

A Culture for Courtship III

Deriving Principles from the Scriptures

Introduction – With the groundwork laid for establishing the kind of culture in a home and within a community where courtship could occur, let us consider several passages to help derive some principles and practices for biblical courtship.

The Father and His Daughter – There are several passages that help us understand the role, responsibility and authority of the father over his daughters.

The Authority of the Father (Ex 22:16-17) – From the time a young man is interested in a young woman until the time that vows are given in a public marriage ceremony, her father has authority and responsibility over everything that goes on. The bride-price or dowry is not a fee to purchase the bride. It is the young man's pledge that he can provide for her and constituted protection for her in case of abandonment by the husband.

The Ratification of the Father – In the Exodus situation, there was consensual activity and sin. Even in this case, the father is required to make wise decisions on behalf of his daughter. Even if there had been vows taken, those vows are not ratified until the father says "her mother and I give this woman..." (Num 30, esp vv3-5). In that situation it is also important to notice that there is no ratification necessary from the father of a young man; there is a gender difference.

The Responsibility and Protection of the Father (Deut 22:13-21) – In a culture where the father is actually responsible for his daughter's purity women are protected from men who detest them.

Marrying and Giving in Marriage (Matt 24:38) – This is to be the normal pattern; the woman under her father's authority until she is given in marriage, brought under the care and authority of her husband. Our culture hates these ideas for many different reasons. But we still like the picture of the new bride escorted down the aisle by her father. We love sentimentalism. We hate objective responsibility, roles, and submission to God's Word.

Godly Jealousy (2 Cor 11:2-3) – The mystery of Christ and the church is not only pictured in marriage but in the entire process of betrothal as well, and Paul is not afraid to use this picture even in the New Covenant. A father is jealous for the purity of his daughter; this is not a sign of an overbearing father, but of godly love.

"I have betrothed you..." – The father makes the promise to give his daughter to a man. As we have said before, this assumes a loyal, trusting relationship between the father, his wife, and their daughter (Psalm 103:13-14). He must know his daughter's frame. If the home is just a place of rules, she will run. But she will not want to run from love. She should grow up seeing her father take the responsibility, often taking the hit, for her mother and all the children in many situations. Only then will it be natural for her to turn to her father when a boy comes pitchin' woo.

"I may present you..." – Even after the promise, the father remains in a place of protection over his daughter until he walks her down the aisle. The father still has the responsibility to present a chaste and faithful maiden to this man upon the wedding day. It does not matter that the person he must protect her from the most may be the groom himself.

Applying Principles to General Situations – Assume the father and daughter have a good, trusting relationship. Assume also that the two of them, along with their mother, have discussed and agreed upon non-negotiables (i.e. only marry in the Lord), and personal preferences (of the daughter). Assume as well that all have been praying that the Lord has been preparing a particular young man and that all are walking content in His timing and plan.

He Shows Up - If a young man is interested in a girl, he may have no idea that such a thing as "courtship" exists. If he approaches the girl, she may simply refuse him or she may say, "talk to my father." She shouldn't give him her phone number; but she can give him her father's.

Dating the Father and the Family – If the daughter is interested, the father may give the young man the opportunity to spend time with *him*, the father, and with the family.

How Much Time – The father, mother, and daughter must debrief regularly (can I stress enough the importance of clear lines of communication before this begins?). If at some point it becomes obvious that the young man is not suitable, the father takes the responsibility to explain this to the young man, not the daughter. If the family is impressed with the young man, more times and opportunities may be appropriately provided for some one-on-one time, but of course this should look far different than what the world calls dating.

Avoiding World-Approved Sexual Immorality (Eph 5:3) – Forget Clinton's debate over what "is" is. Since one of the purposes of marriage is to avoid sexual immorality, then all that we do in the preparation and pursuit of marriage must likewise be to avoid sexual immorality. If things are going well, there will and should be a growing sexual attraction and tension. This is why, all the more, it is important to be honest and accountable; nothing a man and a woman do together before marriage should be leading towards sexual immorality.

The Point – Of course, the point of all of this is that both the man and woman are interested in getting married, not having a boyfriend or a girlfriend. As the relationship progresses, the young man should come to the father and ask for his daughter's hand in marriage. The father, of course, would already know in this situation what the desire of his daughter would be at this point.

Absent Fathers – In many cases a young woman has no father, or no father who would be thinking this way. The suitor must wisely learn to honor the office of the father without dishonoring the father himself. The young woman should seek counsel from the elders of her church or a close, godly family who shares her convictions and will seek to provide objective oversight for her.

Bringing This to Your Home – The subject, the Bible-passages, the principles and applications should produce fodder for much discussion in your home. Take advantage of the sermons to explore as a family, as husband and wife, as father and daughter, and with your sons. And as you do, "I bow my knees to the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named..." (Eph 3:14-15) drh-6/29/08