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The Use of the Communion Table in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper

by James Begg

Part Two

(Continued from the November issue).

Section Two

The use of the Communion Table, in celebrating the Sacrament of our Lord's Supper, is in conformity with the practice of Christians, in the first and purest ages of the Christian Church.

The new mode of substituting pews for a Communion Table, lately introduced into some of our Established Churches, is not only a departure from the Scripture pattern exhibited by our Lord at the institution of the ordinance of the Supper, and followed by the Apostles, but is also a departure from the practice exhibited by Christians in the first and purest ages of the Church. The Communion Table may be easily traced down from the time of the Apostles. It was an essential part of the furniture of every Church. All the faithful had access to it, to commemorate the death of Christ; and it is frequently referred to in the writings of the fathers. As the primitive Christians were frequently employed in celebrating the ordinance of the Lord's Supper, so there is often reference made in their writings to a Communion Table. A few instances of this may be stated that we may be excited to be followers of them, as they were of Christ.

Ignatius flourished in the beginning of the second century, about the year 105, and so lived and saw the latter end of the times of the Apostles. He was bishop of Antioch, a large and populous city, the capital of the ancient kingdom of Syria, where the disciples first were called Christians, which was a central station from which the Gospel had been very widely propagated, and where there had been many teachers, both Apostles and others, in the preceding age, and where we may now expect to

find the institutions of Christianity in their purest form. This holy father and martyr often refers in his writings to the Lord's Table, particularly in his Epistles to the Christians at Philadelphia, and Ephesus, and some others. In his Epistle to the Christians at Philadelphia, he exhorts them to unity and brotherly love, in the most affectionate manner, in language referring to a Communion Table. He says, "I write unto you, and warn you, that you are one faith, one doctrine, one Eucharist: for there is one faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was shed for us, one bread broken for us, and one cup distributed to all, one ALTAR to every church, and one bishop, with the presbytery, and deacons my fellow-servants." In his Epistle to the Ephesians, he exhorts them to be subject to, and at unity with their bishop, and presbytery, from the consideration, "that as every one, not at peace with his brother, was excluded from the ALTAR (Matt. 5:24), much more those who were disobedient to, and at discord with, their bishop, and spiritual fathers, were excluded from thence."

Tertullian flourished in the end of the second century, or beginning of the third century, about the year 200, or about one hundred years after the death of John the Evangelist. He was a Presbyter of Carthage, and refers to the Lord's Table in his Book *de Oratione*, when reproving those who were scrupulous about receiving the sacrament, on their stationary, or fast days. He says, "will not thy station or fast be the more solemn, if thou shalt also stand at God's ALTAR, where thou mayest receive the Lord's body?" He refers to it also in his exhortation to chastity and purity of conduct, when he says, "If a soul be conscious of its guilt, and thereupon conscience be ashamed, how will he dare to pray at the ALTAR?"

Within fifty years after Tertullian lived Cyprian, who was bishop of the same church of Carthage, and

who flourished about the year 250, who, in his various Epistles, often refers to the Communion Table, and particularly in his 63rd Epistle to Cecilius, in which he says that the words of Solomon (Prov. 9:2), “Wisdom hath mingled her wine, and furnished her table,” typified and prefigured the Christian ALTAR. The same Cyprian was president of a synod of bishops, which met in Africa in the year 258, where, in a reference from Spain respecting some bishops who had apostatized to idolatry, and still claimed the exercise of their Christian ministry, it was determined “that the divine law was express, that none but those who were holy and blameless should approach God’s ALTAR;” plainly referring to the Lord’s Table.

Chrysostom, who flourished about the year 398, refers to the Lord’s Table, in his defense of Christianity against the Jews and Gentiles. “From the very extensive spread of the Gospel,” he says, “the British Islands, which lie out of the sea, and are in the ocean itself, have felt the power of the word, for even there also, churches and ALTARS are erected.”

Gregory Nyssen, who flourished about the year 370, in his sermon on the Baptism of Christ, has a striking reference to the Communion Table. He says, “This altar at which we stand, is by nature a common stone, but being consecrated to the service of God is an HOLY TABLE, an ALTAR INVIOLEABLE.”

But authorities need not be multiplied, for there is frequent reference to the Communion Table, as a part of the furniture of the Christian churches, in all the early ages of Christianity.

This table, from the times of the Apostles downwards, has been sometimes denominated *table*, and sometimes *altar*; but usually with some distinguishing epithet, as Altar of God, Lord’s Table, Holy Table, etc. Ancient writers use both names indifferently, sometimes calling it altar, and sometimes table, and sometimes both *table* and *altar* in the same sentence. Chrysostom usually terms it “the mystical, and tremendous table.” Augustine usually gives it the name of *Mensa Domini*, the Table of the Lord.

When it was called *altar*, however, in these early ages, it did not mean an altar dressed up with images, or idol gods, as the heathens commonly had their altars adorned, or an altar for bloody sacrifices, which was the use of altars both among Jews and Gentiles, but it was considered only as a consecrated table, where Christian people presented their oblations, and received the Eucharist.

During the dark ages, the phrase altar was much abused, as connected with the sacrifice of the mass. The use of it was therefore laid aside by the Presbyterians of Scotland at the Reformation, and the phrase table was generally adopted by them, and has been continued in our Established Church.

The term altar has, however, been adopted by some Protestant churches, as they think, on good grounds. They say, when Christ said (Matt. 5:23, 24), “When thou bringest thy gift to the *altar*, and there rememberest that thy brother has ought against thee, Leave there thy gift before the *altar*, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift,” that he intimated, by way of anticipation, that he would institute an ordinance in his church, to commemorate that sacrifice of himself which was prefigured by the sacrifices under the law, and which should be a pledge of their peace with him, and their reconciliation with one another. They also consider (Heb. 12:10), “We have an *altar*, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle,” as not only referring to Christ, but to him as commemorated in the sacrament; for the Apostle there speaks of an *altar*, of which Christians had a right to eat.

During the three first centuries of the Christian Church, the *altar*, or communion table, was usually made of wood, and was moveable from place to place; but in the fourth century, some of them were made of stone; and this practice became gradually more prevalent, until, in the Council of Paris, in the year 509, a general decree was made, “That no *altars* should be consecrated but such as were made of stone only.” From the time of this change in the materials of them, they became more in the nature of fixtures, and the form was also changed. Before this, they were in the form of tables, but they now began to be erected more like *altars*, upon a single foot or pillar in the midst.

During the three first centuries, it was custom for all the faithful, both men and women, clergy and laity, without distinction, to communicate at the *altar*, or *communion table*; and we find Dionysius of Alexandria, who flourished about the year 244, in his Epistle to Eusebius, speaking of “both men and women standing at the *holy table*, and reaching forth their hands to receive the Eucharist there.” The exclusion of the women and laity from the Communion Table, and restricting them to what was called the outer-court of the people, was a corrupt innovation of after times.

The place of the *communion table*, or *altar*, was usually at the upper end of the church, before the bishop’s throne or pulpit, but at some distance from it, that room

might be left *to encompass or surround the table*. It was the usual practice of the ancient Christians to worship toward the East, for certain superstitious reasons, and the ALTAR was usually placed in the east end of their churches. Their churches were usually built in imitation of the Jewish synagogues; and in them, Maimoides tells us, "That at the upper end, looking towards the Holy Land, the law was placed in the wall, in an arch, and on each side the elders were seated in a semi-circle." In the Jewish tabernacle and temple there were *two altars*; the one the *altar of incense*, which stood close to the veil which divided the holy of holies from the rest of the temple, and could be approached only on one side; the other was the *altar of burnt-offering*, which stood in the middle of the court of the priests, and *was surrounded by the worshippers*. It is generally believed that the Communion Table, in the primitive churches, was so placed, as to imitate the position of the altar of burnt-offering. Dr. Hammond is of opinion, that this posture of the altar in Christian churches was in imitation of the altar in the Jewish Temple, alluded to by the Psalmist, when he says (Ps. 26:6), "I will wash my hands in innocency, and so will I *compass thine altar*." This position of the communion table, or altar, is referred to by Eusebius, in his *History of the Church* (lib. 10, cap. 4), where, giving an account of an oration made at the dedication of a magnificent church at Tyre, the "holy altar is stated to be placed in the middle (*viz.* of the east end, or altar part of the church); and to prevent the multitude from pressing too near it, it was compassed with a wooden rail of net work, of such curious workmanship, that it was admirable to behold."

In the first ages of Christianity, there was only *one altar or communion table* in each church. This is a fact referred to by the Fathers in general. In after times, however, when corrupt innovations were introduced, these altars or tables were greatly increased in number. We learn from the writings of Gregory the Great, who lived in the sixth century, that there were then, in the same church, sometimes twelve or fifteen *tables or altars*. In the year 1642, Dr. Francis Potter of Oxford published an essay on the apocalyptic number 666, in which he states, that at that time, there were in St. Peter's church at Rome, twenty-five altars, that the great altar was twenty-five feet square, and the cross upon it twenty-five inches long. Altars thus multiplied with other growing corruptions.

From this historical statement, it is evident that, in the first ages of the Christian Church, the Communion Table was a part of the furniture of every church; that it

was so placed that the communicants could *surround, or compass it about*; and that all the faithful, both men and women, both clergy and laity, without distinction, had access to it, to receive the memorials of redeeming love. What a contrast does this exhibit to the new mode of substituting pews for the Communion Table. There is no such thing as surrounding or encompassing these pews. The whole company of communicants, turning their backs on one another, exhibit themselves in an attitude directly opposite to the pattern set by Christ and the Apostles at the first institution of this ordinance; opposite to that referred to as having been observed in the apostolic age; opposite to that observed in the first ages of the Christian Church, when the communicants always *encompassed the communion table or altar*; and opposite to the laws and practice of the Established Church of Scotland: but they also exhibit themselves in an attitude extremely indecent and unbecoming in itself, and inconsistent with those tokens of mutual affection which ought to mark their conduct as children of God, surrounding his table, at this feast of love. A table still remains, it is believed, on which the bread and wine are placed, in those churches where the innovation has been introduced; but from the table the great body of the communicants are excluded, and they receive the elements sitting in pews, and *not sitting about, as required by our Directory, or at, the table*. These things ought not so to be in the Established Church of Scotland, and if they are allowed to proceed, it is impossible to say where corrupt innovations may end. The phrase, Communion Table, or Lord's Table, is language to which we are habituated, and presents a pleasant object; but when we change that phraseology into Communion Pews, or Lord's Pews, it is by no means an improvement, but the very reverse. "Thus said the Lord, stand ye in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls." **To be Continued (D.V.)**

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Dating: Finding a Life Partner

by Richard Bacon

This sermon is one of a 25 part series called *A Directory of Domestic Duties*. The difference between a directory and a list is that a directory gives us broad concepts — principles by which we can then make lists. *A Directory of Domestic Duties* should give us the principles for those things that God calls upon us to do in our family relationships. We began our study of Domestic Duties with the principle that there are certain relationships that maintain structure in human life. That structure is characterized by the word “covenant.” The term “covenant” helps us to define the relationships we have one with another. There is a *covenant* between husband and wife. There is a *covenant* between parent and child. There is even a *covenant* of sorts between employer and employee. Although in America the relationship between employer and employee is not so covenantally structured as it is between a master and a servant; nevertheless that structure of mutual *trust*, of mutual *duty*, and of mutual *responsibility* holds even for that of employer and employee. Those of you who have employees expect them to work for you and you pay them for their labor. Those of you who work for someone expect a paycheck for your labor. Even in this relationship there are *mutual duties*, *mutual responsibilities*, and even *mutual privileges*. There are *mutual expectations* even in that employer-employee relationship.

For the last several sermons of this series we have discussed the fact that the most basic of human relationships is the one that exists between husband and wife. The family is the most basic fundamental building block of all other aspects of society — including civil society and ecclesiastical society. If it is the case — and it is — that the most basic human relationship is the family, and if the family is built upon marriage, then it is of the most extreme importance for us to choose the right person to marry. The title of this sermon is “Finding A Life’s Partner,” but I wanted to call it “What’s Wrong with Dating?” I thought that might be too direct. However, we will be discussing the Biblical principles that demonstrate what is wrong with dating, and from those principles we will be able to make some applications that will guide our thinking and our choices in finding a life partner.

There may be young people reading this sermon who are thinking that this is *years* in the future for them. This is for all of you, no matter your age. Children,

many of you are reaching the age at which your bodies are changing. Some of you have recognized it. Some young men’s voices are beginning to change. Their voices crack for awhile and then finally one day they stop cracking and they remain deeper. Your bodies are changing. Your bodies begin to take on what is sometimes called secondary sexual characteristics. Boys start to grow beards. Young girls will start to curve differently than they did as little girls. As we grow through that stage of life called puberty, our bodies take upon themselves the things *necessary* for marriage to take place. What we call puberty, the Bible in 1 Corinthians chapter seven calls “the flower of age.” When we reach puberty it means that our bodies are ready for marriage. *That happens automatically*. However, our minds, our hearts, our spirits *do not automatically* become ready for marriage. *That requires the instruction of God’s Word*. My job is to help you — and to help your parents to help you — through this difficult time.

It has been said that adolescence is one of the hardest — if not *the hardest* — stage of life because our bodies *are* going through such changes. Even our mental processes are going through changes. Paul characterized this in 1 Corinthians 13:11, “When I was a child, I *spake* as a child, I *understood* as a child, I *thought* as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.” He did not wake up one morning and just put aside all his childish thinking and begin all of a sudden to think differently. His mind went through a process of change just as his body went through a process of change. Because our bodies do change, it is *possible* for the urges of our bodies to get ahead of our minds. It is even possible for our urges to take command of our wills and to lead our wills. You can lead a bull about if you put a ring in his nose. A bull is a large creature and yet, if you have a ring in his nose, you can lead him about wherever you want him to go. Adolescents, teens, young men and women: often our bodies get ahead of us so that we do what ever our urges lead us to do like that large bull led by a small ring. That is wrong. We have to be prepared *ahead of time* — before it happens — so when it does happen we are prepared. That is why I am talking to you, children, no matter what age you are. *You need to be prepared*. Fathers, it is our job to help our children through this time. Adolescence is that period of time when we change from children to adults. Because of the struggle that is going on *chemically* in our bodies during

that time, we need *spiritual* help. The primary place we should be looking for that spiritual help is to our fathers. One of the key things wrong with dating is that it *panders* to that *very change* that is going on in the bodies of our children.

So, what is wrong with dating? We will discuss this subject under four heads. There are four specific things in regard to dating that need to be ‘cut off at the root.’ The *first* is that there is a *virtual denial of parental oversight and counsel*. Dating is founded upon the autonomy of the child. It violates the very foundation of the family authority structure. The child takes an authority to himself that really belongs to his parents.

Second, dating *promotes or panders to sexual impurity*. I have some statistics we will discuss later that will alarm you. These statistics are not simply for American teenagers in general. I have drawn together statistics from various sources specifically regarding children of evangelical Christian believers. Children, in other words, who have grown up in the church. Children who perhaps have been baptized; children who have called upon the name of the Lord. When children of evangelical parents date, the statistics demonstrate that they become prey to the very same sexual impurities to which the world’s children fall prey. *Let us not send the lambs out among wolves*.

The *third* thing that is wrong with dating is that it is based on the *wrong concept of commitment*. In modern dating practices, first one becomes romantically involved and then he makes a commitment. The biblical pattern is very much the opposite. First we choose whom we will love, then we love whom we have chosen. Let me repeat that. *First we choose whom we will love, then we love whom we have chosen*. There is no passage in the Scripture where we are commanded to love anyone in a romantic way other than our husbands and wives. For us as teens, with hormones surging through our bodies, to lay ourselves open to such temptations, or for us as fathers to lay our sons and daughters open to such temptations is for us to be derelict in our duties. It may be that your son or your daughter has gone out on a date and you can say to me, “Pastor Bacon, my daughter went out on a date and I was hiding in the bushes. I know that nothing immoral happened.” That is great! I can show you five-year-olds that have played with matches and did not burn the house down. But because disaster did not strike the first time does not mean that we hand boxes of matches to our five year-olds. Additionally, I suspect that most fathers were *not* hiding in the bushes while their daughter went on a date and do *not* have first hand knowledge of everything that occurred.

As we begin to talk about the *fourth* thing that is wrong with dating, I want to reflect upon the fact that we become what we practice. The tennis star Monica Seles was stabbed a few years ago. She said it took her some time to heal from her wounds, but since then she has just been practicing again and again and again. She has to practice just hitting the ball over and over. She is practicing her serve over and over. She understands that *we become what we practice*. Even Major League baseball players go out before the game and have batting practice. They know how to hit a baseball, but they understand that “practice makes perfect.” The fourth thing against dating is that *we practice having a short-term involvement and then breaking up*. It should not be a surprise to learn that the same nation that invented dating also has the highest divorce rate in the civilized world. We spend all of our relationships figuring out how to break up. The first time a young man and a young woman go out with one another, breaking up is hard. That very first break up is very difficult emotionally. The right words just are not there. But after awhile, the young man learns to go out with other young girls and the young girl learns to go with other young men, and they learn to break up. They learn to say, “Let’s just be friends.” Breaking up becomes easier and easier and easier. *Dating is practicing breaking up*. As we practice breaking up, we become very good at it! Then it becomes easy to break up, *even after marriage*. It leads to divorce. We have developed what might even be called a pattern of infidelity.

We are not opposed to dating simply because we never did it. We are not opposed to it simply because it is new, though for four thousand years the church has never used dating to find husbands and wives for one another. Dating is a recent phenomenon and it is a peculiarly western phenomenon. There are several questions we ought to ask. Why are we, the people of the church, involved in such a thing? *The church learned dating from the world*. Why does the church now accept it almost unquestioningly? If you tell most Evangelicals that dating is not a good idea, they will look at you as though you just walked out of the seventeenth century — or the first century. Parents, if we take a stand — and I think we should — against our children dating, we will find opposition. Some of the opposition may be from our own children because all their friends date. — “Johnny dates and Mary dates. Why can’t I date, dad?” — You will need the notes from this sermon. You will need the principles discussed here. Fathers, you may not need it tomorrow morning — maybe your ten year old daughter will not want to date tomorrow morning. But the day will come when you will be called upon to answer that question, dad. If you have taken the right

stand, you will be at odds with the world. You will be called upon to give a reason for the stand you are taking.

Dating Denies Parental Oversight

I think there are certain principles that should be presupposed in seeking a spouse. Scripture does not give us explicit instructions. There is not a book in the Bible called, “The Book of First Find a Wife”—or, in the case of many people in today’s society, “Second Find a Wife” or even “Third Find a Wife.” However, Scripture does give us principles throughout that undergird the methods of finding a wife. The first of these principles is that it has to be done *with parental oversight and counsel*. Dating undermines that. This is going to sound very “Victorian” of me, but nevertheless let me say it. There may be times when a young man and a young woman, in trying to determine their suitability for one another, might take a walk where you cannot overhear their conversation. How should you handle that? You walk behind them fifty feet. You do not send them out alone. You *do* chaperone. This is considered a foreign concept in today’s society. The word “chaperone” means headship. A covering is a “chapeau” and the word “chaperone” comes from the same Latin word. If you are going to be the head of your children, fathers, *you will chaperone your children*. You will be with them in your role as the head of their family. Dating violates that principle.

In Genesis chapter two, as God brought the various animals to Adam, God ‘saw’ that none of the animals were suitable for Adam. In verses 21 - 24 we read, “And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he [God] took one of his [Adam’s] ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.” One of the implications of this passage is that the man leaves his father and mother. That presupposes that the man, prior to his marriage, was *with his father and his mother!* His father and his mother had some input in his life even to the very point of his leaving them to become married, and cleave to his wife. Eve did not have a father to give her away in marriage, so we see that God gave her to Adam. Nowhere in this passage do we see Adam having any input in this decision. God brought Eve to Adam and Adam immediately recognized that God had done the right thing by him. Adam and Eve were made one.

In verse 24 of this passage the “therefore” indicates “not until.” One of the problems in American society is that parents let their son or daughter come back home again. The Bible commands that they *leave*. Of course a child can visit his parents, but he does not return home to *live* with his parents. Sons, you do not go back to mom and dad. Daughters, you *especially* do not leave your husband to go back to your parents. A story was related to me recently of a young woman of a few generations ago who decided she would leave her husband and go home to her parents. Her father said, “I gave you away. You go back to the husband I gave you to.” Forced to work things out, the young couple did so and had a long marriage after that. There is a principle involved here. The principle is that we *leave father and mother*. Therefore, if we are not *financially capable* of leaving our parent’s house, we are not ready to get married. Young men need to be *financially ready* to marry. Young women also need to be prepared for marriage. They need to know how to keep a home. Mothers, you need to teach your children how to keep and make a home. Sometimes we call our wives “housewives.” That is a wrong concept. Our wives are not “housewives;” they are *homemakers*. In Titus 2:5, Paul uses the term “keepers at home.” They make a home for us. They are guardians of our homes. The young woman who is aspiring toward marriage needs to be *capable of running a home*. Mothers, you should be teaching your daughters to run a home. They are not ready to leave until they can. Fathers, one of our responsibilities is to help our sons attain a vocation. They need a vocation that will pay them enough to support some *other father’s daughter*. Our children leave the house of their parents when they are prepared to do so — and not before.

Because Eve had no father, *God* gave her to Adam. We would normally see the father giving the daughter away. The one solemnizing the marriage asks, “Who gives this woman away?” The father answers. “Her mother and I do.” *The father is vouching for the fact that he and his wife have raised their daughter to be a godly homemaker*. There is a lot of significance in this small statement. These are not idle words. Fathers are tasked throughout Scripture with giving their children in marriage. No sane person would be willing to give away one of the most precious things in his life to a stranger. And the most precious thing you will ever give away is your daughter. *We ought not to be giving our daughters to strangers*. The same thing is true of our sons. *We ought not to be giving our sons to strange women*. Children are commanded in Scripture to heed their parents’ counsel. Throughout the book of Proverbs, we are instructed to attain wisdom by listening to *and heeding* our parents. The decision to follow Christ

is the most important decision that any of us will ever make. Apart from that, the most important decision we will ever make is who will be our life partner. And children often are not seeking the advice of their parents in this most important decision. In America today, many make this decision lightly. From the very beginning they have decided that if they do not like choice number one, they can go on to number two, — and some go on to number three and even number four.

Children are commanded to heed parental counsel because parents are more than merely advisors. Parents are their heads. Parents are not simply collecting opinions as to what other parents are doing. *Parents should follow Scripture* as to what the Bible commands them to do. Proverbs 1:8-9: “My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother: For they shall be an ornament of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck.” Proverbs 13:1: “A wise son heareth his father’s instruction: but a scorner heareth not rebuke.” Proverbs 15:5: “A fool despiseth his father’s instruction: but he that regardeth reproof is prudent.” Also, in 1 Corinthians 7:36-38, “But if any man think that he behaveth himself uncomely toward his virgin, if she pass the flower of her age, and need so require, let him do what he will, he sinneth not: let them marry.” The word “man” here in this passage does not mean potential husband. It means “father.” The idea here is that the father is behaving himself uncomely toward the unmarried daughter. That is the context. If any man thinks he behaves uncomely toward his daughter (toward his virgin, toward the maiden daughter) if she pass the flower of her age (that is if she has reached puberty, if she has reached marrying age), and need so require, let him do what he will — that is to say that he may in fact let her be married. Now, in this particular letter Paul was writing to a church that was in affliction. There was considerable persecution ahead. Their question was, “Should we get married in spite of the fact that we are going to be undergoing considerable persecution and distress?” Paul answered that, even in a situation like that, it was permissible to go ahead and get married.

“Nevertheless he that standeth stedfast in his heart, having no necessity, but hath power over his own will, and hath so decreed in his heart that he will keep his virgin, doeth well.” Notice that Paul proclaims the father to be the custodian of his daughter’s will. Our confession rightly says that a father ought not to withhold his permission to marry *except for good reason* (WLC 139). That is what Paul was discussing. There was a situation in that day, in that church, in that locality, in which there may have been good reasons not to be giving the daughter in

marriage. Notice that the father had the *custodianship of his daughter’s will*. That just grates against the American psyche. We in America have ignored the concept of the covenant. We talk about family values and then we come to the church and break up the family in Sunday Schools and Youth Groups. We talk about family values then *we let our daughters go out with men we would not trust with our car*. Shame on us! We need repentance. Judgement begins at the house of the Lord. If we, the children of God, do not repent we surely cannot call upon the world to repent.

Dating mocks the covenant. Dating mocks parental involvement. Dating panders to the autonomy of teenagers. Think about how ridiculous is the idea of an eighteen-year-old full of hormones choosing who his life partner is going to be. Dating couples spend most of their time completely alone and unchaperoned. They often make decisions based on sexual trade-offs. They have little or no oversight. Eventually, the big day will come when they bring him or her home to meet their parents. In this country there are young girls wearing make-up and going on dates at twelve and thirteen years old. We *think* we are virtuous because we make our children wait until they are 16 and can drive a car to do that!

We need to make some applications. Let me explain my personal background of how I went about finding a wife. First I decided I was ready to get married. I did not date just because I wanted to be socially accepted by my crowd. The first application is that our children do not date just to be sociable. There can be young persons’ activities where all of the young people in the church go bowling together in a chaperoned situation. They can all go roller-skating or on a picnic or some other activity where there is plenty of oversight. *However, there is no one-on-one dating*. Next, you wait until you are *ready* for marriage. Young men, you wait until the person you are going to take out is someone that you would be willing *to support for the rest of your life*. Young ladies, he should be someone whose home you are prepared *to guard for the rest of your life*. Before you become emotionally involved or physically involved with anybody, you should *make a list*. Make a list of those qualities you want in a life mate. The list may have twenty items or it may have fifty things. Some of those things are going to be absolutely irreducible — “These I absolutely require and I will not settle for less.” Other things are going to be negotiable — “Wouldn’t it be nice if ...” There is a difference between those two things. There are some things that you will not do without. What are some of the things on your list that you will not

do without? If you want a family, then she must want a family. That is irreducible. She has to be a Christian. She has to be someone who is exhibiting at some level the fruit of the Spirit. She has to appear to be walking with the Lord.

Children, let me suggest to you that, to the extent that you know how to pray, you *should pray for your parents* for wisdom! If they are going to be helping you with this decision, if they are going to be guiding and counseling and advising you in this decision, they need God's help. You should pray for wisdom for your parents. *Pray for yourself* too, children. You are going to need considerable humility, you are going to need considerable patience, and you are going to need considerable discernment as you listen to your parents. It is the nature of youth to desire to be independent and to do this yourselves. Somewhere along the way between sixteen and twenty we turn into two-year-olds again and want to do everything ourselves. At two a child learns to say, "I'll do it myself." That phrase returns when we are between sixteen and twenty. So, children, you need to pray that God will give you patience, discernment and humility as you work with your parents in finding a life-long partner for you. Go to your mom and dad. Let them know that you are counting on them. Let them know that you are going to be depending on *their* wisdom, *their* discernment, and *their* insight into what you should be looking for. Develop that list. Start now. *Do not make the list after you have already gotten interested in somebody.* Your list will look just like that person. Make the list before you are emotionally involved. Make the list when you are 'thinking straight.' Make the list when you have nothing to lose and everything to gain by putting the best qualities on that list. Do not aim too low. Keep your sights high.

Think about this for a moment. Your mom and dad are praying for your future partner. You are praying for your future partner. If everything is as it ought to be, your future partner will be praying for you. Now the responsibility becomes even greater. You have a responsibility to *become* the person God expects you to be. You have a responsibility to become the person that the other young person has on *his* list. You should desire *to become the person who is on your future spouse's list.* That means we have to pray and *work toward spiritual maturity.* We need to strive to bring out those gifts that God has given each of us. You need to make a covenant with your parents, children. They promise not to bring home a "bunch of duds" and you promise not to go out looking for a "bunch of duds." You need to have a covenant with your parents that you are going to seek

out a life partner in a godly way. Can you do that? I know that some of you are five or six years old and are saying easily, "yes sir." Keep that in mind when you are twelve. Keep that in mind when you are fourteen. Keep that in mind when you are eighteen. Keep that in mind when you are twenty. When you make your list, give a copy of it to your dad. When young men start to "come a'calling," you can sit down with dad and go over the list. I am talking about making a *commitment to follow this teaching.* Girls, do you know how much it would break your daddy's heart — how much it would break your pastor's heart — if you were to marry the wrong fellow? I am not telling you these things to take your fun away. I am telling you these things because I want you to have a life of happiness and joy and love with the fellow that God has in mind for you. That may not happen if we cater to the flesh. You need to pray for that future spouse. At what age should you begin to pray for your future spouse? As soon as you are old enough to pray you are old enough to begin to pray for your life mate. Imagine being able to say on your wedding day "I have been praying for you since I was two years old."

Finally, and most importantly, *work on your own sanctification.* Get ready. Be ready. Ladies, become that homemaker that God wants you to be. Men, become that provider, that covenant head that God wants you to be. Practice headship, men. Practice submission, women. Young men, you cannot learn headship until you have learned submission. As young men you should submit to your parents. You must learn to submit to a parent. Then you will know what you are to look for in the way of godly submission. You will learn how to be a leader by learning how to be submissive. First we should work on our own sanctification. Next we should avoid those things we are going to be discussing in the next few sermons: sexual impurity and depending upon romantic ideas instead of covenantal commitments. We should avoid developing patterns of infidelity. I first wanted to consider practical application. Next, we will hammer home our reasons. We must have biblical principles as to why we do not choose a life partner the way the world does. Then we will be able to develop together over the next few sermons an answer to the question, "If not dating, then what?"

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