

BUILDING A BIBLICALLY STRONG MARRIAGE "Part I: Dating Biblically Before Marriage"

Introduction: (To show the need...)

(1) Last Sunday, late at night, I told my wife, Nadine that for some unexplained reason, I was being led of the Lord through a series of circumstances to preach a series on building a strong marriage. She confirmed to me God's moving in this direction as she had talked that day with a couple who worried if their marriage could go the distance.

(2) If I had any reservations on this direction when I hit the office Tuesday morning, they vanished when a counselee dropped by to ask me questions about dating! I turned this person to the computer monitor and said, "Take a look at this!" Apparently, the Lord has the concern that this is a good time to handle the dating subject!!

(3) Our world is certainly full of pain and tragedy on the subject:

(a) On Wednesday's Sally Jesse Raphael talk show, a young woman broke up with her partner right on the show. Her partner had told her, "You'll never attract another guy because you are so fat, so I'll cheat on you and sleep with other women just as much as I want!!" The crowd in the room was angry, and urged this girl to break up with such a "boyfriend" as she was being emotionally abused, and could easily attract another nicer guy! When she broke up with him, the tears flowed!! It was very upsetting all around!

Newsweek, "Whose Values?", Joe Klein, June 8, 1992, p. 19-22.)

(4) The Bible has the productive insight to offer those who date that shields us from the pain that results from tragedy here and leads young men and women toward happiness in later marriage!

Need: "Someday I want a great marriage, but my dating experience so far has been a series of utopian ups and painful, insecure downs! With broken homes, AIDS, battered wives, etc. all around us, where do I even begin to HEAD for a great marriage?!"

- I. **First, marriage problems began with sin, Gen. 2:24-3:12. So to start towards a Biblically strong marriage, one must address his sin by believing on Christ for salvation (Jn. 3:16) and then live righteously via the Holy Spirit's power (Gal. 5:16-23).**
- II. **Second, Genesis 2:24 instructs young men to "leave" their parents and to "cleave" to their brides to become "one flesh" in marriage. Thus, we have these Biblical goals for premarital dating:**
 - A. Before marriage, one must be fully independent of his parents in **every** way ("leave"). Thus, dating should aim for such responsibility.
 - B. Dating also thus becomes the discovery of one's self in relating to a potential marriage partner independent of others ("leave") so as to offer his real self to the partner he or she marries..
 - C. To marry, the dating "field" will trim down to one party!
- III. **Third, Scripture offers encouraging guidance while dating:**
 - A. If sin hinders God's blessing on a believer's dating efforts, he may start over in those efforts by applying 1 Jn. 1:9 and Ps. 37:4-5.
 - B. If while dating he faces interpersonal issues, he can apply Gen. 24! Isaac faced the threats of allurements by apostate women, v. 3, of a good partner not wanting him, v. 5 & 65 and of her kin not accepting the wedding, 54-61! All of these are met in the Gen. 24:7 promise: God must deliver to produce a wedding if His eternal plans hinge on it. Therefore, to insure divine blessing in the dating process, **before dating**, one submits to God's will for his **entire** life!
- IV. **Fourth, God has personal gender advice on dating as follows:**
 - A. God has a word of advice for unmarried women on dating as follows:
 1. An unmarried maid should date only those she can later marry :
 - a. A man has a love-making advantage over a woman, Prov. 30:18f. At the levels of eye contact (v. 19a), touching (19b) and physical union (19c), a man has this dominion.
 - b. Since dating leaves her vulnerable to her partner's influence **anyway**, a maid should date only those she can later marry!
 2. Christians must marry only believers, 2 Cor. 6:14. Adding this truth to "II, A" above, a Christian should date only a Christian!
 3. An unloved wife is unbearable, Prov. 30:21,23a! Since a Christian woman is vulnerable to marrying one she dates, a godly woman is best **dating** only one who loves her in the Christian sense of 1 Cor. 13:1-7.

Thus, a good man **for her** to date is patient, humble, unthreatened, selfless, forgiving, trustful, protective, hopeful and persevering in the relationship he has with her!

4. A woman is wise in developing the following attractive qualities:
 - a. She needs to become adept in domestic duties, Pr. 31:10-31.
 - b. She must kindly influence men to be better men, 12, 23.
 - c. She needs to demonstrate a concern for others, v. 10, 20!
 5. Sexual foreplay before marriage harms its fulfillment **in** marriage, S/S 8:8-12 with Ryrie S.B. fn. A wise woman saves this for marriage, avoiding dates who feel otherwise, 1 Cor. 13:5!
- B. God has a word of advice for unmarried men who date as follows:
1. A man must date only those women who avoid sexual foreplay before marriage! Scripture explains why as follows:
 - a. A woman has the power to seduce a man into immorality, Prov. 30:18-19; 7:21 with 1 Cor. 7:4.
 - b. That will harm a man six ways (Prov. 5-6): (a) Immoral women are emotionally cruel to their partners (5:3-6, 9), (b) bearing injurious diseases (5:11), (c) working financial ruin (5:12-14) and (d) trouble from rival partners (6:30-35). (e) Premarital sex while dating brings divine judgment as well, 5:20-22; He. 13:4! (f) Immorality also robs one of later marital bliss, 5:16ff & S/S 8:8-9.
 2. God offers advice to men on what to seek in a young woman;
 - a. He should look for the qualities displayed in Prov. 31:10-30. This includes a woman who is domestic (v. 13-24, 28), who kindly honors men (v. 11-12, 23, 26), who manages resources well (v. 14-19) and who trusts God rather than her passing feminine charm for a permanent marriage, 30f.
 - b. As a Christian, he should date only Christians: (a) godly women are chaste, and that protects him; (b) dating is also designed to lead to a believer he may marry, 2 Cor. 6:14!

Application: To build a Biblically strong marriage, one must start by (1) believing on Christ for salvation from sin, Jn. 3:16. (2) Then, relying on the Spirit's power, he dates toward totally "leaving" his parents to "cleave" to eventually the one he marries. (3) For blessing while dating, he claims 1 Jn. 1:9 and applies the Gen. 24:7 promise, obeying God's advice to his gender!

Conclusion: (To illustrate the lesson...)

Moody Monthly, an article appeared entitled, "Still Holding Hands" in which several couples who had been married for many decades gave their testimonies of how they had achieved these marital milestones.

Buck and Mittie Hatch, married for 51 years testified that the Lord made them stick it out. Buck is tall and Mittie is short; Mittie is full of energy and aggressive where Buck likes to stay home and prefers to be alone. But they made it work as they started out dating with the Lord in view:

(a) Both committed "themselves to seek God's will above all else in the relationship." Buck said, "As I got into Scripture, the most important thing for marriage was God's choice and timing. That meant a lot to both of us. In those early years, decisions, courtship, engagement, all of that was hinging on the question, 'Is this what the Lord wants?'"

(b) They were engaged after a year, but waited for five more years until they both were convinced that it was time to marry.

(c) Buck summarized his marriage, saying, "I'm convinced that most struggles between couples should be settled between the individual and God. I don't believe that if (Mittie) does something that angers me that I ought to tell her to shape up. It's my problem, and I ought to take it to the Lord and get rid of my irritation."

(d) Mittie similarly states the following testimonial: "The Lord has had to remind me when I am arguing about something that it's just that I want my own way. I have to turn to the Lord and say I want His way. Besides, I have discovered that you can't be mad and pray. You just can't!"

Buck and Mittie, after 51 years of marriage and 57 years after first dating, have found that starting with- and staying with **making the Lord one's starting point whether we talk about dating or about marriage itself--is the key to building a strong marriage! THEY OUGHT TO KNOW!**