

COURTSHIP – A BIBLICAL FRAMEWORK



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Goals For Today

1. Give clarity for why there seems to be so much confusion on the topic of courtship
2. Help see why the secular dating model is something that cannot just be tweaked, but rather has to be blown up and replaced with a biblical approach.
3. Show the relationships we see in the Bible between those of the opposite gender and where courtship fits into those. I hope this will provide you with the biblical principles and a framework to be able to more clearly begin to filter the specifics of courtship through.

How Is This Relevant To You?

As members of this Body, we affirm Biblical Courtship as a part of our Distinctives.

Parents – you need to begin training your children from a very early age to have a biblical worldview in all areas of life, including marriage and the process leading up to it.

Singles – due to the fallen world we live in, many of you (like many of us that are now married) didn't grow up thinking about these things, so you have a responsibility to train and equip yourselves in this area. Leadership and mature brothers and sisters in the church should come along side you.

Couples who don't have children or children are out of the home – you need to know how to help your children and grand-children reform their lives in this area as opportunities to speak truth are presented. You can also be a great resource for the singles, both for counsel and to provide a place where couples in the courtship process might be able to spend time together.

What I Am NOT Doing

I am **NOT trying to create an extra-biblical list of rules that everyone has to follow.**

Why This Topic Is So Important

Ephesians 5:31-32 *"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.*

Marriage is a relationship that is supposed to illustrate for the world the relationship between Christ and the church.

If the illustration that we are showing them is marred, it creates a wrong view of the gospel and does not glorify God.

The glory of God is at stake here. Our preparation and careful thinking through these things should reflect the significance of that truth.

In our culture and even in most evangelical circles we approach the steps leading up to marriage so flippantly.

We also assume because we can't find the word "courtship" or "dating" in a concordance, that God's Word has nothing to say about this matter and therefore all aspects of the pre-marriage relationship fall into the area of Christian liberty.

We begin with dating, which is an invention of modern man and a counterfeit of Satan of what the biblical pre-engagement relationship should look like, as our starting point, rather than God's Word.

Why all the Confusion?

We have been indoctrinated with thoughts like these:

- True love conquers all and will triumph in the end
- Love will find a way
- It was love at first sight
- We were meant for each other
- I've never known love like this before
- All we need is love

Courtship becomes just a more moral or physically pure form of dating.

We cannot allow our experiences to define how we go about things.

Courtship is synonymous with engagement.

Grace Life Distinctive

Biblical Courtship – We believe that dating as it is practiced in our contemporary culture is an unbiblical practice that has led to untold misery among the people of God. Although the Scriptures do not specifically address courtship in every aspect, it does give us countless sound principles by which our young men and women may guide their relationships with the opposite gender and discover God’s will for marriage.

My Working Definitions:

Dating – The unbiblical approach to the male/female relationship where the blessings of engagement and marriage are enjoyed outside of the context of engagement and marriage, and the Bible and God’s glory are not primary. Dating may or may not have the intention of engagement and marriage, but is primarily focused on satisfying fleshly desires. The parents may or may not have any involvement.

Biblical Courtship – Taking a biblical approach to the male/female relationship where the blessings of engagement and marriage are reserved for engagement and marriage, the Bible is the guide, obedience is the focus, and our Christ-likeness and God’s glory are the goal. **Courtship has the intention of determining if it is God’s will for two people to be married.** The parents – primarily fathers (or in the case where Christian fathers are absent, mothers or other biblical authority) of the couple exercise loving oversight.

Modern Day Definitions

Dictionary.com:

- *Date - social appointment, engagement, or occasion arranged beforehand with another person: to go out on a date on Saturday night.*
- *Courtship - the wooing of one person by another. the period during which such wooing takes place.*
- *Woo - to seek the favor, affection, or love of, especially with a view to marriage. Synonyms: court, pursue, chase.*

Wikipedia:

- *Dating is a form of courtship consisting of social activities done by two people with the aim of each assessing the other's suitability as a partner in an intimate relationship or as a spouse.*

Focus in modern courtship is affection and emotion, and is even being intermingled with the term dating.

Definitions From Webster's 1828 Dictionary:

Date - That addition to a writing which specifies the year, month and day when it was given or executed.

Courtship - The act of wooing in love; solicitation of a woman to marriage.

What this helps us see:

Dating is a modern invention

Why there is so much confusion on “courtship”? Partly because we giving a different definition to a word than it has had in our culture for over 200 years.

What Do You Think?

A few things to consider regarding appropriateness in the pre-engagement relationship. Ask yourself, would you view these things as OK during this time?

- Being alone in a car together?
- Writing love letters?
- Kissing on the cheek?
- Kissing on the lips?
- Having even more intimate physical contact?
- Living together?

Not so much about the list, but to get you to think about whatever answers you gave, were they based upon biblical principles found in God's Word, or upon your own view of what is right and wrong? Or your own experience? Or what is "normal" in our culture?

What happens if not based upon God's Word? You will just do what I did.

What will happen when pressure comes?

1 John 2:16 *For all that is in the world--the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions--is not from the Father but is from the world.*

If the world (as represented by our unbelieving family members and friends for example) openly embraces our view of the pre-marriage relationship, that should be a major red flag that maybe we don't have things quite right.

Must search the Scripture and Obey.

You will not make lasting change based upon someone else's convictions.

So How Do We Fix The Confusion?

2 Tim 3:16-17 *All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.*

2 Peter 1:3-4 *His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness...having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.*

“Every good work” and “all things that pertain to life and godliness” would certainly include marriage and the pre-marriage relationship.

We must search the Scriptures.

Presuppositions:

1. The primary focus for everything we do should be the glory of God (**1 Corinthians 10:31** *So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God*).
2. Scripture is sufficient to show us the particulars or principles of how to glorify God within the individual circumstances in our lives. **2 Tim 3:16-17** *All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work..*
3. We are not talking about some kind of method where you get 5 or 7 steps that in the end spits out a marriage. It is NOT creating an extra-biblical list of rules that everyone has to follow in this area. We are talking about mining the Scriptures for principles to apply, and having our goal be to walk in obedience to what we find, even if it runs contrary to our own experience, thoughts or preferences, and then trusting God with the results.

Our focus is obedience to the Word of God for the Glory of God.

Remember, marriage between two Christians is a picture of Christ and His Church, the seriousness with which we approach the pre-marriage relationship should show that.

Since we are talking about principles and not a list, this will look differently in each of our individual circumstances.

But, particulars are important.

Authority (usually fathers) must lead. If you sit by silently and passively you ARE in fact acting. By your lack of action, you are actually putting your stamp of approval on whatever methods your son or daughter has adopted.

Numbers 30:3-5 *"If a woman vows a vow to the LORD and binds herself by a pledge, while within her father's house in her youth, and her father hears of her vow and of her pledge by which she has bound herself and says nothing to her, then all her vows shall stand, and every pledge by which she has bound herself shall stand. But if her father opposes her on the day that he hears of it, no vow of hers, no pledge by which she has bound herself shall stand. And the LORD will forgive her, because her father opposed her."*

That is also not to say that any of us will do this perfectly, but we must do it carefully:

Ephesians 5:15-17 *Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.*

Also, it means we have to be prepared to be long-suffering with each other:

– **2 Timothy 4:2** *preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience...*

What about families who have never heard of “courtship”?

We need both principles and specific application, and the reality is that if we are fulfilling our duties as Christian husbands/wives/fathers/mothers many of the specific applications become much easier and much more obvious.

What that also means, is that as a Body, as we begin to have to work through these things in practice, greater clarity will come. By God’s grace what that will mean is that the next generation will have much greater clarity on how to apply these things than we do, and we will have greater clarity in a few years than we do now.

As we talk of the next generation, this is just another reminder of how we have to guard against this becoming a list of rules that will result in our children or grandchildren trying to follow these things, but being nothing but Pharisees. We must keep this, as well as all things in our life centered around the gospel and the glory of God.

Marriage, Engagement & Relationships Outside Of Marriage

In the Bible we see three different types of relationships with the opposite gender:

- Marriage
- Engagement/Betrothal
- Relationships outside of Marriage and Engagement

Characteristics Of Marriage

1. To illustrate the relationship between Christ and His Church. **Ephesians 5:32** *This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.*
2. It is a covenant than can only be ended by death or divorce. **Romans 7:2** *For a married woman is bound by law to her husband while he lives, but if her husband dies she is released from the law of marriage.* **Matthew 5:32** *But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.*
3. Headship of the wife has been transferred from the father to the husband. **Genesis 2:24** *Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.*

4. Responsibility to materially provide for the wife has passed from the father to the husband. **Genesis 2:24**
5. Having and raising godly children (not just procreation).
Malachi 2:15 *Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth.*
Ephesians 6:4 *Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord*

Characteristics Of Engagement/Betrothal

(I think from these you will see that even our modern concept of engagement needs some significant reforming)

1. It is a covenant (or a covenant to covenant), that can only be ended by death or divorce. **Matthew 1:18-19** *Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.*
2. Headship has not been transferred from the father to the young man. **Genesis 2:24**
3. Responsibility to materially provide for the young woman has not yet passed from the father to the young man (as long as the young woman is still in her father's household). **Genesis 2:24,**

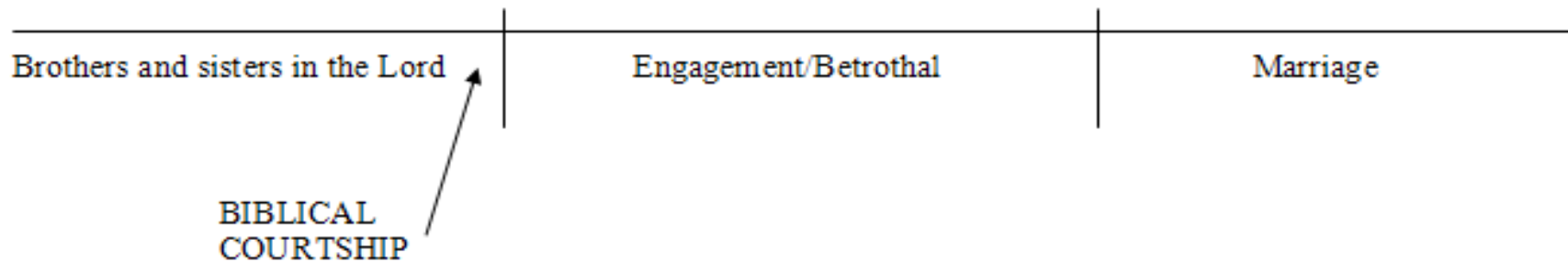
4. The marriage has not been physically consummated.
Hebrews 13:4 *Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.*

Notice marriage and betrothal are covenants than can only be ended upon death or divorce, and that provides protection to the parties involved. Without that protection there should be no risks taken (emotionally, physically and spiritually speaking).

Characteristics of our Relationships Outside of Marriage

1. Like brothers and sisters in the Lord, in all purity. **1 Timothy 5:1** *Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity.*
2. Moral and pure. **Ephesians 5:3** *But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints.*

Where Does Courtship Fit In?



Most of us would affirm this brother/sister in the Lord type relationship, have we thought through the implications of what that means?

Thinking through this is critical and I think will help provide clarity to a great number of questions about what is appropriate during this pre-engagement relationship we are calling “biblical courtship”.

Some Practical Ways To Help Determine If Your Behavior Is Like That Of A Brother Or Sister In The Lord

So think about your interaction or your kids interaction with those of the opposite gender during the time prior to engagement:

1. Do you interact with that person differently than other people (single or married) of the same gender?
2. If someone sees you together, do they automatically assume you are “a couple”?
3. Could another man (or woman), relate to that person in the same way you do?
4. Would you speak with, touch, or show affection to one of the older men or women in the church (or their spouse) in the same way you do that person? If not, why not? Wouldn't your relationship be categorized in the same period of brother/sister in Christ?
5. Have you lost the ability to look at the relationship objectively? What questions 1-4 will help you see that you haven't guarded your feelings and emotions and what you allow, and that will result in is a loss of objectivity.

SUMMARY OF SECULAR DATING VS. BIBLICAL COURTSHIP

	DATING	BIBLICAL COURTSHIP
Authority	Human reason, experience and culture	Bible
Primary Focus	Satisfying fleshly desires	Determining God's will
Oversight	Usually little or none. Involvement from parents is usually only a perfunctory blessing of the relationship after there is already great emotional attachment.	Loving oversight by parents (primarily fathers), or biblical authority is welcomed, respected and honored.
Blessings of Engagement/Marriage	Participated in extensively	Reserved for engagement/marriage

	DATING	BIBLICAL COURTSHIP
How you Present Yourself	Put your best foot forward and not reveal the real you, because you “like” this person and want them to “like” you.	Attempt to reveal as much about yourself as possible, recognizing that it is better to have everyone involved have more information rather than less.
When are Biblical Qualifications and Suitability of the Couple Examined?	After emotional attachment and attraction acted upon, such that objectivity is lost.	Before emotional attachment and attraction acted upon, such that objectivity is maintained.
Self & Lust vs. Others & Love	Self – lust seeks your own fleshly desires, how the relationship meets your needs and makes you feel. Asks: How far can I go and not sin?	Other person – love seeks the best for the other person. You want the best for the other person, even if that means not marrying you. You seek to guard the heart of the other person. Asks: How can I glorify God in this relationship?
Priorities	Only getting to know each other on a surface level, with physical and romantic attraction being the priority	Data gathering mission with the goal of seeking the Lord’s will and His glory.

	DATING	BIBLICAL COURTSHIP
Authority over the Young Woman	Because of emotional connection, young woman often works her life around young man and bases important decisions on her relationship with him	Because of emotions being guarded, young woman remains under authority and submission of her father
Moral Purity	Some degree of romantic involvement (not just physical) is accepted or even expected. This causes any sort of objectivity about the relationship and the other person to be lost, not to mention the violating the command of moral purity.	Relationship remains brother/sister in Christ
View of Temptation	Constantly tempting oneself to be tempted	Attempting to set up biblical and wise boundaries to guard against temptation

Courtship Is Not Engagement

Courtship is not a covenant or commitment, but rather should be thought of as more of a screening process and fact gathering mission that can be ended at any time, for any reason, by any of the parties involved without large emotional consequences.

Becoming emotionally involved must be carefully guarded against (young man, young woman and parents alike), otherwise your emotions can easily override reason and the objective seeking of God's will. This is not to say that there will not be attraction and secret affection, they are just guarded against and not acted upon (self discipline).

What do Most Dating and “Courtships” Look Like?

- The first priority is to make sure there is some kind of emotion and romance.
- After some period of time – maybe even years, the couple begins to look to see if there are actually qualifications for marriage and gets deeper into discussions such as their faith, particulars of marriage, children, etc.
- Since they have waited to walk through those things until after there is great emotional attachment, emotions can and often do totally blind the young people and often the parents from any sort of objectivity at that point. We end up with two young people that have committed a year or two or more to each other, and even though there might be great concerns biblically speaking, they don't want to think they “wasted” that time together, so they continue the relationship and maybe delay marriage. Or in many cases, maybe they go ahead with marriage despite the concern (and is there any wonder why the divorce rate among professing Christians is no different from the world).

Amazing – God’s Way Actually Makes Sense!

How much better to actually get the qualification process and discernment of like-mindedness done prior to any emotional attachment. That is not to say that there will not be emotions and attraction, but they are guarded against being expressed and acted upon. That way if the relationship should not end in marriage because one or both young people are not qualified, one does not even show fruit of conversion, or there are major concerns in like-mindedness, no emotional connection is ever even established and thus emotional damage is greatly limited if not eliminated.

It seems like in the typical dating and “courtship” relationships we have truly put the cart before the horse, and even from a perspective of logic and reason the way we do things doesn’t make sense.

Summary and Practical Applications

1. Fathers, if you now see that you have not been teaching and leading biblically in these things, repent and confess to your family. **James 5:16** *Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.*
2. The same would go for anyone in a relationship that now sees they have not done things biblically. **Revelation 3:19** *Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent.* If things need to be walked back that will surely be a difficult process requiring much prayer and counsel, but must be done if you see biblically that you are at a place you should not be.
3. For those of us who are single and may not have had or do not have parental oversight and guidance, the humble recognition that you should guard against being persuaded by emotions and feelings should lead you to seek oversight for something as serious as marriage and the process leading up to it. This is where the church as a community can come alongside one or both people to help biblically and objectively walk through the process. **Hebrews 10:24** *And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works,*

4. The counsel that we give others should be carefully weighed in light of the magnitude of marriage and based upon biblical truth and not our own experience or wisdom.
5. Until you are engaged, your relationship should look like brothers and sisters in the Lord. If you could not engage in the same particular behavior with a married brother/sister, it is likely outside the realm of what you should be engaging in with anyone else.
6. If you are not willing to covenant with each other through wedding vows, you cannot reach in and pull the blessings of marriage into your relationship.
7. Courtship should be primarily viewed as a data-gathering mission – to determine if it is God’s will for two people to be married. Again, this is not to say that there are no considerations of attraction and secret affection, but these cannot guide the process. Think about this - if a man or woman is not biblically qualified, or if there are other reasons to believe it is not God’s will, the intensity of attraction and connectivity of personalities is meaningless, and why are we even going down the road of some kind of relationship in the first place.

8. During courtship, emotional and romantic involvement and attachment should be guarded against. These things (non-physical) can be expressed during the time of engagement.
9. You cannot do things contrary to God's revealed will (as shown in His Word) and expect Him to bless it (Joshua 7). The pattern is that God gives grace as we walk in obedience.
10. **Matthew 11:30** *For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."* **1 Peter 2:16** *Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God.* If hearing these things feels like a heavy yoke or burden upon you, you have misunderstood the core of this message. These principles should provide you the framework and guidance that actually help you to live in the freedom of Christ as servants of God.

Ephesians 5:31-32 *"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.*

- The unity and purity of this Body and the glory of God are at stake.

Hebrews 3:12-13 *Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.*

- We must be faithful in seeking to encourage and sharpen each other in reforming our lives in this and many other areas. We often don't see how far we have strayed from biblical principles until we take the time to humbly examine ourselves and open ourselves up to other believers to help expose any blind spots we may have.