

A Culture for Courtship II – *John 10:10, Col 3:18-21* A Home Prepared for Establishing More Homes

Introduction – Ever since the Garden, God's purpose has been to spread the glorious manifestation of His dominion by His image-bearers over all the earth. Ever since the Fall, Satan has been in the business of attempting to destroy God's image-bearers and their appointed calling. Ever since the arrival of Jesus Christ, the new Adam has been at work reviving that original work – and it is a work of giving more abundant life. If we understand this, all the Word is gospel and there is no contradiction between the statement of truth in John 10:10 and commandments like Col 3:18-21.

Overview of Col 3:18-21 – These commandments are very general on purpose. These are commandments that generally need to be applied in all aspects of family living and these address our particular temptations. When we are establishing new families, when courtship is happening, there are all kinds of deep emotions. These commandments need to have been obeyed long before they need to be obeyed in the context of courtship. And they need to be obeyed by faith in the Person and Truth of passages like John 10:10. Put another way, when we refuse to obey these commands, we are stating our unbelief in Christ as the more abundant life-giver.

Which Words Do You Hear First? – Husbands tend to hear this passage and hear the word *submit* first, wives hear the word *love*, parents hear the word *obey*, and children hear *provoke not*. Rather, we need to hear the command that is particularly addressed to us in our roles. We tend in our flesh to keep track of others' splinters, overlooking our own beams. We are to *judge not lest we be judged* (Matt 7:1-5).

Sons and Daughters – You may be wondering if, and hoping that Mom and Dad heard that. However, when you have heard the Word of God, you need to deal with you. Can it be said of you that you obey your parents in all things? Why does the text tell you to do this? Do you care? For you, getting into the business of considering a future husband or wife starts right there – are you interested in being *well pleasing to the Lord*?

Fathers and Mothers – You may be breathing a sigh of relief that the pastor has spoken thus to your child. However, the Word is instructing you as well. Your son will learn to love his future wife by watching you love yours. Your daughter is learning how to submit to her future husband by watching you submit to yours. And the only way a culture of courtship can flourish is if daughters trust their fathers – if trust is at the center of all family life.

Connected to Courtship Principles – What does this have to do with courtship? On paper, biblical courtship is clearly superior to recreational dating. But biblical courtship presupposes a place of trust in one another, and a mutual submission to the Word of God in everything. If the home is ruled by this kind of love, loyalty, and trust, the particulars might even be done wrong, but love can trump stupidity or ignorance. If the home is filled with distrust, following some book or method line-by-line will guarantee virtually nothing. Methodological thinking wonders far too much about *"how many times must he speak to the father...when can he have dinner at her house...when can they sit with one another in a room alone..."* This kind of wooden legalism doesn't protect anyone if there is not embodied obedience to the Lord from the heart. Principled thinking emphasizes *"sons and daughters, honor your parents...parents, set an example of love and submission; do not provoke your children...because Jesus came to give us more abundant life"* and the details begin to work out, but in a different way.

Courtship Problems – It doesn't take long in discussions about biblical courtship before one finds that whatever method one is attempting to apply doesn't quite fit – *"but what if he...what if the father...what if his mother..."* Add to this the fact that the desire for romance, intimacy, sex, and security in companionship is one of the most powerful desires we have. This means that unless this is all surrendered to God by all parties we are set up for some fierce quarrels in the home (James 4:1-3). These desires run strong between two young people, but also the parents who have their own dreams and aspirations, some godly and some not so, themselves.

Applying the Golden Rule – Any godly relationship, be it husband and wife, parent to child, or young man to a young woman, has the same basis: that one puts the interests of the other first. Getting married will not change who you are (at least not immediately); it amplifies what you are. Are you ready to respect a husband? Then show it by how you respect your father. Are you ready to love a wife? Then show that forth in how you love and honor your mother. Obedience does not start in the next chapter of your life.

More Abundant Life (John 10:10) – And this brings us full circle to the beginning of the message. *"The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy..."* How true this is in our culture of despair and death-wish, of incessant banal entertainment to satisfy the flesh, of rebellious redefining the bounds of marriage and sex, and of our refusal to submit to anyone else in any situation. But the gospel gives us something else: *"I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly."* In this world made new, a world where people love and obey Christ, how you live with your father and mother is new as well. How you love, discipline, and encourage your children is in a different context. If we live in this new context, this new creation, we will develop a culture for courtship.

The grace of God is greater than anything we have done to mess up anything in our lives. God is in the business of raising the dead. All of it is proclaimed and all of it is accessible – to you in Christ Jesus. You are directly connected to these words by covenant, by your baptism, and you will pick up these words in the tray and eat them, and drink them from a cup. And they will be yours if you hear, if you partake, by faith. Faith is submitting to God, to what He is saying, to what He has promised. It is believing and walking.