

A Biblical Look at Dating

Marriage At An Early Urge!

Nice night in June,
 Stars shine, Big moon,
 In park with girl,
 Heart pound, Head swirl,
 Me say "Love",
 She coo like dove,
 Me smart, me fast,
 Me never let chance pass,
 "Get Hitched?" me say,
 She say, "OK",
 Wedding bells - ring, ring,
 Honeymoon, everything,
 Settle down, married life,
 Happy man, happy wife.

Another night in June,
 Stars shine, Big moon,
 Ain't happy no more,
 Carry baby, walk floor,
 Wife mad, she stew,
 Me mad, stew too,
 Life one big spat,
 Nagging wife, bawling brat,
 Realize at last,
 Me move too fast.

Dating! It is in our culture, and it is here to stay. A message on dating affects everyone. It affects young people in school and approaching it. It affects young adults who are ready to, or possibly already are, dating. It affects parents and grandparents who need to know how to guide and counsel. It affects all of us, who must hold one another accountable, and know what the biblical standards are

But what does the Bible have to say about it? The Bible does not speak about the practice of dating any more than it speaks about the practice of skateboarding – these are practices that are new and were unknown in biblical times. That doesn't mean the Bible has nothing to say to the issue – because the Bible gives us everything we need for life and godliness (**2 Pet 1:3**). The Bible will give us more than enough principles to guide us regarding dating and courtship.

But where do we look? Do we look to Isaac and Rebekah? Abraham decides that now that Isaac has turned 40, it is time for him to get married, so he sends his servant off to their relatives, to bring back a girl who is not a Canaanite. He does so; she arrives on a camel, sees Isaac, veils herself, he takes her, they are married. Simple, right? Yes, simple, but unlikely to happen like that today.

Or do we turn to the book of Ruth, where Ruth is a young widow living with her mother-in-law, and Boaz is an older bachelor who happens to be a distant relative? After getting to know one another Ruth asks Boaz to marry her and to become her

kinsman-redeemer. He agrees; they are married, and become the great grandparents of David the King. Simple, right? It was simple – a lot simpler than the complicated dating relationships we have going today – but again, not something we can mimic exactly.

When we talk about dating, we are talking about a relationship between the sexes. If we are Christians and believe the Bible, then we must be talking about a *relationship between the sexes that aims at marriage*. So from there, we can take many biblical principles related to that and tie them together.

Dating, as the world practices it, is something the Christian should avoid. When I say worldly dating – this is what I mean: First, boy meets girl. By boy and girl I mean male and female of any age, but it seems today that dating begins at about age 11, so the term, ‘boy and girl’, isn’t exactly inaccurate. Boy and girl become increasingly infatuated with each other. Boy and girl decide to ‘go out’ and, at some indefinable point, they become boyfriend and girlfriend. Now, they ‘belong’ to each other, without belonging to each other, and no competitors are allowed. They pledge undying love to one another, and consequently enter into some kind of physical relationship, some meddling with kissing, others simply live together in full-blown immorality. After a time, they are no longer ‘in love’, so they break up and start the whole process again with someone else.

Now I want to give you three Biblical problems with casula dating in that fashion:

1. It undermines Marriage.

The Bible says that marriage is honourable in all and the bed undefiled. Dating, as the world does it, makes marriage seem unnecessary, foolish, or not something to aim for.

Every culture has had some process by which man and woman approach each other for the purpose of marriage. Every culture has also had fornication and immorality where there is no intention of getting married, no desire to make a covenant before God and man, and no desire to take on the responsibilities of marriage and family – but there is a desire to plunder from marriage, its privileges such as companionship, intimacy, friendship and sex.

There have always been these two sides, even in pagan cultures – courtship, and fornication. Now enter the 20th century, and a new phenomenon begins. Now there is a combining of these two ideas in what we have called dating. Dating is a new phenomenon. There was no dating in Israel. There was no dating in Babylon, in Assyria, in Persia, in Greece, in Rome, in India. So we have this new practice occurring which happens to be a kind of merging of both ideas to become something that has the appearance of courtship, but mostly has the end result of fornication.

Dating, on the one hand, looks like it is more than casual immorality – there is the notion of being committed to each other, with a possible, long-term, far in the future, result of marriage; but, on the other hand, when you are dating, you apparently have the right to be as intimate with each other as if you were married. You can pledge your love to one another, you make statements of undying commitment to each other, and consequently you can act as if you were practically married – just not living together

(in some cases), and not taking responsibility to form that covenant before God. In other words, you can have your cake and eat it – you can have all the privileges, and none of the responsibilities. So after having taken the privileges of marriage in this relationship, if you get bored, or decide you are no longer ‘in love’ you just ‘break up’. And then you cry for a while, listen to sad music for a few weeks, till your friends inform you of a new person, and you start the process all over again.

Worse, the cycle of hooking up and breaking up doesn’t end when you get married. If you thought dating was a legitimate way to treat yourself and others, you will find that the same mentality will be with you in marriage – I’m not in love anymore, so we’re going to break up. Only now, the break-up is called divorce, and it tears your life apart.

This whole approach dishonours marriage.

When you have been doing this for a few years – does marriage seem like something you long for? Does it seem like a goal with great reward? Why do you need to get married, if you have already plundered it of all its privileges? Then the only thing you have to look forward to is the responsibilities, and no one relishes those. Unbiblical dating makes your future marriage less secure – you are in a cycle of giving your heart away, breaking up, trying again.

Now think for a moment – what does the Bible tell us that marriage is a picture of? It is a picture of Christ and the church. If worldly dating dishonours marriage – what does it also dishonour? It dishonours Christ; because Christ does not pursue us, and then get bored with us and break up with us. Nor do true believers come into relationship with Christ, and then ‘break up’ with Him halfway and go somewhere else. We do not believe that Christians can lose their salvation. And what picture of Christ’s loyal love, of our chaste, pure love for Him, does worldly dating give?

Biblical dating or courtship keeps the anticipation for marriage, making it a reward instead of a burden; it keeps the commitments until marriage so they will be binding and sincere and true, not hollow and empty.

2) It opens the door to sexual impurity and fornication.

Worldly dating is where two people somehow have license to dip their feet into the waters of the marriage bed without ‘going all the way’. But where do we get this from? Not from the Bible.

1 Cor 7:1 *Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman.*

When do you get the right to touch another person sexually? When they give you that right, correct? Wrong. You get that right when God gives you that right. God gives you that right when you have made a covenant before Him and man in a public wedding ceremony where you vow to remain with each other till death. The fact that you are, as the world puts it, ‘two consenting adults’ is irrelevant to God.

But how can you possibly resist that temptation, if you choose to give your love to another person in a way that belongs in marriage, while yet not being able to consummate your love as God allows? You will be in continual frustration and under enormous pressure. The temptation will, more than likely, overwhelm you, particularly if you give yourself opportunity, such as being alone together in a house or flat.

Moreover, surrendering some of your purity has a snowball effect. If you have already surrendered some of your purity to the last person you dated, there seems to be less to give to the next person you date; so you in fact have to give more to prove to this next person (and to yourself) that they are the one you really love, not that loser you broke up with two months ago.

This is a cycle of self-destruction. With each relationship, you feel more and more defiled. When it is time to get married, there is either incapacitating guilt, or a conscience so seared it can no longer enjoy the gift of the marital bed.

Now let me clear up one misconception that some have held. In **1 Corinthians 6:15-16**, Paul says, *‘Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? Certainly not! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her? For the two, He says, “shall become one flesh.”’*

Now some have misinterpreted that to mean – if someone enters into a physical relationship with someone – then they are married in the sight of God; that because they have become one flesh, they are married. So that has led others to say, ‘There is nothing wrong with two people living together if they are committed to each other. They are as good as married.’ And it causes many young people who enter into premarital sex to say, ‘Well, we are effectively married before God; it is okay for us to live together or to continue to have a physical relationship with one another.’

Now, that is simply untrue. The Bible does not say when someone joins with a harlot that he is married to that harlot; it simply means the person has committed an act of union with the prostitute. Yes, they have become one flesh; they have not entered into a covenant with one another.

The definition of a marriage is not two people having a physical relationship. The definition of a marriage is two people entering into a covenant before God and man. The physical relationship consummates and seals the covenant, it does not create it.

Exodus 22:16-17 *And if a man entice a maid that is not betrothed, and lie with her, he shall surely endow her to be his wife.¹⁷ If her father utterly refuse to give her unto him, he shall pay money according to the dowry of virgins.*

You can tell by this Scripture, that when fornication has taken place – there is an obligation to get married. However, it does not mean they *are* married. The man could still pay the father the bride-price to, as it were, make restitution. Fornication does not create marriage. Fornication creates an obligation.

And the impurity which casual dating fosters produces bonds which are hard to break. To have the sense that part of you has been given to someone, and will remain with them always, even into marriage, is something we want to avoid. Especially as Christians, with the Holy Spirit residing within us – we are to make sure we do not produce bonds which will cause guilt and regret all our lives.

3) It bypasses parental authority

Dating, as the world does it, seldom looks to the parents for guidance or permission. Instead, the young people hook up independently, and when they are sure they like each other, they introduce their steady to their folks. And they are supposed to be mild-mannered and non-interfering, just happy for the kids to have some fun.

Although we are not in a culture of arranged marriages – there is a strong Biblical case for parents being very much involved. The issue is one of authority. The Bible says a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave unto his wife. The idea is that the man will leave the authority of his parents, and forge a new family under his authority. But before he does that, there is to be permission from the previous authorities.

If we are to be Biblical about dating, parents are to be involved.

Here are six principles that will help to guide you regarding Biblical Courtship:

1) You are ready to date when you are ready to marry.

Okay, you hate me for saying that. But it's still true. As Christians we do not want to dishonour marriage, we do not want to be in sexual sin, and we do not want to violate God's chain of authority in our lives. So our understanding of Biblical dating would be a relationship with the goal of marriage.

It is wrong to take the privileges of marriage if you are not in a place to meet the responsibilities.

Is it time for you to embrace the responsibilities of marriage? If you say no, then why would you think it is time for you to embrace the privileges of marriage?

For example **I Timothy 5:8** says, '*But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.*'

Are you ready to provide for the home? If not, then you need to postpone a dating relationship until when you can. Or you need to go ahead and get married and study part-time.

By the way – don't get married if you're not ready to have children. Contraception is not perfect. God can override it. I'm not saying you mustn't get married if you don't plan to have children immediately. I am saying don't get married if you believe you are not ready to be a parent. When you get married you are saying – 'yes, I want to begin a family.'

2) Get the counsel of your parents and spiritual authorities

Turn to **Numbers 30**.

The principle here is one of authority. A girl in her father's house making a vow could have it annulled by her father if he heard it, and so could a wife by her husband. A widowed or divorced woman's vow would stand, because she was not under parental or marital authority.

When a lady is about to step into marriage, she is about to step into a vow. Engagement is not a vow, but it is a promise. Even when she is in the beginning phases of courtship, she is choosing to make a commitment. And the Bible gives her father the right to annul that commitment.

Parents are to be directly involved in the process of getting to know the person you plan to date. The father especially, is to be a protective force. He will get to know the young man, interview him, and spend time with him.

You see some of this in **1 Corinthians 7**, where Paul involves the father as the one who allows his virgin daughter to marry.

This principle applies to both males and females, although it does appear that the man is granted somewhat more independence, while the woman is granted more protection.

Should you marry whomever your parents want you to?

Bear in mind that unsaved parents are very often still decent judges of character, and fathers know males better than you ever will, and mothers know females better than you ever will.

By the way, if your parents don't know this, then help them by seeking their guidance. Ask them to meet this person. Ask them what they think. If your parents are absent or without spiritual wisdom to guide you, seek spiritual counsel as well. Ask your spiritual leaders to help you. Let them partially fill the role of parents, giving you guidance, instruction and warnings where necessary.

3) The first stages of 'dating' are a non-physical, non romantic friendship between the sexes.

Now, when you think about it, God created Eve for Adam because He said, 'It is not good for man to be alone'. Marriage is to provide companionship that reflects Christ. And if you take away children, sex, possessions – and you don't have companionship – you don't have anything.

Your first stop is to see if you can enter into a Biblical friendship with this person? Could you actually spend a lifetime together without your hearts beating out of your chests, but where you are able to discuss things, confide, laugh, disagree, and be quiet together without being uncomfortable? That's friendship. It is this kind of companionship which makes for marriages which last a lifetime. The kind of

feelings that make your stomach bottom out and your heart flutter do not. In fact, who could eat, sleep or work if they did?

In a friendship relationship you can evaluate another person's faith and character. You cannot make an objective, neutral evaluation of another person's faith and character when you have already decided they are 'your boyfriend/girlfriend'. That's like saying, 'I'm going to adopt this child to see if I want to be their parent.' You can evaluate from the standpoint of a brother or sister in Christ.

This message is not about how to choose the sort of person you can marry. But let me just say a few things.

- [First, you cannot, under any circumstances, seek to marry someone who is unsaved.
- [Secondly you should look beyond the physical. **Prov. 11:22** - *As a jewel of gold in a swine's snout, so is a fair woman which is without discretion.*
- [Third evaluate their character and faith. What is their relationship with their family like? How do they respond to authority? Are they lazy? Are they short-tempered? Are they unreliable? Are they stubborn and argumentative? Do they show signs of unbridled selfishness? Are they faithful to the local church? Do they seek to serve in the church? Are they accountable to anyone else in the church? Do they have spiritual goals?

When you approach the matter like this, it removes the pressure. It removes the sexual and emotional pressure that is on you once you have entangled yourself in a romantic relationship.

It removes the pressure of other's expectations. Even in a church, where just because you sit together, people have you married off before we sing the closing hymn, it removes the pressure. People understand – they are in a friendship.

If you don't get married, you have lost nothing. No regrets, no broken hearts. Furthermore, when you restrict your relationship to a friendship level, it goes without saying that you will not indulge in physical love. After all, you don't do that to our friends do you? Physical love is a marriage activity, not a friendship activity.

4) When you have few doubts and mutual desire, make the approach to marriage.

In other words, there is a time when, after seeking guidance from parents and spiritual leaders, after evaluating this person in a friendship and evaluating if you can get along, that you are already near certain that this person is to be your marriage partner. Then you enter a phase where you are approaching engagement and marriage. This period is like a bridge between friendship and engagement. Since your love for one another is now becoming more and more romantic, all the more caution is needed to guard your purity.

Romans 13:14 says, ‘*Make no provision for the flesh.*’ Many Christians who are close to marriage don’t plan to end up in sexual sin, but they also don’t plan not to. In other words, you might not be planning to fall into impurity, but if you are alone together in a house or a flat, then you are definitely not planning not to. You have made yourselves available to temptation. There will obviously be times to be alone together, but you can still be alone in a public place – a mall, a park, a restaurant.

And you ought to protect one another’s testimony as well. **I Thes 5:22** tells us to avoid all appearance of evil. You might want to talk until the early hours of the morning, but remember that if he or she sometimes comes home to their parent’s house at 3 a.m., it isn’t a good testimony.

Make sure you keep accountable to people when you are in this phase – because Satan is waiting to have Christians lose their purity, their testimony and even damage their chances of marriage.

5) Take engagement seriously, and keep it short.

In the Bible betrothal was the equivalent of marriage. When Joseph and Mary were betrothed, for him to break that up was considered a divorce. Now, our modern engagement is not the same as betrothal, so breaking off an engagement is not divorce. But engagement should not be entered into lightly. There are certainly reasons to not go through with a marriage and break off an engagement. Things may be revealed even during the engagement which weren’t seen before. But looking at how many Christians get engaged and then break it off makes one wonder how much they knew of the person before they got engaged. Get engaged when you are absolutely certain. My definition of engagement is – the minimum period of time you need to plan a wedding.

I think a lot of people get engaged as a way of securing this person for themselves. They kind of book the person, and then go on to have these one, two or three year engagements, while they try to plan a decadently extravagant wedding, or while they try to finish school, or perhaps even just get a higher paying job.

I don’t believe that is wise. True, the Jews would be betrothed for up to a year, but the bride and groom did not typically see each other during that time. There was no temptation emotionally or physically.

Don’t get into lengthy engagements. When you are ready to be married, get married. Don’t get engaged and then go on a three year mission trip away from each other.

6) Get premarital counselling from the church.

As a rule, I will not marry someone who has not been through some premarital counselling with me. In fact, premarital counselling is often the final protection against a bad decision. Things come up in premarital counselling which often reveal some critical flaws in another person. There is nothing wrong with seeing that and turning back.

Don't be the kind who does not involve spiritual leaders during the dating phase, during engagement, and then pitch up and ask for a wedding. The church should not be as much focused on weddings, as it is on marriages.

Someone said, 'You can choose your love, but then once you are married, you must love your choice.' You can use friendship to find 'the one'. But after you get married, he or she *is* the one.

Complete