachments to this society — will drive through to the Kingdom (Matt. 11:12). God is our invincible Ally if we diligently seek Him.

It was not an easy undertaking we bargained for when we gave our old selves to symbolically perish in the waters of baptism (Rom. 6:3-6). That simple but sublime ceremony drew upon us the full fire of Satan's wrath (I Pet. 5:8).

But take heart!

God called you, and He *never* makes a mistake (John 6:44). If He drew you to Him and convicted you by His Spirit, you can make it (John 10:27-28).

Furthermore, God knew our total

backgrounds when He called us and, in His supreme wisdom, He decided, in some cases, not to call our mates. Paul referred to this when He said: "Is any man called being circumcised? let him not become uncircumcised. Is any called in uncircumcision? let him not be circumcised. . . . Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called" (I Cor. 7:18, 20).

God has decided He will not call some of our mates, at least not yet. But stop and think! Our wonderful Creator never does anything except for our very best interests in the long run (Rom. 8:28). Think about that next time you're tempted to say, Oh, how I wish God would call my mate.

The simple truth is that the Christian life is a struggle for everyone. We should be happy warriors (Eph. 6:10-11).

One of Satan's favorite tactics is to unsettle, upset and confuse people through their intimate personal relationships. That is where he struck in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:1-6). That is where he often strikes today, and even those families with both husband and wife in the Church are not spared.

Yet, undoubtedly, the fact that a mate is not a member does present some peculiar challenges. To really come to grips with these challenges requires another look at the very bedrock of our commitment to God. Notice Jesus' definitive statement:

"Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me" (Matt. 10:34-38).

Jesus Christ, who knew human nature intimately (John 2:25), candidly warned us about the hazards in the Christian life. He wants us to accept our particular "cross" in life as something to be borne gracefully,

rather than have us make a shallow commitment that crumbles at the first shocks of persecution.

We are promised trouble and tribulation (Job 5:7, Acts 14:22). We can thank Christ that He inspired a whole book, the Holy Bible, to help us learn how to shoulder it.

Wouldn't it be relatively simple for the great God to convert your mate? He humbled the obstinate pharaoh and the strutting Nebuchadnezzar. In God's hands, Saul the destroyer became Paul the apostle.

There is hope! "For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?" (I Cor. 7:16).

A mate's conversion, however, should not be our main hope, because we should resolve to remain steadfast Christians no matter what (Job 13:15). "But as God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk. And so ordain I in all churches" (I Cor. 7:17).

The point is that the all-powerful, all-knowing God could have called your mate (Gen. 18:14). But He didn't. Why not?

Blessing in disguise

"My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing" (Jas. 1:2-4).

God is more concerned about our character than our comfort! His purpose is to mold us, like clay models, into the very image of Jesus Christ Himself (Jer. 18:6). The awkward, sometimes frustrating and exasperating experiences of living with a life partner who is not in the Church could be a great blessing in disguise.

Every close human relationship, including marriage, has its stresses and strains (Amos 3:3). But then, rose bushes have thorns. When a husband or wife is not in the Church, a member has an even more urgent prod to develop wisdom.

James 1:5 tells us, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and

upbraideth not; and it shall be given him."

Living with potential hostility or periodic alienation forces a Christian to examine himself regularly (II Cor. 13:5). Thus the human clay God is fashioning becomes a little more malleable.

Are you as a Christian striving to be a more effective peacemaker? Do you overreact? Do you automatically expect the worst and enter delicate situations bristling with pride and plain old self-righteousness?

Oh, how we all fall down from time to time (Eccl. 7:20)! The good news is that God is more willing to give us wisdom than we are to ask Him for it (Deut. 5:29).

The tragedy is that many people stumble heedlessly through life—discourteous, tactless, unteachable. Then they lament their terrible lack of success in human relationships (Prov. 5:11-13). Wisdom is the art of saying the right thing at the right time in just the right tone of voice and with just enough words to make the point (Prov. 10:32, 12:23, 25:11).

Yes, the sometimes thorny relationships between true Christians and their nonmember mates provide incentive in the lifelong pursuit of wisdom. Tact, diplomacy, strategy, timing—members with antagonistic mates should cultivate all these attributes; they lead to shining success in life.

Listen to these beautiful words: "But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace" (Jas. 3:17-18).

The onus is clearly upon us as members to weed out destructive anger (Prov. 29:22). The carnal, almost irresistible pleasure of striking back, retaliating by word or deed, is not worth the price paid in severed relationships.

It's so hard to resist preaching to or lecturing our mates. But it is better (Prov. 25:8) to develop that "meek and quiet spirit" the Bible prizes so highly (I Pet. 3:4).

Disengage yourself from situations where you feel resentment and bitter-

ness bubbling to the surface (Prov. 17:14). God warns that a brother offended is harder to be won than a fortified city (Prov. 18:19). Allow people to "save face" whenever possible. Treat your partner as you would like to be treated in a similar circumstance (Luke 6:31).

These are basic Christian principles, simpler to read over than to actually put into practice. They do work, however, and the results are well worth the effort. Remember Paul's counsel: "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men" (Rom. 12:18).

Family government

Nothing written above, however, justifies cruelty or mishandling by antagonistic mates. God doesn't expect women, for example, to suffer under despicable examples of manhood who beat them, threaten their lives or attempt to suffocate them spiritually. "God hath called us to peace," Paul stated (I Cor. 7:15).

True, Christian women are required to honor their husbands and to submit to them (I Cor. 11:3). Yet God also says in Colossians 3:18, "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, *as it is fit in the Lord.*"

God requires His converted children, male and female, to appear before Him on the Sabbath (Lev. 23:3, Heb. 10:25). Danger to life and limb, or slow spiritual strangulation by husbands who make it impossible for their wives to obey God's clear commands, needs to be brought to the ministry (Heb. 13:17).

Wives are to submit, yes, but "as it is fit in the Lord." A Christian woman owes allegiance to an authority even higher than her husband—to the One who instituted the husband's authority in the first place, the almighty, eternal God (Prov. 29:25).

Acts 5:29 plainly teaches, "We ought to obey God rather than men." Applying this principle is often one of the greatest crosses a true Christian woman with an antagonistic husband has to bear. Seek plenty of qualified help and advice from God's ministry in this matter.

But remember, God did not write Ephesians 5:22 and Colossians 3:18

as the "Male Chauvinist Bill of Rights."

No scripture justifies the cruel, ironfisted rule of a man who forces a converted woman to infringe on God's spiritual law. The wife is told to "submit herself," not to get sledgehammered into slavery. The phrase "submit yourself" is no license for the female's exploitation.

At the same time, converted women will not seize on any picky areas to excuse dumping husbands they would selfishly like to get rid of. This is a difficult area for many women in God's Church, especially, but the overall principles are clear.

There is nothing in God's Word requiring us to participate in Christmas, Easter, Halloween or other worldly holidays because of a husband's commands. But neither should we become hurt or resentful if the husband chooses this route. Don't criticize. Don't condemn. God isn't judging the world yet, but He is certainly judging us (I Pet. 4:17). Often tact and resourcefulness can work wonders (Prov. 21:23).

Be resourceful

Notice God's encouragement: "Every wise woman buildeth her house: but the foolish plucketh it down with her hands" (Prov. 14:1). "She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness" (Prov. 31:26).

Dozens of young people are studying at Ambassador College because of the determined, wise example set for them by courageous mothers and fathers who walked with God every day in a sometimes tedious struggle to serve Him without offending their mates.

Countless quiet, meek men and women have found untapped reserves of leadership, tact and strategy once they determined to obey God fully (Prov. 28:1). There is never an excuse for rebellion against a husband, of course, but we owe God our total allegiance. It is a matter of obeying the One in greater authority.

One woman had reasoned that she should never attend any activities except Sabbath services. Her excuse? She felt she should spend all her free

time with her nonmember husband and children.

But she began to realize that her family's depressing personal problems were undermining her attitude and cutting her off from the abundant life God's people enjoy in wholesome social activities. Her minister agreed.

She responded to her pastor's suggestions. She joined the church ladies' bowling league and the choir, volunteered for a job responsibility in the congregation and is generally enjoying life much more.

No wonder. She is living the great commandment (Matt. 22:37), and God is blessing her. She now has the quiet conviction that the Head of this Church is looking after her family and will call them to the truth at the best possible time. Meanwhile, she has work to do with God's people, and sets a fine example for all.

Husbands with nonmember, antagonistic wives should zealously take the lead in their families to plan uplifting, enjoyable activities within God's law.

Instead of allowing the sources of friction to dominate your family relations, why not plunge wholeheartedly into activities that build unity? The best defense is a good offense!

If Christmas, Easter and birthdays are sore spots, make up for these antagonisms by planning outstanding events for Thanksgiving, graduations, anniversaries and vacations. Involve your wife's family where possible. Be watchful. Know your wife's interests and enjoyments. If they are within God's law, make the most of them.

Be wise. Be resourceful. Appreciate any opportunity to set a balanced example of God's way. God could use your wife's nonmember status as a vehicle to spread His truth into more and more lives. Be a light (Matt. 5:14). But remember, a light doesn't preach. A light only makes a noise when it is defective.

Claim God's promise: "When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him" (Prov. 16:7).

Abigail's amazing example

"I just can't see how it would work in my case," some will protest. "I've

tried everything, and it just gets worse." Well, remember, the impossible is God's specialty. Let's study an amazing case history recorded to illustrate this very point.

In the days when King David was a rugged guerrilla leader, there was a woman named Abigail, "a woman of good understanding, and of a beautiful countenance" (1 Sam. 25:3). Abigail had married a man who, though a financial success, was an abject failure as a human being. The Bible, with marvelous irony, records that his name was *Nabal*, meaning "a fool" or "worthless fellow" (verses 3, 25).

This ornery individual became involved in a semicomical episode that literally sizzles with the dynamics of human relationships. It is vital that we today understand such episodes (Rom. 15:4).

God's ministers meet many Nabals. Sometimes people forget that the Nabals of this world reap what they sow, eventually (Gal. 6:7). Being a Nabal, an unhappy ingrate, is punishment enough, but sooner or later such a person goes too far (Prov. 11:17, 15:18). A Nabal's habit of "shooting from the hip," often fortified by terrorizing a wife, inevitably leads to a showdown.

This happened. Nabal's spiteful refusal to supply David's small army with provisions caught the Jewish giant killer at the wrong time. David saw red! He'd risked his life defending Nabal's property and all southern Judah from hostiles. In full fury, David set out to punish this snide reprobate (1 Sam. 25:13). The irresistible force was headed for a very movable object, Nabal and his whole family. What did Abigail do? What would you do?

Abigail's "good understanding" rallied. You couldn't live with a viper like Nabal without growing at least a little in wisdom. "The wrath of a king is as messengers of death: but a wise man [or woman] will pacify it" (Prov. 16:14). Swiftly Abigail prepared a sumptuous meal (1 Sam. 25:18).

Then she herself set out to meet David after he had first sampled the delectable food, a true "peace offering." This was the adroit strategy of a forceful, capable woman facing a life-and-death test.

It worked. Her sound, forthright approach completely melted David's anger (verses 23-31). What a study in feminine leadership interposing itself skillfully and diplomatically at just the right time!

David was forever glad he had listened to this woman, an unsurpassed example of strength blended with submission. Abigail did all of this without compromising the government principle in the home.

God Himself upheld this stout-hearted woman who possessed a delicate blend of dignity, nobility and tact. God reciprocated her loyal submission to her obstreperous husband with wisdom to handle her life's crises. More than merely "coping," she ended up as the wife of David (verse 40).

Benefit from the opportunity

Sweet indeed can be the uses of adversity! What a merciful God we serve, who allows us to build character and learn valuable lessons from our most awkward and embarrassing life situations.

Don't lament and bemoan your situation. If your mate is truly "pleased to dwell" with you, rejoice and make the most of the opportunity to be a quiet, tactful witness of God's way (1 Cor. 7:12-13).

Remember, God does not make mistakes. When He called you into His glorious truth and did not open the mind of your husband or wife, He knew what He was doing. Trust Him. Whatever He does is for your good, ultimately.

Above all, do nothing that will stand in the way of your mate responding to God's call. Strive to set the very finest example. Your minister will have other pertinent suggestions. The best thing any of us can do to serve God is to be as involved and interested in His Work as possible (Matt. 6:33).

God is not unfair. He knew what He was doing when He called only one member of your family. One day we will learn that His ways truly are higher than ours (Isa. 55:8-9).

"For surely there is an end; and thine expectation shall not be cut off" (Prov. 23:18). □