

Family Issues #10 – The Dance of Courtship II (Ex 22:16-17, Prov 30:18-19)

Introduction – We are going to continue looking at passages related to the subject of courtship and betrothal. Remember, we are seeking wisdom, principles, and direction that we might learn how to *dance* with one another in a way that pleases the Lord, protects our daughters, instructs our sons, and loves our neighbors.

The Father's Role (Ex 22:16-17) – Marriage normally included a bride-price, or dowry. The groom gave this dowry to the bride and this constituted protection for her in case of abandonment by the husband. The dowry could be given to her father, but it was kept for his daughter's use, not his. There are several implicit teachings to be noted from this text.

The Father's Authority – From the time a young man is interested in a young lady, until the time that vows are given in a public marriage ceremony, her father has authority and responsibility over everything that goes on.

The Father's Protection – The father is responsible to provide protection for his daughter. He is also required to make wise decisions about consequences when there has been sin involving his daughter. This is not talking about rape, but consensual activity.

Gender Differences – We cannot discount the difference between how the daughter and how the suitor are treated here. There is no discussed authority of the young man's father. This is because when he is acting like this, he has declared that he has left his parent's home to establish his own household. Put simply, the time of courtship is between a father and a suitor and, technically, nobody else.

Cultivating Familial Authority – This never works when it's just on paper, or when you are simply quoting a verse to your daughter in a context void of a living covenant, godly kindness, and fatherly nurture.

Live Like a Head – Don't try to convince her that you are the head of the home if you haven't lived like one for 18 years. She should grow up seeing you take the responsibility, often taking the hit, for her mother and all the children in innumerable situations. It is then natural for her to turn to you in the days of courtship.

Love Like a Father (Ps 103:13-14) – Do you know her frame? Does she know you know her frame? Do you reflect the Father's love for His children in your love over her? Protection does not come primarily from rules. Protection comes primarily from your love. She may want to run from rules. She will not want to run from love.

Nurture, Not Provocation (Eph 6:4) – Fathers have this particular temptation towards their children. The area of courtship would be an easy area to provoke your daughter if handled without love and wisdom. And yes, this applies to mothers as well.

The Time of Betrothal (2 Cor 11:2-3) – Paul uses the metaphor of betrothal, or engagement, to discuss his godly jealousy for the church. The 'mystery' of Christ and the church is not only pictured in marriage, but in the entire process of betrothal as well. And in that metaphor, again, implicit teachings can be gathered regarding roles and responsibilities in courtship.

"I have betrothed you..." – It is the Father who has made the promise to give his daughter to this man. The suitor must seek the father's permission for her hand.

"I may present you..." – The daughter, however, is still under her father's head until the day she is walked down the aisle. The father still has responsibility to present a chaste and faithful maiden to this man upon the wedding day (and so Paul, "...I fear...your minds may be corrupted..."). It does not matter that the person he must protect her from the most may be the groom himself.

"...betrothed you to one husband..." – There is a deep vow made at the time of betrothal. A man has promised something, and a woman's father has promised something. And these men must keep their word, as must the young lady. They are not only speaking about themselves.

Learning to Dance – As we have pointed out, the need of the hour is to develop a culture within families (and not just individuals) that understands how to implement methods with wisdom. This should be done from toddlerhood, discussed around the dinner table, and encapsulated in a home of trust, loyalty, and kindness. Nevertheless, individuals will then have to make the move and join the dance.

A Community of Familial and Covenant Hospitality, Fellowship, and Service – Long title, I know, but this is where we must begin. We must provide plenty of opportunity to be with one another, to know one another's children and let them observe godly behavior in other families. Are they seeing you invite others over, serve others, bless others, admonish others, forgive others? Do we begin to see how our children are imitating us? Sons and daughters need to learn what to look for and where to look. And they must learn that they will never find those things out in an intimate, candle-lit restaurant with just the two of them. Godly families should look to provide hospitality for older singles in our body who do not have the protection or instruction from Christian

parents as well.

A Suitor Courts a Father – Courtship is not about a man and a woman; it is about a man and a man. The father gets to set the rules, and a wise father knows how to protect his daughter in a way she will love and appreciate. He will provide ways to get to know the young man, for his family to interact, and for his daughter to interact. But there are no vows, no promises, and therefore there must not be any privileges.

The Father Gives The Promise – We saw from 2 Cor 11 the nature of betrothal. Now that formal vows have been given, a special relationship can be cultivated. But all under the chaperoned responsibility of the father, for the father is still her head.

Abdicating Fathers – What does the interested son or daughter do in the circumstance of an absent or abdicating father? The suitor must wisely learn to honor the office of the father without dishonoring the father himself. The daughter may have a father who doesn't care or feel that he has a role to play. She should listen to whatever counsel he does give, but she should seek out wise counsel and practical accountability from other godly families whenever possible.

The Wedding – This is the doorway to the new household. Vows are given and consummation will occur. It is part of the glorious picture of Christ and His bride and should be well decorated and celebrated. But a word of warning – too often 'the event' takes over and begins dictating the relationships rather than the relationships dictating the event. Invite family. Invite the church. Celebrate God's goodness. He is looking upon this new 'Adam' and 'Eve' and pronouncing it 'very good'.

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