



Courtship and Dating FBH Ethos Classes

A Main Text – 1 Thess 4:1-8

Hands On

Having recently studied the biblical worldview on parenting, the specific principles governing what God expects of fathers and mothers, it makes sense to follow this up with a study on the issue of courtship/dating – preparation for marriage and parenting.

Over the past 30 years there has been much discussion with reference to the practice of what is commonly referred to as 'dating'. Among Christians there has also been much discussion and debate around the matter of what is called *courtship*. Often more heat has produced than light but hopefully our study will shed more light than generated heated debate.

Defining our terms

Does BBC have a particular ethos with reference to this issue? A particular position? I have heard people say, innocently as well as aggressively, 'BBC does not allow its members to date.' Really? That is news to us. It will be helpful first to define what we are talking about:

Dating

We are thinking particularly of the practice which most characterizes romantic relationships in the West of a boy and girl, or young or even older persons pursuing a romantic relationship with each other in which the emphasis is upon being alone together and usually be 'alone' for each other.

The Facebook status reflects that 'so and so' is in a relationship with 'so and so', and this is exclusive. A prevalent idea is that the individuals are 'a couple' and it is expected that they will be romantically involved which might include love letters/notes as well as physical contact intended to send the hormones surging. Often in dating there is the not so subtle message of 'ownership.'

Is there biblical precedent for this? Hardly. In fact much of what is considered 'acceptable' in dating is either discouraged by biblical wisdom or even outright forbidden by biblical precept (1 Thess 4:1-8).

This concept of dating is fraught with dangers, not the least of which is a complete breakdown of what otherwise may have been a good and productive friendship. Other defects are unnecessary emotional heartache and scarring. And of course, the consequences of sexual sin due to a lack of self-control often fostered by a lack of parental oversight.

Courtship

The idea of courtship is that a man and a woman spend time together, intentionally, with a view to perhaps 'tying the knot' in marriage. The difference between this and the common practice of 'dating' is that marriage is very much on the horizon. In courtship the goal is marriage and therefore:

- This discourages, if not completely prohibits, young people from pursuing a romantic relationship. If the individuals are not in a position to soon be married then to 'seclude'

themselves into a 'relationship' is both unwise and spiritually dangerous; it opens the door for all kinds of temptations.

- Since the goal is marriage then the practice of dating in which individuals move like a bee from 'flower to flower' is dealt a major blow. This helps to guard people from being defrauded either emotionally and or physically (1 Thess 4:6).
- The parents are, normally, intentionally involved. In what is commonly known as courtship the individuals will normally spend time under the loving and careful and watchful eye of the parents (assuming here that the parents are instructed and wise parents). But sadly this is often where things go 'pear shaped.' It is vital that the parents take responsibility for the romantic pursuits of their children. This brings us to the conclusion that when it comes to 'courtship and dating' that the parents be *hands on*.

It should be noted that God prescribed the death penalty under the old covenant for sexual sin. In the case of a woman who marries, claiming to be a virgin and yet proven to be unchaste, then she is to be stoned in front of her '*father's house*' (Deuteronomy 22:13-21). Why? Because as her father he is responsible to guard her virginity.

If fathers of daughters would keep this in mind then they would be very careful about her 'romantic pursuits.'

This is a huge subject. But fundamentally it comes down to father's having a proper and loving and caring relationship with their children.

Fathers of sons are to teach them (the book of Proverbs emphasizes this over and over; note especially chapters 5-7, in the context of sexual purity.)

Fathers of daughters are to protect them.

We've all seen those stupid email posts about 'If you want to date my daughter' then don't come to the house and hoot in the driveway, make sure your underwear is not showing, don't have earrings, etc. etc. The truth is, if your daughter would even entertain the thought of 'going out' with such a fool, then you have failed already to protect your daughter.

Though it may seem old fashioned, it is still right that a young man should seek a father's permission to pursue a relationship with his daughter. Fathers of sons should teach them such respectful consideration.

Note a negative example in Genesis 34 concerning the rape of Dinah and Jacob's irresponsible parenting – seemingly from start to finish.

Arranged marriages?

But what about arranged marriages? Is this the more *biblical* approach?

As has been argued, parents being 'hands on' means that they will be *very* involved. And in normal situations, two people should not get married apart from parental approval. But does this require that the marriage be 'arranged'?

Some would argue that it does. And in one sense this is true. If parents are 'hands on' as they should be then they will be arranging a lot of things. Nevertheless, the idea that parents will pick out their child's spouse is not necessarily more biblical than other ways in which a man and a woman will 'find' each other and then marry.

There are examples of 'arranged' marriages in Scripture, such as Isaac and Rebekah (Gen 24). Nevertheless the parents (at least of Isaac) were not involved except for giving certain parameters, (not a Canaanite and only from Abraham's kin). Concerning Jacob and Rachel, it appears that this was motivated initially by Jacob's 'love at first sight' (Gen 29).

The point is that parents are to 'hands on'. If they are then they will be a means in the Hands of God for *His* arrangement of the marriage. By paying heed to Scripture the parents will be used of God to ensure that the marriage that their child enters into will be one in accordance with God's revealed will. The marriage will then be one made in heaven rather than resembling one made in hell.

Summary:

The terminology is not all that important. Whether you call it 'courtship', 'dating' or whatever is not the issue. What is non-negotiable is that parents must be 'hands on' in the process.

Hands Off

An important issue related to this is the recognition of the temptation to sexual sin. Whether one is 'courting' or 'dating', temptation assaults a man and woman who are attracted to each other.

The KJV reads, '*It is good for a man not to touch a woman*' (1 Cor 7:1). The translation is a bit erroneous for the word 'touch' conveys 'holding in possession' such as in sexual intercourse. The following verses make this clear. Nevertheless, if a man literally does not 'touch a woman' then it is impossible to commit fornication with her.

Though the Bible does not specifically prohibit physical contact between a man and a woman who are not yet married, nevertheless if the two are pursuing marriage in a 'courting' relationship, then 'hands off' is a wise approach.

In fact, fathers should do the righteous thing and teach their sons this principle of 'hands off'. Girls are not the property of their suitor. Only *marriage* provides such *mutual* ownership (1 Cor 7:3-4). And fathers of daughters should probably make sure that if the 'suitor' doesn't keep his hands off then he may in fact lose his hands!!

The modern nonsense of those 'courting' or 'dating' literally holding one another physically ('because after all, we 'like and love' one another'), as though they 'possess' one another should be knocked for a six. Ask any pastor about the heartache of dealing with young people (and not always so young) who thought that they could control themselves yet who ended up committing sexual sin. Hands off is a good practice.

One more observation. Whether you agree with this point or not. Keep your hands off of your 'girlfriend' 'boyfriend' or even fiancé when you gather with the saints. This fits nicely into the prescription for the church to gather in modesty (1 Tim 2) as well as being decent and orderly (1 Cor 14) in corporate worship.

Parents, take responsibility. Church members, be concerned enough to intervene if and when necessary. Provide help before unnecessary harm occurs.

Hold Off

As mentioned, unless the goal is marriage, then people should hold off on devoting one's focus on a single relationship. And this means that parents should probably discourage their young people from becoming 'single-minded' about another person of the opposite sex. Often times such pursuits are evidence the young person (especially young ladies) are seeking to fill an insecurity in their lives.

Rather, we as a church should encourage friendships and these in a group setting. If two people come to church and then isolate themselves from others as they spend their time 'gazing into one another's eyes', then they should stop it. Connecting with the Body is the goal, not obsessed with another 'body.'

Hold On

Parents should hold on to their children and children should hold on to their emotions, as well as to their virginity. If we fail in the matter of courtship and dating then we may fall, and fall hard; very hard.

Some of the principles and practices addressed here will prove helpfully constructive if we hold on to them.

As members of BBC we should do so. We should help one another to avoid defrauding another sexually, and or emotionally. Following biblical principles will go a long way towards this.

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