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# The Way of a Man with a Maid

A Response to the Courtship & Betrothal Movements

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by

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*“There be three things which are too wonderful for me, yea, four which I know not: The way of an eagle in the air; the way of a serpent upon a rock; the way of a ship in the midst of the sea; and the way of a man with a maid.”*

Proverbs 30:18-19

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## The Dating Game & The Courtship Controversy

*Where {there} is not already a far deeper unity than marriage can give, marriage itself can do little to bring two souls together – may do much to drive them asunder.*

—George MacDonald<sup>1</sup>

"Where do you go to school, and what grade are you in?" It was a question I was frequently asked as a child. It was also a question that I didn't know how to properly answer. Not knowing what else to say, I would usually blurt out, "I, um, I'm home-schooled."

"You're *what*?"

"I'm home-schooled. I don't go to school, I mean I go to school but it's at home. My mother teaches us."

At that point some people would respond with interest, following it up with perhaps another question. Others would just shrug or whisper to themselves quietly, "I knew there was something weird about that boy."

Those were the days before home schooling became the 'in' thing for American Christians. It rather had the status that tofu did about thirty years ago: something that hadn't come into the limelight of acceptability, but was left for the appreciation of a handful of visionaries.

Now of course things are different. Home schooling has not only become commonplace for thousands of American Christians, but "the home-schooling movement", as it has come to be called, has become a powerful political force. Of recent years the movement has been characterized by people with extremist agendas, often inciting unfair and pejorative generalizations about all home-schoolers.

For some parents, the decision to home-school may be purely in order to give their children a better education. By and large, however, the decision to home-school, at least among Christian parents, usually results from some awareness of the dangers - whether they be spiritual, psychological, emotional or even physical - associated with the public school system. With many parents this may include a sense of danger at the idea of their children having too much independence and autonomy.

Now the desire to control a child's environment is not necessarily either a good or bad thing. A responsible parent can control without being controlling, can regulate the child's influences without being paranoid. But it is a very fine line between these two, a line that can easily become blurred in the motivations of home-schooling parents. In some home-schooling families the independence that normally occurs at adulthood is disallowed and a prolonged or even perpetual state of parental dependence ensues.

Before I go any further let me say that the last thing I am here to do is to criticize home schoolers. Far from it. Just in case anyone gets me wrong on this point, let me say that my wife and I proudly home-school our children. It is as an insider (and a second generation home-schooler to boot) that I am looking at this. But this book is not about home schooling. It is about another movement which is, so to speak, the child of the home-schooling movement.

As I have watched a generation of home-schoolers grow up along side myself, the response from our parents to this phenomenon - their children reaching maturity - has been instructive. The parents who had been campaigning for home education fifteen and twenty years ago, began to develop ideas to meet the new needs brought about by their children growing up. The concept of home schooling was eclipsed by the concept of 'home dating', if you will. Just as these parents had been concerned to protect their children from the harmful influences of the school system, now they were concerned to protect them from the harmful influences associated with the world of romance and dating.

If parents are worried about the effects of school, the solution is simple enough: educate the children at home. But when the same parents become worried about the effects of romance and love upon the lives of their children, what can they do? Can the desire for love and romance be pulled out of a person with the equal simplicity of pulling a child out of school? Or is it possible to modify the conditions of a young man or woman's environment sufficiently so as to minimize the extent, and eventually control the direction of their love life?

It was to grapple with questions such as these that the idea of *courtship* first came about. Of course the word itself is nothing new. To some the term may have romantic connotations - something that brings to mind Jane Austin romances. It comes from the days before dating when the custom was for a man to call on a women at her parent's house to 'court.' Then instead of saying that two people were 'going together' or 'dating', as we might say now, you would say that they were 'courting.' In the new movement, however, the word courtship carries a different nuance, and it is a misconception to associate it with the customs that surrounded the word a hundred years ago.

Some have been encouraged by the success of the movement to predict that "these new priorities for marriage foundations will become standard within the Church in the next decade."<sup>2</sup> While this movement is mainly confined to America, people have recently started bringing the ideas over to England through home schooling organizations. Yet while courtship advocacy is on the rise, the amount of critical material devoted to its analysis it has been virtually non-existent. That is one of the main reasons I felt it was so necessary to write this present book.

So what actually *is* this thing called courtship? Those who now advocate courtship usually define it in negatives, putting more emphasis on what it is not than on what it actually is. To some extent this is to be expected with any movement that is essentially reactionary. For this reason one cannot truly understand courtship without first understanding the problems for which it is an alternative, and the reasons this alternative is seen as necessary. To express these problems in brevity - and at the risk of sounding trite - they are the breakdown of marriage and of sexual morality in our society.

The advocates of courtship rightly point out that there is a connection between the problems we see in marriage (that is, it's almost predictable tendency to breakdown), and the problems we see in how relationships are approached before marriage. They have criticized the outlook that anything is okay before marriage as long as you stay physically pure. Such a

mentality, they point out, can all too easily lead a person to view a relationship as a vehicle for temporary pleasure regardless of commitment. You know the typical pattern: take out whomever you want until one of you grows tired of the relationship and then you switch to another partner. In this pattern, the actual person can become an irrelevance, their only function being to serve the other person's short-term needs and desires.

Marriages are often entered into on this same basis, with no genuine understanding of what true love is all about. Most of the television heroes who are adopted as role models by young children play roles that encourage this wrong approach to relationships.

It would be nice to be able to say that the church has a better track record and has successfully stood against this tide. Unfortunately, the truth is that many churches actually encourage, either actively or passively, the kind of attitude described above. One example of this is Ian Gregory who goes so far as to suggest that sexual attraction should be used to help promote the gospel, since "the anecdotal evidence and logic do point us in this direction that sexual attraction does have a powerful influence on church attendance."<sup>3</sup> It is "ungodly", Gregory says, to "say that the only motivation for coming to church should be a desire to know God."<sup>4</sup>

In his book *No Sex Please, We're Single*, Gregory encourages Christian singles to play 'the dating game' by taking out as many people as possible, not only because "dating should be a laugh," as he puts it, but because this puts us in a position to know, through comparison, what is truly important for us in the opposite sex. Gregory sees that the number one problem facing the church today is that Christian singles cannot find marriage partners, which he attributes to the fact that "church culture suffers from a dysfunctional dating scene..." Finding a marriage partner, he says, is of even greater importance than Jesus' great commission, and the failure of the church to meet this need accounts for why the divorce rate has increased in the church, and it stands as a hindrance not merely to church growth and life, but to world evangelism as well.

As a solution, Gregory suggests that pastors should "facilitate marriages" and he encourages "Setting up a dating agency or offering arranged marriages..." Gregory himself organizes huge parties "with loud music and good food, and a couple of hundred grooving godly lonely hearts" as one report put it.

Though Gregory's views are not yet mainstream, they serve to illustrate the trend in today's church towards a social atmosphere in which pleasure is given a higher priority than integrity, and where recreational dating and partying are seen as vital to make a church-community attractive to outsiders. The difference between this approach and how relationships in the secular world are treated is merely quantitative rather than qualitative, in so far as in the church sex is taboo before marriage. Though even this aspect, once a bedrock of Christian ethics, is now being challenged. For example, consider the words of Gareth Sturdy, editor of one of England's leading Christian magazines, who writes that

The church community that is concerned with purity will produce 'pollutants' and 'would-be-saviours'. That community then becomes highly self-centred and censorious, breeding introversion and smugness. This is not the church that transforms and remodels society.<sup>5</sup>

In other words, for a church to attract unbelievers it must not be 'concerned with purity', for that might turn people off the gospel!

Though the situation I have been describing is cause for much alarm, it is not the concern of this book. Rather, I wish to examine an ideology that has risen in reaction to it. It is not surprising that many in the church are ready for something different, some new method that is as far removed as possible from present trends. The declining state of our society as regards marriage is therefore used as justification for new measures and methods in the selection of spouses and prevention of divorce. This brings us back to the new courtship movement.

Expressed ideologically, the thesis of courtship is seen as the antithesis of dating. It attempts to avoid the pitfalls, not only of premarital infidelity, but also of temptation. It further seeks to eliminate what is seen as an undesirable waste product of love and romance, namely, the potential for broken-hearts. Young people are encouraged to 'die' to their desire to experience a romantic relationship, thus making the most out of their years of singleness rather than rushing around looking for boyfriends or girlfriends. A more holistic view of purity is stressed - one that encompasses not only physical purity but purity of the emotions and mind as well, thus minimalizing the temptations of which physical unchastity is often the result.

Expressed in more practical terms, courtship is a parentally supervised relationship with the opposite sex that is a preparation for marriage. Though the interaction usually occurs in an overseen or semi-supervised family environment, variations can include everything from an arranged marriage to simply pursuing a relationship with the parents' consent.<sup>6</sup> Above all, it attempts to bypass the dangers of the modern dating system through some form of parental involvement. Usually this includes the idea that a relationship must be entered into only after marriage is either already expected or a definite possibility. It is conducted with the understanding that the father has power throughout to give the green light or red. The courtship serves as a kind of testing ground for the father to see if this person is really right for his child.

It would take a whole book in itself just to relate the different ideas of how courtship should be done. In every home-schooling conference, book sale, catalogue or magazine, you'll find a slightly different slant on the whole thing, though with some common universals running through all of them. An exception to this would be Douglas Wilson's teaching on Christian courtship/dating. He does not seem to be tainted by the same tendencies and damaging assumptions we will be considering in this book.

Courtship originally owes its popularity to Bill Gothard. According to Gothard, "Courtship is a father's agreeing to work with a qualified young man to win his daughter for marriage."<sup>7</sup> Jonathan Lindvall defines courtship as "a relationship between a guy and a girl that both of them understand the purpose to be, to seriously look to a permanent relationship. That they are very serious about the expectation or hope of getting married."<sup>8</sup> This expectation, Lindvall argues, is on the basis of the parents discerning God's will *before* there is any kind of romantic relationship, and in some cases before there is any relationship at all. When romance does occur, it is what he calls "authorized romance." Lindvall writes about his own experience as an example of this, which I quote at length as a good example of the courtship method -

I wanted to marry a wonderful Christian young lady my parents liked, but didn't feel was God's choice for me. Thankfully I purposed not to even discuss marriage with her without their full blessing... After repeated unsuccessful attempts to

persuade my parents that I knew God's will, I finally committed myself to die to the vision I was sure was of God.... My father, particularly, hinted that I should pray about marrying Connie. After initially resisting the suggestion, I agreed to pray about it. In time the Lord showed me I was to marry Connie.

"Although I was not yet 'in love' with her (regrettably I had allowed my emotions to focus on the first girl), with my parents' encouragement I sought and acquired Connie's parents' blessing to marry her. All this took place before I had much emotional attachment to Connie, and certainly before she was at all interested in me. When, with her parents' blessing, I proposed to her she had absolutely no idea I was even interested in her. Neither of us were "in love" with the other. In time Connie concluded that I was God's will for her. It was during our engagement period that we actually 'fell in love' with one another."<sup>9</sup>

Elsewhere Lindvall explains about the process of struggle he had to go through to marry Connie against his inclination. He prayed, saying,

"'Lord, I really want your will. If Connie's the one you want me to marry, I'll make the sacrifice, I'll marry her.... Oh, Lord, I surrender my will.' The Lord started speaking to me that, yes indeed, Connie was the one I was supposed to marry. 'Oh, Lord, really, do I have to?' 'Yes, yes, you have to.' 'Oh Lord, okay.' So I went to my dad and said, 'God has shown me I'm supposed to marry Connie.'... It took four months for God to get through to Connie. But finally she saw the light."<sup>10</sup>

Lindvall tells the story of another young man who, desiring to 'court' a certain woman, went and first obtained her father's permission to marry her *before they had ever had anything to do with each other*. "Essentially he was proposing to the father..." says Lindvall, "before they had ever gone out, before, you know, any social interaction between the young lady and himself."<sup>11</sup>

Obviously love does not fit into this package. In fact, that is the whole point. If one can be in control of one's emotions to the degree that love and romance follow clearly orchestrated pre-arranged dictates, then there is less chance of the temptations or emotional pain that are always a potential of a more natural lifestyle. Hence, these teachers consistently oppose such ideas as 'falling in love' and 'finding the right person.'<sup>12</sup> Jonathan Lindvall is typical when he says that God

never intended for people to marry simply because they love each other. Love is not the basis for marriage. Love should proceed *from* the commitment to marriage. The Bible doesn't say, 'Marry the one you love.' It says, 'Love the one you marry.' And there's a vast difference between the two. Today people marry because they love each other.<sup>13</sup>

Any Christian man or woman, if they are mature enough, can practice AGAPE love (that is, love that is an act of the will), but is this all that is needed for a good - and therefore happy -

marriage? If so, then it does not matter who you marry as long as the person practices *agape* love.

In recent years Lindvall has developed his views, becoming more extreme. He is now arguing that courtship has unscriptural flaws because it does not go far enough, since there is still the opportunity for either person to back out if they find they are not emotionally compatible. This Lindvall suggests sounds "vaguely similar to the rationale for a couple living together for a time before marriage - to find out if they are *compatible...*"<sup>14</sup> Instead he suggests 'betrothal' which is essentially an arranged marriage in which not only the man and the woman but both sets of parents have veto power.

In the book my parents have written on this whole subject, they suggest similarly, arguing that parents

possess the God-given and scripturally mandated obligation to occupy a central role in the mate selection process... Not merely an *advisory* role - but a central, even determinative role..."<sup>15</sup>

Central to the underpinning of these proposals is a pervasive suspicion of romantic love, which often comes about because of unbiblical presuppositions about the meaning of love. In the following chapter we will seek to find the biblical basis for love and romance in marriage.

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<sup>1</sup> George MacDonald, *Weighed and Wanting*.

<sup>2</sup> Michael and Judy Phillips, *Best Friends for Life* (Minneapolis, MI: Bethany House Publishers, 1997), p. 25.

<sup>3</sup> Ian Stuart Gregory, *No Sex Please We're Single* (Eastbourne: Kingsway Publications, 1997), p. 26.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p. 27.

<sup>5</sup> Gareth Sturdy, *Christianity: The Independent Magazine for Christians in the World*, "Unequally Yoked?", (Southend-on-Sea, Essex, England, May 1998), p. 26.

<sup>6</sup> In his article 'Approaches to Courtship/Betrothal', David Clank gives a helpful survey of the different definitions posited by the main proponents of these ideas. It can be read at the following web address: [www.unlesstheordmagazine.com/articles/Courtship%20Approaches.htm](http://www.unlesstheordmagazine.com/articles/Courtship%20Approaches.htm)

<sup>7</sup> *Establishing Biblical Standards of Courtship*, (Oak Brook, ILL: Advanced Training Institute of America, 1993), p. 8.

<sup>8</sup> From the taped lecture, *Youthful Romance: The Dangers of Dating*, (Springville, CA: Bold Christian Living), 1996.

<sup>9</sup> Jonathan Lindvall, from a tract titled, *Youthful Romance: Scriptural Patterns* (Springville CA: BOLD PARENTING, 1992).

<sup>10</sup> Lindvall, from the tape "*Youthful Romance: The Dangers of Dating*".

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<sup>11</sup> Jonathan Lindvall, from the taped lecture *Training Godly Teens* (*op. cit.*).

<sup>12</sup> It will be instructive to quote the experience of one married lady who holds this view. “{Love} is not a feeling or an emotion” she writes. “It is a choice we make, an act of our wills. When I walked down the aisle, it was not because of a feeling or a desire; it was an act of my will - in obedience to God and His Word. I praise God and thank God for the victory of that day and for the growing faith that has resulted since that day.” (Testimony used by permission in *Rebuilder's Supplement*, (Institute in Basic Life Principles), 1978, p. 27.) That quote actually describes this woman's remarriage to a man she had divorced. When she became a Christian and attended Gothard's seminar, she was persuaded that she should remarry her former husband, even though both of them had been physically unfaithful. "The wedding day," she writes, 'was probably one of the worst days of my life! I felt trapped, forced into a marriage to someone I didn't even love. When I realized that I would have to consummate the marriage that night, I became so upset and nervous that I was actually physically ill. It was all they could do to get me to the church and then to get me down the aisle. I wanted to run. I nearly passed out twice during the ceremony. The pressure made my head feel as if it were about to explode.' (Ibid, pp. 26-27) The lady explains how at first their new marriage was horrific; eventually, however, God conquered her 'rebellious' spirit. Repeatedly she "would speak positive affirmations of our new love, our 'spirit-to-spirit relationship, our growth as one, and our Godly actions and reactions towards each other...rebuke the negative and speak the truth in my heart." Ibid, p. 27

<sup>13</sup> Jonathan Lindvall, from the taped lecture, *Youthful Romance: The Dangers of Dating* (*op. cit.*).

<sup>14</sup> Jonathan Lindvall, "The Dangers of Dating: Scriptural Romance ", *Home School Digest*, Volume 8, Number 2 (Wisdom's Gate: Covert, MI).

<sup>15</sup> Michael and Judy Phillips, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

## What Has Love Got To Do With Getting Married?

*Only love has eyes. To understand the world of things, you need science and suspicion and the method of doubt accept nothing until proved. Every idea is guilty until proved innocent. But to know people, you need the opposite method: trust, love, openness. Persons are innocent until proved guilty. You cannot hear them unless that is your attitude. Suspicion never reaches the other's heart.*

—Peter Kreeft<sup>1</sup>

In the previous chapter I mentioned some ideas that have arisen as a reaction against the breakdown of marriage today. Although the teachers I referred to do not agree with each other on many particulars, there does seem to be one common universal: a de-emphasizing of anything relating to romantic love.

This should come as no surprise either, seeing that genuine love is not something that can be summoned by the command of parents who have selected the person for their child to marry. A father may require his daughter to marry the man of his choosing, but there is no power under heaven he may call on to make her genuinely fall in love with that man, for "Can love be controlled by advice?"<sup>2</sup>

Instead of marriage being based on love, the teachers in the courtship movement are fond of suggesting that marriage should be based on character. It will be worthwhile to review some of the common arguments put forward for this conclusion.

### **Successful Marriages?**

In chapter one I quoted a section from Mike & Judy Phillips' book *Best Friends For Life*. This book is primarily about how to prepare for marriage, the presentation of what they call "a startling and revolutionary - alternative strategy for choosing a husband or a wife..."<sup>3</sup>

The basic thesis of *Best Friends For Life* is typical of many courtship models. In short, marriage should not be based on love but based instead on a 'friendship partnership' with a person whom the parents and the young person jointly choose. This choice is based on certain criteria in which the omission of love is perhaps the most striking feature. Falling in love is dismissed as a romantic myth. "Certainly it is advantageous to future harmony that a man and woman like (or love) each other", writes Mike Phillips. "But", he is quick to add, "it is not

essential.” Young people following the courtship method are thus encouraged to "learn to *control* and *squelch* and *suppress* your natural romantic tendencies"<sup>4</sup> so that there can be "*Friendship* rather than romance between future lovers."<sup>5</sup>

At first this distinction may appear rather odd since friendship and romance should surely be inseparably intertwined in a healthy love relationship. However, we must understand what is meant by friendship. While acquaintances are spontaneous, friendship, they argue, should be premeditated and deliberate. So you should "choose your friends, therefore, on the basis of character"<sup>6</sup> and "choose friendships according to the character traits you admire..."<sup>7</sup> This same criteria, it is argued, needs also to be the basis of deciding whom to marry. You can then get married to your 'best-friend' because you have *decided* that this person will be your best friend based on their character.

The wisdom of scripture supports the idea that we should carefully choose our friends on the basis of character (Prov. 12:26; 13:20; 2 Thess. 3:14; 2 Tim. 3:1-5; Titus 3:10). The lifelong friendship in marriage is no exception. At the moment I am doing a Bible study with my teenage son to train him how to recognize a vitreous woman. This is because it has been my prayer for many years that he marries a God-fearing, upright Christian woman. My prayer is that he will marry a woman who understands what it means to raise children in a covenant relationship with God, someone who will endeavor to walk in submission to the authority of God's Word in all things.

But while a godly character is something that a young man should look for in a woman, I recognize that it will not, nor should not, be his only consideration. It is also important that two people also love each other and that they will be compatible living and working together throughout the rest of their lives. It is also important that they are just really good friends, not in the sense of mechanically choosing that this person is going to be your best friend because they have passed a character test, but because there is a legitimate and natural friendship already apparent.

In much of the literature of the courtship movement, it is assumed that the *only* necessary ingredient for a good marriage is character. In 2001 the New York Times did a front page article on the courtship movement. One advocate of this approach, a man by the name of Mr. Wheeler, was interviewed. Mr. Wheeler tells about his own experience when a young man named Joshua took him out to breakfast to ask permission to marry his daughter Noelle. "I knew if I could trust his character," said Mr. Wheeler, "then it would make a good marriage, because marriage is built not on love, but on someone who has the character to withstand the storms that marriage brings, the arguments and the disagreements."<sup>8</sup> As long as someone has a good character, all other considerations about the people and their potential compatibility (or lack of compatibility), become irrelevant. Hence Mr. Wheeler knew that Joshua would make a good husband purely on the grounds of his character. Phillips states the matter a bit more starkly,

...it almost doesn't matter whom you marry. You can marry *anyone*. If you bring the mortar of commitment to the joining of the two human bricks, then you've got a workable and permanent marriage."<sup>9</sup>

Lindvall has recently suggested that emotional intimacy is completely irrelevant. “God,” he writes, “has given us not only the physical capability but also the emotional capacity and personal flexibility to be joyfully compatible with whomever He calls us to marry.”<sup>10</sup>

Against the backdrop of such ideas, it should not be surprising that throughout the last six to eight years, as many people have got married under the influence of such teaching, the disaster stories have literally just been pouring in. One is increasingly hearing of marriages that were supposed to be perfect because they followed the right procedures and both people had strong characters, yet these marriages are actually miserable. Many of these marriages have, unfortunately, been ending in divorce, with the young people blaming the parents for “doing this trip on us.” In other cases, I have received reports of teenage daughters running away from home and getting pregnant simply to avoid having to go through a system of being paired up with someone they do not even like.

I’ll never forget the time a friend told me about a conversation he had with a sixty-three year old Chinese co-worker named Eric. Eric emigrated to the United States where he married a woman that his uncle had picked out for him. Eric told my friend that in China the parents always choose the girl, usually based on issues of family prestige and wealth. Issues of personality and compatibility don’t come into play.

Eric jokes about how there is no love in the marriage and he is fond of pointing out the heartache and misery that comes from marrying for love. Eric told my friend that he not only doesn’t love his wife...he hates her. He sleeps in a separate bedroom to his wife in order to avoid her. When my friend heard this, he asked a natural question. “Have you ever considered getting a divorce?” Eric was aghast. Break up the financial alliance? Unthinkable!!!

Does Eric have a good marriage, if such an arrangement can even be called ‘marriage’? Well, if it does not matter that a marriage be happy, fulfilling or beautiful, if all that matters is commitment and the prevention of divorce, then I guess you would have to say that Eric not only has a good marriage, but that his marriage is a paradigm example.

Don’t get me wrong. Commitment and faithfulness are very important elements of marriage. The problem arises when these elements are promoted at the exclusion of other equally important facets, such as love and closeness.

But, says Eric and the proponents of courtship, it is such things as love and romance that cause all the heartache and problems in the world today. In one sense I agree completely: the experience of romance in relationships can often lead to unchaste behavior (even allowing for the distinction between genuine love vs. mere lust). It does not, however, follow that romantic love, in itself, should be de-emphasized, just as the fact that the adultery rate would come down if all the men in the world became eunuchs, does not mean that the entire male race should go and castrate themselves. Yet we are being advised to undergo an emotional castrating so that romantic feelings are denied and seen as stemming from our fallen nature.

It is helpful to remind ourselves just what marriage is. The definition of marriage is a lawful sexual relationship surrounded by covenant vows. Now sexual relations can certainly occur in the absence of sexual attraction or emotional closeness, just as faithfulness to the marriage covenant can occur without being ‘in love’ with one’s spouse. This is, in fact, the state of many marriages, where commitment must exist without any accompanying emotional response. Though we may applaud the covenantal faithfulness exhibited in such marriages, is it

appropriate to consider these marriages a success? Should we be holding such marriages up as models to those who are unmarried?

## Marriagability Checklists

I have already agreed that character is an essential consideration when choosing a spouse while disputing that it is the *only* consideration. However, even this agreement must now be qualified. What the courtship advocates mean by ‘character’ in practice and through application is often something which amounts to no more than having a strong, resolute will, together with an ability to make one’s exterior life sparkle and shine, regardless of the heart condition. Parents are not so much seeking to find virtue in the classic biblical sense, but looking for someone who never shows weakness, someone who is rehearsed at denying themselves habitually and someone who can successfully conform their outward lives to whatever criteria the parents use to test maturity. On the other hand, even where the understanding of good character is sufficiently balanced and biblical, the emphasis on character is often accompanied by a subtle derision of human weakness and failure. Further, the clinical approach to relationships underpinning these suggestions, fails to take into account the actual person who may be a perfect partner even though they do not satisfy preset conditions. With real people there are many intricacies and particularities that cannot be taken into account through a checklist evaluation. In the end every person and situation must be considered individually on its own merits.

Some teachers have even gone so far as to map out in advance the characteristics required before one is ‘marriagable.’ Jonathan Lindvall, for example, gives eight prerequisites before parents should even begin to decide whether a person is right for their son or daughter to marry. As far as the young man is concerned, the prerequisites include that he must be self-employed, have good social skills, no debts and committed to staying out of debt, etc.. Regarding the prerequisites, Lindvall says

I and my wife, the other parents, need to really think through all these things before we even pass it [the proposed match] onto the children. And then the children themselves, the young people, they have to again go through those lists, and through their sense of prerequisites...[sic]

What seems most significant about Lindvall's prerequisites is that apart from his specification that they must be "Somewhat doctrinally compatible", none of Lindvall's prerequisites have to do with the actual *relationship* of the two people. Apparently, whether the two people are likely to get along well together, or whether they are likely to be compatible, is of less importance than whether the man is self-employed and committed to staying out of debt. Likewise, how the two people relate to *each other* is of less relevance to Lindvall than how the man relates to others (i.e., his social skills).<sup>11</sup>

Gothard is even more bizarre. In his Advanced Seminar Workbook, Gothard gives parents a list of fifty-nine suggested questions to ask a potential son or daughter-in-law. The purpose of these questions is to enable the parents to assess whether to allow their child to enter into a courtship with this person. The list includes such questions as *Do you think your parents know*

*the meaning of their names? What was your first childhood ambition? Why do you think God made you the gender He did? What number child are you in the birth order of your family? Do you wish that you grew up in a larger or smaller family? What advantages do you see in being born into your race? How often did you move as you were growing up? What spiritual significance have you attached to any physical "defect" that you may have? How much scripture have you been able to memorize?*<sup>12</sup> And on and on. Like Lindvall, Gothard has little or nothing to say about the actual relationship or compatibility of the people involved. Instead, compatibility can be inferred on the basis of character. Gothard points to the book of Ruth where, in his words, "Boaz was attracted to Ruth before he even saw her. He heard good reports about her character."<sup>13</sup>

These ideas ignore the need for a marriage where there is love and compatibility (the knitting together of characters that 'fit' which will be different for different people), in favor of general character traits which, when present, make love and compatibility nice but not essential. Whether love and compatibility grow out of check-list-characters is not a factor that is relevant in the initial choice.

Kathleen Schajjik has expressed concern that this approach will lead men to be on the lookout for a *type* rather than a *person*. Such an approach, she suggests "has devastating consequences, particularly for women."<sup>14</sup> This is because a woman who is married because she fits the right pattern will almost inevitably begin to doubt the sincerity of her husband's love.

"Did he marry me for me, or did he marry me for my home-making skills?" She starts to feel "objectified," used. A pitiable longing to be loved as a person may drive her to do terrible things, such as unconsciously suppress her "positive attributes" in order to test her husband – to see whether his love for her really goes to the heart of who she is."<sup>15</sup>

## **Should Weak People Marry?**

Israel Wayne has written that a young man "should evaluate all the objective criteria he and his parents have established for finding a mate" and "should wait until he is ready (in all ways) to be married."<sup>16</sup> If I had lived by that advice, I would still be single! When Esther and I married I was twenty-two and she was twenty-eight. I was very inexperienced and had certain blind spots about practical things that often made it difficult for me fit into what we are told is the 'right' and 'only' slots for men and women. To give an example, I have little or no sense when it comes to business or practical matters. Esther doesn't particularly like having to bare the responsibility for these areas herself and I feel bad that I can't be more of a help. Yet we both realize that the Lord expects us to work within the limitations of who we are as people. So we have learned not to struggle but to adapt our unique circumstances to the abilities that we do have. So while Esther is balancing the accounts, I will help by cooking dinner or taking the children for a walk.

Let me give another example from my own experience. Although the different teachers in this movement suggest different characteristics that should be in place before marriage, all of them (including Joshua Harris) seem to agree that financial stability is essential for the man. In itself this is good advice, but what happens if you are poor? What happens to people like me

when I got married? I had hardly any experience in the world, having been extremely sheltered all my life. The effect of my parents trying to time-table my growth, meant that when I got married I had no practical or academic qualifications – I had never even held a job, apart from having been employed at my father’s bookstore for two hours a week. Responsibility frightened me. Needless to say, I would have flunked the financial stability test as well as just about every other test in the books.

Looking back I can see how wonderfully the Lord has used marriage to strengthen me. Esther and I have had to face some exceedingly difficult circumstances. Had I foreseen what married life would entail, I would certainly have deemed myself unready. But the grace of God has been sufficient to meet our needs.

Coming out of the kind of home and background that I had, I needed someone with the sort of maturity that Esther had to offer. I needed someone who really understood the issues and could help me through a lot of rehabilitation with reassurance, constancy and stability. I needed someone who could love me in spite of my immaturity, weakness and brokenness. Did my broken state exempt me from the married state? According to the teachers in the courtship movement, the answer is yes. If I was following their pattern I would never have qualified for Esther’s longsuffering, love and understanding. I never would have made the grade, not then and not now. In the end it all amounts to saying that anyone who is broken, dysfunctional, limited or weak is an unacceptable candidate.

Joshua Harris tells positively about a girl who chose to end a relationship with a man because he had a problem with dark moods. Harris quotes the testimony of one man who went through extensive checks to gauge his readiness, which included asking whether he was ready to lead his wife spiritually and serve her in *every* way? Another question was, “Do I have proved character, and am I growing in godliness?”<sup>17</sup> My concern is that such questions must be self-defeating since it is surely those who are really growing in godliness that would be most aware of their own inadequacies. The truly godly men will be the least likely to admit to being able to serve their spouse in every way, to have a proven character, etc.<sup>18</sup>

Putting aside this difficulty, however, we would do well to take a moment and imagine what would happen if the entire world could undergo this kind of self-evaluation and implement such proposals. The result would be that all the single men and women would fall into two classes: those who measured up to the criteria for being marriageable, and those who did not. The latter class of individuals would be doomed to a life of celibacy and loneliness unless they were able to sufficiently improve themselves. This would lead to a state of affairs whereby all people would begin being motivated by, (a) fear of failure, (b) guilt in those who are not strong willed enough (c) pride and self-righteousness in those elite who can meet the necessary conditions for a working successful marriage. These elite will be superior to those who have a need for unconditional acceptance and intimacy from their spouse, those who need to feel loved, to feel special, to be cherished and exclusively desired by one person *regardless* of their weaknesses and in spite of human shortcomings and failures.

In the end, if we assume that marriage is to be the result of, rather than the means to, maturity, then many people (if not *most* people) will just have to never marry, while those who are mature enough to marry may live in continual fear of emotional rejection should they happen to slip into immaturity or failure. How is the underlying feeling to be avoided that there is a price-of-admission to love? As Erich Fromm points out in *Art of Loving*,

To be loved because of one's merit, because one deserves it, always leaves doubt maybe I did not please the person whom I want to love me, maybe this or that - there is always a fear that love could disappear. Furthermore, 'deserved' love easily leaves a bitter feeling that one is not loved for oneself, that one is loved only because one pleases, that one is, in the last analysis, not loved at all but used.<sup>19</sup>

This principle applies throughout all of life. In parenting, for example, some parents discipline their children by emphasizing that they only love them when they are good. I still have a chart my parents made when I was a child, where so many marks for disobedience resulted in no night time hugs and kisses for a week. The inevitable result of children being treated like this is that they grow up to believe they are loved only because they please.

In marriage, either a strong love or a strong willed character can hold it together, for both hold commitment to a person highly, but only love holds it for the person's sake. True love sees further than outward defects to the heart. But more than this, it leads to a marriage that is sustained by acceptance despite mistakes. Acceptance has been defined as the power to love someone and to receive that person in the very moment that we realize how far he or she falls short of our hopes. The arguments used in the courtship movement imply that this need for unconditional love and acceptance is wrong, even though it is a fundamental need that God created us with. However, if we remove such a need from our considerations, denying it in ourselves so that we become strong and hard people, then I agree that the divorce rate will go down if enough people do this. But what will we have lost in exchange? True, there would no longer be such a thing as heartbreak, for we would have lost our hearts. There would no longer be such a thing as disappointing marriages, because there would be no expectation of intimacy and emotional fulfillment.

In writing about the importance of love remaining constant in spite of someone's weaknesses, this does not deny what I have already written about the concerns people need to take into account before marrying a person. But the *reason* these things are important are not for the reasons given by the teaching we have been considering. Things like integrity, honesty and shared faith matter because they affect whether two people can be compatible, whether they can be fully united spiritually, psychologically and emotionally, and whether they will be of one mind in raising their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. However, these are not areas that can be addressed by the kinds of checklists with which we are being presented and are completely separate from the issue of normal human weakness.

The goal should not be to find someone you will have no problems with because it is accepted that the marriage cannot be flawless, since it is a joining together of two sinners. Failures do happen but that does not change the love.

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Peter Kreeft, *Three Philosophies of Life*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), p. 119.

<sup>2</sup> John Gay, *The Beggar's Opera*, (1728), Act 1, Sc. 8, air 8.

<sup>3</sup> Mike and Judy Phillips, *op.cit.*, p. 45.

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- <sup>4</sup> Ibid. p. 102. All the italics which appear in these quotations also appear in the original unless otherwise stated.
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid. p. 119.
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid. p. 75.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid. p. 80.
- <sup>8</sup> From The New York Times article, "New Christian Take on the Old Dating Ritual", by Laurie Goodstein, September 9, 2001.
- <sup>9</sup> Mike Phillips, from a personal letter to my wife.
- <sup>10</sup> Jonathan Lindvall, 'The Betrothal Path' in *5 Paths to the Love of Your Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: Think, 2005) p. 143.
- <sup>11</sup> For a similar view to Lindvall's, see Israel Wayne's article titled "Don't Kiss Before the Wedding!" (*The Link: A Homeschool Newspaper*, Vol. 4, Issue 2)
- <sup>12</sup> Advanced Seminar Workbook, pp. 150-153.
- <sup>13</sup> *Advanced Seminar Notebook*, p. 157.
- <sup>14</sup> Kathleen van Schaijik, "A Catholic Critique of a Current Notion of Courtship," *The University Concourse*, Vol. V, Issue 7, March 27, 2000.
- <sup>15</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>16</sup> Israel Wayne, *ibid.*
- <sup>17</sup> Joshua Harris, *Boy Meets Girl: Say Hello To Courtship* (Multnomah Publishers, 2000), p. 66.
- <sup>18</sup> "No amount of falls will really undo us if we keep on picking ourselves up each time... It is when we notice the dirt that God is most present in us: it is the very sign of His presence ." C. S. Lewis, *Letter of C.S. Lewis* (Fount Paperback, 1966), p. 365.
- <sup>19</sup> Erich Fromm, *Art of Loving*, cited by John Powell, *op. cit.*, p. 13

## The Wisdom of the Fool

*Love is the wisdom of the fool and the folly of the wise.*

—Samuel Johnson<sup>1</sup>

*'...what the world stigmatizes as romantic is often more nearly allied to the truth than is commonly supposed; for, if the generous ideas of youth are too often overclouded by the sordid views of afterlife [adulthood], that scarcely proves them to be false.'*

—Anne Brontë<sup>2</sup>

So far my use of the term romantic love may have appeared rather vague. It is indeed difficult to give a clinical description for something that is essentially experiential, and which inevitably contains a personal nuance of my own. Nevertheless, it will be helpful to consider some definitions, as well as the relative importance, limitations and inter-relationship of the various types of love within marriage. This will serve as an important foundation for what will follow later in the book.

### The First Man and Woman

I'm going to start by making a statement that may seem so obvious that it is hardly worth making. The statement is this: based on God's original plan when He created the institution of marriage, it seems incredible that the Lord would ever ask a person to walk down the aisle with someone they would rather not be marrying. Obvious as this may seem, it is actually being denied through the implication of statements as the following: “the Bible cautions against marrying based on emotional or physical desire.”<sup>3</sup> Or again, “The decision must be made on the will of the Lord, not on her personal wishes or desires.”<sup>4</sup> Now either that is a false dichotomy or God may require people to grit their teeth and spend the rest of their life with someone they would rather not have married. Such a suggestion fails to appreciate the whole purpose for which God designed marriage. To understand that purpose, we must go back to the very beginning and consider the relationship between Adam and Eve.

The first instance of romantic love was Adam and Eve. The Lord did not create Adam and Eve at the same time, we are told, but created Adam first. To Adam was given the job of naming all the animals. While each animal had a mate, for Adam “there was not found a helper comparable to him.” (Gen. 2:20) The implication is that Adam was, if not lonely, certainly aware that something was missing. Then the Lord said, “It is not good that man should dwell alone; I will make a helper comparable to him.” (Gen 2:18). Likewise, in our alone-ness we feel

instinctively that 'it is not good' - there is a void in our life that only someone of the opposite sex can fill.

The Lord said that it was not good for Adam to dwell alone. But in what sense was Adam actually alone? He was not alone physically or socially, because he was surrounded by numerous animals - to say nothing of the Lord himself. But he was alone *emotionally*, and that was not good. He didn't have someone to love in that special way that only a man and wife can.

One teacher who would be quick to deny this interpretation is John Thompson. Thompson goes so far as to argue that it is not only possible but desirable not to have *any* emotional, social and relational needs. He does not see marriage as God's instrument for fulfilling certain innate needs within each of us, for he denies that such needs even exist.

So how does Thompson reconcile this position with Genesis 2? Thompson tries to argue that Adam required a helper only for what was specifically mentioned: to be fruitful and multiply (Gen 1:28), and *not* for any social, relational or emotional needs. Just as Adam would not have been lonely since he had perfect fellowship with God, claims Thompson, so neither would we have any needs if we walk in the light as He is in the light.<sup>5</sup>

Thompson goes further and uses the example of Adam and Eve to try to prove that people do not need to select their own husbands and wives. He argues that because God "brought together the bride (Eve) and the groom (Adam) for the sole purpose of marriage" instead of "{creating} a dozen men and a dozen women to play the dating game and then marry whomever they wished," this ought also to be our model rather than thinking that young people need to choose their own marriage partners.<sup>6</sup>

## The Meaning of Love

These days the idea of 'falling in love' may, more often than not, conjure up images from stories like *Princess' Bride*. The term 'falling in love' may not be the most helpful of phrases for our purposes here. Even the word 'love' is highly ambiguous because of its myriad of usages, some of which are even contradictory.

Because the word 'love' is so abused in our language, meaning practically anything from a description of one's affection for chocolate to a word indicating the most passionate intimacy, it is rendered practically meaningless unless it is first carefully defined. In Greek there are four words which our language translates as love, which I would briefly like to consider.<sup>7</sup>

STORGE is the kind of love that we would call Affection, and is especially relevant for the affection that exists between parents and offspring.

PHILIA is the kind of love that we would call Friendship. It is camaraderie more frequently among those of the same sex though not limited to that.

EROS is that kind of love to which the word romantic can be applied. It only exists (or only *should* exist) between members of opposite sexes and has been described as including "the idea of yearning to unite with and the desire to possess the beloved." There are many variations of this kind of love which I will deal with later.

AGAPE is the kind of love which the Lord has towards us and which He calls for us to exhibit to those around us (1 Cor. 13). It is interchangeable with the word Charity (at least in

days past before charity came to be more or less synonymous with generosity.) It is the totally unselfish kind of love that can keep on giving without expecting a return because it has the other person's best at heart. Because AGAPE love is a choice, it can be commanded (Jn. 13:34, Eph. 5:25).<sup>8</sup>

## **The Love to Makes Marriage Work**

I said that erotic love (EROS) is the peculiar sort which exists between the sexes. At the least this may be a purely physical attraction. Two people can easily get through a night together with only physical attraction, but to get through a lifetime together you had better be good friends (PHILIA) as well. In fact, your spouse should be your *best* friend. EROS love without friendship love is only an impulse of the hormones. One cannot desire another person over a long period of time without being best friends with that person as well.

But an erotic love that includes friendship is still not enough if there is not also the self-giving and sacrificial love (AGAPE) so beautifully described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 13. AGAPE love, unlike the other loves, is produced by daily acts of the will. It is not a feeling but a choice, something you *do*.

Although EROS and PHILIA are not *generated* by the will (though they may be encouraged or discouraged by the will), they are *maintained* through the will. C. S. Lewis compares these natural loves to a garden full of flowers that would soon go to weed if left alone. What is needed for maintenance is AGAPE love. A man who falls in love with a woman quite effortlessly will find the love destroyed if he constantly acts selfishly rather than choosing to act charitably towards her. Thus, in marriage a couple's intimacy is either maintained or destroyed by the choices made in the arena of life. As Wheat puts it, "*Eros...wants to promise that the relationship will last forever, but Eros cannot keep that promise alone.*"

When a man and wife are committed to their love for each other and their faithfulness to the marriage covenant, the relationship has a foundational reality that cannot go even if the intensity of feelings may come and go. Before Esther and I married, I had naively assumed that love was an automatic thing like money in the bank, so that once you find the right person you just sail effortlessly into a future of bliss. Such is not the case, for there is nothing automatic about the ingredients necessary to permanently sustain a love relationship, such as continuous affirmation of the other's personal worth, ongoing acceptance of, and support for, the other's individuality, and above all the daily sacrificing of my needs and desires for those of my beloved. This includes being willing, when appropriate, to challenge the other even at the expense of personal comfort.

Just because two people are right for each other does not automatically guarantee the success of their marriage. For example, a marriage where there is true love may end if one of the partners, in seeking the gratification of immediate and carnal pleasure, succumbs to sleeping with someone else. Therefore, as Sheldon Vanauken put it, "Inloveness is a gift of the gods, but then it is up to the lovers to cherish or ruin."<sup>9</sup> Or as Maurois reminds us, "A successful marriage is an edifice that must be rebuilt every day."<sup>10</sup> In the early days of in-love-ness people often do not have to think about things like unselfishness, patience, kindness, and the attributes of

Christian charity, because the force of attraction often causes these things to happen naturally. They can be so preoccupied with the other person that they completely forget about themselves and anyone and anything else.

But the Lord knows we cannot live on Champaign all our life, and that if this emotional high were indefinitely maintained no one would ever get anything done, nor would they be able to think about the practical considerations that are necessary for raising and supporting a family. While it may seem unfortunate that the emotions settle down and one has to begin working to maintain the relationship, this actually allows love to become more meaningful and deep, for the lovers have a lifetime to prove their love through difficulty, to serve the other person through genuine self-sacrifice, and to live true to the reality of their love even if their feelings seem to deny that reality at times. "In sickness and in health, for better or for worse." These are not things that could be done if everything remained easy, and yet, through this lifestyle of love, a man and wife may retain or re-learn the natural and unselfconscious charity that perhaps came easy at first. In this way, love is constantly being deepened. It has been our experience that emotional in-love-ness does not fade, but grows with deeper content as we grow together.

Rather than reacting to our society's corruption of love and saying that there is no place in the Christian's experience for falling in love, we ought instead to ask ourselves how God intends men and women to experience romantic love. Many of the courtship advocates simply remove romantic love from the process of finding a spouse. You fall into it and you fall out of it, so they say you shouldn't consider it. As Lindvall says, "If a couple marries based on love, what happens when the passion of romance settles down and they get used to each other, less distracted by their emotions?"<sup>11</sup> Lindvall's answer is that marriage should be based entirely on AGAPE love. He thus completely overlooks love which produces feelings but is more than feelings, and which is maintained by the will, but is itself more than an act of the will.<sup>12</sup> It is automatically assumed that because romantic love is emotional, it therefore gives no indication before marriage of the rightness of the match. After the emotions have been authorized, they are no longer considered harmful and are therefore allowed. Thus, a false dilemma is set up whereby feelings before marriage are wrong and dangerous, while feelings after marriage are benign, even good and helpful.

## **Romance in Secular Culture**

The attack against romantic love goes beyond simply the courtship agenda. What we find in these movements is simply one expression of a larger trend that has been gaining momentum throughout Western culture. It will be instructive to briefly consider how the secular climate of today represents just as strong a reaction against romantic love.

For many centuries Western society has idolized romantic love. We are now finally beginning to see the outworking of the biblical principle that whenever anything is worshiped idolatrously, that thing is lost. This is exactly what is now happening with romantic love. In her survey of contemporary sexuality, Wendy Shalit points out that whereas in past eras a woman had to avoid giving public evidence of sexual desire by living with someone out of wedlock, in today's world the social pressure is such that women must avoid giving evidence of

romantic desire if they are to avoid social ridicule. Shalit quotes from the spring 1998 edition of the teen magazine *YM* where there is a "Pool of Love" test. "'The goal is the 'Diving Area: Out for a Good Time' part of the pool, where you'd be looking for lots and Mr Rights Now!' If you're too romantic, you tread water at the 'deep end' where 'your intensity could scare off some potential candidates.' Any girl who has scored too high on the Romance test *YM* labels a 'Deluded dreamstress.'"<sup>13</sup>

Why is it that an experience that has played such an important part in the experience of men and women throughout history, is now assigned to the category of fantasy - something which is not only irrelevant to a relationship, but seen as a hindrance, a thing that might repel a potential candidate? Two immediate causes come to mind.

First, there is the 'just do it' mentality in today's world. I am told that dating is fast becoming a thing of the past. At least dating had some degree of romance as a backdrop, even when in an artificial sense. Now, however, that romantic apparatus is increasingly viewed as something that is not only irrelevant, but an encumbrance. After all, why go through all that fuss when you can just go and find the nearest bed? Romantic love - which is essentially an other-person-oriented experience - has no point of contact with the consumerist mentality of our age where the primacy of instant gratification has become such a god.

So again we see that it is a self-oriented mentality that is responsible for the exclusion of romantic love, though the form this self-orientation takes in a secular 'just do it' climate is drastically different to the form it takes in the courtship movement.

A second reason why secular culture is so hostile to romantic love is found in the decline of Biblical modesty (though as with many things it is difficult to know what came first between the chicken and the egg). It is to be expected that a world that has become increasingly hostile to the imperatives of modesty will become hostile to romance as a logical result. What then is the connection between romance and modesty? God has designed romance to arise out of the polarity between desire and restraint, longing and self-control, while being charged with a joyful sexual tension. The shyness and restraint with which modesty surrounds the initial expressions of love contribute richness to the experience. When there is finally consummation in marriage, the encounter is all the more wonderful (filled with wonder) for having the 'foreplay' of this romantic backdrop. Now all this is lost or greatly diminished when modesty and restraint are replaced by instant gratification, whether the gratification is physical (promiscuity) or visual (immodesty).

When the erotic suggestion behind romance is implicit and subliminal, the subtle gestures of romance can express this implication in a nuanced way. All this changes when modes of dress and conduct convey one's sexuality in an immediate and external way. Sexuality becomes a crude and explicit quality, even a commodity. Further, because immodesty makes sexuality an *extrinsic* quality instead of an *elemental* and *underlying* quality, people are invited to respond to someone's sexuality independently of attraction and romance with the whole person. The result can easily be that sex becomes an object to take and discard when used up rather than a natural fulfilment of the romantic and emotional attraction that has grown between two people. In the courtship movement, because romance has also been removed as a determining factor in initial union, sex has also lost its integrated and natural function as a consummation of that romance. Sex has become an appendage to who we are as people in both cases.

So we see that almost wherever we turn the concept of romantic love comes under censor. All this post-haste and scurry in the woods does suggest a formidable foe. Yet rarely do

the critics of romantic love take time to try to understand their foe, but instead brush it aside as complete illusion. I hope to have dispelled such ideas by giving a biblical and rational framework in which to understand romance.

### Seeing Feelings in Perspective

Martin Luther once compared the human race to a drunk who falls off his horse on the right side and then, just to make sure everything evens out, tries to fall off his horse on the left side next time. This is an apt metaphor for what happens so many times in our response to human emotions. We see a tendency to go too far in one direction, so we try to even things out by going too far in the other direction. All that has happened is that we have fallen into the ditch on the left hand side of the road instead of the one on the right.

Because the heart is desperately wicked above all things (Jer. 17:9), feelings and romantic desires can be great deceivers. This is not because feelings and desires are wrong, but because they can make us *think* we have found the fulfillment of our desires in a person who is not the one the Lord has chosen for us. That is why it is so important for young people to have the guidance of older and more mature Christians as they begin experiencing these things. Such guidance should involve helping the young person to see their desire for romance and passion, not as weaknesses to be overcome, but as strengths to be reserved for the right person at the right time. Thus, the issue is not *whether* a person should experience passion, but rather, for *whom* does God want me to save these feelings. Denying the emotional side of our lives for fear of the potential explosion that can misfire may work for those whose concept of marriage resembles a business partnership, but not for those who hunger for an abiding, intimate relationship of love with their spouse. Similarly, instead of teaching unmarried people that they are sinning whenever they feel lonely, we should help them to understand that some form of loneliness is inevitable before the Lord gives us someone to love and be loved by.

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Samuel Johnson. cited in William Cooke's *Life of Samuel Foote* vol. 22 (1805), p. 154.

<sup>2</sup> Anne Brontë, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (Penguin Books, 1848), P. 293.

<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Lindvall, email newsletter, #88, 2001.

<sup>4</sup> Israel Wayne, "Don't Kiss Before the Wedding!" (*The Link: A Homeschool Newspaper*, Vol. 4, Issue 2).

<sup>5</sup> John W. Thompson, 'God's Design for Scriptural Romance Part 2: Dealing With The Dating Dilemma'. Taken from the Internet. Thompson is head of Family Shepherd Ministries and started Courtship Family Database, a website that provides a database of families for fathers to use when searching for potential spouses for their son or daughter. Thompson writes, "God has designed fellowship with Himself and within the church to fulfill our loneliness and social needs. Adam was alone, meaning he needed a helper to fulfill the dominion mandate to be fruitful and rule the earth. But Adam was never said to be lonely because he enjoyed perfect fellowship with God. Only repentance from the sin of self-pity will overcome loneliness. The real social need of individuals is to learn fellowship with Christ and His church. Having a boyfriend or girlfriend actually works against true fellowship because it creates a relationship that focuses on one and excludes others." Ibid.

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<sup>6</sup> John Thompson, 'God's Design for Scriptural Romance Part 1: Rediscovering the Timeless Truths.

<sup>7</sup> See C.S. Lewis' excellent book, *The Four Loves*. I am told that there are actually seven Greek words which are translated love, but that is beside the point for our purposes the validity of these four distinctions rest not primarily on a linguistic basis but the ontological basis they have in our experience..

<sup>8</sup> When the word love appears in the New Testament, it is usually AGAPE. This does not, however, mean that the other loves are not important. I received a letter from one man who said that AGAPE was the only kind of love that we needed to have, even in marriage. His reason for thinking that was, as he put it, "Our Lord commands us to AGAPE in every single relationship without any exception on record in the NT." My correspondent was so adamant on this point that he promised to send me a hundred bucks if I could find one exception! As this man was a professor of Greek, I figured he probably knew what he was talking about. Then Esther, my wife, drew my attention to a few scriptures. In 2 Timothy 3:3 and Romans 1:31, Paul condemns those who are "unloving". The Greek here is ASTORGOS which, according to *Vine's Expository Dictionary*, signifies the absence of natural affection or STORAGE. Romans 12:10 says, "Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love..." The Greek here is PHILOSTORGOS and is a combination of PHILIOS (friendship) and STORAGE (affection). In 2 Tim. 3:4 Paul condemns those who are not "lovers of God", the word translated love being PHILOTHEOS which indicates friendship. In 2 Corinthians 7: 15, Paul, referring to Titus, says, "And his affections are greater for you as he remembers...", etc. The word for affections here is SPLANCHA and literally indicates the bowels, regarded by the Greeks as the seat of violent passions and by the Hebrews as the seat of the tender affections. Paul was referring to Titus' emotions as something good, while elsewhere (2 Cor. 6:12) the same word is used in a sense that is not good, showing that the natural loves can be good or bad depending on how they're used and what they lead to. What about Jesus. In Philippians 1:8, Paul writes, "For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ." Again, the word for affection here is SPLANCHON, which indicates emotions. (See also Philippians 2:1, Colossians 3:12.) This shows that Jesus didn't just have AGAPE love, He also experienced the emotions of natural human affections. This is born out even further when we look at the word SPLANCHIZOMAI, which means to be moved inwardly, or to feel tenderly, which is applied of Christ frequently. This shows further that Christ experienced natural emotions - an important point as there is a heresy gaining ground in America right now, being a throwback to the quietest heresy of the middle-ages, which says that natural emotions must be stifled for the life of perfect blessedness and sanctification. Some teachers like to make a lot of the fact that the Bible tells husbands and wives to practice AGAPE while it says nothing about EROS. Indeed, Eros is not mentioned once in the New Testament. But this is hardly surprising. In the Greek speaking world, EROS would have had connotations with paganism and idolatry. The very word comes from the Greek goddess of love, called Cupid by the Latin speaking Romans. The connotations that would have been associated with that word would perhaps have been similar to the connotations associated with a term like 'falling in love' today. So it is not surprising that the New Testament avoids the term. I have used the word purely for the pragmatic need to differentiate from the other loves.

<sup>9</sup> Sheldon Vanauken, *A Severe Mercy*

<sup>10</sup> André Maurois, cited by McCallum & DeLashmutt, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

<sup>11</sup> Jonathan Lindvall, "The Dangers of Dating: Scriptural Romance - Part 2", *op. Cit.*

<sup>12</sup> It would be helpful to think of Agape in relationships like oxygen is to our bodies. Just as the fact that we must have oxygen in order for our bodies to work as God designed implies nothing about the particular purpose of any one body, so the fact that all relationships must have AGAPE if they are to work as God intends says nothing about the purpose of any particular relationship. The purpose of a relationship between a teacher and student is going to be different - and therefore require different human elements to make it work - than the relationship between employer and employee or husband and wife. AGAPE is a character attribute that should be brought to bare on all these relationships, but it does not describe the nature of any relationship to which it is predicated. Hence my argument

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that something more than AGAPE is needed for a good marriage in no way minimizes the importance of AGAPE, any more than it would to say that something more is also needed to make a person a good teacher or a good pastor.

<sup>13</sup> Wendy Shalit, *A Return to Modesty: Discovering the Lost Virtue* (New York: The Free Press, 1999), p. 37.

## The Courting Game

*Very seldom are we ever invited to live out of our heart. If we are wanted, we are often wanted for what we can offer functionally.... So we learn to offer only those parts of us that are approved, living out a carefully crafted performance to gain acceptance from those who represent life to us. We divorce ourselves from our heart and begin to live a double life.*

—Brent Curtis & John Eldredge<sup>1</sup>

*A parent must respect the spiritual person of his child, and approach it with reverence, for that too looks the Father in the face and has an audience with Him into which no earthly parent can enter even if he dared to desire it.*

— George MacDonald<sup>2</sup>

Long before Joshua Harris made history by kissing dating goodbye, Bill Gothard was giving seminars. As far as I am aware, Gothard was the first major proponent of the courtship movement, beginning in the mid sixties with his Institute in Basic Youth Conflicts. Because of Gothard's crucial influence in spearheading the courtship movement, together with the fact that thousands of American families subscribe religiously to his teachings, I feel it is important to devote some space to an explanation of his courtship views. It must be emphasized, however, that since the time when Gothard started the ball rolling, there have been many other teachers who have presented different models, often of a more moderate nature than Gothard. However, the in-fighting between the various models need not concern us (apart from the important distinction between courtship and 'betrothal', which will be considered later in the book) since nearly all the models spring from the same underlying assumptions about relationships and life. Gothard's writing on the subject is particularly insightful since these common assumptions are often stated with alarming precision.

### Gothard's Umbrella Principle

In the courtship movement, the issue of authority is one of the basic axiom from which all their other ideas follow. Gothard is no exception. In short, according to Gothard, all human relationships are governed by a chain of command similar to that in the military. It is *only* when we find our place in God's chain of command, and get under our proper authority, that God will be able to protect us.

Authority is like an 'umbrella of protection', and when we get out from under it, we expose ourselves to unnecessary temptations which are too strong for us to overcome.<sup>3</sup>

“Satan cannot get through to some sons and daughters unless there is a leak in the father's umbrella.”<sup>4</sup>

Gothard maintains that the above truths about authority and chain of command form “The Basis of Achieving Great Faith” since “The size of our God is greatly determined by our ability to see how He is able to work through those in authority over us...”<sup>5</sup> In his booklets about authority one cannot avoid the impression that Gothard is trying to 'sell' his idea to the reader. He begins by listing fifteen rewards that happen to all who get under the proper authority, which include "You will have a long life.... You will avoid fear or condemnation.... You will receive the glory of God.... You will not blaspheme God or His Word.... You will be given clear direction.... You will be protected from evil people.... You will receive God's praise....", and so on.<sup>6</sup>

Gothard especially emphasizes these principles in family relationships. If the father's authority is not properly recognized, then everything else will fall out of place. For example, Gothard teaches wives to believe that rebellious children are the direct result of their own failure to fully submit to their own husbands. In this way, everything in a family stands or falls on this issue of authority and submission. This applies no matter what the person in authority may actually be like.

One of the texts Gothard cites in support of this theory is the familiar passage of Luke 2:41-52. This passage tells us about Jesus when He was twelve. You're probably all familiar with the story. Jesus had gone with his parents to the Feast of Passover at Jerusalem. The time came to go home, but Jesus stayed behind, unbeknownst to his parents. Mary and Joseph only discovered that their son was not among their company after a day's journeying. Returning to Jerusalem, Joseph and Mary searched for Jesus for three days. Eventually they discovered Jesus in the temple listening and asking questions of the teachers.

It is a fascinating story, but what does it have to do with the 'umbrella of protection' and chain of command? According to Gothard, the whole point of the story is to show that Jesus was resolving an internal conflict of interest between obeying God vs. obeying his parents. “Should he follow His spiritual calling and be about His Father's business (Luke 2:49),” asks Gothard, “or should he become subject to His parents and leave His ministry at the temple?”<sup>7</sup> Apparently, Jesus resolved this internal conflict by choosing to re-submit to his parents' authority and come back under their umbrella of protection.

The implications that such an interpretation entails are obvious. If Jesus had to make the difficult decision of submitting to his parents' wishes, then that must mean that He was not submitted at the time. By choosing to re-submit to the umbrella of protection, Jesus must have ceased from His rebellion and sin!<sup>8</sup>

## **Chain of Command**

What Gothard actually means by authority and submission extends far beyond the bounds set by scripture, as the father is to be treated as a dictatorial autocrat with practically unlimited

control. Prior to 1984, in the "Chain-of-Command" section of Gothard's seminar notebook, there is a picture of the husband as the hammer, the wife as the chisel, and the children as gems in the rough. It is a ghastly illustration with the husband beating on the wife who is chipping away on the children. (Due to the concerns expressed, later editions eliminated this drawing and changed the title from 'Chain of Command' to 'Umbrella of Protection' without any actual change in the teaching itself.)

This picture illustrated how Gothard

has become preoccupied with an authoritarian pattern of human relationships that is not balanced sufficiently with love as a model.... It seems that Gothard fails to adequately present the need for relationships with children, positing instead the proper role and proper discipline that is necessary to get a desired response from the children. The preoccupation is with control, predictability, the proper behavior instead of the need for nurturing relationships in which learned behavior & attitudes come from *models, not coercive Manipulation.*<sup>9</sup>

Bockelman cites some interesting examples of what typically happens when these theories are put into practice. One person is cited as saying, "I used to have a good relationship with my boss. He was kind. I thought we worked together well. We respected each other. Then he went to an institute in Basic Youth Conflicts Seminar, and ever since then he has been much harder to work for. He now has the idea of authority, and we no longer have the spirit at work we used to have."<sup>10</sup> In another case, a person was quoted as saying, "I have a sister & brother-in-law, who have just the greatest family. They have two children, both below 10. There is an excellent relationship between the parents & the children. The kids get along well with each other & with their parents. It's just the kind of ideal family I'd like to have. Then the father went to the Institute in Basic Youth Conflicts, & now everything is changed, He's an authoritarian tyrant The kids are getting nervous. Something happened."<sup>11</sup>

As a child matures into adulthood, Gothard teaches that he passes from chain of command to chain of counsel.<sup>12</sup> Yet, as other critics of Gothard have pointed out, in practice there seems to be no difference between Gothard's teaching on chain of command and chain of counsel since he believes no one should ever go against parental counsel, no matter how old the child may be and no matter how ungodly the parents may be. (The only exception he recognizes is if the parent commands something that is a direct and obvious violation of scripture.) Gothard even "suggests that, unless they have parental consent, adult single children should remain at home and that married couples should exercise what seems to be excessive dependence on the counsel of their parents..."<sup>13</sup> The parental chain of command/counsel ends only if the parent delegates the authority to someone else.

This is just one example of how the chain-of-command advocates must twist the Bible completely out of shape before they can find any validation for their model. I am reminded of the time I overheard one man arguing for this approach with a lady who wanted to know about the annunciation. "When the angel Gabriel appeared directly to Mary," she asked, "wasn't this a violation of God's appropriate chain-of-command, according to your view?" "Not at all," the man replied, "for I believe that before the angel appeared to Mary, he had already gone through Mary's father first."

We must now turn to see the implication these ideas have on Gothard's teaching about courtship and dating.

### **The Abomination of Dating**

To put it bluntly, Gothard teaches that young people must allow their authorities to determine whom they will marry, and that *God can bless no marriage if it goes against parental counsel.*

Gothard's booklet *Establishing Biblical Standards of Courtship*, opens with a picture of a handsome couple riding bicycles together. Beneath the picture are the following words:

Is this couple dating, or courting? The answer will have an important effect upon their lives, the lives of their families, and (if they marry) the lives of those in every generation which follows.

"There is a definite and vital difference between courtship and dating. Unless this difference is understood and the principles of courtship are applied, defrauding and hurts can result, as well as lasting physical, mental, and spiritual consequences."<sup>14</sup>

Dating must be a terrible sin if it can have consequences "in every generation which follows." In fact, when the Lord destroyed mankind with a flood, and God saw "that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually," (Genesis 6:5), Gothard believes that "these thoughts were being cultivated through dating-type relationships which were common in that society..."<sup>15</sup>

Definitions are very important for Gothard. In fact, he produces a calendar that gives people a word a month, along with his definition and a supporting scripture. So we do well to ask, how does Gothard define the horrible sin of dating which was practiced at the time of the flood and which has "lasting physical, mental, and spiritual consequences" for those "in every generation which follows"? Gothard defines dating simply as "having a special interest in a person of the opposite gender and cultivating that interest through thoughts, looks, notes, talks, or events...{rather} than building mutual commitment toward the potential of marriage, the goal of dating is personal pleasure."<sup>16</sup> Courtship, on the other hand, "is a father's agreeing to work with a qualified young man to win his daughter for marriage."<sup>17</sup>

Those who court realize that "the Lord has warned us not to follow our natural inclinations but to receive His precise guidelines for carrying out a Godly courtship."<sup>18</sup> In defining dating and courting so tightly and then juxtaposing them side by side, Gothard is creating a false dilemma by assuming that all who date do it for the motive of personal pleasure rather than from the motive of mutual commitment towards the potential of marriage. But this is not always the case, and even if it were, why must courtship be the only alternative rather than, say, serious, conscientious dating? Furthermore, personal pleasure is not necessarily always a bad thing. Neither do Gothard's strictures address the many male/female relationships that are conducted on a purely PHILIA basis.

Gothard's answer to such considerations would seem to be that in dating there is the assumption that you choose your own partner, whereas in courtship you simply submit to your

parent's choice. Gothard cites Solomon, David and Samson as examples that "Those who were the most qualified to choose their own life partners brought sorrow into their lives when they tried to do so."<sup>19</sup>

Another reason why Gothard believes that "Through the deception of dating, Satan is able to reduce the fruitfulness of one's ministry both in singleness and in marriage,"<sup>20</sup> is because when single people spend too much time pairing off and enjoying companionship with members of the opposite sex, they rob themselves of being able "to enjoy the benefits of singleness,"<sup>21</sup> and hence, when they do get married they may soon get bored and "neglect the responsibilities of marriage to enjoy the benefits of singleness."<sup>22</sup>

### **Emotional Sterilization**

Gothard goes on to object to companionship on more fundamental grounds. Although he lists companionship and completeness in his "Six Purposes of Marriage"<sup>23</sup>, he nevertheless maintains that when a single person feels the need to have this companionship, that is a direct result of not being content with the Lord. "...unless we are content with the Lord in singleness," argues Gothard with characteristic universal negatives, "we will not be content with another person in marriage."<sup>24</sup> Therefore, single people should not feel lonely, for,

We experience feelings of loneliness as a result of a deepening desire for companionship. ...when we experience loneliness, this often indicates to us that we are allowing the longings of our souls to dominate our lives, rather than enjoying the ever-present fellowship of God's Spirit with *our* spirits....

"As the Lord brings us through difficult times and we begin to feel lonely, we can accept this as His signal to us that at the very same moment, He is experiencing the same anguish toward us and wants us to make *Him* our basic delight."<sup>25</sup>

Although this idea about loneliness may not seem immediately relevant to the discussion of dating and courtship, it is actually very revealing. It is part of an overall scheme in which the repression of natural emotions is predominant. In his book *The Power of Crying Out*, Gothard even goes so far as to delineate when and how a person should or should not cry.

It may seem that I have wandered rather far a field from Gothard's teaching on courtship, but I have done so in order that we might understand all his ideas in light of a regime in which the emotions must be so regulated that nothing happens independent of volitional control and careful deliberation. It is a hardening up process that reminds me of the disconnection of one's feelings that often occurs among those who have survived the traumas of a war. Many young people who accept this teaching begin to think that emotional desires must indicate a lack of commitment to God. This false dilemma is leading many young people into a torturous struggle in which their emotions are perceived as a threat to their desire to be 'all for Jesus.'

## The Courtship Period

The courtship must not begin until the young people have reached a sufficient degree of sanctification. They should have plenty of time to be at work on this since Gothard discourages marriage before the age of thirty.<sup>26</sup> When a young man is old enough for marriage, sufficiently mature, has amassed monetary wealth and has acquired enough necessary skills for marriage (*i.e.*, this includes being capable of implementing the “five aspects of a 'dynamic home'”), the Lord will indicate the woman he is to court through those who are in authority over him.

When a young man has deepened his fellowship with the Lord, the means God will use to confirm direction toward a particular young lady will be through the authorities He has established... Once the young woman's father has given the young man freedom to focus on winning her heart, the couple enters into courtship.<sup>27</sup>

It must be emphasized that under *no* possible circumstances is a courtship to be entered into without the consent of the parents. In his seminar Gothard says, “I'm firmly convinced that God never intended girls to turn down dates. He intended for their fathers to.” This principle applies equally to marriage. In fact, Gothard encourages children to sign binding vows, promising not to marry without their parent's consent.

Unlike the suggestions given in *Best Friends For Life*, Gothard believes that once the actual period of courtship begins, it should be as short as possible. Given the fact that the man and woman should have had no significant relationship (sometimes not even an acquaintance) previous to the period of courtship, the brevity of the courtship period is truly alarming. Among other things, it raises the practical problem of how two young people are supposed to get to know each other – and hence to know whether they want to spend the rest of their lives together - in such a brief period of time? Gothard's answer is that they get to know each other primarily through getting to know the parents.<sup>28</sup> Since “the proper way to get to know the young lady is by building a relationship with her father”<sup>29</sup> it follows that a private relationship is not necessary for two people who are courting. Indeed, a private relationship is often discouraged with relentless tenacity. As Howard Grant, one of Gothard's followers, said about his twenty-eight year old daughter's courtship, “In a sense, the whole courtship hinged on this principle - a full agreement that there must not be a 'private' relationship built up. Without such an understanding, it's not a true courtship. That's why an understanding about letters and phone calls is so important, because for most people these things become key building blocks toward privacy.”<sup>30</sup>

## Walk in the Counsel of the Ungodly?

A question that naturally arises from Gothard's teaching is this: what is the procedure when the parents are ungodly or simply opposed to the whole idea of courtship? Gothard's answer – based again on twisted exegesis - is that it makes no difference how ungodly the parents may be,

for whether they are Christians or Satanists you still must not marry without their full consent or you are acting in rebellion and *will* have marriage problems.

To support this idea Gothard quotes Proverbs 6:20-21: "My son, keep your father's command, and do not forsake the law of your mother. Bind them continually upon your heart tie them around your neck." Gothard makes the comment, "Notice that the spiritual condition of the parents is not listed as a factor in obeying these clear commands." Since this verse says to keep your father's command, and gives no qualifications or exceptions, Gothard concludes that we must obey our parents no matter how wicked they may be and even when they tell us to perform actions we believe to be contrary to God's will. Yet the 'commands' and 'law' that this proverb refers to is clearly a reference to the laws of Moses, using language very similar to Deuteronomy 6. Solomon was exhorting young people to hold onto the Mosaic law as learned from their parents, and is not addressing the situation of ungodly parents. This kind of exegesis is typical of Gothard's habit of extracting single verses from the spirit of the whole Bible and then forming an absurd theology based on them, while ignoring other verses that qualify or shed light on those verses.. Gothard does actually allow for exceptions to his strict interpretation of Proverbs 6:20-21, but only when parents require something that is against a direct commandment of scripture. If a parent told a child to murder someone, for example, then Gothard would allow for an exception!

Returning from one of Gothard's seminars, Bockelman reports on a testimony Gothard cites about two dedicated Christians who believed God wanted them to marry.<sup>31</sup> They pray about their relationship and they decide to get married, convinced that their plans have God's blessing. But the parents of the girl, who are not Christians themselves, objected. What does she do? No matter what the situation the fact is - according to Gothard - she must be obedient *always* to her parents.

We don't know any of the background of that situation; it may be that the non-Christian parents were wise and saw problems that this young lady was not aware of. But that is not the point. The point that is important to remember is that Gothard has established rules which young people are expected to conform to in every situation regardless of the background and particularities of individual circumstances. Whether this is how God intended things to be is an important question that must be considered in the following chapter.

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<sup>1</sup> Brent Curtis & John Eldredge, *The Sacred Romance* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997), p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> George MacDonald, from *George MacDonald: An Anthology*, compiled and edited by C. S. Lewis.

<sup>3</sup> Textbook for Gothard's Basic Seminar, p. 20.

<sup>4</sup> Bill Gothard, cited by Wilfred Bockelman, *Gothard: The Man and His Ministry: An Evaluation* (Milford, MI: Quill Publications), p. 73.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 19.

<sup>6</sup> *How to get Under God's Protection* (Institute in Basic Youth Conflicts, 1987), pp. 3-4.

<sup>7</sup> Basic Seminar Textbook, p. 20.

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<sup>8</sup> See Don Veinot, Joy Veinot & Ron Henzel, *A Matter of Basic Principles: Bill Gothard & The Christian Life*, (21<sup>st</sup> Century Press, 2002), pp. 102-6 for an excellent response to Gothard's interpretation of Luke 2:41-52.

<sup>9</sup> Bockelman, *op. cit.*, p. 80 & 83.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid, op. cit.*, p. 82.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>12</sup> "The final responsibility of parents for their sons and daughters is to determine with them God's will for a life partner. Thereafter they serve in a chain of counsel for them and their children. Thus, parents enter in the line of authority, and they leave in the line of counsel." *The True Significance of The Wedding Covenant* (Published by ATI).

<sup>13</sup> G. Richard Fisher, "A Study in Evolving Fadism: The Cultic Leanings of Bill Gothard's Teaching", *The Quarterly Journal of Personal Freedom Outreach*, April-June 1996.

<sup>14</sup> *Establishing Biblical Standards of Courtship* (Oak Brook, ILL: Institute in Basic Life Principles, 1993) p. 6.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, p. 6.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, p. 8.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid* p. 7.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, p. 6. I shall be address the examples of Solomon, David and Samson in a following chapter.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, p. 9.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>23</sup> *The True Significance of The Wedding Covenant*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, p. 10.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, p. 11.

<sup>26</sup> Jacob Prasch writes, "Disturbing also is the anti-matrimonial bias of Bill Gothard and his youth seminars. The potential consequences of Gothard's bias can be devastating. He discourages marriage until the age of 30, the gynecological age where if a female has not already had a child she runs the risk statistically of infertility, miscarriage, and a host of possible congenital birth defects for her baby. Gothard is neither medically nor theologically qualified." MORIEL Prayer and Newsletter, December 1999/January 2000, page 3.

<sup>27</sup> *Establishing Biblical Standards of Courtship* (Oak Brook, ILL: Institute in Basic Life Principles, 1993) p. 11.

<sup>28</sup> Gothard writes, "The proper way to get to know the young lady is by building a relationship with her father.... In the Biblical example of Isaac and Rebekah Abraham clearly instructed that Isaac's wife was to be of his own

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kindred. This indicates that Isaac and Rebekah would have known each other through their fathers, and this explains why Rebekah did not hesitate to go with Abraham's servant and marry one whom she did not know personally.... Dating is based on what is presently known about each other. However, God designed courtship to lead to a marriage covenant based on what *He* knows about each partner..." Ibid, p. 11.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Cited by Michael and Judy Phillips, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

<sup>31</sup> Bockelman, *op. cit.* p. 74.

## God in the Back

*“What is this new-fangled religion of yours, this novel sort of humility, that, by your own example, you would take from us power to judge men’s decisions and make us defer uncritically to human authority? Where does God’s written Word tell us to do that?”*

—Martin Luther<sup>1</sup>

*“The Bible requires children to honor their parents throughout life. When they are little this honor takes the form of obedience. But this obligation to obedience ceases when a new household is formed. If a boy were to obey his parents all the way through life, there is no way he could really leave them, cleave to his new wife, and establish a new household.... Children should leave home and make their own mistakes. If they have been brought up well, those mistakes will not be horrific.*

*“The parents should view themselves as successful if their seventeen-year-old boy wants to be away from home.*

—Douglas Wilson<sup>2</sup>

I first downloaded Sarah Schlissel’s article on courtship and a father’s rights about a year ago. Sarah, who was nineteen when she wrote this article, is an influential speaker and writer about courtship and relationship issues. Her parents operate an online matchmaking service for reformed Christians. Sarah’s article “Daddy’s Girl: Courtship and a Father’s Rights” is found many places on the internet and is a favorite amongst courtship enthusiasts. Sarah encourages girls, when they reach marriageable age, to recognize their father’s ‘ownership rights’ over them. She takes the principle that “to generate something is to have an implicit sovereignty over it” and applies this to a father’s sovereignty over his daughter. “As strange as it may sound,” she writes

in the peculiar relationship of the father and daughter, God, as it were, takes a back seat. God has created a hierarchy such that the daughter is directly answerable to her father, and her father then answers to God....

The order of God, as indicated in his word, is that God himself defers to the will of the father when it comes to his daughter. God says, "You heard your father. The answer is no." Thus, the will of the father regarding his daughter IS the will of God.

God in the back seat? How does a jealous God feel being relegated to the back seat of a woman’s life?

I am reminded of the time I tried to encourage a twenty-two year old man named Steve to seek a closer walk with Jesus. Steve brushed all my words aside saying, “That’s up to Daddy. Talk to him about it because he’s in charge of that part of my life.” As I later found out, Steve had heard a woman share her testimony about her relationship with Jesus and realized that something was missing from his life. When Steve told his father about this, the father responded by telling him to stop thinking about that sort of thing. Furthermore, he encouraged Steve to give *him* total control over that part of his life. He would serve as a sort of mediator between Steve and God. “That way you will not have to worry”, said Steve’s father, “because you can just relax in the knowledge that if there is anything you need do or know concerning Jesus, I’ll tell you.”

Steve’s father used authority, like many people use courtship, as a means to control. Douglas Wilson has observed that “Domineering fathers and manipulative mothers are frequently tempted to use the courtship model as a way of controlling their children instead of serving them.”<sup>3</sup> Against the backdrop of such abuses, the temptation is to throw out authority altogether. This is a temptation that, I must confess, I have not been immune to. Indeed, for many years I tenaciously avoided terms like ‘authority’ and ‘submission’, almost considering them to be dirty words because of my own experiences. However, when the abuse of authority in one direction leads to an equally unbiblical approach in the opposite extreme, it is only a matter of time before the pendulum swings back to where it was in the beginning and we are no better off.<sup>4</sup> The solution is to find the Biblical balance. In this chapter we shall be considering the Bible’s teaching on authority and how this teaching is being misused by many in the courtship movement.

## **Is the Old Testament Relevant?**

In seeking to establish a Biblical balance on parental authority, I shall be drawing on both the Old and the New Testaments. I realize that some of my readers may find this difficult, especially as many of the teachers in the courtship movement have been criticized for relying on O.T. models. Such models, it is believed, are antithetic to the grace of Christ as revealed in the New Testament. Later we shall be considering what some of these O.T. models are, but at the moment it must be stressed that the problem is not *that* these teachers are relying on the O.T; rather, the problem is *how* they are using and interpreting the O.T. In opposing these teachers, we must avoid reacting into a false dichotomy between the Old and New Testaments that the Lord never intended. God did not start over at the time of the N.T. Just as the O.T. cannot be appreciated properly without seeing how it is fulfilled in the New, so the N.T. cannot be understood properly without appreciating how it builds on the foundation already laid in the Old.

Without the O.T. we are greatly handicapped in offering an adequate solution to much of the false teaching that is being given on parental authority. This is because whatever the N.T. has to say on the subject of parental authority, it builds on the foundation already laid in the Old. Thus, when Paul was writing to the Ephesians on the subject of parental authority, he rooted his teaching in the moral authority of Old Testament law.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother,” which is the first commandment with promise: “that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.” (Ephesians 6:1-3)

The reason Paul could quote the Sinai law when addressing Gentile children is because, through faith, Gentile believers have now been grafted in to God’s covenant family (Rom. 11:17). The result of Gentiles coming into the covenant is that they are heirs of covenantal laws and promises of the Old covenant.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, “Rather than neglect Mosaic law,” writes Jason Fletcher,

Christians have a theological responsibility to seek in the law given to shape the nation of Israel insight into God’s will for nations generally. This is because Mosaic law was never intended exclusively for Israel; its ethical principles originate in the character of God and are foundational to the creation order. Moreover, Jesus does not abolish Mosaic law but authoritatively reveals its underlying ethical intent, and Paul, although critical of the misuse and powerlessness of the law, also affirms its abiding ethical authority.<sup>6</sup>

Wisdom will be needed to know how to apply God’s laws in today’s world. If, as we shall see, wisdom was required to know how to apply God’s laws at the time they were written, how much more is this true in the world of today. Because we are culturally and politically very far removed from the time when God gave His people the law, there are many laws which seem irrelevant today. However, even in such cases, there are always guiding principles behind the laws that can be extracted and applied in our differing context. For example, in Deuteronomy 22:8 we read the Lord’s command that there be a parapet around the roof of the house. Just because we no longer live in houses with flat roofs does not mean we are free to simply disregard this command, for there are numerous ways that the principle behind such a law – appropriate safety and care of another’s life – can be applied in today’s world. Similarly, the Old Testament laws that related to the theocracy of Israel or the ceremonial requirements that found fulfilment in the death of Christ, still contain truth to which we can and should attend.<sup>7</sup>

With that foundation, we are now in a position to examine what both the Old and New Testaments have to say on the subject of parental authority.

## **Biblical Authority**

As we have already seen from Paul, the foundation of the Bible’s teaching on parental authority is the fifth commandment, “Honor your father and your mother...” (Ex. 20:12; Dt. 5:16; Mt. 15:4; Eph. 6:2). Though this does not tell us very much about the actual functioning of parental authority, it does lay the foundation on which authority must operate. Children must seek, in all things, to honor their parents. It would be a mistake to think that this commandment only applies to young children. No matter how old one may be, Jesus showed that we are still under the command to honor our parents (Mt. 15:3-6). The problem is that in the courtship and betrothal movements, many teachers have made honor synonymous with assumptions about

perpetual obedience. Esther and I have known many families torn apart because of a misapplied notion of honor that grown children have been required to render their parents.

It is true that part of what it means to honor one's parents is to honor the authority God has invested in them. Though all authority rests ultimately with God, the Bible shows that He has invested His authority to different human institutions. "For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God." (Romans 13:1; see also 1 Pet. 2:13-17) As this verse makes clear, the only legitimate authority is that which God has appointed. Now the Bible makes clear that God has invested His authority to certain human institutions, including civil magistrates, church government and the 'government' of the family. The question is whether parental authority functions the same way over grown children as it does over young children. The Bible indicates that parental authority does functions differently over children than it does over adults. While all people are told to honor their parents, it is only children who are commanded to actually obey their parents (Eph. 6:1-3; Col. 3:20). Thus, when Paul lays out the various orders of human authority in his letter to the Corinthians, when he comes to the man he gives no human authority, saying instead that the man is directly accountable to God (1 Cor. 11:3).

In attempting to establish a mandate for perpetual obedience of parents, Lindvall and others have appealed to Romans 1:30-32 and 2 Timothy 3:2-6, where Paul refers to disobedience to parents in a list of other sins that are clearly addressed to adults. Lindvall argues that because the other sins in this list apply to adults – murderers, slanderers, etc. - so the sin of being disobedient to parents must also apply to adults, not simply children. Hence, he says, we should obey our parents even when we are full grown. However, since Lindvall does not apply this prohibition to adult women who are married, since they are then under their husband's authority, his interpretation hinges on maintaining that the entire list of sins refers exclusively to adult males. But the context of these passages, particularly the Romans 1, makes this a difficult hypothesis to maintain. The Romans 1 passage is addressing the perverse end of those who exchange the truth of God for a lie, and there is no reason to assume Paul only had adult males in mind at this point. Similarly, in the 2 Timothy passage, the word for men is the generic word "anthropos" which is neither gender nor age specific, so it is reasonable that within this generic rubric Paul would make mention of specific sins that were committed by a subset of anthropos, namely children. Even Lindvall must agree that this is exegetically possible since he maintains that married women are outside the people guilty of this particular sin.

We have seen that Paul taught that married men are directly accountable to God. Does this mean a man should not be independent until the moment of marriage? The apostle does not directly address this question, so it is a matter of wisdom. When we consider the fact that sons should be prepared for marriage and independence, it is wise to introduce such independence progressively, well before the time of marriage. Remember, young men should be trained to *leave* their father and mother, in accordance with Genesis 2:24. If a young man has never learned to stand on his own feet, he is not suddenly going to be capable of leading a wife and family. As Macaulay and Barrs point out,

Genesis 2:24 speaks of a man leaving his father and mother when he gets married. But this does not mean that marriage should be considered the moment of independence. The independence of the child should be a goal to which the parents

aim. And it should be fostered deliberately so that with each succeeding year quietly and perhaps imperceptibly because of its gradualness, the child moves from being under the parents to being alongside them. The Bible gives no age at which this is to be achieved, but it is clearly the whole intention of the parent/child relationship. The parents are to view themselves only as in *loco parente*, that is, in the place of the parenthood of God. This is what should be uppermost in their minds. In the sense of having their children dependent on them, they are parents for only a short period. God alone is the child's permanent parent. Therefore, they are to aim at withdrawing gradually from their position of authority.<sup>8</sup>

If one surveys the traditions of other cultures, we find that young men became independent no later than their late teenage years. In ancient Greece a boy was considered to graduate out of his father's care at eighteen; in Rome this stage occurred anywhere between fourteen and seventeen, while among the ancient Hebrews it was at twelve that a father relinquished the responsibility for his son to God. William Barclay explains that

In the Jewish world, when a boy had passed his twelfth birthday, on the first Sabbath after it, the father took the boy to the Synagogue, where he became A Son of the Law. The father thereupon uttered a benediction, "Blessed be Thou, O God, who has taken from me the responsibility for this boy." The boy prayed a prayer in which he said, "O my God and God of my fathers! On this solemn and sacred day, which marks my passage from boyhood to manhood, I humbly raise my eyes unto Thee, and declare with sincerity and truth, that henceforth I will keep Thy commandments, and undertake and bear the responsibility of mine actions towards Thee."<sup>9</sup>

Much wisdom is contained in the above benediction. The passage from boyhood to manhood is one where the responsibility of parents is transferred to the responsibility of God. The relinquishing of parental authority and responsibility should be concurrent with the parent's also withdrawing their subsidy.<sup>10</sup> Though a son continues to be under the Biblical obligation to heed the wisdom of his parents (Prov. 1:8-9), the elders in the church (Heb. 13:7, 17) and all godly counsel (Prov. 12:15, 19:20, 20:5; 27:9), he is not to do so under the position of his parents' headship. The son is no longer accountable to his parents but is directly accountable to God for his decisions.

Parental authority over daughters functions differently than with sons. While the authority parents have over sons has a provisional function that should lead into their future independence, the authority that a father has over his daughter fulfils a protective function. Just as the husband is supposed to protect the wife as "the weaker vessel" (1 Pet. 3:7), so the father has a responsibility to protect his daughters for the same reason. This is a difficult concept to grasp in a society that has come to believe that the male instinct to protect and look out for women (and therefore to treat them differently to men) is demeaning to the woman. This only shows how far removed we are from God's heart. According to scripture, women need to be protected and it is the man's responsibility to do so. This comes across clearly in the numerous Old Testament laws relating to the protection of women.

If it is true that men are, in general, obligated by scripture to protect women, how much more is it true that fathers are obligated to protect their daughters. Here again, the spirit of this age counsels us in the opposite direction. In an attempt to avoid the being 'over-protective', the fathers of today leave their daughters vulnerable to all manner of abuse and mistreatment. Yet as the Old Testament laws clearly indicate, it is the responsibility of men to protect women.

### **Numbers 30 & the Nullification of Vows**

We see this principle operative in Numbers 30 where we read about the laws concerning vows. If a man makes a vow to the Lord or swears an oath, he is bound by it and not allowed to break his word. But if a woman makes a vow "while in her father's house in her youth" (in other words, before she is married, while she is still being subsidised by her father), it can be cancelled by her father, provided that he does so on the same day he hears of it. If the woman is married while under a vow she has made, or if she makes a vow whilst married, her husband has the authority to cancel it, again provided he does so on the day he hears of it. This law does not apply to widows or a divorced woman.

Because this passage often plays a central part in the courtship and betrothal apologetic, we need to consider correct application of this law. To do this, it is necessary to first understand something of Ancient Near Eastern legal theory. Jonathan Burnside has pointed out that "Modern scholarly assumptions on how to read biblical law are often based on the values of modern liberalism, particularly the 'rule of law' (the belief that adjudication should be governed by laws and not by people)."<sup>11</sup> Burnside explains that these assumptions lead us to approach biblical laws like we approach our own laws, that is, by looking at all the instances covered by the literal language of a particular law. However, a less anachronistic approach to the laws of the Ancient Near East (including the Old Testament legal code) is not to ask "What situations do the words of this rule cover?" but "What typical image(s) do the words of this rule evoke?" and "What situations (within known social contexts) does this rule make you think of?"

The image that the Numbers 30 law brings to mind is a situation where a father or husband is exercising protective authority over his daughter/wife. The principle behind it is the same as that behind all the laws given for the protection of women. If a woman binds herself by "vows or by a rash utterance from her lips" (Num. 30:6), it is the father or the husband who are ultimately responsible to see that the woman is protected from her own foolishness. It is God's care and love which comes across here, as in all the other laws designed to protect women. And, of course, the issue of authority is just assumed. You cannot be responsible for protecting a woman that you have no authority over.

At this point we can imagine the champions of courtship smiling contentedly to themselves. "Yes," they will say, "you finally got it right Robin: a father's authority over his daughter continues until she is married. Therefore, *even if she is a grown woman Dad can still tell her what to do.*" This is, in fact, what many people are now arguing, often legitimizing it on the basis of this Numbers passage. After all, they point out, if a father can overrule his daughter's will on something as big and important as a vow to the Lord, then how much more should he have authority to overrule his daughter on smaller less important things. Does this passage, therefore, give fathers the right to micromanage their daughter's personal lives up until they are

married? I know one woman whose father believed he had the right to revoke his permission of the match right up until the minute they were wed. He did actually threaten to withdraw his authorization if his daughter didn't exhibit the right attitudes, do her chores properly, and so on. She was in her twenties at the time. Similarly, Lindvall wonders whether this law in Numbers gives fathers the authority to nullify their daughter's marriage vows.

We will deal with the question of marriage vows first. In Old Testament culture, marriage was not a vow but a legal contract. Girls could enter such contracts after the age of twelve and boys after the age of thirteen. While a marriage was not legal unless the woman gave her consent, it could be legal (though not always socially acceptable) without the consent of the father, provided the girl was at least twelve years of age. Further, there is no evidence that any Jews or rabbis ever thought to apply this law to the question of marriage. Rather, it should be seen in the context of the corpus of laws given for the protection of women.

Because the principle behind this law was God's desire to love and protect women, fathers who use it as a blank check to exercise ungodly control are violating the spirit of this law. Since the Old Testament laws were meant to give us pictures that apply to the typical cases they make us think of, we simply cannot take a rule like this and then transpose the principle behind it (a father's authority over unmarried daughters) to any scenario we like. In his book *Studies in the Semiotics of Biblical Law*<sup>12</sup>, Bernard Jackson has suggested that disputes would not have been settled by seeing if they were 'covered' by the literal meaning of any given rule, but by seeing "whether the dispute is sufficiently *similar* to the picture evoked by the rule to justify its use in order to resolve the problem. If it is sufficiently similar, it applies, even though it is not the literal meaning of the words."<sup>13</sup> Because "how similar?" questions are evaluative, a good judge would have required more than just knowledge of the law; rather, he needed to have a sense of spiritual wisdom that could only be gained through a great deal of reflection on and understanding about the whole of God's law.

The Numbers passage clearly assumes that women will be making independent decisions, but this is not antithetic to a father's protective oversight. Similarly, to say that an unmarried woman is under the protection of her father's authority does not mean that she must always live at home or that she cannot pursue independent activities. Fathers are required to provide protective authority for their daughters, not oppressive authority over their daughters. Just as a husband's authority over his wife is meant to be through servanthood and sacrifice (Eph. 5:25), so a father's authority over his daughter should follow the same pattern. This authority is to be applied in love with a respect for the other-ness of the daughter.

This does *not* mean that parents should keep their daughters in an insular environment cut off from what is happening in the world. To isolate and 'shelter' a woman, in the name of 'protection', is actually to leave her unprotected since she will be badly equipped to face the challenges of the world and parenting. Parents should actively foster independence in their daughters while still exercising loving protection over their relationships, not least in a culture like our own where there are so many sexual predators lurking about. If women needed protection in Old Testament culture, how much more in our decadent age. In this regard, going back to courtship as it used to be practiced in previous centuries by responsible Christians, could be a good thing. The problem is that it is difficult to even begin to explore some of these solutions so long as they are sabotaged with other ideas like an unbiblical reliance on technique,

authoritarian control, bad exegesis, oppressive restrictions on cross gender friendships, together with unbiblical doctrines like emotional purity.

In his book *Her Hand in Marriage*<sup>14</sup>, Douglas Wilson has made some progress trying to understand what Biblical courtship/dating might look like without these added factors, while being acutely conscious that, in the hands of the wrong kind of man, his teaching on authority would lead to disaster. To apply the biblical principle of authority without wisdom is like a proverb in the mouth of a fool, being as useless as legs that hang limp (Prov. 26:7).

## **Authority Gone Wrong**

Parents must raise their sons to be future leaders and to therefore want to be independent of them. Distortions of the parental task occur when sons are trained to be perpetually dependent on parents, whether financially, emotionally, psychologically or spiritually. Although daughters are not being trained in the same way as men, they should still be trained to be independent in the sense of being mature, being able to make their own decisions, developing a Biblical strength of mind and having a sense of their own identity as individuals before God. All these things come naturally in a healthy environment and are an essential preparation for marriage.

On the other hand, when these elements or not in place for either the son or daughter, the transition into marriage can be unnecessarily rocky. One young woman who went through the courtship system and whose family believed in excessive parental authority, wrote to me after she was married, saying,

I found that I was not very well-equipped for life as an adult, even a married woman. I did not know how to make decisions or how to have opinions and desires that may be different from an authority's, personal boundaries, a real personality and identity of my own, or an independent relationship with God. I am learning, but it's very difficult and at times painful.

Jonathan Lindvall has gone so far as to teach that sons and daughters should not have opinions and desires different to those of their parents.<sup>15</sup> Lindvall has certainly succeeded in planting this vision in his children. On his website Lindvall shares a song that his daughter Bethany wrote for him on Father's day. The chorus goes as follows:

I want to give you my heart  
All my dreams, my time and love.  
I set my eyes to observe your ways  
That I may learn to please the Lord.

It is not surprising that Lindvall's daughter would feel like this about her father. From an early age, Lindvall shares, he has been

asking them to, from their heart, find fulfillment in serving with me. I am asking them to let me shape their ambitions, to shape their tastes or preferences, to aim

their hearts as a warrior does arrows (Ps. 127:3-5). I am asking them to willingly give up exclusive focus on their individual desires. I want my children to give me their hearts--for their own sake.<sup>16</sup>

Not too long ago a young man of twenty-one years wrote to Lindvall in a state of despair. His parents had recently become followers of Lindvall's teachings. This young man, however, did not agree with some of Lindvall's ideas. "I could no longer live in a family of Lindvallians" this man wrote, "I wanted to be a living, breathing, active, FREE Christian."

The parents then wrote to Lindvall asking how they should handle their 'rebellious' son? Lindvall's advice to them - which unfortunately was implemented - was to completely cut this man off, not allow him any contact with his mother or 19-year-old brother and to "deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved..."

When the young man wrote to Lindvall, he pleaded with him to retract the advice given to his parents that he might once again be allowed to see his mother and his brother. Furthermore, the young man begged Lindvall to at least listen to his side of the story before making such a harsh judgement. Both these requests Lindvall squarely refused. Instead Lindvall wrote this young man a letter, stating that if he wanted to resume a relationship with his family he needed first to come under complete obedience to his father. Such obedience included the necessity to accept his father's opinions. Here is a quotation from the letter.

Sons are supposed to be extensions of their fathers... The fact that your opinions differ so markedly from your parents is evidence that you have never fully given your heart to them. Solomon appealed to his son (Prov. 23:26), 'My son, give me your heart.' A son is supposed to give his father his heart. That means he fully surrenders to his parents' desires, opinions, tastes, aspirations, etc."

Lindvall's steadfast refusal to listen and take into account what the son might have to say is not merely an isolated example of Lindvall's many errors, but is highly revealing of his basic orientation. It is no exaggeration to say that Lindvall lives, and draws others, into a world where right and wrong become increasingly irrelevant regarding the operation of family relationships. Whether it concerns a wife whose abusive husband is a danger to her children and a threat to her own life, or a grown son who is being shunned by his parents, it never matters to Lindvall who is right or wrong since all that is required is blind, uncontingent obedience to the father/husband.

One follower of Lindvall told me that if his daughter were to rebel and not repent, then he would stop feeding her, encourage his other children not to treat her as a sister in Christ, and finally help her to leave home. Such "rebellion" could be simply disagreeing with the family interpretation of a Bible passage. When such judgments are pronounced, the child is typically given no voice in the matter, however unfairly he or she may have been treated. Lindvall's insistence that Biblical patterns of discipline include no place for a counselor or parent listening to the child, of any age, result in the type of letter already cited. In that letter Lindvall goes on to say,

You assume that it is a scriptural requirement of a Biblical counsellor before advising parents how to relate to their children, that they hear the details of a conflict from both

sides. Is this really what the Bible teaches? If you were advising parents about handling their disobedient children, do you believe you would be obligated to ask for the child's "story" before advising his parents to discipline him?... [Remember Lindvall is writing about a son who is twenty-one years old]

Regarding the theological side of the question, Lindvall writes,

The passage [Deut. 21:18-21] goes on to direct that after taking their son to the "elders of his city" and stating their accusation, the elders are to do something {namely, stone the son to death}. Interestingly, it never says anything about them pausing and listening to the son's side of the story.

Lindvall is certainly mistaken here since the Bible *did* command the people to listen to the "other side of the story", particularly when it concerns the weaker party, such as the stranger or the small and weak. In Deuteronomy 1:16-17, Moses wrote,

"Then I commanded your judges at that time, saying, 'hear the cases between your brethren, and judge righteously between a man and his brother or the stranger who is with him. You shall not show partiality in judgment; you shall hear the small as well as the great; you shall not be afraid in any man's presence, for the judgment as God's. The case that is too hard for you, bring to me, and I will hear it.'"

Throughout scripture that Lord shows his character in making special provision for the weak, for children, orphans, aliens, wives and slaves - the very classes that normally would have had no rights in the customs of those days. Lindvall might argue that this injunction to "hear the small as well as the great" refers only to hearing the cases of under privileged men and not a principle that applies equally to sons, daughter's and wives. However, the entire context of this passage relates to judging *righteously*. If the Lord says "it is not good to show partiality in judgment" (Prov. 24:23) does this principle suddenly cease to apply when it comes to evaluating a father's judgement on his son or daughter? Lindvall says yes, both in cases where the death penalty would have been the result as well as today with parents and grown sons.

The fact that the Lord made provision for cases that were too hard for the people, shows that He was concerned about the *details* and *facts* in the judgment. Even though the legal code was very clear about the effects certain behavior would incur, we see that in the actual outworking of the laws each situation was considered on its own merits, as in the case of the man who was caught working on the Sabbath. (Num. 15:32-36) In that case, Moses had to go and inquire of the Lord before they knew how to handle the situation. Although the laws for breaking the Sabbath were very clear, the application of those laws in everyday situations could only work as the Lord himself directed, which was no doubt because it required an attention to detail, circumstance and motive. As Jason Fletcher observes,

...the Torah was not seen as a flat, wooden or static collection. A discretionary element existed in its application, which helps explain why Moses placed such a

premium on appointing judges who were ‘capable men’, ‘men who fear God’ and ‘trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain’.<sup>17</sup>

As should now be clear, following God’s law was never a matter of playing connect the dots, feeding every situation through the same static model and then seeing what result comes out. Take the passage from Numbers 30 that we have already looked at. The teachers in the courtship movement are often fond of pointing out that because this passage and other laws relating to parental authority make no exceptions in the case of ungodly parents, it follows that parental authority functions across the board in an apodictic sense. Yet instances where parental authority has become corrupt, like other circumstantial anomalies not covered by these laws, are atypical to the images these laws were clearly designed to evoke. As such, these instances would fall under the adjudication of a judge’s wisdom.

In addressing these difficult situations, wisdom does not occur in a vacuum. The Bible may not directly address cases of ungodly parental authority, but it does give general principles about authority that can be studied by those seeking God’s wisdom. For example, the Bible shows that our obedience to the authority of human government is contingent on other factors (compare Romans 13:1 with Acts 5:29.) There are examples in the Old and New Testaments where disobedience to civil authority was honored (Exod. 1:15-21; Acts 4:15-21), because the authority had become corrupt. Where disobedience to authority does become necessary, it never absolves one from the obligation to show honor to the authority, as we see from Paul’s example in Acts 23:2-5. Another example is David: although he fled from King Saul’s unreasonable demands, he continued to acknowledge him to be the God-ordained authority (1 Sam. 26:9).

These principle can be applied, in wisdom, to all forms of authority God has ordained, including authority within the family. As with the government of the state or the church, the government of the family is capable of becoming corrupt. Douglas Wilson writes that

In the realm of family government, we have the fine example of Abigail, a beautiful and intelligent woman, who immediately saw that her husband was being a reckless idiot, endangering the whole clan. She, without getting his permission, took it upon herself to save his life, along with the life of every other male in the family.

So we have examples of godly "disobedience" in every sphere of God-given government.<sup>18</sup>

Elsewhere Wilson writes that “No human authority is absolute, and this includes the authority of the parents in courtship.”<sup>19</sup> Genuine authority does not imply unlimited authority.

Although these principles should be clear, it is often difficult to know what to do when parents do presume to exercise absolute, unlimited authority. Esther and I often have to advise people who are involved in situations like this or who have come out of the most difficult of circumstances. In one case, there was a teenage girl named Maria whose father was a practicing warlock/witch and whose mother was obsessively controlling and possessive. When Maria came to know the Lord, her conversion created an earthquake at home. There followed five years of unbearable tension, manipulation and demonic pressure channeled against Maria. Eventually, the

strain of living at home became too much and Maria moved in with another family from her church. Even though Maria was in her twenties at the time, the family that took her in were heavily criticized by other Christians for “usurping the authority of Maria’s parents.”

## The Meaning of Trust

A chapter on authority would not be complete without saying something about trust. “Trust,” writes Douglas Wilson, “is at the center of all family life. Trust is what makes authority bearable.”<sup>20</sup>

In many of the homes that advocate courtship, the parents have not behaved in trustworthy ways. Because they have not developed a relationship of trust with their children over the years, when these parents do speak about trust, it sounds artificial and contrived because it is. Consider the following imaginary statement spoken by a young adult to his/her parents (quoted with approval in *Best Friends for Life*).

'Mom, Dad, I trust you completely. I know you have nothing but my good in mind. I believe that you hear from God on my behalf. I believe you are more mature in your walk with God than I am. Therefore I would like *you* to decide for me whom you think God would have me marry. I want your help.'<sup>21</sup>

Perhaps many would think that such a statement would be indicative of a healthy parent/child relationship. However, in any relationship where the parents have fostered the kind of obsequious reverence that leads their children to talk in the above way, we do well to question whether there has been a basic misrepresentation to the child's mind of the meaning of trust. One common misrepresentation is when control and manipulation are advocated in the guise of trust. When a parent expects their children to exercise blind trust it means that trust has been twisted into a tool for manipulation and control.

Unfortunately, among some of the teachers in the courtship movement, this twisted idea of trust is now being advocated. As the authors of *Best Friends For Life* have written, “Trust is only involved when you *don't* see the wisdom of why you ought to place your trust in someone else.... That is something you do by choice.”<sup>22</sup> On the contrary, as long as trust is divorced from wisdom and truth, then we have no criteria for differentiating between all and any who happen to demand our trust. Yet in *Best Friends For Life*, we are told that “In relationship, *trust* can be even more important than *truth*.”<sup>23</sup> The consequence is drawn from this that young people can and should simply “*decide* to trust your parents”<sup>24</sup> as an act of the will.

It is crucial to understand that trust is not something intrinsically virtuous for its own sake for, like any transient verb, its merit depends entirely on that to which it is predicated. To know whether a person’s trust or submission is virtuous, you must first know the direct object of that trust or submission. Are they being submitted to the pride of life and the lusts of the flesh? Are they trusting the devil or his agents? Suffice to say, godly trust does not take place in a vacuum but flows out of a positive relationship. Because godly trust always relates to the particulars of a given relationship<sup>25</sup>, it follows that one cannot simply make a generalization that young people *ought* to trust their parents with the decision whom to marry. In fact, it could be argued that

parents who could even ask such a thing would, in the very asking, render themselves untrustworthy.

If parents have done their job properly, the home will be an environment where sons and daughters talk naturally and informally with their parents about their romantic interests, within the overall understanding of what it means to be submitted to biblical authority in a covenant home. Thus, when the young people are ready to think about getting married, because there is already an established context of trust, respect and submission to biblical standards, parental involvement will happen naturally and necessarily as a matter of course. Trust of parents will not have to be artificially mustered up as a spiritual exercise in submission, because it will have been built up over years.

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, trans. J. I. Packer and O.R. Johnston (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1957), p. 69.

<sup>2</sup> Douglas Wilson, *Standing on the Promises: A Handbook of Biblical Childrearing* (Moscow, ID: 1997), pp. 162-163.

<sup>3</sup> Douglas Wilson, 'The Courtship Path' in *5 Paths to the Love of Your Life* (op. cit., p. 81).

<sup>4</sup> For an excellent discussion of the two opposite imbalances of Biblical authority, together with their relationship to the two most common Trinitarian heresies, see the outline for Douglas Wilson's sermon "Marriage as Manifest Glory XXVIII: 'What Headship is Not'" in Blog and Mablog at [www.dougwills.com/](http://www.dougwills.com/) A recording of the entire sermon is available through Canon Press, Moscow ID.

<sup>5</sup> See chapter 4 of Douglas Wilson's excellent book *Standing on the Promises: A Handbook of Biblical Childrearing* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 1997).

<sup>6</sup> Fletcher, *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> See J. H. Wright *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Leicester: IVP, 2004) to see ways in which Old Testament social ethics can find meaningful application today.

<sup>8</sup> Ranald Macaulay & Jerram Barrs, *Christianity with a Human Face*, (British Edition, Inter-Varsity Press, 1978) p. 177.

<sup>9</sup> *The Daily Study Bible: The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians*, Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1954) pp. 36-37.

<sup>10</sup> See Douglas Wilson's talk 'Recovering Lost Ground' in the series *Shepherding Young People* (Moscow ID: Canon Press, 1990).

<sup>11</sup> Jonathan Burnside, "Licence to kill?" Cambridge Papers vol. 11, num. 2 (Cambridge, 2002), p. 2.

<sup>12</sup> Bernard Jackson, *Studies in the Semiotics of Biblical Law* (Sheffield Academic Press, 2000).

<sup>13</sup> Burnside, *ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Douglas Wilson, *Her Hand in Marriage*, (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 1997).

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<sup>15</sup> In his *Bold Parenting Seminar*, Lindvall shares how he and his father had always disagreed over whether it was permissible for a Christian to drink a little wine. When Lindvall became an adult he began taking a little wine, to his father's horror. But, as Lindvall said, "I've been taught all my life that, you know, as soon as you're an adult you...live by your own convictions, right? I decided the day I get married...I'm going to have my convictions instead of my dad's...." (Jonathan Lindvall, *Bold Parenting Seminar*, *ibid.*) One day Lindvall began to wonder if his actions in this area failed to honor his father. Then Jonathan imagined himself in a similar position with his own children. He realized that it was inconsistent to expect *his* children to obey and pass on his teachings when they were grown if he did not do the same to his father. Eventually, he concluded that he should accept his father's position and teach his children to do so, and teach them to teach their children to do so, etc. *ad infinitum*. Only in this way could Jonathan realistically expect his children to do the same with his teachings. "If I would defer to my father" said Jonathan, "I would have a guarantee that every single one of my children would walk with the Lord and pass it on to their children. (*Bold Parenting Seminar*.)

What is interesting here is the way Lindvall subtly undercuts the basic protestant doctrine of *solo scriptura* ('scripture only'). Notice what is happening: Lindvall teaches his children that they must follow extra-biblical teachings of their grandfather, and that they must pass on his own extra-biblical ideas to their children. Carrying on in this manner - with the father of each successive generation adding a little more teaching to the collection - it wouldn't take long before a virtual Talmud of extra biblical imperatives had been amassed. Such imperatives (however few or many) are disastrous precisely because they are given an authority that properly belongs only to scripture (see Mark 7:7).

<sup>16</sup> Bold Christian Living E-Mail Newsletter, Issue #74 © 2000. Subject: Children's Hearts.

<sup>17</sup> Jason Fletcher, "Mercy not Sacrifice: Mosaic law in Christian social ethics" *Cambridge Papers* Vol. 13, Number 4, 2004. See also Christopher J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Leicester: IVP), 2004.

<sup>18</sup> Douglas Wilson, 'A Pig in a Poke' from his website Blog & Mablog ([www.dougwils.com](http://www.dougwils.com)), 6<sup>th</sup> May, 2006.

<sup>19</sup> Doulgas Wilson, 'The Courtship Path' in *5 Paths to the Love of Your Life* (*op. cit.*, p. 65).

<sup>20</sup> Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

<sup>21</sup> Michael & Judy Phillips, *op. cit.*, p. 161.

<sup>22</sup> Cited from a personal letter.

<sup>23</sup> Michael & Judy Phillips, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid* p. 49.

<sup>25</sup> This is even true when it comes to infants and young children, where trust again does not occur in a vacuum but is built up through experience. A baby clings to his/her mother and not a stranger because it is the mother who feeds him/her. If a young child is given to someone who does not act in a loving and gentle way, the child will learn very quickly not to trust that person. Likewise, young children can tend to be wary of strangers until the new person has, so to speak, proved trustworthy. Although this all occurs on a precognitive and instinctive level with babies and children, it illustrates the principle that trust does not occur in a vacuum but is the outcome of a healthy relationship.

## Courting Disaster

*Many people are more passionate about the process they use than the person God has called them to be. Oftentimes, method is emphasized over theology; process is emphasized over personal maturity; and premarital methodology, which is short-term, is emphasized over marital understanding, which is long-term.*

—Rick Holland<sup>1</sup>

### Avoid Some Needless Strife?

Mine eyes have seen the wisdom of a courtship stand for life.  
It's a righteous way to live for Christ and find a Godly wife.  
If you want to serve Christ wholly and avoid some needless strife,  
Then lay that dating down.

Thus begins the first verse of ‘The Battle Hymn of Courtship’ (sung to the tune of the ‘Battle Hymn of the Republic’). It is followed by this chorus:

Don't be fooled though it seem fancier.  
Dating is a deadly cancer.  
Courtship is the only answer.  
So, lay that dating down.

The song proceeds with each verse articulating another aspect of why “courtship is the only answer”, and each verse ends with the injunction to “lay that dating down.”

I don’t know whether the song has actually convince anyone to follow the courtship method, but it is a useful revelation of the rhetorical humbug with which courtship is so often adorned.

We are told that through courtship we will avoid some needless strife. The most charitable response to this claim is that it is misleading. It would be more accurate to say that the opposite is the case. This was highlighted recently when I read a message on an e-group, written by a woman who had gone through the whole courtship process. “I think I can honestly say,” she wrote, “that because of the courtship process and authority teachings (or at least my parents' interpretation of them), that was one of the most miserable periods of my life.” Courtship, so often heralded as the panacea of all ills, turns out to be more of a Pandora’s box!

### What’s The Alternative Then?

One of the main objections I get runs something like this: “Okay, Robin, you’ve done a good job at articulating some of the problems with courtship, but you don’t seem to have anything better to suggest.” Sometimes this carries with it the implication that in the absence of any better alternative courtship is validated by default.

For a while it was difficult for me to know just how to respond to that objection. After all, I thought that I had given serious attention to an alternative, if by alternative I can mean my emphasis on understanding love in a way that is true and beautiful and which, by implication, excludes the cheap imitations. Eventually, however, I began to realize that the people who were asking that I propose an alternative to courtship were actually looking for an alternative set of techniques. Their thinking seemed to be something like this: *if courtship is out then we must have some other system or formula to follow if we are to avoid the pitfalls of recreational dating.* (The fact that millions of godly Christians throughout history have found love-filled and happy marriages without having a set of techniques to follow doesn’t seem to enter into the equation here.) Those who took this line apparently understood my reasons why the courtship technique does not work while failing to learn the far more important lesson that the search for a technique in the first place is symptomatic of an illusionary approach to life. The illusion is that we need a set of techniques to live by before we can successfully manage ourselves.

To say that the Bible does not offer a set of techniques does not mean that the Bible does not provide answers to these questions. However, the answers the Bible gives are in principles, not formulas. Anyone wanting to study the Biblical principles governing pre-marital relationships, would do well to read Rick Holland’s entry in *5 Paths to the Love of Your Life*. Other books which contribute to the discussion in a helpful way include *Dating With Integrity* by John Holzmann and *Her Hand in Marriage* by Douglas Wilson. Douglas and Nancy Wilson have a very helpful series on the family which would be useful for a healthy biblical understanding of relationships that is not technique based.

## **Swing of the Pendulum**

It is certainly understandable why people feel the need for techniques to guide relationships. History shows that often moral licentiousness will cause a swing of the pendulum whereby people look to legalism for the answer. As I emphasized in chapter one, the ideas about courtship are certainly a reaction against the trends of lawlessness and unaccountability that plague contemporary society. But in reacting against the improper latitude in modern relationships, let us not go into another equally undesirable ditch whereby we put young people into straight jackets with unnecessary rules and limitations. Douglas Wilson has wisely noted that,

As the bankruptcy of the modern dating system becomes increasingly obvious, the temptation to react will be present with us on every side. But reactionary behavior is always destructive, and this does not even include the calamities brought on by overreaction.<sup>2</sup>

It is not really surprising to see courtship gaining a rise of interest as parents and young people are desperate to find *something* that works. In so far as courtship is seen to be 'unworldly', it is therefore assumed to be holy, and therefore right. Indeed, many people have argued for courtship on just such grounds.

### **The Way God *Has* To Work!**

In *Best Friends For Life*, it is suggested that the young person spend a year living under the watchful eye of his in-laws, which is called "a universal insurance policy that is *almost* guaranteed to...work toward a best-friend marriage."<sup>3</sup> In this way, the will of God is determined through humanly orchestrated means. If a young man is unwilling to submit himself to the "testing fires of sacrifice, hard work, and waiting" (as achieved through submission to the one year plan) then, "how true is that love?", we are asked.

Would *you* want to marry someone who is unwilling to give a year of his or her life for you? If he or she is unwilling to give a *year* now, do you really think he or she will give you the next *thirty or forty years* without wavering in that commitment?<sup>4</sup>

This illustrates the typical tendency to place the will of God within the hands of human control and administration. It is assumed that whoever would object to this proposal must have a bad character, just as it is assumed that any young person who goes against his/her parents' will in marriage is automatically guilty of giving in to 'independence' and pressure from the world. In this way a humanly staged set of techniques becomes equivalent to the Word of God, and this allows no room for God's will to be something entirely different for an individual couple.

This is the basic principle by which most courtship ideas take root: man decides the will of God and administers it. There is a certain method which, if implemented, must work in a cause/effect progression. There is, therefore, no reason why a person would need to individually seek the will of the Lord, for the results are predictable according to the extent to which you plug into the man-made procedures.

I am told that a proper translation of John 3:8 reads as follows: "The Spirit blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is every one who is born of the Spirit." I think it's significant that the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives is compared to wind. The Holy Spirit's work, like the motion of wind, cannot be confined to any system or set of techniques - it goes where it wills. Although one cannot control the course of natural wind, one can block it through putting up walls or boxing oneself into a wind proof structure; similarly, one cannot control the course of the Holy Spirit, but one can block the work of the Spirit by boxing ourselves into systems of our own devising.

### **The Family Context**

When family life is lived and breathed in the Lord, then the guidance, training and discipline the parents administer will equip their children to leave home. It will equip them to establish independent families and lives of their own before God. The biblical standards that the parents have raised up, especially in the area of love and marriage, will gradually become the children's own convictions. The children will not have grown to simply accept these standards, but to love them as God's standards. Hence, they will have no desire to frivolously pair off into 'couples' because they will know that this is not a biblical expression of romance and attraction.

This does not deny that teenagers and young adults still need to be instructed. Indeed, when children reach the age of interest in the opposite sex, an ideal teaching and guiding time is at hand. This teaching should flow naturally from the *already established* atmosphere and understanding that have been cultivated in the home. Consequently, there will be no need for a sudden safety plan because the children will already desire the right sort of relationships. If mistakes are made, these will be made by young adults whose allegiance is the Lord's, not people in rebellion. Obviously we hope any mistakes will be small, but we cannot let our fear hold them back from engaging in their own lives independently before the Lord. They have to go out and fight with the equipment and weapons we have furnished them with.

On the other hand, if this groundwork has not been laid, it will accomplish little for parents to suddenly start panicking when their son or daughter reaches sixteen and then trying to enforce a courtship model of rules. If a young person still needs parents to give them rules in this way, it only reveals that the parents have failed to raise their children to know and love God's rules for themselves. Whether the children have been prejudiced against Biblical standards through parental abuse, indifference or some other failure, it is no good realizing that a child is ill-equipped for life when it is too late and then hoping to correct matters by pulling the child through a miserable safety plan.

If Paul told fathers not to provoke their children to wrath (Eph. 6:4) and discouragement (Col. 3:21), how much more is this true when the children become young adults. A clear way to provoke a teenager to wrath and discouragement is to suddenly start enforcing a regime of authority as soon as they get to a marriageable age. This will only make the teenager resentful, discouraged and desirous to break away from home for all the wrong reasons. Parents in this position can repent for failing their children when they were young, intercede for their child and seek opportunities to instruct and challenge them as they would any other adult. They can also begin to lay the groundwork for proper adult relationships with their children. But it is too late to instruct through enforced rules. As Charlotte Mason says,

though the emancipation of the children is gradual, they acquiring day by day more of the art and science of self-government, yet there comes a day when the parents' right to rule is over; there is nothing left for them but to abdicate gracefully, and leave their grown-up sons and daughters free agents, even though these still live at home and although, in the eyes of their parents, they are not fit to be trusted with the ordering of themselves, it is too late now to keep them in training fit or unfit, they must hold the rudder for themselves.<sup>5</sup>

For about sixteen to twenty years, parents have the God-given authority and task of bringing children up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, preparing them for adulthood.

Families are the best ground to nourish a child in the love of the Lord and His ways. Deuteronomy reminds us that a parent's task is to apply the laws of God constantly to everyday tasks and life. The authority, protection and discipline of children by parents is for the purpose of training them in the ways of God to become people of God in their own right. Parents who have acted in this way have every right to expect their older children to be able, in their various capacities, to hold their own.

On the other hand, there may be families in which the children cannot actually face the world when they reach this age because the parents have not built them up, trained them or made them ready for the battle. If the children get to that age and the parents still feel they have to shelter them as if they were still small children, then something is amiss. If parents do not feel happy in seeing their children leave home and become independent and need, instead, to keep their children ever dependent on them, then such parents are abusing their role. Parents who have failed in this way must repent and stop perpetuating their failures into the children's adulthood through oppressive and controlling regimes.

It is true that the father exercises a generic type of authority over all who are in his household, including guests and grown children. According to Old Testament law, a man was responsible for all his dependents, even strangers that might be living in his home. For example, it was incumbent on the master of the household to make sure strangers and guests kept the Sabbath. However, this kind of authority is different to the authority a father exercises over children when they are young. Some fathers think that their position gives them the right to use their authority however they choose while their children are still at home. The authority God has invested in the father is inherent just as it is with human governments, but this does not validate whatever rules the father may choose to enforce anymore than it validates the rules a government makes. A father can choose to behave unbiblically and make the lives of his dependents miserable and stunted, or he can fulfill his God-appointed role with wisdom and discretion. A father who fails in the wisdom I have been discussing is not just being a foolish man; rather, he is demonstrating failure to be biblically protective and responsible for those God has given him.

## **The Problem of Friendships**

I received a letter from a man named Andrew who had asked a young lady named Nichole if they could have dinner together, being careful not to describe it as a date. Nichole's answer was clear: not until you get permission from my father. So, Andrew took Nichole's father out for lunch, and after that the answer came clear again: you're not serious enough about marrying my daughter yet. Andrew shared the frustration of being expected to subject himself to an open-ended conversation with Nichole's father, and pressured to decide whether or not he was seriously interested in pursuing her for marriage, before he had even had a real conversation with Nichole. How could he make such an important decision before getting to know her?

The above story reveals one of the chief practical difficulties about courtship, namely that no provision is made for ordinary friendships between the sexes outside of a courtship relationship. *Best Friends For Life* is typical in suggesting that a young man will approach a girl's father before they begin to pursue a relationship in order to get the green light. We are told

that in some instances this is done "even *before* they are acquainted."<sup>6</sup> The young man does not simply ask the father's permission to see and be a friend to his daughter, but asks if he can 'apply' for the position of her husband. "It's different from asking a man to marry his daughter," they say, "though it represents a major step exactly in that direction."<sup>7</sup> If the parents give the green light, then the process of courtship begins, being a testing ground to see if the match meets the approval of all parties involved.

Under many courtship plans, there is no provision for ordinary friendships. Because courtship cannot happen until there is this kind of 'potential engagement', there is, therefore, no way to simply develop a non-romantic friendship with someone of the opposite sex. Though the level of restrictions on pre-courtship friendships will naturally differ from family to family, such friendships in courtship families are often highly supervised or disallowed altogether. Friendships with members of the opposite sex are considered to be unimportant or dangerous prior to courtship. That is why no casual, brother-sister type relationships between the sexes are allowed, only serious ones that represent "a major step in the direction of marriage."

Godly parents can and should exercise a general oversight over his son or daughter's activities and friendships without needing to go to the extremes of segregating them from all casual contact with the opposite sex. In a society like our own, this reactionary approach is all the more damaging given that there are not nearly enough venues where young people to get to know each other within godly family contexts. Parents should be seeking to facilitate opportunities for young men and women to mix and mingle in Biblical environments, not making an exclusive relationship the only grounds on which some interaction can occur. Douglas Wilson's books on parenting are very good in showing the appropriate Biblical balance in this whole area.

In the case of Jonathan Lindvall, not only did he ask his daughter "not to even be friends with boys"<sup>8</sup>, but he does not even allow her to form individual friendships with members of her own sex. "At first glance", writes Lindvall,

this will sound incredible, but none of my children have ever had individual friends. Instead, we find our identity corporately as a family and maintain family friendships. Thus, my children only interact with peers in family settings in which we are all involved. They don't have individual friends! WE have family friends!<sup>9</sup>

In a church or community that teaches courtship to be 'the only way', it can be very difficult for a man and woman to be friends. I was told of one case with a young woman named Grace, who had a friendship blossoming with a young man named Christopher. It didn't take very long before Grace's friends began to share 'concerns' about her friendship with Christopher. The reason they were concerned about the friendship was because it was a friendship! In fact, the friendship became such a concern to Grace's friends that she and Christopher began 'courting' just to pacify everyone's fears. As soon as the 'courtship' began everyone was satisfied and happy...except Grace and Christopher. The reason they weren't happy was because an official courtship was too great a step for them at the time. Their friendship hadn't developed far enough to start thinking about marriage. Consequently, their relationship was put under so much strain that they decided to go back to being only friends, whatever the others might say.

Hard as it may have been for Grace and Christopher, their relationship was easy compared to what some have had to face as a result of the courtship system. While Grace and Christopher had to only endure the censor of their peers, there are many young people who have been ostracized from their families because of their refusal to do courtship. Over the years I have received various letters from people desperate for prayer and advice, sometimes almost reaching the point of nervous collapse because of family ties being severed over this issue. I also receive letters from parents when one of their grown children has become involved in a relationship with someone from a courtship family. Often these parents, not being familiar with courtship, want to try to understand where the other family is coming from and why there is such antagonism towards them – in some cases, they want to understand why the other parents are refusing to even communicate with them.

However many restrictions operate in a young person's life, is it really possible, under any system, to completely achieve the ends these teachers desire? How it is possible to remain emotionally sterile until courtship or engagement (different teachers will place the timing at different times), and then as an act of the will, become emotionally fertile, is a process nobody has yet adequately explained. That, however, is exactly what young people are being taught to do in the name of 'emotional purity.' In the next chapter I would like to consider exactly what is meant by emotional purity and the reasons why it is being taught.

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<sup>1</sup> Rick Holland, 'The Guided Path' (ibid), p. 89.

<sup>2</sup> Douglas Wilson, "Courtship Horror Stories," *Credenda Agenda Vol. IX, issue V*. (Moscow, ID, 1997).

<sup>3</sup> Michael & Judy Phillips, *op. cit.*, p. 179.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. 183.

<sup>5</sup> Charlotte M. Mason, *'Home Education' Series Volume II: Parents and children*, (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, & Co., 1904) p. 17.

<sup>6</sup> Michael & Judy Phillips, *op. cit.*, p. 126.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 127.

<sup>8</sup> From Lindvall's taped lecture, "Shamefaced Romance."

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Bold Christian Living, E-mail Newsletter #21: Policy explanation, Youthful Romance.

## Emotional Purity and Broken Heart Syndrome

*There is no safe investment. To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket - safe, dark, motionless, airless - it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. The alternative to tragedy, or at least the risk of tragedy, is damnation. The only place outside Heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers and perturbations of love is Hell.*

—C. S. Lewis<sup>1</sup>

One young woman named Felicity wrote to me about her failed courtship experience. The relationship had been set up by the two sets of parents and was done exactly ‘by the book.’ (One of their ‘dates’ was actually a trip to one of Gothard’s seminars accompanied, of course, by the entire family.) The only area where it differed from the ideal courtship scenario was the fact that the young man named Trevor happened to still be in love with his former girlfriend, who had gone off with another guy. During the courtship Trevor admitted to Felicity that he was still in love with his former girlfriend, but this didn’t bother Felicity. Nor did it bother Felicity that Trevor did not even seem to particularly like her. As Felicity later wrote when reflecting over the whole episode,

Since this didn’t seem to be a problem in my parents’ eyes, I saw nothing unusual with marrying a man whose heart belonged to another, and who was not deeply interested in or attracted to me. Of course, since we weren’t supposed to love each other until after we were engaged it was almost an advantage that we didn’t have a lot of emotional attraction for each other.

So what eventually happened with Felicity and Trevor? Fortunately, the courtship did not lead to marriage, but not through any unwillingness on Felicity’s part. Felicity wrote afterwards that she was quite willing to marry Trevor, even though she didn’t love him.

I told God that whichever way it turned out, I would be fine. If Trevor and our parents wanted me to marry him I would say yes, but if not I wouldn’t mind ending the courtship. I really didn’t care which way it went and was willing to live with whatever was decided for me, as my parents indirectly encouraged me to do (telling me to leave it up to God and not push it, etc.).

Felicity is now happily married to a man she deeply loves and who deeply loves her. Every time she remembers her courtship with Trevor she sees God's hand of protection on her life. She is so thankful that Trevor decided to pull out of the courtship, even though this was to the great disappointment of both sets of parents. "It's rather sad," writes Felicity, "that the system and people who were supposed to be protecting me and making sure that I didn't make a poor decision were willing to let me marry into a situation like that."

To most people in our culture, the prospect of spending the rest of your life united to a person who is in love with somebody else (and who does not even particularly like you) is far from a desirable prospect, to state the matter mildly. However, to someone who has grown up to imbibe what I call a 'courtship mentality', such a prospect not only doesn't seem strange, but in some sense seems to make things easier. Recall that Felicity said that it was almost as an advantage that she and Trevor didn't have any emotional attraction for each other since it is only during the engagement period that authorization for falling in love occurs. The ideological backdrop to this concept of authorization is found in the doctrine of 'emotional purity', which I would now like to consider.

### **'Emotional Purity'**

"Purity..." writes John Thompson, "means no physical affection or romantic emotions prior to God's approval."<sup>2</sup> Now it is one thing to argue against physical affection prior to 'God's approval' - which in Thompson's phraseology refers to parental authorization - but *no romantic emotions*? Yet, like it or lump it, that is exactly what is meant by emotional purity: complete absence of romantic emotions, thoughts, desires or aspirations, until the father says 'Go!'

I have a friend named Emily who had always accepted the teaching about emotional purity and believed that to have a crush on a boy amounted to nurturing an idol in her heart. However, when Emily actually found herself being attracted to a young man, she was helpless to know how to handle it. Nor were matters helped when friends began to come up to Emily and say, "Don't you know that you are committing emotional fornication? You're being promiscuous and I think you should be careful to save yourself *totally* for your future husband."

In another instance, a lady named Katie told me about the time her father gave permission for emotional bonding after her courtship period had been officially entered. The problem was, Katie's father did not give permission for her emotions to be released completely, only *somewhat*. Katie was still supposed to guard her heart to *some* extent and not get *too* emotionally attached. (Katie confessed to me later that she had difficulty figuring out where the line was, but apparently her parents felt she had crossed it.)

Typically, Lindvall manages to find scriptural justification for this odd behavior in the most unexpected parts of the Bible. He appeals to the example of Adam. When, through naming the various animals, Adam realized that he, alone among all the beasts, had no partner, God put him to sleep. Likewise, argues Lindvall, when we get to the age when our interest in the opposite sex is stirred up, God asks us to "go to sleep emotionally!"<sup>3</sup>

The goal here is an ideal of emotional virginity, so that when the marriage finally occurs, both people will not only have never had physical relations with anyone else, but will also be

emotional virgins, having never *felt* anything towards anyone else. “Not only are we to be physically pure,” says Lindvall, “but we need to be emotionally pure in our hearts.”<sup>4</sup>

Just because a person feels an attraction that will not culminate in marriage does not make those emotions impure. ‘Emotional purity’ is therefore a bad term since it presupposes that there is something impure or wrong about these emotions, as if to have such feelings defiles a person in the same way as sexual immorality.

It must be understood that this ideal of ‘emotional purity’ does not simply mean that young people should reserve the expression of romantic feelings until after the father has authorized it, but that the emotions and thoughts themselves must be stifled prior to parental authorization. As Lindvall clearly states,

I have concluded that God's best for me is to teach my children not to allow themselves to cultivate romantic inclinations toward anyone until they know God has shown them this person is to be their lifelong mate...Ideally they don't even allow themselves to dream about romantic relationships. Certainly there will be struggles, but to the degree that they allow me to protect them from the emotional scars my wife and I bear, they will be spared the regrets we suffer.<sup>5</sup>

Later we shall consider the reasons for Lindvall’s regrets and the effect emotional purity is supposed to have on a marriage. In this chapter, however, I want to look at this issue from the point of view of the child.

Lindvall explains, always with enthusiasm, his success in imposing this idea on his own daughter.

At age twelve, I took Bethany out to dinner one evening and presented her with a golden necklace with a heart-shaped pendant formed like a padlock. There was a small keyhole and an accompanying key. I presented the pendant and necklace to her and asked her to "Give me your heart" (Prov. 23:26). I explained that I wanted to keep the gold key as a symbol of her trusting me with her emotions. I specifically asked her to not entertain romantic thoughts toward any young man until she and her mother and I together conclude that he is God's choice to be her husband. (There is scriptural precedent for the young people involved to be consulted and consent to a marriage arrangement.) I explained that at the beginning of her marital engagement I would give the gold key to her betrothed, and that although she might not yet love him, she would then be free to aim her heart toward him. Bethany unreservedly entrusted the symbolic gold key into my care, and with it, her heart.<sup>6</sup>

Some young man is going to come to me and say, 'I believe God wants me to marry your daughter.' And I'll pray about it. And if God shows me the same thing, I'm going to give him that key, and I'm going to say, 'You are authorized, and I'm going to help you woo my daughter, as she will be your help mate forever.'<sup>7</sup>

In that conversation I asked Bethany to take it a little further. I asked her to commit to me that she would not be friends with any fellows. I asked her not to even be friends with boys."<sup>8</sup>

Lindvall started a trend here, and now there is a website that sells “‘Heart Necklace with Key’ designed for this very purpose. This is a meaningful symbol of a daughter giving her dad the key to her heart until he gives it to the man selected to be her future spouse. The inscription on the heart is ‘He who holds the key can unlock my heart.’”

One gets the feeling from all this that romantic emotions are something that can be turned on or off like a light switch. Obviously our will does play a part in the process as with everything else, however, very often the romantic feelings, crushes, and infatuations that young people experience are things that, to a large extent, cannot be controlled by the will. What can be controlled is how the person *responds* to these feelings that can come and go like the wind. To try to tamper with the emotions themselves, however, is bound to be unproductive. The only way to prevent such ‘unauthorized’ emotions from happening would surely be to build monasteries and nunneries to house our youth. When the time for wedding vows does arrive, the vows can directly follow the introductions.

Let us consider what happens when a child reaches puberty. As the whole person struggles to adjust to the hormonal changes that are happening, it is natural that the child will be bombarded with an array of feelings, thoughts and sensations connected with their sexuality. As the body develops, gradually things settle down, though in the case of our sexuality this may not occur for many years.

If a child's first awakenings to the world of sexuality are accompanied by an atmosphere of guilt and negativity, this will almost inevitably effect how that child responds to his or her sexuality later in life. If, however, the child can be helped to view sexual awakening and these intense inner experiences objectively and in an atmosphere of understanding, this may help not only to prevent the child from developing an unnecessary guilt complex, but also deter him or her from thinking that these sensations demand an outlet for gratification and expression. Although children should be helped to see that it is not helpful to *voluntarily* entertain unhealthy sexual fantasies, this needs to be done in a way so that it does not become more serious in the child's mind than it really is. There is a risk of a phobia developing about sexual or romantic thoughts which could be self-defeating, following the principle that the attempt to obliterate something from our minds necessarily involves making that thing an object of concentration. In the same way that the words, "Do not think of a purple elephant" immediately arouse in the mind the very image we are being told we must not think, so the prohibition of sexual thoughts and feelings can do more to arouse the imagination in these areas than simply ignoring them ever could.

As a young adult I went to a Bible college where a similar mentality operated. I was one among only nineteen other young adults under the burden of over a hundred written and unwritten rules. One such rule was a universal taboo on anything to do with romance. The staff of this school did their best to prevent the young people from anything that might excite them romantically. Every cassette and CD that a student brought to the school was carefully previewed, and if any love songs were found then the album or the song would be banned. The administrator of the school encouraged us to make fun of kissing when it appeared on videos,

even mocking the act with disgusting lip noises like prepubescent boys tend to do. When springtime came the young men were given instruction to be extra careful, as this was the season when nature causes the hormones to play up. There was a ban on private letters and phone calls across the sexes, and Lindvall's lectures were often played at the beginning of term. If one of the staff members noticed that a man and woman were spending too much time together, they would step in and do something. In one such case, where two people actually fell in love, the staff decided this young man and woman shouldn't be allowed to communicate at all with each other, even from their homes during the summer holidays.

The result of so much concentration on not being tempted by love was interesting. The young women often seemed to treat romance as if it was a big joke and could be flirtatious in a flippant way. The consequence of not treating love and romance seriously in the right way, meant that it was treated flippantly in a totally wrong way. I found that there was not the appropriate care taken by the girls concerning how their actions might hurt the males. On the other hand, whenever any interaction with the opposite sex was at all serious, it was pregnant with self-consciousness, introspection and guilt. Furthermore, a psychotherapist has noted that the percentage of sex abuse cases among those who had been to that school was phenomenal - far higher than the percentage among the average non-Christians sector of the population.

Why did these problems arise among those who are instructed so intensely to view romance so cynically and negatively? A similar question might be asked concerning the huge sex scandal that rocked Gothard's Illinois based organization and nearly forced Gothard into retirement.

I believe part of the answer lies in the way these concerns were handled. The devaluation, even the mocking of romance prior to the appropriate time, led to a general misconstruction of romance and love in general. Because these feelings were not aligned to a model of the high and good value of romance, it was very easy to treat them - whether consciously or unconsciously - as things that were sinful; to try to bury them in a dark closet and hope they reemerge as infrequently as possible. Often when a person has undergone this kind of unhealthy repression, it causes the thing that has been repressed to be displaced onto another area of his or her experience, so that the thing that was repressed reemerges with a new shape - a shape that the person does not recognize as stemming from the very area they thought was killed.

Another factor was the false dichotomy between the things of the spirit and the passions of the body, as if they are in competition to each other. You didn't pursue romance *because* that took your mind off Christ. We thus had no idea how to give the Lord control of these areas because we expected Him to take them away. These areas were not as important to God as things like Bible memorization, study and prayer meetings and if God was interested in them at all, it was in helping us overcome them.

We have already seen this false divide between human emotions and the things of the spirit in Gothard's treatment of loneliness, which I have already mentioned in chapter 4. We also find this false divide between the spiritual world vs. the earthly realm of romance and emotions throughout Lindvall's teaching. In Lindvall's newsletter he recently shared a letter from a young man who confessed to "struggling with thinking about a girl" whom he might marry. The man wrote,

I have prayed that God would take these thoughts from me, and have tried to stop thinking them myself, once I become aware that I am thinking about her again.... I am just frustrated, and am feeling powerless against these thoughts. (Even though my mind tells me that I'm wrong, and I do have the power to control them).

Lindvall's advise to help this man achieve 'victory' was that he turn totally to Jesus, fast, pray and try to channel his emotional energy into reading and memorizing scripture. Additionally, Lindvall quoted Colossians 3:2: "Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth."<sup>9</sup> Since the world of romantic emotions is seen as belonging to the inferior realm of "things of the earth", it is at variance with our pursuit of heavenly things above. A divided field of experience ensues in which a false competition is set up between the spirit and the emotions.

As I found at the Bible college already mentioned, this fragmented and compartmentalized view of our humanity meant that Christ was not Lord of our entire person, and consequently the area of our passions remained outside of His Lordship. Because we were made to feel guilty for even having such emotions, we tended subconsciously to assume that there must be something unclean, dirty, naughty, or impure about this area of life, or else treat it clinically as mere animal instincts. Romance and passion were not viewed as something in which our whole person participates, but treated instead almost like a 'thing' external to us that we take on and off. It is always dangerous when life is divided into compartments like this since Christ's Lordship should permeate all areas of life.<sup>10</sup>

In the rest of this chapter I want to explore one of the main arguments used to compel young people to cultivate this negative and unhealthy view of their emotions.

## **Broken Heart Syndrome**

In *Best Friends For Life*, we read

...one of the great benefits of courtship is that it minimalizes as much as is humanly possible the broken-heart syndrome so many young people experience.

As this quotation indicates, the need to avoid 'broken-heart syndrome' is one of the primary motivations behind the courtship method. But to what exactly does 'broken-heart syndrome' refer?

This term, 'broken heart syndrome' was popularized by Lindvall to describe the painful side of romantic emotions when a person feels that their "heart is broken." Like the term 'emotional impurity', it is a pejorative description that unfairly typifies certain experiences. If the courtship advocates can get us to think of emotional heartache as a 'syndrome', then they have nearly won the argument, in so far as a 'syndrome' usually implies neurosis.

This is really what we should expect. When romantic love comes under censor, the next step is to take a dim view of the experience of heart broken-ness. For what does a broken heart indicate other than that one has made the fatal mistake of losing control of one's emotions in an

experience of romance: that one has extended oneself too far, put too much hope or confidence in another person, slipped from the safe platform of self-control into the unpredictable sea of emotional involvement?

Similar reasons have led counsellors in the secular climate to despise broken hearts. The self-centred consumerist mentality of today has no understanding for an experience which signifies the capacity to lose yourself or feel disappointed - an experience which presupposes that there is a soul that can feel hope, rejection, betrayal, and, yes, love as well.

Sharon Thompson tells us that many girls are unhappy with the casual sex they are expected to have, and the reason for their unhappiness is because they are still "condition[ing] sexual consent on romantic expectations."<sup>11</sup> When one girl was so traumatised by her first experience of premarital sex, the girl vowed to save sex until marriage so she could be sure the relationship meant as much to the man as it did to her. Thompson concludes that by this decision Tracey "had gone back...to the very same convictions that had set her up to become a victim of love in the first place."<sup>12</sup> In other words when we enter into sexual experiences with romantic expectation, we become a victim of our own illusions. Because the romantic 'illusion' has at root assumptions about gender differences, a young girl experiencing a broken heart does not require sympathy – at least according to Sharon Thompson - but instruction, since such a person is engaging in "bids for sympathy and absolution based on assumptions about gender differences so conventional that whole genres turn on them."<sup>13</sup> As a solution Thompson suggests girls learn to treat love as something ephemeral and play the field with the kind of emotional detachment that will save them from heartbreak. This is called 'unencumbered sex'.

Although the context is different, the motivation is the same as we find in the courtship movement. Those who push courtship begin the discussion of broken hearted-ness at the same point as Sharon Thompson's, namely, the need to avoid being a victim of the heartache and disappointment that romantic expectation can create. The solution of the former is to encourage all manner of loose behaviour but without the expectation of a secure relationship; the solution of the latter is to try to eradicate any behaviour that might give vent to romantic expectation prior to the security of marriage. In both cases they are trying to avoid what Capon calls "the indulgence of the ultimate risk of giving oneself to another over whom we have no control."<sup>14</sup> Let's have a closer look at what is being proposed as a solution.

### **The Solution: Emotional Sterilization**

Lindvall draws our attention to the fact that in the typical dating pattern when a person enjoys a series of temporary dating relationships, each relationship must endure a breaking up process before moving on to the next. "However," writes Lindvall,

As their hearts are wounded, and then heal after each episode, they develop emotional calluses as a defense against the depth of grief that would be useful in motivating married couples to shore up the performance of their union.<sup>15</sup>

The more often they experience this [breaking-up], the more scared their emotions are, and then we wonder why when we marry we have a difficult time becoming vulnerable and open with our husband or our wife.<sup>16</sup>

Israel Wayne has argued similarly, comparing the emotional pain of breaking off a relationship to sticking on and then ripping off a piece of tape on your arm: at first it hurts, but eventually, if you repeat the process long enough, the hairs that originally acted as pain sensors eventually cease to register pain to the brain. Similarly, it is argued, the more we experience the emotional pain of breaking up a relationship, the more desensitized we become. Eventually our emotions become hardened as an instinctive defense against future pain. “It may seem good to have our emotions hardened,” Wayne writes,

but this doesn’t work very well in a marriage. Who wants to have a spouse who is uncaring, unfeeling, and guards themselves so they won’t be hurt? We all want spouses who can freely give and receive love.<sup>17</sup>

The solution that both Lindvall and Wayne give is to reject the typical dating pattern of in/out relationships for the model of emotional purity. Emotional purity guarantees that you won’t get hurt since you don’t release your emotions until it’s safe.

Not for the first or last time, Lindvall and Wayne have presented us with a false dilemma. The choice they give us is between a series of in/out dating relationships vs. shutting down the emotions completely until it is completely ‘safe.’ This gives them the perfect platform to persuade young people to be emotionally ‘pure’, since the young people they are addressing already have an antipathy to the typical pattern of irresponsible relationships. Forced into this false choice, the model of emotional purity is clearly the only option for a biblically-minded young person or parent. It is only after you go deeper into the system that you find that this solution not only excludes irresponsible dating but *any unguarded emotions even when experienced within in a biblically responsible relationship*. They are not teaching young people that within the context of being honorable towards those of the opposite sex, you are not being sinful, unspiritual or defiled if you have growing feelings for someone; nor are they teaching young people how to approach and deal with such feelings. Instead, they are teaching that romantic feelings, emotional desires and expectations are wrong if felt at anytime while there is still a risk that the object of those desires may not become our future spouse. We must safeguard our life against the potential of any emotional pain in the very first place.

It is interesting that this basic argument hinges, not on an appeal to scripture, but on pragmatic and utilitarian concerns, as it promises to maximize the agent’s future happiness in marriage. We are being told that marriages will be happier and more emotionally liberated if both parties have practiced these principles prior to engagement. We would do well to question this basic assumption. Surely those who go through youth trying to avoid emotional pain, trying to prevent the possibility of suffering, trying to protect their emotions, are not as a result suddenly going to be emotionally vulnerable and open as soon as they get married. If anything, *they* will be the ones who have developed the emotional hardness.

Imagine a young girl who is first learning to walk on her own two legs. The father notices and realizes that there might be falls, and the potential of physical pain, before she can finally

walk without error. Suppose the father, wanting to prevent his girl from the possibility of this pain, comes and offers her a wheel chair for her to sit and be pushed around in until she is nine. At nine years old, he thinks, her mind will have developed a level of control and sophistication to enable her to learn to walk without the errors that invariably confront the toddler. Now if a father really did that, what would happen when the girl finally reached the day where he authorized her to walk? She would be a cripple since her legs, through continual neglect, would have lost the ability to function.

In a very similar way, a father who successfully disallows his daughter (or son) from experiencing natural human emotions until she is able to do so without the possibility of hurt will very likely have damaged her very ability to experience normal emotions.

I'm not a neurologist but I've read enough neurology to know that during a person's formative years the brain has a placidity which allows certain patterns to be established in the infrastructure of the brain. During these years the brain is like flexible putty. The older one gets, however, the more the brain gradually solidifies. This means that if one part of the brain has been deprived from growing normally, it is very difficult to go back and cut new grooves since the brain does not have the same neuro-plasticity. Now the brain controls the emotions, and an adult's ability to experience healthy emotions is contingent to a large degree on how his or her emotions were handled during the formative years. For example, if a baby or child senses parental disapproval every time they cry, they quickly learn to repress such feelings and expressions. As an adult such a person may find it difficult to express or even to feel spontaneous emotion since the brain has been trained to do the opposite.

Similarly, when it comes to romantic emotions, if an adolescent is influenced to greet the arrival of such emotions with suspicion, repression and guilt, they will likely find it difficult to experience these emotions properly when they are suddenly told it is legitimate. The positive side is that the Lord is able to heal and make whole, but this can be a torturesomly difficult process if one has years of opposite brain patterns to contend against.

## **The Young Person's Point of View**

It will be worthwhile now to consider the issue of emotions from a young person's point of view. For nearly every young person, the intensity of emotions is perhaps the hardest thing to work through. The sensation that life is unbearably happy one minute and unbearably sad the next is a common experience. In retrospect we may forget how real and meaningful our feelings were to us back then, and we are left with little or no understanding and sympathy to offer our children.

The courtship pioneers have taken it one stage further to question whether this age of passion and intensity is really necessary, or whether it is a sort of appendage which lack of true perception, together with cultural pressures, make us subject to.

It must be realized that a broken heart of the sort that has a teenager sobbing into his or her pillow one day but heals into hope the next, is a basic part of a young person's life. As adolescents we need the love, support and guidance of our parents, not the censor and subsequent

guilt of being told we have done wrong or have been too weak. It is in learning that we grow, not in becoming so emotionally contrived that we become hard and unemotional.

Often the broken heart is a private affair - we secretly like a boy or girl but never tell anyone, least of all the person in question! - but our heart skips a beat when we pass them. Then that person leaves the neighborhood and our world comes crashing down. Or we 'fall in love' with a wonderful person in a film or book, and at the end of the story the beauty of it breaks our hearts, we hardly know why. Such are the experiences of most young people: crushes, fantasies, dreams and feelings which are very real to us at the time.

In time, however, such feelings fade and we grow to see things more objectively. But if, at the time, scorn or ridicule had been meted out to us in our vulnerability, we would in fact have closed up our heart, thoughts and feelings when we may actually need to share them with someone. Or if our parents had brought us up to feel there was something intrinsically wrong with these experiences, something they disapproved of, then we might have hardened ourselves emotionally and formed a crust around our heart out of desperation to be 'correct.' Others, unable to do this, may live in a perpetual guilt-ridden state, too ashamed to share their 'sinful feelings' with anyone.

If a young person's feelings are not seen in perspective by the adults who should be helping them through these years, namely their parents, then the normal emotional intensity has added to it the parents' unrealistic notion of life. Things, which in time would die a natural death, are given an extended life of prolonged guilt. It is all very counterproductive.

## **The Trade-off**

Parents who have this destructive mentality will not only prevent guilt-prone youths from falling into the 'sin' of having a crush on someone, or of admitting it if they do, but they will prevent that child from the natural healing of that broken heart. The parent who is trying to tie up their youth's emotions is not at the same time able to help that youth come to terms with those feelings, to face them, accept them, grow from them, and grow out of them.

I am not saying that having a broken heart is an inherently good thing because we can grow from it, or that we should *try* to get our hearts broken in order to learn lessons. Far from it! A boy who is learning to ride a bicycle will likely have a few falls to start with, and learn from the painful experience of falling how to properly manage the bicycle. It would be stupid, however, if the boy took this fact and fell off the bike on purpose in order to learn from it. The parent who says his teenagers mustn't have individual friendships with members of the opposite sex because there is then the possibility of the emotional pain of a broken heart, would be like a parent who didn't let his son learn to ride a bicycle because of the possibility of the physical pain of falling off.

I am saying what is true of any kind of suffering, that although it is not something that we should go out of our way to try to experience, neither does God want us going out of our way to try to prevent suffering.<sup>18</sup> Creating a plan for life that will safeguard us from pain, from our own emotions, and those of others, likewise does not help us grow. Nobody likes pain, nobody wants a relationship to end in tears, but if that does happen, does that automatically mean we were

sinning? Does that mean we should make sure we protect our children from such an experience by attempting to exercise tight control over their emotions? Does it mean we should allow fear to turn us into something like a computer that automatically backs itself up at every point?

It is the job of a parent to help growth, not to dictate it, to help young people approach relationships with integrity and honor and to help them if things go wrong. It is the job of parents to help young people grow from their suffering and broken hearts, not to try to artificially create situations to prevent any possibility of broken hearts. The only way to prevent the possibility of a young person getting a broken heart is to prevent that child from ever feeling love, and that is the most tragic thing a parent could do to a child. It is not sensitive and caring when Lindvall talks about wanting to spare his children the suffering of a broken heart, for if you want a heart that cannot be broken, what you need is a heart that cannot love. C.S. Lewis puts this well.

I believe that the most lawless and inordinate loves are less contrary to God's will than a self-invited and self-protective lovelessness... We shall draw nearer to God, not be trying to avoid the sufferings inherent in all loves, but by accepting them and offering them to Him; throwing away all defensive armor. If our hearts need to be broken, and if He chooses this as the way in which they should break, so be it.<sup>19</sup>

When the New York Times did a front page feature on the courtship movement they quoted from a 'betrothed' man who said, "I can begin to emotionally connect because it's safe." Safe? What in life is really safe? If these people are looking for an emotionally safe existence, they need to go a lot further to guard themselves. Hell is the only place where you are perfectly safe from all the dangers and perturbations of love, as C. S. Lewis brings out in the excellent passage I cited at the beginning of this chapter.

With regard to the particular pain of a broken heart, if this must be avoided at all costs, why stop at a prohibition on relationships with the opposite sex? Why not also prohibit all friendships with members of the same sex since it is always possible that someone we have grown to love - perhaps a best friend that we have shared our heart with in a special way - may die, may change, or may do something that leaves us hurting?

After the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center my wife was talking to a woman about it. The woman mentioned that she had heard on the news that a boy had telephoned his mother from the airplane just before the crash to tell her that he loved her. My wife's friend said that she would not have been able to cope with that sort of thing if she was a mother. She has chosen not have children in order to avoid the potential pain. It's certainly true that if you're not prepared for the possibility of a broken heart, you shouldn't have children. After all, children may die, they may suffer, they may go through experiences that make the parents weep. If God were somehow against broken hearts, He surely would not have given parents the ability to have children.

In the end, if we really want the security of knowing our heart will not break, if we really want a life that is emotionally safe, we must carefully guard our heart from becoming attached to anyone - man, woman or animal.

If all that is being sought is some formula for a mistake-free, pain-free life, then the message being currently preached is that mistakes are sin, and pain is sin, and we must not allow either a place in our lives. This is not the gospel that produces a lightness and freedom and trust

in God. Instead this places such a huge burden of responsibility on a person to get every detail right one hundred percent of the time that to fail is weakness, and weakness is despised. The emphasis is placed on *our* control, not God's. The emphasis is that the fewer mistakes you make the more pleasing you are to God. And this brings us full circle, for isn't the whole courtship methodology, as exposed in *Best Friends for Life*, the result of this wrong idea: that achievement equals acceptability? That we are loved for *what* we are rather than *who* we are? If we feel that that is the way God 'loves' us, then we will never understand true love in our human relationships either. The real problem with the teachers we have been reviewing is not primarily a misunderstanding about relationships, but a misunderstanding about the very character of God.

### **The Shoe is on the Other Foot**

It is a paradox worth considering that although these apparent solutions to 'broken heart syndrome' are meant to reduce or eliminate emotional pain, in practice we often find the exact reverse operating. When young people do 'slip' and express themselves romantically, the persecution and 'discipline' that is often levied upon them is certainly a far greater source of broken hearts than any hypothesized effects that pre-engagement romance is supposed to have in future marriage. To illustrate this I'd like to share what happened in one church that was progressively taken over by followers of Gothard and Lindvall.

The sad incident I am about to relate concerns a young man (whom I will call Mark) whose parents were hard-core Gothardites, and a young woman (whom I will call Rachel) whose parents were not so legalistic but still had strict standards when it came to relationships. Events transpired whereby Mark and Rachel developed a relationship. They never went further than to hold hands on one occasion for a few minutes. However, when Mark's parents found out that they had held hands, they were horrified and said that they had both committed spiritual adultery against their future spouses. The parents of Mark decided to follow the advice for such situations, namely to make sure that all ties between the two were completely severed. Never again would their son be allowed to speak to Rachel. I do not mean that Mark was not allowed to speak to Rachel for a period of time; I mean that Mark was *permanently* banned from ever having anything to do with Rachel for the rest of his life! Rachel's parents were horrified, especially since she was being treated like an adulterous.

Think of this and all the other broken hearts that this teaching has caused, together with the lives and relationships it has ruined. Consider then that this teaching is being propagated on the grounds that it will *reduce* emotional pain! Surely that is the ultimate self-deception.

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<sup>1</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*, in *The Inspirational Writings of C. S. Lewis* (New York: Inspirational Press, 1960), pp. 278-9.)

<sup>2</sup> John Thompson, "God's Design For Scriptural Romance Part 1: Rediscovering the Timeless Truths", *op cit*.

<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Lindvall, *The Dangers of Dating: Scriptural Romance*, *Hope School Digest*, *ibid*.

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- <sup>4</sup> From the taped lecture, *Youthful Romance: The Dangers of Dating*, *ibid.*
- <sup>5</sup> From the tract entitled *Youthful Romance: Scriptural Patterns*, (Springville, CA: Bold Parenting, 1992).
- <sup>6</sup> Jonathan Lindvall, from the tract entitled *Youthful Romance: Scriptural Patterns*, *ibid.*
- <sup>7</sup> From the taped lecture, *Youthful Romance: The Dangers of Dating*, *ibid.*
- <sup>8</sup> Shamefaced Romance, *ibid.*
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>9</sup> From Bold Christian Living E-Mail Newsletter, Issue #99.
- <sup>10</sup> Susan Schaeffer Macaulay is very good on this idea of the Lord permeating *all* aspects of life. See, *For the Family's Sake*, (Wheaton, ILL: Crossway Books, 1999), especially p. 34.
- <sup>11</sup> From Sharon Thompson's study, *Going All The Way: Teenage Girls Tales of Sex, Romance, and Pregnancy*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995) Cited by Shalit, *op. cit.*, p. 64.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>14</sup> Cited by Rodney Clapp in "What Hollywood Doesn't Know About Romantic Love: Celebrating Valentine's Day in the spirit of the Song of Solomon". *Christianity Today*, Feb. 3, 1984 issue.
- <sup>15</sup> Bold Christian Living catalogue, article titled 'Do Teen Dating Practices Prepare Young People For Marriage or Divorce?' (Springville, CA: Bold Christian Living).
- <sup>16</sup> Jonathan Lindvall, from the taped lecture, "Scriptural Betrothal: God's Design for Youthful Romance." (Springville, CA: Bold Christian Living).
- <sup>17</sup> Israel Wayne, "Don't Kiss Before The Wedding!", *The Link: A Homeschool Newspaper*, Volume 4, Issue 2.
- <sup>18</sup> Edith Schaeffer is very good on this point, and I would highly recommend her book *Affliction* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1978), particularly chapter eleven where she addresses the temptation to abort affliction.
- <sup>19</sup> C. S. Lewis, *op. cit.*, p. 279.

## This Business of Betrothal<sup>1</sup>

*... the most disturbing thing {about betrothal} is the way writers have taken their fanciful interpretations and imaginative ideas and attributed them to the Word of God. I have read books and articles that are half Scripture, yet with close examination, nearly every quote proves to be misapplied or skewed in some way. The Bible clearly defines Christian conduct, which of course applies to the processes of marriage and "giving in marriage," but it does not give us a betrothal plan....*

*"If one wants to create a program to be followed in taking a wife, or in giving your daughter in marriage, that is perfectly fine, but let us be honest with the Scripture. You can call it betrothal, and you can give it any kind of twist you like, but don't call it "God's plan for taking a wife." If God wrote a book of great length and did not choose to give a rigid order for taking a wife, let us not put words in his mouth nor pretend that our words are Scripture.*

—Michael Pearl<sup>2</sup>

### Time to Kiss Courtship Goodbye

I couldn't believe my eyes! In my hands I held a letter from a man I had been corresponding with, a champion of betrothal. Up till now, I knew this man had some strange ideas, but *this*. Surely this was going too far! I continued to read the letter as this man explained that two young men had approached him asking permission to marry his daughter. She did not know about the proposal, nor the fact that her father and mother were in the process of praying to determine which of the two men to choose, if either. It did not seem to enter into this man's head that perhaps his daughter should have some say in the decision. Instead, he will merely give his daughter the freedom to accept or refuse whichever proposal he decides to present to her. She will never be told about the other proposal.

At the same time as I received that letter, my wife was corresponding with a married couple. This couple had only met each other twice, for a very short interval, before getting married. They are now teaching others how to follow similar procedure.

Now that sounds even worse than courtship, I thought to myself when I first heard about it. What is this new teaching? To answer that question we must first back up. Courtship has been in vogue for many years. Many people have practiced it, with a variety of results. Some of the advocates of courtship have felt disappointed that courtship has failed to offer the solution they had originally hoped. Since some people have 'courted' multiple individuals in succession before landing on one that the parents were happy with, those who saw courtship as a means to ensure that romance only occurred with one person, were disillusioned.

The result of such disillusionment has been that some advocates of courtship have abandoned the idea for the stricter and more consistent theory of betrothal, urging other

Christians “to discard experimental ‘courtship’ as an ideal, in favor of the scriptural model of irrevocable betrothal.”<sup>3</sup>

At the moment, betrothal is the newest thing on the rise, and though it is more consistent and airtight than courtship, it is also more disastrous.

There are many horror stories about people who are being burnt by the betrothal system. There have been young men who have sought to marry a girl, submitted to the system, only to fail in the end at passing through the tricky betrothal obstacle course. Other testimonies speak of how often a daughter is totally surprised at her father's choice for her husband. There are young men who have been home-schooled, have very high standards and would normally be attracted to the sorts of women whose families do betrothal, yet are scared off by the whole process. They consciously avoid any girl whose family professes betrothal since they feel they must court that woman's father rather than the woman herself, and must make a commitment before they know what they are committing to.

So what exactly is betrothal and how does it differ from courtship? I'd like to answer that question by examining the teachings of the main proponent of betrothal, Jonathan Lindvall.<sup>4</sup>

## **False Dilemma**

Lindvall's views about love and romance are very similar to those we find in *Best Friends For Life*, although he reaches his conclusions through quite a different route. Typically, he always begins his sessions by attacking the mentality that thinks, ‘Let’s date just for the fun of it and when we get tired of each other we can just move on to somebody else.’ Lindvall then portrays scenarios where recreational dating is practiced in a way that any mature Christian would find objectionable, and then juxtaposes this with his method. Likewise, he describes a ‘love’ that is based merely on lust and then juxtaposes this with his idea of betrothal. Thus, he reaches his conclusion through another use of false dilemmas. When he makes out that these are the only options from which we must choose, we are hardly left with much of a choice! By employing these false dilemmas, along with an emotional appeal to high standards, Lindvall is able to target that segment of young Christians who most sincerely desire God's will but are unable to recognize the logical fallacies inherent in his reasoning. Those who have responded in disagreement to Lindvall's ideas (including myself) receive exhortations from him to commit themselves wholly to pleasing God rather than man<sup>5</sup>, as if it is inconceivable that anyone wholeheartedly committed to Christ would hold any other viewpoint!

## **Love is not the Foundation**

As an alternative, Lindvall proposes betrothal. The definition of betrothal is best left to Lindvall’s own words. He writes,

In the Biblical model of 'betrothal', the decision to marry is made based on God's will, confirmed by parents and other authorities, rather than emotional and hormonal impulses. The betrothal period is provided for the emotions to catch up to the irrevocable decision made prayerfully and rationally. Our emotions are not to lead us, but to follow us.<sup>6</sup>

Notice here how Lindvall makes the alternative to betrothal one in which the marriage is based solely on emotional and hormonal impulses. The idea of marriage being based on love is not worthy for Lindvall to even mention as an option here. Elsewhere Lindvall does address this to say (speaking of his marriage),

Our marriage is not based on love, our marriage is based on the will of God, and the love followed the decision to surrender to God's will.<sup>7</sup>

We have an either/or situation here as prayer, spiritual submission and rationality are contrasted to emotionally felt love. The idea that prayerful submission to God's will is opposed to emotionally felt love is simply assumed.

Elsewhere Lindvall likens love occurring as an act of the will to the act of the will involved in praising the Lord and choosing to be joyful whether we feel like it or not. When we make that choice the emotions will follow, for "God's intent is that emotions would follow the will...that the will would dictate to the emotions."<sup>8</sup> He quotes Colossians 3:13 ("Put on love") and says, "Put your will in gear and say, 'I WILL love.'...Love is an act of my will to put someone else first."<sup>9</sup>

But hold on. If Lindvall believes that the definition of love is a volitional commitment, and that such a commitment must form the foundation for marriage, then what of his frequent statements that "Love is *not* to be the foundation of marriage"<sup>10</sup>? Part of the problem is that Lindvall frequently uses inconsistent definitions of love interchangeably, depending on which conclusion he is arguing for at the time and depending on which scripture he is trying to force into his definitions.

## **Bailing Out Mode**

But let us continue with Lindvall's argument. He suggests that when a person experiences a series of temporary romances, the breaking up process that is necessarily involved develops bad habit patterns. "Though 'breaking up is hard to do'", he writes, "*the more you do it the easier it gets*. This is more accurately preparation for divorce than for marriage."<sup>11</sup> Wayne has argued similarly:

After a while, a deep-rooted pattern of leaping out of relationships is developed. Once such a person is married, if things don't go their way in the relationship, they revert to default mode: bail out!<sup>12</sup>

Is this true? It depends. If the *reason* a person moves through a series of boyfriends or girlfriends is because of a fundamentally wrong approach to relationships – whether it be they are flirtatious, or seeking the thrill of short-term intimacy rather than the potential of marriage, or unwilling to stick it out through the difficult as well as the positive aspects of a relationship - then of course these wrong attitudes, like any wrong attitude, are going to become easier the longer they are practiced. However, consider the case of a woman I know whose approach to relationships was very conscientious and prayerful, but who, through a combination of misfortunes and honest mistakes, went through three boyfriends plus one broken engagement before she found the man she finally married. This woman did not create for herself ‘a deep-rooted pattern of leaping out of relationships’, nor did it become gradually easier for her to break up the more she did it. In fact, the opposite was true: the more this woman broke up with various boyfriends, the more desirous she became to find a relationship that would be permanent. It is nonsense to suggest that now she is married she must find it more difficult to remain with her husband because she had a series of short-term relationships before marrying him.

Based on the construction of this false problem, Lindvall is able to argue that we need an alternative method for conducting relationships. At first he taught that the solution to dating was courtship. Now, however, Lindvall has concluded that courtship has unscriptural flaws because "it does not go far enough".<sup>13</sup> This is because there is still the opportunity for either person to bail out if they find they are not emotionally compatible, which Lindvall suggests sounds "vaguely similar to the rationale for a couple living together for a time before marriage - to find out if they are *compatible...*"<sup>14</sup> Thus, according to Lindvall, the whole idea of courtship being a 'testing ground' is flawed.

Lindvall concludes that the only answer is what he calls betrothal. This includes a complete prohibition on all personal friendships with the opposite sex prior to the betrothal period. If breaking up during a romantic relationship will really lead to all the damaging consequences that Lindvall suggests, then we need to be sure that our children don't fall in love or experience *any* romantic emotions or thoughts prior to knowing with absolute certainty who they will marry. Once the match is determined, it needs then to be impossible for either party to back out. To fully understand why Lindvall believes this is necessary, let's have a look at his teaching about the pre-betrothal period in which romantic emotions and thoughts are disallowed.

## **Retroactive Marriage**

It is here that Lindvall postulates a rather convoluted argument that I have taken the liberty of naming 'the theory of retroactive matrimony'. This idea implies that marriage works backwards, so that behavior that would be inappropriate for Lindvall's wife to exhibit towards other men (*i.e.* going out with them, having a romantic relationship. etc.), would be equally wrong before she ever married Lindvall. He maintains that whether a person is *actually* already married or *actually* single is irrelevant to the fact that it is wrong to have romantic emotions towards them, unless you know for sure that this person will one day be your spouse. Thus, to an imaginary young man going out on a date, Jonathan says

So tonight you're taking out a girl that probably will not be your wife, and in fact, someday she'll probably be someone *else's* wife. So you're taking out somebody else's wife tonight....<sup>15</sup>

That's a very big leap! Just because a woman might someday be someone else's wife does not mean that to take her out is the same as taking out somebody else's wife, for the very obvious reason that the marriage has not yet occurred! Or has it? Lindvall's mentor, Bill Gothard, has argued

Being a 'one-woman man' or a 'one-man woman' means that we have accepted the *lifelong* commitment of marriage. The wisdom of proverbs praises the one who does the partner good *all* the days of his life (including *before* marriage). (See Proverbs 31:12.)

We do this by remaining morally pure in our thoughts and actions for the one we will one day marry. Because this commitment to reserve ourselves for one individual, every person is like a 'strange-man' or a 'strange woman' to us except the one God directs to marry through the confirmation of parental authority and the love He places in our own hearts."<sup>16</sup>

Of course, you should keep yourself pure for your future spouse even before you are married, but this is very different to the kind of "lifelong commitment of marriage" to which Gothard is referring. Both Gothard and Lindvall seem to assume a notion of 'retroactive marriage.' This can give rise to all sorts of absurd and unnatural situations, such as Lindvall's scenario of "taking out someone else's wife." Another consequence is Lindvall's suggestion that Paul's words in 1 Tim. 3:12 and Tit. 1:6 that a church leader should be literally a "one-woman man" might be referring to premarital emotions as well.<sup>17</sup>

In the Old Testament the sin of adultery was considered more serious than that of fornication, and incurred a greater penalty.<sup>18</sup> The reason for this was surely that adultery is a transgression against an *existing* marriage covenant, one that did not exist until it was ratified. (In the next chapter we shall discuss in more detail Old Testament marriage customs.) Because Lindvall implies that the marriage covenant extends, not only into the future, but retroactively into the past as well, he is able to argue that the same standards which apply to relationships among married people apply equally to relationships among unmarried young people. He says,

I am convinced if there is something that is inappropriate for me to do with a woman I'm not married to, it is also inappropriate for my son to do this with a woman he is not married to.<sup>19</sup>

Somehow we have been brainwashed into thinking that we can have one standard for married people and another standard for single people.... We've got a double standard here.<sup>20</sup>

Of course, there are abundant situations where Lindvall is totally correct that the same standards that apply to a married person also transfer over to the unmarried. For example, both

married and single people must avoid lustful thoughts, must maintain sexual morality, honor God in all their relationships, and so on. Yet equally, there are other cases where this rubric of similarity does not transfer over one simply assumes it prior to all argument. For example, the same standards that govern how much recreation time I take each day do not also apply to my children. Similarly, my teenage son and daughter form individual friendships with members of the opposite sex to an extent that I would not be comfortable with my wife doing. Ideally we hope that romance will always lead to marriage, yet we acknowledge that because we live in a fallen world, this ideal will not always be realized. There are times when engagements must be called off, for whatever reason. When this does happen and a person ends up having successive romances, though this may be regrettable, it is in no way comparable to a married person being romantic towards someone who is not his or her spouse.

### **Your Emotions Belong to Dad!**

Lindvall carries his theory to its consistent conclusion: no young person should have any romantic feelings for anyone until they are engaged to their future spouse. This brings us back to the concept of 'emotional purity' which I looked at in the preceding chapter. "There's a time for romance," writes Lindvall, "but it's not before their decision, it's after the decision has been made."<sup>21</sup> Essentially, Lindvall says to his children, "Do not stir up nor awaken love until the father so desires" - to make a variant of Song of Songs 2:7.

Just as we teach our young people to reserve themselves physically for marriage, I believe the scriptures call us to train them to reserve their romantic emotions for the betrothal period immediately preceding marriage, having enjoyed the benefit of God-ordained protectors (parents) in helping them seek and find His will for their lifelong companion.<sup>22</sup>

Part of Lindvall's motivation for doing this with his children is that he and his wife "bear deep regrets" from the fact that they each had romantic relationships with others before they married each other. Even now, though he is in his fifties, Jonathan says,

I sometimes ponder wistfully what a wonderful thing it would be if I were the first man she had knitted her heart with. She wishes the same about me, but with pain I recognize that I didn't save my heart for her. It is my intention to spare my own children the regrets I bear.<sup>23</sup>

Building on the fact of his particular deep regrets, Lindvall suggests generally that no young man would want the woman he will one day marry to be dated by another man or to have romantic feelings for anyone else other than himself. Consequently in keeping to the Golden Rule of doing to others as we would have them do to us, he thinks we ought to restrain any romantic feelings until we know for certain who we will marry. A woman, he says, is the property of her future husband, and therefore we should think in terms of property and ownership

when it comes to romantic relationships. When a woman is 'given in marriage' by the father to the groom, this symbolizes a transfer of ownership. But to have a romance with a woman before her ownership has been formally transferred, is for that man to "defraud his brother" (1 Thess. 4:6) since he is stealing something that properly belongs only to the woman's future husband. "God intends for them to marry," says Lindvall, "but God wants them to experience authorized romance. Authorization, not only for the physical but for the emotional ownership of one another."<sup>24</sup>

### **It's Up to God to Make It Work!**

So when does this authorization for emotional ownership occur? Well, first of all, God reveals who the son or daughter is supposed to marry. How does He reveal this? He reveals it to the parents. As Lindvall writes,

As we go through the right way, I think there are enough safeguards that we can be pretty sure that you're not going to get the wrong person if you do it the right way. How are we going to know it's the right person? God will speak, and God has revealed in His word that He speaks through authorities in all of our lives.<sup>25</sup>

...the decision of whom to marry is based entirely on God's will confirmed by our authorities, with a confidence that God would bring romance to us as a blessing of our obedience...<sup>26</sup>

...God wants young people to honor their parents...by voluntarily submitting their choice of a marriage partner to them.<sup>27</sup>

We see from the above quotations that the entire system hinges on the assumption that God is going to make it work. I have observed earlier how unhealthy it is for parents to straight-jacket young people into the one-and-only-way for getting married. The question might now be considered from the Lord's point of view. I wonder how God feels when told that He has to work within the confines of this system – that the whole plan hinges on His cooperation. Somehow, I don't think the Lord is very amused.

Despite the emphasis placed on God's participation, His exact function in the betrothal system remains ambiguous. Lindvall says that the young person can say, "It's in God's hands, God's speaking to my parents, and I'm just resting."<sup>28</sup> When I was a boy and discussed this issue with Lindvall I happened to refer to "the father choosing" who his offspring would marry, whereupon Lindvall corrected me. "No," he said, "it's not the father who chooses. It's *God* who chooses. God reveals His will to the father." This being the case, it seems rather erroneous for Lindvall to go through long lists of criteria for helping parents to decide (see chapter 2), analyzing the conditions each of the four parents must keep in mind when making the decision, and presenting dozens of safeguards and prerequisites along the way as a sort of insurance policy. This would seem to imply that it is not so much a matter of Divine revelation as

analytical deliberation on the part of the parents. Furthermore, the idea that if any of the six people involved (i.e. both sets of parents, both young people) choose to veto it, the marriage can't happen, hardly seems consistent with the supposition that God has mandated the match through a special revelation to the father. Yet Lindvall wants it both ways: in order to persuade the young person Lindvall wants to be able to have the father say that God has spoken to him regarding the rightness of the match, but in order to preserve his idea of an authority structure, he wants to also have the subsequent possibility of the match *not* being of God if one of the six people choose to veto it. As he says

It would seem to me that any one of the parties involved, either of the mothers, either of the fathers, and either of the young people has a possibility of vetoing the whole thing and everything is off at that point.<sup>29</sup>

Remember, this is before the young people are allowed to have any feelings for each other.

### **Veto Power: a Generous Concession?**

Typically if one suggests that this scheme involves forcing unwilling marriages upon people, advocates will point out that this is not the case because of the veto-power with which the son and daughter are invested. However, if some reflection is given to this idea of veto power, I believe we will see that it is not all it seems.

One has to remember that in order for the betrothal system to work in the first place, in order for it to even make sense to the young people involved, they must have grown up under conditions that most people would consider quite abnormal. In short, these are not people who have been encouraged to develop a sense of their own independence, nor have they been nurtured towards spiritual maturity. Rather, these are people who have been taught from a very early age to accept their parents' judgment on everything. The anecdotal evidence from people who have escaped from such families usually always presents the same picture: a person who finds independent thinking scary and who, in many important respects, cannot even function as an individual. So it sounds good in theory to say that such a person has the ability to veto their parents' choice of a mate, but if they have been trained never to disagree with Mom and Dad, if they have been told that God does not speak to them directly but only through their parents, if they have been taught that they must obey their parents in everything even as adults, and if their own independence has never been encouraged, then to tell them that the parents have given them permission to veto the person their parents have chosen (a choice which, we are told, is based on a direct revelation from God!), is not going to amount to very much. It is hardly the generous concession that it seems.

Someone I know who grew up under this system had some very insightful observations to make about this, so called, 'veto power.' Looking back over her own experience, she pointed out that we must

take into account that these young people have never had any kind of close bond with anyone outside their family, and have never even had same-sex friends that weren't family friends. All their social interactions were in the context of their own family, and they were expected to have their only really close friends within the family (parents and siblings). So they don't know what really connecting with someone or having a healthy relationship with the potential of deep emotional intimacy looks like. If their parents don't have an exceptionally good marriage, they haven't seen what real connection, love, and respect looks like, or how a man and woman who deeply love and respect each other treat one another.

Since these young people have heard all their lives that love is not a necessary prerequisite for marriage, and that married love is really no different from "brotherly love" or the love all Christians should have for each other, they really see no necessity for any connection beyond that of faith, similar convictions, and liking each other reasonably well. So it would make no sense for a young person to reject the first person that comes along that their parents like, as long as that person is godly, has the correct views and character traits, and seems nice enough. That's really all that's considered necessary.

I have been told of one occasion where a father did not agree with his daughter about the man she wished to marry. So she decided to do the 'right' thing and submit to her father's choice. She met her future husband twice before the wedding. At the wedding she sang a song in which the recurring refrain was, "Daddy, you're the only man in my heart." Sad as this is, it is perhaps sadder that such examples are held up as role models.

### **Keep the Woman In The Dark**

I have suggested that the young person's ability to veto the proposed match is not the generous concession that it seems. This becomes even more evident when we consider the fact that the young lady, according to Lindvall and many other advocates of betrothal, should not even be informed that the match is under consideration until it has passed all the other five people, otherwise she might accidentally release her emotions towards him prematurely and end up being defrauded if the man doesn't "pass inspection." Therefore, she "should be the last one to know unless God sovereignty speaks to her first"<sup>30</sup>, for as Israel Wayne puts it,

If she knows that this man desires to marry her, she will almost inevitably give her heart to him (assuming he is a decent man). This would be dangerous if the young man fails to follow through with the needed preparation.<sup>31</sup>

### **Once the Betrothal Begins**

If the young lady says yes, then the betrothal starts and "the young couple can begin to safely release their emotions to each other."<sup>32</sup> At that point "this is an irrevocable commitment"<sup>33</sup> that Lindvall suggests is initiated by presenting it to the congregation. The congregation is then required to hold the young people responsible for a number of things, such as staying morally pure, not touching each other, not spending time alone together and

Another thing that we would ask the congregation to hold them accountable to is cultivating that emotional bond, that during this period even though, you know, they're saying, 'Hey, we know that God wants us to get married, we're not in love with each other and so we're asking the congregation to pray for us, to reinforce us, to push us together emotionally, to cultivate that romance so that we will, in fact, be in love, deeply in love, before we marry.'<sup>34</sup>

God wants our young people to experience a 'no risk' commitment.... God's design is that we would encourage them to fall in love only after the commitment is made.<sup>35</sup>

Because of a basic confusion about the meaning of various kinds of love, together with an unrealistic view of human nature, Lindvall assumes that falling in love is something a person can just decide to manufacture - that two people can choose not to fall in love until God's will has been revealed, and then as an act of the will, magically decide that now they are going to fall in love. As Wayne puts it, "if you determine to love someone, the emotions follow."<sup>36</sup> Human beings are thus treated like robots controlled by gadgets and buttons. But there is no button on human beings that can be pressed to make one person truly love someone that they do not.

Be that as it may, however, I still hear cases of this method apparently 'working' where betrothed couples fall in love and then have a good marriage as a result of following this procedure. But we must define what we mean by a 'good' marriage. As we have seen earlier, often the presence of AGAPE love is all that people think is needed for a 'good' marriage? But according to the New Testament we should practice AGAPE love to our enemies, so if the presence of AGAPE is all that is needed to make a marriage 'good', then in theory a man and wife could be enemies and still have a 'good' marriage. Such a definition of a good marriage reduces language to a meaningless game.

As for there being empirical evidence that people have chosen to fall in love during the betrothal period, I have no doubt that if a young man and woman have been subjected to the above circumstances, have been raised without a proper understanding of love, and are expecting to fall in love after betrothal, and they know that they will eventually have sex, obviously - the human chemistry being what it is - some emotions are going to click in eventually. But here it is essential to ask whether those emotions proceed from an *intrinsic* oneness and compatibility of the two people, or whether the emotions proceed from *extrinsic* conditions and would, therefore, have been equally apparent if another man or woman had been chosen. Whether these emotions can meaningfully be called love would depend on one's understanding of love.

But getting back to Lindvall's argument. He suggests that the betrothal period differs from the normal idea of engagement in that, while one may break an engagement, a betrothal is

irrevocable. Although the betrothal is not legally binding, and although consummation has not occurred, nevertheless we should think of it just as binding as a regular marriage. That is the sense in which it is a 'no risk' commitment, because there is not the risk that you will 'defraud' your future spouse through experiencing emotions towards another person or through bailing out in the middle of engagement. Your chance of backing out is gone. During this period, the young people are authorized to fall in love, and indeed, are *required* to do so, despite the fact that they must constantly be chaperoned.

In his taped lecture "Scriptural Betrothal" Lindvall gives suggestions, based ostensibly on Biblical patterns, for the betrothal period and wedding. Lindvall does say that these are only suggestions for us to think about. Though he hopes his children will take the following suggestions, he does not advocate them with the same dogmatic adherence as he does the basic principles of betrothal.

One such suggestion is that the parents decide the date of the wedding without telling the two young people. This enables the parents to wait until they feel the young people are ready and then arrange the wedding sort of like a surprise birthday party. (The comparison to a surprise birthday party originates with Lindvall, not me.) To support this idea Lindvall appeals to Christ's words that "not even the Son knows the day nor the hour, only your Father who is in heaven"<sup>37</sup> which he says is a reference to Jewish marriage customs.<sup>38</sup>

Another suggestion is that the wedding happen at the parents' house, and that the service is officiated by the father. Regarding sexual instruction, Lindvall suggests it is best for this to occur on the day or a few days before the wedding. Regarding the honeymoon, Lindvall asks "What is the scriptural precedent? Going to the groom's house - going to their home."<sup>39</sup> Lindvall says that hopefully during the betrothal period the man will have been making or preparing a home he can take his wife to.

The reason Lindvall believes this latter suggestion – and, no doubt, some of the others - has 'scriptural precedent' is because it was practiced in the Jewish culture at the time the Bible was written. As this is the same ground from which Lindvall argues for the scripturicity of betrothal, we must consider whether the argument holds. In short three questions must be asked. One, does scripture give any indication that the traditions of Judaism are accompanied with a divine endorsement? Two, is betrothal, as Lindvall defines it, actually an ancient Jewish practice? Thirdly, and most fundamentally, is betrothal Biblical? These are the questions I would like to explore in the next two chapters.

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<sup>1</sup> Some of the material in this chapter originally appeared in my article, *The Dating Game*, "Midwest Christian Outreach, Inc. Journal", Volume 6 No 3, Summer 2000 and is reprinted here with permission.

<sup>2</sup> From an article titled, "To betroth or not to betroth?" January-February 2001, taken from No Greater Joy Ministries' website at <http://www.nogreaterjoy.org/>.

<sup>3</sup> Lindvall's email newsletter, #88, 2001.

<sup>4</sup> Jonathan and I have known each other since I was a small boy, as he used to stay at my parents' house whenever he gave seminars in our town. Nothing I have to say in this chapter is meant to be a personal attack on Lindvall himself, but a heartfelt plea for him and his followers to re-examine these ideas in the light of scripture and common sense.

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- <sup>5</sup> See for example, *Home School Digest: The Quarterly Journal for Serious Homeschoolers, Volume 10, Number 3*, "Contention Regarding Emotional Purity" by Jonathan Lindvall (Covert, MI) p. 23.
- <sup>6</sup> Lindvall, 'Do Teen Dating Practices Prepare Young People For Marriage or Divorce?' Ibid.
- <sup>7</sup> From Lindvall's taped lecture "Shamefaced Romance", ibid.
- <sup>8</sup> Jonathan Lindvall, from the taped lecture, "Scriptural Betrothal: God's Design for Youthful Romance." (Springville, CA: Bold Christian Living).
- <sup>9</sup> Jonathan Lindvall, from the taped lecture, "Scriptural Betrothal: God's Design for Youthful Romance." (Springville, CA: Bold Christian Living). Lindvall also develops this definition of love in detail in the Bold Christian Youth Seminar.
- <sup>10</sup> *Home School Digest: The Quarterly Journal for Serious Homeschoolers, Volume 10, Number 3*, "Contention Regarding Emotional Purity" by Jonathan Lindvall (Covert, MI) p. 23.
- <sup>11</sup> Bold Christian Living catalogue, article titled 'Do Teen Dating Practices Prepare Young People For Marriage or Divorce?' (Springville, CA: Bold Christian Living).
- <sup>12</sup> Israel Wayne, "Don't Kiss Before The Wedding!", *The Link: A Homeschool Newspaper*, Volume 4, Issue 2.
- <sup>13</sup> Jonathan Lindvall, "The Dangers of Dating: Scriptural Romance", Covert: MI, *Home School Digest*, Volume 8, Number 2.
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid
- <sup>15</sup> From the taped lecture, *Youthful Romance: The Dangers of Dating*, ibid.
- <sup>16</sup> *Establishing Biblical Foundations for Courtship*, op. Cit. p. 13.
- <sup>17</sup> "Dating? Courtship? Betrothal?: Scriptural Romance" (Part 2) *Home School Digest*, Vol. 8, Number 2.
- <sup>18</sup> Deuteronomy 22: 22 & 28, Leviticus 20:10, Exodus 22:16
- <sup>19</sup> Bold Christian Living E-Mail Newsletter, Feb 15, 1999, subject: "Just Friends".
- <sup>20</sup> From the taped lecture, *Shamefaced Romance*, ibid.
- <sup>21</sup> From Lindvall's taped lecture, "Shamefaced Romance."
- <sup>22</sup> Jonathan Lindvall, from a tract entitled *Youthful Romance: Scriptural Patterns*, (Springville, CA: Bold Parenting, 1992).
- <sup>23</sup> Jonathan Lindvall, from the tract entitled *Youthful Romance: Scriptural Patterns*, ibid
- <sup>24</sup> From the taped lecture, *Youthful Romance: The Dangers of Dating*, ibid.
- <sup>25</sup> Jonathan Lindvall, from the taped lecture, "Scriptural Betrothal: God's Design for Youthful Romance." op.cit.
- <sup>26</sup> Jonathan Lindvall, "The Dangers of Dating: Scriptural Romance Part 1", *Home School Digest*, Vol. 8, Num. 2, p. 23.

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<sup>27</sup> Jonathan Lindvall, "The Broken Heart Syndrome" in *Establishing Biblical Standards of Courtship* (ATI, Oak Brook: Ill, 1993), p. 3.

<sup>28</sup> Jonathan Lindvall, from the taped lecture, "Scriptural Betrothal: God's Design for Youthful Romance." (Springville, CA: Bold Christian Living).

<sup>29</sup> Jonathan Lindvall, from the taped lecture, "Scriptural Betrothal: God's Design for Youthful Romance." op.cit.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid

<sup>31</sup> Israel Wayne, Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Israel Wayne, "Don't Kiss Before the Wedding!", Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> I have not been able to learn whether this was in fact a Jewish custom. Some Jews have told me that it was and others have said it was not.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

## Is Betrothal Jewish?

*To be aware of the sexual possibilities inherent in every relationship is not sick; it's a mark of humanity.*

—Manis Friedman<sup>1</sup>

*Abusus non tollit usum.*<sup>2</sup>

Does the idea of betrothal, as it is being advocated today, have any Biblical support? That will be the question that this and the following chapter will seek to address. Those who teach betrothal not only claim that the Biblical evidence is there, but that the evidence is so overwhelming that you have to either be blind or dishonest not to see it. There are certain standard texts, terms and stories in the Old Testament that the advocates of betrothal commonly cite to substantiate this. However, when one actually analyses these passages, we see that far from supporting such ideas, they actually refute them. In addition to faulty exegesis, one also finds the case for betrothal resting on inaccurate historical data and anachronistic assumptions about how the ancient world operated.

### Is Emotional Purity an Historical Concept?

Consider the following words, written by Jonathan Lindvall.

...in many parts of the world today, and certainly in the not-so-distant past world-wide, the concept ['emotional purity'] has been assumed. In the modern west, we...have entirely forgotten the idea of saving one's heart for the one we will marry.<sup>3</sup>

If Lindvall is prepared to make such an audacious assertion, you would expect him to at least provide a minimum of historical verification. Although there is a growing quantity of published tapes and literature on this subject, I have yet to see an advocate of betrothal cite even one historical example showing the idea of 'emotional purity' to be anything other than a modern invention.

The following quotation is a typical example. After positing the false problem of broken-heart syndrome and emotional impurity, Israel Wayne writes

What is the answer...? My wife and I found it in the Bible. You see, the ancient Jewish people held to the belief that your emotions should follow you, rather than you following your emotions. The Old Testament is filled with stories of young people who chose to marry their spouses before romantic love had begun. They made a decision to love the person they married. Our culture tells us to 'marry the person we love...'"<sup>4</sup>

Lindvall argues similarly, "the norm of scripture is that a couple becomes bonded emotionally after becoming committed to one another."<sup>5</sup> Is this true? Is the Old Testament really literally 'filled' with such stories? In the next chapter I'd like to have a look, but it is first necessary to lay an historical framework for our study by considering the culture and customs relevant to those times.

## **Brief Survey of Old Testament Culture**

The Old Testament culture was a patriarchal society, which meant that the rights of women were very minimal compared with today. However, as we have already seen in chapter five, the Lord established laws that showed an acute concern for the protection of woman. Thus, Israelite women had considerably more protection than women in the surrounding cultures of the day.

In Ancient Near Eastern culture marriage could often be treated more like a business contract than a relationship, and a wife like an object of property. A man could have many wives just as he would have many heads of cattle, although women were not able to have multiple husbands. If a man grew tired of his wife he could write her a certificate of divorce for an offense as trivial as cooking a meal in the wrong way. A woman was not granted the same privilege, however, and could only divorce her husband under special circumstances.

Regarding marriage, the bride had to be 'bought', if you will, by the bridegroom's father, either by money or service offered in exchange for the bride's father being willing to part with her, while the bride herself received no dowry. When the bride was 'given in marriage' there was a transfer of ownership from her father to her husband.

It is only against this cultural backdrop that we can understand the custom for parents to authorize or, in some cases, to arrange a marriage. In Ancient Near Eastern culture, if a man wished to marry a girl, he had to first procure the permission of her father. This necessity for parents to authorize a match only applied on the woman's side. Like everything else, this was a function of the patriarchal society, as well as economic and social conditions. Economic conditions were such that dependence on parents and the larger pedigree played a crucial part in the establishment of a new family. People tended to think much less about the union of individuals and much more about the union of families or family groups. It is not difficult to see how this led naturally to some of the customs regarding parental authorization of marriage. It is a gross anachronism to suppose the need for such authorization derived from a network of ideals about emotional purity. When we consider the fact that fathers had the right to sell their daughters into slavery as a concubine if they wished (a practice referred to in Ex. 21:7-8), it becomes absurd to suppose that the role a father also exercised over his daughter's marriage was

a corollary of any doctrine of marriage. It resulted, rather, from the simple fact that a daughter was considered her father's property, to do with as he liked whether that meant marriage or slavery. One of the reasons why this was is because women were completely dependent on their fathers or family until that dependence was transferred to a husband. You couldn't just move away from home when you were eighteen and support yourself. The sense in which women lacked economic autonomy led to lack of independence in other areas as well.

In the Hebrew culture of the Bible and Apocrypha, we find a continuity to this basic cultural structure. While young men did not always gain approval from their parents to marry, young women always did (i.e., Jacob had to get Leban's permission to marry Rachel, but not his father Isaac's, Tobias had to get Raguel's permission to marry Sarah but not his father Tobit's permission) except for cases when the woman was self-supporting, as in the case of Abigail's marriage to David. Just because society was structured like that does not mean that such structure derived from a divine mandate. Yet some Christian teachers are now picking certain aspects out of this culture (such as arranged marriages) and arguing that these customs have a divine precedent simply because they were practiced in Old Testament times. Such an argument is not only theologically unsound (since it confuses scriptural description with scriptural prescription), but it is meaningless as long as we cannot also return to the whole network of social and economic conditions that lay behind those customs. Such conditions involved not simply an entirely foreign way of life, but many practices that would be objectionable to try to reintroduce into our society (such as the custom of raising up seed to your brother's widow). The fact that the Lord gave commands to show His people how to operate *within* their existing social context, does not mean that this society always got it right. To use an obvious example, the fact that Deut. 21:15-17 gives laws to govern situations where a man has two wives in no way gives God's stamp of approval on the men of today taking multiple wives.<sup>6</sup>

It is against this cultural backdrop that we must understand a verse like Exodus 22:16-17. Here the Lord commands that if a man has premarital relations with a virgin, the father may refuse to give his daughter to him in marriage, though the young man must still pay the bride price. This scripture is often pointed to in order to prove that parental veto power "is not simply a cultural practice that is neutral in God's eyes. God didn't just permit it, but required it."<sup>7</sup> It may or may not be true that God intends fathers to veto marriages they believe will harm their daughter, but we cannot deduce such a position from this passage alone. The passage assumes a society in which a father had the power to veto his daughter's marriage, just as Deut. 21:15-17 assumes a society in which men have the power to take more than one wife. But just as the laws governing polygamy or slavery do not tell us, one way or another, whether that was God's ideal, neither does Exodus 22 tell us whether paternal veto power is God's ideal.

Michael Pearl explains how Exodus 22:16-17 shows that fornication was viewed in terms of its economic implications since it guaranteed that the father was not defrauded of the bride price that accompanies betrothal. It also discouraged a young man from lying with a girl for temporary pleasure since he would have to pay the bride price anyway and might be forced to marry her. The fact that the father could still say no to the union would have prevented a man from lying with a woman as a way of manipulating an automatic marriage. When we look at the Exodus passage in that light we find that the whole point of it is not to do with marriage at all, but the fact that there is a responsibility that a man acquires when he sleeps with a woman, and therefore he must pay the bride price even if they do not marry. There are many applications we

might draw from that in our culture today. On the other hand, to read into this passage a Divine sanction for a certain procedure for getting married, is to make it into nonsense and to completely miss the whole point of what the passage is trying to tell us.

Having made these general observations about the Old Testament culture, I want to now move to and look closely at the custom of betrothal.

## **Marriage & Betrothal in Jewish Culture**

In defining what betrothal meant in the ancient world, it is necessary to spend greater energy defining what it was *not*. Betrothal, as it was practiced in the Jewish and Israelite culture, was very different indeed to 'betrothal' in the new movement, even as the old fashion custom of courtship was very different from its application in the new movement.

At the time of Christ the Jews had very defined marriage customs, just as any culture has distinct ceremonies connected with their nuptial rites. These customs had evolved gradually as the culture matured and would not have been present in the ancient times of the patriarchs.

We tend to think of betrothal as similar to engagement, or maybe a halfway house between engagement and marriage. In the Jewish culture of the first century, however, betrothal (“ERUSIN”) *was* marriage. There were two stages to the marriage. During the betrothal stage, though they were legally married, they did not cohabit together. The wife remained in her parent's house preparing herself for the move to her husband's house. This lasted a month. If the wife was under twelve years of age, however, this period lasted a whole year, to give her time to prepare a trousseau. In some parts of ancient Judea, the man and wife were allowed intimate physical contact once during the betrothal period, to wet their appetite and to help the husband appreciate and desire his wife more. After the final wedding ceremony took place, the wife returned to her husband's home for the consummation of the marriage.

Just as the Jewish betrothal was equivalent to marriage, so their “*shiduchim*” would correspond to what we would call engagement, in so far as it was either a non-formalized agreement to get married or a formalized contract to enter at a later stage into a marriage (betrothal) contract.<sup>8</sup>

## **What Betrothal Was *Not***

Now I must say what betrothal was *not*. It had nothing to do with the idea of a father receiving direct revelation for who his child would marry, it had nothing to do with restriction on cross-gender friendships and, most importantly, it certainly had nothing to do with denying all romantic feelings until the betrothal period. On the contrary, *Hasting's Bible Dictionary* tells us “that in ancient Israel the association of the sexes was comparatively unrestrained, and naturally led to personal attachments which sought satisfaction in marriage...”<sup>9</sup> And again, as the respected Hebrew scholar Alfred Edersheim wrote (about a hundred years ago),

Where the social intercourse between the sexes was nearly as unrestricted as among ourselves, so far as consistent with Eastern manners, it would, of course, be natural for a young man to make personal choice of his bride. Of this Scripture affords abundant evidence.<sup>10</sup>

In his taped lecture, "Scriptural Betrothal", Lindvall goes through every single verse in the Bible where the word betrothal occurs. As Lindvall simply tells us what the word betrothal meant (namely, the essence of his ideas in the previous chapter), he is then able to take all these scriptures as support for his position. That is to say, he reasons to his conclusion based on premises that assume his conclusion. That initial assumption, however (i.e., the definition of betrothal in Bible times), is not subject to investigation or argument. Lindvall simply tells us that,

The scripture talks about a pattern that it calls betrothal.... In the Bible there were two steps, with a fairly long period of time in between. During that lengthy period in between the couple was encouraged to cultivate their romantic feelings towards one another but not be physical with one another. And it was during that period that they fell in love, but it was *after* the commitment had been made. So they were free and secure, they were not at risk emotionally of giving their heart to someone and then being defrauded. That is God's design. Let's look at the Biblical model of betrothal. God wants our young people to experience a no risk commitment.... God design is that we would *encourage* them to fall in love only after the commitment is made."<sup>11</sup>

Based on this definition of betrothal, Lindvall is able to argue that the 'betrothal' of Mary and Joseph was an irrevocable period (apart from adultery) for "them to mentally and emotionally prepare for marriage..."<sup>12</sup> The 'betrothal' of Mary and Joseph is in fact one of Lindvall's main arguments. But is this what the word 'betrothal' actually meant in the first century? According to Lindvall, the answer is yes, for as he writes, "Even if one doesn't hold that betrothal is to be practiced today, it is at least clear what the Bible means when it uses the term."<sup>13</sup> So what does the Bible mean by the term? According to Lindvall, "A biblical betrothal was an irrevocable covenant made at the beginning of the romance, authorizing the parties to bond emotionally."<sup>14</sup> And again, "the parties keep (guard) their hearts from romantic involvement until after the commitment is made and then use the betrothal period to cultivate emotional attachment to one another..."<sup>15</sup>

I have never seen any documentary evidence to suggest that the above ideas were part of the Jewish custom of betrothal referred to in the Bible<sup>16</sup>, especially as concerns no risk emotions. In fact, there is actually a wealth of evidence to the contrary. One piece of evidence is the fact that - whatever Lindvall may claim - a betrothal, like ordinary marriage, was not irrevocable and did not require an act of physical unfaithfulness for it to be terminated. Thus, to suppose that the concept of 'a no risk commitment' or 'emotional purity' lay behind the betrothal custom, is inconsistent with the fact that if a couple "fell out of love", or the man found another woman more beautiful, he could simply divorce his wife, whether it was during or after the betrothal period.<sup>17</sup>

To this we must add the fact that a man might acquire as many wives as he liked, a custom still practiced by the Jews in the first century. (The Talmud, while suggesting limits on the amount of wives, nevertheless supports polygamy.) When we add to this the fact that a degree of free association between the sexes was enjoyed and often led to romantic love occurring prior to any commitment, it becomes ludicrous to suppose that anything verging on emotional protection was a principle behind Jewish marriage traditions. It emerges that, whatever betrothal might have meant in that culture, it was very different from the principles behind modern 'betrothal', especially as concerns the protection of emotions.

Lindvall's teaching that children should be allowed veto-power but no positive volitional fiat in the decision whom to marry, is very unjewish as well. In the Jewish Talmud we read that

A man is forbidden to give his daughter in marriage while she is a minor, until she is grown up and says, 'I wish to marry so-and-so'..."<sup>18</sup>

As far as law was concerned, however, though a father could marry off his daughter while she was still a minor (less than twelve years and one day), she could annul the marriage upon reaching twelve years and a day without needing a divorce, if she did not love the man.

## **Sex, Marriage & Modesty in Judaism**

Because Lindvall appeals to Jewish traditions in support of his ideas, when I first listened to Lindvall's tape on betrothal I decided to contact some Jewish scholars to ask what they thought of it. I wanted to know whether Lindvall had his history right. I must say that speaking with various Jews and rabbis was the highlight of all my research. As this chapter was one of the last ones I wrote, my conversations with Jews made a refreshing and fitting conclusion to my study. It is difficult to impart in mere words the whole spirit and dynamic behind the Jewish way of life, but I shall briefly try.

In the orthodox Jewish tradition, marriage is held incredibly highly - much more so than in the historic Christian tradition. The role of romance, love and attraction were also held in high esteem by the Jews, as these things were seen as central to a lasting and therefore happy marriage. A famous Jewish quote is that "an unmarried man is an incomplete human being" and "an unmarried woman is an incomplete vessel."

The Christian tradition has tended to view singleness as a sign of piety. Among the Jews the opposite holds true: singleness is seen as a curse. Not only is a priest who is unmarried disallowed from administering as High priest on the Day of Atonement, but

"He who, by denying his legitimate instincts, fails to produce children 'is as if he shed blood, diminished the Image of God, and made the *Shekinah* depart from Israel" (Sh. Ar.. EH 1:1, based on Yev. 63b-64a), and he will have to account for his actions in the world to come (shab. 31a). Marriage is so important that a man may sell a Torah scroll in order to marry (Meg. 27a) and a woman will tolerate an unhappy marriage rather than remain alone (Yev. 113a, Kid 7a). One should

never approach marriage lightly. To make a successful match is as hard as the parting of the Red Sea (Sot. 2a. et al.), and it requires the infinite wisdom of God himself (Gen. R. 68:3). Hence, although in one view a person's marriage is predestined (Sot. 2a), the individual must choose wisely: "Hasten to buy land; deliberate before taking a wife" (Yev. 63a).<sup>19</sup>

The centrality of marriage in Judaism leads to certain things in practice. For one, the orthodox Jews are opposed to modern practices of dating, immodest apparel and practices that easily lead to the eroticism so commonplace in today's society. However, the reason why they are opposed to these things is polar opposite from why the courtship and betrothal group oppose them.

For the Jews, marriage, love and sexuality are things so sacred that they must be nurtured with care and caution. The distinction between nature and nurture is important here. Our sexuality and passions are treated in a very natural way by the orthodox Jews, so that there is no sense of embarrassment or repression about this aspect of our lives. At the same time, however, Jewish parents try to nurture an atmosphere in which our sexual instincts are not encouraged in the wrong way, as erotic images and lack of modesty invariably will. The eroticism of our culture creates temptations for young people that would never exist within a traditional Jewish culture. The necessity of modesty, of holding back rather than flaunting one's sexuality, is summed up in the Jewish term TZNIUT. To understand the ethos behind these ideas, one must return to the Jewish concept of marriage. Since marriage is the structure God created for the fulfillment of our passions and sexuality, there is a strong desire for young people to be landed within happy marriages with a person they are right for. It is to this end that immodesty and flirtation are discouraged within the Jewish social atmosphere.

It is precisely *because* the Jews regard sex as sacred that it is guarded so carefully. "The Hebrew word for marriage, 'Kiddushim', comes from Kaddosh, the word for holy. But 'holy' for the Jew does not mean 'put on a pedestal', removed from everyday life. It means a special gift, to be enjoyed and appreciated to the full."<sup>20</sup> The Jews certainly know how to enjoy themselves.<sup>21</sup> If Michelle Guinness' testimony is anything to do by, Orthodox Jews who walk around with side-curls and top hat by day, abandon themselves to unbridled eroticism at night. And what about the women? Believe it or not, the Rabbi will often give preparation courses to young men before their wedding to instruct them in the art of bringing their wife to orgasm. Traditionally, in fact, the Jews have put more emphasis on a woman's sexual pleasure than the man's. The emphasis is on the man's duty to his wife, and if he fails in his sexual duty towards her it is such a serious matter that she is allowed to divorce him. The Torah's 'laws of marriage' develop elaborate systems out of concern for female sexual satisfaction. The Lord shows concern about this aspect of marriage, as seen in such passages as Exodus 21:10, where marriage rights are classed along with the food and clothing that a husband is obligated to provide for his wife. The centrality of conjugal obligations in Judaism are not directly linked to the need for procreation, for female pleasure is not a necessary condition for reproduction. Central as the raising of seed is to the Jewish mind, they nevertheless see procreation as a secondary end of sex: the primary end for which love-making exists is to cement a relationship together.

The Jewish sense of modesty is not compromised by the fact that they can be surprisingly straightforward and explicit in discussion about sexual matters, but in a very natural, objective

and detached way. To the traditional Jew, modesty does not imply a sort of general shame and embarrassment connected to anything sexual. Neither does it imply what we might call attitudes of 'prudery.' It is because they have no illusions about the strength and power of our sexual urges that they recognize the need for it to be protected rather than flaunted.

It is difficult to view ways of thinking from a different culture without some sense of bias generated from the cultural presuppositions that permeate one's own age and climate. Thus, people have always tended to approach differing cultural traditions with some degree of suspicion at best and demagoguery at worst. Nor am I able to claim exemption from this tendency. When I began this present study I had a preconceived idea that arranged marriages were always bad. But after receiving a Jewish perspective on the matter, I came to realize that this is not necessarily always the case. One rabbi I had the privilege to speak to told me that when Jewish parents arrange a marriage for their son or daughter, it is never a selection made exclusively by the parents. Rather, it is an attempt by the parents to find and then bring people together who might likely be compatible. At that point, the parents stand back and watch whether something 'happens'. If nothing does happen, then another relationship is attempted, until the right one is found. The role of parents is more like a screening process to eliminate relationships that would likely lead to marital breakdown. The feelings of the young people, and often the suggestions of their peers, play a central part in this 'matchmaking' procedure.

That, at least, is some of what I learned from one rabbinic scholar with whom I spoke. While I do not know the extent that everything he said applies to ancient Jewish customs in specific detail, clearly it gives us insight into the heartbeat and ethos behind this people. Such insight is essential if we are to guard against the damaging tendency to interpret modes of behavior peculiar to a specific culture in light of our own ideas and feelings, thus assuming reasons and motivations behind actions that in actuality would have been alien to the minds of that people.

This brings us back to the teaching on 'betrothal'. Without exception, every Jew that I spoke with said that Lindvall's idea of no romantic emotions prior to betrothal (particularly as concerns the repression of one's emotions) was very unJewish. One rabbi, after hearing some of Lindvall's misrepresentations of ancient Jewish practice, asked rather bewilderedly, "How can you restrict emotions?" Sexuality to the Jew is an enduring adjunct of the personality<sup>22</sup>, and can no more be switched on or off than we can change the color of our hair at the push of a button. The Jewish emphasis on modesty is effective since it builds from this realistic foundation. Instead of telling young people that they shouldn't be feeling or thinking this or that, the Jew will address how one should handle these passions. There is a lot we can learn from that.

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<sup>1</sup> Manis Friedman's *Doesn't Anyone Blush Anymore*, (HarperCollins, 1990).

<sup>2</sup> "The abuse does not abolish the use."

<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Lindvall, "Contention Regarding Emotional Purity", Home School Digest Volume 10, Number 3, p. 20.

<sup>4</sup> Israel Wayne, *Ibid*.

<sup>5</sup> Email newsletter, #88, 2001.

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<sup>6</sup> While polygamy is not forbidden in the Old Testament, the implication can be drawn that monogamy was still God's ideal from verses such as Ps. 28; Prov. 12:4; 18:22; 19:14; 31:10-31, Is. 62:5)

<sup>7</sup> Jonathan Lindvall, personal letter to author.

<sup>8</sup> As the *Encyclopedia Judaica* states, "In Jewish law shiddukhin is defined as the mutual promise between a man and a woman to contract a marriage {betrothal} at some future time and the formulation of the terms on which it shall take place. In general parlance, as opposed to legal terminology, it is known as erusin (Kid. 63a, Tos.), which is in fact part of the marriage ceremony proper. The concept of shiddukhin can entail either a promise by the intending parties themselves or one made by their representative parents or other relatives on their behalf (Kid. 9b; Sh. Ar., EH 50:4-6 and 51).... Shiddukhin as such has no immediate effect on the personal status of the parties - it being only a promise to create a different personal status in the future (Resp. Rosh 34:1; Beit Yosef EH 55). In the middle ages the Jews combined the betrothal ceremony with the wedding ceremony because it was inconvenient to have an interval between the two ceremonies where the parties were prohibited from cohabiting yet all the stringency of the married status applied to them. (*Encyclopedia Judaica*, Volume XI, p. 1036.)

<sup>9</sup> *A Dictionary of the Bible*, Edited by James Hastings, M.A., D.D. 1900 Publ. T. & T. Clark. 5 volumes.

<sup>10</sup> Rev. Dr. Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life in The Days of Christ*, (London: The Religious Tract Society) p. 143.

<sup>11</sup> Lindvall, *Scriptural Betrothal*, Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Lindvall's newsletter, #87

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

<sup>14</sup> Newsletter, issue #88.

<sup>15</sup> Newsletter, issue #85.

<sup>16</sup> Here is a complete list of all the places where the term appears in scripture: Ex. 22:16; Lev. 19:20; Deut. 20; Deut. 22:23; Deut. 22:25; Deut. 22:27; Deut. 22:28; Deut. 28:30; 2 Sam. 3:14 ; Ho 2:19; Ho 2:20; Mt. 1:18; Lu. 1:27; Lu 2:5.

<sup>17</sup> Because a betrothed couple was officially man and wife, a divorce was needed to break it, as we see in the story of Mary and Joseph. Divorce was not uncommon in those days, and in fact it was easier to get a divorce than it is today. A man need only write his wife a certificate of divorce and then send her away. At the time of Christ there were two rival rabbinic schools, the school of Shammai and the school of Hillel. Both schools had differing interpretation of the Biblical text (Deut. 24:1) that allowed divorce. The scholars of Shammai argued that the phrase in Deuteronomy "he has found some uncleanness in her" or "unseemly thing", literally means "nakedness of a thing" and thus refers to unfaithfulness as the only grounds for divorce. But the school of Hillel understood the phrase to mean anything unseemly and declared the famous words, "He may divorce her even if she spoil his cooking, or as Rabbi Akiba put it, "He may divorce her even if he found another woman more beautiful than she." Some Talmudic sages went so far as to say, "A bad wife is like leprosy to her husband. What is the remedy? Let him divorce her and be cured of his leprosy.... If one has a bad wife, it is a religious duty to divorce her. Cited in Dr. A. Cohen, *Everyman's Talmud*, (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1932) p. 162. Despite the boldface audacity of these words, nevertheless the Hillel position was supported by Deuteronomy 24:3 where a second divorce can occur simply if the "husband detest her", and also from the fact that divorce would not have been necessary in cases of adultery since adultery was punishable by death. It was the Hillel view that found its way into state law, and the historian Josephus confirms that divorce was common for "any cause whatever". Nevertheless, many who endorsed this as jurists understandably condemned it as moralists. Likewise, when Jesus was presented with the question, while he sides

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with the ethics of the Shammai view as being God's original intent, he nevertheless recognizes the Hillel position to be the correct interpretation of Moses' words by acknowledging that the Mosaic law gave more latitude on the matter because of the people's hardness of heart. Jesus in fact reforms the law (Mt. 19:1-12), rather than appealing to an existing law.

<sup>18</sup> Cited in Dr. A. Cohen, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

<sup>19</sup> *Encyclopedia Judaica*, volume XI, p. 1028

<sup>20</sup> Michele Guinness, *A Little Kosher Seasoning* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1994), p. 216.

<sup>21</sup> Along this line it is interesting to note that the famous custom of breaking a glass at Jewish weddings is said by medieval commentators to have had its origin in a wedding in which the father took to breaking expensive glasses in an attempt to reduce the unseemly hilarity of rabbis present. It is also reported that at one wedding the husband astonished the rabbis by dancing with his bride on his shoulders. Not only that, but the Talmud justified his behavior entirely! (*Encyclopedia Judaica*)

<sup>22</sup> See Daniel Boyarin book *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

## Is Emotional Purity Biblical?

*Love actually dates before the 19th century. Not only can you find stories of people who loved each other in the Bible and in Ovid's poetry, but you can find stories of love in many non-Western cultures as well. There were tales of romance combining chivalry with love in China, for instance, even in the Early Han Periods (c. 300-120 B.C.). If you're like me and you've been hearing your whole life that love-is-a-Western-nineteenth-century-construct-so-just-get-over-it, you might find James J. Y. Liu's survey of *The Chinese Knight Errant* to be enormously encouraging, as well as interesting. Of particular interest with respect to modesty is *A Tale of Chivalrous Love* (Hsia-yi Feng-yueh Chuabn), a story of the romance between T'ieh Chung-yü and Shui Ping-hsin, whose personal name means "Ice Heart" - ice here signifying purity, not coldness.*

—Wendy Shalit<sup>1</sup>

*“Set me as a seal upon your  
heart,  
As a seal upon your arm;  
For love is as strong as death,  
Jealousy as cruel as the grave;  
Its flames are flames of fire,  
A most vehement flame.*

*Many waters cannot quench  
love,  
Nor can the floods drown it.  
If a man would give for love  
All the wealth of his house,  
It would be utterly despised.*

—Song of Songs 8:6-7

When Agur, son of Jakeh compared the way of a man with a maid to that of an Eagle in the sky, a snake on a rock, and a ship in the midst of the sea (Prov. 30:19), it is hardly something that can be construed as a pejorative description, despite the snake. Yet if, as Lindvall maintains, all ways between a man and a maid should be prohibited until after betrothal, this verse must be heavily qualified to ensure that the terms 'man' and 'maid' do not refer to persons of a single

status. (The Hebrew term for maid that is used indicates a virgin.) It is indeed an exercise of unrestrained imagination to conceive such distinctions being inherent in this proverb. As I tried to show in the preceding chapter, such concepts would have been completely foreign to the Jewish way of thinking, and therefore cannot be externally imposed on the Biblical texts.<sup>2</sup>

One scholar, after I asked him if he knew of any documentary evidence that could be used to prove the unjewish-ness of 'emotional purity', pointed me to the Bible, which is full of examples of love occurring prior to commitment. We shall be examining some of these examples in this chapter, but first it must be emphasized that because the Bible stories were not written to specifically address this subject, any bits we are able to extract should not be turned into a model for one method or another. This is precisely the mistake that the advocates of courtship and betrothal frequently make in approaching narrative scripture from a statistical pattern to try to determine right practice. It is always dangerous to turn the descriptive passages of scripture into prescriptive commands. A descriptive passage tells us *what* happened while a prescriptive passage tells us how something *should* happen. An example of this is the prayer of Jabez in 1 Chronicles 4:10, which is descriptive, vs. the prayer which Jesus taught his disciples to pray which is prescriptive. Now, of course, we can gain wisdom on how to live from studying the descriptive passages, but they should never be approached as blanket models for us to automatically apply in our own situations.

Having said that, I would like to now look at some of the descriptive passages of the Bible where we read about people getting married and having relationships. My purpose in the following survey is to show that the theories of emotional purity do not have a pedigree dating back to the Bible or ancient Jewish practice. (And even if they did, this would not itself prove that such ideas are normative, based on the above distinction between description and prescription.) In so doing we shall also see how completely untenable is the assumption that romantic love is a modern invention - an assumption so pervasive in the literature of the courtship and betrothal movements.

### **Isaac and Rebekah: Betrothal Blueprint?**

The relationship between Isaac and Rebekah is a favorite among advocates of courtship and particularly betrothal. I cannot begin to count the amount of times I have seen Isaac and Rebekah's relationship cited as a paradigm of 'God's way.' Referring to the Isaac and Rebekah narrative in his book *Dating vs. Courtship*, Paul Jehle writes, "In principle it is an authoritative guide for us to follow..."<sup>3</sup> However, when we look at what the Bible actually says about Isaac and Rebekah, nowhere do we find God sanctioning the pattern of courtship, betrothal, emotional purity, or anything of the sort.

To fully understand story, we must back up and consider what God had been doing with Abraham. The Lord had set Abraham apart to found a nation that would be God's representative on earth. It was very important that Abraham's son, Isaac, should not procreate seed that was defiled, i.e., that was contaminated by the seed of other people's. Nowadays we see this principle applied in the New Testament where we are exhorted not to be unequally yoked. Racial purity is no longer an issue as it was back then.

So Abraham made his servant

swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and the God of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell; but you shall go to my country and to my family, and take a wife for my son Isaac."

"And the servant said to him, 'Perhaps the woman will not be willing to follow me to this land. Must I take your son back to the land from which you came?'

"But Abraham said to him, 'Beware that you do not take my son back there. The LORD God of Heaven, who took me from my father's house and from the land of my family, and who spoke to me and swore to me, saying, 'To your descendants I give this land,' He will send an angel before you, and you shall take a wife for my son from there. And if the woman is not willing to follow you, then you will be released from this oath; only do not take my son back there.' (Gen. 24:3-8)

We do not know what was behind Abraham's reluctance for his son to travel to his homeland, although we can speculate. The betrothal lobby have suggested that this was because the custom was for young men not to be involved in their own marriage decisions. But notice the servant's reluctance to go without Isaac, and doubt as to whether the woman would want to go and marry a man she had not met. The implication is that under normal circumstances Isaac would have sought his own wife.<sup>4</sup> But this was an unusual situation, and that very fact never seems to be taken into account when the betrothal advocates appeal to this example. In fact, it was so unusual an occurrence that a miracle needed to happen. The servant had no idea which girl would be the right one as there was no knowledge of, or interchange with, these far off relatives. Hence, he had to rely solely on an act of divine intervention. Because this was part of the Lord's plan, in fulfilling the mission to found a chosen people through the patriarchs, the Lord moved directly in these affairs, bringing the girl of His choosing to the servant before he had met anyone else. It was all part of the Lord miraculously fulfilling his original word to Abraham. The servant recognized this marvelous act of mercy and praised the Lord for it, saying,

"Blessed be the LORD God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken His mercy and His truth toward my master. As for me, being on the way, the LORD led me to the house of my master's brethren." (Gen. 24:27)

What was Rebekah and her parent's response to this unusual proposal of marriage to a man she had never even met? Her parents recognized that "The thing comes from the LORD..." (Gen. 24:50) though they desired that their daughter remain with them for at least ten days before leaving (24:55). Despite her parent's wishes, Rebekah desired to depart the very next day (Gen. 24:56). In this Rebekah shows a degree of autonomy that is discouraged by the advocates of betrothal.

The Lord blessed their faithfulness, for we are told that Isaac loved Rebekah (Gen. 24:67). This love was obviously emotional, for we read that it comforted Isaac after his mother's death. (24:67)

Nowhere do I find this story set out as a blue print for selecting a spouse. Rather, it is a story of Abraham, Isaac and Rebekah's trust in God's faithfulness. Abraham's faith in the Lord's word regarding his progeny is shown to have substance in the way God went before and prepared this young woman for Isaac, and then miraculously engineered the circumstances necessary to bring them together. To try to find from this story some divine methodology for finding a spouse reduces its power and significance.

## Take a Wife

Now *if* a divine precedent for finding a spouse *had* been set through these events, then one would confidently expect Isaac to continue the procedure with his son Jacob. However, with Jacob we find a very different set of circumstances ensuing.

We are told in Genesis 26:34-35 that Jacob's brother Esau "took wives", which "were a grief of mind to Isaac and Rebekah." Ah, there you have it, Esau he *took wives for himself* rather than letting his father select them! Furthermore, the result brought grief to his parents. That is how the betrothal advocates interpret this verse. For example, Thompson mentions this by commenting that "every example where the father did NOT initiate and oversee the relationship (such as Esau/wives, Shechem/Dinah, Samson/Delilah, etc.) the outcome was either mixed or disastrous."<sup>5</sup>

But just hold on a second. The unifying factor in the three relationships that Thompson mentions, which accounts for the disastrous outcomes, is that each involved union with a Gentile, which God had forbidden. The grief Esau brought upon his parents was not that he 'took wives' for himself, for that same language is used of Abraham, a generation earlier, taking a wife for himself: "Abraham again took a wife, and her name was Keturah." (Gen. 25:1) So the grief would not have been because Esau took wives, but because, as Rebekah says,

"I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth; if Jacob takes a wife of the daughters of Heth, like these who are the daughters of the land, what good will my life be to me?" (Gen. 27: 46)

The grief Esau caused his parents was not because of the procedure for getting married, but because he took wives *from among the pagans*. So Isaac instructs Jacob not to take a wife from the daughters of Canaan, but to go find one amongst his own family.

Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him away to Padan Aram to take himself a wife from there, and that as he blessed him he gave him a charge, saying, "You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan." (Gen. 28:6)

Isaac simply sent Jacob away to find a wife. Even I favor more parental involvement than that! Isaac had no idea who his son was going to choose, he simply asks that it be from his own kinsmen. When Esau heard of this he was jealous and went and took another wife from Abraham's family too. (Gen. 28:9)

Non-biblical literature from the Ancient Near East points in the same direction. In the apocryphal book of Tobit, Tobias' father instructed his son, saying, "do not disdain your brethren and the sons and daughters of your people by refusing to take a wife for yourself from among them." The implication of this statement was not that the father was exercising an inherent right to control his sons' marriage decision but, like everything else he said in that chapter, simply pointing him in the direction of what was right. The advice that Isaac and Tobit gave their sons would be similar to the way a Christian father might counsel his son not to seek a wife from among unbelievers. Here again, what is not said is as important as what actually is said in so far as the fathers say nothing concerning the need to approve the actual individual women.

### **Jacob: Love Before Commitment**

Getting back to Jacob, the events that unfolded show that people did not hold back their emotions prior to commitment. In Jacob's case, exactly the opposite is found. We are told that "Jacob loved Rachel" (Gen. 29:18) *before* he asked Leban if he could marry her. In other words, the love preceded the commitment. As Jacob was penniless, and therefore had no bride price to pay or means to support a wife, he had to work fourteen years to earn her. As Schajjik observes, "Jacob did not labor fourteen years for Rachel's hand because he had 'discerned a compatibility' with her, but 'because he loved her.'"<sup>6</sup> So deep was Jacob's love for Rachel, in fact, that these seven years "seemed only a few days to him because of the love he had for her." (Gen. 29:20) Again, in that culture the father of the bride always had to give consent. Now Leban was a scoundrel who took advantage of Jacob's penniless state, maneuvering things to get fourteen years work out of Jacob. You all know the story, how Jacob was tricked into marrying Leah thinking he was marrying Rachel. It is interesting that in this case the arranged marriage (Jacob and Leah) was actually a disaster. Why was the arranged marriage a disaster? Quite simply because Jacob didn't love Leah (Gen. 29:31). On the other hand, the relationship that Jacob himself chose, prospered because it was a love-match.

Lindvall acknowledges that "there are several instances in scripture of men and women clearly being drawn emotionally to one another prior to their marriage," BUT he hastily adds, "these seem to be not only exceptional, but to invariably result in unique problems."<sup>7</sup> I wonder what sort of 'unique problems' Lindvall imagines resulted from the fact that Jacob loved Rachel before gaining permission to marry her. He doesn't say.

### **Dinah and Shechem**

Perhaps Lindvall would point instead to a story such as that of Dinah and Shechem (Gen. 34). This incident has been cited by others as an example of the disasters brought about by choosing your own marriage partner. However, the incident proves nothing either way, but it does serve to demonstrate the difference between the proper way that Jacob handled his emotions versus the improper way of the Gentile Shechem. Jacob was in love with Rachel just as Shechem

was in love with Dinah, but Shechem wanted physical satisfaction immediately while Jacob showed restraint. Jacob obviously desired Rachel physically too (Gen. 29:21), but he waited. Jacob's attitude runs contrary to the consumerism of our materialistic age, where the primacy of instant gratification leaves little point of contact with romantic love, while Shechem demonstrates the opposite. It is interesting to note that, even so, Shechem went to his father to ask him to obtain Dinah for his wife. This shows that this procedure for parental authorization concerning the female was the protocol that was required in order to be married - by the godly and the ungodly alike, by the pagans as well as the children of Israel. There was a general acceptance of the customs, etiquette and protocol of the culture.

## **Sampson**

We see this again in the story of Sampson. (Judges 14) Although Sampson had found a girl that "pleased him well" and whom he desired to marry, it was still necessary for the actual marriage that cultural customs were observed. So Sampson said to his parents, "get her for me as a wife." (Judges 14:2) The parents initially refused on the grounds that she was from their enemies, the Philistines. Again we see that the authority of the parents to make the plans was an intrinsic part of that culture. It was not simply a custom observed by righteous people, as if it was 'God's way' that He had instituted, but was also practiced by those outside the covenant.

## **David**

Another person who needs to be studied is David. In 1 Samuel 18:20 we read that "Michal, Saul's daughter, loved David. And they told Saul, and the thing pleased him." Notice here again that the love preceded the commitment. It is obvious that this was how people lived then as we do today. Also notice that the father was informed subsequent to the love.

Saul's interference eventually destroyed David's marriage to Michal and David took the widow Abigail to be his wife (1 Sam. 25:39-42). David and Abigail certainly didn't follow any procedure of parental authorization. David asks directly for Abigail to be his wife (through messengers) and she accepts immediately. We also read that "David also took Ahinoam of Jezreel" (25:43), but we are told nothing about it.

## **The 'Sons of God': Dating Relationships?**

In Genesis 6:1-5 we read about 'the sons of God' who saw that the daughters of men were beautiful and so came down to take wives of them. In his defense of betrothal, John Thompson cites this in his list of 'significant relationships to study.' What this has to do with the case for betrothal I fail to grasp. The passage deals with angels ('sons of God', see Job 1:6) who disobeyed God by coming down to take wives of humans, which led to the production of giants. The procedure for conducting a relationship is not the issue here; the issue is disobedient angels

and wicked humans. Nevertheless, Gothard somehow manages to see this as an example of "dating-type relationships..."<sup>8</sup>

## **Christ's Betrothal to the Church**

John Thompson writes,

Perhaps the most compelling reason for recognizing betrothal as transcultural is our Lord's use of this standard for His relationship with His own "multicultural" bride, the church. As the spiritual father of the Corinthians, Paul declares: "...for I betrothed you to one husband, that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin" (2 Cor. 11:2). Why would Christ choose betrothal if it were not God's own prescription for pre-marital fidelity? Indeed, Paul suggests that its primary purpose is to "present you as a pure virgin." Just as Christ doesn't want us "dating around" in the spiritual realm because it leads to physical, mental and emotional impurity, so likewise in the natural realm.

To say that betrothal must be God's way because He drew upon it to illustrate His relationship with the church, is a fallacious argument, for two reasons. First, Jesus used whatever material was around at the time for illustrations. He drew upon many things from living in tents to using swords in warfare. Does that mean that fighting with swords is more godly than fighting with guns because God used the former and not the latter as an illustration? Is it godlier for farmers to plant vineyards of grapes rather than fields of oats because God used the former as an illustration and not the latter?

Secondly, when we realize the vast difference between true historical betrothal vs. modern betrothal, then the above argument amounts to saying, "modern betrothal must be God's way because He drew upon historical betrothal to illustrate His relationship with the church", even though the latter, as we have seen, was entirely different, both in its outworking as well as the ideology behind it.

One aspect of historical betrothal that is particularly meaningful in illustrating Christ's relationship with the church is the two distinct phases: first, the judicial union of the couple at the commencement of the betrothal, and then the physical union after the wedding at the end of the betrothal. This being so, betrothal was a particularly apt custom for Paul to draw upon in describing Christ's marriage to the church since Christ's union to the church occurred judicially when Christ died but will not be consummated until He returns in glory when "the Spirit and the bride say 'Come!'" to the bridegroom. (Rev. 22:17) When that time comes, we shall say,

"Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.' And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints." (Rev. 19:7-8)

The principle that matters here is that we remain faithful to Christ, and not desert our first love (Rev. 2:4), but eagerly await the return of the bridegroom when the above verse will be fulfilled. While we wait, we can make ourselves ready by arraying ourselves in the fine linen of righteous acts.

To try to reduce these truths into a method for getting married misses the whole point that the scripture is making. It is absurd to say that Paul and John were exhorting their hearers on a "prescription for pre-marital fidelity" here. Paul spent considerable detail elsewhere laying down rules for marital and premarital behavior, never mentioning anything close to such ideas.

The attempt to see Christ's relationship with the church as an illustration of modern betrothal has actually led some teachers to implicitly deny the basic gospel message. To show how this is so it is first necessary to review the four-fold progression once the go ahead has been given for a match.

1. First an offer of marriage/love is made to the woman
2. Then the woman accepts an irrevocable commitment.
3. Then the couple 'falls in love'.
4. Finally, there is marriage and consummation.

The advocates of betrothal are teaching that the above progression parallels Christ's relationship to the church. First Christ makes us an offer of marriage through the gift of salvation. Then after we accept comes the betrothal period. During this time Christ woos us and we fall in love with Him. It is irrevocable apart from spiritual adultery, which would be turning our back on Him. Finally, when Christ returns, there is consummation of the marriage.

God forbid! Scripture declares that Christ's love for us *preceded* our commitment to Him. "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His son to be the propitiation for our sins... We love him because he first love us." (1 Jn. 4:10-19) And again, "God demonstrates His own love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). Why did He die for us and offer salvation? Out of love (John. 3:16). Therefore His love cannot be the effect of our commitment to Him, but the other way round. When we say 'yes' to Christ's marriage proposal, it is because He has wooed us by His great love through the Holy Spirit (John 6:44), instead of in the modern betrothal method where the husband woos the woman only after she has made a commitment to Him. Christ's relationship to us is the very antithesis of the pattern of modern betrothal.

### **What About 'Defrauding'?**

There are two other verses from Paul's letters that are frequently cited by both courtship and betrothal advocates. One is 1 Thessalonians 4:3-6.

For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know

God; that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified.

This is the main verse that Lindvall cites as a proof text for betrothal *a la* Lindvall. Lindvall argues that Paul's words that no man should take advantage of (or 'go beyond', as some translations have it), is referring to the sins of sexual impurity, while the word 'defraud' is referring to the sin of emotional impurity. "We can all recognize," writes Lindvall, "that 'going beyond' applies to physical impurity. This is important, but it's not all there is. He also said not to 'defraud' one another."<sup>9</sup> Lindvall argues that defrauding applies when a person's emotions are drawn towards someone that they do not end up marrying. They are defrauded because they expected something that was not given. Hence, emotions should only be released after a commitment to marriage.<sup>10</sup>

Surely this is to artificially impose a distinction in Paul's words that the syntax does not allow. The use of the inclusive conjunction, together with both phrases being linked into 'this matter' of sexual immorality, indicate that 'taking advantage' and 'defrauding' are part of the self same thought rather than being a distinction between different forms of sin. Furthermore, since defrauding, by definition, involves deceit, it cannot apply to cases where there is simply emotional attachment that is not culminated in marriage, as is being suggested, but only to those cases where a person flatters or flirts a person who believes they are being genuine when they are not.

The words 'possess his own vessel' Lindvall says mean 'acquire his own wife.' Scholars disagree whether the words 'vessel' are referring to a wife or one's own body. If they refer to a wife (which is unlikely from the context of the passage), it is interesting that the emphasis is not on the father acquiring a spouse but the individual in question. Lindvall claims that the words 'passion of lust' refers to the process of pursuing a partner through romance and dating rather than God's method of betrothal.<sup>11</sup>

But let's not forget that the whole passage - the whole book of 1 Thessalonians in fact - is talking about personal sanctification versus sexual immorality. If this passage is read in the context in which it occurs, it becomes obvious that it is not a passage to unmarried people about how to (or how not to) get a wife. When Paul intended to give specific advice to unmarried people, as in 1st Corinthians 7, he said that that is what he was doing. But 1 Thessalonians 4:3-6 is a passage about the general wrongs of sexual immorality, similar to Paul's exhortation in 1 Corinthians 6:18-20. He emphasizes the seriousness of sexual purity, and the sinfulness of following the passion of lust. Seen in this context, when we read not 'to take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter', it is clear that 'this matter' is the sexual immorality spoken of in verse 3, and more specifically adultery. To make out that this is a reference to pre-marital emotions is absurd, for if Paul had meant that, he surely would have made it clear. While Paul may not have been the most organized of writers, let's give him more credit than that!

## **What About Brothers & Sisters?**

Another passage that these teachers are quick to point to is Paul's words in 1 Tim. 5:2, where he instructed Timothy to treat "younger women as sisters, with all purity" and to treat the older woman as if they were mothers. Lindvall argues that this passage indicates that Paul disapproved of romance before engagement.

What did Paul mean by his words to Timothy? Surely he meant that Timothy should show respect to young women as he would his sister, even as he should respect elderly woman as he would his mother. So the application is don't mess around or flirt because the bottom line in all relationships must be AGAPE love. If Paul had wanted to say that romance was wrong, and that most of the entire human race had been deceived by the romantic inclination, he did not say it here. Further, it is interesting that Paul's words only make sense if you assume that there was at least some level of interaction between the young men and women.

## **The Song of Songs**

No discussion of love in the Bible can ever be complete without considering the Song of Songs (also called Song of Solomon). If space permitted, I would devote an entire chapter to this beautiful book of the Bible.

The Song of Songs has always held a mysterious excitement for me, going back to my childhood when I was permitted to read all the books of the Bible except this one. Later, when I was grown and attending a Bible college that advocated Gothard/Lindvall type ideas about love, I waited in anticipation for the time when this book would be studied, curious to see how it would be handled. When the book was finally treated, it was not seen as a celebration of the glory and beauty of human love, but understood as only allegory.

I do believe that the Song of Songs can be understood for its allegorical significance in symbolizing the love relationship between Christ and His bride. Though the allegorical interpretation has often been espoused by those who find a straightforward interpretation embarrassing, even shocking, we should not think that the two approaches are mutually exclusive.

There are many different ways of reading the Song of Songs. Those who advocate betrothal have claimed the book for their side, suggesting that it is about a betrothed couple and thus shows how romantic 'betrothal' can be. Other scholars, such as Tremper Longman III, have suggested that the book is a collection of disconnected love poetry. By far the most pervasive reading of the book is to understand it as showing a love relationship between king Solomon and a Shulamite woman.

Other scholars have suggested an alternative interpretation of the book that is less well known but, in my opinion, more clean and internally consistent. (See Dr. Bullinger's *Companion Bible* and C. D. Ginsberg commentary on The Song of Songs.) According to this alternative interpretation, the book is not about a mutual love between King Solomon and the Shulamite woman at all; rather, it is the story of Solomon attempting to woo the Shulamite away from her shepherd boy lover. The scholars who take this view believe that *The Song of Songs* is the story of how, despite enormous pressure, the Shulamite girl remains faithful and true to him until the end when their love is restored. It is a story of the triumph of love, enduring at all costs and

victorious in the end. It is a story of a love that must be pursued in secret when it is opposed first (not insignificantly) by familial authority and secondly by the King himself.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Wendy Shalit, *op. cit.*, p. 181.

<sup>2</sup> One interpretation of this passage is to see it as referring to the insidious nature of men 'having their way' with maids. The justification for this interpretation is thought to rest in the following verse, "This is the way of an adulterous woman: She eats and wipes her mouth, and says, "I have done no wickedness." (Prov. 30:20) Seen in the context of verse twenty, therefore, some have interpreted the reference to 'the way of a man with a maid' to be referring to immorality. According to this line of thought, the four things the writer mentions all have one thing in common: An eagle leaves no trace of its passage through the air, a serpent leaves no trail upon a rock, a ship leaves no path in the midst of the sea, and a man leaves no trace of having 'his way' with a maid when he commits fornication with her. All this is said to be like the way of an adulterous woman (verse 20), because her infidelity leaves no trace, no trail, no path. After "she eateth, and wipeth her mouth," she can say "I have done no wickedness," and who can prove otherwise?

There are many reasons for rejecting that interpretation. Starting at verse 15 in the chapter, the writer begins to give several groups of four for our contemplation. They may be listed as follows –

1. Four things that are never satisfied. v15-16
2. Four things too wonderful. v18-19
3. Four things the earth cannot bear. v21-23
4. Four things that are little but wise. v24-28
5. Four things that are comely. v29-31

Groups 1 & 3 are of negative import, but groups 2,4 & 5 are definitely of positive import. The group that is of main interest to us is group 2, four things that are WONDERFUL. Now that word translated as wonderful appears in several places in the O.T., the following of which clearly set out its meaning.

2 Sam.1:26 David speaks of Jonathan as follows - Your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women.

Ps.40:5. Many, O Lord God are your wonderful works.

Isa.9:6 And His name shall be called Wonderful . . . .

It would be superfluous to add any more. I would therefore say that all four of the items in group 2 are WONDERFUL, in the fullest possible positive sense. What then of those who attach verse 20 to the end of verse 19, to make it into something evil. Verse twenty reads, "This is the way of an adulterous woman . . ." Advocates of this interpretation are quick to say that "This is the way ." refers *back*. But according to the rules of grammatical interpretation, "This is the way . ." in Hebrew, points *forwards* to what follows. In order to be sure, the author gives us one other parallel in verse 17, an interlude that separates group 1 from group 2. The context of this, dealing with the mocking eye, has *nothing* to do with the things mentioned in group 1. Therefore, verse 20 has no immediate bearing on verse 19, except to show by *contrast* the difference between the wonderful way of a man with a maid with the adulterous way of a harlot with a man.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Jehle, *Dating vs. Courtship* (Plymouth, MA: Plymouth Rock Foundation, 2001), p. 113.

<sup>4</sup> The Talmud states, "A man is forbidden to take a woman to wife without having seen her, lest he afterwards perceive in her something objectionable and she becomes repulsive to him..."

<sup>5</sup> John W. Thompson, "God's Design for Scriptural Romance Part 1: Rediscovering the Timeless Truths", from the internet.

<sup>6</sup> Schaijick, *ibid.*

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<sup>7</sup> Lindvall's email newsletter, #88, 2001.

<sup>8</sup> Establishing Biblical Foundations For Courtship, *ibid*, p. 6.

<sup>9</sup> Bold Christian Living E-Mail Newsletter, Issue #26: Introduction to Emotional Purity--Part One: Courtship?

<sup>10</sup> Lindvall writes, "It is just as defrauding for a young man to draw your daughter's heart before betrothal as it would be for me (a married man) to draw the heart of some woman other than my wife (no matter how physically pure such a flirtatious relationship might be). God is calling both married people and single people to both physical purity and emotional purity." (Bold Christian Living E-Mail Newsletter, Issue #93)

<sup>11</sup> 'Shamefaced Romance', *Ibid*. Also Lindvall's email Newsletter #26: Introduction to Emotional Purity--Part One: Courtship?

<sup>12</sup> Space prohibits any further explanation or defense of this way of interpreting the book, but anyone interested in knowing more should consult my article titled 'A Song of Love', located on my website at:

<http://myweb.tiscali.co.uk/largerhope/>

## Why Dating Isn't the Problem & Courtship Isn't The Answer

*The second reason for its appeal, I think, is that it so greatly simplifies things for singles. It makes the pre-marriage period manageable. It gives a safe formula for getting through an extremely complex, confusing and peril-fraught time of life. By putting things on a clear, up-front, rational basis, much of the uncertainty and vulnerability that inevitably accompany "affairs of the heart" is eliminated.*

— Kathleen Schaijik<sup>1</sup>

For the last half hour I have been surfing the net, skimming the voluminous quantity of material on the subject of courtship. My interest was particularly drawn to a 'Christian Courtship Webring' operated by a young man named Nathan Baily. Nathan's website provides everything from links to similar websites to a 'Pop Quiz' dealing with the Bible's teaching on courtship. After taking Nathan's quiz and getting the answers wrong, my attention was aroused by Nathan's article 'My Courtship: A Trip into The Future.' In this article Nathan describes what he expects in a future wife.

Among other things, writes Nathan, he expects his wife to have 'a dowry.' This would include the woman's father being able to offer a financial contribution to the marriage and the woman being able to contribute a good character to the marriage. Issues of character weakness, such as unforgiveness, bitterness, abuse and lust, need to be dealt with before Nathan will marry her. Nathan makes clear that there should be no areas of unrepentant sin or areas of weakness that she is not doing anything towards fixing before he will consider a woman as a candidate for marriage.

Nathan also expects that this woman will have parents that can "protect her from 'unqualified applicants'" and can help her to build a relationship with the right young man. If her parents don't want him to marry her, "Then, quite simply," writes Nathan, "I cannot violate their spiritual authority." Nathan is clear that this also applies to unsaved parents. "We need to understand", writes Nathan

that when we marry, we marry the family too. So, if I, their daughter and our spiritual authorities feel we should marry, but her parents still do not, then we would take our case up with God. This is a matter of trust -- is God in control of your world, or her parents? If you truly believe in a sovereign God who answers prayer, then this presents no problem at all! I also believe that it is similarly important to have her pastor's blessing.

Nathan goes on to explain that he and his future wife will not have romantic feelings for each other until after the commitment to marriage. "This is the only way I can see", he writes, "of ensuring that you only romance one partner in your lifetime. ... the engagement period is also the time when the couple fall head-over-heels in love with each other, so that by the day they get married, they are totally besotted with each other."

Nathan is just one among many victims of the courtship movement. Masses of young people similar to Nathan are literally being brainwashed into accepting these ideas. One of the commonest techniques that the proponents of this teaching use to brainwash the youth, and of which I have already had occasion to mention, is to unfairly stereotype dating and then present courtship/betrothal as the only alternative. For example, after defining dating as "a temporary romantic relationship...focused on current enjoyment rather than future matrimony", John Thompson goes on to give a chart with thirteen negative characteristics, motives and sins of dating which he juxtaposes with thirteen positive characteristics of betrothal. It does not seem to even occur to Thompson that perhaps these thirteen characteristics, motives and sins do not need to follow from two people going on a date. If dating does lead to these things then the problem lies, not in the act of dating itself, but in the lack of integrity in the people involved. However, having left no one room for any who might honestly disagree, Thompson goes on to utter harsh pronouncements on those who date, assuming that to do so is always to act out of rebellion to God. "A 'dating spirit', he writes,

is a desire or yearning to enjoy the romantic appeal, glamour, and allurements of dating, even though you know in your conscience that it dishonors God's principles and distracts you from a single-minded devotion to Christ (1 Cor. 7:32,35). A "dating spirit," therefore, may be found in a young man or a young woman who is committed not to date, but who still allows his or her heart to become attached emotionally to someone prior to betrothal. A "dating spirit" is like lusting rather than committing adultery — it's not as bad, but it's still very wrong and dangerous.<sup>2</sup>

The power of this kind of polemic lies not in its logic but in its psychological appeal. Sadly, it is often the young people who desperately want to serve God wholeheartedly who are the easiest prey for these ideas. Such young people have perhaps watched friends involved in recreational dating or moral decadence and, in their enthusiasm to reject that way of life, do a complete swing of the pendulum without the wisdom and maturity to discern the middle ground.

In this chapter I would like to try to point us towards a middle ground.<sup>3</sup> I will start by saying that not everything within the courtship movement is wrong. One of the positive things

that have emerged out of the movement is a heightened emphasis on purity and the dangers potentially inherent in the modern dating system. This does not mean that I share their view that dating is a sin, for there can be good dating and bad dating, depending on the attitude and motives of the two people involved. First I must say, however, that the word dating is potentially as ambiguous as the term courtship. It will be helpful, therefore, to consider some different kinds of dating and then to consider some practical solutions to some of the main problems that young people encounter in the dating scene.

## **Recreational Dating**

To start with, there is the kind of dating in which there is no thought or real understanding of what an exclusive love relationship is all about. Two people are simply pursuing their relationship as a means for personal pleasure. It is an artificial romance or organized flirtation, because it is induced in order to give the parties a thrill through a sort of 'emotional foreplay.' It is 'easy come, easy go' and intimacy for the sake of intimacy. Often this kind of dating leaves people feeling used and uncared for, particularly if it leads to sex.

In this kind of relationship, because the pleasures of an exclusive relationship are enjoyed without commitment, you can simply dump your partner by the way side as soon as the intensity of romantic feelings wane or as soon as the relationship requires more than one is prepared to give. When two people are dating like this there is an assumed exclusivity to their relationship, as if they have ownership rights on the other. In this context a kiss may mean nothing more than "I am attracted to you." It has nothing to do with being serious about each other, and if it has anything to do with the potential of marriage it is only through the understanding that the relationship *might* lead to marriage, though this potential is only accidentally related to the pursuit of the present relationship.

This kind of dating is creeping down to earlier and earlier age groups. Often it is fostered by the mentality that young men are incomplete without a girlfriend and that girls are incomplete without a boyfriend. Having someone to go out with can be a status symbol, while those who don't have somebody feel like rejects. Sadly, many Christian youth groups encourage this kind of destructive mentality, either actively or passively.

## **'Flash in the Pan' Romance**

There is another form of dating where there is genuine feelings of love and unselfish attachment and commitment, but it is short lived. This is what I call 'flash in the pan romance.' You genuinely feel that you want to spend the rest of your life with this person and deeply care for them. Perhaps dozens of love letters are exchanged, but then something happens and you break up and go on to another person with equal intensity. Often people can go through a dozen dating partners in a year and feel at the time that each one will be their future spouse. It is like a fire of thin, dry branches compared to one of solid coal - very bright and hot, but after it has

burned itself out there is little left behind. What often happens here is that a person thought they were in love with someone when in reality they were in love with love. Or it may have resulted from the void that most young people (especially those with innate insecurities or passive dependency needs) experience in the absence of a boyfriend or girlfriend, which often leads to an indiscriminate filling of that void through a relationship for relationships' sake, in which there is not real love.

We do well to caution young people about the dangers in this kind a relationship. When we are swept off our feet by someone it is easy to offer undeliberated commitment and to make promises that we are unable to keep. Such a relationship draws a person out of their ego boundaries and allows them to expose their vulnerability to the other as they lower their barriers. When this occurs in a relationship that is halted midway, the people are left stranded in their vulnerability, and often there is hurt as one may have assumed the other was more serious than he or she actually was. After emotionally undressing we are suddenly left stranded in the cold and future relationships may thereby be sullied with doubt, suspicion or fear. As John Powell points out,

Since love can exist on many levels, it is extremely important not to offer a commitment of love that I may not be able to honor. Inexperienced and immature people tend to do this, to say things under the impulse of strong emotions or physical reactions (and under the trees at night), which have a hollow sound the next morning after coffee....

If I have made a premature or overstated commitment, I will later have to take back my promises made to such a person. I will have to explain that I really did not mean what I said, or that I changed my mind. I will leave the person standing painfully naked and unprotected. He or she will return again to the dense forest of a new security operation, go back behind a higher and more impenetrable wall.<sup>4</sup>

Powell goes on to say that these considerations should not preclude a person from enjoying a multiplicity of heterosexual relationships, only to guard against overstatement of intentions and premature commitment.

### **Deep Regrets in Marriage?**

More than ever before, young people require guidance and understanding to develop a high value for love and marriage. A correct framework for understanding relationships will help young people not to pursue relationships in the light of the last two approaches. However, it needs to be understood that when there has been hurt in a broken relationship and when further relationships are sullied with doubt and fear as a consequence, that is never something that a true love relationship within marriage cannot heal. Each is able to find healing from past mistakes through the love and forgiveness of the Lord.

I want to especially emphasize this fact as there is a great deal of fear being generated within young people today by teachers who are saying that romantic relationships engaged in before marriage with anyone other than one's future spouse will rob from one's marriage.

One lady recently wrote to me concerned about a teen-age girl she knows whose parents follow Jonathan Lindvall's teachings. This lady told me how fearful her young friend has become of experiencing any romantic emotions that are not consummated in marriage. Even the possibility of this happening provoked alarming distress in this girl who replied, "I don't want to even *know* about someone being interested in me until we are betrothed!"

This is not one isolated incident. Growing numbers of young people are becoming so fearful of 'unauthorized emotions'. One lady wrote that she had been in bondage and fear over this for years. When she went on her first 'coffee-date' she feared that she would be damaging her future marriage by going out with someone who might not become her husband. Later she wrote, "I am so happy to be released from this groundless fear."

Why is there such extreme fear? The answer is because these people have been absolutely convinced that unalterable consequences will follow the existence of such emotions. What are such consequences? Thompson says that a woman who has had former boyfriends will "have only a fragment of her heart left to give" to her husband. In Joshua Harris' first book *I Kissed Dating Goodbye* he refers to a bride's nightmare in which her groom stands at the altar, holding hands with the phantoms of all his previous girlfriends.

Lindvall never misses a chance to share that because he and his wife experienced romantic relationships before marrying each other, it has "hindered our emotional unity."<sup>5</sup> We have already seen that one of Lindvall's central arguments for betrothal is the need he feels to spare his own children the deep regrets that he and his wife bear as a result of each other's former boyfriends and girlfriends. Writing of his children, Lindvall says "to the degree that they allow me to protect them from the emotional scars my wife and I bear, they will be spared the regrets we suffer."<sup>6</sup>

Throughout my adolescence I had numerous crushes on all sorts of girls, and yet my wife does not feel jealous because she knows that she is the fulfillment of all my earlier romantic dreams and aspirations. I feel the same way about her. If, however, I had truly and intimately loved another woman before marrying my wife (a 'knitting of heart', as Lindvall describes his regrettable experience with a former girlfriend), then it would be understandable that my wife might feel jealous. But where love is true, unconditional, strong and exclusive in marriage, it will eventually swallow up any feelings of jealousy over past relationships through the solid reassurance it provides.

Where it is possible to have past relationships permanently harm a present marriage, the problem is within the marriage itself. While it is only natural for a man to want to be the only man his wife has ever fallen in love with, and visa versa, we live in a fallen world and this will not always be the case. Does this mean that the marriage will automatically suffer, that the husband and wife will not be able to love each other as much as they otherwise might have been able, that they will be less able to discover God's best, that their relationship will be less enriching, less fulfilling? Absolutely not! Now there are certainly going to be insecurities in just about every marriage and each will need to have their partner's love reassured. Insecurities are a result of many things from the thought of past relationships (which can especially be a problem when one or both of the parties has been married before) to one's inability to believe oneself lovable because of abuse as a child. In each case, these are things that a man and wife can work through together and be drawn closer as a result, not by having a fatalistic attitude which says, "this has happened in my past, therefore my marriage is necessarily going to be less good than it

otherwise could have been." Rather, the husband and wife should be seeking ways to let God's love cover over and heal all the regrets of the past. This even includes situations where one of them may have had bad sexual memories, as Nancy Wilson writes.

Perhaps you have had bad sexual experiences in your past that are a hindrance to you enjoying a healthy relationship with your husband. This can be another hindrance that you must overcome. Remember you are a Christian. Christians are people who understand what it is to be forgiven. We are not to drag our past around like a ball and chain. We have been delivered from our past sins. Thank God for His forgiveness, and do not dwell on your sins. Dwell instead on His grace and mercy.<sup>7</sup>

### **'Brother-Sister' Friendships**

Another aspect that needs to be considered in the discussion on relationships is "brother-sister type friendships." There is a lot of talk among the courtship proponents about this. Some of their ideas along these lines are positive, in so far as in less restrictive models of courtship young people are encouraged to get to know members of the opposite sex and enjoy the pleasures of friendship in exactly the same way that you would develop a friendship with members of your own sex or with your brothers or sisters. Unfortunately, as we have seen in earlier chapters, the stricter versions of courtship render this practically impossible - even though it may be affirmed theoretically - by there being such strictures, and hence an underlying heaviness, attached to any cross-gender relationship.

The idea of brother-sister friendships comes from Paul's first letter to Timothy where he told Timothy to treat the older women as mothers and the younger women as sisters. (1 Tim 5:2) If this can become one's basis for how to act with members of the opposite sex (and it needs to be understood by *both* in order to work), and if one can go out with someone just as you would go out with your sibling, then not only does this avoid the pitfalls described earlier, but it gives one the opportunity to develop many heterosexual friendships long before one is ready to start thinking about marriage. In this way, a boy may be a friend with any number of girls, or a girl with any number of boys, because there is no romantic commitment or expectation. It would be hard, though not impossible, to pursue this kind of brother-sister relationship in a date setting, because such settings easily lend themselves to a focus on the 'couple-ness' of the two. Because an official 'date' setting has connotations attached to it, a brother-sister friendship is best pursued in the company of others or through an external activity. Friendship has been described as being two people facing the same direction and looking at the same thing, so it's good to have activities of common interests to pursue with members of the opposite sex.

When two friends have a flash in the pan romance, it is very difficult to go back to just being friends after breaking up, and what could have been a good friendship is thereby potentially spoiled. People are too quick to rush into romance in our culture. Feeling attracted to someone or even feeling that you *might* want to marry them, is simply not a good enough reason to put those emotions into speech or action since such speech and action can easily convey unintentional messages to the other person. Sadly, you cannot assume that even Christians will

not give verbal and non-verbal implications of commitment (and, therefore, obligation) that they have no desire or ability to fulfill. This is not to say that one shouldn't *feel* anything towards a person prior to making a commitment to them; rather, it is to address what one *does* with those feelings. It is no different here than with married people who may inadvertently find themselves feeling romantically attracted toward someone they are not married to. The single person not yet ready or willing to commit to marriage, like the married person, must refrain from acting and speaking *as if* they are ready or willing to commit to marry the person toward whom they are feeling such desires.

### **Defining the Differences**

It may seem after my comments on dating that I share much common ground with the advocates of courtship on the important issues, and merely disagree in the outworking. While there is a limited sense in which this is true, it obscures the fact that the real flaws in the courtship movement lie in the ideological presuppositions rather than the practical proposals, the later being symptomatic of the former. As Kathleen Schaijik has stated the matter,

The problem with it is that it is drastically lacking the fullness of truth about the mysteries of love and sexuality. And the lack here is not a mere incompleteness--so that if a few additions or adjustments were made, we'd have it in full. Rather, it is the kind of lack that entails a reduction and distortion of reality. And any distortion on the philosophical level is bound to work its way into the practical realm, doing damage in human lives in proportion with the seriousness of the error.<sup>8</sup>

Schaijik goes on to suggest that we should teach single men and women a sense of reverence by holding up to them "images that reveal the heart-melting beauty of a pure human love." One is reminded here of Plato's words that "the object of education is to teach us to love beauty." (The Greek word rendered 'beauty' in Plato's sentence can equally be translated 'good.')

By imparting to young people the beauty and goodness inherent in 'pure human love', as Schaijik puts it,

they cannot help but long for it, and, under Grace, aspire to it. Their aching desire for authentic love gives them courage and insight; they begin to recognize intuitively and shrink from the impurity that threatens their chance of attaining it.<sup>9</sup>

Schaijik has beautifully expressed what I believe to be the primary grounds on which the courtship and betrothal movements fail. They fail primarily because of what is missing from the picture, yet as Schaijik emphasizes, what is missing is not a matter of mere incompleteness but a fundamentally wrong approach to life itself. In struggling to put my finger on the main elements of this wrong approach to life, I find myself wondering whether it also has something to do with not fully understanding the sovereignty of God.

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<sup>1</sup> Schaijik, *ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> John W. Thompson, 'God's Design for Scriptural Romance Part 2: Dealing With the Dating Dilemma', *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Those desiring to do further study on the positive approach to pre-marital relationships, would do well to consult Rick Holland's 'The Guided Path' in *5 Paths to the Love of Your Life* (*ibid.*).

<sup>4</sup> John Powell, *op. cit.*, p. 38-39.

<sup>5</sup> From the taped lecture, *Shaefaced Romance*, *ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Jonathan Lindvall, from the tract "Youthful Romance: Scriptural Patterns", *op. cit.*

<sup>7</sup> Nancy Wilson, *The Fruit of Her Hands: Respect and the Christian Woman* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 1997), p. 94.

<sup>8</sup> Schaijik, *ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

## Courtship, Human Weakness and the Sovereignty of God

*Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations...according to the commandments and doctrines of men? These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.*

— The Apostle Paul<sup>1</sup>

*To this day millions of Christians simply can't believe it. They persist in thinking of God as a stern judge and of their road to heaven as the onerous piling up of good deeds for the day. They've read the New Testament a dozen times and missed the whole point. If they hadn't missed it, how could they go around with long faces and worried consciences all the time? It wasn't worry warts who won the world. Nor was it iron wills. It was doubting Thomases and foot-in-mouth-disease Peters and persecuting Pauls who became little Christs by believing the good news of the big Christ...*

— Peter Kreeft<sup>2</sup>

One father who has written a book defending courtship also wrote some more general books on parenting when his children were young. In these books the father argued that “Whether you're a Christian or not, if the principles are applied, the results will be predictable.” What were these principles? In the father’s own words,

If we want him to turn out a certain way, then we must visualize him that way, believe in that vision, and act so as to bring it to fulfillment. ...'loving' our children is not a sufficient goal to yield a workable plan....

Parents must do the same [as a contractor]. They must first decide what they want to build and then draw up plans for the actual construction. ... Once they have visualized the end result, they must map out a plan in order to achieve that result.

From this father’s perspective, things looked so simple. Raising his children was just like building a house: if you follow the right rules then the result will be predictable. As he wrote elsewhere, “The maturing of characteristics in our children is predictable according to the extent

to which we follow these procedures.... They can mold him into any shape they choose...” These, so called, ‘procedures’, were to apply discipline as a pragmatic conditioning technique rather than using it to teach conviction of sin within the context of love, acceptance and biblical authority.

I knew this father and his children, and it was interesting for me to see what happened as his children grew up. The children were never allowed to grow in any area outside the pre-designated plan of the father's mind. This ‘plan’ was not limited merely to issues of morality and spiritual growth, but involved the timetabling and careful management of every area of who they were as people, including what they thought and felt. Even love and affection would be dispensed or withheld depending on the extent to which the children conformed to the fixed idea in the father’s mind. However, because children, like all life forms, grow from the inside-out rather than from the outside-in, they did not turn out as the father had planned. Unfortunately, the father learned when it was too late that raising children is not as simple as building a house. He then retracted and destroyed all his parenting manuals (which is why I have preserved his anonymity).

The problem this father made was to assume a sovereignty that belonged only to God. He believed he had absolute power over the child’s life. It is revealing that he once wrote, “Of course I cannot control and predict every detail of my child's life. *But I must behave as if such were indeed possible...*” (italics are mine).

While the implication of this father’s teaching clearly denied God’s sovereignty, the sovereignty of God ostensibly plays an important role in the courtship and betrothal schemes. At the beginning of the last chapter I quoted Nathan Bailey saying that “if you truly believe in a sovereign God who answers prayer” then there is no problem in the idea of having to have full consent from all the key authority figures before you marry a girl. In the literature of this movement I have read dozens of similar statements where the sovereignty of God is appealed to as the reason why a seemingly unworkable game-plan will have to work. Typically this false dilemma will then be pushed to the next and final absurdity that everyone who objects to such a plan as unworkable proves that they do not fully trust God’s sovereignty.

But who is really failing to trust God’s sovereignty here? Consider what they are actually saying: that if you don’t follow the rule that all authorities must have consent then you don’t trust God, that your God isn’t really a sovereign God. Such an argument does not reveal trust in God; if anything, it reveals man trusting in himself. It rests on the fact that man first creates an authority structure and then demands God be subject to its rules. In this way these people have reduced God as much as they have reduced love.

Even with all the Biblical quotations that pour forth from these movements, and all the *talk* about grace and sovereignty, one comes away with the distinct feeling that God is bound by the strictures of men. They have packaged God into a manageable, automated, safe commodity. But God is like Aslan in the *Narnia* stories, who was not a tame lion. God is not easily manageable as if His sovereignty can be delineated to such paltry terms and then held up as a barometer of an individual’s trust!

Throughout the Scriptures we see the mystery of God’s sovereignty worked through the trust, obedience and faithfulness of God’s people, but we also see it worked through the weakness, failures, mistakes and sufferings of God’s people. This should give us a sense of great security. However, such security is not possible when the Maker of Heaven, the Alpha and

Omega, the Risen and Glorified Christ is made to resemble a rather bureaucratic, unsmiling, pedantic school master with a cane behind his back always on the lookout for an excuse to rap the knuckles of his students.

Such a view of God inevitably leads to a fear-based approach to life. Fear drives young people to stand on the sidelines of life rather than entering into the fray where they might get hurt. Yet each person must be prepared to gamble before God. The deceptions of our hearts can and do expose us to mistakes and failures, but because this happens in the context of God's love and sovereignty, such failures should not cripple us with guilt. Our failures do not suddenly make us ineligible for God's love and forgiveness, nor do they mean that God's will for us cannot thereby be accomplished.

The more I speak to people who have come out of the courtship movement, the more I learn just how much the whole system is sustained by fear. Countless people testify that it is fear that keeps them in. But what do these people fear? Lost salvation? Punishment from God? A broken relationship with the Lord? An angry God in eternity because they kissed a girl or had a crush on a movie star? I know that throughout my early life my father's teaching instilled within me a fear that God would be angry with me throughout eternity. I was afraid that if I failed to fully submit to my father's authority then this would happen - I would still go to heaven, but it would be to meet Someone who would give me a scolding for each time I had been naughty. I had read the book of Romans all the way through but somehow missed the entire point of the gospel.

We have every reason to question whether the propagators of this teaching have properly understood what it means to be a Christian, what is meant to be human and to really know God's grace. They speak as if one wrong move here, a mistake there, a sinful thought about that person, a sinful deed with this girl, and God's sovereignty and grace suddenly cannot cope. It is as if God does not understand our frame but is shocked by our sin. They are afraid to embrace the wonderful freedom of being totally secure in the Lord's control in spite of our own weaknesses. They cannot see the Christian life is an adventure with inherent risks and unknown terrain that should be exciting.

To even attempt to invent a risk free, pain free system fails to understand the true nature of our human condition and the condition of the world as defined by the Bible. However, the Lord is under no illusions about our condition even if we are. He knows the incredible complexity of each individual's life; He appreciates each unique mix of circumstances; He knows how utterly incapable we are of managing our own lives, even when we deceive ourselves and others by appearances.

## **Modern Day Pharisees**

Like the Pharisees of the 1<sup>st</sup> century, some of those in the courtship and betrothal movements have heaped on many sundry laws, rules, check-lists and methods for evaluating maturity, all of which become burdensome and fail to address the true nature of ourselves before God. An entire body of qualifications is being built up that one feels pressured to judge spirituality by, such as homeschool, home birth, 1<sup>st</sup> child within ten months of marriage, head-

coverings, length of hair, length of dress, etc. Although some of these things are Biblical, such as Christian education, they are being practiced for the wrong reasons. People are being pressured to conform to man-made barometers of spiritual growth in order to keep up the appearance of godliness. We know of one lady whose courtship had been hailed as well nigh perfect who, after having two children within two years of marriage, was shell-shocked, lonely and miserable, still having to project herself as the perfect mom and wife to the outside world. In other cases, older daughters are becoming embittered surrogate mothers to their younger siblings since their own mothers are exhausted by the multiple pregnancies they feel compelled to have in order to fulfill the expected ideal. One girl who contacted us told how, amongst the families she had grown up with, there was an unspoken competition regarding the number of children you had. Further, she told how certain traditional styles of dress and hair (*i.e.*, the *Little House on the Prairie* paradigm) were considered inherently more godly. In short, holiness had a 'look' to it.

I have talked to many people who look at certain families in these movements and say how godly and mature the children are. I often find this difficult when I happen to know the parents in these families, and I know they have successfully cultivated an immaturity in their children that gives an appearance of humble godliness without the power of true godliness (2 Tim. 3:5). The apparent gentleness and humility in these children has no depth or sustaining power because it is a parasite on the personality of a powerful father figure. Jeff VanVonderen commented on this sort of thing when he observed that,

The measuring stick becomes: how things look; what people think; religious behavior....Children must learn to act like miniature adults in order to avoid shame...fault and blame are the order of the day.<sup>3</sup>

Fundamental to the problem is a mistaken idea of what constitutes godliness. The Lord is not looking for families burdened down by an exacting load of perfectionism. Rather, the Lord is looking for love, obedience, growth, and faithfulness within the context of our fallen world. To forget in practice what it means to live in a fallen world by God's grace leads to one of two things. Either we end up successfully forcing ourselves into a mold that projects a façade and makes us think we have attained a measure of godliness, or we are constantly broken on the rocks of disappointment and guilt by trying to attain the ideal.

In my own family, while we are not soft on sin, neither are we preoccupied with it. We know that we are sinners, we know that each second we breathe the air of the Lord's grace. We occupy ourselves with thankfulness that our sin has already been dealt with at the cross and that, because of this, there is a simple means of cleansing and forgiveness each time we fail (1 John 1:9).

The courtship and betrothal teaching, on the other hand, has failed to accept the reality of the life God has given us. They have scheduled the timing of things, made check lists to evaluate ourselves, devised schemes for being in complete control of everything that happens to us. Then they dictate to the Holy Spirit how He is allowed to work.

People like Jonathan Lindvall and the father I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter openly stated that they were in a position to control, to map out, to organize - in short, to *own* - their children's outward and inward lives. For those who are less extreme the same mindset still prevails, even if it is in a more moderate and unconscious form. They have developed a timetable

that robs God of the choice to work in different ways with different people. In giving themselves such control, they prevent the Lord from speaking outside a pre-arranged rubric. They do not know how to trust a Person who is utterly secure yet unpredictable.

Esther and I have tried to imagine what our family would be like if we lived according to the lifestyles recommended by these teachers. It would just be so artificial and contrived – even laughable – for us to attempt to set up a method to assess marriage eligibility, let alone attempting a full blown heart-given-over-to-Dad ceremony on the twelfth birthday! Why? Because the type of relationships we have in our family exclude such artificial behavior. Our children have been brought up to act with integrity in their relationships under the authority of God’s revelation. Beyond this general framework, however, we cannot reduce the lives of our children to a system. We just cannot even imagine the damage that such an approach would do to them.

This does not mean that our children won’t make mistakes. Neither does it mean that we might have been able to succeed in preventing certain mistakes if we had used the tactics of fear, manipulation and control. We certainly pray that our children will not need to learn things the hard way, but we know that ultimately that is their life before the Lord. We do everything we can to set our children in the direction for life and to equip them for independence, yet we realize that they will do not always overcome – we all fail. But it is the struggle that matters. We struggle daily in the knowledge that when we fall, the Lord, in his mercy, will pick us up. We struggle *within* the security of our loving Father’s arms, not in order that we might gain His love and acceptance. We struggle against the whims of our flesh, the temptations of the world and the influence of the devil *within* the context of the freedom purchased for us at Calvary. This should give us a sense of being gloriously safe – not the pseudo safety that comes from having a risk free, mistake free, pain free plan for our lives, but the true safety of having peace with God in the midst of a stormy world.

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<sup>1</sup> Colossians 2:20-23

<sup>2</sup> Peter Kreeft, *Heaven: The Heart’s Deepest Longing*, op. cit., p. 184.

<sup>3</sup> Jeff VanVonderen, *Families Where Grace Is in Place* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1992), pp. 138–40.

## Man's Chief End

*...all departments of life are governed and breathed into by the 'Lord who is Lord of all of life.' ...life cannot be divided into compartments with one labeled 'religious' - the Lord made the whole of life, and He has a place in each part.*

Susan Schaeffer Macaulay<sup>1</sup>

*Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.*

Westminster Shorter Catechism

### Self-Denying or Christ-Affirming?

Esther and I are currently teaching our children the Westminster shorter catechism. The opening question of the catechism is, “What is the chief end of man?” The answer is, “Man’s chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.” That’s not the answer you expect after years of saturation in the courtship and betrothal movements. One comes away from reading the literature of these movements with the impression that man’s chief end is to deny the self and enjoy nothing, let alone God. Self-denial, we are told, is something positive as an end in itself, a quality that represents the very essence of sanctification.

There are many testimonies in the courtship and betrothal literature where young people are praised for dying to relationships that are acknowledged to be good and healthy, as a sort of spiritual exercise. Lindvall tells the story of a father who emotionally manipulated a couple into giving up their interest in each other in order to test them, all the while fully intending for them to marry.<sup>2</sup> Nor are these kinds of tactics confined to young adults. Michael and Debi Pearl’s advice to parents is that “If, during the course of a day, no contest [between the child’s will and the parents’ will] arises naturally, you should arrange one. Seek opportunity to thwart the child’s will...”<sup>3</sup> Having to die to our own desires is thus seen to be necessary for its own sake.

In his tape, *Training Godly Teens*, Lindvall speaks about his own experiences as a youth. He shares how the Lord used his loneliness to draw him closer to Christ. So far so good, but then Lindvall makes the leap and concludes “that one of the best things that can happen to our young people is to experience that emotion of loneliness...” He goes on to say that the natural inclination to be with others, which makes us feel good, is to be denied because it does not teach us to be full-time servants. Of course, no one would question that the Lord uses loneliness to draw people nearer to Him, but we would do wrong to conclude that loneliness, or any kind of suffering, is something we should deliberately seek to experience.

The constant emphasis on denying the self for its own sake leads one to feel as if to desire our own joy is wrong, that God does not want us to be happy in this life, or that happiness is at least irrelevant. These teachings can seem to be virtuous simply because they are hard on our feelings and personal desires.

In his sermon, "The Weight of Glory", C. S. Lewis pointed out that although the New Testament has a lot to say about self-denial, in almost every case this is accompanied with an appeal to desire or purpose. For example, Jesus said that "everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands for My name's sake, shall receive a hundred fold and inherit eternal life," (Mt. 19:29-30, Mk. 10:29-30). Jesus appeals to our desire for reward as a motivation for following Him. Jesus does not present self-denial as a virtue in itself, but as the means to a higher end. It took me a while to realize this truth, for as a young child I had been taught that self-denial was the essence of the believer's experience. One day my mother told me that the Christian Church would be better off if all the books were removed from the shelves of their Christian bookstore and, in their place, signs were put that simply said 'crucify yourself' (to be metaphorically applied...presumably). Then there was the time my father said that if the Christians throughout the world would do nothing but deny themselves for three days, the entire world would want to become Christian simply by seeing the example.

Nowhere in the Bible does the Lord ask us to perform 'self-crucifixion'. We do not seek suffering for its own sake. Taking up one's cross and following Jesus is not a form of masochism, it is simply the acceptance that to be a Christian involves cost. It involves the willingness to choose the will of Christ even when that means having to forego something that might be good in itself. When that happens, the emphasis is not on the denial of self but on the affirmation of Christ. We do not follow suffering, we follow Christ which sometimes results in suffering along the way.

In their book *Being Human*, Macaulay and Barrs explain that sanctification is not a matter of negation, of trying to get rid of everything that is enjoyable, crushing whatever inner impulses one has simply because they are part of human experience.<sup>4</sup> To teach such is not Christianity but Buddhism, which works on the principle of self-negation or self-transcendence.

## **Lord over All**

The incarnational vision that lies at the heart of Christian theology necessarily glories in the richness of our physical human experience. This is because we recognize that God took on flesh and died to redeem all creation, including our material human experience. From this it follows that the distinction between what is sacred and what is secular, or between what is religious and what is ordinary, is in fact a distinction that does not exist. Since Jesus is Lord over all of life (Mt. 28:18), working hard is just as spiritual as playing hard if we do it unto Him; having a feast is just as spiritual as having a fast if we do it unto Him; going for a family picnic is just as spiritual as going to church, if we do it unto Him.

Obvious as this may sound, it is a concept that is frequently denied. I once read the entries on a mother's panel on an internet e-group devoted to discussing the ideas of Bill Gothard. A number of ATI ('Gothardite') mothers were discussing the various parenting methods they had learnt, such as the effectiveness of eliminating their children's playtime. What

interested me was the presupposition that play was somehow less spiritually valid than work, and hence to be turned away from in the life of a child. One mother of eight children - from twenty-two to three years of age - wrote of being

...encouraged to turn away from playfulness toward work. We are to do our work heartily unto the Lord, not unto our pleasures (legos). We had a "play fast." It was for one week and then we tried it another week. So we've adopted the old-fashioned idea that children play on Saturday afternoon only.

Certainly I have no problem with children sharing in the work of the home - that should go without saying. The problem I have is with the underlying assumption that God is less apart of our lives when we are playing than when we are working. If a child plays with their Lego, they *are* told to do it unto the Lord no less than they are to do their work unto the Lord. This is because the Lord requires us to do everything unto Him.

The idea that the Lord is more apart of our work (what is difficult) than our pleasure (what is fun), reinforces the impression that God's ways are stoic and straight laced. Worse than that, however, it implicitly denies the lordship of Christ over every aspect of our experience. Consequently, when we *feel* pleasure or enjoy anything in life, we expect there to be a catch, as if we're not quite spiritually pleasing. But this is *not* how God made us to be. Being human, enjoying life, play, love, sex, nature (or Lego if we are children!) are all an expression of being made in God's image as He originally intended Adam and Eve to be (check out Deuteronomy 20:5-7 to see some of the natural pleasures to which God gives just as high a priority as fighting the enemies of Israel).

In his analysis of Bill Gothard's theology, Bockelman shows that Gothard subtly depreciates our physical side by creating false dilemmas between the spiritual and the physical all the time. For Gothard, God becomes part of a Christian's total experience, not by discovering the fingerprint of God that already exists in any intrinsically good activity, but by artificially attaching an explicitly religious significance to everything in life. Gothard has failed to realize that the Christian-ness of any intrinsically good thing or activity lies, not in how it can be related to something with an explicitly Christian meaning, but in what that thing or activity is in itself as part of God's creation.

Those who maintain a false distinction between things sacred and things secular, are forever scurrying about to try to transform every natural, ordinary thing into something religious, thereby thinking that in so doing they have validated that thing. I saw a classic example of this when a mother I know forbid her daughter from painting fairies on her wall but said it would be all right as long as she turned the fairies into cherubs. Other examples of this mentality can be seen in a number of fundamentalist education curricula that are published in America (including Gothard's ATI). The writers go to enormous lengths to try to attach an obvious 'Christian message' to every field of study from geography to English grammar. Again this reflects a failure to understand that Christ's lordship already covers the whole of reality, whether it has a scripture verse attached to it or not.

No where is this truncated application of Christ's lordship seen more clearly than the approach to sexuality taken by some of those in the courtship and betrothal movements.

## Shame-Faced Sexuality

Wherever the universality of Christ's lordship is not recognized or applied, sexuality is often one of the first casualties. This is exactly what we are finding in some of the writings in the courtship movement, where there is a general devaluing of sexuality, together with a shame and embarrassment about the whole subject.

In the book *Best Friends For Life*, this devaluing of our sexuality is done indirectly through denying the naturalness of romantic and sexual feelings, condescendingly referred to as "so-called natural feelings of attraction..."<sup>5</sup> Later we read that "Perhaps for some it is natural"<sup>6</sup> when speaking of feelings of attraction, though "natural" in the same way that being selfish and needing to use the toilet is natural.

A toddler is recognized as growing up when he can control the natural impulse to go to the bathroom and can reserve that natural phenomenon for the proper time and place.... Yet somehow when it comes to the so-called "natural" feelings of attraction toward the opposite sex that begin at ten, twelve, fourteen, or sixteen, society does not consider them in the same light as potty training, controlling anger or selfishness, and independence. At this point they say, "Ah, the hormones have kicked in, these are natural feelings, and we must let young people express them however and whenever they want."<sup>7</sup>

The implication here is that if we accept the premise that it is natural to have feelings of attraction towards members of the opposite sex, we are sanctioning the expression of these feelings in any way shape or form. Thankfully, this is a false dilemma. While our sexuality and all that it entails (i.e. romantic instincts, preoccupation with the opposite sex, etc.) *is* a natural part of us, there are still biblical guidelines we must operate under in how we respond and express (or don't express) these natural inclinations. These guidelines do not mean that there is anything wrong with the sexuality itself - as if it could even be compared to anger and unselfishness - but precisely the opposite: it is *because* our sexuality is special that it must be protected with guidelines. This is precisely why modesty is important. We hide our sexuality behind modest attire and behavior, not because our sexuality is ugly but because it is beautiful. Just as my valuable silver is too precious to put to common use, so the treasure of my body is too valuable to use in any but the appropriate context. It is the *wrong use* of the silver or the body that we should object to, not the thing itself.

The shame-faced approach reduces sexual morality to negation: you must *not* do this, you must *not* wear that, etc. While it is true that to affirm anything is also to deny something else, it is crucial that we *begin* with the Biblical affirmation. The motivation for modesty and moral purity should always start from a desire to be responsible with the treasure of our sexuality that God has given us.

The shame-faced approach is actually not that different to the reductionist approach to sexuality so common in the world. Whether the reductionist approach leads to promiscuity or the shamed-faced approach leads to prudery, the effect in both cases is an inevitable lessening of one's ability to be naturally sexual. In short, both extremes fall short of the joy that biblically

legitimate sexual experience has to offer those whose orientation is neither shame-faced nor reductive, promiscuous nor prudish. Both unbiblical extremes have the effect of disenchanting sex, one because it turns sex into something embarrassing and shameful, the other because it turns it into something common and trivial. Biblical modesty and morality, on the other hand, preserve our sexual dignity against these errors by keeping our sexuality, in a sense, secret. However, because the veil of secrecy results from the sacredness of sexuality, it follows that this secretness must be understood as being qualitatively different than mere concealment. If mere concealment were the goal then women should dress in clothes that obscure any aspect of shape, even to the extent of going completely veiled as they do in some Islamic nations. Kathleen van Schaijik has suggested, on the other hand, that the sacredness of female sexuality is as much a justification for dressing beautifully as it is for dressing modestly.<sup>8</sup>

### **Is it Really Natural?**

Unfortunately, *Best Friends For Life*, could easily evoke shame of our sexuality by the way it questions whether some of the corollaries to being sexual are even natural.

There are valid questions about just how "natural" these romantic impulses of the twelve or fourteen-year-old actually are. Actually we would contend that much of this early-teen romantic preoccupation is learned. That romantic impulses are perceived as natural by our society is unquestioned.... Even an unnatural appetite can be made to appear "natural" if it is continually fed, as is the romance mentality of our society. That bodily and hormonal changes occur in the early teen years is not at issue. But do they really cause such an enormous preoccupation with things sexual and romantic? Jonathan Lindvall, for one, argues that this preoccupation is not natural at all. Our recognizing them to be not nearly so "natural" as society would tell us, and therefore not originating with God but man (the preoccupation, that is, not the hormonal changes) will perhaps make the contention that they are to be "controlled" easier to accept.... Simply put, it demonstrates a lack of maturity and self-control for a young person to yield to a preoccupation with the opposite sex.... A premature romantic preoccupation with guys (if you are a girl) or with girls (if you are a guy) reveals a weakness of character.<sup>9</sup>

There can be little doubt that the media and society often do play a destructive part in augmenting and distorting one's natural sexuality. My concern is with an attempt to explain such impulses exclusively in these terms. Worse still is the idea that feelings of attraction and romance indicate a character weakness. The inevitable result of equating sexual impulses with a weakness of character is that one's very sexuality begins to be viewed as sinful.

Again the distinction is confused between having romantic/sexual feelings and yielding to any expression of them. The above quotation seems (I think) to imply that both are wrong, or at least that it would be better not to have such feelings. It may be helpful if we took a really obvious example to help to clarify this distinction. Is it wrong for a young man to feel stimulated

by the female anatomy? I would urge that any man immune to such stimuli has something severely dysfunctional about his sexuality. However, if such physical attraction is natural, does that make it all right to yield to every expression of this natural impulse and, for example, to look at pornography, to watch explicit scenes in movies or to engage in sexual fantasies? Of course not. The same is true with all the effects connected to our sexuality - the inclinations, impulses and instincts are natural and God-given, but it is in how we respond to these natural impulses that we either sin or glorify God.

Recognizing this distinction is important if we are to help young people. During the teen-age years when sexuality is being awoken, it can take a long time to stabilize. Young people may feel all sorts of things and have a flood of uncontrollable thoughts, feelings and sensations. They can tend to think that they are the only ones who have such sensations, and may suffer from an enormous sense of guilt if they are led to believe there is something wrong with what they are experiencing. This period can be difficult for a young person, as they are struggling to understand what is happening to their bodies and work through difficult issues about themselves. During this period it is crucial that the young people have the support and understanding of adults, not their condemnation. If the young person is taught that it "reveals a weakness of character" to even have romantic or sexual feelings, then they may grow up subconsciously imbibing an attitude of shame towards the whole subject.

Here let me draw on my own experience. Throughout my teen-age years, I was aware of girls and their bodies even though I was raised in an environment that could not have been more insular. If such preoccupations resulted from the influences of society, as is being suggested, then I would not have experienced these things since I was so sheltered. As soon as I reached puberty, my young mind was just as full of thoughts and sexual fantasies as that of any teen age boy, even though I had never been told anything about sex. As I grew older I began to suffer from guilt, believing there was something wrong with me for what I was feeling and the interest I had with girls and their bodies.

Because our parents conveyed to my brothers and me an orientation that anything to do with romance or sex was embarrassing and shameful, it is no surprise that I was afraid to share what I was going through. As a result of never talking about this 'Forbidden Subject' in the family, and never having someone explain to me my brothers about the hormonal changes we were experiencing in our bodies, we became scared and embarrassed by our bodies.

It was not until I was married that I experienced healing in this area. As a result of my wife's acceptance of my body, I was able to fully accept myself and rejoice in how God had made me.

### **Part of Our Relationship With Christ**

The person who takes the shame-faced approach to sex will never be able, however hard he might try, to fully reconcile their sexuality with their Christian experience. It will remain something outside the Lordship of Christ.

Because Gothard and those like him live in a world carefully divided between the natural and the spiritual, the later being more valid than the former, it is not surprising that they find it difficult to know what to do with sex. This can be seen in Gothard's list of intercourse rules for

married couples. These rules include such things as abstinence during and seven days after menstruation and abstinence the evening prior to worship. Gothard quotes bizarre statistics to prove that abstinence increases the likelihood of having strong children and decreases the likelihood of being barren or of having children with genetic abnormalities

As absurd as this may seem, there is a consistency at work. Apart from when done specifically to fulfill the dominion mandate, it is difficult for even the cleverest minds to transform sexual activity into something with a ‘Christian’ function in the truncated sense, while it is easy for such people to invent all sorts of ways in which abstinence can be seen in such a light. The Biblical solution is to reject this divided field between the natural and the spiritual. When we allow sexuality be fully integrated into the wholeness of our Christian experience, we realize that by rejoicing in our bodies, we give glory to the One who formed us. Sexuality is one of the ways by which we can glorify and enjoy God. This is because the Lord is as much a part of a husband and wife’s life when they are making love as when they are singing hymns in church. Jesus is just as present when husband and wife celebrate His gift of their bodies as when they are celebrating the Eucharist. Douglas Jones articulates this truth excellently.

Celebration is worshipping God with our bodies, with the material creation He has set up around us. Celebrating - whether in feasts, ceremonies, holidays, formal worship, or lovemaking – are all part of obeying God's command to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength" (Deut. 6:5; Mk. 12:30). We are to show our love for God not just with one portion of our being, the spiritual aspect; we are to love God with our whole body, heart and strength and legs and lips.<sup>10</sup>

### **Sex in Courtship & Betrothal Marriages**

Although Lindvall and the betrothal advocates have not expressed the same kind of direct suspicion of sexuality that we find implicit in Gothard and the Phillips, the outcome of their ideas lead to an equal negativism. Because the doctrine of “emotional purity” denies the God-giveness that feelings of sexual attraction play in the process of finding a spouse, sexual attraction is collapsed into an external condition we choose to adopt after the commitment has been made. The assumption of emotional purity is that we can somehow be a-sexual before a certain point, which reduces sexual attraction, and by default sex itself, to a function rather than a natural part of our humanity. Since sexual attraction is something we learn, as an act of the will, after we have submitted to “God’s choice”, it is not surprising that the type of love and romance spoken about often sounds artificial and contrived. It is as if romance is something a man and wife *do* to each other rather than something they *are* toward each other. Lindvall writes,

My marriage is wonderfully sweet and very romantic. But at its core, it isn’t based on love. It is based on submission to the Lord. The romance is a by-product of our obedience to God.<sup>11</sup>

This orients one to think of sexual and romantic attraction as something external to the people themselves – something they can put on like a rain coat. Rather than being seen as a natural part *of* the very relationship, sexual and romantic attraction are reduced to ‘by-products’ *in* the relationship. This should not be surprising when the very idea of an unconditional love relationship is looked upon with suspicion. In previous chapters we saw that love and intimacy are minimized and considered unimportant compared to a person's strength of character and lack of personal weaknesses, as defined by the parents. Essentially, marriage becomes nothing more than a partnership that is consummated. By implication, this necessarily excludes what I have stressed is an essential aspect of lovemaking, namely an expression of unconditional acceptance despite weakness. Surely sex is most meaningful when it is an affirmation that one's spouse is accepted - passionately accepted - in spite of shortcomings and regardless of their mistakes. Sex involves not only naked bodies but naked and vulnerable souls, as the clothes of achievement, character strengths, personal weaknesses, shortcomings are all removed to expose our naked self to another who knows, loves and accepts us for who we are.

Now suppose the marriage covenant was started, not because there was this kind of exclusive choosing based on unconditional love, but because a person's life demonstrated behavioral maturity, as is the criteria among so much of the courtship camp. In that case, physical coming together could not have the significance I have suggested since it could not be an affirmation of acceptance irrespective of actions. It is not because my wife is 'good' that I covenanted to enter a sexual relationship with her and continue to desire her, but because I *love* her. On the other hand, if there is not true love, then there can be nothing that sex affirms or expresses, apart from the fact that two people chose (or their parents chose for them) to enter into this state. Sexual union cannot be a beautiful expression of intimacy if that intimacy does not exist and, if the courtship advocates are to be believed, should not even be sought or considered in the initial choice. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Schaijik observed how in the courtship movement

No mention is made of tenderness, romance, reverence, self-donation. Physical intimacy is reduced to sexual foreplay, and sexual morality [is reduced] to its negative aspect of sin avoidance.<sup>12</sup>

This teaching leads to sex either being nothing more than a means of male physical gratification or baby making, or both. Women will begin to feel used as sex objects and baby machines, growing either to hate or be indifferent to intercourse. These woman will see sex simply as the husband's conjugal right, or they may be forever dissatisfied, craving sexual and emotional fulfillment but never finding it since sex is practiced in a relational vacuum. We know that there has been a large fall out from thee destructive ideas about sex, with the results being a near epidemic of pornography in the American home-school community, coupled with silent miserable women.

If the sexual act is an expression of acceptance regardless of performance, a way of saying, "I love you" regardless of weakness and failure, then is it any wonder that this is being relegated to a mere function? If you should not even get married to a person with too many weaknesses of character, then there can simply be no celebration of unconditional love in sexual intimacy. It turns into a mechanical act.

It should be an important condition in the process of finding a spouse that a man and woman feel physically attracted to each other. They should desire each other before they make a choice. Without this acknowledgement that our sexuality is a natural part of who God made us to be, and therefore a consideration in determining the rightness and compatibility of two people, there is a risk that sex will be seen as merely a function in marriage. It is certainly true that, by God's grace, attraction can grow even when it was not an original consideration, but this does not legitimize the reductive approach.

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<sup>1</sup> Susan Schaeffer Macaulay, *For The Family's Sake*, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Lindvall, "A True Romantic Betrothal Example," *Bold Christian Living*, 1997, from [http://www.boldchristianliving.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=9&Itemid=25](http://www.boldchristianliving.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=9&Itemid=25)

<sup>3</sup> Michael and Debi Pearl, 'Training Roseanna's Flesh,' *No Greater Joy* 1, 2.

<sup>4</sup> Ranauld Macaulay and Jerram Barrs, *Being Human: The Nature of Spiritual Experience* (Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship, 1978), p. 107.

<sup>5</sup> Mike and Judy Phillips, *op. cit.*, pp. 57-58.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, p. 59.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, p. 58.

<sup>8</sup> "If we revere something, we do not hide it. Neither do we flaunt it in public. We cherish it; we pay it homage; we approach it with dignity; we adorn it with beauty; we take care that it is not misused." Kathleen van Schaijik, 'A Different Perspective on the Modesty Question', *The University Concourse*, Vol. IV Issue 5, March 11, 1999. See also Wilson's discussion of female modesty and attire in *Her Hand in Marriage*, *op. cit.*, pp. 47-58.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 59-60.

<sup>10</sup> Douglas Jones, *Credenda Agenda* Vol. 10, Number 2, 'Worshiping with Body', *op. cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>11</sup> Lindvall, *5 Paths to the Love of Your Life* (*op. cit.*, p. 148).

<sup>12</sup> Schaijik, *ibid*.

## No Safe Investment

*"Is he – quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion...."*  
*"Safe?" said Mr. Beaver; "don't you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you."*

—C. S. Lewis<sup>1</sup>

*...great joy through love seemed always to go hand in hand with frightful pain. Still, he thought, looking out across the meadow, still, the joy would be worth the pain – if, indeed, they went together. If there were a choice – and he suspected there was – a choice between, on the one hand, the heights and the depths and, on the other hand, some sort of safe, cautious middle way, he, for one, here and now chose the heights and the depths.*

—Sheldon Vanauken<sup>2</sup>

At the opening of chapter seven I quoted C. S. Lewis on the inherent risk of all love. I was very moved the other day when a young man named Paul wrote to me about the effect that quote had in changing his life. Let me share Paul's experience as he recorded it.

In the name of safety, I myself have wrapped my heart carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries, avoided entanglements, and locked it up. It has not been broken. But it has begun to change. It has started to become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. Thankfully, I don't think I've reached that point, and I am confident that God can undo the damage I have done.

What am I talking about exactly? When I was about 13, I was introduced to the teachings of a man named Jonathan Lindvall. I listened to his tapes and attended one of his seminars. One of the primary beliefs I accepted from his teaching was that I should avoid and suppress romantic emotions before I make a lifelong commitment with my future wife. Notice that the idea was not that romantic emotions should be understood and controlled, but rather avoided and suppressed....

Though it seems to make sense at first, especially to the American "safety and security" mindset, it is really a lie. And I recognized the lie when I read Lewis's words: "If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one...The alternative to tragedy, or at least the risk of tragedy, is damnation."

Tragedy, pain, brokenness, can all result from giving your heart to someone that isn't fully committed to you. But THAT'S OK! "We shall draw nearer to God, not by trying to avoid the sufferings inherent in all loves, but by accepting them and offering them to Him; throwing away all defensive armor. If our hearts need to be broken, and if He chooses this as the way in which they should break, so be it."

... I realized last night that avoiding or suppressing my emotions is never a good idea, because they are an integral part of why God made me.... What has changed is that the process by which I choose my wife will no longer be devoid of emotion. It will be full of emotion, and risks will be taken for the sake of love. However the change of my mind extends beyond my view of pre-marital romance, into my view of love in general.

...there is the concern that if a couple's relationship is based on emotions, then when the emotions are lost, the relationship will be abandoned. But it is a false dichotomy to say that a relationship is either based on commitment or emotions. Why can't it be both? Aren't married people supposed to cultivate and share deep emotions for one another? And can they not, at the same time, be fully committed to one another? Sure there is the danger that emotions will fade and the relationship will lose its vitality. But that doesn't mean we should abandon emotions entirely! The answer to infidelity is not subtracting emotion, but rather adding commitment to the emotion.

Though I've still got a long way to go, I think that God has started unlocking my heart, and I trust that He will redeem the years I've spent trying to keep it intact. I pray that God would help me to "throw away all defensive armor" and that He would make me willing to have my heart broken. May my love be dangerously passionate!

No true relationship is safe, whether it be a love relationship or just a relationship of friends. That is why the philosophy of safeguarding ourselves against emotional hurt can only lead to the death of relationships. Indeed, if the principle which courtship and betrothal is based be consistently applied to its full extension, then all forms of relationships must be denied us, for that principle is that the possibility of emotional pain must be removed whatever the cost.

I am reminded of Christ's parable of the talents. Recall that the man who was given one talent feared lest he lose it. While the other servants were out trading with their capital and seeing it increase, the fearful servant dug a hole and buried his talent in the ground. It was his fear of losing it that prevented him from using it. As a friend of mine recently observed, fear of failure is the greatest motivation to failure that ever existed. Every trade involves a risk. It is only by overcoming our fears and risking something of ourselves that we ultimately get anywhere.

We have seen the way certain teachers have attempted to create a pain-free world, where one never gets heart-broken and every element of risk and unpredictability is systematically eliminated from the equation of human relationships. In this way, what is created is a world where ostensibly you have nothing to fear, yet the paradox remains that it is fear that drives people to submit to such regimes in the first place. As with the man who had one talent,

something is buried in the ground. In this case, however, what is buried in the ground is not money...it is our own hearts.

C. S. Lewis himself confessed a struggle with this very issue. In *The Four Loves*, Lewis says that in one sense it seems like perfect advice not to give your heart to anyone but God.

“Don’t put your goods in a leaky vessel. Don’t spend too much on a house you may be turned out of. And there is no man alive who responds more naturally than I do to such canny maxims. I am a safety-first creature. Of all arguments against love none makes so strong an appeal to my nature as “Careful! This might lead you to suffering.”

To my nature, my temperament, yes. Not to my conscience. When I respond to that appeal I seem to myself to be a thousand miles away from Christ. If I am sure of anything I am sure that His teaching was never meant to confirm my congenital preference for safe investments and limited liability. I doubt whether there is anything in me that pleases Him less.”<sup>3</sup>

Lewis goes on to suggest that the most lawless passion that prefers the beloved to happiness is more like ultimate Love Himself than this search for safe-investment-relationships. Lewis points out that even our love for God does not offer safety and security. Was Christ’s love for us a ‘safe investment’? It cost Him His life! And as Christ lay dying for us, did He not feel that the Father had forsaken Him?

So what happens when one of these ‘safe’ relationships does lead to marriage? Presumably it is imagined that the resulting marriage will be an emotionally safe frontier. Marriage can be emotionally safe, but only in the same way that pre-marital relationships and life itself can be made emotionally safe. Remain in the safety of the shallows and do not allow yourself to be discovered, to be known by yourself and the other in all your nakedness, vulnerability and weakness. Harden up when that little voice says, “Watch out, you might get hurt.” Such a marriage may be free from pain, it is true, but it will also be free from joy, intimacy and glory. Allender and Longman observe that

Marriage is an institution of joy and grief. And the glory often comes through the struggles in communication, goals, priorities, child rearing, and sex. Anyone who expects glory without a fight is foolish. In a fallen world, problems, both small and great, will arise.

If we recognize that we are both sinners and if we expect that conflict will happen, we can avoid thinking something is uniquely wrong with our marriage. ...we can have hope that we will find joy in the midst of pain.<sup>4</sup>

Joy in the midst of pain. That is something that applies not merely to relationships but to all of life. It is through the struggle, conflict and pain that we grow to know ourselves and to know others. The courtship/betrothal movements have denied people this adventure. Most tragically of all, however, they have denied people the ability to know God.

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<sup>1</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, (First published in 1950 by Geoffrey Bles).

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<sup>2</sup> Sheldon Vanauken, *A Severe Mercy* (San Francisco: Harper Collins: 1977), p. 18.

<sup>3</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* in *The Inspirational Writings of C. S. Lewis*, op. cit., p. 278.

<sup>4</sup> Dan B. Allender & Tremper Longman III, *Intimate Allies* (Wheaton, ILL: Tyndale House, 1995 ), p. 44.

## Courtship and the Christian Worldview

*Christianity is a world and life view and not simply a series of unrelated doctrines. Christianity includes all of life. Every realm of knowledge, every aspect of life and every facet of the universe find their place and their answer within Christianity. It is a system of truth enveloping the entire world in its grasp*

— Edwin Rian<sup>1</sup>

After writing this book, I contacted six of the leading figures in the courtship and betrothal movements to ask if they would criticize my book. In the covering letter to some of them, I wrote,

Before the book goes to print, I wanted to give you an opportunity to offer a response or even just a short statement of where you stand in relation to my biblical critique of your teachings. This would also give you a chance to let me know if in any way I have inadvertently misrepresented the teaching.

In writing thus to these men, my aim was to generate some healthy discussion as well as to learn where I might have erred in any of my conclusions. Only two of the six men expressed any interest in responding to the book. After I sent the manuscript to these two men, one went quiet and the other said he changed his mind and would not be responding.

This is merely one case in point of the way the Christian ability to think and engage in rational discourse is being lost. In many ways, the courtship and betrothal movements are but symptoms of the kind of intellectual paralysis that Os Guinness has described so clearly in his book *Fit Bodies, Fat Minds*.<sup>2</sup>

In this final chapter, it will be helpful to consider how this state of affairs has come about. What is the relationship between the courtship/betrothal movement and the larger anti-intellectual trends in Western society?

Although the courtship and betrothal movements are relatively recent developments, their roots go back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the period known as the ‘Enlightenment.’ There were many ways that the, so called, Enlightenment has wrought a lasting effect on Western culture through such philosophies as materialism, egalitarianism, secularism, humanism, etc. But perhaps the most subtle and - from a Christian perspective – damaging effects of the Enlightenment, was the way it deconstructed the notion of truth. Starting as early as Francis Bacon in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and culminating in the Enlightenment of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, numerous thinkers proposed a divided field of truth. What this meant, in practice, was that truth became separated into two categories. In one category you had all the truths of science and the external world. This kind of truth was public, verifiable and objective. In the other category was the truth of religion and faith. This

truth was subjective, private and unverifiable – a personal kind of truth that need not have any relation to the outside world of fact.

Prior to these developments, thinkers had generally tried to achieve integration between these two spheres. The Enlightenment said not only that such integration was unobtainable, but that to even seek it was a category confusion. They said we should not need factual coherence to be antecedent to religious belief since such belief is personal, private, autonomous affair, freed from the constriction of objective fixity. The humanists who championed such ideas were clear that their agenda was to marginalize the influence that Christianity held on culture and public life.

The Enlightenment would not have been able to succeed in achieving this goal had it not been for the fact that most Christians were caught off guard by the new ideas. While rejecting the Enlightenment's conclusions, few Christian thinkers took the challenge of offering a rational critique of the assumptions on which these conclusions were based, such as that of the divided field. Like the Romantics in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, serious Christians at the time of the Enlightenment tended to emphasize the importance of religious truth, while still unconsciously accepting the redefinition of that truth as being something subjective, private and non-rational. Thus, rather than thinking through their faith and trying to find answers to the attacks being waged against the Bible, they took refuge in an emotional, devotional kind of Christianity that did not require any intellectual underpinning.

On the surface, Christianity seemed to spread in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Movements sprung up all over the place, including the Quakers and Methodists in England, the Great Awakening in America, Jansenism in France, Pietism in Germany, etc.. However, beneath the apparent progress Christianity was making, there was an underlying, usually unconscious, acceptance of the Enlightenment's dualities. Although the founders of most of these movements were far from being anti-intellectual themselves, these movements tended to emphasize the personal, emotional and inspirational aspects of faith at the expense of the objective, public elements.<sup>3</sup> In the end this led to an almost exclusive emphasis on saving souls while the domains of culture, society, politics, art and philosophy were left firmly in the hands of the secularists. The Enlightenment's compartmentalization of the sacred and the secular, together with their definition of which belonged in which box, seemed to be winning the day. Christianity was fast ceasing to be a religion in the classic sense of being a totalising system that structured the whole of one's life, but was instead becoming, at best, a system of strong personal piety and, at worst, a personal worship hobby.<sup>4</sup>

As time progressed, this bifurcation only heightened, culminating in the strident anti-intellectualism in the Christians of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. You began to get evangelists like Dwight Moody who boasted about not having any theology ("My theology! I didn't know I had any"<sup>5</sup>) or Billy Sunday who declared he didn't "know any more about theology than a jack-rabbit knew about ping pong."<sup>6</sup> This derision of theology was symptomatic of a kind of Christianity where the emphasis had been entirely whittled down to one thing: getting as many people into heaven as possible. Once you became saved - that is, once your ticket to a happy afterlife was secured – Christian living was seen to involve living by a pedestrian code of personal pietism. No longer was the Bible seen as giving us a worldview that structured the whole of personal and public reality. It became a privatised faith that, as Roszak put it, was "socially irrelevant even if privately engaging."<sup>7</sup> Hardly surprising, it was around this

same time that hymnology began to be increasingly ‘feminised’, with the singing of robust psalms and hymns being replaced by spiritual subjective sentiments like “he lives within my heart” and “now I am happy all the day” and “precious memories of everything Jesus has done for me.”<sup>8</sup>

Christians forgot that they were a people at war and most remained oblivious of the fact that the greatest cultural revolution of all time was continuing unchallenged in their very midst. As Christianity was cut off from the concerns of culture in its individual pietism and feel-good-relationship-with-Jesus message, Christians themselves became more and more worldly in their Monday through Saturday thinking and living. Jesus was the subject of a personal religious experience rather than the public Lord whose demand for allegiance was totalising and all-encompassing.

Gradually but inevitably, not only were the lives and values of individual Christians beginning to look no different to those in the world, but the theology of the church was now also under threat against an influx of liberal theology and deconstructionism. The anti-intellectualism of the church had for too long given secular atheism and liberal theology a free ride, and it was only when this began to infiltrate the church that Christian pastors and teachers began to sit up and take notice. As a consequence, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century three Christians wrote a twelve volume word titled *The Fundamentals*. The Christians who affirmed the doctrines in this book soon came to be known as fundamentalists, a term which has subsequently come to carry pejorative connotations. As fundamentalism began to be a badge to distinguish a true “Bible-believing-Christian”, the emphasis came to rest more on *what* you believed rather than *why* you should believe it. The notion of ‘faith’, long since subjectivized, deteriorated further to become an approximation for anti-intellectualism – the unthinking mindset that said, “Don’t question, just believe.” The Christian outlook was reduced to merely a set of beliefs rather than a philosophy that had implications for all of reality. All the while, the church was becoming more and more insular, deliberately isolating itself from the concerns of culture, which was viewed as innately secular. Wherever there was a residue of proper Christian thinking, this tended to be a specialist domain, detached from the concerns of the mainstream evangelical church.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, as the 20<sup>th</sup> century progressed, and Christians found themselves confronted with difficult ethical, environmental and philosophical questions, many have been gradually trying to pursue a more integrated approach to truth. As Francis Schaeffer and other Christian apologists have emphasized the importance of a unified field of truth, this century has seen many Christians returning to fields long deserted, be it science, philosophy, politics, art, etc.. Recently there have been many Christians from the Reformed heritage who have become increasingly concerned about applying the truth of Christ’s Lordship to every area of life and culture. Yet, for the majority of evangelical churches, the faith has deteriorated into a kind of Christianity-lite. This can mean either feel-good-pop-Christianity or an insular model of strict personal piety. While pop-Christianity tends to compromise with the world, pietistic-Christianity tends to retreat from it, while both these extremes fail to present a totalising vision of the Christian faith – a vision that would seek to apply the Lordship of Christ to every area of the world and culture.

Against this backdrop, it is not surprising to see the courtship and betrothal movements emerge as they have. As Christianity has been robbed of its substance, depth and totalizing structure, a great vacuum has arisen. Religion, like nature, abhors a vacuum. Strict codes of personal pietism, such as the courtship and betrothal legalism, promise to fill this vacuum by

giving an illusion of depth. They also give the illusion that Christ's Lordship has become totalizing, not because they have allowed Him to sanctify all that is good and natural in life and culture, but because they habitually deny themselves good things under the guise of discipleship. The more areas of life that can be brought under this approach, the more we feel that we are honoring Christ in every area. We have forgotten what the Puritans grasped, that Christ is just as present when we pray to Him in church as when we are drinking beer, so long as both are done to the glory of God. On the other hand, if we accept the Enlightenment's division between the sacred and the secular - the later being external to that by which we can glorify and enjoy God - then we must approach anything 'secular' with a great deal of suspicion. What is left over after the secular realm is cut off will be a narrow range of pietistically legitimate experiences for us to retreat into.

What this means in relation to courtship and betrothal is that just as the post-Enlightenment Christians found it easier to retreat into an insular religious subjectivism than to articulate a public vision and engage in the cultural fray, so many Christians today are finding it easier to retreat from the worlds of romance, love and relationships than to confront these things head-on with a sanctified approach. But it is not limited merely to romance and marriage. Indeed, the paradigm of personal pietism is now incorporating an entire package.<sup>10</sup> While some of the elements in this package may be appropriate in themselves, they are arising out of the growing desire American Christians feel to categorize, define and box things in. In the midst of the theological and intellectual poverty that the Enlightenment has left us with, there has become a great desire for formula as a substitute for substance. A false sense of safety and security is gained when all one needs to do is follow a series of rules 'and then God will be pleased with me.' Those who have this underlying need will itch to reinterpret the scriptures in terms of formulae, even if it leads to bizarre exegesis.

Because the courtship and betrothal movements arose after nearly three centuries of mainstream Christians being trained to think in privatized, subjective and non-rational categories, the youth of today are without the intellectual defenses that would otherwise have enabled them to identify the faulty exegesis and logical fallacies with which this teaching is saturated. For all the emphasis home-schoolers now place on developing a Christian worldview, most Christian young people still think in disconnected slots. The biblical framework is not being allowed to function in a totalizing way to structure all the diverse areas of our experience into an integrated whole. The corollary of this is an inability to even debate this teaching biblically without people becoming highly defensive or taking personal offence. I have repeatedly tried to engage one of the main advocates of betrothal into discussion, only to find him continually side-stepping everything I say by drowning it into a puddle of warm benevolence. This man will assure me that he's praying for me and that it is wonderful that God knows where my heart really is but will never answer any of my questions. This is a paradigm of what has happened on a larger scale: the youth of today do not have the equipment to even begin debating things biblically.

A parallel problem is now occurring in the way the term 'Christian worldview' is being hijacked by people who do not even begin to understand what it means but who use the term to impart a feeling of depth to an otherwise shallow or compromised view of life. It is like an empty house with a hugely elaborate exterior. No lasting headway will be made until we are prepared to fill up the empty house with a proper biblical worldview. This, of course, involves changing our

whole way of thinking as Christians. We need to rediscover what it means to think Christianly about *all* of reality, to reject the categories which the Enlightenment has unconsciously wrought on our thinking, and to forge a distinctively Christian culture for us and our children. Only in this way will our sons and daughters really be equipped to go and engage in the world without fear and without the need to retreat into a holy huddle of isolationism.

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<sup>1</sup> Edwin H. Riad, cited by David A. Noebel in *Understanding the Times: The Religious Worldviews of Our Day and the Search For Truth* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1991) p. 30.

<sup>2</sup> Os Guinness, *Fit Bodies Fat Minds: Why Evangelicals Don't Think and What to Do About It* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994).

<sup>3</sup> See Randal Macaulay's article, 'The Pietistic Roots of Evangelicalism Today', in *A Collection of Thirteen Lectures by L'Abri Authors*, (Greatham: L'Abri Fellowship), 1991.

<sup>4</sup> See Stephen Perks' online lecture 'Christianity as a Cult' on the Kuyper Foundation's website at,

<http://kuyper.org/main/main.php?p=home>

<sup>5</sup> Cited by Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Vintage, 1962) p. 108.

<sup>6</sup> Cited by William G McLoughlin, *Billy Sunday Was His Real Name* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), p. 123.

<sup>7</sup> Theodore Roszak, *Where the Wassteland Ends* (New York: Doubleday, 1973), p. 449.

<sup>8</sup> On the gradual feminization of American culture, see Ann Douglas' book *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1977).

<sup>9</sup> See David Wells, *No Place For Truth or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993); David Wells, *Losing Our Virtue: Why the Church Must Recover its Moral Vision* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998).

<sup>10</sup> See Rachel D. Ramer 'Christian Families on the Edge: Authoritarianism and Isolationism Among Us', *Christian Research Institute Journal* Volume 26, Number 1, 2003.

## Appendix A

### Joshua Harris and the Courtship Movement

I am often asked to give an opinion on Joshua Harris' bestselling books on relationships. I have always been interested in Joshua Harris' ministry for personal reasons. When we were teenagers, Joshua and I exchanged a couple of letters, met on three different occasions, and he commissioned his magazine to do a two page profile on me.

It is partly because of this background that I have been overtly concerned with not misrepresenting Harris by mentioning him along side the teachers in the courtship movement. Some people I have spoken with who are as opposed to the courtship and betrothal movements will lump Harris together with these movements. Other opponents of courtship and betrothal see Harris' work as an alternative to these errors. Clearly there is some ambiguity with regard to where Harris stands on these issues, and I have wanted to avoid creating additional ambiguity by linking him to the teachers examined in this book. Nevertheless, the fact of his great influence and the fact that he is now using the term courtship very liberally, make it necessary to say a few words about him.

When Harris began his ministry as a teen-ager he advocated courtship. Yet Harris began to find that for many people the 'system' of courtship was becoming the issue rather than Christ. He also found that relationships that were conducted inappropriately could have the illusion of being valid simply by calling the relationship 'courtship' rather than 'dating.' Thus, in an article written a couple years prior to the publication of his book *I Kissed Dating Goodbye*, Harris explains why he has intentionally avoided using the term 'courtship' in his upcoming book.

Courtship has become a "catch-all" phrase to describe something better than dating. It's the word used by people for everything they think boy-girl relationships should be, a wish list for how things should ideally unfold - The boy goes to the father, the boy courts the girl in safe family settings, boy and girl fall in love, and the sun shines at their outdoor wedding - and this is all good. We should have high standards; we should be idealistic. But misguided idealism can make for a rather unpleasant collision with reality. Unfortunately, what looks good on paper doesn't always go as smoothly as planned in real life. Relationships are confusing no matter what you call them.<sup>1</sup>

In the same article Harris reflected on an earlier article he had written, titled 'Dating Problems, Courtship Solutions.' "It's title," suggested Harris, "betrayed my search for pat answers..."

In 1997, *I Kissed Dating Goodbye* soured to the top of the bestseller lists. However, it is very instructive to note that many teens were not satisfied. As it says on the Amazon website, "Teens...wanted an intentional, God-pleasing game plan." Thus, Harris' next book *Boy Meets Girl: Say Hello To Courtship* seeks to meet this demand, giving more practical guidelines for conducting a godly relationship. What is most surprising about Harris' second book is his return

to the notion of 'courtship.' In fact, 'courtship' features so prominently in *Boy Meets Girl* that the term is even part of the subtitle.

Since Harris' first book kisses dating goodbye while his second book says hello to courtship, it would be easy to think that he is again advocating that the system of dating should be replaced by the system of courtship. Yet he makes clear that he is not advocating any 'system', and *Boy Meets Girl* is full of cautions against techniques and the kind of rule-book approaches that Harris is obviously familiar with. He also emphasises that the terms are really irrelevant and that by courtship he does not mean a set of rules, that "Dating versus courtship' isn't the point and that he simply happens "to like the term *courtship*" to describe "that special season in a romance where a man and woman are seriously weighing the possibility of marriage."

Harris is obviously aware of the implication-laden nature of the term 'courtship.' The extent to which he desires to be associated with the general ideological framework that accompanies this term remains uncertain. It can hardly be surprising that Harris is so often lumped together with the proponents of courtship. Some people are even prepared to wipe him off the board for this reason. This is a mistake, for clearly Harris is at variance with many of the central teachings prevalent in this movement. For example, he criticises parents who attempt to control their children's courtships and he admits that most people will probably have romance with more than one person before marrying. Furthermore, though he cites testimonials that are clearly taken from those who practice courtship, the tale of his own relationship with Shannon bares little resemblance to such models. It is not surprising that many within the courtship movement consider Harris to be a traitor.

Nevertheless, *Boy Meets Girl* does present some disturbing parallels with the courtship movement, particularly in his emphasis on reaching a quality of character correctness before one is ready for marriage, and his rather mechanical approach to the operation of human emotions. Despite these aspects, however, the general tenor of Harris' approach to life and the Lord seems quite different to that which we find in the courtship and betrothal movements.

To sum, the problem is not that Harris defies classification, as if I were out to put him in a box. Rather, the problem is that people might be inadvertently sucked into the wider courtship movement through Harris' writings as a result of the semantic similarity. There is empirical evidence of just such a thing happening.

I sent an email to Joshua to ask him about some of these points and to say that I wanted to avoid any misrepresentation of his message. In response I received a letter from a secretary saying that he was too busy to read and reply to all his emails. Certainly he is a very busy man, yet if he has time I know that there are many people who would like to know his views on the issues raised in this book.

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<sup>1</sup> "Searching For True Love Part 1: Beyond Formulas", *New Attitude: The Christian Magazine for Home School Teens*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (Gresham, OR, 1995), p. 9.