

SHOULD A CHRISTIAN DATE SOMEBODY IN THE WORLD?

Introduction

It has been asked if somebody, being a disciple of Christ, may have a sentimental relationship with somebody of the world, that is to say, date with somebody in the world.

We are not talking about marriage, that is, of an indissoluble relationship, of which the Bible is explicit in forbidding God's people to get married to somebody in the world (Deuteronomy 7:3-4, Ezra 9-10, Nehemiah 13:23-30, 1 Corinthians 7:39, 9:5, 2 Corinthians 6:14-17 etc).

But having a girlfriend/boyfriend is not the same as being married. What does the Bible say about *this*?

I think the biblical answer is still no, and I will explain *why* in the following study.

I am a single man, so I will be talking mainly from a masculine prospective (i.e I will use the term "girlfriend" more often), but obviously the same reasons are valid for the sisters as well.

In this study I will first consider the reasons why the Bible doesn't allow a disciple of Christ to have a girlfriend/boyfriend in the world, and then I will consider some common objection raised, answer them, and then finally share something about my life and what I think is the only spiritual solution.

But since the main reason that I have heard from people trying to justify dating somebody in the world, has been the fact that the Bible doesn't speak *explicitly or directly* about this issue, I will first consider if this reason is enough for justifying this kind of relationship, or not. Then I will make the other considerations.

The Bible does not address the issue directly, so everybody can choose for him/her-self.

It's true. The Bible doesn't say in *explicit or direct* way not to have a girlfriend or boyfriend in the world. That is, in the Bible you don't find the phrase: "*You must not have a girlfriend or boyfriend in the world*".

But does this fact make it legitimate? No, unless we want to be overly legalistic in interpreting the Bible. There are many things in our lives today about which the Bible does *not* contain a *specific*

verse that tells us *exactly* what to do in the specific situation, and yet condemns. In reality it would be impossible to write down every single right or wrong thing we can do in every single situation in our lives. The Bible would be a very big and very annoying book. Instead often the Bible gives us *precepts, concepts or principles* that guide us, and these are applicable to the different situations. For example the “sin list” in Galatians 5:21 ends with “ ... *and similar things*”, and in 1 Timothy 1:10 it ends with “ ... *and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine*”. Truly it is impossible to write down every single way in which we might displease God.

Let's take an example to clarify this point: taking drugs. In the Bible there is no specific verse that says “Do not use heroin”. But does this mean that for this reason using heroin is all right? Does it mean that the Bible does not forbid it? Obviously no. We all would answer quoting clear Bible *precepts* like “do not harm your body”, “do not loose control”, “do not waste your money and time” etc. Thus obviously the Bible condemns this act, even though there is not the specific phrase “Do not use heroin”. This phrase could not be in the Bible because at the time it was written heroin did not exist. The same is true for other drugs and smoking.

We can find many other examples in our modern life about which there is no specific verse in the Bible that forbids them explicitly, but about which we would all agree that are sinful. For example there are no specific verses against euthanasia, the dependence on gambling, abort on demand, homosexual marriage, and also, if I am permitted to use some unpleasant examples, pornography (magazines, cable television, DVD, Internet) or erotic comics or chat-rooms, or even actions such as masturbation.

All these cases (and many others more) are condemned by the Bible even though there is no specific verse against any of them that uses *exactly those words*, since all of them are socially modern phenomena.

In fact, as surprising as it may seem, I have found that many people in the religious world even maintain that since the phrase “do not have sexual relationship until marriage” is not explicitly expressed in this way, “with these words”, in Scripture, that means that there is nothing wrong about having sex before marriage (“if you are truly in love with that person”). If you object that that *the definition* of the word “fornication”, as it is used everywhere in the Scripture, is any kind of sex outside of marriage, they simply answer that this is “just an interpretation” (and they always have an authority, usually a priest, backing them up in this – 2 Timothy 4:3). Thus again we see that the reasoning which considers wrong only that which is specifically forbidden in the Scriptures (with modern-day words and expressions) and accepts as lawful everything that is not

explicitly forbidden in Scripture, yields some very strange, and clearly wrong, conclusions.

The same is true about dating in the world. Of course I am not at all proposing that dating in the world is equal to the things I talked above; I am using these examples only to show that the absence of a specific direct verse in the Bible does not imply that therefore it is all right to do that or that the Bible is silent about that. As Mike Taliaferro put it in *"The Killer Within"*: "There are no Scriptures which say you cannot play football on the freeway. There is no scripture that says you cannot get out of your car and pet lions in the game park. It is not forbidden...[but] if you play with fire you are going to get burned. Don't be naive!".

The Bible does not talk about girlfriend/boyfriend directly, using these terms, for the simple reason that this is also a recent social phenomena, that then (like today in many non-western countries) did not exist. Thus if it didn't exist in the time the Bible was written, it's obvious that the Bible cannot talk about it *explicitly*. But this doesn't mean that it is silent about it. There are many biblical principles that *implicitly* forbid to a disciple of Christ to date in the world. Let's see some of them together.

The difference between a disciple and the world

Let's start from the basics: a disciple of Christ (Christian) is somebody who *"loves God with all his heart, all his soul and all his mind"* (Mathew 22:37), to whom the love for the other things in comparison seem hatred (Luke 14:26). There are no middle ways. A person cannot be a disciple of Christ only because he comes to church regularly, or because he makes some charity work or similar things (Revelation 3:15-19). For a disciple God is the number one passion. There is nothing that can interest him more. It is this way that Jesus thought and lived, and everybody who claims to be his disciple (student, follower, imitator) must do the same.

The world (even the religious world) on the other side has another master, another first love. In Mathew 6:24 it is said that Mammon is its master and first love. And as a consequence, it *"hates"* and *"despises"* God. Jesus says the same in another place: *"The world ... hates me because I testify that what it does is evil"* (John 7:7).

This is the biblical world view. There are no middle ways. Not only, but often the so-called *"middle ways"* - like, I respect religion, it's enough to be nice persons, do not judge etc - are often worse than simply denying God altogether (Revelation 3:15-19).

Now the obvious question that is raised, once we accept this biblical world view, is: how can

somebody who loves God more than anything else in the world, for which God is the first love, the first passion, want to have as a girlfriend/boyfriend a person who “hate” and “despise” God and in whose thoughts He is last?

Let's take an example: imagine a man whose wife dies and leaves him with a child, whom he loves with all his heart. Suppose that he knows a woman with which he starts to build a friendship. But then, after knowing his son, she says that she detests him. Imagine that she says to him: “Even though I detest your son, this should not be in the way of our relationship. I assure you that I will not prevent you to hug him whenever you want to and even to give him three meals a day, and even I will never beat him (of course if he doesn't deserve it). But I will not do more than this. I don't love him and I have no intention to cuddle him or give him affection. He can stay at home if you want to, but he shouldn't be on my way. He has his own life, you and I our own life.”

What would you do if you were the man? Would you get together with this woman? Would you think that if this man, knowing this, marries her, or even has a relationship with her, truly loves his son? Or would you think that he doesn't care much about his son, or at least not so much as he cares about himself and his own pleasure?

Another aspect similar to this is found in 1 Corinthians 1:18-24. It is written that the thoughts of God are foolishness to the world and that the thoughts of the world are foolishness to God. Both parts therefore think that the other is a “fool”. What kind of friendship can there be between the two? Obviously none (2 Corinthians 6:14-18).

If a person chooses one of the two “parties” he will adopt that way of thinking (and as a consequence will think as “fool” of the thoughts of the other part). This is so because the thoughts of God are in opposition to that of the world, and thus if I “agree” with God will have to agree also to the fact that the thoughts of the world are “foolish”. The same is true also for the non-christian (or the religious person who goes every sunday in church, but who lives and thinks as the world), who accepting the world's way of thinking will think that the disciples way of thinking is foolish. With this I don't mean that people (christian or not) will go around calling each-other “fools” or that their thoughts may not superficially resemble to each other. It means only that deeply inside, in their way of thinking about life and doing things, in their priorities, in the way they use their time and money and everything else they have, they are very different.

I am not talking about a single aspect of life, about which often the world and God “agree”. For example most of the persons, religious or not, think that killing, stealing etc, are wrong even though they may not even believe in God.

When the Bible talks about the fact that they think “fool” of each other, it is meant in their thoughts *as a whole*, in what they call the most important things in life, in the substance. As it is written: “*The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.*” (2 Corinthians 2:14), or also: “*... because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so* “ (Romans 8:7). Don't we see the importance of this? If I truly have a way of thinking about life which that girl in the world thinks “foolish”, and on the other side she has a way of thinking of life which I consider “foolish”, what can unite us? How can I have a romantic relationship with her?

The only possibility I have to be with her is to modify a little bit the way I do things, make them a bit similar to hers', “adapt” them a little. But are we sure then that my thoughts are not so similar to hers' that I myself am considered a “fool” by God? Or said in another way, if she doesn't find my way of thinking basically “foolish”, then am I sure that my thoughts are like those of God? Or they just resemble outwardly, but in reality inwardly they are very similar to those in the world (Luke 6:26)?

Another consideration along these lines is found in Mathew 7:13-14. Clearly there are two ways, and two alone. They go in opposite directions and are neatly separated. Then how can I be intimately connected to one person who is headed in the opposite direction? One who goes north when I am going south? The roads are in opposite direction, and I can have as a companion of voyage only a person who walks in the same direction as I do, who walks the same road that I walk.

Or consider some other differences with the world highlighted in the Scripture. We are new creatures, the old is gone (2 Corinthians 5:17); before we were of the world, but God took us out of it (John 15:18-19); before we were dead in our sins, rebels, object of wrath, but God forgave us and gave us life (Ephesians 2:1-6); before we were in the darkness, but today we are in the light (Ephesians 5:8); before we were enemies of God, but now we are reconciled (Colossians 1:21-22, Romans 5:10).

Whereas the world is *still* rebellious, is still in sin and darkness, is still under the wrath of God, is still an old creature and is still an enemy of God.

Then what kind of relationship can there be between these two kinds of totally different people?

No wonder this kind of rhetorical question is posed in 2 Corinthians 6:14-18: *“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?”*

Truly, what kind of relationship can there be? Surely not a deep and intimate relationship.

The conclusion of all these considerations? *“Do not be yoked together with unbelievers... as God has said: I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people. Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord...”* (2 Corinthians 6:14-17)

The influence of the World

Certainly, if a person of the world reads this, would not understand, and to him it would seem a very strange and hard talking. “Why?” would he ask “What is so different from a Christian and a good person who maybe doesn't go to church, but that leads a good life, doesn't hurt anybody and even does some voluntary work?”

Usually the person who poses this kind of question does not have a biblical definition of the word “Christian”, that is to say that of a disciple of Christ. Usually what they mean with the word “Christian” is somebody who goes from time to time to church or that is born in a “Christian nation” like Italy or Spain or USA, or simply “a good person”. But we know that in the Bible the word “Christian” means much more than that. And that is the first answer to this objection.

Another problem with this objection is that it presupposes that man is good. But the Bible is clear on this point: we are evil (Mathew 7:11), and there is nobody, non even one, that is good or righteous (Romans 3:10-19). The Bible uses a language that to the world seems “too hard”.

But if I can trust my experience, I know that the Bible is not too hard and does not at all exaggerate when it describes me like this. I remember that before I became a disciple I was “a good guy” (in the world's eyes). However, in reality there was so much hatred, contempt, envy, impurity and a lots of evil things in my heart, that I was all but a “good guy”. The same is true for all the world. That's why we need God's grace to be forgiven. And for the same reason we are asked to be “holy”, that is, separated from the world, not to be influenced by it (Romans 12:2, John 17:16, Ephesians 5:7, Revelation 18:4, 1 Peter 1:14-18, 4:3-4, James 1:27 etc)

How much more should we then avoid such close relationships as having a girlfriend/boyfriend in the world? This is not just a piece of good advice in the Bible. You cannot be “separated from the world” and at the same time be so closely related to it. It's simply impossible. In fact Paul talks of

the persons in the world as “outsiders” (Colossians 4:5, 1 Corinthians 14:22-25, 1 Timothy 3:7), that is, people who are not part of God's family, the church.

Let's move on. The Bible says that even the *wrong friendships* (with the world) “*corrupt good character*” (1 Corinthians 15:33), that is to say that they have a negative spiritual influence (Proverbs 1:10-19, 13:20 etc). This is so because we all get influenced by the people close to us (this is why, by the way, that the Bible is full of “each-other” verses, encouraging us to form strong spiritual friendships and relationships within the church, so that we may have a good influence on our spiritual life – Hebrews 3:12-13, 10:24-25, Proverbs 13:20 etc).

So if even the friendships influence so much, how much more having a close romantic relationship, which is something more?

And if somebody believes that this is not true, we can only ask: “Whom should we trust: you that say that this kind of relationship with the world will not influence you spiritually, or God who instead says it will?”

What should we think of somebody who knows that this relationship with the world will have a negative spiritual effect on his life, and yet chooses it? Is this the kind of choice “*first the kingdom of God*” (Matthew 6:33)?

Matthew 6:33 says: “*But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well*”. The choice of dating in the world is a choice in contrast with this scripture. This is so because this relationship will take time (apart from a lot of other things) from the Kingdom of God.

If she were a disciple of Christ also, we would do things together for God, we would have the same life style, the same time-tables. We would have the same friendships in the church, and the free time, that little free time, we would spend it together to do things for God: share our faith, study the Bible with people, go to christian parties or other christian events which would help us spiritually and also help strengthen the relationships with the other disciples, and many other things as well.

And also when we would be together alone, in our talk surely we would include also God and the church. We would help each-other grow spiritually. As C.S.Lewis has said in “The Four Loves”, we would understand each-other because “*we both submit to the same law*”.

Whereas if she is of the world I would surely leave aside at least some spiritual engagement, because I will be with her (for example I will not be able to share my faith, simply because she

doesn't have it). Not only, but while staying with her I will have to “switch off” the themes around God or christianity or similar things. We would talk about anything else, but not God.

Maybe we would introduce the theme of God from time to time in our talks, but if she doesn't love God and doesn't want to become a disciple, our talk about God will be superficial, and even almost embarrassing: “Look, let's leave these things aside. You know I get annoyed by these discourses. If you want to believe you may believe whatever you want. I respect that and do not forbid you to follow what you feel. But I don't feel it. So now let's leave this aside and talk about something else.”

Will this help me grow spiritually? If I take the decision to have her as my girlfriend, would you think of me that in my heart is truly to seek “first the kingdom”? Or on the other side, if I don't have any problem of not talking about God, would you think that in my heart this argument is truly the most important thing? The answer to this question is clearly given by Jesus: “*For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks*” (Mathew 12:34)

Moreover being together with a non-disciple would prevent me from doing whatever else I would have done for God. This is so because since she is not a christian obviously she will not live a 100 % christian life, and thus if I want to keep staying together with her I will need to adapt my life to her life, at least on some things. For example she may well accept that I go on Sundays and also midweek to church, and may even come to church herself for my sake. But after that she will say to me: “Look, I came to your thing and to your friends. Now you come to *my* thing and to *my* friends”. What kind of spiritual effect may have on me having the fun the world has, which is what I will need to practice if I want to keep staying with her? And again, by so doing, I am taking away time (among other things) from the kingdom of God. And not only some little time, but at least 50% of my free time (half for me and half for her). And this is what I voluntarily choose. What does this tell about my priorities?

If somebody is already in a non dissoluble relationship, as is marriage, when he becomes a disciple, and his wife does not want to be a disciple also, obviously he will do less for the advancement of the kingdom of God, to obey God in the other aspects of life such as not getting divorced from his wife and loving her and taking care of his family (1 Corinthians 7:12-14, 1 Timothy 5:8 etc). But putting yourself voluntarily in this kind of situation is quite another matter.

What if I, worrying of not marrying and remaining alone (a serious preoccupation, at least as serious as not eating – Mathew 6:31-32), take the decision of having a girlfriend in the world, even

though this clearly is against the spirit of the Scriptures? Am I showing faith that “all these things shall be added to me” (Mathew 6:33)? Or am I behaving, as the Scripture says, as “a pagan”, that is, as a worldly person?

Let's not lie to ourselves. She will not help me love God more for the simple reason that she doesn't love God. Thus the only way she can influence me is in the opposite direction, that is, love God less (as she does).

What if I thought: “No, it will be me who will influence her!”? I would be lying to myself (1 Corinthians 15:33). This is so because God is in “disadvantage” with all of us. We, naturally and spontaneously, tend to choose what is against God's will. In us the will to do evil is strong whereas the will to do good is weak. For us it is much easier to be egoistic than altruistic (Romans 3:10-18, 7:14-25). In fact it is written that we must *strive* to enter through the narrow door (Luke 13:24); and we know that we have to strive for what is difficult to do, not for what is easy to do. This means that to us it is very difficult to be spiritual, as God wants us to be. For this same reason it is much more easier for the world to convert us back to her, than it is for us to help her convert to God. As it is written: “*for they [their women] will turn your sons away from following Me to serve other gods*” (Deuteronomy 7:4), not the opposite.

The examples we have clearly prove the point. The best example is Solomon, the wise, who sinned because he allowed the world to enter in his heart (1 Kings 11:1-4). If this happened to a prophet, a writer of the Bible, one to whom God talked personally, the wisest of all, how much more can it happen to us? (that's actually Nehemiah's argument in Nehemiah 13:26-27)

And if it happens in marriage, can it not, by extension, happen also in the relationship closest to marriage, which is the ‘girlfriend-boyfriend relationship’?

In the Old Testament God, for this same reason, commanded to his people to be separated from the other nations (Deuteronomy 7:3-4), and we know that when Israel didn't do it, it became like the other nations (Psalm 106:34-35). Today, we (the disciples of Christ) are the nation of God, his people, and the world is “another nation” (1 Peter 2:9-10). Has God changed his views regarding his people? Or does He still want them to be separated from the nations that “do not belong to Him” (James 1:17, 2 Corinthians 6:14-18)?

The World as friend

Earlier we spoke of the theme of the friendship with the world. The Bible is full of scriptures that

warn us against the World and who is behind it, that is, Satan (for example Psalm 1:1-2, Mathew 7:15, Ephesians 5:7, James 1:27, 4:4 etc). This is so because the world is ever more dangerous just when it approaches us as a friend. Satan can lie better when he is "*masqueraded as an angel of light*" (2 Corinthians 11:14), and as a consequence even the world doesn't seem a spiritual enemy, because "*his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness*" (2 Corinthians 11:15).

The Old Testament is full of stories of how the world managed to led astray the people of God, away from Him, just by approaching as a friend. It started in Genesis 6:2 and it was repeated in the same manner in the coming centuries. We are asked to learn from them, and not to make the same mistakes (1 Corinthians 10:11).

A secular history lesson might be helpful in this moment: during the first centuries the world was an obvious enemy of the church, it made war to the church till the martyrdom of the disciples. Exactly at that those times the church grew in numbers and, more importantly, holiness. But then, with emperor Constantine, the world became a "friend", and corruption entered in the church, until it reached it's peak in the catholicism of the medieval period. Let's not forget this, because if we do we will fall in the same way; as it is often said: those who don't learn from the mistakes of history are doomed to repeat them.

William Law, in one the best devotional book ever written, *A Serious call to a Devoted and Holy Life*, writes:

"You will perhaps say that the world has now become christian, at least that part of which we live, and therefore the world is now not to be considered in that state of opposition to Christianity was when it was heathen. True, the world now professes to be christian, but will anyone say that this Christian World is of the Spirit of Christ? Are it's general qualities the qualities of Christ? Are the passions of sensuality, self-centredness, pride, covetousness, ambition, and vainglory, less contrary to the spirit of the Gospel now, among Christians, than when they were among heathens? Or will you say that the tempers and the passions of the heathen world are lost and gone?

Consider what is meant by the words, "*the world*". John describes it for us in 1 John 2:16 *For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world.*

This is an exact and full description of the world. After reading these words, will you say that this

world has become christian? The world we live in is the same world that John condemned as being not from the Father. If all this still exists, then the same world is now in existence, and it is the same enemy to Christianity that it was in John's time.

Therefore, whether it openly professes or persecutes Christianity, it is still just contrary to the true spirit and holiness of the Gospel. Indeed by professing Christianity, the world is so far from being a less dangerous enemy than it was before, that it has destroyed more christians than it ever did with the most violent persecution. We must, therefore, be far from considering the World in a state of less enmity and opposition to Christianity than it was in the first times of the Gospel; we must instead, guard against it as a greater and a more dangerous enemy now than it was in those times. It is a greater enemy because it has greater power over christians by its favors, riches, honors, rewards, and protection, than it had by the fire and fury of the persecutions. *It is a more dangerous enemy by having lost its appearance of enmity.* Its outward profession of christianity makes it no longer considered an enemy, and therefore most people are easily persuaded to resign themselves to be governed and directed by it ... How many consciences are not awakened because they sin under the authority of the christian world. How many conformities people make to the christian world, without any hesitation or remorse – conformities that would have been refused as contrary to the holiness of christianity, if they had been required of them only from the heathens!

Many people are content with seeing how contrary their lives are to the gospel, because they see that they live as the christian world does. How could anyone who reads the Gospel need to be persuaded of the great necessity of self-denial, humility, and poverty of spirit, unless the authority of the world had banished the doctrine of the Cross? There is nothing therefore, that a good christian ought to be more suspicious of, or more constantly guard against, than the authority of the christian world.

All the passages of Scripture that represent the world as contrary to Christianity and that require our separation of us from it as from a mammon of unrighteousness, a monster of iniquity, are all to be taken in the same strict sense in relation to the present world. For the change that the world has undergone has only altered its methods, not lessened its power of destroying religion.

Christians had nothing to fear from the heathen world [in the first centuries] but the loss of their lives;

however the world became a friend, and made it difficult for them to save their religion.”

This is what the great christian writer has to say about the world just a couple of centuries ago. His conclusion of that chapter? He writes: “There is, therefore, hardly any possibility of saving yourself from the present world, unless you consider it the same wicked enemy to all true holiness as it was in the Scriptures”.

This is not just his opinion. John writes: “*Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him*” (1 John 2:15).

And James is even more radical: “*You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God*” (James 4:4).

A biblical story, which shows clearly the world's intentions on God's people, is found in Ezra chapter 4. The Jews are rebuilding Jerusalem. The people around Jerusalem, who were Israel's enemies (v.1), were not happy of this thing, and didn't want Jerusalem to be rebuilt. What did they do? In v.2 they approach as friends saying that they also want to help in rebuilding Jerusalem. But in v.3 the Jews rightly declined their offer. Then those persons in v.4 showed their real intentions, their real purposes, by starting to discourage the people, by corrupting the counselors and by frustrating their plans. Moreover in v.6 they write a letter to the king of Persia accusing the Jews of rebellion, which led to the interruption of the work in Jerusalem (v.23). Thus the persons who *pretended* to be friends and *said* that were willing to help rebuild the wall, are the same persons who, showing their real intentions, caused the interruption of the work. The lesson is clear: the world cannot help spiritually, but can only do the opposite, that is, have a negative influence, independently of what it says with her mouth.

As the great philosopher Søren Kierkegaard warned: “The day when Christianity and the world become friends, Christianity is done away with.”

Maybe he who believes that a close relationship with the world (as is having a girlfriend) will not have a negative influence on his spiritual life, really believes it. But it only means only that he cannot see it, not that it is not really happening. As we have seen before, the Bible clearly teaches that this relationship will in fact influence him negatively in his spiritual life (1 Corinthians 15:33, Proverbs 13:20, 16:29). “*So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall.*” (1

Corinthians 10:12).

Why this relationship?

Let's move now to another argument. As Christians, *why* do we have a girlfriend/boyfriend? What is the purpose of it? Is it not so that we understand if this person is one with whom we can build a lasting relationship and have a family, the person with whom we want to spend the rest of our lives? If we see that that's the case, then we marry. If we see that it is not like this, we separate. And in the kingdom of God, the beautiful thing is that latter we can really be friends, because we kept the relationship "absolutely pure" (1 Timothy 5:2), and there has been nothing "physical" among us of which we should be ashamed, or feel resentful, afterwards.

In the world often people get together even though they don't have any thought or desire to bring this relationship anywhere. They call these relationships, "non serious relationships" or "an adventure" or "just for fun".

Between us, in the Kingdom, this is unthinkable and unacceptable. We don't get together "just for fun", without any intention of being sincerely committed. Our relationships are by definition "serious".

But if it is truly like this, then why having a girlfriend in the world? If I know from the very beginning that this relationship is not for marriage (because the Bible explicitly forbids to a disciple to marry in the world), then why get together with her? It's simply logical that if I am supposed to marry only a Christian, then I should date only a Christian. Otherwise I behave as the world, and get together with this person "just for fun".

Let's turn back again to the question I asked before: what am I searching in this girl in the world? Surely not God, because she doesn't know and love God (1 John 3:1). Then what am I looking for? If the most important thing we look for in a person is something different than spirituality, then we shouldn't be surprised if this leads us away from God. It's the old principle of "you reap what you sow" (Galatians 6:7-8). In this case, if we invest in a relationship on non spiritual basis, the results will be non spiritual. "*Thorns do not produce grapes*" (Matthew 7:16).

If we build a relationship in which God is voluntarily left outside, how can we expect his blessing? And how can we expect that this relationship gives glory to God? 1 Corinthians 10:31 says: "*So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God*". If even our eating and

drinking, that are “trivial” actions, must give glory to God, how much more our relationship? But if we build this relationship not around God, but around anything else (because that's what we do when we choose our girlfriend/boyfriend in the world), how can this bring glory to God? It can't because God is voluntarily left outside this relationship.

William Law in his classic work, *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*, writes: “If religion commands us to live wholly unto God and to do all for his glory (1 Corinthians 10:31), it is because every other way goes wholly against ourselves and will end in our own shame and confusion ...

Those who confine religion to times and places and little rules, who think it is being too strict and rigid to introduce religion into everyday life because it will put limits on all their actions and ways of living – those people mistake the whole nature of religion. That is like misinterpreting the whole nature of wisdom by not thinking it desirable to be always wise. Anyone thinking it too much to be pious in all his actions has not learned the nature of piety”.

Purity

Earlier I quoted 1 Timothy 5:2. It is a scripture that guides our premarital relationships. It says to man to treat the young women “*as sisters*” “*with absolute purity*” (and for extension also to the girls to treat the young men “*as brothers*” “*with absolute purity*”). The world doesn't like this verse of the scripture, because it clearly forbids sexual relationships before marriage.

In the world instead it is “a rule” that somebody should have sexual experience as soon as possible. This is the way of thinking that I had before I became a disciple, and that's how the vast majority of people in the world think. And even those few who think differently, often are ashamed to say it. The word “virgin” is perceived as a strange and even almost offensive word. Whereas in reality waiting till marriage for having a sexual union is the plan of God, and that means that it is the best thing ever. It is the only thing that allows you to build a strong lasting relationship today, and tomorrow a happy family life. The world thinks differently; but it is not at all surprising that many relationships in the world finish with hatred, the divorce rate for unfaithfulness is very high, and people are usually lonely and have great difficulties trusting other people because of fear of being used and hurt.

Why do I mention all of this? Because if I have a girlfriend in the world, it would seem very natural to her to have sexual relations before marriage. She will ask: “What's wrong with that? We are just

two adult and responsible people who make love to each other. We do not hurt anybody". What can I answer? Will she accept the reason that since God doesn't allow it, then it isn't the best thing to do? That actually it is wrong to do it?

In reality this may not be the most important issue. I could explain that the Bible doesn't allow it, and she may respect that.

But 1 Timothy does not talk *only* of the sexual act "in itself". In the "absolute purity" and "treat as a sister" is included also avoiding such actions as "french kissing", touching in certain manners in certain places etc. Actually to us is said to no even *think* sexual thoughts (Mathew 5:28), and thus avoid situations that stimulate these thoughts (Mathew 5:29-30), just as some kinds of physical contact and kissing certainly cause.

And this may be harder to explain to the person in the world, and much harder still to be accepted. She will say to me: "I can accept that you don't have sexual relations before marriage. I respect that. But why not kiss in this or that way, or not stay close in this or that way, not dance in this or that way? What's wrong with this?"

Will she accept to put in practice an absolutely pure relationship in this sense? Often, for the disciples themselves who accept and submit to the Word of God, putting this in practice is very difficult. How much more for a person in the world? Even when there are *both* persons who are doing their best to obey God in such high standards of purity, it may happen that they sin. How much more possible is it if one of them doesn't like it, doesn't care of where it came from, doesn't understand it's reason, and if they do it, they do it reluctantly? Do you think that if there is a moment of weakness on the other's side, they will stop? Let's not lie to ourselves: it is much, much more probable to fall into impurity (as the Bible defines it) if my girlfriend is from the world, than if instead she is a disciple of Christ.

Objection: we have already talked about this before we got together!

Now I would like to talk about an objection that I have heard from somebody who wanted to justify their relationship with somebody in the world.

They say: "We have already talked about the issue of purity before we got together. I explained to her that I don't intend to have sexual relations before marriage. I also explained her that I have a faith, and that Sunday and Wednesday (midweek) I got to church. She said that she could respect that, and that it wasn't a problem for her. So what's the problem?".

There are different considerations that can be done about this comment:

First of all, experience has shown that the vast majority of people have fallen, after a while, in immorality. Even though theoretically the world expect to stay pure in the beginning, nothing will stop it to “seize the moment” in which we are weak spiritually and make us fall. This is not being paranoid. The Bible explicitly warns us against it, and our experience is painfully full of examples of fallen christians who didn't pay attention to the already mentioned biblical principles, and have “played with fire” by getting a girlfriend in the world in spite of everything.

Second, for most of these people, the “talking about purity” is intended exclusively as talking about the sexual act “in itself”. But as we saw before somebody may be impure by biblical standards just simply with the thoughts (especially if she is not very “caste” in her way of dressing), or with the kissing, dancing, way of touching etc. And generally these are things about which they do not talk when they “make arrangements” before getting together. And from these *more subtle* types of impurity is much more easier pass to the rest, after a first weak attempt to stop.

Third and last, but not least (actually this may be the most important consideration), the problem is in that same sentence that they uttered.

Who speaks like this, is implicitly limiting christianity in simply coming to church during sunday and midweek and not having sexual relationships before marriage. The reasoning beneath it is: “If I do all my religious duties, that is, I come to church and do not have sexual relationship before marriage, what's the problem? What does He want? This is something mine, and He should be content because I do all his things that he asks me to do. I am OK.”

Probably none of them would put it this way, but the bottom line reasoning is just this. Thus we see that the world is *already* influencing this person spiritually, making him very strict and legalistic (and in time a hypocrite), making him do “the minimum indispensable” for God.

Christianity is something of the heart, a way of living, a walk, a relationship, not a series of external rules to follow as an end in themselves. Luke 18:9-14 shows that a “religion” intended in this last sense is no religion at all.

But those who want to have a girlfriend/boyfriend in the world, adopt just this way of thinking, when they see the biblical impossibility of such a relationship. So if they want this relationship very much and don't wish to deny themselves (Luke 9:23), they transform christianity in a set of external rules which they can follow, and thus in this way they can be allowed to have that relationship. But by doing this they simply deceive themselves; God does not change.

This way of thinking is similar to that of some husbands to which their wives lament that they are never at home but always at work, or that they don't feel loved and respected by them. These

husbands answer: "I don't understand what your problem is. I do not cheat on you. I do not beat you. Once a month I buy you a flower. I bring money to home. What else do you want?"

External rules are good, but they will never be a good substitute of love, respect and deep relationship. The same is true for God.

Some other times the "compensation" attitude is preferred. Sometimes they basically tell God: "Look God, I will do very well this and that. And I will give more in this and that. But in return I will not obey in this single thing."

Let's see the absurdity of such a reasoning by an example. It is as if a husband says to his wife: "I promise to love you, to respect and sustain you economically, and you will never have to work a single day if you don't want to. I will always bring you gifts and say you nice words. But there is one thing I need to have in return: don't ask me to be loyal all the time. I would like from time to time to have some sort of relationships with some other woman." It is an absurd reasoning, it is true. And yet how many times we ourselves have made a similar reasoning toward God, when something we liked (whatever it was) was clearly against His will?

Other compromises

Let's turn to what we were saying before. I could well maintain all the objectives I had set before I got together with that girl, that is, I may keep on coming to church in Sunday and midweek (not missing a single meeting) and not have outside-of-marriage sexual relationships.

But that doesn't mean that *in other aspects* of the spiritual life I would not find some compromise. This is so because she lives as the world does, and if I want to stay with her I will have to adopt my life to hers'. She will tell me something like this: "Look, if you want to go to church twice a week I don't have any problem, and also it's all right for me not to have sexual relationships out of marriage. I respect that. But we will not do everything your way. In these other things we will do them *my way!*".

Only if she lives an 100% christian life, I will not have to modify my christian life. But if she is not a christian, then it is not how she lives. And if it is like this, then I have to change my life in order to accommodate it with hers', or separate.

We must never forget that sexual sins are simply *the clearest way* in which the world can cause us to sin, but surely it's not *the only way*. There are more subtle and insidious ways. Often we don't even understand them, while we are drawn into sin. This principle is clearly seen in other aspects

of life: a prostitute for example is clearly a sinner; a pharisee is also a sinner, but not so clearly. This type or kind of sin is even more dangerous, not being very clear in its nature (and this explains the different ways in which Jesus confronted people. He was very sensitive and non judgmental to the woman caught in adultery and the prostitutes and publicans, because they already recognized their sin and only needed grace. Whereas the pharisees didn't even understand their sin, which explains the seemingly abusive language of Jesus against them: he wanted to open their eyes, to wake them up from the mortal sleep of subtle sin in which they have fallen).

In similar way, if the world cannot make us dissolute with sexual sin, maybe it is doing something far worse; maybe it is transforming us into pharisees (Luke 18:9-14). One thing is sure though: the world pushes us in one direction or the other, or both.

There is no better way to describe this situation than what C.S.Lewis has written in his wonderful little book *The Screwtape Letters*. In it, Screwtape, an old retired devil writes to his nephew, Wormwood, who had just started his work among humans, and teaches him temptation techniques. In his tenth letter he writes: "My dear Wormwood, I was delighted to hear from Triptweeze that your patient has made some very desirable new acquaintances ... I gather that the middle-aged married couple who called at his office are just the sort of people we want him to know - rich, smart, superficially intellectual, and brightly sceptical about everything in the world ... This is excellent. And you seem to have made good use of all his social, sexual, and intellectual vanity. Tell me more. Did he commit himself deeply? I don't mean in words. There is a subtle play of looks and tones and laughs by which a Mortal can imply that he is of the same party as those to whom he is speaking. That is the kind of betrayal you should specially encourage, because the man does not fully realise it himself; and by the time he does you will have made withdrawal difficult. As long as the postponement lasts he will be in a false position. He will be silent when he ought to speak and laugh when he ought to be silent. He will assume, at first only by his manner, but presently by his words, all sorts of cynical and sceptical attitudes which are not really his. But if you play him well, they may become his. All mortals tend to turn into the thing they are pretending to be. This is elementary".

An objection: the relationship with a disciple does not guarantee purity

It is sometimes said: "Yes, but also the disciples can do wrong things and cause us to sin".

This is true. Disciples not always behave the way they should. But is this a sufficient reason to then date in the world? No. Actually it is exactly the opposite: if even if those who know and accept the truth and put it into practice, can fall and make us also fall into sin, how much more a person who doesn't know the truth and doesn't want to accept it? This reason should pull us even more away from a deep relationship with somebody in the world, to protect ourselves spiritually.

The sins that occur in the church by the disciples are "the flesh" or "the world" that still lives inside them and that must die (Colossians 3:1-5, 2 Corinthians 4:16). But this should not be used as an excuse for making other mistakes. It is as if I considered myself justified in lying or stealing only because for example I saw a married disciple lose his temper and yell to his wife. It is not a good reasoning. Yet it is the same kind of reasoning used by those who say: "I had a girlfriend in the church, but we didn't keep the absolute purity of which the Bible speaks in 1 Timothy 5:2. Thus now I will choose a girlfriend in the world, because in the final analysis it is the same".

No, it is not the same. If there was sin in the previous relationship, that was "the flesh" still present in the heart of both of them. The spiritual solution is thus to accept the sin, confess it (James 5:16), and make every effort to repent and change (Proverbs 28:13), not going to the world.

The influence of my choice on the Church

Let's pass to another no less important consideration. In 1 Corinthians 10:32 we are told not to give any motive of scandal to anyone, and also to the church. But if I have a girlfriend in the world, what kind of example am I giving? What effect will this have on the church?

Consider just for the sake of argument that I am an extremely spiritual person, that I have very strong conviction, and also that all of the above consideration from the Scriptures are not valid, and that my relationship with somebody in the world does not have any negative effect on my relationship with God.

Even if this were true, however I should not get together with somebody from the world. This is so because if I do I will be bringing the world inside the church, by my example.

A young christian who has not yet acquired strong spiritual convictions on plenty of life's aspects (Hebrews 5:12-13), seeing that I got together with somebody from the world, would do the same. And nobody can say no to him, because there is my example. But for him it is much much easier to return to the world, for example falling into sexual sin or adopting the world's way of thinking (2

Peter 2:20-22).

The world can influence and lie to a “baby” in Christ much more easier than than a “grown-up” in the faith. Thus with my example I am causing the falling of a young disciple. Of course the responsibility of his sin is all his, but this doesn't take away the fact that I have influenced him in a bad way with my example, pushing him toward the world, and thus in a sense I also have a part of responsibility for his sin (Luke 17:1-2).

Objection: But my girlfriend in the world may be converted!

At this point one may object by saying that it may happen that his girlfriend in the world may come to church and eventually be baptized. We truly hope this may happen.

But does this therefore mean that it is all right to have a girlfriend in the world?

Before answering this question I want to remind once more that the great, great majority of the times it is the world that converts the christian back to her ranks, not the opposite. We must not lie to ourselves (1 Corinthians 15:33, Deuteronomy 7:4), and above all not forget it.

Turning to our question, even if it happened that my girlfriend in the world truly became a disciple, does this mean that I took a right decision? Surely not (unless all the reasoning from the Scripture we did thus far was vain). It shows only that God can bring good even out of a wrong choice (as we see for example in the story of Joseph in, in which Joseph's brothers did something wrong, but God brought good out of it - Genesis 50:20).

The best example I can think of, relevant to our study, is the example of Ruth. We know the story: an Hebrew family, in a time of famine, went to live for a while in the country of Moab, and both the sons married to moabite women, and after that both the sons died, Naomi wanted to go back to Israel. Only Ruth decides to go with her, and after that she becomes the wife of Boaz, and thus the ancestor of David, the great king, the figure of the Messiah.

In this story we see a wrong decision (Hebrews deciding to marry moabite women), but of which God could bring out good (one of these moabite women becomes the ancestor of David).

But does this mean that *all the other* Hebrews, hearing this story, could marry moabite women?

Obviously not. Only because God could bring good out of a wrong decision, this doesn't mean that their decision was not wrong or that they didn't sin. They sinned, and whoever imitates them sins

also. This is not a story to imitate, but only a story to glorify God that can bring good out of bad.

In a similar way, we today may make a mistake and God can bring good out of it. But it doesn't mean that therefore we may do wrong as we please. "*It is written: Do not put the Lord your God to the test*" (Mathew 4:7).

A last consideration about this story: the Bible says nothing about *their* (Naomi's sons) relationship with God, and on how these women influenced *them* spiritually and if they are saved or not. The Bible records only that they disobeyed to God.

Summary of points made thus far

These are then some of the biblical principles that forbid us having a girlfriend/boyfriend in the world. Aren't they convincing?

If the only objection to all of these scriptural reasoning, is simply the pointing out that the Bible doesn't forbid it in explicit way, then I think the arguments are very solid and the case is made.

And if somebody nevertheless still wants to hold on to the argument: "*technically talking* the Bible doesn't forbid it because there is not the explicit phrase", then we cannot but answer him: "If you want to do everything *exactly as it used to be done in biblical times*, then you shouldn't have a girlfriend at all, and it should be your parents who arrange your marriage, even with a girl you have never seen before or know very little. Because that's how it used to be done in those times". In each case it seems that having a girlfriend in the world is not an option for a disciple of Christ, if we want to truly live for God and do His will. Reason and Scripture are on the side of this conclusion.

Let's turn to the example I used in the beginning: taking drugs. How many of us have doubts that using heroin is wrong, just because in the Bible there is no verse that says "do not use heroin"? And how many of us would accept excuses such as: "I will try it only once, and then I will not do it any more! I have everything under control, don't worry! There are persons who have used it and are not dependent of it! Even if you become dependent, you can still get out of it! etc"?

I think none of us. And if we wouldn't accept this, that bring "only" to the destruction of the body,

how much less we should accept something that bring to the destruction of the soul?

So if we want to "cling" to the argument that since in the Bible the specific words or phrase about girlfriend/boyfriend lack, then we cannot, forbid somebody (by the Bible) to take drugs, for the same (unreasonable) reason.

Objection: But this is Love. You cannot reason about Love!

Somebody who is more emotionally oriented, may now object: "But this is Love (with capital "L") You can't use reason and logic when you talk about it. Love is something of the heart".

People who object this way, seem to think under the assumption that if something is done "because of love" then it is right, pure and holy, *whatever it is*. Of course this is the easiest objection to answer to: only because somebody is "in love" with someone else doesn't mean that is right to follow whatever these emotions require. Sometimes it may happen that these feelings, as glorious and incredibly beautiful as they are *in themselves*, require from us some action that is not right, pure or holy. For example if somebody falls in love with another woman that is not his wife, then it would be wrong for him to divorce his wife and marry this other woman. How many times people in the world have betrayed their wives/husbands and excused themselves by saying: "Well, this is Love. What can I do? You cannot command your heart!".

This is simply false.

First of all, we *can* command our hearts. By constant "spiritual exercise" (1 Timothy 4:7), by constantly "inclining our hearts to understanding" (Proverbs 2:2) and constantly "denying ourselves" ungodly desires (Luke 9:23), *in our everyday life*, we learn in time to want and love only what is true, noble, right and pure (Philippians 4:8). This means to conform our hearts and minds to God, thus to become the persons that He wants us to be (Romans 12:2, Ephesians 4:23-24). When we do that, our heart naturally will not desire what is forbidden or even if it starts desiring it, we can stop it from the very beginning. For example we will not allow our heart to desire somebody's else wife, even though she may be beautiful. By doing so from the very beginning, these emotions, even if they show up, will not become stronger, and eventually will die out (Colossians 3:5).

But even supposing it's true that we can't command our hearts, it is also true however that we *can* command our *actions*. We don't have to obey the commands of these emotions. They are not

God. The Father is God and we must, as Jesus did in Gethsemane, obey *His* word, independently of how we feel. *"Not as I will, but as you will!"* (Mathew 26:39).

"Listen to your heart" is, maybe, a beautiful song, but surely it is not what the Bible teaches:

The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? (Jeremiah 17:9)

He who trusts in his own heart is a fool, But he who walks wisely will be delivered (Proverbs 28:26)

This point is made superbly by C.S.Lewis in chapter 5 of his brilliant book "The Four Loves", when he talks about *Eros*, that is, the love between a man and a woman. I wish to quote Lewis lengthly:

"For it is the very mark of Eros that when he is in us we had rather share unhappiness with the Beloved than be happy on any other terms... To Eros all these calculations are irrelevant... Even when it becomes clear beyond all evasion that marriage with the Beloved cannot possibly lead to happiness when it cannot even profess to offer any other life than that of tending an incurable invalid, of hopeless poverty, of exile, or of disgrace Eros never hesitates to say, "Better this than parting. Better to be miserable with her than happy without her. Let our hearts break provided they break together." If the voice within us does not say this, it is not the voice of Eros. This is the grandeur and terror of love... It is in the grandeur of Eros that the seeds of danger are concealed. He has spoken like a god. His total commitment, his reckless disregard of happiness, his transcendence of self-regard, sound like a message from the eternal world.

And yet it cannot, just as it stands, be the voice of God Himself. For Eros, speaking with that very grandeur and displaying that very transcendence of self, may urge to evil as well as to good. Nothing is shallower than the belief that a love which leads to sin is always qualitatively lower – more animal or more trivial – than one which leads to faithful, fruitful and Christian marriage. The love which leads to cruel and perjured unions, even to suicide-pacts and murder, is not likely to be wandering lust or idle sentiment. It may well be Eros in all his splendour; heartbreakingly sincere; ready for every sacrifice except renunciation...

We must not give unconditional obedience to the voice of Eros when he speaks most like a god.

Neither must we ignore or attempt to deny the god-like quality. This love is really and truly like Love Himself. In it there is a real nearness to God (by Resemblance) ; but not, therefore and necessarily, a

nearness of Approach. Eros, honoured so far as love of God and charity to our fellows will allow, may become for us a means of Approach. His total commitment is a paradigm or example, built into our natures, of the love we ought to exercise towards God and Man...

But Eros, honoured without reservation and obeyed unconditionally, becomes a demon. And this is just how he claims to be honoured and obeyed. Divinely indifferent to our selfishness, he is also demoniacally rebellious to every claim of God or Man that would oppose him. Hence as the poet says: "*People in love cannot be moved by kindness, And opposition makes them feel like martyrs*".

Martyrs is exactly right... Of all loves he is, at his height, most god-like; therefore most prone to demand our worship. Of himself he always tends to turn "being in love" into a sort of religion...

When lovers say of some act that we might blame, "Love made us do it," notice the tone. A man saying, "I did it because I was frightened," or "I did it because I was angry," speaks quite differently.

He is putting forward an excuse for what he feels to require excusing. But the lovers are seldom doing quite that. Notice how tremulously, almost how devoutly, they say the word love, not so much pleading an "extenuating circumstance" as appealing to an authority. The confession can be almost a boast. There can be a shade of defiance in it. They "feel like martyrs"...

"*These reasons in love's law have passed for good*," says Milton's Dalila. That is the point; in love's law.

"In love," we have our own "law," a religion of our own, our own god. Where a true Eros is present resistance to his commands feels like apostasy, and what are really (by the Christian standard) temptations speak with the voice of duties quasi-religious duties, acts of pious zeal to love. He builds his own religion round the lovers... It seems to sanction all sorts of actions they would not otherwise have dared. I do not mean solely, or chiefly, acts that violate chastity. They are just as likely to be acts of injustice or uncharity against the outer world. They will seem like proofs of piety and zeal towards Eros. The pair can say to one another in an almost sacrificial spirit, "It is for love's sake that I have neglected my parents left my children cheated my partner failed my friend at his greatest need." These reasons in love's law have passed for good. The votaries may even come to feel a particular merit in such sacrifices; what costlier offering can be laid on love's altar than one's conscience?...

Thus Eros, like the other loves, but more strikingly because of his strength, sweetness, terror and high

port, reveals his true status. He cannot of himself be what, nevertheless, he must be if he is to remain Eros. He needs help; therefore needs to be ruled. The god dies or becomes a demon unless he obeys God."

Thus it seems clear to me that we can either change our way of thinking and learn to allow our heart to love only what is permitted by and connected with God, or else obey God even when our heart tells us not to. But disobedience to God is not an option for a disciple of Christ.

Conclusion of the study

We believe that it is wrong to date in the world. This is what we have believed and practiced from the very beginning of our movement. And so it must remain. This is not for defending human tradition, but because that's clearly God's will for his people: to be holy, that is, to be separated from the world (1 Peter 1:16, 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 etc). If we fail to do that, then our church will die, just as other churches who have not listened to these kinds of warnings, have died before (Apocalypse 2:5, 3:16).

I have know many so called "christian churches" in the religious world, in whose bosom the world has entered in this way. It wasn't a great surprise to see that these "churches" were exactly like the church in Laodicea in Apocalypse 3, of which God says that he will "vomit". The world has entered in the innermost place of the church, in it's heart, and there it exercised all it's influence. By then these churches were not real churches, but only a sort of *cultural club* or something similar, in which people could come in and out as they pleased, and in which there were no expectation from it's members except to be present from time to time at the Sunday meetings. And even those who were sincere and were trying to love God and do His will, found themselves discouraged and impotent in front of such a mundane atmosphere, and ended believing that the biblical standards are a sort of "utopia" that couldn't really be put into practice. In short, these "churches" were like the world. Jesus says: "*Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness... it is thrown out*" (Luke 14:34-35).

We must be different from the world, separated, holy. But that cannot be achieved if the world enters into our hearts.

A personal sharing

Now I think it's time I share something about my own experience. I will share two parts of my life, one is before I became a disciple, the other one is after I became a disciple.

Before I became a disciple, I had a girlfriend who used to be part of a "christian church" as the ones I mentioned before (I believe it was a pentecostal church). She was taught that in a relationship "if you are sincere everything is fine". We didn't have sexual relationship, but our relationship was very impure and was going in that direction (it didn't happen because after a while somebody invited me to church and I became a disciple). Our relationship was very impure and I had a very negative spiritual effect on her for that reason. But that isn't surprising: I was part of the world, and thus I thought and behaved naturally in that way. I used to say to her that I loved her, when in reality that wasn't true. I just used her. And I used to do this as if it was a perfectly normal and innocent thing to do, and from outside I was "a good guy". The majority of guys in the world that I have known think this way (and it is difficult for me to imagine that the girls in the world are more righteous in this either). Maybe they don't admit this with their words, but in reality most of them behave this way. I don't mean that all man in the world are as despicable as I was; there are the truly "good guys". But surely the majority is not. And even those "good guys", in God's eyes are still evil (Mathew 7:11, Romans 3:10-18). Maybe they don't even dream of using a girl the same way I did, but surely there are other areas of their life that are evil spiritually (1 Timothy 5:24). We should never be fooled in believing the world to be "good", friendly to God's people, innocuous. It may seem so for superficial things, but as we have seen, the Bible is very clear that deep inside is not like this.

This experience of mine convicts me of the negative effect that the world can have on the spiritual life of a person.

The other period of my life I want to share about is after I became a disciple. It is about ten years. Throughout this period I have not had a girlfriend. In the world, of course, I have known many girls, in the university and outside of it. Many of them were very nice and made my heart "tick". But of course I "kept the distance", not that I didn't talk with them, but knowing that between us there could not be that kind of relationship, I didn't allow my heart to "fantasize" excessively. Generally after 2-3 days "the crush" passed.

But then I knew a girl that I really liked a lot, in which there were a lot of the things I am looking for in a girl. Unfortunately she lacked the most important aspect of all, that is, being spiritual, because she was not a disciple of Christ.

I talked with her different times, I brought her to church and introduced her to the brothers and sisters, gave her something to read. In short I did everything I could do to help her become a disciple of Christ. In my heart I had decided however that if she didn't become a disciple of Christ, nothing would have happened between us. She would be a friend, but nothing more. She decided that she didn't want to have anything to do with God and the church (and latter with me). I had to accept this, even though it was not pleasant.

I think this is the only attitude that a disciple can have toward those in the world whom he/she likes. Do you truly want to help them become disciples, thus saved? Stay near them, show them kindness and friendship, love them as Christ did. But also make it perfectly clear (directly or indirectly) that nothing can happen between you and them unless they become disciples of Christ. First of all, this will protect you. But also will make it clear to them, who is your first love. This will bring them to ask themselves, what is this thing that is so important to you that you are ready to give up something you like, for it. It is true that this may also move them away from you. But that is a risk that is worth taking. Jesus for example risked in John 6:66-69 when he asked to his closest friends if they wanted to leave Him also, after having already lost some thousands of disciples. And he won. Because in this case the faithfulness of the disciples toward Him grew after this episode. In a similar way, in taking this position we may lose that person. But if a person moves away from you when they understand that following Christ is the most important thing in your life, and that it is a very serious thing, that maybe this is the best thing. It means that he/she didn't have any intention to take it seriously, and thus would have had only a negative effect on your spiritual life. If instead they become even more curious by your example, then they will know what it truly means to love God with all the heart (because they have seen an example), and they will also become true disciples of Christ. And only then it will be possible to have a truly spiritual relationship. Like Jesus, you too would have risked and won.

But if you compromise and get with them in a relationship even though they are not disciples, this will not help them become disciples. They will think: "It shouldn't be such an important thing for him/her, if he/she choosed to get with me even though I think it so differently. Or even if it is important, it surely is not the most important thing in their life. Because if it was, how could he/she have stayed with me, who thinks it so differently? But for me this is not a problem; everybody has his own things: for him/her it is religion, for me it is sports/shopping".

And if this happens, you will have lost exactly what you were trying to save (Luke 9:24).

I don't think this could be better illustrated than in the story of the love between Licia and Vinicio, in the marvellous historical novel "QUO VADIS?" of the Nobel Laureate for literature, Henryk Sienkiewicz (a highly recommended historical novel based on the persecution of the early church under emperor Nero).

I shared these two moments of my personal life, before and after I became a disciple, because I think they are very pertinent to the theme we are discussing here.

There is a problem: we are a small church. What to do?

Finally, one cannot ignore a legitimate lamentation, seen especially in small churches. Whoever has been a single in the church for some time has had sooner or later these feelings: "I am alone. I would like to have a relation in the church, but we are a small church and so there is not much choice. And from the brothers/sisters in the church, even though I have a brotherly love for them, there is however nobody that is just like I would like, with whom I could build a relationship". And when we have these feelings, the temptation to go in the world to find that special person, becomes very strong.

This is a real problem that must be solved.

As it always happens, there are two ways which one can take to solve a problem: one is spiritual, but difficult, whereas the other one is not spiritual, but in compensation it is easy (Mathew 7:13-14). In this case the easy solution is to go to the world and become similar to it. The other solution is to share our faith ever more, with zeal and conviction, and thus make disciples (Mathew 28:19-20). And this is to be done by the whole the church, nobody excluded, not just by single persons. In this way new people will be added to the kingdom of God, the church will grow in numbers, and spiritual relationships will be possible.

There are many stories around the world of brothers and sisters that while sharing their faith have found their future husbands and wives. For example, Andy Fleming, a noted brother in our fellowship, was sharing his faith one day, when he met a young man named who was very open to learning more about God and within two weeks of studying the Bible was baptized. This man also introduced his girlfriend, Tammy, to the church and she was baptized just two weeks later.

Interestingly, about four months after this couple broke up, Andy began to date Tammy and a year later they were married. (It is also encouraging to note that more than twenty-three years later that young man is still a faithful disciple and is happily married to another disciple). Thus you never

know how God will work things out if you go and share your faith. Of course it would be a wrong motivation to share your faith in order to find a wife or husband. God's glory and people's salvation should be the only motivations. Yet, in the example I gave, Andy was not looking for a wife that day. He was just out sharing the good news with people and helping them to see the love and forgiveness of God. And he saved two persons *and* got a wife, even though he wouldn't have told you so in that moment, for he didn't know and couldn't imagine.

Is this not, after all, what Scripture says? "*But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well*" (Mathew 6:33)

The only spiritual solution to this problem is thus one: converting the world. Otherwise, as people have rightly pointed out, if the church does not convert the world, it will be the world that converts the church.

The whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27)

Allow me one last thought: when people try to do only *half* of God's will, the results are often painful, maybe even more painful than not doing anything at all.

Let's take an example. There are persons who obey God as of divorce, that is, they don't accept it. But on the other side, they don't obey God on other aspects of marriage, on things like respect, love, forgiveness, dedication and so forth. And this produces a terrible domestic atmosphere of constant fights and "scenes" and bitterness. An outsider looking at that family would instinctively think that the best thing for them is to just divorce and be done with it (obviously the other better solution, and the only one righteous in front of God, is that they both learn how to obey *also to the other* commandments of God, that is to forgive, respect and love each-other).

Thus we see that doing God's will only partially can produce more hurt than good (being lukewarm is worse than to be cold: Revelation 3:14-18).

As it concerns our present study, we (rightly) insist that disciples must marry only disciples and as a consequence they should date only other disciples. But if we do not share our faith (not rightly), this will bring, on the long run, to the loneliness of persons that otherwise would have had a family (it's true that for some celibacy is a gift, but surely it is not a gift for everyone: Mathew 19:10-11, 1 Corinthians 7:7-9).

In Revelation 3:14-19 we are given three choices (which can be applied to every situation in our lives, and which I will apply to the present study): the worst of all is to be lukewarm (that is, not dating in the world, but also not to share our faith), then comes being cold (that is, dating in the world and not sharing our faith), and finally is the best, the only one that makes true happiness, being hot (not dating in the world, and sharing your faith ... and in time find the right spiritual person).

What will we choose?

Marriage

Obviously the things said above are applied to marriage as well; and much more so, because marriage raises also the issues of how to educate the children, what kind of values and direction in life to give them, it raises the issue on how to use the time and money the family has and many other crucial aspects of life on which the christian answer and the world's answer are opposite to each other. Even though if for someone the explicit scriptures that tell us to marry only in the Kingdom of God are not enough, the scriptural reasons exposed above should be more than enough.