

# Should I Date Outside the Faith?

by Glen Davis – last revised 2/18/2021

One of my favorite Chris Rock routines is from “Bigger and Blacker”, where he riffs (slightly edited for content):

Whatever you into, your woman gotta be into, too, and vice versa... or the [stuff] ain't gonna work. It ain't gonna work!

That's right. If you born-again, your woman gotta be born-again, too.

If you a crackhead, your woman gotta be a crackhead, too... or the [stuff] won't work.

You can't be like, “I'm going to church, where you going?” “Hit the pipe!”

That relationship ain't going nowhere.

Two crackheads can stay together forever.<sup>1</sup>

Is Chris Rock right?

Let's start by taking a look at what the Bible teaches, and then we'll see if we can figure out what it might mean in our culture today.

## The Bible Forbids Marrying Outside the Faith

The Old Testament is very clear that there are dire consequences for marrying outside the faith:

- Do not intermarry with them [the Canaanites]. ***Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons, for they will turn your sons away from following me to serve other gods, and the LORD's anger will burn against you and will quickly destroy you.*** (Deut 7:3-4, NIV)
- The Israelites lived among the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. ***They took their daughters in marriage and gave their own daughters to their sons, and served their gods.*** The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD; they forgot the LORD their God and served the Baals and the Asherahs. (Judges 3:5-7, NIV)
- After these things had been done, the leaders came to me and said, "The people of Israel, including the priests and the Levites, have not kept themselves separate from the neighboring peoples with their detestable practices, like those of the Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians and Amorites. ***They have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and***

---

<sup>1</sup> At about 56:20 at <http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x2hwd07> - disclaimer: he doesn't say “stuff”

*their sons, and have mingled the holy race with the peoples around them. And the leaders and officials have led the way in this unfaithfulness.*" (Ezra 9:1-2, NIV)

- [The leaders had the people recite in unison] "We promise not to give our daughters in marriage to the peoples around us or take their daughters for our sons." (Nehemiah 10:30, NIV)

The pattern is clear: marrying someone from a different faith undermines your own faith. Esau (Genesis 26:34-35; 28:6-9), Samson (Judges 14:1-3), and Solomon (1 Kings 11:3-4) were all led astray by interreligious marriages.<sup>2</sup>

In the New Testament, Paul echoes this teaching:

- A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to *marry anyone* she wishes, *but he must belong to the Lord.* (1 Cor 7:39, NIV)
- Don't we have the right to take *a believing wife* along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord's brothers and Cephas? (1 Cor 9:5, NIV)
- *Do not be yoked together with unbelievers.* For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. (2 Cor 6:14-16a, NIV)

Throughout the Bible the message is consistent – marrying outside the faith is a sin.

## So What Does This Mean Today?

Marriage then is pretty much the same as marriage now, so marrying someone who does not share the faith is out of bounds.

But if you've been paying attention, you've noticed that these commandments and examples say nothing about dating. Why is that?

Because dating, like telecommuting, wasn't an option in Bible times. There are no direct commands in the Bible about voting, about using the Internet, about driving while intoxicated, or about dating.

Instead, we must find analogous situations and extrapolate from them.

---

<sup>2</sup> To be clear: God is not forbidding interracial marriages – merely interreligious ones. There are many examples of interracial marriage celebrated in the Bible. Joseph married an Egyptian (Genesis 41:45, 50). Moses married a Cushite (Ethiopian) woman (Numbers 12:1). When Moses was criticized for this interracial marriage, his critics were smitten by God (Numbers 12). And Salmon married Rahab the Canaanite from Joshua 2. Likewise, their son Boaz married Ruth the Moabite (Ruth 4). These latter two unions were instrumental in the eventual coming of Christ (Matthew 1:5).

For example, one of the reasons we believe driving under the influence is sinful is that the Bible commands people in positions of authority not to get drunk, because their actions while intoxicated can harm people.

**Proverbs 31:4-5 (NIV)**

"It is not for kings, O Lemuel—  
 not for kings to drink wine,  
 not for rulers to crave beer,  
 lest they drink and forget what the law decrees,  
 and deprive all the oppressed of their rights.

It’s not too hard to see how this is similar to being drunk while driving. We gain a level of power when we direct a multi-thousand pound vehicle to move at rapid speeds. We must take that power seriously and not allow intoxication to affect our use of it.

This is an apropos example because it still has its original meaning (leaders need to be very careful about their clarity of mind, whether kings, presidents, generals, or CEOs) and it also extends more broadly – we all fall under the instruction of this verse when we gain and use power.

In the same way, the biblical commands on marriage are more applicable to dating than we might imagine. This chart might help:

<b>Rule</b>	<b>Original Audience</b>	<b>Contemporary Audience</b>	<b>Other Contemporary Applications</b>
Kings Should Not Get Drunk	Kings	National Leaders	Everyone Who Wields Power Over Others
God’s People Should Marry Within The Faith	People Considering Marriage	People Considering Marriage	People Dating

If this seems counterintuitive to you, consider the following thought experiment: a young Jewish expatriate likes his Babylonian neighbor, but knows they should not marry. But he pressures his parents, and they relent and enter negotiations with the Babylonian family for an arranged marriage. With the arranged marriage approved, the two young lovebirds begin courtship. Eventually, they marry.

Here’s the question: at what point did the young Israelite begin to sin? Do you believe he was blameless up until the moment of the wedding ceremony? It is absurd on the face of it. Pressuring his parents to arrange the marriage was also an act of disobedience.

“Ah,” you say, “but that’s planning a marriage. That’s more like being engaged. The purpose of dating isn’t marriage; it’s recreation!”

Really?

There are billions of people on the planet, but you will marry one of the handful you seriously date. There is certainly a recreational aspect to dating, but you are deluding yourself if you don't acknowledge that dating is our culture's spousal selection process.

The average age of marriage in our culture is 25 for women and 27 for men.

What do you think the total time is that you will date and be engaged before marriage? Assuming two years is typical, most people begin dating their future spouse when they are 23 (for women) or 25 (for men).

How many serious dating relationships do you think you are likely to have before then? If you're in college, the number is probably less than five. It's more likely to be two or three. And it might just be one – "the one."

So don't date someone who's not eligible for marriage. You're more likely to tie the knot with them than you think.

## Questions

### So what constitutes dating?

First an observation: this question sounds like loophole-seeking.

Second, dating is pretty straightforward. Here are a few definitions:

- "A social appointment, engagement, or occasion arranged beforehand with another person"<sup>3</sup>
- "An engagement to go out socially with another person, often out of romantic interest."<sup>4</sup>
- "A form of romantic courtship between two individuals who may or may not expect marriage."<sup>5</sup>

So if you're doing those things, you're dating. If you're seeing someone regularly and are not sure if you're dating, assume for the purposes of this essay that you are.

### But I know people who came to faith by dating Christians! Isn't this sometimes God's plan for a person's life?

In Genesis 50:20 (NIV), Joseph tells his brothers "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives."

---

<sup>3</sup> "dating." *Dictionary.com Unabridged (v 1.1)*. Random House, Inc. 17 Sep. 2008. <[Dictionary.com http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/dating](http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/dating)>.

<sup>4</sup> "dating." *The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition*. Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004. 17 Sep. 2008. <[Dictionary.com http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/dating](http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/dating)>.

<sup>5</sup> "dating." *Wiktionary: The Free Dictionary*. 17 Sep. 2008 <[Wiktionary.com http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/dating](http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/dating)>.

Joseph's brothers are guilty of sin before God even though their actions wound up advancing God's master plan.

Likewise in Acts 4:27-28 (NIV) we read, "Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen."

The outcomes of our choices do not determine their morality or their wisdom. People sometimes win the lottery, but that doesn't make playing it a wise thing to do. You are acting foolishly even if the person you're dating winds up coming to faith.

And you are also taking a huge risk – most such relationships end in heartache, not conversion.

**So if a hottie asks me out while I'm in line at the supermarket I have to give them some kind of doctrinal quiz on the spot?**

There are actually two different questions here. The first question is, "Do I need to be absolutely certain of someone's devotion to Jesus before I give them my phone number?" The answer to that question is no. In our culture a first date is an interview to figure out if you want a second date. Go out and enjoy yourself. But be sure to find out if they follow Jesus and what they mean by that. If they don't follow Jesus as you do, thank them for the evening and tell them you don't think it's going to work out.

The second question is, "What if I don't know the person at all and they just hit on me?" In that case, it seems that they don't really care who you are – they just care how you look. A specific situation could be different – maybe you just finished giving a speech on the resurrection of Christ and are wearing a t-shirt that says, "Jesus rocks!" But in most cases, the person is just hitting on you because they like the way you look in those jeans. Odds are great that such a person doesn't really have the devotion to Jesus you're looking for.

**So I've found out they're a Christian. But they're kind of immature about their faith. They go to church sometimes. I think. But they did pray to receive Christ back in seventh grade. So they're fair game, right?**

There's no Biblical command that prohibits you, but I direct your attention to Paul's words, "You say, 'I am allowed to do anything'—but not everything is good for you" (1 Corinthians 6:12, NLT).

Just because you can doesn't mean you should. A fifty-year old can legally date an eighteen-year old, but in most cases that would be a very bad idea. And a committed Christian can date someone of more questionable allegiance, but they're better off holding out.

**Seriously – this is just recreation. I’m not going to marry him/her. I’m just having fun. What’s wrong with that?**

First, you may think you’re just having fun, but are you sure they feel that way, too? Don’t toy with them.

Second, you are designed to fall in love. And the fact that you find each other attractive enough to go out with means that eventually one of you will develop feelings for the other. If you say different you're either lying or self-deceived.

Third, once your emotions become involved, the impact of rational considerations goes way down. How many of your friends have you seen become involved in relationships that are obviously and objectively bad? Their emotions won’t let their brains process the reasons the relationship will not work out. The time to make decisions about who to allow yourself to fall in love with is at the beginning before your emotions defang your thoughts.

**I’m already dating someone who’s not a Christian. What should I do?**

You should break up with them, and you should do it compassionately and quickly. You must choose between some pain now and more pain later – take the pain up front. No matter how hard it is you must be absolutely honest.

“Hey [name], this is hard for me. I like you, but I have to break up with you. It’s nothing you can change – or at least not quickly. I’ve realized how important it is to me that my romantic partner shares my faith and you don’t. Even if you started going to church with me right now I’d wonder if you really meant it or if it was just a strategy to keep me. This is our last date. I wish you well.”

**That’s so hard!**

Decisions about whether to put Christ first are often hard, and that is ultimately the issue here. Which do you desire more: Christ or romance? If it is Christ you desire most, your romance must be with someone on the same journey as you.

Jesus warned us that following Him would not always be easy, “Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. <sup>38</sup> Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. <sup>39</sup> Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.” (Matthew 10:37-39, NIV)

I pray that God gives you insight, wisdom, and strength: insight to see your situation (and your heart) clearly; wisdom to perceive the best way forward; and strength to act upon your wisdom.