

SEEKING A GODLY SPOUSE

Rev. W. Bruinsma

The following is the body of a speech given by Rev. Bruinsma for an area-wide Bible seminar at Hope College in Holland, Michigan.

I assume most of us here have not come just to hear an interesting speech on dating. If we are parents, then we are concerned with giving wise counsel to our young people concerning their dating life. If we are young people, I assume we wish to be instructed in this whole area of our lives. I would like to begin by telling you that I do not have all the answers. Just as the Bible itself is not a ready-made handbook on dating, neither am I. I have learned very quickly, through my own experiences as a father with children of dating age, that when I think I have the answer I at times do not! For that reason, I will attempt to root what I say in Scripture, the one authority before which all of us must bow.

I also assume one other matter about our young people. I assume that all of us are genuinely concerned with establishing and maintaining solid, Christian marriages and families. We are looking for some stability in a world where divorce occurs almost as frequently as marriage! We want to enter into the marriage bond with the rock-solid assurance that this marriage is a good one and will last, because it is based on the Word of God! If that is our concern, then we must realize that establishing a good marriage begins already long, before we settle down with someone. It starts already in our seeking and finding a marriage partner. A solid, Christian marriage depends on whom we choose to live with for the rest of our lives. And this has everything to do with dating! So, dating is not frivolous and irresponsible, but it is a weighty subject.

There are really two basic questions out of this broad subject of dating that I believe are basic. If they are answered correctly, I believe many of the other difficulties confronted in dating will fall into place. The first question is: how old must I be to date? (That is a sticky question, right?) The second is: who may I date? Are there certain people I may not date? These questions we wish to address this evening.

Before considering the whole question of dating the parent is called upon to make a solid determination: how old must my teenager be before I allow him or her to date? Because of the increasing pressure placed upon our children to date at an early age, the teenager himself ought to seriously consider that question as well. How old must I be to date? This question gets at what I would call: “the maturity factor” of dating. How spiritually mature must I be to date? Well, young people, you may breathe a sigh of relief, because I am not going to set down a rule for a specific age. Many parents might even chafe beneath my rules (though every parent should consider establishing such rules for his family)! I make it a general rule in my family that my children must be sixteen years old to date. Even that seems young to me! By today’s standards, however, sixteen is considered pretty old. (But then again, I have been known to break the standards set by many today!) Yet, that is a rule for my family, and I may not force that rule on other parents of the church. The Bible does not give us a specific age for dating, so neither can I. Christian parents are called upon to exercise their spiritual common sense in answering this question for their home.

There are a couple of matters we ought to bear in mind, however, if we tend to allow our children to date at too young an age. The first is the matter of fornication. In his book *Why Wait?* Josh McDowell quotes Brent Miller (p. 79) who researched this matter by interviewing two thousand four hundred young men and women. These were Miller’s conclusions:

“The younger a girl begins to date, the more likely she is to have sex before graduating from high school. It is also true of girls and boys who go steady in the ninth grade. Of girls who begin dating at 12, 91% had sex before graduation— compared to 56% who dated at 13, 53% who dated at 14, 40%

who dated at 15, and 20% who dated at 16. Of boys with a ninth-grade steady, 70% said they'd had sex compared to 60% of girls. Of boys who dated occasionally as freshmen, 52% had sex compared to 35% of girls."

Now, I would like to believe that these statistics were taken among unbelieving young people! They sound high for young men and women professing godliness. But we ought never to underestimate the power of our own sinful natures, even as God's children. We ought not to deny that the sin that characterizes the world is in us too, and that the temptations experienced by unbelieving young men and women are temptations that are real for us as well. The fact is, the earlier the dating experiences, the more susceptible a young person becomes to fornication, not to pregnancy perhaps (not today, anyway!), but certainly to fornication! That is one serious consideration, if we are thinking of allowing our children to date when they are young.

The other matter is the seriousness of dating. Most often parents who allow their children to date at a young age also tell them that dating is strictly for fun. They ought not to take it too seriously, but simply go out and have a good time. Play the field! Of course, our young people may have a good time when they date, neither do they need to be intent on marrying the first person they go with. Nevertheless, dating is a serious matter! By telling our children that dating is not to be taken seriously, it may leave them with a frivolous attitude about dating that they should not have. I agree with Rev. Cornelius Hanko in His book, *Leaving Father and Mother*, (p. 9),

"Seeking a life's mate is a serious matter. Young men should not play the field to see how many scalps they can collect before they settle down.

The young woman should not play the field to see how many fellows will fall victim to her charm, how many shattered hearts and broken hoes she can leave along her trail before she marries. Dating is not a frivolous game that can be played without doing serious damage to some innocent victim."

There is a warning, therefore, that goes out to parents who allow their children to date when they are too young. As young people also, who seek to be mature in our dating we ought also to be concerned for ourselves in this whole matter of dating.

Instead of laying down a strict rule about age, let's consider two Scriptural principles that should be givens in deciding the age for dating. These will determine whether one is mature enough to become involved in this all-important aspect of a Christian young person's life. The first principle of Scripture is this: I am called to love and honor my parents! Now, maybe this may seem at first to have nothing to do with dating. But it most assuredly does! Christian parents who are vitally concerned with the future happiness and security of their children take an active interest in their children's dating life. And well they should too! God has given to them the children of the covenant, and commanded them to raise them in the fear and admonition of His Name. Covenant parents have vowed before God and church that they would do this. That calling of a parent does not cease when you become a teenager. It is theirs as long as you are in their home. This is why Solomon in his wisdom as a parent could speak the words of Proverbs 5:1-4, "My son, attend unto my wisdom, and bow thine ear to my understanding: that thou mayest regard discretion, and that thy lips may keep knowledge. For the lips of a strange woman drop as an honeycomb, and her mouth is smoother than oil: but her end is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword." That is the advice of a wise father to his son concerning whom he dates.

A young person is mature enough to date only when he realizes that he must bow before parental authority while he dates. He must submit himself to their decisions concerning whom he dates, when he dates, curfew, where he goes on a date, and so on. If a young person is not ready to love, honor, and obey his father and mother in his dating life, then that young person is not old enough to

date. He is not mature enough to date. Cheerful obedience to parents should determine when our children may date. It is a part of the “maturity factor” that plays into our dating life.

But this is not the only principle. This does not stand alone in our determination of whether a young person is old enough to date. There is a second important factor involved: the young person’s spiritual conviction! I am not old enough to date until I am convinced of what I believe as a child of God! If I am not ready to make a spiritual commitment to my Lord and to serving Him, if I am not sure of what my church teaches me as the truth, then I ought not to date. I am not ready.

The reason behind this is Scriptural and wise! But we will wait to explain this until the next article. That will give us some time, however, to reflect on what has already appeared in this article, and digest that first.

Rev. Bruinsma is pastor of the First Protestant Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan.

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