

Courtship THAT GLORIFIES GOD

*A Biblical Approach
to Dating
and Engagement*

JOHN COBLENTZ

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This booklet is a reprint of Chapter 3, Dating and Engagement, in *Christian Family Living*. We are presenting it also in this separate binding for sharing with young people, either personally or in Bible schools, high schools, Bible study groups, etc.

—The Publishers

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Courtship THAT GLORIFIES GOD

A Biblical Approach to Dating and Engagement

Introduction

A number of years ago a minister was teaching a series of evening classes on relationships in a congregational setting. One evening the subject was dating. The minister began by raising the question, “Is dating a good way to get a life companion?” After a few moments of studied silence, a well-respected elderly member who had been married twice said quietly, but with a twinkle in his eye, “Well, it certainly has been enjoyable.”

This man’s off-the-cuff humor reflects what too few of us have been willing to acknowledge—we’ve been enamored enough with the pleasantness of dating that we have not seriously considered putting it to any other test. Perhaps it would be well to begin this chapter with the same

question: Is dating a good method for choosing a companion? There are, after all, other methods. We never read of dating or courtship in the Bible. Oriental custom was for parents to arrange the marriage. The Law added the special feature of a year-long honeymoon, where the husband had no assigned work except to get acquainted with his new wife.

Merely raising the question about dating in this chapter does not mean we will attempt to abolish the practice. The Bible does not prescribe practice in this matter. It does, however, provide principles. And we need to consider the question because surely if we follow Biblical principles in the matter of dating, ***our dating practices will differ markedly from the accepted dating practices of our culture.***

And we might even say further that faithfulness to the Biblical principles may cause us to differ even from dating practices which have been accepted by much of the church.

Some who read this chapter may disagree with some of the practical guidelines and suggestions. Thousands of successful marriages, some may argue, have occurred without doing all that is suggested. Fine. These suggestions are offered, however, as possible ways of honoring timeless principles. Witness a thousand Christian homes today and see how many, disregarding God's principles, are in trouble! As the pressures toward selfishness and sin increase, the more important it becomes to build marriages squarely upon the foundation of God's Word and His timeless principles.

Why Are We Dating?

The question of motives for dating at first may seem obvious and unimportant. But our concept of dating seems to have suffered considerably from not weighing motivation honestly, Scripturally, and rationally. Let's begin with noting what the Bible says.

“And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh” (Genesis 2:18, 24).

“Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the LORD. A prudent wife is from the LORD” (Proverbs 18:22; 19:14).

“There be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake” (Matthew 19:12).

“He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord” (1 Corinthians 7:32).

“For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: that every one of you should know how to possess his vessel [acquire a wife] in sanctification and honour; not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God” (1 Thessalonians 4:3-5). (It must be recognized that there is controversy about the exegetical meaning of “possess his vessel.” But even if it does not strictly mean “acquire a wife,” as some translations suggest it does, we may paraphrase it so for our present subject, and find it is a true statement.)

On the basis of these Scriptures, we will briefly discuss three propositions about motivation for dating.

Proposition 1: Pleasing God must always be our highest motivation.

It is only stating the obvious when we note that many dating young people allow lesser things than God's will to motivate their relationship. Some want companionship above all else. Some are after security. Some are merely following biological urges.

The Christian young man and woman will need to surrender their dating plans to the will of God. This does not primarily mean asking the simple (but important) question, "Is it God's will that I date Sue?" Rather, it means honestly considering dating and marriage in light of God's will for one's life. Can anyone make practical and specific decisions about dating until he has sought God's direction for life? Unfortunately, many dating young people have never seriously asked the following questions: What work do I sense God leading me to? How will my life best contribute to the kingdom of God? Is there preparation which I need in view of God's leading for my life? The answer to these questions will affect not only WHOM I should date, but WHEN I should date, and in some cases even WHETHER I should date at all.

As long as God's will is not given this kind of priority, marriage (and life itself) is certain not to deliver fulfillment according to our expectations. This point can hardly be overstressed. It speaks to many of the hollow marriages of our day, even within the church.

Proposition 2: Marriage is the only proper motivation for dating.

On the surface this may seem obvious and incidental. But it is likely the most overlooked point made here, and perhaps the most controversial as well. Where dating becomes merely a casual event, a pleasant way to spend an evening, a fun thing to do on a weekend away from home, or where dating becomes a way of helping someone out of spiritual, emotional, or social trouble, those involved have serious misconceptions about dating. This is NOT to say that from the first date, a couple must be convinced that they are for each other. It IS to express warning, however, against dating for motivations less than marriage.

Following is a list of four common ways in which this point is ignored:

1. *Dating many partners.* For a young man or a young woman to date numerous partners for present fun, expressly not wanting to “get serious” with anyone yet, erodes the foundation for his or her faithfulness in the future.
2. *Dating one person repeatedly, simply “as friends.”* To date with this “no strings attached” mentality is but to ignore reality. Ties are being formed which, if broken, will inevitably bring hurt.
3. *Dating to help someone with problems.* Major violations of integrity occur when the appeal of companionship is mingled with the working of the Holy Spirit. Commitments made to God under the pull of infatuation are never genuine. What appears to be God-ward progress is so confused with girl-ward or boy-ward