

Courtship & Marriage article 5

Dear Young People,

In my last letter I discussed some things about dating, but did not finish what I wanted to say, because I like to keep these letters short. So I will continue the subject of dating in this letter.

The first question I want to address is: At what age ought young people to begin dating? Last time I mentioned that, because worldly people make dating a game, they encourage their children to begin dating at a very early age, sometimes even when boys have no interest in girls, and girls have no interest in boys. I know that girls start taking an interest in boys at an earlier age than boys start taking interest in girls, but that is a point of no interest to me now.

In our home where I grew up we were not permitted to begin dating until we were sixteen years old. We followed that rule in our own family and would not let our children date until they were at least sixteen. The fact is, however, that I did not begin dating until I was eighteen. It seems that I did not really have much interest in dating until I met my present wife in my last year of high school. And, if I remember correctly, our children never showed much interest in dating until they were eighteen years old or older.

It does seem to me, looking back, that sixteen is really too young. And, if I am at all correct, young people do not start dating in Singapore until they are quite a bit older than eighteen. Maybe that isn't so bad. At any rate, the time when young people start dating ought to be determined by the age young people wish to marry. A long courtship is not good. If a person wants to finish school before marrying, let him or her also postpone dating. If they wish to begin dating when they are still in their teens, let them do that only if they plan to marry young. I think that in Singapore, young people tend to wait with getting married also until they are older. Maybe some of you can write me and tell me if I am correct. It would be doing a favor to me also if you would give me your own opinion on the matter.

Dating must be practiced with a view to marriage, and so dating must also be a time of preparation for marriage. When I say that dating must be done with a view to marriage, I mean that both young men and young women date to find the spouse God has determined for them

That is a wonderful thing. We believe that God controls sovereignly our whole life and all that happens to us is according to His plan. And so we believe also that God brings to us our spouses. When God created Eve, the Bible says that God brought her to Adam and so she became his wife. The marriage form in our Psalter, which is really the only one used in our churches, comments on this act of God in bringing Eve to Adam; it adds, "And also today God brings to every man his wife.

This does not mean, of course, that we can date and eventually marry an unbeliever and then justify that wicked act by saying: God brought her to me." That is sort of like tempting God. It is sort of like standing on a railroad track with a train coming

full speed and saying, "If God does not want me to die, I will not be killed by this train even if I stay on the tracks. That kind of talk is wicked.

God deals with us as responsible men and women and expects that we, on our part, believe that God will bring us a good wife or husband only if we seek Him in our search for a wife or husband. That means that we do our dating prayerfully; and our pray is that God will send us the wife or husband He has chosen for us and with whom we can live in a marriage which is a picture of Christ and the church. It is something very wonderful to know that God already knows whom we re going to marry. It is for us to learn this, and we will learn this when we prayerfully seek the Lord to guide us. Our chief concern is to find the wife that God has chosen for us.

Sometimes we find our future wives as soon as we begin dating. That is what happened to me. I never dated anyone but the girl I finally married. But this is not always the case. It is not even necessarily good to find one's future spouse on the first date. But we may be sure that the wife God has planned for us is one who is a God-fearing young woman. And the same is true when a girl seeks to marry. When Paul in I Corinthians 6 speaks of not being unequally yoked with unbelievers, he is referring also to marriage. God does not want us to marry unbelievers and become unequally yoked with them in marriage; and so we ought never to date unbelievers.

I speak here primarily of boys seeking wives. I do this because mostly boys take the initiative in dating. A boy asks a girl to go with him here or there. But this does not mean that the same thing is not true for girls. They must go with a boy who loves the Lord. They may not go with anyone who asks them, one whom they have met in school, or one who works in the same place they work.

So these are some of the questions which a young man (or a young girl) asks when dating. Does this person love the Lord? Does this person walk in obedience to God and to His commandments? Will this young lady be a good mother for my children? Or will this young man be a good father for my children/ Will this young girl be one with whom I can live no matter what happens; for better or for worse, as some marriage vows have it? Will I still be able to live with her and love her if she is disfigured in an automobile accident? Will I still want to live with him if he is sent a dreaded and incurable disease by the Lord?

At the time my wife and I were dating, I was working in a laundry after school. In that same laundry an older Polish woman worked. She was a devote Roman Catholic who went to mass early every morning before coming to work. She had lived a difficult life and had to work to support her children. She was a roly-poly woman worn with the cares of a long life of toil. She had not had much education, but she was usually happy and a sort of fountain of some very down-to-earth and practical wisdom. When she heard I was dating, she said to me, "I would like to see a picture of your girl-friend." And so I showed her a picture. Her comment was: "She is very pretty, but what are you going to do when all those curves change to bulges?" She was making a good point in her own crude way? She meant to say, of course, "Will you still love her when she is no longer a pretty young girl?" It was a question worth pondering.

But the letter is long enough for this time. We will return to the subject later, God willing.

With warmest Christian greetings,

Prof Hanko