

The Dating Game

By Al Felder

“Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing: and I will receive you.” (2 Cor. 6:17)

God has called His people to be separate from the world. Through His word we learn a different way of life, a different way of looking at things. We are to be a distinct people in the way that we act and think. The process that we use to select a husband or wife is no different. In this area too, we are to be different from the world.

Unfortunately, more than any other area, the Church is becoming indistinguishable from the world when it comes to the process of selecting a mate. The world’s method has led to sexual activity before marriage, and infidelity and divorce after marriage. If we continue to follow the same pattern as the world we will suffer the same consequences. There will be immeasurable pain and great consequences brought to the body of Christ if we do not correct our course in this area.

Time and time again we find the value of the family stressed with great importance within the word of God. The Church cannot and will not be what God intends for her to be if the family is not what God intends for it to be. In order for the family to be what God intends it to be we must instruct our children on God’s way for selecting a spouse, and not leave them to follow the ways of the world. If we fail great harm will be brought to the name of Christ.

The modern approach to relationships and dating practiced in our society is new when you take into account man’s history. In fact, the modern dating practices did not appear until the 20th century. The majority of them sprang out of the sexual revolution of the 1960’s, yet these practices seem to be all that we know today. We have been greatly influenced by the world and forgotten God’s pattern.

What is the contrast between these two approaches to relationships and dating? Modern dating is initiated by either the man or the woman, it is conducted outside of the oversight or authority of both person’s family, and it may or may not have marriage as its goal. This is quite different from the principals we find within the word of God. In God’s word the relationship between a young man and woman begins with the young man approaching the young woman by going to her father first, the relationship is conducted under the oversight and authority of the woman’s father, and marriage is always its goal.

As we begin to consider more closely these differences between modern dating and biblical principles for selecting a mate, I believe that it is necessary for us to consider what the

Bible teaches regarding the role of the father in this process. God, in His word, has placed such great emphasis on the father's role in this process that even non-religious people today are influenced by it. In almost all modern ceremonies a question is still asked, "Who gives this woman to be married?" Through this question the father's consent for the woman to marry is sought.

Young men have always asked a woman's father for her hand in marriage because we have always known that a father is responsible for protecting his daughter. ¹⁶*"And the damsel's father shall say unto the elders, I gave my daughter unto this man to wife, and he hateth her; ¹⁷And, lo, he hath given occasions of speech against her, saying, I found not thy daughter a maid: and yet these are the tokens of my daughter's virginity. And they shall spread the cloth before the elders of the city."* (Deut. 22:16, 17) From this passage, and many others in the Old Testament, we find that it was the responsibility of the father to protect his daughter's virginity. The father was responsible for presenting his daughter as a pure bride.

This thought is carried over into the New Testament as well. *"But if any man think that he behaveth himself uncomely toward his virgin, if she pass the flower of her age, and need so require, let him do what he will, he sinneth not: let them marry."* (1 Cor. 7: 36) Once again we see the importance of the relationship between a father and daughter in this process. As a father I am to be the protector of my daughter. I am to be able to present her as a pure bride.

How exactly is this done? For starters, I don't need to allow my daughter to go on unchaperoned dates. Such a practice would have been unheard of a hundred years ago. Now, it seems to be an accepted practice. As a father I should never send my daughter off alone and hope for the best. God has charged me with the responsibility of being her protector and being able to present her as a pure bride.

Also, as a father I should give my daughter valuable insight on any possible suitors. Now I am not talking about or promoting arranged marriages, but as a father it is my responsibility to evaluate a young man and make sure that he is suitable for my daughter. Of course, this requires for the father-daughter relationship to be strong, and cultivated to the point that the daughter respects and honors her father's judgment and wisdom. This principle too is found within the wedding ceremony as the father walks the bride down the aisle and gives her to the groom. It is a beautiful gesture symbolizing the father's guidance through this process, and his assurance that his daughter will be well taken care of by the young man.

Modern dating recognizes no differences between the roles that God has given men and women. Each gender is viewed as the aggressor capable of initiating the relationship. *"But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God."* (1 Cor. 11:3) God has made the man the head of the

home, and given him the responsibility of taking the lead. It seems fitting, therefore, that these roles be recognized in the relationship that will ultimately lead to the making of a home.

Within the biblical pattern we find that men took wives, and women were given in marriage by their fathers. *“Take ye wives, and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; that ye may be increased there, and not diminished.”* (Jer. 29:6) Since the man is to be the leader in the relationship, he should be the one to pursue the woman. If the young woman takes the lead and pursues the young man she will be tempted to lead throughout the marriage.

When God created the first man and the first woman this very idea was introduced. *“Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.”* (Gen. 2:24) From the very beginning we find that God intended for the young man to pursue the young woman, and not the other way around. He is the one who is to take the initiative.

How exactly does a young man do this? I believe that the answer can be found in much of what we have already discussed. The young man should approach the young woman’s father, and let his intentions be known. This has become more of a symbolic gesture today. In modern practices of dating the father’s permission is sought after the couple has spent years together, and in many instances already enjoyed the privileges of marriage. A young man would do well today and show great signs of becoming a man if he seeks the permission of a young woman’s father in order to begin a relationship with her.

What are the dangers involved in the modern approach to dating? Like many other things, the dangers in the modern approach to dating exist within the struggle between the flesh and the spirit. *“¹⁶This I say then, walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. ¹⁷For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.”* (Gal. 5:16, 17) The flesh always seeks to dominate and control us, but we must not allow it to – especially in the area of relationships. The modern approach to dating gives in to the flesh by starting with a physical or emotional connection, leaving the spiritual connection last if it even gets to that point. In God’s order, there is a spiritual connection made first with a limited emotional connection followed by a deeper emotional and physical connection after marriage.

In other words, modern dating practices are really centered on fulfilling the flesh here and now, rather than seeking God’s best latter. Today elementary and middle school boys and girls date just to have a good time or for a thrill. *“Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned?”* (Prov. 6:27) Young people, when you date just for fun or so you can

have something to do, you are playing with fire. Such an approach to dating serves the flesh, and will awaken passions within you that should not be awakened prior to marriage.

The modern approach to dating encourages young people to act like a married couple. The goal is to go through this process with as many people as possible in order to find that one special person. The problem with this approach is that it leads to a strong emotional and physical relationship with several people. When the relationship doesn't work out, the couple goes through something that is like a divorce both emotionally and physically.

Young people, you need to guard your hearts. God calls His people to be pure. *“Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded.”* (James 4:8) Resolve to be not only physically, but emotionally pure in your relationships. Guard your heart, thoughts, and emotions. Don't give little pieces of yourself away, rather, save yourself for that one person with whom you will spend your life.

Save intimacy for marriage. By intimacy, I am referring to the sharing of information about yourself with another person. Today, young people share the most intimate information about themselves in text messages and social media websites. There really is nothing that is considered sacred anymore. We live in a society of high-intimacy, low-commitment, and casual hook-ups. Be careful with the things that you share.

Also, don't give away all of your firsts, leaving only your seconds for your spouse. There is more than just the first time to hold hands or the first kiss. There are also the first words of affection, the first song, the first nicknames, along with the first piece of your heart. Don't give into the world's idea of having a casual romance with every person you can, and use up all of your firsts before you actually become someone's husband or wife.

By now you may be asking, “How far can we go?” Let me rephrase that question for you so you can get a true sense of what is really being asked. “How close to the line of sexual sin can I get without crossing it?” If you are pursuing godliness, as we should be, the question shouldn't be “how far?” Instead, it should be “how can I best pursue God's holiness?” *“¹Rebuke not an elder, but intreat him as a father; and the younger men as brethren; ²The elder women as mothers; the younger as sisters, with all purity.”* (1 Tim. 5:1, 2) God calls us to treat one another in a way that is pure. Young people, your relationship with one another is not an exception to that rule. You are not husband and wife; therefore, don't act like it.

The time will come when you are weighed down with the responsibility of being a husband or wife. You will have children, and bills to pay. *“³³But he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife. ³⁴There is a difference also between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she be holy both in body and in spirit: but she that is married careth for the things of the world, how*

she may please her husband." (1 Cor. 7:33, 34) There is a very important point for you in this passage of scripture young people. It is a point regarding what your priority should be at this point and time in your life.

The modern approach to dating is filled with drama. Young people are consumed with relationship statuses. It's like a big game. All the talk is about who likes who, who cheated on someone, and who broke up. It's a cycle of date someone, have fun, break up, and date someone else. During this process young people spend countless hours daydreaming, fantasizing, and romanticizing. In short, when you take the world's approach to dating it consumes all of your time.

The Bible teaches that God should be the main focus at this point in your life. *"Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them."* (Ecc. 12:1) Before you pursue a relationship with another person, pursue a relationship with God. Learn of Him and His ways. Obey His word, and make Him Lord of your life.

There will come a time when your life will be full of the responsibilities of family life. God should still come first, but you will have priorities that you do not have now. Now you have one priority. Seek God! Learn how to serve Him!

Don't ever fail to realize the value of using your single years for the kingdom of God. *"Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity."* (1 Tim. 4:12) With youth comes energy and time. That's energy and time you could be devoting to the Lord. Right now, you are establishing pattern's that will have a great impact on the rest of your life.

Take advantage of your youth, and learn about God. Dedicate and devote yourself to serving Him and putting Him first. Before you seek a relationship, learn what the Bible teaches about being a man or woman. Learn what your responsibilities will be as a husband or wife, or as a father and mother. If you do this, what you will experience later in life will be far better following God's way than what you will experience now following the world's way.

In conclusion, how will you know when it is time to seek a relationship with someone? Well, whenever you believe that you are ready for marriage that is when it is time to seek a relationship with someone. That is a major difference between modern dating and biblical principles for forming a relationship. Marriage is always the goal when following God's way. It's not about having a good time; it is about seeking that person with whom you will spend the rest of your life.

Young men, once you reach this point in your life seek a wife. Seek to get to know a young woman under the supervision of her parents and guidance of your parents as well. Remember, that at this time you are not husband and wife. Young women, you are still under your father's headship and his authority. Young men, you are not the head of the young woman. That comes after marriage, not before. Use the principles set forth in God's word in order to seek that special person. Enjoy God's best later, and not the world's lust now.