

Why Did God Forbid Mixing Linen and Wool Threads

by Tony Warren

One of the questions that is frequently asked of Christians is, "Why did God forbid mixing wool and linen threads?" What's wrong with mixing wool and linen? In fact, the pertinent verse is often cited in the standard argument that skeptics give to mock Biblical prohibitions, because it appears to be so trivial and is generally completely ignored in modern Christianity. Many Christians are also puzzled about why God would make such a law, and what it could possibly mean for us today? There are two places in the Bible that prohibit wearing clothing mingled with linen and wool, and in both instances the references are clearly in the context of segregation or prohibitions against mixing different animals or seeds. This God authored precept is listed in both the books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy:

Deuteronomy 22:9-11

- "Thou shalt not sow thy vineyard with divers seeds: lest the fruit of thy seed which thou hast sown, and the fruit of thy vineyard, be defiled.
- Thou shalt not plow with an ox and an ass together.
- Thou shalt not wear a garment of divers sorts, as of woollen and linen together."

What's wrong with mixing wool and linen? When viewed in its proper context, we see that this prohibition against mixing threads does not stand alone. It appears together with laws against mixing seeds and against yoking together certain diverse animals. Note that the reason God gives for not sowing two different types of seeds together is clearly ceremonial cleansing, so that the fruit of the seed they had sown would not be defiled or made unclean. The reasons for the prohibition of planting two different kinds of seeds in a field, yoking a donkey together with an ox, and of mixing wool and linen fibers together, are not really that difficult to discern when considered in context and in harmony with the rest of the Bible. It is the same reason God prohibited Israel from eating shellfish ([Leviticus 1:12](#)) or pigs ([Leviticus 11:7](#)), which He calls an abomination. It was not to illustrate to God's people that shrimp, rabbit and pork were somehow unhealthy foods, but rather the law illustrated in these ceremonial precepts the difference God placed between unclean and clean people. It signified the God breathed principle of segregation, that God's people were to be a separate and pure people. By God making this distinction between beasts ([Acts 10:14-15](#)) considered clean and could be eaten,

and beasts considered unclean and not to be eaten, He was pointing to the separation of God's people from the Gentile unbelievers. This is why the Jews looked upon the Gentiles as unclean. Likewise, the threads that could not be mixed with other diverse threads pointed to this same separation principle. Just as the donkey was prohibited from work yoked together with the Ox, or the precept that different seeds were not to be planted together in a field. It was all to signify that God's people Israel were a special, peculiar people deemed clean and "set apart" from other nations for the service of God. This was always illustrating something of *infinitely* more significance, consequence, magnitude, seriousness and import than dietary, animal labor and clothing restrictions. These laws regulating separation of animals, seeds and threads were instituted by God as signs of ceremonial ablutions, parallel demonstrations to highlight the issue of keeping the children of Israel separate from the corruption of non believers. These laws were to avoid syncretism.

Leviticus 19:19

- "Ye shall keep my statutes. Thou shalt not let thy cattle gender with a diverse kind: thou shalt not sow thy field with mingled seed: neither shall a garment mingled of linen and woollen come upon thee."

The people of Israel were a covenanted people, a people of promise ([Romans 9:4](#)) that were separated unto sanctification for the service of God. And these laws were designed to keep them mindful of that separation, a sign of their peculiar distinctness as God's holy people. These threads were distinctive, because linen is from a plant (*often flax*) fiber, while wool is from animal fiber. When you interweave these fibers, you are mixing two very diverse kinds together as one. God used this as an example that signifies mixing righteousness with unrighteousness. When we compare scripture with scripture, we can also see this illustrated in the declaration of God concerning the offerings brought before Him by Cain and Abel. Cain brought a plant offering, and Abel brought an animal offering, and it is no coincidence that God did not favor Cain's offering, but favored the offering that Abel had brought. One unschooled in scripture might presume it arbitrary, but God is painting a portrait of an offering of righteousness and unrighteousness.

Genesis 4:3-05

- "And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD.
- And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering:
- But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell."

Abel brings God the firstling of sheep and Cain brings a plant offering. One is respected of God and the other is not. This symbolizes that one was a believer's offering (Abel) unto righteousness through the shedding of blood ([Hebrews 9:22](#)), and the other unacceptable for righteousness. An unrighteousness demonstrated in Cain murdering his own brother. Abel is a portrait of God's people, while Cain illustrative of those unrighteous who lie in unbelief. Like linen versus wool, God's righteous people are not to be mixed with the unrighteous. Abel illustrated the faith of Christ in his offering, wherein his deed is recorded of God a testimony to all of us. Cain illustrated man's envy and enmity against God, wherein he is seen as a sign of betrayal and hatred.

Hebrews 11:4

- "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh."

Two different types of people, but only one of faith, elect in the righteousness of Christ. The other without faith, the token of unrighteousness and murder. Just as in this illustration, the law of Deuteronomy and Leviticus that linen (which is a plant fiber) should not be mixed with wool (an animal fiber), is the illustration that believers and unbelievers are different people. They are not equal and thus (*as the ox and the donkey*) should not be unequally yoked together. One is of an acceptable offering unto God, and the other is not. One is not to be tied together with the other anymore than the children of Israel would tie a donkey together to plow with an Ox. This is why in the context of Leviticus God also forbids His people's cattle from being mingled with diverse kinds. It seems obvious the reason God decreed these ceremonial laws to avoid contamination were so that Israel would understand that He had made them a distinct people, and they should remain separated from the unbelieving ([Ezra 10:10-11](#)) nations. To ignore such precepts would put them in transgression of the law of God. Likewise, linen and wool were not to be married in the same garment to symbolize this same separation of God's people. To yoke the two together would violate the covenant principle and special nature of Israel. Not at all unlike God's ordinance that He gave to His New Testament people illustrating this same law of remaining distinct and separate.

2nd Corinthians 6:14-17

- "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?"
- "And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?"
- "And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people."
- "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you,"

This is why a donkey could not be yoked together with an ox. It signified that God's people were a unique and chosen kingdom of Priests that should not mix with other kindreds or worldly societies. 2nd Corinthians illustrates to us that God's covenant with His people has not changed in all these years, so that they are still bound by this sign of peculiarity and distinction. They are still a separate ox from the unclean animals of the world. And they are still not to be unequally yoked together with them, and thus a Christian is not to marry an unbeliever. In the Old Testament His people could not wear a garment of divers materials like wool and linen together because the garment of Israel signified the righteous clothing or covering of Christ. Therefore it could not be mingled with a different kind of cloth to defile or make it impure. Having apparel mingled with different threads indicates that something foreign or strange has been added, marring it. eg:

Zephaniah 1:8

- "And it shall come to pass in the day of the LORD'S sacrifice, that I will punish the princes, and the king's children, ***and all such as are clothed with strange apparel.***"

This indicates they were mixing with the ungodly, which is forbidden. The ceremonial law of separation from uncleanness is seen in mixing wool and linen in clothing, plowing with a donkey and an ox yoked together, the eating of unclean fish and meats, and the sowing two different types of seed in one field. These were instituted to vividly paint a portrait to Israel of how they were not to mingle with the strange and different nations that were around them, and who were considered unclean. That is why the nation of Israel also looked upon the Heathen/Gentiles as unclean dogs ([Matthew 15:26-27](#)), because they were outside of God's covenanted people and thus to be looked upon as unclean. This ceremonial law illustrated that God's people were to remain clean, unique, peculiar and dedicated to Him alone. Today these sundry laws may seem strange to some people not educated in theology, but they were God's way of illustrating Israel was not to be mingled together with the Gentile nations. The same for making a baldness between their eyes for the dead. It was not a call for physical ethnic purity, but because God wanted Israel to be a different people, a people of promise above all others.

Deuteronomy 14:1-3

By keeping these laws illustrating ceremonial cleanliness, the Old Testament saints proved themselves a people committed to Jehovah God alone. Thus they would reject the vain fashions, tastes and plowings of the world for the distinction of being a special people that God had chosen. By their obedience in carefully avoiding themselves being woven into the fabric of the unclean world, they show themselves distinct from it.

Ezra 9:11-12

- "Which thou hast commanded by thy servants the prophets, saying, The land, unto which ye go to possess it, is an unclean land with the filthiness of the people of the lands, with their abominations, which have filled it from one end to another with their uncleanness.
- Now therefore give not your daughters unto their sons, neither take their daughters unto your sons, nor seek their peace or their wealth for ever: that ye may be strong, and eat the good of the land, and leave it for an inheritance to your children for ever."

This is the principle of not mixing clean with unclean, and of being a diverse and holy people. Even in not plowing unequally with donkey and ox, or in eating what was deemed unclean, or in mixing threads in garments, God's children would show forth in these ordinances the glory of God in the peculiar distinctiveness that He instituted for them. When the question is asked, "why did God forbid mixing wool and linen threads," the answer is that it is all to intimate how careful God's people were not to mingle themselves with the heathen. They were (*so to speak*) not to weave any of the fabric of the Gentiles, into the fabric of Israel.

Exodus 19:5

- "Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine:"

The Children of Israel in everything that they did were ordained to be a peculiar or special people set apart for the service of God. This is what all these ritual laws that people puzzle over and question today, signified. In these rituals God commanded, He is demonstrating that the mixing of these things would be a sign of a mingled people, the corruption of God's chosen people. It all looked forward to the coming Messiah who would satisfy or fulfill the law and truly make all those in Him a peculiar, holy people, called out and separated from the heathen unto the service of God.

Titus 2:14

- "Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."

In the New Testament dispensation, God's people, no matter what nation they come from, are to be regarded as a special or peculiar people that belong to the Lord Jesus and are not in any wise to be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. Christ fulfilled the law that God put forth in forbidding mingling of seeds in a field, breaking down the wall of partition and making both Jew and Gentile one in Christ. It is in Him that they are to be different from the world, and not be in spiritual friendship or affinity with them ([James 4:4](#)), which is confusion. Such unequal yoking is enmity against God and strictly forbidden. There is a dissimilarity between believers and unbelievers as between righteousness and unrighteousness. That makes it unlawful for us to mingle together as one. The child of Israel was not to intermarry or mix households with unbelievers, as that would be mixing righteousness and unrighteousness. The same holds true today with the child of God and the unbeliever. For the New Testament child of God is spiritually a Jew, and the unbeliever spiritually a Gentile. To intermarry would be like mixing seeds of two diverse sorts or yoking two diverse animals together to plow. This is what signified ([Leviticus 19:19](#)).

May the Lord who is gracious above all, give us the wisdom to discern the truth of His most glorious word.

Amen!

Peace,



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