

Bio:

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Andy is a full time elder of Kings Church Horsham where he is a regular speaker. Andy is passionate about seeing people come to know Jesus for themselves. He loves reading the bible and is committed to faithfully preaching the "whole council of God" even when it is unpopular in today's politically correct society.



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Can I Date a Non-Christian?

Is it ever right to date or marry a non-Christian?

Introduction

As a youth leader, and throughout my life in church, this must be one of the all time most frequently asked questions – “Can I date a non-Christian?” I have put this paper together in response to that question. You can also listen to a sermon called “Sex, Violence, Judgement & One Man's Zeal for God” where I tackle this “hot topic”. Visit [MY WEBSITE](#)

Fundamental Assumptions

There are some basic assumptions that I am making about you the reader and your beliefs.

Assumption 1 – You love Jesus

My fundamental assumption is that you love Jesus with all your heart, mind, soul and strength¹ and that it is your greatest desire to live your life for him, to please him by living a life worthy of his name, to fulfil his commands to you – To love God² & Love People³ and to go and share Jesus with everyone⁴ you can either in word or deed.

Assumption 2 – You believe in the inerrancy of the bible

I assume too that you believe that the bible is the inspired word of God and that it is, in its entirety, for our good, for our instruction, to help us live great lives for God⁵.

These assumptions allow us to read the bible and form our decisions on the basis of scripture. We can then avoid offence as we are simply professing the teaching of the bible and thus the word of God however “unpopular” that may be. We can avoid including our own personal preferences where the bible has clear instruction on what we must do even when that seems contrary to what we, or society and our culture, want.

Can I Date a Non-Christian?

Personally I believe that the bible, both old and New Testament show unequivocally that for a Christian to date a non-Christian, is contrary to scripture. That is for a Christ follower (Christian) to date a non-Christian (someone who is not a Christ follower) goes against the teaching of the bible. I will therefore layout why I believe this to be the case and show how scripture leads me to this conclusion.

What does the bible say?

We see throughout the Old Testament the Lord commanding Israel not to “intermarry” with the nations around them. They are repeatedly told not to take wives for their sons from outside the children of Israel. Exodus 34:1-17 gives examples of this and the Old Testament is littered with similar examples⁶.

Be careful not to make a treaty with those who live in the land; for when they prostitute themselves to their gods and sacrifice to them, they will invite you and you will eat their sacrifices. 16 And when you choose some of their daughters as wives for your sons and those daughters prostitute themselves to their gods, they will lead your sons to do the same
Exodus 34:15-16

¹ Luke 10:27

² Mark 12:30

³ Mark 12:31

⁴ Matthew 28:19

⁵ 2 Timothy 3:16

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This was an Old Testament dating scenario and I believe the same is true today. Now one might argue that “things were different back then. They had arranged marriages” well of course this is true, but regardless of the parents selecting a spouse or, as is the case in our culture, you selecting your own spouse the principle hold

up equally well. The principle being outlined here is one of joining together unequally. We read here and throughout the Old Testament that we should not “intermarry” that is marry a non-Christian. And, if we believe that the purpose of dating is to prepare for marriage we cannot date a non-Christian either. This does of course raise another topic for discussion, that of “Why Date? Is it to prepare for marriage or for fun and experience gathering” and I will discuss this in another document at a later date. For now I think that “ultimately” dating will lead to marriage ... hopefully at some point.

2 Corinthians 6:14-18 (ESV)

Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty."

This passage talks again about not being married to unbelievers, they have nothing in common. What union is there between Christ and the devil? In Amos is asks “Can two walk together unless they are agreed?⁷”. The answer is of course no. Take that into to the context of Sex the bible says that when we have sex that “the two become one flesh. This being the case what are we doing uniting our body, the temple of the holy spirit with that of an unbeliever. What union is that?

1 Corinthians 6:15-17 (New International Version)

Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, "The two will become one flesh." But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit.

Whilst I am not in any way likening a non-Christian to a prostitute I am saying that the same principle applies. We could read this as “Do you not know that he who unites himself with [an unbeliever] is one with her in body? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with [an unbeliever]?”

This I feel is pretty conclusive, but, just in case you were thinking that this is all about marriage, and you are only talking about dating ... let’s look at the process of dating. Even if everything is really platonic, and above board, part of you is still involved with this other individual. Part of you is still given to them ... your heart. The bible addresses this for us in Proverbs 4:23

⁶ Ezra 10:11, Nehemiah 13:27, et al

⁷ Amos 3:3

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Proverbs 4:23 (New International Version)

Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.

We are told as Christians that “above ALL else” we should guard our heart. That we should be careful to keep it whole and not break it. We need to only share it with those who will have the same care and honour for their own heart – Another Christian. How can we share something so precious as our heart with someone who will not have the same regard for it, or for the affairs of our heart – Namely Jesus !

I know what you are thinking, If I go out with them I will be able to introduce them to the church, to God, to Jesus, they will get saved and we will all live happily ever after! My answer is NOT!

1 Corinthians 15:33 (New International Version)

Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character."

Deuteronomy 11:16 (English Standard Version)

Take care lest your heart be deceived

Why do you think it says “So not be misled” or “take care”? Because we are easily and often misled! Don’t think you are the stronger part here. You are not. It is easier for them to draw you away, than for you to draw them up.

This brings us full circle back to Exodus 34:16 “do not choose wives from outside of Israel for your sons as then they worship their gods they will draw your sons away and they will do the same” [My paraphrase]

If you are in a relationship with a non-Christian already then your heart will be telling you that all this is wrong and that what is being said here is not correct. But let me tell you that your emotions, feelings and your heart are deceiving you and keeping you from the truth.

Jeremiah 17:9 ESV

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

People in the world have gods of worldliness, of selfishness, or greed and lust. You will be drawn away no matter how smart you think you are.

Let’s look at one final example: Solomon. He was the wisest man on the face of the earth⁸, and I am sure that none of us would venture to say we are smarter than he was. Yet this very thing, dating and marrying none Christians was the thing that “mislead” him.

⁸ 1 Kings 4:29, 2 Chronicles 1:12

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1 Kings 11:1-3

King Solomon, however, loved many foreign women besides Pharaoh's daughter—Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians and Hittites. They were from nations about which the LORD had told the Israelites, "You must not intermarry with them, because they will surely turn your hearts after their gods." Nevertheless, Solomon held fast to them in love. He had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines, and his wives led him astray."

1 Kings 3:12

I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be

Solomon, even with all his wisdom was led astray by his unbelieving wives. Don't be misled, dating a non-Christian is folly, a mistake of gigantic proportions.

Conclusion

Nehemiah 13:23-27 (English Standard Version)

In those days also I saw the Jews who had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab. And half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and they could not speak the language of Judah, but only the language of each people. And I confronted them and cursed them and beat some of them and pulled out their hair. And I made them take oath in the name of God, saying, "You shall not give your daughters to their sons, or take their daughters for your sons or for yourselves. Did not Solomon king of Israel sin on account of such women? Among the many nations there was no king like him, and he was beloved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel. Nevertheless, foreign women made even him to sin. Shall we then listen to you and do all this great evil and act treacherously against our God by marrying foreign women?"

I believe that the bible is clear. Marrying and therefore dating non-Christians is not Gods best for us. Don't do it!

Common Objections

This is a very emotive subject and most often people are asking the question is because they have a non-Christian boyfriend/girlfriend and are looking to justify this. The most common “excuses” that are presented to me are below.

God has told me to

No he hasn't! God will never tell you something that contradicts his revealed word in the bible. I fully subscribe to the gifts of the Holy Spirit being alive and active today including the gift of prophecy. However, God will never reveal to you, or anyone else, something that is different to what the bible makes clear. Jesus made it clear when he was here on earth that he did not come to abolish the law⁹. So his Holy Spirit will not come and tell you anything that goes against what God has already revealed to us.

I will convert them

Unlikely (although there are exception cases). The vast majority of examples show the Christian falling away from Jesus not the other way around. Remember that bad company corrupts good character, not the other way around. As I said earlier normally you are dealing with someone who is already dating someone already in which case they are emotionally attached and often not wanting to “give up” this person. They want to be in a relationship and want to feel loved, accepted and needed. Jesus tells us to seek him first and his kingdom¹⁰ and the things that we need, and he knows we need, will be added to us.

I Can't Trust God for that

So often people are willing to trust God for finances, jobs even healing and the miraculous, but are unwilling to submit this area of their lives to him. This can indicate a few things.

Independent Spirit

Has the individual really submitted their lives to Jesus or have they simply signed up for their sins being forgiven and going to heaven but not looked at counting the cost of being a follower of Jesus. One of those things is submitting our entire lives to him and trusting him in every area of life

Poor understanding of the Nature and Character of God

Sometimes people's unwillingness to allow God to control this area of their lives is because they have a wrong view of God. They somehow believe that if left to God he will make them marry a real moose! Someone they are totally not attracted to. They don't see God as that loving father that really wants the best for his Son/daughter. I want my two boys to marry really attractive girls who that are totally smitten by. The bible tells me that I am made in the image of God¹¹ and I know from reading the bible that he wants the best for us. He does not want to harm us, he wants us to do really well and he wants us to have a great future and life¹².

Not understood Forgiveness

Sometimes people think that god want to punish them by giving them a spouse that they don't find attractive or that they don't get on with to punish them. They clearly have not understood that they are forgiven, fully justified by faith and not by what they have done. When you became a Christian you realised that there was nothing you could do to contribute to your being forgiven by God. It was by faith alone. It was a free gift! We now have peace with God and we can relax knowing that Jesus has paid the price for us. Our sin was punished by God when Jesus died on the cross for you. All this happened before you were born, so you had not yet

⁹ Matthew 5:17

¹⁰ Matthew 6:33

¹¹ Genesis 1:27

¹² Jeremiah 29:11

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committed any sin, so the punishment that Jesus received on your behalf was for the sins you were going to commit (because you had not been born then) so that also includes the sin you have not yet committed! That is truly salvation by grace! God is not going to punish you by giving you someone you don't like for a spouse.

Afraid of Singleness

People are often afraid of being alone, or sometimes they are afraid that God will call them to be single. This not only is a wrong view of godly singleness ... if you are called to that you would not feel the need to be reading this I am sure. God want to fulfil your desires¹³, he is not going to call you to something that is the exact opposite of the desire of your heart. He may be asking you to put it down now, for a time but this comes back to getting a right view of God and his character. He loves you and want to trust him for the future and all areas of your life.

Trust God

My initial assumption was that you love Jesus with all your heart, mind, soul and strength and that it is your greatest desire to live your life for him, to please him by living a life worthy of his name, to fulfil his commands to you – To love God & Love People and to go and share Jesus with everyone you can either in word or deed.

If you truly desire to life your life for Jesus, wanting to please him then it is clear that you must live your life in line with what Scripture teaches. Give it to Jesus, lay it down, seek first his kingdom and because God is faithful he will give you a wonderful spouse in his timing and in his way. The key is to delight yourself in him and in serving him.

Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart
Psalm 37:4

¹³ Psalm 145:19

Questions Asked and My Answers

I have, as you would imagine, had some questions asked of me as a result of this paper. As I am sure they are questions that many people would want to ask I thought I would update this document and put some of them in along with my answers.

But I know a Couple ...

Andy, I know a couple were the man was a Christian and in a leadership position who was "asked out" by a non-Christian girl and as they dated she was saved and they are shortly going to be married. You cannot therefore say things are as clear cut as you present here in your paper. Can you?

This is one objection, or exception that people believe proves the rule.

The sad truth is I know many, many more where this is not the case who are now divorced, or who have lost their faith, whose children are unable to come to church because the spouse won't allow it.

That said, I too know of a few couples who did not follow the principles outlined here and are now happily married, the non-Christian spouse has come to know Jesus and even in one particular case the non-Christian party became a Christian and is now an elder in a church!

My question is "Does that show there is an exception to the clear direction of scripture OR does it further express the amazing, overwhelming and lavish grace that God pours out on us?"

When God takes our rebellion and uses it for good it does not justify the disobedient action. Take King David and Bathsheba for example. David found himself committing the sin of Lust¹⁴, which he allowed to become the sin of coveting (Do not cover your neighbour's wife from the 10 Commandments¹⁵) and then that of adultery¹⁶ and then finally murder¹⁷. As we read on in the story in 2 Samuel we see that David eventually married the woman and their son was Solomon went on to build the "house of God" which God himself said "I will put my name there forever¹⁸", and of course we know that Jesus was a direct descendant of David, through Bathsheba.

So then, does the fact that Solomon was blessed of God, that he built "the house of God" where God himself dwelled and that Jesus was a descendant of this marriage legitimise David's actions? Can we now say that Adultery is OK because David did it with Bathsheba and Jesus came from that result? Can we legitimise murder? OF COURSE NOT! It simply shows that not only is God sovereign, but that he is so gracious to us! He forgives us. His forgiveness and/or his outpoured grace does not legitimise our wrong actions (or our right actions for that matter) but should only increase our love for him and cause us to wonder further at his amazing grace towards us.

So the fact that I know a woman who married a non-Christian, who then became a Christian (well almost he became a Christian when he was putting together the final preparations for the wedding with the minister)

¹⁴ Matthew 5:27

¹⁵ Exodus 20:17

¹⁶ Exodus 20:14

¹⁷ 2 Samuel 11:15

¹⁸ 1 Kings 9:3

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who in turn went on to build churches and become an elder does nothing to legitimise her actions. It just shows the wonder of the Grace of God towards her, and him. Let's never stop wondering at the grace of God towards us. I am ever mindful of this because I call the couple in this story "Mum & Dad"!

Had Boaz not married a Moabite woman there would be a huge hole in the genealogy of Jesus. Does this not legitimise marrying "non-Christians"?

Genealogy of Jesus involves non-Israelite women.

This is a great question and one that caused me to get stuck into some study.

Background: If you read the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1 you will see that Jesus family tree, as we mention in the previous question, can be traced back to King David and then right back to Adam and Eve. You will see, in verse 5 a reference to Boaz who had a son called Obed with his wife Ruth. Ruth was a Moabite women and this would therefore seem to suggest that there are exceptions to the rules God has laid out throughout scripture.

Investigation: The answers to this question are found, not too remarkably, in the book of Ruth in the Old Testament. The fact that there is an entire book in the bible dedicated to this particular element of Jesus genealogy gives us some indication as we start that this woman, Ruth, was no ordinary woman.

Time and Culture: In Ruth chapter 1 we start off with the phrase "in the days when the judges ruled". This gives us some insight into the period in Israel's history. On reading the book of judges we can see the theme of the entire book summarised in the last verse of the book of judges:

Judges 21:25 (English Standard Version)

In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

We are in a time where the people were not following God and just doing their own thing. As you read the book of Judges you see it to be an example of what happens to mankind when God is excluded and people are simply left to what "they think best" – Not dissimilar to the time in which we find ourselves living today.

As we continue the story of Ruth we discover that an Israelite man travels to the land of Moab with his wife Naomi, where they raise a family and he subsequently dies, as do her two sons, but not until after they had taken Moabite wives. Yet another example of people doing their own thing, what seems right in their own eyes, and not following God.

So Naomi is left with two foreign daughters-in-law and decided to return to her family and go back to the people of Israel. She suggests that her daughters-in-law go back to their home and find new husbands. However, one of the daughters-in-law, Ruth, will not leave Naomi and pledges to stay with her.

Ruth 1:16-18 (English Standard Version)

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*¹⁶But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. **Your people shall be my people, and your God my God.** ¹⁷Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the LORD do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you."
¹⁸And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more.*

The answer to our question lies here at the end of verse 16: **Your people shall be my people, and your God my God.** This is the turning point where Ruth essentially pledges herself not only to Naomi, but to God. She “joins” herself to the people of Israel, to Gods people and to God himself. As you go on to read the story it is then that she goes on to marry Boaz and give birth of Obed the father of Jessie, the father of King David.

Having read and studied this I am of the opinion that, long before Ruth met Boaz, she joined herself to God and gave herself to Gods people. I think in New Testament terms we would draw the parallel of someone becoming a Christian. This, in the context of our discussions, clearly demonstrates that Ruth was clearly a part of Gods people when Boaz started “dating” and eventually marrying Ruth.

So in answer to the question raised ... No, I don’t think this example does legitimise the marrying of a non-Christian as I believe it is clear from what I have explained that Ruth was clearly part of the people of God when she married Boaz, and although she was Moabite by birth and nationality she was grafted into the family of God¹⁹ as a result of her declaring God as her Lord and demonstrating that through her actions. She was adopted²⁰ if you will into the family of God. The important element in this is that all this happened before she started dating and subsequently marrying Boaz.

¹⁹ Romans 11:17

²⁰ Ephesians 1:5