

YOUTH -- DATING AND COURTSHIP

Editorial

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The three most important decisions that people make in life, are usually made during the late teens or during the twenties. These are: 1) Choosing or rejecting the Lord Jesus as personal Saviour and the molding of religious beliefs. 2) The choice of a life work, a daily vocation. 3) The choice of a lifetime marriage companion. The church generally provides teaching concerning religious beliefs. Vocational schools offer help related to one's life work. But our homes often offer very little *specific* guidance concerning the choice of a marriage companion. As a result, many young couples marry, and at the reception they cut the wedding cake - but sometimes they have not given as much thought to what kinds of ingredients are required to establish a lasting marriage relationship, as the baker has given to the ingredients used in producing the cake.

Marriage is not a custom that gradually came to be accepted during early human history. The family, as an institution, was originated by God at the time of the beginning of the human race. Genesis 2:24 says, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave unto his wife, and they shall be one flesh." The highest, purest, and happiest form of human relationship has always been that which God instituted the union of one man and one woman in a marriage commitment for life. When a couple takes vows to live with each other, and to love and cherish each other "until death do us part," they are affirming the truth of Genesis 2:24.

Notice some conclusions drawn from Genesis 2:24:

- 1) *No homosexual marriages* - The instruction is given in the context of a man and a woman (Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve).
- 2) *A lifetime commitment* - The word "cleave" speaks of "a binding glue." Marriage is not for a day, or a week, or several years, or until one partner tires of the other and tells him to "hit the road." Marriage is for a lifetime.
- 3) *Establishes a separate unit* - The word "leave" means "to abandon the former relationship." It does not mean "to dishonor" one's parents, but the newly married couple becomes a separate entity.

In the New Testament, the union of husband and wife is compared to that of the believer and Christ (Ephesians 5:25-30), and in 1 Corinthians 7, we are told that one way to help avoid sexual impurity is for each person to have a spouse, and to have wholesome sexual relationships within the commitment of marriage.

Family life in America is not like it was several decades ago, when the standard was a working father, a stay-at-home mother, and a number of children each of whom was taught respect for parental authority. The "family" has been influenced by cultural forces (urbanization, secularism, humanism) which have brought about tremendous changes in our society during the current century. There are apartment marriages, bigamous liaisons, and various types of loose communal arrangements. Divorce and remarriage is more and more being considered an acceptable way of life. During the time of dating (the period of finding a companion), the couple must resolve to make the marriage work. One of the reasons for the skyrocketing rate in divorce, is the loss of determination to stay married.

It is difficult for the average young person in our country to realize that in some parts of the world, the family of the bride or of the groom arranges the wedding. In India, for example, the bridal couple (in a Muslim wedding) do not see each other until the day of the wedding. Among certain African tribes, the

prospective husband must work for several years in order to get a bride (just like Jacob did many years ago in Mesopotamia). Yet it is God's will that most young persons consider marriage, and certainly it is unwise to marry without first getting to know each other. Therefore we encourage dating and courtship among young people -- however there are some instructions that should be given to those of dating age. Read on.

--H. S. M.

Youth -- Dating and Courtship

By Harold S. Martin

Next to your decision to receive Jesus Christ as your Saviour, and next to your resolution to crown Him the Lord of your life, comes the vital question of whom you shall marry. A wrong choice here can tragically wreck your entire life. On the other hand, the right choice here can promise that your future years will be a bit of heaven on earth.

There is perhaps nothing more normal and more natural than for young people of the opposite sex to be attracted to each other. Boys and girls have a God-given built-in attraction for each other. Girls, for example, should never be ashamed of their desire for a husband and a home and children. Marriage is a natural and God-blessed experience, and therefore we want to think through a program of courtship that will help bring about a happy marriage.

1. THE CHARACTER OF COURTSHIP

When we talk about "courtship," we refer to that period during which a young man or a young woman *finds* a companion for life. Courtship affords two young people an opportunity to study at close range the attitudes and conduct and true worth of their friends. It would certainly be foolish for people to marry, without ever having paid any attention to each other, or without being mutually attracted and happy together. Marriage is God-ordained; it is sacred; it is a lifetime proposition, and the Bible encourages young people to consider marriage. We read in Proverbs 18:22, "Whoso findeth a wife, findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favor of the Lord."

Surely God knows a few things about courtship, for it was God who established the institution of marriage, and it was God who joined the first man and the first woman in holy wedlock. And so we look into His Book for guidance and instruction concerning courtship practices.

2. THE COMMENCEMENT OF COURTSHIP

When we speak of "commencement," we speak of a beginning. The high school commencement at the end of the school year is not called "commencement" because it marks the end of a grammar school training, but because it marks the beginning of new

responsibilities in life. And so when we speak of the commencement of courtship, we want to speak of a few matters that need to be considered at the beginning of courtship.

First, be a consecrated child of God -- not just a church member, but a consecrated Christian. And by "Christian" we mean not merely one who attends church services, or one who treats his neighbors right, but one who has opened the door of his heart to the crucified Christ. A Christian is one who has come to know the miracle of regeneration and has become a new creation in Jesus Christ. Such a person has new aims and new ambitions in life. He knows that his body belongs to Jesus Christ.

Second, pray that God will lead you to the right person for your companion through life. The Bible teaches God's people to pray about life's affairs. We are commanded to pray for our daily bread and for our physical needs. Surely this second greatest step in life (selecting a life companion) should always be accompanied by much praying and waiting before God. Amazing as it may seem God is not so busy managing the affairs of this vast universe that He has no time to be concerned about whom you shall marry; He wants for you the very best in life; He will guide your choice and insure your happiness if you will only ask Him.

3. THE CHOICE OF COURTSHIP

The Bible is crystal clear in teaching that believers are never to even consider marriage with unbelievers under any circumstances whatever. From the very beginning, the Godfearing family of Seth was forbidden to intermix by marriage with the irreligious family of Cain. When God established the law in Israel, care was taken to forbid intermarriage with the heathen nations about them (Deuteronomy 7:5). The New Testament very clearly commands the same thing (2 Corinthians 6:14). Those who seek your hand in marriage may be generous, rich, well-trained, handsome, and industrious - but unless they are children of God by faith in Jesus Christ, you must not make them husbands and wives. Failure to observe this basic law of the Scriptures has caused shipwreck in thousands upon thousands of homes.

When a Christian marries a non-Christian, he transgresses the law of God, and remember that "the way of the transgressor is hard." How will you be able to raise an altar to God in your house if you marry an unbeliever? Will your unbelieving partner urge you to do it? How will your children be brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord? You'll teach them one thing, and their daddy will teach them the opposite. What are you going to do when you feel this opposition day after day? When you go to church services, he'll go to a ball-game. When you read the Bible and engage in prayer, he reads the latest novel and turns on the TV. When you praise the Lord, he indulges in blasphemy. You tell your children one thing; he encourages them to do the opposite. The Bible says, "How can two walk together except they be agreed?"

And then too, it is never sound judgment to choose a mate merely because of a pretty face, or because of curly hair, or because of captivating brown eyes. The facial features of some girls might contradict all the laws of a beauty contest, and yet many of those same

girls have the graces of soul and spirit that will keep them attractive throughout their entire span of life. When a man's love for his wife is based merely on her youth and charm and beauty, that love doesn't last long because those qualities often soon fade away.

There are a lot of things in life far worse than being an old maid (or a bachelor), and one of the things which is worse than being an old maid, is to marry the wrong man. Never enter into the marriage relationship lightly. Always look for characteristics such as cheerfulness, patience, industry, and kindness - qualities that abide the test of time.

4. THE CONFUSIONS OF COURTSHIP

There are many dangers and pitfalls for young people during the years of courtship. The devil stands ready to lead you into sin and to spoil the happiness of your life. God has made the bodies of men and women so that they attract each other. Woven into the physical bodies of both boys and girls are certain natural sex functions. These are necessary for the reproduction of the human race, but sex experience is right only within the bounds of true and honorable marriage. The Bible says, "Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled; but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge" (Hebrews 13:4). Sex indulgence outside the bounds of honorable and true marriage is naked, shameful, wicked sin.

The sin of fornication (illicit sex relations among the unmarried) never occurs between two ordinary decent young people who want to do right, except through the stages of kissing, necking, and petting. Kissing is the first act that paves the way and excites the passions to encourage the next step in the downward plunge that leads eventually to the sin of fornication. Necking (the act of embracing and caressing) is the second step in the path that leads to sex relationships. Petting (handling parts of the body) is the final step that leads to the shameful sin of fornication.

Step by step (if you start) you will push back the barriers of what you permit, until it is almost impossible to avoid the final step of fornication. When people trifle with the human body, aroused passions become stronger than the will, and the bodily passions often take control. Remember that this is as true about girls as it is about boys. It is just as true about good boys as it is about bad boys. The best Christian in all the world (if he is not good enough to keep from necking and petting), may not be good enough to keep from fornication and adultery. And so for the sake of your Creator, for the sake of your health, for the sake of your future, and for the sake of your soul - make a pledge early in life never to practice habits that will lead to illicit sex relations.

5. THE COMRADESHIP OF COURTSHIP

There are wholesome things to do and worthwhile places to go during your courtship days. It is important to always have something definitely planned for each date. It is when young people have nothing to do that they begin habits that arouse evil desires. It is at such times when they begin kissing and necking and cuddling around in dark rooms and

squirming in parked cars, and go far beyond their first intentions and plans. One of the best safeguards to pure noble courtship is a well-planned date.

- a) Attend the services of the church together. There are the Sunday services, Bible studies, hymnsings, the prayer meeting, and other special services of the church.
- b) Read and pray together. Why not agree to read a certain portion of the Bible at the same time each evening during the week? There's a special thrill that goes along with knowing that your Prince Charming is doing exactly the same thing you are doing at exactly the same time, even though you may be separated by many miles of space.
- c) Visit old folks and homes for the aging. It is really encouraging for older people to hear younger persons sing hymns and visit them. The time passes more quickly for the older person and the experience will be a real blessing for both of you also.
- d) Maintain hobbies together. Every young person ought to have a hobby. For girls, there is sewing, textile painting, and gathering collections of various kinds. For boys, there is photography, woodworking, coin collecting, etc. Share each other's interests in these respective hobbies.
- e) Enjoy good music together. Not jazz and rock n' roll and popular music, but everybody likes to sing hymns around a piano. Perhaps it is old-fashioned, but there is something especially wholesome about singing hymns together.

These have been a few things you can do to make your courtship purposeful and constructive. Note that we did not include activities such as dancing, attending the commercial movies, and frequenting the public bathing beaches. These enterprises are geared to appeal to those who walk after the flesh and not after the Spirit of God.

When two people stand before God and promise to cherish each other until death separates them, it is not hard to believe that the angels in heaven hush their songs and grow silent in wonder as they listen to the holy vows, when two hearts and lives are joined in wedlock. Whatever your situation in life, if you have never done it, we urge you to open the door of your heart and let Jesus come in. Surrender completely to His will for your life.

SEVEN CHARACTER QUALITIES THAT SHOULD SURFACE DURING DATING

- 1) Your marriage partner should have a strong faith in God, and should accept the teachings of the Bible as his rules for life.

- 2) Your partner should possess self-confidence - not an air of superiority (thinking he knows it all - but a positive feeling that he is going to meet and work through life's problems.
- 3) He should manifest self-discipline, exercising reasonable control over his words, his temper, and his bodily appetites.
- 4) He should be willing to admit his own mistakes and take responsibility for them - and vow to profit from them.
- 5) He should have mature ideas about how to handle money. He should not be a miser and worship his possessions, neither should he be a prodigal spender. He should have ambition and purpose, showing a sense of responsibility toward work and toward getting things done on time.
- 7) He should reflect a sense of respect for his home and parents and brothers and sisters.

The young person who looks for these qualities in a marriage companion, should work diligently to develop these qualities in his or her own life. If there are areas of great weakness, seek to strengthen them by helping and encouraging each other. Remember that marriage will not solve your courtship problems; it will only *magnify* them.

TEN BIBLE FACTS ABOUT MARRIAGE

- 1) Marriage was instituted by God (Genesis 2:18).
- 2) Marriage is an honorable institution (Hebrews 13:4).
- 3) Marriage is a permanent relationship (Mark 10:9; Romans 7:2).
- 4) A good wife is a prize treasure (Proverbs 31: 10-31).
- 5) A bill of divorcement was written for convenience (Mark 10:4-6).
- 6) Separated married partners are not free to remarry (I Corinthians 7:11).
- 7) A successful marriage requires agape love (Ephesians 5:25).
- 8) Marriage is confined to this life (Matthew 22:30).
- 9) Marriage is not for everyone (1 Corinthians 7:8).
- 10) Marriage is a foretaste of our eternal relationship with God (Revelation 19:9).