

Family Issues #9 – The Dance of Courtship (Gen 2:18-25, Prov 30:18-19)

Introduction – The way of a man with a woman, from the time of courtship and through their final wedding anniversary, is a great mystery. Paul makes this clear in Eph 5:31-32. Time and again through this series, we have emphasized the need to grow in wisdom. Family issues cannot be handled in a clunky, wooden, one-size-fits-all kind of way. At the same time, in attempting to recover and reconstruct a Christian culture that spans generations, we ought not to neglect the instruction and examples of those who have come before us. Dating, as it is commonly called, would never have been an acceptable option in godly cultures of the past. It is the fruit of egalitarianism, individualism, and anti-covenantal thinking. But as we learn the dance of courtship, we must learn wisdom, we must apply principles to develop methods, and not vice-versa.

The Pursuit of Marriage – It is a good and proper attitude for a woman to desire to be married and for a man to pursue a woman for the purpose of marriage. It is possible to desire without covetousness and with contentment and thankfulness in present circumstances. Remember, it was God who said, “*It is not good for man to be alone.*”

Good Reasons – Marriage is good because it is God’s provision for companionship and sexual intimacy (Gen 2:18, 24), and for godly offspring (Mal 2:15). Since the Fall, marriage is also a provision from God to protect men and women from sexual immorality (1 Cor 7).

Bad Reasons – Peer pressure in different adolescent (and adult) settings can be brutal, even within Christian circles. As parents, we must remember that there is a pressure for our kids to pair-off because, frankly, it’s fun. Children need to learn that pairing-off without intent or ability to marry is simply a recipe for disaster. How many horror stories could we tell?

Two Elements of Marriage – As defined through the scripture, the Lord has given us something that has a public and private (but publicly acknowledged) portion.

A Covenant (Mal 2:14, Prov 2:17) – A marriage covenant is a public declaration of faithfulness in the assigned roles of husband and wife by a man and woman. It is public before the face of God and man.

Sexual Union (Gen 2:24) – A man and a woman do not become ‘one spirit’ in marriage. The point of joining or cleaving here is sexual union. One flesh is pointing to the publicly acknowledged private affair between a husband and a wife.

And Therefore – A covenant without sexual union is an unconsummated marriage. Sexual union without a covenant (becoming ‘one flesh’ – 1 Cor 6:16, Ex 22:16-17) is not a marriage. It is important to instruct here – when sexual immorality occurs, marriage is not required. Repentance is.

Purpose of ‘the Dance’ – We will deal with some principles later. The overarching purposes of this mysterious dance should be –

To Avoid Sexual Immorality – Since one of the purposes of marriage is to avoid sexual immorality, then all that we do in our preparation and pursuit of marriage must be to avoid sexual immorality. Therefore, nothing a man and a woman do together before marriage should be leading towards sexual immorality (Eph 5:3).

To Recognize Godly Lines of Authority – The young man’s actions towards the woman he is interested in are all the responsibility of her father. This is not because we are ‘old fashioned’ or ‘uptight’. It is because we are thinking covenantally. The son leaves his father’s household to establish a new household. The daughter is given to the young man by her father to join her new husband’s household. When this is done with wisdom, the woman receives protection, honor in every station, and blessing from the Lord.

To Develop Cultural Norms – We are people, not minds with the unfortunate addition of unnecessary bodies. It is not enough to ascent to all that is wrong with our culture’s ‘dating game.’ We must develop godly cultural practices so that the ‘Smith’s’ and the ‘Jones’s’ know how to interact with one another as their children grow up. Another application is for the single men and women who do not have this culture in their home to have some handles for courting in an appropriate and godly manner.

Conclusion – If we want to take the Bible’s teaching on family seriously, we must equally take the Bible’s teaching on forming a family seriously. This a part of our koinonia, our fellowship in Christ with one another, for a marriage and all the preparation of marriage is never simply speaking of that marriage, but of the church and her Husband, the Lord Jesus Christ.

