

The Christian Home (2): The Pursuit of Marriage

Marriage was created by God for His glory and man's good. It was given to man in paradise, and should ordinarily be the pursuit of every man.

I. The Pursuit of Marriage

1. *Singleness*. (1) Singleness is the result of the fall. This doesn't mean it's sinful, but it's the result of sin. Without man's fall into sin, there would have been no single people. "And the LORD God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him"" (Gen.2:18). It was not good for Adam to be alone in paradise. Of the many reasons Adam needed "a helper comparable to him," was to fulfill his creation mandate. "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen.1:28). Thus, singleness and bareness are both the result of the fall, and would not have existed in paradise. "If Adam had persisted in the state of innocence, this intimate relationship of husband and wife would have been most delightful. The very work of procreation also would have been most sacred and would have been held in esteem" (Luther).¹ "It is plain that God in His Word has set forth marriage as the normal state for adults. God did not intend for Adam to remain a single person when He placed him in the garden" (Adams).²

(2) Singleness is a gift from God. People are single for three reasons: they are widowed, they are waiting (looking), and they are gifted. With respect to the first two, God will be their portion as they wait on Him. These should not be shamed, despised, or viewed as second-rate citizens of the kingdom. They form a very important part of the church. With respect to the third, God has uniquely gifted them for singleness. "There are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He who is able to accept it, let him accept it" (Matt.19:12). "For I wish that all men were even as I myself (single). But each one has his own gift from God, one in this manner and another in that" (1Cor.7:7). Singleness is a gift that God gives to some people. "Thus, singleness is not a curse but a blessing, a blessing for which some are uniquely equipped and to which they are called supernaturally" (Baucham).³ "It is good for man not to touch a woman" (1Cor.7:1). "That is, it is good for a man not to engage in those practices that belong to the marriage relationship. In other words, it is good not to marry" (Gritters).⁴

Thus, singleness as a gift from God, comes with self-control and contentment. First, self-control. Those gifted with singleness, are given grace to remain pure. "The essential gift required for the single life is the gift of self-control, sexual self-control. If one does not have this gift, he or she must not remain single, but must seek to be married" (Gritters).⁵ "But I say to the unmarried and to the widows: It is good for them if they remain even as I am; but if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion" (1Cor.7:8-9). "They are called to marry who have not the gift of celibacy, and cannot by the use of lawful means attain it" (Baxter).⁶ Second, contentment. Those gifted with singleness, are content with service for the Lord. "There is a difference between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman cares about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit. But she who is married, cares about the things of the world—how she may please her husband" (1Cor.7:34). Those with the gift of singleness, "serve the Lord without distraction" (1Cor.7:35). "The single life enables a person to serve the Lord to a greater degree than a married person can (1Cor.7:32-34). Thus, whoever chooses to remain single, must do so

¹ Martin Luther, *Works*, 1:117

² Jay Adams, *Christian Living in the Home*, 59

³ Voddie Baucham, *What He Must Be*, 39

⁴ Barry Gritters, *The Family*, 9

⁵ Barry Gritters, *The Family*, 9

⁶ Richard Baxter, *A Christian Directory*, 395

because he/she desires to *serve God* in single life" (Gritters).⁷ "If it be clear that in a married state you have better advantages for the service of God and doing good to others, than you can have in a single state of life, then it is undoubtedly your duty to marry" (Baxter).⁸

2. *The role of parents.* "From Abraham's search for Isaac's mate in Genesis 24 to Paul's instructions to father of virgin daughters in 1Corinthians 7, we see paternal involvement in marriage" (Baucham).⁹

"Parents must endeavor that their children may timely and conveniently be married" (Swinnock).¹⁰ "In the affair of marriage, children should be guided by the advice of parents or guardians. Parents have no right to select for you, nor ought you to select for yourself, without consulting with them" (James).¹¹ "God has further laid a responsibility upon parents to provide marriages for their children" (Gouge).¹² "Take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, so that they may bear sons and daughters" (Jer.29:6). In both cases, taking wives for sons and giving daughters to husbands, parents are to be active. They play an active role in finding suitable spouses for their sons and daughters. William Gouge gave two cautions for parents in providing marriages for their children: first, that the match which they provide be fitting. "The match provided must not be of family too closely related, of a contrary religion, of too unequal an age, of too great a difference in standard of living." Second, though the match may seem good in the parent's eye, yet he may not force his child to accept it. "Parents may use all kinds of lawful means to move their children to yield to that which they see good for them, but if they cannot move them to yield, they must leave the matter to God and not force their children against their wills."¹³

Some believe that parental involvement in marriage is cultural (Jewish) and not Biblical and necessary. David Merck in his book *Maintaining Dating Purity*, gave six reasons why this is wrong: first, because God did this in the Garden with the first marriage when the enduring creation ordinance of marriage was established (Gen.2:22); second, because this was a universal practice before the nation of Israel and the OC existed (Gen.24:50-51; 29:18-21, 23, 26-28; 34:8, 9, 12, 14-17; 38:14, 26; Ex.2:21; Matt.24:38 [cf. Lk.17:27]); third, because this continued to be the practice in surrounding Gentile nations after Israel became a nation (Duet.7:3; Judg.3:5-6; 14:20; 15:6; Ezra 9:12; Neh.10:30; 13:23-25); fourth, because this was the practice sanctioned by example under the NC in the Gentile city of Corinth. "He who gives his virgin in marriage does well, but he who does not give her in marriage does better" (1Cor.7:38); fifth, because Jesus indicated that giving in marriage was a practice that would continue until the end of the age (Lk.20:34-35); sixth, because such an oversight of the marriage of women is a proper extension of God's order of male headship or authority over women in the family sphere (Num.30:1-9; 1Cor.11:3).¹⁴

Another general duty of parents is the bestowing of their children. This bestowing is when they, knowing their children fit for marriage, not to have the gift of singleness, do use their best endeavor to provide matches for them in time, or, at least, do advise them thereunto.¹⁵

⁷ Barry Gritters, *The Family*, 9-10

⁸ Richard Baxter, *A Christian Directory*, 395

⁹ Voddie Baucham, *What He Must Be*, 51

¹⁰ George Swinnock, *Works*, 1:423

¹¹ John Angell James, *A Help to Domestic Happiness*, 84

¹² William Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 3:152

¹³ William Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 3:153-154

¹⁴ David Merck, *Maintaining Dating Purity*, 26

¹⁵ William Perkins, *Works*, 10:179

In addition to searching for possible spouses and giving advice, parents must exemplify character traits necessary in potential spouses. Submissive wives and loving husbands, provide examples of what children should be and pursue. What Voddie Baucham said of husbands is also true of wives: "It will be difficult for our daughters to pursue something they've never seen. Thus, it's incumbent on us as fathers to take great care in the exercise of our roles."¹⁶ There's fewer compliments more meaningful and beautiful than a daughter's testimony that she wants to be like her mother and one day marry a man like her father.

3. *Specific steps in pursuing a spouse.* What must those do who lack the gift of singleness and thus desire to marry? Three things: pray, prepare, and pursue. (1) Pray. As marriage is a gift from God, so individual spouses are gifts from God. "He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor from the LORD" (Prov.18:22). "Houses and riches are an inheritance from fathers, but a prudent wife is from the LORD" (Prov.19:14). As prayer must be accompanied by actions (as we shall see under the next point), it must also be accompanied by contentment. "Delight yourself also in the LORD, and He shall give you the desires of your heart" (Ps.37:4). The LORD knows our desires and needs, and we can trust Him.

The Christian single needs to believe their heavenly Father does love and care for them as a Christian single, and does only good to them including sometimes withholding the gift of a much-desired husband or wife, at least for a season (Ps.84:11-12; Rom.8:28). There needs to be humble submission to the will of our sovereign God no matter what it may be (1Pet.5:5-6).¹⁷

(2) Prepare. Those who desire to wed, must prepare themselves spiritually, practically, and vocationally. (a) Spiritually. To marry a mature and healthy Christian, you must be a mature and healthy Christian.

(b) Practically. With respect to women, "develop your abilities to do domestic duties to the full. Learn to cook and sew, and spend time with children" (Adams).¹⁸ Paul exhorted Titus to teach "older women to train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, workers at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands" (Tit.2:3-5), and he told Timothy, "I desire that younger widows marry, bear children, and manage the house" (1Tim.5:14). Thus, if young women who are married must attend to the cares of the home, then young women who desire marriage should learn how to care for the home.

With respect to men, they must cultivate graces and gifts necessary for a loving and wise leader. In his book *What He Must Be*, Voddie Baucham suggested young men must strive to be four things:¹⁹ first, he must be a protector. "In order for a man to be a protector, he must possess—among other things—personal strength, wisdom, and courage." Second, he must be a provider. Fathers must protect their daughters from lazy men. "For a father to walk his daughter down the aisle and give her away to a man who lacks a work ethic should be unthinkable. Moreover, if we raise our daughters with a clear understanding of biblical manhood, such a man should be repulsive to them." Third, he must be a prophet. "A prophet is one who instructs his people in God's truth. This is one of the cardinal roles of a husband. God has given husbands the responsibility of washing their wives in the water of the Word, diligently teaching the Law to their children, and bringing them up in *the discipline and instruction of the Lord*." Four, he must be a priest. "A priest is an intercessor who represents his peo-

¹⁶ Voddie Baucham, *What He Must Be*, 102

¹⁷ David Merck, *Maintaining Dating Purity*, 5

¹⁸ Jay Adams, *Christian Living in the Home*, 62

¹⁹ Voddie Baucham, *What He Must Be*, 139-157

ple before God. A man has the responsibility of being a priest in his home and praying for his family. Thus, any potential suitor must be a man of prayer."

(c) Vocationally. "Prepare your outside work, make it fit for yourself in the field; and afterward build your house" (Prov.24:27). This has a specific application for young men (women may learn a vocational trade that would prove domestically helpful). They must first prepare their field and then build their house. "The young man is taught to cultivate his land before he has to bear the burdens of a family" (Barnes).²⁰ "Marriage and having children is something to be entered on when full preparation has been made" (Brady).²¹

(3) Pursue. "It is not enough to seek a spouse by prayer; we must also prayerfully seek a spouse" (Beeke).²² While a young woman can and should pursue a husband (as she makes herself available and heeds the direction and counsel of her parents), a young man must take the initiative. "He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor from the LORD" (Prov.18:22). A wife must be found. Thus, while a young man should welcome his parent's involvement and counsel, he must pursue a wife. This can be illustrated in Christ, who left His Father's House in search of His Bride. He was far from being passive, but was very active.

William Perkins provided three marks of a suitable match: first, parity or equality in regard of Christian religion. "Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness" (2Cor.6:14). "Marry not a swine for a golden trough; nor an ugly soul for a comely body" (Baxter).²³ But simply being a Christian is not enough. There must be theological harmony. "Can two walk together, unless they are agreed" (Amos 3:3)? A Reformed lady, who rejoices in the sovereignty of God, could hardly submit to an Arminian husband. Second, parity or equality in regard of age and condition. This will endure harmony with regards to practical issues. Entertainment, child-rearing, education, specific domestic duties, and apparel are only a few subjects that must be generally agreed on. "To marry a person *without* piety, is sinful; to marry *for* piety *alone*, is foolish" (James).²⁴ Third, parity or equality in regard of public honesty and credit. By this Perkins means, a marriage that will be "well thought and spoken of abroad." Here he speaks of personal preferences concerning a person's past and personality. Choosing someone that's right for us. This includes personality and appearance. "Personal attractions alone are not enough to form a ground of union. Few things are more superficial or fleeting than beauty. The fairest flower often fades the soonest. There ought to be personal attachment I admit, but that attachment should be to the mind as well as to the body" (James).²⁵

Isaac Ambrose offered six points to consider in choosing "an agreeable spouse." First, their report. What kind of reputation do they have? How do people speak of them in their absence? Second, their looks. Does their countenance reveal an angry and discontent heart? Do their eyes reveal a malicious and lustful heart? Third, their speech. Is there tenderness, compassion, gentleness, and contentment in their speech? Fourth, their apparel. Do they dress so others will think better of them than they are? Do they dress to attract the eyes of others? Fifth, their companions. Who do they spend their spare time with? Do they behave differently with their friends than at church? Sixth, their education.

²⁰ Albert Barnes, *Commentary*, Proverbs 24:27

²¹ Gary Brady, *Heavenly Wisdom*, 659

²² Joel Beeke, *Living in a Godly Marriage*, 61

²³ Richard Baxter, *A Christian Directory*, 402

²⁴ John Angell James, *A Help to Domestic Happiness*, 372

²⁵ John Angell James, *A Help to Domestic Happiness*, 369, 373

Knowing the manner in which a person was educated can alert us to the factors that shaped his character.²⁶

²⁶ Isaac Ambrose, *A Well-Order Family*, 5