

A Biblical Perspective on Dating

By Rebecca May

- **Is dating biblical?**
- **Should I be alone on a date?**
- **Should I date non-Christians?**
- **Should I date someone who is divorced?**

Recent American statistics say that the fundamentalist Christian community has a higher rate of divorce than society in general. I'm sure there are many reasons for the popularity of divorce in Christianity. However, one probable reason is that Christians reach marriage the same way non-Christians do--we date.

There is nothing biblical about dating. There is no example of a date ever taking place in the Bible. Marriages were arranged, that is, fathers gave away daughters, and men took wives for themselves. Dating is a modern cultural development without a biblical example or command. The Bible does, however, say a lot about marriage, and since the purpose of dating is to prepare for marriage, we can learn a lot about dating by knowing how God wants us to enter into marriage.

Based on our failure to differentiate ourselves from the world concerning divorce and on the non-biblical nature of dating, it is time to pursue for ourselves, and teach our young people, a new way to date, emphasizing biblical principles concerning marriage.

Dating will be defined here as spending time with the opposite sex for the purpose of preparing for marriage.

Dating and the Role of Men and Women

In Genesis 2:24 we read, *For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.* From this verse we get a clear picture of what marriage, and therefore what dating, should look like. Specifically, a man should leave prior to cleaving. That is, a man should be spiritually and emotionally responsible for himself apart from his parents.

A man's responsibility goes beyond leaving, it also includes taking for himself a wife. *And he shall take a wife in her virginity* (Leviticus 21:13; see also Genesis 25:1; 26:34; 34:8-21; 38:6, 14; Exodus 21:10; Matthew 19:4-5; Mark 12:25; Luke 17:27). In dating, being consistent with the principle of marriage, men should pursue women, not the other way around. This is what is written in the Song of Songs 1:7 where Solomon's beloved reveals that she wants to spend time with him, yet emphasizes she will not be like the harlots who chase men.

Besides responding to men rather than initiating, women are to be given by their fathers in marriage. According to 1 Corinthians 7:36, the father may decide whether he will give his virgin daughter in marriage. If a daughter needs her father's blessing to marry, she should seek his permission in dating and should submit to his decision. With reference to dating, therefore, women should not chase men but rather should respond with their father's approval to the initiation of men.

Women: If a man has not left home, while he may date, he is not biblically prepared to take a wife. If he cannot lead his own life, how can he be a leader for you?

Men: If a woman does not obey her father as a daughter, why would she submit to you as a wife?

Dating and Sexual Immorality

For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality ... (1 Thessalonians 4:3). Fornication, often translated "sexual immorality," means all kinds of illicit or unnatural sexual intercourse, that is, any sexual

relationship outside of a heterosexual marriage. This includes adultery and homosexuality. Fornication is the Greek word *porneia*, from which we get the English word “pornography.”

Hebrews 13:4 says, *Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators [porneia] and adulterers God will judge.* 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 says, *Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators [porneia], nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor {the} covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God.* Consider the company with which Paul describes fornicators. And he lists *porneia* first!

1 Corinthians 6:18 says, *Flee immorality [porneia]. Every {other} sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.*

For the purpose of the undefilement of the believer’s body and the purity with which we are to enter marriage, God desires believers to be without sexual immorality. A dating relationship which includes sex, therefore, is a sin and is, by definition, pornographic.

Dating Non-Christians

Since dating is not in the Bible, dating non-Christians is not in the Bible. The Bible does, however, have something to say about marrying non-Christians. 2 Corinthians 6:14 says, *Do not be bound together with unbelievers...* “Bound together” is the Greek word *heterodzugountes*, which means “unequally yoked.” For example, Deuteronomy 22:10 says, *You shall not plow with an ox and a donkey together.* To marry an unbeliever is to be yoked to someone who is different than a believer. While it is not a sin to date a non-Christian, it can be emotionally dangerous, and it is a sin to marry one. So if the person you are dating does not become a Christian, the relationship must end before marriage.

Dating Someone Who Is Divorced

In Luke 16:18 Christ comments on marrying someone who has been divorced. *Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries one who is divorced from a husband commits adultery.* Paul also comments on marrying someone who has been divorced. In 1 Corinthians 7:27 Paul writes, *Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be released. Are you released from a wife? Do not seek a wife.* “Released” is the Greek word *lusin*, which means to dissolve, break, unbind, or destroy. Therefore, if someone’s marriage is broken, they should not pursue another marriage, since to marry another is to commit adultery.

Dating and Society

Before he married Ruth, Boaz gathered together 10 elders of the city and made the proper arrangements which allowed them to have a socially acceptable marriage (Ruth 4:1-12). Dating also should be socially acceptable with one’s family, close Christian contacts, and a godly Christian community.

Dating and One-on-one Time

A popular alternative to dating presented in many churches today is called “courtship.” It offers many conservative principles, but the central point is to not allow the couple to spend time alone together. “One-on-one recreational dating should not be allowed... The man may be a regular guest for dinner, join in family devotions, go on family outings, attend church together, etc. Encourage courting but discourage dating” (“Christian Courtship vs. The Dating Game,” page 29). The reason they suggest that a couple should not be alone is that it will protect them from sexual temptation and they will be able to avoid sexual sin and lust.

While I agree it is not good to always be alone and there are certain times when it would not be good to be alone, you cannot eliminate sexual immorality by eliminating all one-on-one time. At best, you could only prevent unwanted pregnancy. As Christ points out to the Pharisees, just because you have not had sex doesn’t mean you are sexually innocent (Matthew 5:28). Not only is it not a sin for couples to be alone, it can be very valuable. If a couple is never alone together and forced to

control their sexual desire, how can either know whether the other can control their desire after they are married when they are alone with someone else of the opposite sex? Ruth was alone with Boaz before they were married, yet they remained pure (Ruth 3:7-10). Solomon invited his beloved to his chamber and out on walks alone with him, yet they too remained pure (Song of Songs 1:4-10). There is no verse forbidding a couple from being alone together, and the Bible certainly doesn't say that avoiding one-on-one time will prevent sexual sin. Rather, I find examples where couples have been alone and remained sexually pure.

Questions and Answers

Q: *Is dating biblical?*

A: Dating is not in the Bible, so principles on how to enter marriage should be applied to dating (Genesis 2:24).

Q: *Should I be alone on a date?*

A: It is not a sin to be alone on a date. In fact, it may be a valuable way to practice self-control and remain pure (1 Thessalonians 4:3).

Q: *Should I date non-Christians?*

A: It is not a sin to date non-Christians. However, it can be emotionally dangerous, and it is a sin to marry one (2 Corinthians 6:14).

Q: *Should I date someone who is divorced?*

A: The Bible says that a divorced person should not get remarried unless their spouse dies. Since dating is preparation for marriage, we should never date someone who is divorced, because, unlike dating a non-Christian who may become a Christian before marriage, a divorced person cannot become not divorced (Luke 16:18; Mark 10:1-12; and Romans 7:1-3).