

RIGHTEOUS RELATIONSHIPS: DATING & DEBATING



1. DATING

1.1. Wikipedia definition: “dating is a form of courtship consisting of social activities done by two people with the aim of each assessing the other's suitability as a partner in an intimate relationship or as a spouse.”

1.2. The Bible would see all forms of courtship (whether called by the term “dating” or “courting¹”) as exclusively for assessing one’s suitability as a spouse and never just as “a partner in an intimate relationship” since all such relationships would undoubtedly include sexual attraction² with the obvious goal of sexual activity – something forbidden outside of the marriage covenant (1Th 4:2-3 - “sexual immorality” = sexual activity outside the completion of a marriage covenant).

1.3. The biblical concept of betrothal is therefore closest to the concept of dating³ since:

1.3.1. It takes place before the actual marriage (e.g. Mat 1:18-20).

1.3.2. It exists (among other things) for the purpose of assessing marriage suitability. Consider (2Co 11:2): all Divine-human covenants are betrothal or inchoate in nature⁴ versus complete or choate – something which takes place only after the marriage ceremony is complete. In relation to God, this happens only after we have passed from this life into the next (see Rev 19:6-9). As additional support, consider also the fact that Joseph pursues “divorce” in relation to Mary though they are only betrothed. This implies a covenant/contract is already in place (see again Mat 1:19).

1.4. As such, dating must operate within the following parameters for Christians:

1.4.1. Only those recognized by the Church as Christians are eligible (2Co 6:14-15).

1.4.2. Only when approved by the Church (Exo 22:16; 1Sa 18:25 w/ its NC understanding: Mat 19:29).

1.4.3. The existence of both spiritual and sexual attraction (Gen 2:18-24).

1.4.4. A demonstration of brother-to-sister behavior only (1Ti 5:2; 2Co 13:12)⁵.

1.4.5. Free of any activity which is meant to arouse/gratify the sexual desires of either person (1Th 4:2-8).

¹ There is nothing more biblical about using the word “courting” (versus “dating”) to describe this process though some have attempted to make such distinctions (e.g. Joshua Harris, *I Kissed Dating Goodbye*). Neither word can claim biblical origins since neither were a part of the social landscape when the Bible was written.

² It is true that some people have dated and married without any sexual attraction or desire for sexual activity but such relationships strain even the common worldly understanding of these terms and (as we shall see) is completely unbiblical.

³ Many equate the betrothal period to that of the modern day engagement period. Though there are similarities between the “bride-price” (Exo 22:16) and the purchase of a ring today, engagements oftentimes are purely pragmatic in purpose: to give time for planning the wedding. By this point, assessment for “marriage suitability” is a foregone conclusion.

⁴ Betrothal was considered the first act in the marriage covenant process and though not all rights and privileges (e.g. sexual license) had yet been granted at this point (“inchoate marriage”), oftentimes spousal terms were employed to refer to each other (Consider Deu 20:7; “husband” in 2Co 11:2; Hos 2:2-4 – In addressing His marriage covenant relationship w/Israel, God refers to the children of Israel as the children of whoring – not as His own. Consummation of the marriage covenant has not yet taken place making all progeny at this point – illegitimate). Modern sensibilities however require that we not confuse such terminology by using it outside of what is viewed as marriage today. For further study on this subject see Gordon P. Hugenberger, *Marriage as a Covenant*, p.243-251.

⁵ These verses establish what constitutes sexual behavior: Any physical activity which would be inappropriate for siblings to engage in.

1.4.6. Free of any activity which might imply sexual relations to others (Eph 5:3).

1.4.7. An exclusive commitment (“betrothed...to one husband” 1Ti 3:2, 12).

2. DEBATING

2.1. Wikipedia definition: “debate is contention in argument”; Free dictionary definition: “debate is to engage in argument by discussing opposing points.”

2.2. Debating/arguing is absolute necessary to both discovering and defending the truth in a sinful world (Act 15:1-2, 3-22: notice this is IN the church!; Jud 1:3; Luk 11:37-54).

2.3. Debate therefore is not sinful, what can be is our approach to or avoidance of it (Gal 5:20; Mat 10:22-33).

2.4. Debate which is honoring to God:

2.4.1. Always practices intellectual honesty:

2.4.1.1. The goal is discovering and defending the truth (not one’s reputation, position or pride – i.e. “winning the fight”)(2Co 4:2).

2.4.1.2. Never uses one’s position of authority to take advantage of others (1Pe 5:3; 1Th 2:6).

2.4.1.3. Readily acknowledges when their point/position is wrong and immediately repents (Act 23:1-5).

2.4.1.4. Is only committed to what can be legitimately proven to be the facts (Deu 29:29; Isa 8:20; 2Co 13:1; Mat 18:16; 2Co 10:5; 2Ti 2:16; 2Ti 1:13).

2.4.1.5. Does not assume (act like you know what you know, never what you don’t) (1Co 4:5).

2.4.1.6. Hates all forms of gossip and slander, but also flattery (Rom 1:29-30; Job 32:21-22; Psa 5:9, 12:2-3,; Pro 28:23; Rom 16:17-18; 1Th 2:5).

2.4.2. Always reasons logically:

2.4.2.1. Committed to the rules of logic (Identity/Context; Non-contradiction, Excluded Middle, Rational Inference) (e.g. 1Co 15:12-16; 1Pe 3:15)

2.4.2.2. Emotions/feelings are irrelevant (i.e. never the measure of what is true but what we think is true.) (e.g. Jud 1:4, 10; 2Pe 2:1-2, 18; Pro 31:30 – “charm is deceitful”).

2.4.2.3. Contradictions are recognized as the first sign that what we think is false (1Ti 6:20-21).

2.4.3. Always expresses respect for those in authority (1Pe 2:18, 3:1-2, 7, 13-16; 1Ti 5:17-19; 1Th 5:12-13).

2.4.4. Always demonstrates love and patient endurance with those who are brothers/sisters in Christ (Eph 4:1-3, 16, 32-5:2; Col 3:13; 1Th 4:9-10, 5:14; 2Ti 4:2).

2.4.5. Always seeks restoration or a peaceful resolution (1Pe 4:11; Rom 12:18).

2.4.6. Always submits to the parameters of Matthew 18:15-17 (Act 15:1-28; this is why 1Co 11:16).

2.4.7. Always shows wise restraint and willingness to listen (Rom 12:3; Pro 5:1-2, 12-14, 10:8, 12:15, 13:16, 14:15-18, 29, 15:31-32, 18:1-2, 6-7, 13, 19:20; Jam 1:19-21).