“My Girlfriend’s Parents Won’t Accept Me Because I’m Not Saved”

My girlfriend’s parents do not accept me because I am not saved though I have never put a foot wrong. I would like to know where Probe Ministries stands on this. As a footnote, she has a child which I have accepted as my own.

Thanks for writing. Although I do not know all the details of your case, there is actually biblical justification for your girlfriend’s parents reaction to you. The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians as follows in 2 Corinthians 6:14-16:

> *“Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. 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.’*

This passage clearly forbids believers to marry unbelievers. If your girlfriend is a Christian, then this could at least partially explain her parents’ reaction to you.

Of course, the good news is that you don’t need to continue relating to your girlfriend’s family as an outsider! After all, Christ died for you too! So why not repent of your sin, give your heart and life to Christ, and place your trust in Him for forgiveness, cleansing, and the free gift of eternal life? Of course, you must do so genuinely and sincerely and from the heart. But if you do, then you will (most

importantly) be an adopted son of God and a member of His family forever. In addition, if you sincerely give your life to Christ, it might also make you more acceptable to your girlfriend's parents. Of course, I want to be very clear, that you do not PRETEND to become a Christian in order to win their approval. That would be a very great sin in the eyes of God. However, if you genuinely and sincerely give your life to Christ and become a member of the family of God, then He may (as an added bonus) grant you the approval of your girlfriend's family as well. And even if He doesn't, you will still have the greatest good that any man can ever have/M a personal relationship with the Triune God, your Creator and Redeemer who loves you, and gave His Son for you. And what could ultimately be better than that?

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn

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"I'm a Christian in Love With a Hindu"

Hi, I'm a Christian girl. I'm in love with my friend who is Hindu. I'm much worried for my future. I'm praying for his salvation, so that my marriage goes smooth and we can lead a Christian family life. If I ignore him, also, it would mean I had made a sin. Please give me a helpful guidance, so that I should not sin.

God is very clear about this kind of situation in 2

Corinthians 6:14 (King James Version): “Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?” The context of the passage is marriage. If you marry anyone other than a Christ-follower, you cannot and will not have a smooth marriage. This is especially true when the people come from such strongly different worldviews and belief systems. Do pray for your friend’s salvation, but do not date him. We marry people we date and fall in love with; I strongly suggest you distance yourself from him because he is not safe for you spiritually.

If you ignore him—or even withdraw from him—it is not a sin. That is obedience and wisdom, not sin.

I hope you find this helpful.

Sue Bohlin

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Love Myths

Soul Mates

In this article we are going to focus on a few of the myths surrounding love and romance that can have a negative effect on dating and marriage. Some of these ideas have become so pervasive in our society that it may seem heretical to label them as myths. But as we will see, they can have a devastating impact if they are accepted uncritically.

The first myth is the belief that you will know when you meet “the one.” Of course, this assumes that there is only one

person who is right for you—a soul mate you must find and marry. Garry Friesen in his book *Decision Making & the Will of God* (along with many other Christian writers) question whether there is *only* one right person for you to marry. But I will set aside this theological question to focus on some relevant practical issues.

First, is the problem of a false positive. We have all heard stories about couples who met and immediately one or both of them knew they were going to marry the other person. Often we call this "love at first sight." But we don't hear as much about the many other people who met, thought they had met "the one," but later decided not to get married or ended up getting married and then divorced.

Certain people come into our lives and we immediately "click" with them. Why? We carry around in our minds a template of what that certain ideal person may be. It is influenced by our family background, our own expectations, books, movies, and personal experiences. When that template comes into our lives sparks fly. We may not even know much about that person's social, family, and religious background, but we are immediately attracted to him or her. We may feel that he or she is "the one," but over time our relationship may surface concerns that might be detrimental to a successful marriage. Unfortunately, many people can be blinded by a belief that they have met "the one" and thus ignore important warning signs.

Second is the problem of the false negative. We also no doubt have heard stories of couples who weren't attracted to each other when they first met. Many didn't even like the other person. Only over time did they get to know each other and began to see admirable qualities in what became their marriage partner.

Pepper Schwartz in her book *Everything You Know About Love and Sex Is Wrong* (New York: Pedigree, 2000) says we are a romance-

addicted society. We love movies with Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan, but life is more complicated than what is portrayed in movies with skillfully written plots, blended music, beautiful actors, and exotic locations.

Choosing a marriage partner requires more than romance and emotion. For every story someone tells of finding “the one” and experiencing “love at first sight,” there are many more where those initial emotions turned out to be wrong.

Two Peas in a Pod

The second love myth is the belief that you should be similar to your partner. This myth is quite pervasive in part because there is some truth to it. Obviously, there should be some common basis of belief within a marriage. The Bible warns Christians not to be “unequally yoked together with unbelievers.” (2 Cor. 6:14) And there should be some common areas of social and cultural similarity.

But I believe we should question the prevailing belief that your life partner should be the same age, height, and race while having the same interests, gifts, and abilities. As some marriage counselors have said, “If your mate is exactly like you, then one of you is redundant.” Strong marriages celebrate the differences and work to have each person’s gifts and abilities complement the other. One partner may be good with the finances. The other partner may be good in the kitchen. One partner may be good at details. The other partner may be able to look at the bigger picture and plan for the future. Each partner’s gifts complement the other partner’s gifts.

In many cases, having a similar partner can actually be a source of conflict. Kevin Leman has found that two “first-borns” bring their perfectionist tendencies into a marriage. They will often “pick” at each other leading to increased marital conflict. Does that mean that two first-born children should never marry? Of course not. But they might want to

reconsider whether they want to marry someone who is so similar to them.

What about differences in age? Couples should obviously consider the implications of vast differences in age in terms of energy level, hobbies, activities, and friendships. But there is also good reason to begin to rethink the prevailing assumption that compatibility must be based upon similar ages. Once again different ages and life experiences might be a significant way to bring complementarity into a marriage.

The same could be said about difference in ethnicity. Not so long ago, society frowned upon so-called mixed marriages. Today, more and more marriage partners come from different ethnic and racial backgrounds. While we still tend to marry people who come from the same social and cultural background, this trend seems to be changing.

The key point is this: you don’t have to be similar to your partner to have a good marriage. In fact, your differences might actually help you to complement each other in marriage.

Annoying Habits

Now I would like to focus on the question of whether little annoying habits are unimportant in a long-term relationship.

When we are in love, little things like bad manners or chronic lateness may seem insignificant. Besides, we reason, we can always change our partner later on so that this is no longer a problem. We may even convince ourselves that these little annoying habits are kind of cute.

Well, they may seem cute in the courtship phase of a relationship, but they usually don’t stay cute once you are married and have to deal with them every day. In fact, small habits often grow into bigger habits once they are indulged.

The book *Everything You Know About Love and Sex Is Wrong*

describes a study done by Professor Diane Femly at the University of California-Davis. The researcher asked people why they married and then why they divorced. The reasons for both were often quite similar. The only difference is that what was once sweet had now turned sour.

For example, a person might say: “I married him for his incredible sense of humor.” When asked why they broke up, she might say: “He was always silly, he was a lightweight.” Another person might cite her partner’s creativity and spontaneity as a big attraction, but later said of her spouse that he was “a dreamer” who “couldn’t stick with any one thing, couldn’t plan anything ahead of time.”

So it wasn’t that these people didn’t know who they married. Their spouse hadn’t changed, but their tolerance of their habits had changed. What was a minor annoyance before they married, became a major reason for their breakup later on.

Frankly, I believe one of the real tests in a marriage are the minor annoyances of everyday life because they accumulate day after day. A quirky habit might be even attractive when you first encounter it, but with daily repetition can become annoying and irksome.

A related issue is the iceberg problem. Most of the mass of an iceberg is below the surface. Likewise, most of the really difficult problems a person may have will stay below the surface during the dating and courtship phase of a relationship. Many couples, in fact, awake on their honeymoons to an entirely different person than the one they thought they married.

Here are a few issues to consider:

- *Cleanliness: what might at first seem like an admirable lack of vanity may indicate a general lack of personal hygiene.*

> • *Neatness: although keeping things in order may seem like a small thing, it can develop into a major problem in marriage reminiscent of scenes from "The Odd Couple."*

The bottom line is this: consider the long-term impact these little annoying habits will have in your marriage, *before* you get married.

Living Together

Next I would like to look at the question of living together before marriage.

In our society today, cohabitation has become an extension of dating and courtship. Couples see living together as an audition for marriage, reasoning that you want to get to know someone intimately before you marry them. Although the logic seems sound, it not only goes against biblical injunctions but against sound sociological research.

A 1999 study by sociologists David Popenoe and Barbara Dafoe Whitehead released through the National Marriage Project at Rutgers University confirms earlier studies about the danger of cohabiting and added additional detail. They found that cohabiting appears to be so counterproductive to long-lasting marriage that unmarried couples should avoid living together, especially if it involves children. Whitehead says that living together is "a fragile family form that poses increased risk to women and children."

Part of the reason for the danger is the difference in perception. "Women tend to see [living together] as a step toward eventual marriage, while men regard it more as a sexual opportunity without the ties of long-term commitment." And people who live together in uncommitted relationships may be unwilling to work out problems, and instead will seek less fractious relationships with a new partner.

The National Institute for Healthcare Research has found that couples who live together and then marry report less satisfaction in their marriages than other couples. Scott Stanley at the University of Denver has found that cohabiting couples who get married have a significantly higher rate of divorce than those who did not live together.(*A Lasting Promise: A Christian Guide to Fighting for Your Marriage*. Josey-Bass, 1998)

Couples argue that living together will provide important information about how a partner will behave and interact once married. But a cohabiting person may be quite different from a person within marriage. Marriage is a commitment for life, while cohabitation is usually a commitment for a season. That makes a big difference in a relationship. It's like the difference between being in a play and auditioning for the play. In the first example, you are in the stage production and working to make the play the best it can be. In the second example, you are trying out for the play and have much less invested.

Couples may also argue that they can live together and eventually get married when they are ready for children. But will that day ever come? The living together arrangement actually erodes a foundation of commitment rather than strengthening it. And if the woman becomes pregnant during cohabitation rather than marriage, it is less likely that the children will have a legal (and committed) father.

Living together before marriage may sound like a good idea, until you look at the facts.

Got Problems? Have Kids

Finally I would like to conclude by focusing on the idea that children bring a couple closer.

To begin, let's acknowledge that Psalm 127:3 says that

children are a gift from the Lord. Children are wonderful. A Christian family with children is delightful.

The issue here is the prevailing belief that bringing a child into a relationship that has problems will improve the situation. There is good evidence to believe that is not the case. If anything, a child can increase the tensions that are already present. Pepper Schwartz in her book *Everything You Know About Love and Sex Is Wrong* believes this may be the most damaging myth of the 25 myths she addresses in her book.

The fantasy that children will increase love and intimacy needs to be balanced by the reality that child-rearing also involves time and energy that can increase stress, fatigue, and worry. It will also decrease privacy and communication between partners. Unfortunately, many young couples may underestimate the impact of children on their marriage and be unprepared for the constant daily attention necessary to be a successful parent.

While having a child may be one of the most intimate things a man and a woman can do, the erosion of intimacy after the child arrives often surprises many couples. Even before the child arrives, a pregnant mother often begins to feel fat and unattractive. Once the baby arrives, she must give most of her time and attention to the child. On the positive side, she is madly in love with the child but may tend to squeeze her husband out of the picture. On the negative side, she may be so exhausted from caring for a child all day that she has little energy left for her husband.

Even good marriages must work hard not to allow their marriage to be pulled into two parallel worlds. It is natural to begin to divide tasks and focus on those, but couples need to schedule “date nights” and “talk times” to make sure their two worlds intersect. Isolation is a natural drift in any marriage. Children and children’s activities can increase isolation if marriage partners don’t attempt to counter-

program against the pressures that naturally will push a couple apart.

Couples should also plan ahead for a time when children are not a constant focus of the marriage. In my article on *The Second Half of Marriage,* I talk about the time when children begin to leave the nest. No longer does the marriage have to be child-focused. It should return to a partner-focused marriage. Even while a couple is traveling through "the valley of the diapers," they should keep a clear focus on the need to invest time, energy, and emotions in their partner.

Children are a gift from the Lord, but couples should understand their impact on a marriage. If a marriage has problems, having children will not bring that couple closer.

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