

# DATING OUTSIDE THE HOUSEHOLD - IS IT RIGHT?

THE Old Testament scriptures are clear. The Israelites were a holy nation, a peculiar people, and were not to associate with the heathen nations around them. To do so for personal reasons such as enjoying the companionship of the opposite sex might lead to marriage which was totally prohibited ( Deuteronomy 7:1–6 ; Joshua 23:11–13 ).

“When the LORD thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them: neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son. For they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of the LORD be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly.”

( Deuteronomy 7:2–4 )

Why? God knew that bringing into His fold individuals with extended families of different beliefs would eventually influence His people to live unacceptable lifestyles and worship other gods. We see the consequences in the very public lives of the kings who married foreign wives and lost their children to the world. In the New Testament we are told that friendship with the world is enmity with God ( 2 Corinthians 6:14–18 ; James 4:4 ; 1 John 2:15–17 ). Friendship can be an ambiguous word. We have relatives, many of them not in the Truth, who are not only friends but loved ones. So how can we not be friends with the world?

God knows our circumstances. He wants all to be in the Kingdom ( John 3:16 , 17 ; 2 Timothy 2:3 , 4 ; 2 Peter 3:9 ). If we have relatives outside the Truth, one of our greatest goals in life should be to share our precious pearl, the hope of eternal life, with them! If they are not interested and try to pull us into their lifestyle we should not make close ties with them ( Matthew 10:34–39 ; 12:46–50 ; Mark 10:28–31 ). In fact, there will not be time if we are busy loving and caring for the ecclesia, excited about preaching, and studying to show ourselves approved. The ecclesia is our new family and some sheep need us desperately.

“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.”

( Matthew 10:35–37 )

Whereas in most cases we cannot choose our relatives, some do make the choice when they marry. But before marriage, there is always a period of growing friendship during which decisions to continue the relationship are constantly being made. God knows we are not putting Him first when we date outside the Truth. Even if the person is baptized after developing a friendship, and subsequently is married, our spouse will always know that at the time of our courtship we were prepared to look for friendship and fulfilment outside the things of God. Convincing a spouse or their family of our sincerity in putting God first and asking them to do the same can be difficult once we have taken this position. The power of our human nature to pull us down is stronger than our will to do good. It is a lifelong

battle, and we need our spouse to trust us. With God as our strength and our spouse on our side the battle can be won. The prize is glorious!

### **For our Good**

Why does God make these commandments? Is it to make us miserable if we are in isolation or in an ecclesia with few desirable partners? No. It is to try our faith and see if we will follow the example of His faithful of old in choosing a wife or husband as did Abraham and Isaac ( Genesis 24:1–4 ; 28:1–5 ). It is a fact that the institution of the family is in jeopardy. With the divorce rate for first marriages being over 50%, second marriages 60% and for all recent first marriages 67%, we know it is hard to make this relationship work. Children are a product of their families of origin and learn their values and ways of thinking primarily from them. Within the last few years it has been important for students of sociology and psychology to become increasingly empirical in their research. Their statistics must be mathematically valid and reliable. As a result many very stringent studies have been done to prove how and why behaviour can be predicted. It has been shown that cohabitation before matrimony makes less successful marriages, and that people who marry within their religion help sustain their religious beliefs.

### **What should we do about it?**

Scripture cannot be ignored. Is it wise for us to justify the end by the means? “Brother X or Sister Y married someone they dated before they were baptized and he or she is stronger in the Truth now than many others.” A true understanding of why marriage was instituted is essential to see why this logic is faulty. In the world, marriages have been made for many reasons such as companionship, children, or financial security. God had a higher purpose from the beginning. Marriage was introduced to teach what the relationship between Christ and his bride, the ecclesia, should be like. Helping to prepare a human being for the kingdom by doing everything in one’s own power to promote his or her spirituality becomes the main reason for marriage ( Ephesians 5:20–33 ).

“Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and *gave himself* up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. For this *reason* a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.”

( Ephesians 5:24–29 , 31 , NIV)

If this reason comes low on the list of priorities in marriage we have laid a faulty foundation. It is very difficult to keep such a goal alive with the support of parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins in the ecclesia. It is harder without it. It is worse still to have to deal with strong pulls in the other direction from relatives who would rather we not be devoted to living and preaching the Truth.

### **The Conclusion of the Matter**

Let us find the scriptures that teach us clearly what God desires. Let us share them with our children and with our friends. Let us not justify our own mistakes by pointing to God’s mercy in making all things work together for our good. It is like playing Russian Roulette with half the chambers filled. Some will not die from pulling the trigger of disobedience, but many others will. Are we willing to take that chance?

We must share with others what to look for in a mate and why. We must counsel others to bring interested friends to a knowledge of the Truth through members of the same sex, *before* the emotions of dating obscure objective reasoning and love perhaps overrides beliefs for a while. When the initial all-consuming passion has died, a spouse's true love for God as their primary focus in life, will surface. Then it will be too late if that love for God is not first in one's heart.

We can encourage each other with the knowledge that our world has become increasingly smaller, and to find strong partners in other corners of the world is a real possibility. To plan, be patient, and make ourselves spiritually strong so that we will attract spiritually strong people takes time. It can keep us active and happy while we wait for God to bring that special person into our lives. Pray that we may have faith to do our part, for we know He will do His ( Hebrews 10:23–27 ; 1 Corinthians 10:7–14 ; 2 Corinthians 4:13–18 ).

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<sup>1</sup>. *Vol. 134: The Christadelphian : Volume 134*. 2001, c1997. The Christadelphian, volume 134. (electronic ed.). Logos Library System . Christadelphian Magazine & Publishing Association: Birmingham