

OpenTheo

Approaching Marriage



Toward a Radically Christian Counterculture - Steve Gregg

In "Approaching Marriage", Steve Gregg discusses how the teachings of Scripture differ from societal norms when it comes to finding a partner and getting married. Gregg emphasizes that while marriage may be a general calling, it is not the original calling for anyone, and it is not good to approach it outside of the church. He argues against casual dating and instead suggests that individuals should remain true to their convictions and seek out potential mates who share the same belief system. Gregg also emphasizes the importance of respecting the sanctity of marriage and avoiding anything that might lead to inappropriate physical contact or emotional attachment with someone who is not a suitable partner.

Transcript

Tonight we're going to be talking about the topic of approaching marriage and the ways in which that would be done differently in a society that was following radically the teachings of the Scripture in contrast to that society in which most of us were raised. which society, Western, American, 20th century society most of us have been raised in up to this point, has often seen itself as Christian, at least has been strongly influenced by the Christian documents of the scripture, and by Christian values to a certain extent. And yet, long before any of us in this room were born, our culture moved away from what the Bible teaches on the subject before us, and that is the subject of approaching marriage.

Now, the last several sessions that we have had have been related to the topic of the culture of families confronts the culture of individuals, and we've said almost all that I'm going to be saying in this series on families before we go on to something entirely different. But this is, I expect, the last lecture of this general category, and it seems inadequate to feel like we have addressed what the scripture says about families without talking about the biblical teaching that has to do with the forming of a family, the creation of a family. And of course, a family is created when a marriage takes place between a man and a woman.

That is a family. We might think more commonly of a family beginning when a child is

born or children are present, but actually some married couples never have children. They may be barren, but that doesn't mean they are not a family.

They are a family, but of course the normal situation is that a family would have children, but there are families that cannot or do not for some other reason. That does not mean they're not families. What is essential to the creation of a family is a marriage, and most of us are called into that institution at some point in our lives.

I say most because the Apostle Paul acknowledged in 1 Corinthians 7 that some people never will marry, and that is not simply an unfortunate circumstance for them. Some of them have the gift, Paul said. He didn't call it the gift of celibacy.

He did speak of it as a gift, the ability not to marry, to be unmarried and undistracted, but he did say in 1 Corinthians 7 to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife and every woman her own husband. He said he gave that instruction by concession, not commandment, because he would like it if more people were capable of remaining celibate lifelong, but Paul was realistic. He says to one is given this gift to another another gift.

By that he means that the gift of a spouse is a gift from God, and the gift of being able to remain celibate without a spouse is also a gift from God. There are two callings along these lines, the calling to be single and the calling to be married, and Paul's general statement in the beginning of 1 Corinthians 7 indicates that the calling to be married is the more general calling, the more common calling in the sense that more people are likely to be called to the marital state than are called to the special state of singleness, which Paul described as a state of being devoted wholly in body and in mind to the service of Jesus Christ. Some people, like maybe some missionaries and some people who are called to various full-time ministries, might find that to be unmarried is a better situation for them, or even, you know, it may be that some people may wish to be married, but they are given grace to be single, and God has not simply brought marriage into their experience yet, and so they, you know, they are to devote themselves to the Lord until such a time that God might bring them a spouse or bring them into marriage, but notwithstanding these exceptions, we find that the general teaching of Scripture is expressed well enough in God's original statement on the subject in Genesis chapter 2 that it is not good for man to be alone.

Now, when he said that about Adam, Adam was truly alone. There were no other humans. He had no human society or human companionship, and God created a marriage to remedy that by creating a wife.

It is possible today to be unmarried, but not necessarily to be alone. We have the fellowship of other Christians, and therefore it should not be argued that it's bad to be single. It is not bad to be single, but it is good to be married or single as God has called you.

Now, assuming that the majority of people are to be married or probably will be married, and I think that that is implied in Paul's general statements, I would like to address the question, how does one move from the position of being unmarried to the position of being married? Marriage may be a very general calling, but it's not an original calling for anyone. No one is born married. Everyone is born single, and if they are going to transition from that state into a married state, something, some things are going to have to happen.

They're going to have to meet somebody that they decide they want to spend the rest of their life with. That person is going to have to have some kind of a mutual sense about that and agree to that. There's going to have to be some commitment made and housekeeping set up and so forth.

There are things by which people transition from the single state to the marital state, and in every culture there are certain norms that have come into being that basically express the sentiments of that culture as to how marriage is to be entered by those who have not yet been married. So that you have courtship customs and betrothal customs and in our society dating customs that have become the dominant consensus of people who live in a particular society as this is how we do it. This is how our young people find each other and get acquainted with each other to the point where they can make a decision to marry.

Every culture has their own. For many centuries, most cultures had some customs different than those with which we are the most familiar, because about a hundred years ago, things began to change in our society, less than a hundred years ago really, and the idea of dating and playing the field and trying out several potential partners before one decides who they will marry became more and more normative. So that today it's a given, even in Christian circles, it's very common to assume that a person should not marry the first person that they fall in love with, but they should experiment with a number of relationships.

Play the field, as I said, get some experience with maybe a number of romantic relationships, and then having had some pool of experience from which to draw upon, make an informed decision as to which of those people you'd like to spend the rest of your life with. This mentality, as I say, is so common among us that if you would challenge it, you'd be looked at as if you came from another planet by people who are not Christians, and more often than not, I think you'd be looked at the same way by the average Christian in our society. If you go to the average evangelical church and suggest that the young people should not be encouraged to date each other until they're prepared to marry, most people would think that you'd, you know, been in a time warp for over a hundred years and that you somehow were just way out of touch with reality.

In fact, they would not even know that what you were suggesting is what was the

common morality of almost all cultures until, as I say, less than a hundred years ago on our own. We are such creatures of our own age, more than we know. We're so provincial in our thinking that we assume that what we grew up with and what our parents grew up with is what, you know, intelligent people have always done.

But that's not necessarily the case. That's simply the courtship rituals of our dominant culture here in the West. Now, there are many Christians today who are advocating that the courtship rituals of our culture here in the West are not very good.

They're not producing very good results. After all, in the very process of this courtship, lots of young girls get pregnant. A lot of people go through emotional trauma because they get bonded to someone, one another, and break up.

There's a lot of jadedness, a lot of sense of by the time you marry someone you're getting damaged goods, somebody that's been passed around a great deal. And then many times even the product of this courtship, the marriages, are not really all that we could wish for. Certainly the stability of marriage in our culture has not been a very good advertisement for whatever courtship rituals are being followed in our culture because we now have heard from George Barna, the statistician, that just with this year the rate of divorce is higher among evangelical Christians than it is among the population at large in general.

Now, it's not good outside the church either. I mean, it's a great shame that it would even approach the percentages of the world, much less exceed them. But the culture at large is seeing less than a 50% success rate in its marriages, which ought to, if there was nothing else to raise our eyebrows, should make us wonder whether we're approaching marriage in a way that really makes sense.

Is this really the way God designed for it to be done? Are people, you know, supposed to make these terrible mistakes? And how could they be prevented from doing so? As a result of this, many Christians have felt they certainly want to protect their children. Unfortunately, not enough Christians want to do this, but very commonly, especially in the homeschooling crowd, since homeschoolers typically are those parents who really are more than average interested in protecting their children from the evils of the temptations of a really corrupt environment, many homeschoolers in particular, and some who are not, have begun to seek alternatives to the courtship ritual of our society. And many have, I feel, made a grave mistake, and that is that they have substituted for the carnal and worldly rituals of our society, the carnal and worldly rituals of other societies of the past, including Jewish.

It's often thought, I don't know why, the Bible certainly doesn't support this notion, but Christians often have this sentimental notion that whatever the Jews did in the ancient past must somehow be pleasing to God. They must not have read much of the Old Testament, because most of what the Jews did in the Old Testament was very

displeasing to God, and certainly Jesus' condemnation of the religious practices of the Jews and so forth does not encourage Christians to think that just going back to Jewish ways is somehow a good solution to our present problem. But you know how many people have just assumed, probably because of the emphasis on Bible prophecy and the importance of the Jews, as it is often taught, that more Jewish is better.

For example, there was a real fad a couple decades ago, and it probably is still with us to some extent, of having worship songs that are cast in a sort of a traditional Hebrew style of music, which I, by the way, like. I like Hebrew style music. Some people may not, because it's minor chord and so forth, but somehow, I remember not too very long ago, probably a decade and a half ago, the idea of Jewish dance became very popular, at least in charismatic churches, getting Hebrew traditional dance and Hebrew traditional sounding music in the church somehow was considered to be, you know, getting back to our roots or something like that.

Well, my roots are in Jesus, not in Judaism, and Jesus himself denounced not only his Jewish roots, but also the roots of his immediate family. When he said, who are my mothers and my brothers? Only those who do the will of my father and my mother and brothers. There's really nothing sanctified about the man-made customs of the Hebrew culture any more than the man-made customs of any other culture, including our own.

So it is, I believe, a mistake for Christians to say, okay, it's not working. Western culture is not really functioning in the way it should in order to produce godly courtships and stable godly marriages. What shall we do? And the answer that some have given is, go back to the Jewish rituals.

Well, the Bible does not advocate going back to Jewish rituals, and many have done it and appealed to nothing more than that the fact that traditionally the Jews did this, they had this length of courtship, they had this factor, this factor, this factor, and they said, this is the way we ought to do it. And many people have been doing that now for some time. I first taught on the topic I'm about to address right now, I suppose, five, six years ago.

At that time, I was not aware of very many people who were teaching on it. They may have been out there, but I had not encountered them. I know, I think I knew of only one who is teaching these things at that time besides myself.

But apparently, either at that time or since that time, a lot of people have been traveling around doing seminars, writing books, teaching on this subject that is usually termed betrothal. And sometimes the term courtship is used. These are not necessarily identical terms and meaning, but those terms are both commonly used as expressions of a norm that is to be preferred over whatever is more normal in our secular culture today, usually referred to as dating.

We'll talk about all these things in a moment. What I wanted to say is that now, several years into the emphasis on this subject, there have been a number of marriages that have been contracted in this way. Some of them have been positive experiences.

I know of at least one couple in Texas that travel around the world giving talks about how their betrothal was conducted, and they followed as much as they could the Jewish way of doing it and so forth. And it was a big blessing to them. They're all glad they did it and so forth.

There's some happy results, but there's also some unhappy results I'm hearing about. I'm hearing that some people have followed some of these procedures and been very disappointed with the results, and have had second thoughts when it was too late as to whether that was the right way to go either. Now we might say how tragic that people may have followed the Jewish rituals and after it was too late decided they'd gone about the wrong way.

It is tragic, but it's no more tragic than the fact that the vast majority of Americans have followed the American cultural way, and a great number of them after it was too late figured they made some mistakes too. We've all made mistakes, and many of us have made mistakes in the way that we approached marriage. And it is my desire that we could somehow discover what the Scripture says, if anything, that will help us to not make those mistakes, those who are still single and may hope to marry again, or perhaps even more importantly, how to help our children avoid making those mistakes.

Many of us, even if we hit on the right idea right now, and we were single right now, for us it'd be too late to do everything right, because we've already done so many things wrong. But that doesn't mean that there's no sense in discovering the right way. All of us will be in the position at some time to counsel our children or grandchildren, cousins, nephews, nieces, neighbors, Sunday school children, whatever.

I mean all of us really ought to have some idea of what the Bible says on this subject, because until some generation is brought up in the church that is taught the biblical way, we'll simply keep duplicating the kind of results we've been getting. And as I said, substituting a carnal Jewish culture for a carnal American culture isn't the answer. But there are some things that we can learn from Scripture that will help us.

I've recently read some critiques of some of the courtship practices that have been out. One of these critiques, well both of them that I've read, have come from newsletters that come from families that I feel pretty like-minded with. And yet when they critiqued the courtship, one refers to what they're critiquing as courtship, the other calls it betrothal.

These terms are sometimes used interchangeably, though they don't exactly have the same range of meaning. But the critiques seem to be a criticism of something I have not myself seen nor taught. I read these critiques and I thought, I wonder if these critiques

could be leveled against what I've taught in the past on this subject.

So I pulled out my tapes just this morning. The last time I taught it was a couple years ago, and then I had taught it three years before that. I listened to my tapes and I was relieved to find I hadn't said anything or advocated anything that they were critiquing.

But apparently there are some people out there saying this is God's way of finding a mate, and then giving a whole bunch of stuff that isn't anything to do with what the Bible says. It's like when people go around saying this is God's way of raising children, and then they write a book this thick on it, when in fact God's book on it, if you took all the statements about raising children, would be much thinner, because God didn't give all the specifics these people do. But people sometimes make a ministry for themselves saying we are the experts on God's way of raising kids.

Well some are doing the same thing, saying this is God's way of bringing young people together for marriage. And a lot of times some of the things they say aren't really what God said, and therefore it's a bit presumptuous to say this is God's way. I was once talking to somebody on the radio about this.

We were talking about the subject some years ago, and a listener who didn't much sympathize with what I had to say sent me an email, something he pulled off the internet, and said here are the biblical ways of finding a mate. And it had probably about 20 cases, all of them from the Old Testament. One was when the Benjamites kidnapped women to take against their will as wives.

Another was when you conquer a people and bring home the slave girls. If you see a beautiful woman you want to marry, you can marry her and take her and shave her head so she can mourn the death of her parents for a month, and then take her. And it gave all these different cases from the Old Testament that were, I mean, they're bizarre.

They're bizarre to us. And the purpose of the man who sent me this was to show that for me to advocate anything from the Bible as a means of finding a mate, I might as well advocate these things. Kidnap your neighbor's daughters, and go conquer your neighbor's country, and take captive the women, and so forth.

And they didn't seem to understand that I'm not suggesting, I never have suggested, that Christians ought to follow the practices of the Hebrews in the Old Testament. But that the Bible is not silent when it comes to certain matters of principle and of morality that our culture, including the churches in our culture to a very large extent, often ignore. And I think very much to the detriment of the purity of the church.

So I'd like to talk about this tonight. Some of the things, by the way, that these criticisms of courtship or betrothal have raised, let me tell you some of the things that they are criticizing. And I will agree with these criticisms.

One, and again these must be things that are being advocated by some people that I've never personally listened to, but one of the things they complain about is the imposition of extra-biblical Jewish customs. I've already said a fair bit about that. I agree with that objection.

We should not impose extra-biblical Jewish or other kinds of customs, at least not as a norm and say this is the Christian way of doing things. I mean if a particular couple wants to, thinks it's charming to go about, you know, arranging their betrothal the way that the Jews did it in ancient times, you know, that might work for them. It's not, there's nothing against it.

I mean there's no reason why they can't. But for someone to say that's the Christian way is to make the mistake of confusing Christianity with rabbinism. Now rabbinism has nothing to do with rabies.

It has to do with the rabbis. And rabbinism is basically what Orthodox Judaism is today and what the Pharisees religion was in Jesus' day. It was basically the following of the customs of men who basically promoted them as if they were the Word of God.

There are people doing that today as well and using the same customs, the Jewish customs. Another objection to some, I guess, some of the teaching out there on this subject is its legalism and its sterility. That is to say that people are following a rigid and inflexible pattern.

So you've got to do it just this way. And many times the thing eliminates all leading from the Holy Spirit, eliminates all sense of the young people involved really, you know, being in love with each other and therefore becomes a very sterile and very inflexible and a very, you know, God's outside the thing altogether. It's just being done mechanically along the lines of certain principles that someone feels they've discovered.

And, you know, God doesn't really have a say in the matter. And therefore it's just legalistic and sterile. Another complaint that some of these have made is that, I guess, some of the teaching out there on this subject advocates a very smothering role of the parents, especially in the arrangements and also in the supervision of the couple.

There are some apparently who advocate that, you know, it should practically be like the arranged marriages of the Middle East. Not necessarily exactly like that. I don't know if I've ever heard, and I would be very surprised to hear any Christian teacher say, you know, people ought to make arrangements for the marriage of their children to someone else's child from birth, as occasionally is done in the Middle East.

Or I've never heard anyone really advocate doing what Abraham did in sending a servant to another country to find a wife for their son and bring him back and they marry immediately upon meeting for the first time. Apparently that which we read of in Genesis

with Abraham and Isaac and so forth, and Rebecca, is not really something that most Christians would want to do. Although in Jewish times, biblical times, it apparently was not a unique case.

That kind of thing apparently happened from time to time. But while I don't think anyone's advocating quite the role of the parents like that, there are some who have the parents micromanaging the whole matter. And so much so that the couple who are getting married are never even allowed to talk to each other except in the presence of the parents.

And there's just this smothering, suffocating involvement of the parents in the teaching of some. Now I will say this, I think some of my children have not understood my views of this, because I do advocate parental involvement. But I've never advocated anything like this.

And I know at least one or two of my children have expressed concern that maybe my wife and I will be involved to a degree that I've never intended to. I've never intended to be, and I've never taught that should be. But at the same time, I do feel we don't want to pendulum swing too far, but we are reacting here in advocating parental involvement.

We're reacting to a culture today where the parents in many cases don't even have a vote, don't have anything to say in the matter. The kids just meet someone at college or meet someone somewhere. And the kids have left home years earlier, and they meet someone and get married and inform the parents they're doing so, if they bother to inform the parents they're doing so.

And you know, so parental involvement is a factor, but apparently some people have really gone overboard in making the parents practically the ones who are doing the courting. And then one thing that one of these critics of courtship in particular laid heavily on, in fact it seems to be the principal thing, hopped on a great deal. And it was certainly a custom I've never heard advocated, but I guess there are some people out there advocating it.

And that is that they're telling these young people that before they court, they should have this list of qualifications for the person that they would marry. And this particular critic of that practice suggests that especially when a girl has this really demanding list of things that she's going to require her husband to be and do, that this, well there's certainly no biblical precedent for doing that. Now I believe that people can decide anything they want as to who they will marry and who they will not marry, in terms of what they'll hold out for.

I mean certainly all Christians would have to hold out at least for the person being a Christian. There might even be a certain level of spirituality that they would hold out for, and maybe even certain shared convictions. I don't think anyone could criticize that.

I think it would be rather foolish if one party believed in birth control and wanted to practice it, and the other person had a conviction that birth control was of the devil and was not of God. I'd say that that couple would be very foolish to get married without finding an agreeable partner in that matter, because otherwise you're gonna have to be celibate for a long time after you get married to get that worked out. But the fact is, there must be some people advocating a very detailed list of Mr. Right and Miss Right, and you know, don't marry unless they measure up to all these points.

This critic points out, of course, quite correctly, that in most of the biblical marriages there was no such long list of criterion, and therefore, you know, if people choose to do that, they're not choosing to do what the Bible advocates or models. I honestly don't think it'd be wrong for, for example, a young man or young woman who believes strongly that they, let's say they didn't believe in birth control, and they were convicted homeschoolers. I think that if they were being courted by somebody who didn't want to homeschool the kids and, and wanted to use birth control, I think it'd be very wise for the, the person with the stricter convictions to hold out until someone came along who shared those convictions.

I certainly wouldn't advocate throwing away all criteria, but these are some of the things I've been reading criticisms of. These are the points I've heard raised as criticisms against certain approaches to courtship and betrothal. These particular points apparently are the points that are being taught by many, but I've never encountered most of them.

I've never heard the people teach these things, and they have not been part of what I've taught in the past, nor what I would advocate today. I would like to stick more closely to what the Bible says and what it does not say. Let me start out by saying this, that I'd like to make a distinction between what all of us were raised, probably, thinking about this subject, that is, what is the courtship ritual of our dominant culture, that culture of which we were all products, and what, on the other hand, are the distinctives of the courtship rituals of the, of the Bible, and of what the Bible would require, really, if anything.

First of all, the, the rituals of our age that most of us were raised with can be referred to as dating. Dating is really a better word than courtship for it, in many cases, because while even worldly people in our society do believe in a thing called courtship, it usually is something that involves dating. It either means that you date a lot of people, at least as many as you can, before you begin to court one of them, or it even means that dating is itself the courtship, that the courtship is simply dating an individual that you feel pretty strongly attracted to, that you want to marry, and, and you're dating in order to find out whether that's the person you do want to marry.

I have problems, and I'm certainly not alone in this, even people who've reached different conclusions than I have about what the proper thing is, there's a lot of people have reached the conclusion that dating, as it is practiced in America, is simply not

moral. It's not biblical, and the saddest thing, the most shocking thing, is not that American culture advocates it, but that even the churches advocate it. Even some of the great cultural icons of evangelical Christianity on the radio advocate it, or at least they don't decry it, and sometimes the most that they can be heard doing is suggesting regulations upon it, rather than questioning the legitimacy of it altogether.

What is dating? Now, dating is not simply having a date, at least not the way I'm using it. Having a date is something that even a married couple might do. In fact, the word date often just means an appointment, you know, you know, getting together as a group of people can be a sort of a date, but when we talk about dating, we're talking about a practice of uncommitted, recreational, short-term, romantic encounters.

Now, all of those things are important to the to the notion of dating in our culture. It's an uncommitted, recreational, short-term, romantic encounter, and of course, we know it usually happens when somebody asks somebody else out, and they go out and do something. Maybe they go to a movie, maybe they go to a ballgame, maybe they go out to dinner, maybe they do a combination of these things, maybe they go to a party, but the thing is, one person finds another person attractive, asks if they want to go to such and such a place with them, and they go there together.

Now, this is not just like a brother and a sister going together to a ballgame or to a movie or out to eat, and it's not really like a couple of friends of the same sex. Now, it is possible for an unrelated couple, a man and a woman, to go to an event together without it being a date, in that sense, because they simply enjoy each other's company, but they're not romantically interested. The romantic part is an essential part of the definition of what we're calling dating.

If you have an entirely platonic relationship with somebody of the opposite sex, I'm not saying that I encourage this. I'm just saying that there's nothing to necessarily condemn it in Scripture, and if the relationship is entirely platonic and people like to do things together, then there's nothing really to be said against them going places together. It's not a romantic thing.

Now, also, I'm not suggesting that romance is an evil thing. Romance is a God-given thing, but just as there is with sex, also there is with romance, which is emotional foreplay related to the subject of sex, as God designed it at least, that there is an environment in which God intended for there to be romance and sex, and there's outside that environment He didn't intend for it to exist. What we have in our culture is a bunch of young people who have no interest in that particular proper environment.

That environment is marriage, of romance and sex. They have no interest in entering that environment, that sanctioned realm, but they do want to play around with the goods. They want to have romantic fun.

Now, I'm making a distinction between romance and sex in a certain sense, because I'm not going to assume that everybody who has a romantic interest in someone is trying to seduce them. I'm not going to suggest that everybody who has a brief romantic interlude on a date are necessarily becoming sexually involved with each other. I'm not equating those two things.

I would make a distinction between them, but I would say this, the two are related in that the first is designed by God to lead to the second. A romantic interest in another person is something that God put in people, I believe, in order to lead to full commitment and the full, unfrustrated, unrestrained expression of that commitment in a sexual relationship. There are many people who like the feeling of the romantic relationship who would never go so far as the sexual relationship, but of course we know there are people who like the feeling of a sexual relationship who would never go so far as marriage, but would seek both romance and sex.

We need to say, you know, it's not enough to say, well, I don't believe in premarital sex, but I do believe it's kind of cute when the kids go out and kind of get romantically interested in each other for a little while. I mean, that's, we feel like we're being more moral than the world when we draw the line at sex, but the Bible draws the line somewhere else, I believe, and I'd like to suggest to you something I'm going to develop in a later talk in this series when we talk about the culture of purity. I'd like to suggest to you a proposition that I will defend more at length another time, and that is that God, when He designed man and woman, designed them to have a romantic relationship, and only one, in a lifetime.

Now, I'm not saying that if you have more than one in a lifetime that you're in sin. Something has happened called the Fall. You may marry and plan to marry for a lifetime, and you may be widowed, or your spouse may desert you and run off with someone else, in which case another spouse in your life is not a sin, but it's not the ideal.

God never did design originally for people to have more than one romantic relationship in a lifetime. We acknowledge that sometimes circumstances due to the Fall may lead to a legitimate second or whatever, third romance, depending on the nature of the problem here, but I mean if you're widowed ten times and then remarried ten times, that's not really any fault of yours, but no one can say that's the norm or that that's what everyone would want. When we want to know exactly what God had in mind for the relationship between men and women, it's best to not use models that come to us after the Fall, unless it's models from Jesus' own teaching.

But when Jesus was asked, for example, on the subject of divorce, he said, well, have you not read how it was in the beginning? And the Pharisees made some kind of an appeal to a law that Moses made that seemed to be somewhat different than what Jesus was saying, and Jesus said, well, yeah, God permitted that because of sin, because of the

hardness of your hearts, but from the beginning it wasn't that way. And Jesus' appeal was, listen, do you want to know what God wants in this situation? Then don't look at the concessions he has made here, there, or somewhere else, or what he's permitted, or what he has not lowered the boom on, the things that God has allowed people to get away with. That's not what you should be looking at.

You should be looking at how God did it in the beginning, because you may recall before the Fall, when God made man and gave him a woman and brought them together, God said, it's very good. And if we want to do things in a way that God can look on and say, it's very good, then we ought to at least look back in principle at what did God do, and what did God institute that he said was so good? Because after that, surely a fall took place, and many things were not good after that, including some of the things God didn't immediately judge, some of the things God even permitted were not real good. We know that, for example, he permitted polygamy.

That's not real good, and it certainly isn't what he had in mind in the beginning. He permitted divorce. That's not real good.

It's not very good, but it's a necessity of the Fall, it may be in some cases. I mean, I don't necessarily think it's a necessity, but it happens. But the thing is, we're talking about, well, what did God really want? If we want to be like Jesus and say, we're going to form our opinions about these things based on how it was in the beginning, before it fell, when it was real good in God's sight, what can we discover? One thing that's very interesting is that God only made Adam one romantic partner.

He had many friends in the animal kingdom, but none of them were a mate to him. None of them were suitable partners in the sense of a romantic relationship, obviously. Many people are very fond of their animals, and I don't think there's anything wrong with being fond of animals, but God did not make Adam such that he was to have a romantic relationship with anything other than one who is made like himself, and there was only one made.

Now, this is an interesting thing. Since God stated his intention when he made the woman, he said to them, be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. Well, it wasn't many generations later that people discovered, you know, we can have a lot more kids a lot faster if one guy has a lot of wives.

Now, it doesn't help if a woman has a lot of husbands. She can still only have one baby or two at a time. She can have a hundred husbands.

It's not going to increase the population any, but for a man to have ten wives, well, then they can populate the earth much better. It seems like God could have figured that out. God wanted Adam to fill the earth, but he only gave him one woman to do it with.

He didn't give him four like Jacob had, or a thousand like Solomon had, or eight like David had. He gave Adam one woman. Why? Because that's how God designed it should be.

Adam... God could have given him a lot of romantic partners, but he didn't. He didn't put a lot of women around for Adam to play the field with a little bit and decide which one of them he wanted to be with. God brought him one and said, this is the one and this is it.

And for Adam's entire life, even after the fall, so far as we know, Adam had only one romantic partner. Now, you might say, well, that doesn't that's not the same thing as saying some kind of a command from God. You're right.

Maybe it isn't the same thing as a command from God. And if you're going to make all your decisions based on only those things that God gave direct commands about, you can be a good Pharisee. A Christian is supposed to be more concerned, not just about the things God commanded, but where God might have given us hints about what he's interested in.

We're not just... don't want to be legalists who just follow letters of the law. We want to say, well, did God give us... you know, okay, God said this much. We didn't say as much as I wish he had said.

I wonder, are there any hints elsewhere as to what God's mind might be on this? I want to be close to... I want to fit the pattern that he's interested in. And certainly, Jesus indicated that in the creation of man and woman, God has given us just that. That from which we can deduce and extrapolate basically all we need to know about what God wants for men and women.

And we can see this, that while God could have given Adam many wives to speed up the process of filling the earth, it obviously somehow was not in God's plan to do so. Now, I don't think it's because it was sexually dangerous. I don't think... I think it's entirely because of the nature of the man and woman relationship that God intended.

He didn't want a man having this kind of relationship with more than one woman. Not only at a time, but in a lifetime. Now, I realize that most of you who are of my generation or older here might feel like, well, what he's saying condemns me because I had more than one boyfriend or girlfriend before I married my spouse.

And I don't say any of that to condemn anyone. I say that simply to enlighten us all. I did not understand these things when I was young and single, and I did not follow everything that I would recommend to you.

But if I had been a bank robber and a drug addict, that doesn't mean I have no credibility to say, hey, don't rob banks and don't use drugs. I mean, when people make mistakes and get burned, you might want to listen to them. And all of us who are a little bit older

probably grew up without a lot of light on this subject and made some mistakes.

It doesn't mean that we don't have the credibility to go back to the Bible and say, here's where I turned off the right road. Here's why I didn't get it. Here's where my parents or my church or my school or the people that influenced me, here's where they let me down and didn't tell me.

And many times our parents didn't tell us because no one told them. They didn't know. But dating is what I'm calling dating and what our culture basically has as its primary courtship ritual, is an uncommitted, recreational, short-term, romantic encounter between two people.

I say it's uncommitted because they have no plans of marriage. Now, you might say, what, you tell me people in our culture don't plan to get married? Yes, they do. But that's not what I'm talking about.

Planning to get married is another thing. I'm talking about something that doesn't involve the plan of marriage. Something that many people find pressure to do from a very early age.

Even people who are otherwise seemingly godly people, Christian people, sometimes talk to little girls who are five years old. If they're real pretty little girls, they say, I'll bet you have a lot of boyfriends. Those kinds of comments.

As if, oh, I guess that's what I'm supposed to have, is boyfriends? What's this little girl supposed to think when she grows up? And from puberty on, a lot of times kids felt pressure to get involved in this dating thing. And if they're not, that they're somehow some kind of a wallflower, some kind of an outcast, someone who's not maybe appealing or attractive because they're not out there, you know, having these encounters with people. Many people have argued that dating is a way, A, of preparing for marriage.

I'm not sure in what way dating prepares anyone for marriage. If it's not preparing you to marry the person that you're dating. I don't know of anything that dating and marriage have in common with each other, except that two people are attracted to each other and feel romantic toward each other, but you don't need to practice that.

If you marry the right person, you'll have, you know, the romantic feelings come naturally. You don't have to get a lot of practice with previous relationships to know how to do that. Everything else about marriage doesn't have any overlap at all with what happens in dating.

Marriage is a sexual relationship. Dating is not supposed to be. Marriage is a permanent relationship.

Dating, by definition, is not. You're dating someone that you have no permanent

commitment to. And many people have felt that, and this has become rather a cliché, it's so true, it's been, you know, things that are really true become clichés, and sometimes we don't listen to them anymore because they're such a cliché, but we ought to think about why is it a cliché? People say it so much because it's so true.

It's become something of a cliché in the courtship circles to talk about that dating is not really a preparation for marriage, it's a preparation for divorce. Because what it conditions young people for is the idea that you can have a short-term romance. And you have that romance just as long as you feel romantic.

Once you no longer feel romantic to each other, you stop dating. And you look for someone else that you feel that way toward. This conditioning gives the basic impression that, you know, you're here to have a feeling of romance with somebody.

And as soon as you don't have it anymore, there's no reason to hang around them anymore. Find someone else that you can feel it with. And that's what dating conditions people for.

And if people get married on that supposition, they get married to someone they feel romantic toward. Most people have times in their marriage where they don't feel quite as romantic as they did when they first got married. Some lose it all together.

And because of that, many in our culture suppose, well, I just don't love this person anymore. No sense being married to him. I love this person over here more.

This person who works in my office. This person who's in the church with me. This person who's my neighbor.

This person who delivers the milk. I feel more attracted to them. I feel more those vibes toward them that I feel toward my spouse.

And, you know, the idea is I've been conditioned that if I don't feel this way toward them, you dump, you break up with them and you find someone else to start it up with. And another of those clichés in the courtship circles is that breaking up is hard to do, but it gets easier with practice. And dating is essentially an institution that allows practice.

Practice not at being married, not practice at being committed, practice at breaking up with someone that you once felt something for. And once a person gets a lot of practice, they find that they can do it a lot easier in the future. And if they do it enough before they get married, it's not too hard for them to do it after they get married either.

It's an institution that has no resemblance to marriage. And if anything, it has a lot more resemblance to promiscuity. Even when there is no sexual intercourse going on on a date, it is still promiscuous.

It's emotionally promiscuous. Think about it this way. Most people, most young people who are not married will be to somebody.

Now, if two people go out who are attracted to each other and they have no intention of marriage, and that's again part of what I'm calling dating, they're going out just for fun. It's recreational. It's not courtship really.

It may lead to that, but initially it's just for fun. They're attracted to each other. They may have enough morals or fear to behave themselves somewhat on the date, and they may not indulge in sexual promiscuity there, but they still are going out because they're attracted to each other and they're hoping to feel some good vibes about each other.

There's a romantic interest in other words. And yet, if they do not end up marrying each other, in most cases they will marry someone else. And the person they end up marrying is the one that apparently God wants them to be faithful to.

It's the one God had for them. But that person who marries them is now getting used property, which I think is properly called damaged goods. If a girl has given part of her heart to a young man and then she marries to someone else, that young man that she marries has to share her heart with another man who's got part of it somewhere else.

And he may never be really willing to let go of it completely. Michael Pearl, who writes the No Greater Joy newsletter, was talking about how his daughter recently married at age 26. She had never had a boyfriend.

It's very commendable the way he says it. Let me read this paragraph. It's really quite good.

He says, Rebecca was 26 when she married and she never had a boyfriend, never shared any kind of emotional or physical relationship with anyone. Her husband need not be concerned that someday a man may walk up to him and say, your wife and I used to be very special to one another. He is her first and only.

I doubt if most of us think any man's going to walk up to us and say, your wife and I used to be very special to one another. It'd be a very provocative thing to say. But even though a man may not say that, there may be men out there who think that because they were.

And they do have a part of your spouse's heart. And this is simply not something that God ordained. God did not make men to share their hearts with several women.

He did not make women to share their hearts with several men. He intended that there be basically one romantic relationship in a lifetime. Now, if you've had more than one already, that doesn't mean your life is ruined.

But it's jaded. I mean, we all, let's face it, let's get used to reality. All of us have had some imperfection in our past and we all bear some of the scars from that.

That doesn't mean that we have to multiply that or make light of it and say, well, I had to go through it, my kids are going to have to go through it too. Why should they? Why must they? Why do we have to perpetuate a damaging institution that has produced terrible fruit just because it's easier to go with the flow of our culture than to resist it? I would suggest that in this area, as in many, it's important for us to reassess what our culture has taught us and see whether the Bible gives us something better. Let me tell you what I believe is wrong with the whole idea of dating.

I've got four points here I'd like to make real quickly in rapid succession. First of all, dating in this uncommitted sort of way treats the emotions of other people as playthings. The idea of a date is to go and have a good time with somebody and to cultivate a romantic feeling.

Now, one person might say, this is harmless enough. I'm not really that interested in them. We're not going to fall in bed or anything like that and it's just for fun.

I'm just going to have fun. But at the other's expense, maybe the other was more interested than you are. You can't guarantee that they won't become attached.

It's just a gamble that should not be done. It's toying with their emotions. You cannot cultivate even a low-grade romantic relationship with someone without taking the risk that in them what is only a little smolder in you may become a flame in them.

In which case, you are exploiting their emotions so that you can have a good time on the weekend and that's all you want. But there's no guarantee that they won't want more but you're not going to give it to them because you have no commitment. It's just treating other people's emotions as playthings.

Secondly, it sometimes treats their bodies as playthings too because it's very seldom these days that two young people attracted to each other alone in an unsupervised situation for a protracted period of time that they don't eventually, if they do this very often, begin to have physical contact of a sort that really doesn't belong outside of marriage either. Now you might say, well Steve, what kind of physical contact do you think belongs only inside marriage? Is it okay to kiss? Is it okay to hold hands? Is it okay to hug? I mean, what exactly are you saying about physical contact that doesn't belong outside of marriage? How prudish are you, Steve? Well, there's a very simple way to answer that. What would you like your wife to be doing with somebody else? Or what would you like your husband to be doing with some other woman? Well, you only have to answer that question honestly and you'll know what kind of behavior is only proper within marriage and what is not.

You may have heard the story, I don't remember where I first heard it, but a young man, a Christian young man, but in a family that believed in dating, he was 16 years old, he was going out on his first date and he was a little nervous. He says, Dad, I've never been on a date before. I don't really quite know what I'm supposed to do.

And his father said, I thought it was pretty straightforward. You're going out to dinner and going to go to the ball game and come home. I mean, what's not to know? And the son said, you know, Dad, I don't mean that.

I mean, what am I supposed to do with a girl on a date? And his dad said, oh, okay, well, let me ask you a question. Are you going to marry this girl? He says, I doubt it. You know, this is just the first date.

I don't have any intention of marrying her. His father said, okay, you're not going to marry her necessarily. Do you think you'll ever marry anybody? And his son said, well, probably.

I kind of figured I would. It may not be her, but someday I expect to marry someone. And his father said, well, do you suppose this girl you're dating tonight, do you suppose she'll someday marry somebody maybe other than you? He said, well, she's an attractive girl.

I have every reason to believe she'll probably find a husband somewhere down the line and probably will marry someone. And his father then said, well, what about the girl you're going to marry? Do you suppose it's possible she might be going out on a date tonight with somebody? The boy said, have no way of knowing, but I guess there's nothing about that scenario that's unreasonable or impossible. It could be.

His father said, well, if the girl you're going to marry is going out with somebody tonight, what would you like him to do with her tonight? And that's what you should do tonight. Well, of course, the real answer is he'd rather they didn't go out at all. And there is a law, which is the primary law of Christianity, which if we're going to have anything like a radically Christian approach to marriage and to coming toward marriage from singleness, that law has to permeate all of our thinking as it does in all other categories.

And that is, as you would that men would do to you, do likewise unto them. I knew of a man who said that he was once interested in a young woman. He was a godly man and she was a godly young woman.

And they didn't have, they weren't dating or anything like that, but they went places together a lot, rather platonic really. It was more of a convenience thing. He didn't have a car, she did.

And they went to a lot of the same Bible studies and church meetings and things like that. So she often would drive him there. She lived in the same neck of the woods and came to pick him up on the way there.

And he said that at certain points he began to feel in his heart a certain romantic attraction to this woman. And he contemplated whether he ought to speak to her about it, but he said every time that came to his mind, he felt like the Lord spoke to him and says, have nothing to do with her, she's another man's wife. And yet she was single.

And so he backed down. This thing happened a few times. And then later it turned out that she did end up marrying his best friend.

And he told his best friend he was really delighted, since she wasn't going to be his own wife, that she ended up being his best friend's wife. But it was really a remarkable story, if we can credit it with truth, that is if he really did hear from God. Because it suggests that even though this was a single woman, as far as God was concerned, she really wasn't available.

She was really someone else's wife, because God had in mind for her, very shortly thereafter, to be married to somebody, and it wasn't Him. And as far as God was concerned, she was this other guy's wife. Now, I realize some people may not go for that kind of a conclusion, but there's really nothing unbiblical about it.

And we do know this, Paul said this in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, when he's advocating a strict code of moral purity, he says in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, beginning with verse 3, for this is the will of God, your sanctification, that means holiness, 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. And verse 6 says that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such. I always thought this was interesting, that he said that no one, and one there is masculine, no man, should take advantage of or defraud his brother in this matter.

Now, does this mean in the sense of adultery? I mean, how does a man defraud another man in terms of a sexual situation that he's advocating? Well, he's not using the word adultery, he's using the word fornication, which doesn't necessarily restrict it to adultery. And defrauding his brother, many have concluded, although it's not certain, may refer to the fact that when a man commits fornication with a woman who is not his wife, he is defrauding the man who will someday be that woman's husband. And that may be Paul's, may or may not be, but the point is, whether any of these anecdotal things prove the point or not that this person is already someone else's spouse even before they're married, in God's sight, we can say this, that if she's not yours, then you've got no business doing things with her that belong in marriage.

And what are those things? The things you wouldn't want your spouse doing with someone else. That's what thing, whatever it is. You might, everyone here would be offended, of course, if their spouse struck up an adulterous relationship with someone they met, you know, at the bank.

But would everyone equally condemn their wife, let's say, or their husband striking up an emotional romantic relationship without physical contact with someone they met at the same place? I mean, if a man never had a sexual relationship with the bank teller, but he and that bank teller developed an emotional bond, and he's a married man, would anyone have trouble seeing that as inappropriate? Would it not be obvious that his wife would be equally offended to know that her husband had a romantic, though non-physical relationship with a woman other than herself? Wouldn't that bother her at least almost as much as if it was physical? I would think so. I have no doubt about that. I know it would bother me if my wife had such, and it wouldn't have to be physical.

Just the fact it's an emotional thing there, it would make a man jealous, big time. It would be devastating. Now, if that's true, then when two young people go out together, even if they don't have a physical relationship, if they're cultivating a bond of this kind, and yet they don't really belong to each other, in fact, in reality, God may know that each of them belongs to someone else, and are going to marry somebody else.

Then this is as inappropriate, it seems to me. I can't see how any Christian could not see this, unless they just didn't want to. It seems obvious to me that romance is appropriate in marriage only, and if you don't think so, then just imagine your spouse having a romance with someone outside the marriage, and I think you'll suddenly recognize that it is.

It's only for marriage. So, dating is like dating, and it's wrong also because it affirms a model of love, that assumes no long-term commitment, thus diminishing the ability to think biblically about love once married. When someone thinks, I loved this person for a while, we went steady.

We dated for a while. We just thought each other was the greatest thing in the world, but now we just don't feel that way anymore, so we broke up, and now we're looking for someone else to do the same thing with. That just conditions an idea of love as something that can be temporary.

As long as it feels the way it did at the beginning, it's worth keeping around. That is a scary conditioning to bring into marriage, and many Americans bring it in, which is why so many marriages don't last. They don't start right.

It's not that there is so much done wrong in the marriage. There may have been a great deal done wrong in the marriage, but the problem in many cases has happened a long time before they even met each other. It's the conditioning about what love is that is wrong from the beginning.

When they get into marriage, they don't know any better. At least they're not conditioned any better. And of course, another thing that's simply an entirely different consideration is that dating someone that you're not committed to and that you're not

married to, but who you're attracted to, alone and unsupervised, definitely increases the danger of the temptation to fornication.

And while there are many young people who might be offended if you said to them, you know, I don't really think you should go out together because there's, you know, these strong hormonal things out there. You know, you could fall into temptation. Many young people would be indignant at the suggestion.

And yet, how many really good Christian people, even married ones today, can say that they avoided all those temptations completely when they were single? Now, I was a virgin when I got married the first time. But even so, I can't say that I avoided all those temptations completely. I was just technically a virgin.

There, I mean, there, you know, a kid was saying to his father, what, dad, you don't trust me to be with this girl alone in the car? You know? And his dad said, I wouldn't trust me to be alone with that girl in the car. I mean, adults are smarter than children sometimes. Adults often have learned by sad experience that temptation can be stronger than you anticipate it being.

And there are very, very few young people who have gone through a process of dating several people who have come out of it without compromising in some measure, even sexually. Even those who might say, I never went all the way. That doesn't mean there were no compromises sexually.

A great deal of compromise there. Now, I'm not saying that every time people date, they do fall into fornication. Some may not.

I say very few do not. But what's the point of running toward the temptation? The Bible says, flee temptation. Flee youthful lust.

Not run into it. This is where dating is just the opposite of the spirit of Christianity altogether. It does not do what it promises to do, but it does the opposite.

And it certainly works against Christian purity. It works against the stability of marriage. It is wrong-headed from the beginning.

And maybe that's why decent cultures rejected it until recent time. And even our culture had to become pretty debauched in order to permit it. Now, some people opt for what they call courtship, but it's really not much more than an intensified form of dating.

There's a lot of things that people call courtship. Technically, courtship isn't even a term found in the Bible. It's just the term for approaching marriage, trying to cultivate a relationship that will end in marriage.

That's what courtship is. The courtship ritual of our dominant culture is dating. And many

people say, well, I don't believe in dating, but I believe in courtship.

But what that is is simply a slightly modified form of dating. When I was a teenager, I had never been taught anything biblical on these subjects, but I just felt convicted that recreational dating with someone you didn't have any interest in marrying, it just seemed like that was wrong. I had a friend who was a younger Christian than I was, but an older young man, and he had had this girlfriend for two or three years, and they liked each other a lot, and they were pretty serious about each other.

But I asked him once, are you planning to marry her? He said, never really give it too much thought. They've been going steady for two, three years. And I said, it was strange to me.

I was only about 17, probably, or 18. I said, but don't you feel like you're using her? Now, what was strange to me is I asked what I thought was an obvious question. He's just using her.

He told me later he was really convicted by that because it never had crossed his mind that he was using her. He was just having fun. He figured she was too.

As it turns out, she really had wanted to marry him, but she was just waiting for him to get serious, and he didn't. She eventually married someone else, a man who was willing to get married to her. But it's a strange thing in our society that people sometimes don't even cross their mind to marry.

They just want to enjoy each other's companionship in a romantic way without ever getting committed. But some people say, no, you shouldn't do that. You should only date people who you are now interested in marrying, someone that you've actually made some kind of decision, I want to marry that person.

Then, of course, you date them in order to get to know them. We'll have to get married. That is a form of courtship that's slightly more ethical than mere recreational dating, but it's not all that much better.

It still has many of the same drawbacks. For one thing, because the two are not really committed to marriage, they're just interested in marriage, there's the possibility of breaking up and, therefore, of doing as much damage to the other person emotionally as before. I was talking about this on the radio once.

Someone called and asked my thoughts about dating, and I told them I thought it was bad for a number of reasons. I cited one of them is that it does emotional hurt to other people when you break up with them. If you're not committed, of course, you're going to break up with them, unless you get committed.

Either you get married or you break up. I always marvel when I hear the old pop songs.

When I go into a store and they're playing the songs from the 60s and the 70s, and probably the new ones are that way, too.

I just don't hear those ones, but I remember the older ones from when I was young. It didn't seem strange at the time to me, but so many of the songs were talking about how my girlfriend, she walked out on me, she found someone new, she's out the door, it looks like it's all over for us, and woe is me, and how sad, and I got a gun, I'm going to go kill her and go to Mexico, and so forth. These kinds of songs, and I was listening, I was in a store not too long ago, and I heard some of these songs on the radio.

I used to listen to these songs and not think what I now think about them. The first thing that comes to my mind right now is when he says, she walked out on me, and I thought, well, what did you expect her to do? Were you committed for life? Did you expect her to be committed for life? You had no commitment. What did you think would happen? You think you're going to be there for life without being committed for life? Of course she's going to walk out, either today or tomorrow or someday.

How can you complain that someone broke up with you when you never had any commitment not to do so? And even courtship, the way some people describe it, is really only a strengthened form of dating. It's just dating with a purpose. It's dating with an objective, with honorable intentions.

You know, I'll date this person, hoping to marry them. Now, when I was a teenager, as I said, I wasn't very well instructed. I knew well enough that you shouldn't just date around.

I had no interest or time even for that. But I thought that I was honorable because I would only go out with a girl if I thought that she might make a good wife. And I would only go out with someone so long as I was still thinking those terms.

I was eager to get married. From a young age, I knew I was going to get married and I was in the ministry and I didn't want to be distracted by being single and so forth. So, I mean, I was looking for a wife.

And I would not go out with a girl unless I really thought, seriously, this was a potential mate. And as soon as I knew a girl long enough to know that I didn't want to marry her, I wouldn't go out with her anyway. I wouldn't string her on.

I thought I was very honorable in that respect. But really, it's not really much better than dating. It's just the same thing, only you get people more interested before you break their heart, maybe, you know, because now they have more hopes.

I mean, if you're just dating without any talk of marriage, there's no hopes raised. If you're saying, you know, we're dating, think about maybe we're going to get married, then hopes get raised. And then if it breaks up, it's even more devastating.

I've mentioned this on a radio program. I started to tell you this story a moment ago. And a guy who didn't agree with my position called me and then sent me an email.

He said, he says, you complain that dating, you know, subjects people to emotional hurt and so forth. He says, isn't that kind of wimpy of you to be concerned about that? I mean, isn't hurt, isn't pain sort of a normal part of life? Don't we grow through pain? Doesn't the Bible indicate that trials are a part of life? And, you know, are we supposed to avoid all pain altogether and so forth? And I wrote back and said, you know, there's a very simple difference that you're overlooking here. It's true.

The Bible does say that God can use pain. We can grow through it. We can learn through it and so forth.

But there's a vast difference between enduring pain and inflicting pain. If we're looking for a Christian ethic, our Christian ethics may tell us, well, if I get hurt, I got to cope with it like a Christian. But our Christian ethics should also tell us I should not be unnecessarily hurting other people or, you know, subjecting them to the potential of hurt unnecessarily just so I can have a good time today.

I'd like to have a good time tonight. You may hurt for it tomorrow, but live with it, you know. You'll grow.

Well, maybe they will. But that's not for me to say. It may be if I rob them and beat them bloody and send them to the hospital, they may grow through that too.

But that's not a good thing for me to do. And dating is simply a form of exploitation. Now, many of us maybe weren't guilty of some of the more gross, objectionable things in our practices.

But I doubt that very many of us really ever heard when we were younger what it is that is the right way to do things. So let me suggest to you, I'm going to use the word betrothal because it's a biblical word. But let me make plain to you what the word betrothal means and what it does not mean.

Unfortunately, since a lot of people are running around talking about betrothal and they've got a whole bunch of other things attached to the subject besides what it really is, people who are otherwise unfamiliar with the term, when they now hear it, it has all of this baggage attached to it. A lot of people think that betrothal means an arranged marriage with a year between the commitment and the marriage and many times a whole bunch of other things attached to it. None of those things are implied in the Bible.

The word betrothal simply means this literally, a promise to marry. That's all it means. In the Bible, I believe the Bible not only models but teaches this in principle, that people do not become romantically interested in each other or at least do not cultivate a romantic interest between themselves until they have promised to marry.

Now, what's the difference between a promise to marry and a marriage oath at the wedding? To the Christian, not very much because when a Christian says they'll do something, it's supposed to be as good as if they made an oath. Jesus said you shouldn't have to take vows because your yes should be as good as a vow. It should be a yes.

You say yes and you mean yes. You say no, you mean no. You don't have to make vows because your word without a vow is as binding to you as if it was accompanied by a vow.

So, if Christians promise to marry, it should be that the person they promise to marry can count on it. They're going to marry them. Now, unfortunately, some of the examples of betrothal that I have become acquainted with in a number of cases have been very unfortunate in that they assume that betrothal also meant something of a hasty commitment to be betrothed when the couple hardly knows each other.

And the idea, they thought, was the betrothal period is for them to get to know each other and maybe develop some romantic feelings during that time. And they thought that, okay, we're not dating now, we're betrothing. And here's what we do.

Instead of going out with that girl on a date that you're interested in, you go get betrothed to her. Okay, now you're betrothed. Now you've got to spend some time before you get married to get to know her.

That's not implied at all in betrothal. I have never recommended and I would strongly advise against ever couples getting betrothed to anyone that they don't know very well. In fact, I think a person should know a person as well before they get betrothed as most people would say you should know them before you marry because you are essentially promising to marry.

And you shouldn't promise to marry anyone that you wouldn't marry that day. It's true, between the time that people promise and the time they get married, there may be a period of time, maybe short or long. But once that promise has been made, it's a promise to marry.

And Christians are supposed to keep their promises. Therefore, you should never betroth yourself to anybody until you know them so well that you know that that is the person you want to marry and you could as easily marry them that day. And anyone who becomes betrothed to someone they don't know well enough to marry them that day is doing a very dangerous thing because betrothal means this.

I promise to marry you and that means whatever degree you may now expose your heart to me, make yourself vulnerable to me and make preparations to live your life with me and so forth, you can do that now knowing that I'm really going to be there. This is not just a date. This is not just a flimsy courtship.

I'm committed. It's going to happen unless I die first. And that provides an environment

in which young people who already know each other well enough to know they want to marry can actually start making the mental preparations for being married.

You know, the transition from being single to being married is a big step and it doesn't hurt to have a little time to mentally adjust to it. I mean, the choice of who you will marry is one thing. Once you know who you will marry, getting adjusted to the idea that you're going to be married to them and what that means that the wife, the girl's leaving her parents' home.

That's got to dawn on her. So it's nice if that can dawn on her a little bit gradually so that when she gets married, she knows what she's doing. She's emotionally ready for that.

But the betrothal time is not the time to find out if you love this person enough to marry them. That should have been decided before the betrothal. I mean, an ideal situation, and few of us experience ideal situations, but they're not impossible.

There are such things. An ideal situation would be that a young couple had known each other for all their lives and their families had known each other all their lives. I'm not saying that has to be the case.

I'm just saying that'd be an ideal situation, or at least for many years, so that before any couple enters into betrothal, there's no mysteries about what this person believes about certain doctrines and so forth, what this person believes about family planning, what this person believes about lifestyles and standard of living and so forth. I mean, if this woman wants to be in a big house and he wants to live in a shack, they should know that long before, long before they ever are betrothed. What I believe is this.

Betrothal simply means this, that you don't date, you don't encourage a romantic relationship with that person until you can promise them that you will go ahead and marry them. Now, one of the big objections to this is, well, how can you make a commitment to marry someone when you haven't already developed a romantic relationship with them? I mean, who can just, how can you know if you're going to marry this person when you don't already have these romantic feelings? I'm not saying you don't already have romantic feelings. I would not advise anybody to commit to marrying when they don't have romantic feelings toward.

It's one thing to have romantic feelings. It's another thing to have cultivated a romantic relationship, because if I have romantic feelings, if I'm a single person, there was a time when I was single before I knew my wife, that there was a woman that I had a romantic interest in. It was merely platonic as far as she was concerned.

There was no romance there. But, you know, I was single and looking for a wife, and this was a young woman I thought would be a good wife, and I was romantically interested. But she never led me on.

She never cultivated a romantic relationship with me, and so the fact that I didn't end up marrying her wasn't as devastating. But if she had given me an impression that she felt that way toward me, and we were cultivating that, and then we broke up, it would have been much different. You see, you can't necessarily guarantee that you're not going to feel a romantic attraction to somebody that you won't eventually marry.

But if you never communicate that with them, it doesn't go so far. It doesn't do the damage if it doesn't end up in marriage. But you begin to communicate with them at that level, and you're going to have some problem.

Now, see, the Bible does not tell us how a young couple have to meet. It doesn't say anything, doesn't tell us anything at all at how they come to the point where they make that promise. When we say that the Bible advocates betrothal, it does.

Not only does it give it as an example of the way things were done, but it also advocates it in the sense that the relationship of Christ and the church is compared with betrothal. Now, we know that roles in marriage to the Christian are dictated by the fact that marriage is a picture of Christ and the church. And Paul uses that fact in Ephesians 5 as a proof that wives should submit and that husbands should love their wives.

Husbands should be like Christ to the church. The wives should be like the church to Christ. The marriage institution, Paul employs it.

It says it's a God-ordained institution, and it's a picture of Christ and the church. Well, betrothal is too. Paul says to the Corinthians over in 2 Corinthians, I have betrothed you to one husband.

That is Christ. And he's obviously referring to betrothal as part of the whole process of marriage. We are betrothed to Christ.

Now, when he returns, we'll be joined with him in marriage. That's what the parable of the ten virgins is picturing. A betrothed couple are planning to get married, but they're not, they haven't joined yet.

And the virgins are all waiting for the bridegroom to come because he's going to come and get his bride, and they're going to get married. The picture of Christ and the church is as much wrapped up in the whole concept of betrothal as it is in marriage itself. However, the Jewish customs of betrothal were never always the same, and the Bible doesn't lay out any norms for that.

It doesn't say it has to be a year long or a month long or however long. All we know is this, that Jesus has made a promise to us, and we've made a promise to him. And until we are married, we are not at liberty to violate that promise in any way.

But we are, during this time, to prepare to be with him forever. We're to prepare

ourselves. Remember what it says in Revelation 19, the wedding supper, the marriage supper, the Lamb has come, and the bride has made herself ready.

That's what happens during betrothal. Once the marriage has been agreed upon by the parties who are getting married and their parents, then the time that is left is spent getting ready to actually be together, getting mentally prepared and whatever else has to be done. The young man may have to go out and get a job.

He may have to go out and build a house. Who knows what he has to do to be prepared to receive a wife. And she may have to learn some additional skills, homemaking skills that she hadn't really polished up on yet because before she was promised a marriage, she didn't know if she was going to get married any time soon or not.

Once you know you're going to get married, you concentrate from that point on, on those things that are preparing you for that union. And that's what our relationship to Christ is, according to Scripture. But as far as getting from unbetrothed to betrothed, the Bible doesn't talk, it doesn't advocate, you know, arranged marriages or this kind of meeting or that kind of meeting.

It seems to me in the Bible, people met each other a great number of ways. The Bible doesn't put a stamp of approval or disapproval on any of these particular ways. There certainly is appropriate and inappropriate behavior before and during betrothal in terms of moral behavior.

But I could not say, and I never have said, that the Bible advocates doing it a certain way. But I will say this. It is important that the parents' role is given its proper place.

Now, what is the proper place of the parents? Well, not too much is said about this, but something is. The Bible makes it clear throughout its pages that a girl gets married when her father gives her up, when he gives her over to the new man in her life. It may seem chauvinistic to suggest that the Bible pictures the woman's life as she's under the protection of her husband, or her father, until she leaves that in order to be under the protection of her husband.

Modern feminism teaches that women don't need men, don't need protection. And the very fact that these women have come to this conclusion shows how much they needed it and didn't have it. They became feminists.

They apparently were improperly protected by their fathers, and therefore they have not learned to be godly women. But the Bible indicates that a woman needs protection of a man. The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 11, a woman is made for man.

And while a feminist might say, well, a woman needs a man like a fish needs a bicycle, feminists are not really getting their information from God. In the Bible, the young girl is always seen as in her father's house. In passage after passage, you find she's in her

father's house until she's married, and then she's in her husband's house.

And she's under the protection of her father. Now, I don't know that a young girl in every case has to be literally under the roof of her father. I can't think of any better places to be.

But even if a young woman has left home with her father's permission to go to school or something like that, which I don't advocate, she's still under her father's authority until she marries. And then she's under her husband's authority. Now, in our culture, the idea seems to be, why should my parents have a say about this? They're not going to have to live with the person I'm marrying.

I've got the life to live. I should be able to make my own choice, with or without my parents. This assumes that somehow you own yourself.

I heard a radio ad on a Christian station today, and I don't remember what was being advertised, but the line they gave was, it's your life. It's your life. And I thought, this is on a Christian station? Where in the Bible does it say it's my life? I thought the Bible says I'm not my own.

I've been bought with a price. I don't own me. It's not my life.

What makes me think that I can just go off on my own and make all the decisions for myself, and I own myself? How did you come to own yourself? Have you ever thought about that? I'm sure everyone here has been conditioned from childhood to think that at least once you're an adult, you own yourself. But how do you come to own any given thing? You either create it and you own it that way, or you bought it, or earned it. Did you do any of those things to yourself? Did you pay any money to become you? Did you bring yourself into existence? You didn't know.

The Bible says we are His people, the sheep of His pasture. It's He that has made us, not we ourselves. We are not owned by ourselves.

We're not our own. And furthermore, even with reference to other people, we don't necessarily own ourselves more than others do. Children don't understand this usually until they have kids of their own, but when they do, they begin to appreciate this.

Parents, in a very real sense, biblically, legitimately own their children until they give them away. That's why in the Law of God, if a man found a virgin who was not betrothed and seized her and lay with her, he had to marry her unless the father said, no, you can't. Now, the girl might have wanted to marry the guy, but it doesn't matter.

If her father said no, she couldn't do it. Why? Well, what's the father got to do with all this? How about everything? The father and mother brought her into the world at great personal expense, financial, emotional, a great investment of their time, at least 20 of

the best years of their lives. They ceased pursuing their own happiness in order to give happiness and well-being to their child.

I mean, who has something invested in your life? You or your parents? Who paid for you to exist? It's obvious to anyone who even thinks about it, even if the Bible didn't say it so clearly. The parents own the children until they give them away. Now, the child shouldn't say, well, that's no fair.

That means I'm just no better than a slave. Well, that's, hey, wake up and smell the coffee. That's what the Bible says.

We're all slaves. We're all owned by someone other than ourselves. It's not a bad thing to be owned by your parents.

At least they care about your well-being. There are slaves who have masters who don't. And so, the Bible says, for this cause a man leaves his father and his mother to cleave to a wife.

And a man, even in our marriage customs, the father gives away the bride to the groom. Now, this does not mean that the parents go out and do the selecting. And this is important to note.

This is where I've heard some people misunderstand entirely what's going on. They've gotten the impression that because the parents are the ones who give them away, that this means the parents go out and do all the selecting and that the kids have to marry whoever the parents say. There's limits to this.

The kids don't have to marry anyone their parents approve of. It is simply that the parents have veto power. I personally don't believe that any godly parent would require their child to marry someone that that child didn't very much want to marry.

In my own case, when I wanted to marry Kristen, she didn't know it yet, or if she did, she didn't know it for sure, because we hadn't dated or anything. In fact, we never did date. But I went to her father first.

I didn't know what else to do. We were friends. We knew each other.

I didn't know how to make the step from there to courtship or whatever, because I didn't even know a lot of things that I know now about these things. But I did know one thing I could do. I could talk to her dad.

And I went to her dad and asked for permission to court her, actually, to pursue marriage with her. And he gave me permission. Well, he didn't say I could marry her.

That was left largely up to her. He didn't say that, you know, okay, Steve, you want her? She's yours. He just said, well, you've got my permission to pursue, you know.

I mean, but I had to win her approval, too. And I believe that's the right way to do it. I don't think that the parents decide who their child will marry, but they certainly have every right to decide who their child will not marry.

Any godly parent, any parent who loves their children, will want their child to pick somebody that is the most pleasing to that child. The only thing that the parents need to do is to protect the child from unwise decisions. Because children can be unwise.

But it's not the parent's place to force the child into a marriage someone that child wouldn't otherwise want to marry. It's just a matter that the parents should be in the position to say, I'm sorry, I wouldn't let you marry that person. I didn't know these principles when I got married to my first wife.

If I had, I probably wouldn't have ended up marrying her. That would have been a good idea, probably. My parents probably wouldn't have approved, but I didn't consult them.

I didn't know I was supposed to. They had never told me I was supposed to. I don't even know if they knew I was supposed to.

But biblically, the parents are not doing all the arrangements necessarily. A young Christian couple can pursue marriage according to their own plans, so long as their plans are not disapproved of by their parents. But if the parents don't approve, the children should recognize the parental authority.

The parents have much more invested in that child's life than the child does him or herself. And the Bible does, throughout the scriptures, indicate the parents are the authorities in the situation. And they decide.

You've got the case, as I said, of the man who would otherwise have to marry a girl, but if the father won't let her, then it's not going to happen. In Exodus 22, verses 16-17, in Numbers 30, verses 3-5, it was assumed that if a girl made any kind of a vow, you know this one, many of us have even talked about this recently, but let me just quickly, I'm going to have to wind this up here, but I just want to look at this and show the implications this has for a father's involvement in the decision about marriage. In Numbers 30, verses 3-5, it says, Now, this is about vows in general.

What about a marriage vow? What if a girl makes a marriage vow or betroths herself, agrees to betroth herself to someone? Her father has the right to say, no, you're not. Now, he has to make the decision the first day. He can't leave her hanging, her not knowing whether she's going to have to keep this vow or not.

As soon as he knows about it, he has to make a decision within that first day. But he has every right to say, you're not marrying that guy. And I dare say, even in a case where a young couple run off and elope and get married without permission, as soon as her father hears that it's happened, he has every right to say, I am not that vow.

That's what the Bible says. That's how much authority the parents, in particular the father, has in the situation. Now, we don't find anywhere that the father has the right to force his daughter to marry somebody that she wouldn't otherwise want to.

But he has the right to say, no. And that's all that she really needs. That's the protection she needs.

Hopefully, if she's a Christian girl, and we can't be doing things in a radically Christian way if they're not Christians anyway, but if she's a Christian girl, she should have the leading of God in her life. And she knows who she wants to marry. And if that person asks her, then basically she should make sure she has her father's approval.

And if she has it, she has every right to accept. But once betrothal has been entered, that's the situation where the relationship can really be allowed to be a cultivating of romance between the couple. Once again, let me make this very clear.

Some people have seen so many of the wrong examples or think they know the wrong examples from stereotypes. They picture a couple that doesn't have romantic feelings for each other and maybe doesn't know each other very well getting betrothed and then trying to work it up. That is not what we're talking about.

We're talking about a case where these people already know each other well enough to know they want to marry. That's why they get betrothed, because they know each other so well that they'd be prepared to marry that day. And so, they commit to that day.

They obviously wouldn't do that if they didn't feel romance toward each other. A young man is not likely to come and ask for a girl's hand in marriage unless he has at least the sense that he has the potential to feel romantic toward her. And she's not likely to accept unless she feels the same thing.

We're not talking about some sterile, clinical kind of a legal relationship here. We're talking about people who love each other. We're talking about people who are romantically attracted to each other, entering into an honorable agreement so they can actually marry honorably to each other.

But they already have these feelings, but when they're betrothed, they can then be open with these feelings and develop these feelings and promote these feelings to one another. That's what we're talking about here. And people say, well, how are you going to know someone that well without dating? It can happen.

Kristen and I never dated. We knew each other as we went to the same church. We were in a lot of situations where we were both there and other people were there.

Sometimes I drove her places and sometimes she drove me places when we didn't have a romantic relationship. It was in that context that I got to know her well enough that I

wanted to marry her. That's a very easy thing to do.

There's a lot of situations where groups of kids can be together over periods of years and know each other like brothers and sisters, but eventually a couple of them start feeling something towards each other that's not brotherly and sisterly. It's more like husbandly and wifely. And at that point, they know that they want to go that direction if they can.

But the assumption that we have to date, we have to have a series of romances or have to even cultivate romance with a person before we can know that we want to marry them is all simply worldly nonsense that doesn't belong to a biblical worldview or a Christian culture. It certainly belongs to our dominant culture in America, but that's the culture that we need to counter because it's an ungodly culture and its results are ungodly. .