

YOU CAN SEE BETTER IF YOU DON'T COVER YOUR EYES

Every now and then a letter is so entangled with identifying references that I can't clean them all out. That's what happened here, so I've left out the letter and printed only my reply. You're smart enough to figure it out. Right? I hope so.

Dear Miss R:

Your intelligent and well-organized letter convinces me that one part of you wants me to tell you the truth, and tell it straight. Unfortunately, it's pretty clear that another part of you is terribly afraid that I might do just that. Your writing is full of lines like these: "Now don't get worried about how close we are. ... Please do not say that he is using me. ... Please do not say that we are infatuated. ... " I'm not sure which side of you is stronger just now, but perhaps that doesn't matter, because your feelings don't have to rule your will. Decide which side of you to listen to. That side will become strongest, because you have appointed it to that office in your soul.

May I speak for one side against the other? Your situation presents five different kinds of misunderstandings. *First misunderstanding:* You don't grasp the nature of atheism. Yes, it's true that I was once an atheist myself. Thank you for your compliment, but it's quite untrue that atheists disbelieve in God because their superior minds won't let them make a leap of faith. Rationally, theism beats the stuffing out of atheism, and the things your friend believes require a much greater "leap" than anything we Christians do. For example, there is better documentary evidence of the life of Jesus Christ than of the life of Julius Caesar, yet your friend believes Caesar existed and Jesus didn't. There isn't a shred of evidence that Mary ever slept with a Roman soldier, but your friend says he believes that too. Even if Jesus wasn't the Son of God, he couldn't have been a bastard and nonexistent, could he? Yet your friend believes both things at once. The force driving his atheism isn't intelligence, but revolt.

Second misunderstanding: You don't grasp what is happening between the two of you. At one point you deny that your 18-month exclusive relationship is "missionary dating," and at other points you deny that it is "dating" at all. I don't care what you call it. What matters is the reality. The young man dominates your thoughts, and you are already imagining yourself married to him. My dear, get this straight. He'll never marry you. He's made that clear. His remark "I'm the noncommittal kind who

doesn't believe in marriage" is merely another way to say "I'm the selfish kind who doesn't believe that other people are really real." You write "Sometimes, I feel he treats me like a wife." Perhaps in a certain perverse way he does, but believe me, he will never treat himself as a husband. Even if by some mischance he did blunder into marriage with someone, he would not accept that responsibility.

Third misunderstanding: You don't grasp why you are losing the argument about Christianity. Plainly, you are intelligent; just as plainly, the young man is irrational, as I pointed out just a few paragraphs ago. If you are losing, then, it isn't because he has better arguments or a stronger intellect, but because you've thrown away your advantage. The thought behind his thoughts is something like this: "I am not willing for God to be God, because I want to be God myself. To keep God from seeming real, I will tell myself whatever it takes, no matter how baseless, blasphemous, or irrational. To justify myself, I will try to ruin my girlfriend's faith and get her to be more like me." The thought behind your thoughts is something like this: "I am not willing for my friend to look foolish, because I love him. To keep him from seeming like an idiot, I will tell myself that anything he says is plausible and reasonable, no matter how baseless, blasphemous, or irrational it may be. To justify myself, I will pretend that I can convert him and get him to be more like me." Get the picture? He's in no danger of becoming a Christian, but if you let this go on you are in danger of becoming a lonely agnostic: lonely because there is no future with a man like him, and agnostic because in the futile quest for such a future, you will end up losing your faith.

Fourth misunderstanding: You don't grasp what St. Paul means when he commands against becoming "unequally yoked with nonbelievers." You say you know you can't marry the fellow. But if we are not to marry nonbelievers, then it follows that we are not to fall in love with them, and if we are not to fall in love with them, then it follows that we are not to tempt ourselves to fall in love with them. That's exactly what you're doing by spending all your time with him and avoiding other people — as you put it, "using each other to keep away unwanted girls or boys." One of your excuses is that "we seem to complement each other in that we accept each other as we are" — him as an atheist, you as a Christian. Now how do you figure that the love of God "complements" the rejection of that love? Two different voices joined in a duet of praise can complement each other, but music cannot be complemented by noise.

Fifth misunderstanding: You don't grasp what your own motives are. At one point you remark that you tend to attract men who don't want to get married. The reason you attract this kind of man, I fear, is that men are attracted by women who are

attracted to them. Your inclination is toward damaged men so that you can have someone to fix. Although you can unlearn this inclination, first you have to recognize it, and then you have to offer it to God for repair. Peering between the lines of your letter, I also catch glimpses of a great loneliness, because you also think you can't attract a Christian man. Of course you can, but don't be deceived; God is not mocked. Don't pray, "God, in violation of your command and counsel I am dating an atheist, so please make him a Christian." Rather pray "God, if you intend me for the married life, there must be a Christian man for me, so please lead me to him, and him to me."

So what should you do? *First thing to do:* Stop dating this young man who rejects and blasphemes your Lord. To prevent equivocation about the meaning of a "date," let's put it this way. Stop seeing him one-on-one; stop seeing him often; banish all romantic hopes about him from your mind; and never allow those hopes to return. Choose now between the little heartbreak of breaking it off, and a greater heartbreak later. There is no third way; a successful romance with this fellow is spiritually impossible. When you choose, don't fall for the illusion that heartbreak is somehow romantic. It isn't; it's hell.

Second thing to do: Get back into fellowship with other Christians. That includes both ordinary fun and intellectual challenge. You seem isolated from the body of Christ. Where are your yokemates, your accountability partners, your brothers and sisters in the household of God?

Third thing to do: Learn how to be attracted to the right kind of guy, and seek that kind of guy consciously. Don't be a fixer of damaged men. Mixing romance with counseling is like mixing orange juice with Sterno; both ways you go blind.

God intended you for joy and completion, dear. He intended your friend for that too, but so long as your friend rejects these things, he will seek to prevent those around him from reaching them too, and joining in his ruin isn't love. Seek love where it is found. Christ will help you, and all heaven will join in. We are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses who urge us on.

I'm glad that you wrote.

Grace and peace,
PROFESSOR THEOPHILUS

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