

Some thoughts on 'going out' with non-Christians:

The Bible doesn't say anything about 'going out' or dating. As far as I'm aware it only speaks of people who are single, married or betrothed (engaged to be married). There are, however, some principles that would make 'going out' with non-Christians unwise.

Why do people 'go out' anyway? God made us for relationship. Relationship with each other (both males and females) and with Himself. In creation God saw that it was not good for the man to be alone so he created a woman from the man (Genesis 2:18-25). The woman complemented the man. This was very good. People 'go out' for a variety of reasons, some of which might be: to have someone to talk to, because everyone else has a boy/girl friend, attracted to the person. But one of the main reasons for 'going out' is to select a marriage partner.

The Bible gives us a number of criteria to choose a marriage partner. They must be:

- not a blood relative;
- free to marry (ie. not already married);
- a Christian;
- of the opposite sex.¹

In 1 Corinthians 7:39 a widow is given the option to marry. She is free to choose whether she will marry, but if she chooses to marry, he (the husband) must belong to the Lord (ie. a Christian). If Christians can only marry Christians, then to 'go out' with a non-Christian will mean that they can't get married and will therefore have to break up. If this is the case there is no point in 'going out' with them in the first place.

Some people might say that we could convert our non-Christian boy/girl friend. In God's grace this can happen but more often than not, it is the Christian who is led away from Christ (I can think of people as I write this). The non-Christian doesn't have the same priorities or goals as the Christian does and so the Christian must decide whether to follow and please God and 'ignore' their partner or follow and please their partner and 'ignore' God.

One of the main sins in the Old Testament was that God's people (the Israelites) were marrying foreign women. This led them into sin because they would then go and worship the gods of their wives. This is idolatry: God hates it (see Ezra 9:1-10:17)!

In light of this, I am going to work from the basis that you 'go out' with someone to see if you want to marry them. It is with this in mind that I suggest some reasons as to why you wouldn't 'go out' with a non-Christian.

¹ Philip D Jensen & Tony Payne, *Guidance & the Voice of God* (Sydney: Matthias Media, 1997), 143-4.

1. Christians have the command to love their neighbour as themselves (Matthew 22:39). Is it loving to 'go out' with a non-Christian if you are only going to break up with them anyway? It doesn't seem to be the most loving thing that you can do for someone. Relationships are tricky things and they can bring great joy, but they can also bring great pain and heartache. If we are serious about our Christian lives and loving others, then we will be careful about how we treat them, especially in the area of romance and dating. It may be that by not 'going out' with them they see that there is something else that guides my life and may ask about it. Here is a great chance for you, or someone else, to explain the gospel of Jesus to them. Pray for them that God would cause them to come to trust in Jesus.
2. Why settle for second best? "If you are a Christian and single and you really want a partner, why settle for second best? By 'second best' I do not mean that Christians are great people and everyone else is bad. I simply mean that a relationship between two Christians who put God first will naturally be more fulfilling than a relationship of differing beliefs and priorities".²
3. Sexual temptation is also an issue. God has created us to be sexual beings and this is a good thing. Sex is part of God's good creation and it was given to us before the fall (Genesis 2). It was given to be used in the right context - marriage (Genesis 2:24,25). In other words, sex is part of the marriage relationship, a committed, lifelong union between a man and a woman.

We are bombarded with sex through the media, advertising, movies and television. It gives the world's view on sex and relationships. It's difficult to stay committed to sexual purity when you're single or 'going out' with a Christian. 'Going out' with a non-Christian can make this decision even harder. If they want to have sex before marriage, the temptation will be strong. Don't start down that path. Save sex for marriage! Flee sexual immorality (1 Corinthians 6:18).

There is more to sexual temptation, though, than simply sexual intercourse. Other areas which we can have difficulty controlling range from lustful thoughts through to inappropriate touching. All of this can become much harder when 'going out' with a non-Christian who may not hold the same values as Christians do. (Some couples I know have decided not to kiss before their wedding day. Interesting?)

4. Whether you have a boy/girl friend or not makes little difference to God. How you treat your boy/girl friend is very important to God. One decision many people don't consider is whether to even have a boy/girl friend. Why would you choose not to have a boy/girl friend? It sounds crazy! The Apostle Paul, in 1 Corinthians 7, gives a great reason to remain single (at least for a time, if not more permanently). In v29, he says that, "time is short". What time? The time before Jesus returns. Jesus is coming back soon and so we should be committing our time to "the Lord's affairs". This may

² John Dickson, *Hanging in There* (Sydney: Matthias Media, 1997), 64.

mean that you choose not to be in a relationship so you can spend more time telling your friends and others about Jesus. What a great way to spend your time! By being single your time is not divided between your boy/girl friend and God. You can be wholly committed to the Lord's affairs – saving the lost. To choose to remain single, at least for a time, is a great way to minister to those of the same sex as you. You have the opportunity to tell them the gospel or to push your Christian friends on in their Christian lives. Being single may also give you the opportunity to be involved in lots of ministry in your local church. Remaining single for a time may mean you decide not to 'go out' with anyone while you're at school (or maybe longer). Paul says these things to those considering getting married, but the same principle can be applied to those who are, or considering, 'going out' with someone. This is not to say that those who are going out with someone can't do this, but Paul says their time is divided (this just makes sense).

In saying all this, it is good to be in relationship with someone as we were created for relationship, with God and others. Paul does recognise that not all of us can be single and so should get married (1 Corinthians 7:7-9). But it's an option that not many of us consider at all.

These are just some thoughts about 'going out' in general and thinking through some issues and how they relate to Christians 'going out' with non-Christians. Dating is a tricky issue and an area we need to apply biblical wisdom to. I have tried to highlight some of the issues that may arise from 'going out' with non-Christians in the hope that we can be godly and loving to others.

One final thing to say is about our relationships. We are created for relationship and our primary relationship is with God. We are made complete by being in relationship with God through the death of Jesus. This is the most important relationship we have. Whether you have a partner or not, we are made complete by being in relationship with the one who made us. If we are Christian we are already engaged – to Jesus. In Revelation 21 we see the picture of the great wedding when Jesus will come to be with his bride (his people – us).

¹Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ²I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."
[Revelation 21:1-4 NIV]

What a great day that will be when Jesus returns to take us home to be with him! Live in light of this reality. Whether single or 'going out' or married, remember this wedding and give thanks to God.

Some other helpful references are:

- Dickson, John. *Hanging in There*. Sydney: Matthias Media, 1997.
- Dickson, John. *A Sneaking Suspicion*. Sydney: Matthias Media, 1999.
- Dickson, John. "The Best Sex You Can Get". *Zed* 7 (1997): 4-6.
- Stewart, Alan. "True Romance". *Zed* 4 (1997): 24-25.