THE WAY OF A MAN WITH A MAID
THE

WAY OF A MAN WITH A MAID

A Response To the Courtship and Betrothal Movements

ROBIN PHILLIPS
“There be three things which are too wonderful for me, yea, four which I know not: The way of an eagle in the air; the way of a serpent upon a rock; the way of a ship in the midst of the sea; and the way of a man with a maid.”

PROVERBS 30:18-19
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Forward to this Edition

It is a pleasure to present a new edition of *The Way of a Man With a Maid*.

Since writing this book in 2001, I have received many positive responses from people all over the world who have been helped by my work. Esther and I have been very blessed to meet a variety of people who have contributed their insight and stories to the discussion.

Not all of the responses I have received have been positive, however. People on both sides of the debate have sometimes drawn erroneous conclusions about my position and even my motives. In the minds of some critics, my cautions about certain tendencies within the courtship movement has been equivalent to a full-scale advocation of recreational dating together with a rejection of parental authority.

For this reason, I would like to use this new edition as a chance to set the record straight, in addition to charting some of the areas where I have changed in my outlook.

First of all, I do not and have never advocated recreational dating. Neither have I ever thought that parental non-involvement in the marriage decision is the Biblical norm. Rather, my objections to courtship and betrothal fall roughly into five areas, all of which are fleshed out in the book:

1) a technique-based approach to life and relationships which often underpins courtship and betrothal proposals;

2) faulty exegesis which is sometimes used to defend courtship and betrothal;

3) the unbiblical theory of emotional purity, which sometimes plays a key role in the courtship movement and plays a necessary part of betrothal;

4) authoritarian and oppressive patterns of parenting which are sometimes present in the courtship model and permeate the betrothal model.
5) A general attitude of pessimism towards romance and sexual attraction which can sometimes accompany both courtship and betrothal.

It should be apparent that the above points are concerns about principles rather than particular schemas. There is nothing intrinsically wrong or right with any method for finding a spouse so long as Biblical principles are being observed. Even my objections to Jonathan Lindvall's theory of betrothal are, at root, concerns about a framework of wrong thinking, of which betrothal is merely a symptom.

Having made these clarifications, some qualifications are now in order.

Preparing this new edition has forced me to revisit the subject of courtship and to think these issues through afresh. I do so from a vastly different standpoint than when I first wrote the book. I am now not merely a researcher, but a parent of teenage children, forced to deal practically with the very issues I wrote about. Moreover, I am now part of a church community that is generally sympathetic with the concerns of the courtship movement. This has forced me to re-evaluate some of my earlier contentions.

While still standing by the substance of what I wrote eight years ago, I am now prepared to say that where courtship is absent of the five errors above, it has the potential to be a valuable alternative to the modern dating system. In his book *Her Hand in Marriage*, Douglas Wilson has made some progress trying to understand what Biblical courtship/dating might look like without these added factors, while being acutely conscious that, in the hands of the wrong kind of man, his teaching on authority would lead to disaster. While I do not agree with everything in Wilson’s book, Esther and I have been quite happy to give it to our teenage son and daughter to read and follow. Other books we have given our teenagers to read and which I would recommend to those wanting to study the topic further are Rick Holland’s entry in *5 Paths to the Love of Your Life*, John Holzmann’s book *Dating With Integrity* and Debbie Maken's book *Getting Serious About Getting Married*.

When I originally wrote *The Way of a Man With a Maid*, my perspective was predominantly that of an immature romanticist. Little did I realize that I was simply over-reacting to the viewpoints of my opponents in the same way that they had over-reacted to the perspective of dating culture. This led to certain extreme positions which I would now no longer defend. For example, since I believed
that a divine spark was the only justification necessary for two people to marry, I vigorously denied the role that character can play as a father vets a young man for his daughter. By wrongly applying the principle of unconditional love, I argued that young men shouldn’t have to meet conditions in order to prove themselves ready for marriage. From the perspective of a parent, I now realize that there does need to be a “price of admission” to love. Simply put, it would be irresponsible for me to turn one of my daughters over to a man who could not support her financially and spiritually, regardless of how deeply in love they were with each other. If a marriage is going to stand the test of time, character not less than compatibility, needs to be an important consideration. I have edited the book accordingly to reflect this shift.

I am conscious that this was not the only area where my previous perspectives were tinged with an unbiblical romanticism. Ironically, I seem to have fallen into the same trap as my opponents by elevating one particular pattern (i.e., the “falling in love” pattern) above all other patterns and principles. In focusing on whether “falling in love” was good or bad, I unwittingly committed the same error that Lewis’ devil Wormwood made in *The Screwtape Letters*. When writing to the junior tempter on how to corrupt his Christian patient, the demon Screwtape remarks:

> You complain that my last letter does not make it clear whether I regard *being in love* as a desirable state for a human or not. But really, Wormwood, that is the sort of question one expects *them* to ask! Leave them to discuss whether “Love”, or patriotism, or celibacy, or candles on altars, or teetotalism, or education, are “good” or “bad”. Can’t you see there’s no answer? Nothing matters at all except the tendency of a given state of mind, in given circumstances, to move a particular patient at a particular moment nearer to the Enemy or nearer to us. Thus it would be quite a good thing to make the patient decide that “love” is “good” or “bad”. …get it quite clear in your own mind that this state of *falling in love* is not, in itself, necessarily favourable either to us or to the other side. It is simply an occasion which we and the Enemy are both trying to exploit. Like most of the other things which humans are excited about, such as health and sickness, age
and youth, or war and peace, it is, from the point of view of the spiritual life, mainly raw material.¹

I cannot guarantee that I have successfully expunged all traces of unbiblical romanticism from the present edition and I welcome any reader input which will help in the ongoing revision process.

The Way of a Man With a Maid has been criticized for failing to show the shape that a truly Biblical approach to courtship might take. In so doing, it has been argued, the book presents a misleading caricature of the entire movement. There is some merit to this objection. I would urge my readers to see this book as the beginning, and not the final say, to the discussion. Anyone wishing to know what a positive approach to courtship might look like should refer to the above recommended books (although not all of them use the term courtship).

It has been said that an author is his own worst critic. I am certainly no exception. Upon re-reading The Way of a Man With a Maid to prepare this new edition, I was struck by the fact that many of the truths presented in this book are simply assumed rather than defended with rigorous Biblical exposition. I would urge my readers to play the part of faithful Bereans and search the scriptures to see if the things I have written are true.

If these qualifications are kept in mind, I believe my basic message is one which still needs to be heard, if only so that the air can be cleared for a truly Biblical approach to “courtship”.

From Home-school to Courtship

Where [there] is not already a far deeper unity than marriage can give, marriage itself can do little to bring two souls together – may do much to drive them asunder.

—George MacDonald

When Homeschool Was Weird

“Where do you go to school, and what grade are you in?”
That was a question I was frequently asked as a child. It was also a question that I didn't know how to properly answer. Not knowing what else to say, I would usually blurt out, “I, um, I'm home-schooled.”
“You're what?”
“I'm home-schooled. I don't go to school, I mean I go to school but it's at home. My mother teaches us.”

At that point some people would respond with interest, following it up with perhaps another question. Others would just shrug or whisper to themselves quietly, “I knew there was something weird about that boy.”

Those were the days before home schooling became the “in” thing for American Christians. It had the status that tofu did about forty years ago: something that hadn't come into the limelight of acceptability, but was left for the appreciation of a handful of visionaries.

Times have changed since then. Home-schooling has now become so popular that an entire industry has spawned around it. Moreover, some parents can boast of being second and even third generation home-schoolers.

One of the results of the home-schooling movement reaching maturity is that it has brought into stark focus the radically different

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1 George MacDonald, Weighed and Wanting.
ideologies which motivate parents to home-school in the first place. In my experience, I have generally noticed three different mindsets among parents who have chosen to home-educate.

First, I have known parents who used home-schooling as a means of keeping their children perpetually sheltered and innocent. Since the world – epitomized by the state school system - is a dangerous place, these parents tried to create an insular environment where temptations were either minimized or eradicated. Children were trained to fear the world in the hopes that this would cause them to turn their backs on sinful temptations when they grew older. Parents having this mentality often cloistered with other families of a similar bent, creating Christian ghettos insulated against the perils of modern life. When children raised in such regimes eventually grew up and become exposed to the world, they typically either rebelled completely, or pursued the project of cultural retreat into the next generation. Of course, the ideal was that a child should move from adolescence to adulthood without ever having to be exposed to the worldly temptations normally associated with autonomy and independence. Since this orientation believed growth occurred from the outside-in, everything stood or fell on a child’s environment.

On the other hand, I have known other home-schooling parents who took a more positive approach. They believed it was their mission, not to perpetually shelter their children, but to equip them to confidently engage with the world and secular culture. These parents trained their children to engage in the battle instead of retreating from it. Instead of taking a fearful approach against anything that might lead their children astray, these parents used Christian education as a means of training their children to love what is good, true and beautiful. Instead of thinking that the goal was to get their children simply to conform to Biblical standards, these parents’ goal was that their children would come to love those standards. Recognizing that growth must occur from the inside-out, these parents sought to create an environment in which the good, the true and the beautiful could be inculcated in their children’s hearts. When these children got older, the parents did not fear to let them go but rejoiced in it. They could relax if their grown children reached different ideas to themselves, rejoicing to see an independence of mind and purpose, because a basic unshakable foundation had been established.

A third approach can be found in the many Christian parents who choose to home-educate for pragmatic rather than ideological reasons. Perhaps they are concerned about school bullying, too much
homework, bad peer pressure, sex education or how tired their children will be each day after school. Although these concerns may be valid, many parents approach these problems in isolation, without the larger context of a Biblical worldview. Consequently, when the parents’ original concerns are alleviated or if home-schooling becomes too difficult, there is the potential that the children will be sent back to the state school system.

The Problem of Relationships

When I was being home-schooled, most of the children I knew were part of families who took the first approach. As all of us grew older, new challenges began to present themselves to our parents. How do you handle things like boyfriends and girlfriends? Romance? Sexuality? Marriage? This presented a challenge far more difficult than that of education. While you may escape from the public school system by simply never sending your children to the local school, you can hardly isolate your children from exposure to the opposite sex.

Here again the two approaches gave radically different answers. Parents adopting the isolationist approach preferred for their child to somehow go straight from home-school to marriage without ever having to navigate the difficult waters of relationships and even sexual awareness. Since this is not possible, however, they devised a network of techniques designed to suppress and ultimately control any sexual and romantic impulses. Again, the approach was predominantly reactionary, as the guidance given to young adults in relationships became focused around sin-avoidance. Dating became to relationships what the state school was to education.

Now if parents are worried about the effects of school, the solution is simple enough: educate children at home. But when the same parents become worried about the effects of romance and love upon the lives of their children, what can they do? Can the desire for love and romance be pulled out of a person with the same simplicity that it takes to pull a child out of school? Or is it possible to modify the conditions of a young man or woman’s environment sufficiently so as to minimize the extent, or control the direction of, their love life? Many parents working with the outside-in model of growth, believed that the answer to all these questions lay in properly tinkering with a child’s environment.

Parents taking the more affirmative approach also said that casual dating is wrong, but for different reasons. It is wrong
precisely because it is a cheat. The problem with casual dating, like intimacy pursued without a clear possibility of marriage, is that it trivializes relationships and treats our sexuality as unimportant. Because we have been created in the image of God, casual relationships cannot fulfill us and will always leave us feeling empty even when they provide a temporary thrill. The do's and don’ts of Biblical morality spring forth from a whole attitude about how we approach members of the opposite sex—an orientation of honor, responsibility, care and love. Children raised to think like this were trained to put such a high premium on marriage, sexuality and love that the thought of squandering these things in a careless and flippant way filled them with horror.

On the surface, the first two approaches share many things in common. For example, they both emphasise the importance that we have rules to govern our relationships, but for different reasons. The first approach believes that rules are necessary to the good life like gasoline is necessary to a car: they are the things which make the Christian life go. The affirmative approach also believes rules are necessary, but not as the primary thing to drive the Christian life forward. Rather, rules are like a fence to guard the good things God has entrusted to us.

In families that have chosen to home-school for more pragmatic reasons, the results are often disastrous when the children reach their teens. Because the Biblical worldview has not permeated family thinking to the core, the children tend to uncritically imbibe a secular mindset. It is in the teenage years that the fruit of this approach becomes more obvious. Realizing that they haven’t adequately prepared their children, the parents often react by suddenly clamping down rules.

Now of course, there is an infinite number of shades in between these three approaches, as well as multiple ways that they can be combined. It is also true that the differences between these approaches are more subtle than my brief discussion implies. Sometimes the differences are hardly noticeable to an outside observer. However, our subtle and unconscious commitments play a powerful part in shaping how we view the world, and certainly how we view our interactions (or our children’s interactions) with the opposite sex.

This book is about some of the techniques adopted by parents taking the outside-in, pessimistic, rule-based approach to relationships. This book is not a systematic exposition of the more affirmative approach.
A problem exists, however, in the fact that many of the terms employed by parents with the negative mentality are also used by those following the more affirmative, Biblical approach. The main example of this is the very term ‘courtship’ itself. In writing about many of the damaging ideas associated with the courtship movement, I would not want my reader to jump to the conclusion that I am dismissing everybody’s teaching about relationships simply because they use the word courtship. But I am getting ahead of myself. What do we mean by ‘courtship’ and what ideas specifically am I referring to?

The Courtship Movement

The word courtship is nothing new. It comes from the days before dating when the custom was for a man to call on a woman at her parents’ house to 'court.' For a man to ‘court’ a woman meant that he was pursuing her honorably with the potential of marriage in mind.

Home-schoolers have picked up on the word and used it to describe a cluster of ideas and methods which exist as an alternative to the modern dating scene. While still retaining something of the original sense of courtship, it has come to mean a lot more. Courtship, as such, is essentially a parentally supervised relationship with the opposite sex that is a preparation for marriage. Though the interaction usually occurs in an overseen or semi-supervised family environment, variations can include everything from an arranged marriage to simply pursuing a relationship with the parents’ consent. Above all, it attempts to bypass the dangers of the modern dating system through some form of parental involvement. This normally always includes the idea that a relationship must be entered into only after marriage is either already expected or a definite possibility. It is conducted with the understanding that the father has power throughout to give the green light or red. The courtship serves as a kind of testing ground for the father to see if this person is really right for his child. Bill Gothard puts it, “Courtship is a father’s agreeing to work with a qualified young man to win his daughter for marriage.”

In the minds of many parents – especially those taking the pessimistic, rule-based approach - courtship is a way to avoid the

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pitfalls, not only of premarital infidelity, but also of temptation. In many cases, it is presented as a way to eliminate what is seen as an undesirable waste product of love and romance, namely, the potential for broken-hearts. Young people are encouraged to 'die' to their desire to experience a romantic relationship, thus making the most out of their years of singleness. A more holistic view of purity is stressed - one that encompasses not only physical purity but purity of the emotions and mind as well.

It would take a whole book in itself just to relate the different ideas of how courtship should be done. In every home-schooling conference, book sale, catalogue or magazine, you'll find a slightly different slant on the whole thing, with some common universals running through all of them.3

“Do I have to marry her?”

Jonathan Lindvall, a disciple of Gothard and one-time advocate of courtship, defines courtship as "a relationship between a guy and a girl that both of them understand the purpose to be, to seriously look to a permanent relationship. That they are very serious about the expectation or hope of getting married."4

The expectation that they will marry, Lindvall explains, is on the basis of the parents discerning God's will before there is any kind of romantic involvement, and in some cases before there is any relationship at all. When romance does occur, it is what he calls “authorized romance.” Lindvall writes about his own experience as an example of this:

I wanted to marry a wonderful Christian young lady my parents liked, but didn't feel was God's choice for me. Thankfully I purposed not to even discuss marriage with her without their full blessing... After repeated unsuccessful attempts to persuade my parents that I knew God's will, I finally committed myself to die to the vision I was sure was of God.... My father, particularly, hinted that I should pray about marrying Connie. After

3 In his article ‘Approaches to Courtship/Betorthal’, David Clank gives a helpful survey of the different definitions posited by the main proponents of courtship. It can be read at the following web address: www.unlessthelordmagazine.com/articles/Courtship%20Approaches.htm

initially resisting the suggestion, I agreed to pray about it. In time the Lord showed me I was to marry Connie. "Although I was not yet 'in love' with her (regrettably I had allowed my emotions to focus on the first girl), with my parents' encouragement I sought and acquired Connie's parents' blessing to marry her. All this took place before I had much emotional attachment to Connie, and certainly before she was at all interested in me. When, with her parents' blessing, I proposed to her she had absolutely no idea I was even interested in her. Neither of us were "in love" with the other. In time Connie concluded that I was God's will for her. It was during our engagement period that we actually 'fell in love' with one another.5

Elsewhere Lindvall explains about the struggle he had to go through to marry Connie against his inclination. He prayed, saying,

"'Lord, I really want your will. If Connie's the one you want me to marry, I'll make the sacrifice, I'll marry her.... Oh, Lord, I surrender my will.' The Lord started speaking to me that, yes indeed, Connie was the one I was supposed to marry. 'Oh, Lord, really, do I have to?' 'Yes, yes, you have to.' 'Oh Lord, okay.' So I went to my dad and said, 'God has shown me I'm supposed to marry Connie.'... It took four months for God to get through to Connie. But finally she saw the light."6

Lindvall tells the story of another young man who, desiring to 'court' a certain woman, went and first obtained her father's permission to marry her before they had ever had anything to do with each other. "Essentially he was proposing to the father..." says Lindvall, "before they had ever gone out, before, you know, any social interaction between the young lady and himself."7

Obviously mutual attraction does not fit into this package. In fact, that is the whole point. If one can be in control of one's emotions to the degree that attraction, romance and love follow

6 Lindvall, from the tape "Youthful Romance: The Dangers of Dating".
7 Jonathan Lindvall, from the taped lecture Training Godly Teens (op. cit.).
clearly orchestrated pre-arranged dictates, then there is less chance of temptations or emotional pain. Hence, teachers such as Lindvall consistently downplay the role of attraction in choosing one’s spouse, emphasizing instead that love is an act of the will. God, Lindvall points out,

never intended for people to marry simply because they love each other. Love is not the basis for marriage. Love should proceed from the commitment to marriage. The Bible doesn't say, 'Marry the one you love.' It says, 'Love the one you marry.' And there's a vast difference between the two. Today people marry because they love each other.8

Certainly Christians are exhorted in the Bible to practice AGAPE love (that is, love that is an act of the will). But is this all that is needed for a good and happy marriage? According to one lady quoted approvingly by Gothard, the answer is yes:

“[Love] is not a feeling or an emotion. It is a choice we make, an act of our wills. When I walked down the aisle, it was not because of a feeling or a desire; it was an act of my will - in obedience to God and His Word. I praise God and thank God for the victory of that day and for the growing faith that has resulted since that day.”9

Dragged Down the Isle

The above quote describes a woman’s remarriage to a man she had divorced. When she became a Christian and attended Gothard's seminar, she was persuaded that she should remarry her former husband, even though both of them had been physically unfaithful. Listen to her description of the wedding:

"'The wedding day,'" she writes, 'was probably one of the worst days of my life! I felt trapped, forced into a marriage to someone I didn't even love. When I realized

8 Jonathan Lindvall, from the taped lecture, Youthful Romance: The Dangers of Dating (op. cit).
9 Testimony used by permission in Rebuilder's Supplement, (Institute in Basic Life Principles), 1978, p. 27.
that I would have to consummate the marriage that night, I became so upset and nervous that I was actually physically ill. It was all they could do to get me to the church and then to get me down the aisle. I wanted to run. I nearly passed out twice during the ceremony. The pressure made my head feel as if it were about to explode.”

The lady explains how at first their new marriage was horrific; eventually, however, God conquered her 'rebellious' spirit. Repeatedly she "would speak positive affirmations of our new love, our 'spirit-to-spirit relationship, our growth as one, and our Godly actions and reactions towards each other...rebuke the negative and speak the truth in my heart." Admittedly, the above scenario is extreme. Most teachers would acknowledge the importance of a couple having some positive feelings for each other before they commit to marry. However, even this is being implicitly challenged. For example, Lindvall is now arguing that courtship has unscriptural flaws because it does not go far enough, since there is still the opportunity for either person to back out if they find they are not compatible. This Lindvall suggests sounds "vaguely similar to the rationale for a couple living together for a time before marriage - to find out if they are compatible...

As an alternative, Lindvall suggests 'betrothal' which is essentially an arranged marriage in which not only the man and the woman but both sets of parents have veto power. This arrangement should be entered into before the young people have any attraction to each other. Central to this idea is a pervasive suspicion of romantic love or of marrying in accordance with personal desires. “The Bible cautions against marrying based on emotional or physical desire” wrote Jonathan Lindvall in 2001. Betrothal advocate, Israel Wayne, has argued similarly, saying that "The decision must be made on the will of the Lord, not on her personal wishes or desires.”

10  Ibid, pp. 26-27
11  Ibid, p. 27
14  Israel Wayne, "Don't Kiss Before the Wedding!" (The Link: A Homeschool Newspaper, Vol. 4, Issue 2).
What Has Love Got To Do With Getting Married?

Only love has eyes. To understand the world of things, you need science and suspicion and the method of doubt: accept nothing until proved. Every idea is guilty until proved innocent. But to know people, you need the opposite method: trust, love, openness. Persons are innocent until proved guilty. You cannot hear them unless that is your attitude. Suspicion never reaches the other's heart.

—Peter Kreeft

Time For Something New

The advocates of courtship rightly point out that there is a connection between the problems we see in marriage (that is, its almost predictable tendency to breakdown), and the problems we see in how relationships are approached before marriage. They have criticized the outlook that anything is okay before marriage as long as you stay physically pure. This mentality can all too easily lead a person to view a relationship as a vehicle for temporary pleasure regardless of commitment. You know the typical pattern: take out whomever you want until one of you grows tired of the relationship and then you switch to another partner. In this pattern, the actual person can become an irrelevance, their only function being to serve the other person's short-term needs and desires.

Marriages are often entered into on this same basis, with no genuine understanding of what true love is all about. Most of the television heroes who are adopted as role models by young children play parts that encourage this wrong approach to relationships.

It would be nice to be able to say that the church has a better track record when it comes to approaching relationships.

Unfortunately, the truth is that many churches actually encourage, either actively or passively, the kind of attitude described above. One example of this is Ian Gregory whose book *No Sex Please, We’re Single*, encourages Christian singles to play 'the dating game' by taking out as many people as possible, not only because "dating should be a laugh," but because this puts us in a position to know, through comparison, what is truly important for us in the opposite sex.²

Though Gregory's views are not yet mainstream, they serve to illustrate the trend in today's church towards a social atmosphere in which the recreational value of romance is given a higher priority than integrity. The difference between this approach and how pagans approach relationships is merely quantitative rather than qualitative, in so far as sex is taboo before marriage. However, even this aspect, once a bedrock of Christian ethics, is now being challenged. For example, consider the words of Gareth Sturdy, editor of one of England's leading Christian magazines, who writes that

> The church community that is concerned with purity will produce 'pollutants’ and 'would-be-saviours.' That community then becomes highly self-centred and censorious, breeding introversion and smugness. This is not the church that transforms and remolds society.³

In other words, for a church to attract unbelievers it must not be ‘concerned with purity,’ for that might turn people off the gospel.

Faced with such compromise, it is not surprising that many in the church are ready for something different, some new method that is as far removed as possible from present trends. In reaction, it is tempting to throw the baby out with the bathwater and say that romance has no necessary role to play in a Biblical marriage. This is the position that many of the hard-liners within the courtship movement are taking.

**Is Character Enough?**

Some teachers have attempted to map out in advance the characteristics required before one becomes marriageable, as well as

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the qualities that a father should look for in a potential son-in-law. In itself this is not a problem. However, the criterion often employed is one which focuses on details at the exclusion of more fundamental concerns such as whether the two people are compatible. The assumption is often that having a good character is not simply a necessary condition to a good marriage, but a sufficient condition, (all that is required).

Jonathan Lindvall, for example, suggests eight prerequisites before parents should even begin to decide whether a person is right for their son or daughter to marry. As far as the young man is concerned, the prerequisites include that he must be self-employed, possess good social skills and have a commitment to staying out of debt. Regarding the prerequisites, Lindvall says

I and my wife, the other parents, need to really think through all these things before we even pass it [the proposed match] onto the children. And then the children themselves, the young people, they have to again go through those lists, and through their sense of prerequisites...[sic]

What seems most significant about Lindvall's prerequisites is that apart from his specification that they must be "Somewhat doctrinally compatible," none of Lindvall's prerequisites have to do with the actual relationship of the two people. Apparently, whether the two people like each other or are compatible is of less importance than whether the man is self-employed and committed to staying out of debt. Likewise, how the two people relate to each other is of less relevance to Lindvall than how the man relates to others (i.e., his social skills).

In his Advanced Seminar Workbook, Gothard gives parents a list of fifty-nine suggested questions to ask a potential son or daughter-in-law. The purpose of these questions is to enable the parents to assess whether to allow their child to enter into a courtship with this person. The list includes such questions as Do you think your parents know the meaning of their names? What was your first childhood ambition? Why do you think God made you the gender He did? What number child are you in the birth order of your family? Do you wish that you grew up in a larger or smaller family? What

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4 For a similar view to Lindvall’s, see Israel Wayne's article titled "Don't Kiss Before the Wedding!" (The Link: A Homeschool Newspaper, Vol. 4, Issue 2)
advantages do you see in being born into your race? How often did you move as you were growing up? What spiritual significance have you attached to any physical "defect" that you may have? How much scripture have you been able to memorize? And on and on. Like Lindvall, Gothard has little or nothing to say about the actual relationship or compatibility of the people involved. Instead, compatibility can be inferred on the basis of character. Gothard points to the book of Ruth where, in his words, "Boaz was attracted to Ruth before he even saw her. He heard good reports about her character."

These ideas ignore the need for a marriage where there is attraction and compatibility (the knitting together of characters that ‘fit’) in favor of general character traits which, when present, make attraction and compatibility nice but not essential.

Certainly the wisdom of scripture supports the idea that we should carefully choose our friends on the basis of character (Prov. 12:26; 13:20; 2 Thess. 3:14; 2 Tim. 3:1-5; Titus 3:10). The lifelong friendship in marriage is no exception. At the moment I am doing a Bible study with our teenage son to train him how to recognize a virtuous woman. This is because it has been my prayer for many years that he marries a God-fearing, upright Christian woman. I desire that my sons and my daughters marry people who understand what it means to raise children in a covenant relationship with God and who endeavors to walk in submission to the authority of God’s Word in all things. As important as these character considerations are, I realize that there are also other considerations related to the relationship of the two people involved. Are this man and this woman culturally and linguistically compatible? Is the personality of this man and this woman such that they will be compatible living and working together throughout the rest of their lives? Is there the kind of genuine affection between these two people that will help contribute to an aroma of love and joy in the home?

Such questions are ignored in much of the literature of the courtship movement, since it is assumed that the only necessary ingredient for a good marriage is character. In 2001 the New York Times did a front page article on the courtship movement. One advocate of this approach, a man by the name of Mr. Wheeler, was interviewed. Mr. Wheeler tells about his own experience when a

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5 Advanced Seminar Workbook, pp. 150-153.

young man named Joshua took him out to breakfast to ask permission to marry his daughter Noelle. "I knew if I could trust his character," said Mr. Wheeler, "then it would make a good marriage, because marriage is built not on love, but on someone who has the character to withstand the storms that marriage brings, the arguments and the disagreements." As long as someone has a good character, all other considerations about the person and their potential compatibility (or lack of compatibility), become irrelevant.

Lindvall has similarly suggested that emotional intimacy is completely irrelevant. "God," he writes, "has given us not only the physical capability but also the emotional capacity and personal flexibility to be joyfully compatible with whomever He calls us to marry."8

Against the backdrop of such ideas, I am not surprised to hear story after story of marital disasters among couples who get married under the influence of such teaching. Marriages that were supposed to be perfect because both people had strong characters are increasingly ending in misery or complete marital breakdown. In some cases, I have received reports of teenage daughters running away from home and getting pregnant simply as a mechanism to avoid being paired up with someone they don’t even like.

Marriage is a lawful sexual relationship surrounded by covenant vows. Now sexual relations can certainly occur in the absence of emotional closeness, just as faithfulness to the marriage covenant can occur without being ‘in love’ with one’s spouse. This is, in fact, the state of many marriages, where commitment must exist without any accompanying emotional response. Though we may applaud the covenantal faithfulness exhibited in such marriages, is it appropriate to consider these marriages successful? Should we be holding such marriages up as models to those who are single?

I’ll never forget the time a friend told me about a conversation he had with a sixty-three year old Chinese co-worker named Eric. Eric emigrated to the United States where he married a woman that his uncle had picked out for him. Eric told my friend that in China the parents always choose the girl, usually based on issues of family prestige and wealth. Issues of personality and compatibility don’t come into play.


Eric jokes about how there is no love in the marriage and he is fond of pointing out the heartache and misery that comes from marrying for love. Eric told my friend that he not only doesn’t love his wife…he hates her. He sleeps in a separate bedroom to his wife in order to avoid her. When my friend heard this, he asked a natural question. “Have you ever considered getting a divorce?” Eric was aghast. Break up the financial alliance? Unthinkable!!!

While Eric and his wife certainly have commitment, we would be hard pressed to call their marriage ‘good.’ More is needed to make a good marriage than simply faithfulness.

Don’t get me wrong. Commitment and faithfulness are vital elements of marriage. They are necessary conditions but they are not sufficient. Love and closeness also have an important role to play.

But, say the united voice of both Eric and the courtship radicals, look at all the heartache and problems caused by love and romance. And they have a point. Romance in relationships can often lead to unchaste behavior (even allowing for the distinction between genuine love vs. mere lust). It does not, however, follow that romantic intimacy between the sexes should be de-emphasized. The adultery rate would certainly go down if all men became eunuchs, but it thankfully does not follow that we ought to all go and castrate ourselves. Yet many within the courtship movement are being advised to undergo an emotional castrating so that all romantic feelings are suppressed.
The Wisdom of the Fool

*Love is the wisdom of the fool and the folly of the wise.*

—Samuel Johnson

### The First Man and Woman

The first instance of love between a man and a woman was Adam and Eve. The Lord did not create Adam and Eve at the same time, we are told, but created Adam first. To Adam was given the job of naming all the animals. While each animal had a mate, for Adam “there was not found a helper comparable to him.” (Gen. 2:20) The implication is that Adam was, if not lonely, certainly aware that something was missing. Then the Lord said, "'It is not good that man should dwell alone; I will make a helper comparable to him.'" (Gen 2:18). Most single men and women can relate to this. In our alone-ness we feel instinctively that ‘it is not good’ - there is a void in our life that only someone of the opposite sex can fill.

The Lord said that it was not good for Adam to dwell alone. But in what sense was Adam actually alone? He was not alone physically or socially because he was surrounded by numerous animals, to say nothing of the Lord himself. But he was alone because he lacked human companionship. More specifically, he didn't have someone to love in that special way that only a man and wife can.

John Thompson, on the other hand, claims that it is desirable not to have any emotional, social and relational needs. He does not see marriage as God's instrument for fulfilling certain innate needs within each of us, for he denies that such needs even exist. So how does Thompson reconcile this position with Genesis 2? Thompson tries to argue that Adam required a helper only for what was specifically mentioned: to be fruitful and multiply (Gen 1:28), and not to fulfill any social, relational or emotional needs. Just as Adam would not have been lonely since he had perfect fellowship with

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God, claims Thompson, so neither would we have any needs if we walk in the light as He is in the light.2

Thompson goes further and uses the example of Adam and Eve to try to prove that people do not need to select their own husbands and wives. He argues that because God “brought together the bride (Eve) and the groom (Adam) for the sole purpose of marriage” instead of “[creating] a dozen men and a dozen women to play the dating game and then marry whomever they wished,” this ought also to be our model rather than thinking that young people need to choose their own marriage partners.3

The Four Loves

Because the word 'love' is so abused in our language, meaning anything from a description of one’s affection for chocolate to a word indicating the most passionate intimacy, it is rendered practically meaningless unless it is carefully defined. In Greek there are at least four words which our language translates as love.4 I will be helpful to briefly consider these distinctions.

STORGE is the kind of love that we would call Affection, and is especially relevant for the affection that exists between parents and offspring.

PHILIA is the kind of love that we would call Friendship. It is camaraderie more frequently among, though not limited to, those of the same sex.

EROS is that kind of love for which the adjective romantic can be applied. It only exists (or only should exist) between members of opposite sexes and has been described as including “the idea of yearning to unite with and the desire to possess the beloved.” There are many variations of this kind of love which I will deal with later.

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2 John W. Thompson, ‘God's Design for Scriptural Romance Part 2: Dealing With The Dating Dilemma’. Available online at www.preterism-eschatology.com. Thompson writes, “God has designed fellowship with Himself and within the church to fulfill our loneliness and social needs. Adam was alone, meaning he needed a helper to fulfill the dominion mandate to be fruitful and rule the earth. But Adam was never said to be lonely because he enjoyed perfect fellowship with God. Only repentance from the sin of self-pity will overcome loneliness. The real social need of individuals is to learn fellowship with Christ and His church. Having a boyfriend or girlfriend actually works against true fellowship because it creates a relationship that focuses on one and excludes others.” Ibid.


4 See C.S. Lewis, The Four Loves (Harvest Books, 1960)
AGAPE is the kind of love which the Lord has towards us and which He calls for us to exhibit to those around us (1 Cor. 13). It is interchangeable with the word charity (at least in days past before charity came to be more or less synonymous with generosity.) It is the totally unselfish kind of love that can keep on giving without expecting a return because it has the other person's best at heart. Because AGAPE love is a choice, it can be commanded (Jn. 13:34, Eph. 5:25).

**Love in the Bible**

When the word love appears in the New Testament, it is usually AGAPE. This does not, however, mean that the other loves are not important. I received a letter from one man who said that AGAPE was the only kind of love that we needed to have, even in marriage. His reason for thinking that was, as he put it, "Our Lord commands us to AGAPE in every single relationship without any exception on record in the NT." My correspondent was so adamant on this point that he promised to send me a hundred bucks if I could find one exception! As this man was a professor of Greek, I figured he probably knew what he was talking about. Then Esther, my wife, drew my attention to a few scriptures I had forgotten about.

In 2 Timothy 3:3 and Romans 1:31, Paul condemns those who are "unloving". The Greek here is ASTORGOS which, according to *Vine's Expository Dictionary*, signifies the absence of natural affection or STORGE. Romans 12:10 says, "Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love..." The Greek here is PHILOSTORGOS and is a combination of PHILIOS (friendship) and STORGE (affection). In 2 Tim. 3:4 Paul condemns those who are not "lovers of God", the word translated love being PHILOTHEOS which indicates friendship. In 2 Corinthians 7:15, Paul, referring to Titus, says, "And his affections are greater for you as he remembers...", etc. The word for affections here is SPLANCHA and literally indicates the bowels, regarded by the Greeks as the seat of violent passions and by the Hebrews as the seat of the tender affections. Paul was referring to Titus' emotions as something good, while elsewhere (2 Cor. 6:12) the same word is used in a sense that is not good, showing that the natural loves can be good or bad depending on how they're used and what they lead to.

What about Jesus? In Philippians 1:8, Paul writes, "For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ." Again, the word for affection here is SPLANCHON, which
indicates emotions. (See also Phil. 2:1, Col. 3:12.) This shows that Jesus didn't just have AGAPE love but also experienced the emotions of natural human affections. This is born out even further when we look at the word SPLANCHIZOMAI, which means to be moved inwardly, or to feel tenderly, which is applied of Christ frequently. This shows further that Christ experienced natural emotions.

Some teachers like to make a lot of the fact that the Bible tells husbands and wives to practice AGAPE while it says nothing about EROS. Indeed, Eros is not mentioned once in the New Testament. But this is hardly surprising. In the Greek speaking world, EROS would have had connotations with paganism and idolatry. The very word comes from the Greek goddess of love, called Cupid by the Latin speaking Romans. The connotations associated with that word would perhaps have been similar to the connotations associated with a term like 'falling in love' today. In light of this, it is not surprising that the New Testament avoids the term. I have used the word purely for the pragmatic need to differentiate from the other loves.

The Love to Make Marriage Work

I said that erotic love (EROS) is the peculiar sort which exists between the sexes. At the least this may be a purely physical attraction. Two people can easily get through a night together with only physical attraction, but to get through a lifetime together you had better be good friends (PHILIA) as well. EROS without friendship is only an impulse of the hormones. One cannot desire another person over a long period of time without being best friends with that person as well.

But an erotic love that includes friendship is still not enough if there is not also the self-giving and sacrificial love (AGAPE) so beautifully described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 13. AGAPE love, unlike the other loves, is produced by daily acts of the will. It is not a feeling but a choice, something you do. It has no expectation of return and is self-giving for the good of the beloved.

Although EROS and PHILIA are not generated by the will (though they may be encouraged or discouraged by the will), they are maintained through the will. C. S. Lewis compares these natural loves to a garden full of flowers that would soon go to weed if left alone. What is needed for maintenance is AGAPE love. A man who falls in love with a woman quite effortlessly will find the love destroyed if he constantly acts selfishly rather than choosing to act
charitably towards her. Thus, in marriage a couple's intimacy is either maintained or destroyed by the choices made in the arena of life. As Wheat puts it, \textit{“Eros...wants to promise that the relationship will last forever, but Eros cannot keep that promise alone.”}^{5}

When a man and wife love each other and have committed to remain faithful to the marriage covenant, the relationship has a foundational reality that cannot go even if the intensity of feelings ebb and flow. Before Esther and I married, I had naively assumed that love was an automatic thing like money in the bank, so that once you find the right person you just sail effortlessly into a future of bliss. Such is not the case, for there is nothing automatic about the ingredients necessary to permanently sustain a marriage relationship, such as continuous service and affirmation of the other.

Just because a man and a woman have genuine affection for each other does not automatically guarantee the success of their marriage if it is not underpinned with daily kindness. As Sheldon Vanauken put it, "Inloveness is a gift of the gods, but then it is up to the lovers to cherish or ruin."^{6} Or as Maurois reminds us, "A successful marriage is an edifice that must be rebuilt every day."^{7}

Many teachers in the courtship movement deny that erotic or romantic love has any significant part to play in the process of finding a spouse. As Lindvall says, "If a couple marries based on love, what happens when the passion of romance settles down and they get used to each other, less distracted by their emotions?"^{8} Lindvall’s answer is that marriage should be based entirely on AGAPE love. He thus completely overlooks love which produces feelings but is more than feelings, and which is maintained by the will, but is itself more than an act of the will.^{9}

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5 \textit{Love-Life For Every Married Couple}, by Ed. Wheat, M.D. & Gloria Okes Perkins

6 Sheldon Vanauken, \textit{A Severe Mercy} (HarperOne, 1987).

7 André Maurois, cited by McCallum & DeLashmutt, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 117.

8 Jonathan Lindvall, “The Dangers of Dating: Scriptural Romance - Part 2”, \textit{op. Cit.}

9 It would be helpful to think of Agape in relationships like oxygen is to our bodies. Just as the fact that we must have oxygen in order for our bodies to work as God designed implies nothing about the particular purpose of any one body, so the fact that all relationships must have AGAPE if they are to work as God intends says nothing about the purpose of any particular relationship. The purpose of a relationship between a teacher and student is going to be different - and therefore require different human elements to make it work - than the relationship between employer and employee or husband and wife. AGAPE is a character attribute that should be brought to bear on all these relationships, but it does not describe the nature of any relationship to which it is predicated. Hence my argument that something more than AGAPE is needed for a good marriage in no way minimizes the importance of AGAPE, any more than it minimizes the importance of AGAPE to say that something more than AGAPE is needed to make a person a good teacher or a good pastor.
Romance in Secular Culture

The attack on romantic love goes beyond certain radical teachers within the courtship movement. What we find in these movements is simply one expression of a larger trend that has been gaining momentum throughout Western culture. It will be instructive to briefly consider how the secular climate of today represents just as strong a reaction against romantic love.

For many centuries Western society has idolized romantic love. We are now finally beginning to see the outworking of the biblical principle that whenever anything is worshiped idolatrously, that thing is lost. In the her survey of contemporary sexuality, Wendy Shalit points out that whereas in past eras a woman had to avoid giving public evidence of sexual desire by living with someone out of wedlock, in today's world the social pressure is such that women must avoid giving evidence of romantic desire if they are to avoid social ridicule. Shalit quotes from the spring 1998 edition of the teen magazine YM where there is a "Pool of Love" test. "The goal is the 'Diving Area: Out for a Good Time' part of the pool, where you'd be looking for lots and Mr Rights Now!" If you're too romantic, you tread water at the 'deep end' where 'your intensity could scare off some potential candidates.' Any girl who has scored too high on the Romance test YM labels a 'Deluded dreamstress.'

Why is it that an experience which has played such an important role in the experience of men and women throughout history, is now assigned to the category of fantasy - something which is not only irrelevant to a relationship, but seen as a hindrance, a thing that might repel a potential candidate? Two immediate causes come to mind.

First, there is the 'just do it' mentality in today's world. I am told that dating is fast becoming a thing of the past. At least dating had some degree of romance as a backdrop, even when in an artificial sense. That romantic apparatus is now increasingly viewed as something that is not only irrelevant, but an encumbrance. After all, why go through all that fuss when you can just go and find the nearest bed? Romantic love – which is essentially an other-person-oriented experience - has no point of contact with the consumerist

mentality of our age where the primacy of instant gratification has become such a god. The underlying assumption of romance, especially among women, is the desire for exclusive love with one person.

So again we see that it is a self-oriented mentality that is responsible for the exclusion of romantic love, though the form this self-orientation takes in a secular 'just do it' climate is drastically different to the form it takes in the courtship movement.

A second reason why secular culture is so hostile to romantic love is found in the decline of Biblical modesty (though as with many things it is difficult to know what came first between the chicken and the egg). It is to be expected that a world that has become increasingly hostile to the imperatives of modesty will become hostile to romance as a logical result, although the connection between romance and modesty may not at first be apparent. When the erotic suggestion behind romance is implicit, the subtle gestures of romance can express this implication in a nuanced way. All this changes when modes of dress and conduct convey one's sexuality in an immediate and external way. Sexuality becomes a crude and explicit quality, even a commodity. Further, because immodesty makes sexuality extrinsically apparent, instead of an elemental aspect, others are invited to respond to one's sexuality independently of attraction and romance with the whole person. The result can easily be that sex becomes an object to take and discard when used up rather than a natural fulfillment of the romantic and emotional attraction that has grown between two people. To the degree that romance is removed from being a determining factor in initial union, sex has also lost its integrated and natural function as a consummation of that romance. Sex is reduced to an appendage to who we are as people.

Seeing Feelings in Perspective

Martin Luther once compared the human race to a drunk who falls off his horse on the right side and then, just to make sure everything evens out, tries to fall off his horse on the left side next time. This is an apt metaphor for what happens so many times in our response to human emotions. We see a tendency to go too far in one direction, so we try to even things out by going too far in the other direction.

Because the heart is desperately wicked above all things (Jer. 17:9), feelings and romantic desires can be great deceivers. That is
why it is so important for young people to have the guidance of older and more mature Christians as they begin experiencing emotions towards members of the opposite sex. Such guidance should involve helping the young person to see their desire for romance and passion, not as weaknesses to be overcome, but as strengths to be reserved for the right person at the right time. Thus, the issue is not whether a person should experience passion, but rather, for whom does God want me to save the expression of these feelings? Denying the emotional side of our lives for fear of the potential explosion that can misfire is neither healthy nor Biblical. Instead of teaching unmarried people that they are sinning whenever they feel lonely, we should help them to understand that some form of loneliness is inevitable before the Lord gives us someone to love and be loved by.
Bill Gothard and the Courting Game

Very seldom are we ever invited to live out of our heart. If we are wanted, we are often wanted for what we can offer functionally.... So we learn to offer only those parts of us that are approved, living out a carefully crafted performance to gain acceptance from those who represent life to us. We divorce ourselves from our heart and begin to live a double life.

—Brent Curtis & John Eldredge¹

A parent must respect the spiritual person of his child, and approach it with reverence, for that too looks the Father in the face and has an audience with Him into which no earthly parent can enter even if he dared to desire it.

— George MacDonald²

Long before Joshua Harris kissed dating goodbye, Bill Gothard was giving seminars. As far as I am aware, Gothard was the first major proponent of the courtship movement, beginning in the mid sixties with his Institute in Basic Youth Conflicts. Because of Gothard’s crucial influence in spearheading the courtship movement, together with the fact that thousands of American families subscribe religiously to his teachings, it is important to devote an entire chapter to an explanation of his courtship views.³

The Umbrella Principle


² George MacDonald, from George MacDonald: An Anthology, compiled and edited by C. S. Lewis.

³ For a history of Gothard’s organization and a general overview of his teachings on other subjects, see my article ‘Bill Gothard and ATI’ at http://robinphillips.blogspot.com/2008/03/bill-gothard-at.html
Much of Gothard's system is governed by the idea that all human relationships are governed by a chain of command similar to that in the military. It is only when we find our place in God's chain of command, and get under our proper authority, that God will be able to protect us.

Authority is like an 'umbrella of protection', and when we get out from under it, we expose ourselves to unnecessary temptations which are too strong for us to overcome.4

“Satan cannot get through to some sons and daughters unless there is a leak in the father's umbrella.”5

Gothard maintains that the above truths about authority and chain of command form “The Basis of Achieving Great Faith” since “The size of our God is greatly determined by our ability to see how He is able to work through those in authority over us...”6 He lists fifteen rewards that happen to all who get under the proper authority, which include "You will have a long life.... You will avoid fear or condemnation.... You will receive the glory of God.... You will not blaspheme God or His Word.... You will be given clear direction.... You will be protected from evil people.... You will receive God's praise....", and so on.7

Gothard especially emphasizes these principles in family relationships. If the father's authority is not properly recognized, then everything else will fall out of place. For example, Gothard teaches wives to believe that rebellious children are the direct result of their own failure to fully submit to their own husbands. In this way, everything in a family stands or falls on this issue of authority and submission. This applies no matter what the person in authority may actually be like.

One of the texts Gothard cites in support of this theory is Luke 2:41-52. This passage tells us the familiar story about Jesus was twelve. Jesus had gone with his parents to the Feast of Passover at

4 Textbook for Gothard's Basic Seminar, p. 20.


7 How to get Under God's Protection (Institute in Basic Youth Conflicts, 1987), pp. 3-4.
Jerusalem. The time came to go home, but Jesus stayed behind, unbeknownst to his parents. Mary and Joseph only discovered that their son was not among their company after a day’s journeying. Returning to Jerusalem, Joseph and Mary searched for Jesus for three days. Eventually they discovered Jesus in the temple listening and asking questions of the teachers.

It is a fascinating story, but what does it have to do with Gothard’s ‘umbrella of protection’ and chain of command? According to Gothard, the whole point of the story is to show that Jesus was resolving an internal conflict of interest between obeying God vs. obeying his parents. “Should He follow His spiritual calling and be about His Father’s business (Luke 2:49),” asks Gothard, “or should he become subject to His parents and leave His ministry at the temple?”8 Apparently, Jesus resolved this internal conflict by choosing to re-submit to his parents’ authority and come back under their umbrella of protection.

The implications that such an interpretation entails are obvious: if Jesus had to make the difficult decision of submitting to his parents’ wishes, then that must mean that He was not submitted at the time. By choosing to re-submit to the umbrella of protection, Jesus must have ceased from His rebellion and sin!9

**Chain of Command**

What Gothard actually means by authority and submission extends far beyond the bounds set by scripture, as the father is to be treated as a dictatorial autocrat with practically unlimited control. Prior to 1984, in the "Chain-of-Command" section of Gothard's seminar notebook, there is a picture of the husband as the hammer, the wife as the chisel, and the children as gems in the rough. It is a ghastly illustration with the husband beating on the wife who is chipping away on the children. (Due to the concerns expressed, later editions eliminated this drawing and changed the title from ‘Chain of Command’ to ‘Umbrella of Protection’ without any actual change in the teaching itself.) This picture illustrated how Gothard

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8 Basic Seminar Textbook, p. 20.

has become preoccupied with an authoritarian pattern of human relationships that is not balanced sufficiently with love as a model.... It seems that Gothard fails to adequately present the need for relationships with children, positing instead the proper role and proper discipline that is necessary to get a desired response from the children. The preoccupation is with control, predictability, the proper behavior instead of the need for nurturing relationships in which learned behavior and attitudes come from models, not coercive Manipulation.\textsuperscript{10}

As a child matures into adulthood, Gothard teaches that he passes from chain of command to chain of counsel.\textsuperscript{11} Yet, as critics of Gothard have pointed out, in practice there seems to be no difference between Gothard's teaching on chain of command and chain of counsel since he teaches that no one should ever go against parental counsel, no matter how old the child may be and no matter how ungodly the parents may be. (The only exception he recognizes is if the parent commands something that is a direct and obvious violation of scripture.) Gothard even “suggests that, unless they have parental consent, adult single children should remain at home and that married couples should exercise what seems to be excessive dependence on the counsel of their parents...”\textsuperscript{12} The parental chain of command/counsel ends only if the parent delegates the authority to someone else.

I was once part of an e-group where a man was attempting to defend this approach. A lady asked him to explain about the annunciation. “When the angel Gabriel appeared directly to Mary,” she asked, “wasn’t this a violation of God’s appropriate chain-of-command?” “Not at all,” the man replied, “for I believe that before the angel appeared to Mary, he had already gone through Mary’s father first.”

\textsuperscript{10} Bockelman, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 80 & 83.

\textsuperscript{11} “The final responsibility of parents for their sons and daughters is to determine with them God's will for a life partner. Thereafter they serve in a chain of counsel for them and their children. Thus, parents enter in the line of authority, and they leave in the line of counsel." \textit{The True Significance of The Wedding Covenant} (Published by ATI).

We must now turn to see the implication these ideas about authority have on Gothard's teaching about courtship and dating.

The Abomination of Dating

Gothard's booklet *Establishing Biblical Standards of Courtship*, opens with a picture of a handsome couple riding bicycles together. Beneath the picture are the following words:

Is this couple dating, or courting? The answer will have an important effect upon their lives, the lives of their families, and (if they marry) the lives of those in every generation which follows.

“There is a definite and vital difference between courtship and dating. Unless this difference is understood and the principles of courtship are applied, defrauding and hurts can result, as well as lasting physical, mental, and spiritual consequences.”

Dating must be a terrible sin if it can have consequences "in every generation which follows." In fact, when the Lord destroyed mankind with a flood, and God saw "that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually," (Genesis 6:5), Gothard believes that "these thoughts were being cultivated through dating-type relationships which were common in that society..." Not only must you not date, but Gothard teaches that young people must allow their authorities to determine whom they will marry, and that God can bless no marriage if it goes against parental counsel.

Definitions are very important for Gothard. In fact, he has produced a calendar that gives people a word a month, along with his definition and a supporting scripture. So we do well to ask, how does Gothard define the horrible sin of dating which was practiced at the time of the flood and which has "lasting physical, mental, and spiritual consequences" for those "in every generation which follows"? Gothard defines dating simply as "having a special interest in a person of the opposite gender and cultivating that interest through thoughts, looks, notes, talks, or events...[rather] than

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building mutual commitment toward the potential of marriage, the goal of dating is personal pleasure."15 Courtship, on the other hand, "is a father's agreeing to work with a qualified young man to win his daughter for marriage."16

Those who court realize that "the Lord has warned us not to follow our natural inclinations but to receive His precise guidelines for carrying out a Godly courtship."17 In defining dating and courting so tightly and then juxtaposing them side by side, Gothard is creating a false dilemma. Gothard’s argument only works if you start by granting the assumption that all who date do it for the motive of personal pleasure rather than the motive of mutual commitment towards the potential of marriage.

Gothard sees in dating the assumption that you choose your own partner, whereas in courtship you simply submit to your parent's choice. Gothard cites Solomon, David and Samson as examples that "Those who were the most qualified to choose their own life partners brought sorrow into their lives when they tried to do so."18 When singles spend too much time pairing off and enjoying companionship with members of the opposite sex, they rob themselves from being able "to enjoy the benefits of singleness,"19 and hence, when they do get married they may soon get bored and "neglect the responsibilities of marriage to enjoy the benefits of singleness."20

The Courtship Period

The courtship must not begin until both parties have reached a sufficient degree of sanctification. They should have plenty of time to achieve spiritual maturity since Gothard discourages marriage

15 Ibid, pp. 6-7.
16 Ibid, p. 8.
17 Ibid p. 7.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
before the age of thirty.\textsuperscript{21} When a young man is mature enough, wealthy enough and old enough for marriage, the Lord will indicate the woman he is to court through those who are in authority over him.

When a young man has deepened his fellowship with the Lord, the means God will use to confirm direction toward a particular young lady will be through the authorities He has established... Once the young woman's father has given the young man freedom to focus on winning her heart, the couple enters into courtship.\textsuperscript{22}

In deciding who to court, Gothard downplays the need to get to know the other person first. Instead, he argued, the way to learn whether someone is worth courting is by getting to know their parents.\textsuperscript{23} Even after courtship has begun, many of Gothard's followers discourage the cultivation of a private relationship. As Howard Grant, one of Gothard's followers, said about his twenty-eight year old daughter’s courtship, “In a sense, the whole courtship hinged on this principle - a full agreement that there must not be a 'private' relationship built up. Without such an understanding, it's not a true courtship. That's why an understanding about letters and phone calls is so important, because for most people these things become key building blocks toward privacy.”

Unlike other courtship paradigms, Gothard believes that once the actual period of courtship begins, it should be as short as possible.

\textsuperscript{21} Jacob Prasch writes, “Disturbing also is the anti-matrimonial bias of Bill Gothard and his youth seminars. The potential consequences of Gothard's bias can be devastating. He discourages marriage until the age of 30, the gynecological age where if a female has not already had a child she runs the risk statistically of infertility, miscarriage, and a host of possible congenital birth defects for her baby. Gothard is neither medically nor theologically qualified.” MORIEL Prayer and Newsletter, December 1999/January 2000, page 3.

\textsuperscript{22} Establishing Biblical Standards of Courtship (Oak Brook, ILL: Institute in Basic Life Principles, 1993) p. 11.

\textsuperscript{23} Gothard writes, “The proper way to get to know the young lady is by building a relationship with her father... In the Biblical example of Isaac and Rebekah Abraham clearly instructed that Isaac's wife was to be of his own kindred. This indicates that Isaac and Rebekah would have known each other through their fathers, and this explains why Rebekah did not hesitate to go with Abraham's servant and marry one whom she did not know personally... Dating is based on what is presently known about each other. However, God designed courtship to lead to a marriage covenant based on what He knows about each partner...” Ibid, p. 11.
Walk in the Counsel of the Ungodly?

A question that naturally arises from Gothard’s teaching is: what is the procedure when the parents are either ungodly or opposed to the whole idea of courtship? Gothard's answer is that it makes no difference how ungodly the parents may be: whether they are Christians or atheists, marrying without their full consent means you are acting in rebellion and will, consequently, have marriage problems later in life.

To support this idea Gothard quotes Proverbs 6:20-21: “My son, keep your father's command, and do not forsake the law of your mother. Bind them continually upon your heart, tie them around your neck.” “Notice,” Gothard says, “that the spiritual condition of the parents is not listed as a factor in obeying these clear commands.” Since this verse says to keep your father's command, and gives no qualifications or exceptions, Gothard concludes that we must obey our parents no matter how wicked they may be and even when they tell us to perform actions we believe to be contrary to God's will for our lives.

But is this what Proverbs 6 is saying? The ‘commands’ and ‘law’ of your mother, to which this proverb refers, is clearly a reference to the laws of Moses, using language very similar to Deuteronomy 6. Solomon is here exhorting young people to hold onto the Mosaic law as learned from their parents, and is not addressing the situation of ungodly parents.

Returning from one of Gothard's seminars, Bockelman told of a testimony Gothard cited about two dedicated Christians who believed God wanted them to marry. They prayed about their relationship and decided to get married, convinced that their plans had God's blessing. But the parents of the girl, who are not Christians, objected. What must the young lady do? No matter what the specific facts of the case may be, according to Gothard she must be obedient always to her parents.

We don’t know any of the background of that situation. It may be that the non-Christian parents were wise and saw problems with the young man which the lady was unaware of. But that is not the point. The point that is important to remember is that Gothard has established rules which young people are expected to conform to in

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24 Bockelman, op. cit. p. 74.
every situation regardless of the background and particularities. Whether this is how God intended things to be is an important question that we will be considering in the following chapter.

**Emotional Sterilization**

Gothard objects to casual companionship between the sexes. Although he lists companionship and completeness in his "Six Purposes of Marriage," he nevertheless maintains that when a single person feels the need to have this companionship, that is a direct result of not being content with the Lord. "...unless we are content with the Lord in singleness," argues Gothard with characteristic generalizations, "we will not be content with another person in marriage." Therefore, single people should not feel lonely, for,

> We experience feelings of loneliness as a result of a deepening desire for companionship. ...when we experience loneliness, this often indicates to us that we are allowing the longings of our souls to dominate our lives, rather than enjoying the ever-present fellowship of God's Spirit with our spirits....

> “As the Lord brings us through difficult times and we begin to feel lonely, we can accept this as His signal to us that at the very same moment, He is experiencing the same anguish toward us and wants us to make Him our basic delight.”

Although this idea about loneliness may not seem immediately relevant to the discussion of dating and courtship, it is actually very revealing. It is part of an overall scheme in which various emotions are themselves seen as sinful instead of helping people to learn not to act on those emotions in an ungodly way. The result is that people begin to feel guilty for having the emotions in the first place. (See his book *The Power of Crying Out*, where Gothard delineates when

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25 *The True Significance of The Wedding Covenant*

26 Ibid, p. 10.

27 Ibid, p. 11.
and how a person should or should not cry in order for God to hear them.)

Many young people who accept this teaching begin to think that emotional desires must indicate a lack of commitment to God. This false dilemma is leading many young people into a torturous struggle in which their emotions are perceived as a threat to their desire to be ‘all for Jesus.’

Gothard’s teaching on courtship is part of a larger regime which attempts to regulate the emotions to the extent that no feelings occur outside volitional control and careful deliberation. This involves a hardening up process similar to the disconnection of one’s feelings that often occurs among those who have survived the traumas of a war.
God in the Back

“What is this new-fangled religion of yours, this novel sort of humility, that, by your own example, you would take from us power to judge men’s decisions and make us defer uncritically to human authority? Where does God’s written Word tell us to do that?

—Martin Luther

“The Bible requires children to honor their parents throughout life. When they are little this honor takes the form of obedience. But this obligation to obedience ceases when a new household is formed. If a boy were to obey his parents all the way through life, there is no way he could really leave them, cleave to his new wife, and establish a new household…. Children should leave home and make their own mistakes. If they have been brought up well, those mistakes will not be horrific.

“The parents should view themselves as successful if their seventeen-year-old boy wants to be away from home.

—Douglas Wilson

I first downloaded Sarah Schlissel’s article on courtship and a fathers’ rights about a year ago. Sarah, who was nineteen when she wrote this article, was an influential speaker and writer about courtship and relationship issues. Sarah’s article “Daddy’s Girl: Courtship and a Father’s Rights” is found in many places on the internet and is a favorite amongst courtship enthusiasts. Sarah encourages girls, when they reach marriageable age, to recognize

—Sarah Schlissel


their father’s ‘ownership rights’ over them. She takes the principle that “to generate something is to have an implicit sovereignty over it” and applies this to a father’s sovereignty over his daughter. “As strange as it may sound,” she suggests

in the peculiar relationship of the father and daughter, God, as it were, takes a back seat. God has created a hierarchy such that the daughter is directly answerable to her father, and her father then answers to God…. The order of God, as indicated in his word, is that God himself defers to the will of the father when it comes to his daughter. God says, "You heard your father. The answer is no." Thus, the will of the father regarding his daughter IS the will of God.

God in the back seat? This sort of rhetoric can easily be used unscrupulously by fathers with a controlling agenda. I am not saying that Sarah’s father has that kind of agenda, nor that Sarah lacks an independent mind. But I am concerned about the implications of a courtship system based around the idea that God’s prescriptive will is subordinate to a human agency.

Douglas Wilson has observed that “Domineering fathers and manipulative mothers are frequently tempted to use the courtship model as a way of controlling their children instead of serving them.” This reminds me of the time I tried to encourage a twenty-year old man named Randy to seek a closer walk with Jesus. Randy brushed all my words aside saying, “That’s up to Daddy. Talk to him about it because he’s in charge of that part of my life.” As I later found out, Randy’s father had encouraged Randy to give him total control over his relationship with Christ. The father intended to serve as a sort of mediator between Randy and God. “That way you will not have to worry”, said Randy’s father, “because you can just relax in the knowledge that if there is anything you need do or know concerning Jesus, I’ll tell you.”

Randy’s father used authority as a means to control.

Against the backdrop of such abuses, the temptation is to throw out authority altogether. However, when the abuse of authority in one direction leads to an equally unbiblical approach in the opposite extreme, it is only a matter of time before the pendulum swings back to where it was in the beginning and we are no better

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30 Douglas Wilson, ‘The Courtship Path’ in 5 Paths to the Love of Your Life (op. cit., p. 81).
off.\textsuperscript{31} The solution is to find the Biblical balance. In this chapter we shall be considering the Bible’s teaching on authority and how this teaching is being misused by various teachers today, not least those within the courtship movement.

\textbf{Is the Old Testament Relevant?}

In seeking to establish a Biblical balance on parental authority, I shall be drawing on both the Old and the New Testaments. I realize that some of my readers may find this difficult, especially as many of the teachers in the courtship movement have themselves been criticized for relying on Old Testament models. Such models, it is believed, are antithetic to the grace revealed by Christ in the New Testament. Later we shall be considering what some of these Old Testament models are, but at the moment it must be stressed that the problem is not \textit{that} these teachers are relying on the Old Testament; rather, the problem is \textit{how} they are using and interpreting the Old Testament. In opposing these teachers, we must avoid reacting into a false dichotomy between the Old and New Testaments. God did not start over at the time of the New Testament. Just as the Old Testament cannot be appreciated properly without seeing how it is fulfilled in the New, so the New Testament cannot be understood properly without appreciating how it builds on the foundation already laid in the Old.

Without the Old Testament we are greatly handicapped in offering an adequate solution to much of the false teaching that is being given on parental authority. This is because the New Testament’s comments on the subject of parental authority builds on the foundation already laid in the Old. Thus, when Paul was writing to the Ephesians on the subject of parental authority, he rooted his teaching in the moral authority of Old Testament law.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother,” which is the first commandment with promise: “that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.” (Ephesians 6:1-3)

\textsuperscript{31} For an excellent discussion of the two opposite imbalances of Biblical authority, together with their relationship to the two most common Trinitarian heresies, see the outline for Douglas Wilson’s sermon “Marriage as Manifest Glory XXVIII: ‘What Headship is Not’” in Blog and Mablog at www.dougwills.com/ A recording of the entire sermon is available through Canon Press, Moscow ID.
The reason Paul could quote the Sinai law when addressing Gentile children is because, through faith, Gentile believers have now been grafted in to God’s covenant family (Rom. 11:17). The result of Gentiles coming into the covenant is that they are heirs of the covenantal laws and promises of the Old covenant. Therefore, “Rather than neglect Mosaic law,” writes Jason Fletcher,

Christians have a theological responsibility to seek in the law given to shape the nation of Israel insight into God’s will for nations generally. This is because Mosaic law was never intended exclusively for Israel; its ethical principles originate in the character of God and are foundational to the creation order. Moreover, Jesus does not abolish Mosaic law but authoritatively reveals its underlying ethical intent, and Paul, although critical of the misuse and powerlessness of the law, also affirms its abiding ethical authority.

Wisdom will be needed to know how to apply the laws of the Old Testament in today’s world. If, as we shall see, wisdom was required to know how to apply God’s laws at the time they were written, how much more is this true in the world of today. Because we are culturally and politically very far removed from the time when God gave His people the law, there are many laws which may seem irrelevant today. However, even in such cases, there are always guiding principles behind the laws that can be extracted and applied to a variety of differing context. For example, in Deuteronomy 22:8 we read the Lord’s command that there be a parapet around the roof of the house. Just because we no longer live in houses with flat roofs does not mean we are free to simply disregard this command, for there are numerous ways that the principle behind such a law – appropriate safety and care of another’s life – can be applied in the contemporary world. Similarly, the Old Testament laws that related to the theocracy of Israel or the ceremonial requirements that found fulfillment in the death of Christ, still contain truth to which we can and should attend.


33 Fletcher, *ibid.*

34 See J. H. Wright *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Leicester: IVP, 2004) for some of the ways in which Old Testament social ethics can find meaningful application today.
With that foundation, we are now in a position to examine what both the Old and New Testaments have to say on the subject of parental authority.

**Biblical Authority**

As we have already seen from Ephesians 6:1-3, the foundation of the Bible’s teaching on parental authority is the fifth commandment, “Honor your father and your mother…” (Ex. 20:12; Dt. 5:16; Mt. 15:4; Eph. 6:2). Though this does not tell us very much about the actual functioning of parental authority, it does lay the foundation on which parental authority must operate. Children must seek, in all things, to honor their parents. It would be a mistake to think that this commandment only applies to young children. No matter how old one may be, Jesus showed that we are still under the command to honor our parents (Mt. 15:3-6).

A problem arises when certain teachers within the courtship and betrothal movements assume that honor of parents is synonymous with perpetual obedience. I have known many families torn apart because of a misapplied notion of honor that grown children have been required to render their parents. It is true that part of what it means to honor one’s parents is to honor the authority God has invested in them. As Paul says in his epistle to the Romans, “there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.” (Rom. 13:1; see also 1 Pet. 2:13-17) As this verse makes clear, the only legitimate authority is that which God has appointed. Now the Bible makes clear that God has invested His authority to certain human institutions, including civil magistrates, church government and the ‘government’ of the family. The question is whether parental authority functions the same way over grown children as it does over young children. The Bible indicates that parental authority does function differently over children than it does over adults. For example, while all people are told to honor their parents, it is only children who are commanded to actually obey their parents (Eph. 6:1-3; Col. 3:20). Thus, when Paul lays out the various orders of human authority in his letter to the Corinthians, when he comes to the man he gives no human authority, saying instead that the man is directly accountable to God (1 Cor. 11:3).

In attempting to establish a mandate for perpetual obedience of parents, Lindvall and others have appealed to Romans 1:30-32 and 2 Timothy 3:2-6, where Paul refers to disobedience to parents in a list
of other sins that are clearly addressed to adults. Lindvall argues that because the other sins in this list apply to adults – murderers, slanderers, etc. - so the sin of being disobedient to parents must also apply to adults, not simply children. Hence, he says, we should obey our parents even when we are full grown. However, since Lindvall does not apply this prohibition to adult women who are married, since they are then under their husband’s authority, his interpretation hinges on maintaining that the entire list of sins refers exclusively to adult males. But the context of these passages, particularly Romans 1, makes this a difficult hypothesis to maintain. The Romans 1 passage is addressing the perverse end of those who exchange the truth of God for a lie, and there is no reason to assume Paul only had adult males in mind at this point. Similarly, in the 2 Timothy passage, the word for men is the generic word “ANTHROPOS” which is neither gender nor age specific, so it is not unreasonable that within this generic rubric Paul would make mention of specific sins that were committed by a subset of ANTHROPOS, namely children. Even Lindvall must agree that this is exegetically possible since he maintains that married women are outside the people guilty of this particular sin.

When Does Independence Occur?

We have seen that Paul taught that married men are directly accountable to God (1 Cor. 11:3). Does this mean a man should not be independent until the moment of marriage? The Bible does not directly address this question, so it is a matter of wisdom. When we consider the fact that sons should be prepared for marriage and independence, it seems wise to introduce such independence progressively, well before the time of marriage. Young men should be trained to leave their father and mother when he gets married. But this does not mean that marriage should be considered the moment of independence. The independence of the child should be a goal to which the parents aim. And it should be fostered deliberately so that with each succeeding year quietly and perhaps imperceptibly because of its gradualness, the

Genesis 2:24 speaks of a man leaving his father and mother when he gets married. But this does not mean that marriage should be considered the moment of independence. The independence of the child should be a goal to which the parents aim. And it should be fostered deliberately so that with each succeeding year quietly and perhaps imperceptibly because of its gradualness, the
child moves from being under the parents to being alongside them. The Bible gives no age at which this is to be achieved, but it is clearly the whole intention of the parent/child relationship. The parents are to view themselves only as in loco parente, that is, in the place of the parenthood of God. This is what should be uppermost in their minds. In the sense of having their children dependent on them, they are parents for only a short period. God alone is the child's permanent parent. Therefore, they are to aim at withdrawing gradually from their position of authority.35

If one surveys the traditions of other cultures, we find that young men became independent no later than their late teenage years. In ancient Greece a boy was considered to graduate out of his father's care at eighteen; in Rome this stage occurred anywhere between fourteen and seventeen, while among the ancient Hebrews it was at twelve that a father relinquished the responsibility for his son to God. William Barclay explains that

In the Jewish world, when a boy had passed his twelfth birthday, on the first Sabbath after it, the father took the boy to the Synagogue, where he became A Son of the Law. The father thereupon uttered a benediction, “Blessed be Thou, O God, who has taken from me the responsibility for this boy.” The boy prayed a prayer in which he said, “O my God and God of my fathers! On this solemn and sacred day, which marks my passage from boyhood to manhood, I humbly raise my eyes unto Thee, and declare with sincerity and truth, that henceforth I will keep Thy commandments, and undertake and bear the responsibility of mine actions towards Thee.”36

Much wisdom is contained in the above benediction. The passage from boyhood to manhood is one where the responsibility of parents is transferred to the responsibility of God. The relinquishing of parental authority and responsibility should be concurrent with the


parents also withdrawing their subsidy. Though a son continues to be under the Biblical obligation to heed the wisdom of his parents (Prov. 1:8-9), the elders in the church (Heb. 13:7, 17) and all godly counsel (Prov. 12:15, 19:20, 20:5; 27:9), he is not to do so under the position of his parents’ headship. The son is no longer accountable to his parents but is directly accountable to God for his decisions.

Parental authority over daughters functions differently than with sons. While the authority parents have over sons has a provisional function leading toward future independence, the authority that a father has over his daughter fulfils a protective function. Just as the husband is supposed to protect the wife as “the weaker vessel” (1 Pet. 3:7), so the father has a responsibility to protect his daughters for the same reason. This is a difficult concept to grasp in a society that has come to believe that the male instinct to protect and look out for women (and therefore to treat them differently to men) is demeaning to the woman. This only shows how far removed we are from God’s heart. According to scripture, women need to be protected and it is the man’s responsibility to do so. This comes across clearly in the numerous Old Testament laws relating to the protection of women.

If it is true that men are, in general, obligated by scripture to protect women, how much more is it true that fathers are obligated to protect their daughters. Here again, the spirit of this age counsels us in the opposite direction. In an attempt to avoid being ‘over-protective,’ the fathers of today leave their daughters vulnerable to all manner of abuse and mistreatment. Yet as the Old Testament laws clearly indicate, it is the responsibility of men to protect women. A good example of this is Numbers 30.

37 See Douglas Wilson’s talk ‘Recovering Lost Ground’ in the series Shepherding Young People (Moscow ID: Canon Press, 1990).

38 The story of Eli’s sons might be cited as proof that grown sons are still accountable to their father since 1 Samuel 2:25 condemns Hophni and Phinehas for “not heed[ing] the voice of their father”. It is true that these young men ought to have listened to the voice of their father when he told them not to transgress against the Lord, but it is also true that they ought to have listened to anyone giving the same advice. The story of Hophni and Phinehas’s rebellion and subsequent deaths remains a warning to those who are raised with the knowledge of God yet openly rebel against it. The story can also be taken as a warning to fathers who honor their children more than the Lord (1 Sam. 2:29). The story does not seem, even at a stretch, to be implying that indefinite parental authority over grown sons is Biblically normative.
Numbers 30 & the Nullification of Vows

We see this principle operative in Numbers 30 where we read about the laws concerning vows. If a man makes a vow to the Lord or swears an oath, he is bound by it and not allowed to break his word. But if a woman makes a vow “while in her father’s house in her youth” (in other words, before she is married, while she is still being subsidized by her father,) it can be cancelled by her father, provided that he does so on the same day he hears of it. If the woman is married while under a vow she has made, or if she makes a vow whilst married, her husband has the authority to cancel it, again provided he does so on the day he hears of it. This law does not apply to widows or divorced women.

Because this passage often plays a central part in the courtship and betrothal apologetic, we need to consider correct application of this law. To do this, it is necessary to first understand something of Ancient Near Eastern legal theory. Jonathan Burnside has pointed out that “Modern scholarly assumptions on how to read biblical law are often based on the values of modern liberalism, particularly the ‘rule of law’ (the belief that adjudication should be governed by laws and not by people.)”39 Burnside explains that these assumptions lead us to approach biblical laws like we approach our own laws, that is, by looking at all the instances covered by the literal language of a particular law. However, Burnside argues that a less anachronistic approach to the laws of the Ancient Near East (including the Old Testament legal code) is not to ask “What situations do the words of this rule cover?” but “What typical image(s) do the words of this rule evoke?” and “What situations (within known social contexts) does this rule make you think of?”

The image that the Numbers 30 law brings to mind is a situation where a father or husband is exercising protective authority over his daughter/wife. The principle behind it is the same as that behind all the laws given for the protection of women. If a woman binds herself by “vows or by a rash utterance from her lips” (Num. 30:6), it is the father or the husband who are ultimately responsible to see that the woman is protected from her own foolishness. It is God’s care and love which comes across here, as in all the other laws designed to protect women. And, of course, the issue of authority is just assumed. You cannot be responsible for protecting a woman that you have no authority over.

Some teachers have used this passage to argue that even if a woman is fully grown and living independently, Dad can still tell her what to do. Further, it has been pointed out, if a father can overrule his daughter’s will on something as big and important as a vow to the Lord, then how much more should he have authority to overrule his daughter on smaller less important things. In this way, the Numbers passage has been used to give fathers the right to micromanage their daughter’s personal lives up until they are married. I know one woman whose father believed he had the right to revoke his permission of the match right up to the minute they were wed. He did actually threaten to withdraw his authorization if his daughter didn’t exhibit the right attitudes, do her chores properly, and so on. She was in her twenties at the time. Similarly, Lindvall wonders whether this law in Numbers gives a father the authority to actually nullify his daughter’s marriage vows.

Such suggestions fail to appreciate the context of Numbers 30. We will deal with Lindvall’s suggestion first. Does Numbers 30 give fathers the right to nullify their daughter’s marriage vows? In order to answer this question we must first understand that in Old Testament culture, marriage was not a vow but a legal contract. Girls could enter such contracts after the age of twelve and boys after the age of thirteen. While a marriage was not legal unless the woman gave her consent, it could be legal (though not always socially acceptable) without the consent of the father, provided the girl was at least twelve years of age. Further, there is no evidence that any Jews or rabbis ever thought to apply this law to the question of marriage. Rather, it should be seen in the context of the corpus of laws given for the protection of women.

Because the principle behind this law was God’s desire to love and protect women, fathers who use this passage as a blank check to exercise ungodly control are violating the spirit of this law. Since the Old Testament laws were meant to give us pictures that apply to the typical cases they make us think of, we simply cannot take a rule like this and then transpose the principle behind it (a father’s authority over unmarried daughters) to any scenario we like. In his book *Studies in the Semiotics of Biblical Law*[^40], Bernard Jackson has suggested that disputes over Old Testament laws would not have been settled by seeing if they were ‘covered’ by the literal meaning of any given rule, but by seeing “whether the dispute is sufficiently similar to the picture evoked by the rule to justify its use in order to

resolve the problem. If it is sufficiently similar, it applies, even though it is not the literal meaning of the words.\(^{41}\) Because “how similar?” questions are evaluative, a good judge would have required more than just knowledge of the law; rather, he needed to have a sense of spiritual wisdom that could only be gained through a great deal of reflection on and understanding about the whole of God’s law.

The Numbers passage clearly assumes that women will be making independent decisions, but this is not antithetic to a father’s protective oversight. Similarly, to say that an unmarried woman is under the protection of her father’s authority does not mean that she must always live at home or that she cannot pursue independent activities. Fathers are required to provide protective authority for their daughters, not oppressive authority over their daughters. Just as a husband’s authority over his wife is meant to be through servanthood and sacrifice (Eph. 5:25), so a father’s authority over his daughter should follow the same pattern. This authority is to be applied in love with a respect for the other-ness of his daughter.

For a father to exercise protective authority over his daughters is a very different thing to a father keeping his daughters in an insular environment cut off from what is happening in the world. To isolate and ‘shelter’ a woman, in the name of ‘protection,’ is actually to leave her unprotected since she will be badly equipped to face the challenges of the world and parenting.

Parents should actively foster independence in their daughters while still exercising loving protection over their relationships, not least in a culture like our own where there are so many sexual predators lurking about. If women needed protection in Old Testament culture, how much more in our decadent age.

A further question remains about the Numbers 30 passage. If it is true that a father has authority to nullify a vow made to the Lord, then doesn’t it follow logically that he would have authority on less important matters, such as potential suitors and even her decision who to marry? In answer to this question, it is important to emphasize that the question is not whether a father has authority over his daughter (the text simply assumes that); rather, the question is whether it is a Biblically appropriate use of a father’s authority for him to ask a grown daughter to acknowledge his final veto power over relationships.

\(^{41}\) Burnside, ibid.
There are numerous matters of lesser importance than a vow made before the Lord which we would all recognize are wrong for a father to decide upon for a grown daughter, even if he has the authority to do so. For example, if a father started making the kinds of decisions for his 30-year-old daughter that he made for her when she was 5, we would all recognize that as being unbiblical, and it would not be a rational defense to say: “if such authority rests with the father or the husband concerning a vow made to the Lord, how much more does it apply to these other issues of lesser importance?” Suffice to say, Numbers 30 does not seem to tell us anything either way about whether a particular paternal decision, let alone the decision to authoritatively veto a relationship for a grown daughter, was ever meant to be Biblical normative.

If we take the principle of authority, which Numbers 30 establishes, and then apply that principle to other situations where there is no specific law, then it would be a matter of wisdom. What does that wisdom look like in cases of grown children who are no longer living at home? I am not convinced that this passage itself sets any precedent for answering that question.

1 Corinthians 7

1 Corinthians 7:36ff, is sometimes used to defend the position that it is a Biblically appropriate use of a father’s authority for him to ask a grown daughter to acknowledge his final veto power over relationships.

The passage is admittedly less than clear. Commentaries don’t even agree on who the pronouns refer to. For that reason alone we should be very cautious about using it as a proof text for veto power. In Richart Pratt’s commentary on the passage, he suggests that the “anyone” in verse 36 may not actually refer to the father at all but the woman’s fiancé (as suggested by the NIV and the NRSV). As he writes:

“Paul’s “anyone” is somewhat ambiguous here. It may refer either to a young woman’s fiancé or to her father. The NIV and NRSV understand fiancé, and are most likely correct given that 7:25-28 lay the responsibility for keeping or breaking engagement on the groom. Whether Paul referred to fathers, fiancés, or both, however, the basic idea is the same. If someone is convinced that
marriage is right before God, he should do as he wants. He is not sinning.”

Someone else suggested that the idea here is that due to a man’s daughter getting beyond a marriageable age (“beyond the flower of her youth”) the father should step in and arrange a marriage. Although that seems consistent with the language of the text, it may be a bit of a stretch.

Hodge points out that Paul is addressing fathers because “with them, according to the practice both of Jews and of Greeks, rested the disposal of the daughters of the family.” If this is correct, it is less than clear whether Paul is intending to teach us, or even implying, that this cultural practice should be ethically normative, instead of simply giving advice for working within an existing cultural paradigm.

Kistemaker seems to share Pratt’s tentative view that the “anyone” of verse 36 does not actually refer to the virgin’s father but to her fiancé:

These verses lack clarity of expression and thus are open to a number of interpretations. For instance, who is the person described as “someone” (v. 36)? Is he the fiancé of the virgin or is he her father? If he is the father, why does Paul say “let them marry” when the fiancé has not been introduced? If we assume that Paul refers to the fiancé, why does he write, “he has decided to keep his own virgin” (v. 37)? Should the translation of verse 38 be “he who marries the virgin” (NIV) or “he who her gives in marriage” (NKJV)? And finally, do we interpret this passage from an ancient oriental point of view in which the father made the marriage arrangements for his daughter? Or do we explain the matter of engagements and marriage on the basis of today’s customs? Let us study the verses of this passage line by line.

a. “But if someone thinks that he is behaving dishonorably toward his marriageable virgin.” Presumably Paul has been asked to give advice in the matter that concerns a virgin of marriageable age. He
begins with a conditional clause that expresses reality and continues with the word *someone*. This term must refer to a man who possesses a virgin, possibly his fiancée. The man is “behaving dishonorably” toward the unmarried woman and acting contrary to what Paul urges every believer in Corinth to do: to promote decorum (v. 35). In light of the usage of the Greek, the term *behave dishonorably* may be a euphemism for sexually indecent acts. Paul advocates marriage when people, particularly those who are engaged to be married, are unable to control themselves (v. 9).

b. “If his passions are strong and it must be so.” The subject of the preceding conditional clause is a man whose moral conduct has become questionable. For that reason, we maintain the same subject in this conditional clause. The intimate nature of the matter at hand causes Paul to express probability with the conditional particle *if*. In Greek, the term *hyperakmos* can mean either “past marriageable age” (with reference to the woman) or “with strong passions” (referring to the man). We choose the latter. Paul adds, “and it must be so,” which probably means that his sexual drive controls the man and compels him to marry.

c. “Let him do as he wishes; he does not sin. Let them marry.” Earlier Paul gives the same advice: “let them marry” (v. 9) and “if you should marry, you have not sinned” (v. 28). The subject is the fiancé and his betrothed virgin for whom Paul advises wedlock.

Personally, I am convinced that Pratt and Kistemaker are correct in tentatively taking the “anyone” to refer not to the father but to the fiancé. Joseph R. Nally, the Theological Editor for IIBM, summarized the evidence for this position in a personal letter to me. This is what he wrote:

…there is no mention of previous parental duties or relationships. If Paul is referring to the father then he uses “extraordinary” language – “under no compulsion” –
“having authority of his own will” = possessing sufficient will power – and “he does not sin.” In addition, the shift in v. 36 from a singular subject – he does not sin – to a plural subject – let them marry – abruptly brings in a 3rd party – the groom. Moreover, it is irregular to refer to a father’s daughter as “his virgin.” In Acts 21:4 Phillip’s 4 daughters are described as his “virgin daughters” not his “virgins.” Lastly, I would ask why inform a father, who presumably is married, that marriage is good but the single life is better? It makes more sense – at least to me – if these words were directed to those exploring the possibility of marriage for themselves.

Therefore, I think Paul is addressing engaged Christians considering marriage. R. Collins considers 7:36-38 to be a kind of commentary on v. 27. The “anyone” refers thus to the fiancée, which reveals Paul’s expected chastity before marriage comment. This view seems to fit the preceding context and what follows in vs. 39-40, where widows are told they are free to marry if they choose, but in Paul’s opinion would be happier if they remained single. In a setting where sexual asceticism was acclaimed as good, the decision to marry could easily have become a moral struggle. Thus, Paul is urging the finance who has strong sexual urges to marry. But if his desires are under control then he would not wrong his fiancée. Lastly, the Greek- aschemonein – may have a variety of connotations – one of which he is acting against social custom. Winter states “The survey of literary writers and non-literary sources contains some 87 occurrences of this word and its cognates and provides overwhelming evidence that, within the context of male and female relationships, the word ‘to behave unseeingly’ has sexual connotations. The ‘but’ beginning 7:36 contrasts this ‘unseemly’ conduct with the goal of ‘seemly’ (euschemon) conduct in 7:35. There are some other reasons, but I think this makes the point pretty firmly.

Authority Gone Wrong
Parents must raise their sons to be future leaders and to therefore want to be independent of them. Distortions of the parental task occur when sons are trained to be perpetually dependent on parents, whether financially, emotionally, psychologically or spiritually. Although daughters are not being trained in the same way as men, they should still be trained to be independent in the sense of being mature, learning to make their own decisions, developing a Biblical strength of mind and having a sense of their own identity as individuals before God. All these things come naturally in a healthy environment and are an essential preparation for marriage.

On the other hand, when these elements are not in place for either the son or daughter, the transition into marriage can be unnecessarily rocky. One young woman who went through the courtship system and whose family believed in excessive parental authority, wrote to me after she was married, saying,

I found that I was not very well-equipped for life as an adult, even a married woman. I did not know how to make decisions or how to have opinions and desires that may be different from an authority’s, personal boundaries, a real personality and identity of my own, or an independent relationship with God. I am learning, but it’s very difficult and at times painful.

Jonathan Lindvall has gone so far as to teach that sons and daughters should not have opinions and desires different to those of their parents. Lindvall has certainly succeeded in planting this vision in his children. On his website Lindvall shares a song that his

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42 In his Bold Parenting Seminar, Lindvall shares how he and his father had always disagreed over whether it was permissible for a Christian to drink a little wine. When Lindvall became an adult he began taking a little wine, to his father's horror. But, as Lindvall said, "I've been taught all my life that, you know, as soon as you're an adult you...live by your own convictions, right? I decided the day I get married...I'm going to have my convictions instead of my dad's...." (Jonathan Lindvall, Bold Parenting Seminar, ibid.) One day Lindvall began to wonder if his actions in this area failed to honor his father. Then Jonathan imagined himself in a similar position with his own children. He realized that it was inconsistent to expect his children to obey and pass on his teachings when they were grown if he did not do the same to his father. Eventually, he concluded God wanted him to accept his father's position and teach his children to do so, and teach them to teach their children to do so, etc. ad infinitum. Only in this way could Jonathan realistically expect his children to do the same with his teachings. “If I would defer to my father” said Jonathan, “I would have a guarantee that every single one of my children would walk with the Lord and pass it on to their children. (Bold Parenting Seminar.)

What is interesting here is the way Lindvall subtly undercuts the basic protestant doctrine of sola scriptura (‘scripture only’). Notice what is happening: Lindvall teaches his children that they must follow extra-biblical teachings of his grandfather, and that they must pass on his own extra-biblical ideas to their children. Carrying on in this manner - with the father of each successive generation adding a little more teaching to the collection - it wouldn't take long before a virtual Talmud of extra biblical imperatives had been amassed. Such imperatives (however few or many) are disastrous precisely because they are given an authority that properly belongs only to scripture (see Mark 7:7).
daughter Bethany wrote for him on Father’s day. The chorus goes as follows:

I want to give you my heart
All my dreams, my time and love.
I set my eyes to observe your ways
That I may learn to please the Lord.

It is not surprising that Lindvall’s daughter would feel like this about her father since he has been training her from very young to think like this. From an early age, Lindvall shares, he has been asking them to, from their heart, find fulfillment in serving with me. I am asking them to let me shape their ambitions, to shape their tastes or preferences, to aim their hearts as a warrior does arrows (Ps. 127:3-5). I am asking them to willingly give up exclusive focus on their individual desires. I want my children to give me their hearts--for their own sake.\footnote{Bold Christian Living E-Mail Newsletter, Issue #74 © 2000. Subject: Children's Hearts.}

A young man of twenty-one years old – who will we call Daniel - once wrote to Lindvall in a state of despair. His parents had recently become followers of Lindvall's teachings. Daniel, however, did not agree with some of Lindvall’s ideas. "I could no longer live in a family of Lindvallians" this man wrote, “I wanted to be a living, breathing, active, FREE Christian.” The parents then wrote to Lindvall asking how they should handle their 'rebellious' son? Lindvall's advice to them - which unfortunately was implemented - was to completely cut Daniel off, not allowing him any contact with his mother or 19-year-old brother. Moreover, Lindvall instructed the parents to "deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved…”

When Daniel wrote to Lindvall, he pleaded with him to retract the advice given to his parents that he might once again be allowed to see his mother and his brother. Furthermore, Daniel begged Lindvall to at least listen to his side of the story before making such a harsh judgment. Both these requests Lindvall squarely refused. Instead Lindvall wrote this young man a letter, stating that if he wanted to resume a relationship with his family he needed first to

\footnote{Bold Christian Living E-Mail Newsletter, Issue #74 © 2000. Subject: Children's Hearts.}
come under complete obedience to his father. Such obedience included the necessity to accept his father's opinions. Here is a quotation from the letter.

Sons are supposed to be extensions of their fathers... The fact that your opinions differ so markedly from your parents is evidence that you have never fully given your heart to them. Solomon appealed to his son (Prov. 23:26), 'My son, give me your heart.' A son is supposed to give his father his heart. That means he fully surrenders to his parents' desires, opinions, tastes, aspirations, etc."

Lindvall’s steadfast refusal to listen and take into account what Daniel might have to say is not merely an isolated example of Lindvall's many errors, but is highly revealing of his basic orientation. It is no exaggeration to say that Lindvall lives, and draws others, into a world where right and wrong become increasingly irrelevant regarding the operation of family relationships. Whether it concerns a wife whose abusive husband is a danger to her children and a threat to her own life, or a grown son who is being shunned by his parents, it never matters to Lindvall who is right or wrong since all that is required is blind, uncontingent obedience to the father/husband.

One follower of Lindvall told me that if his daughter were to rebel and not repent, then he would stop feeding her, encourage his other children to cease treating her as a sister in Christ, and finally help her to leave home. Such “rebellion” could include simply disagreeing with the family interpretation of a Bible passage. When such judgments are pronounced, the child is typically given no voice in the matter, however unfairly he or she may have been treated. Lindvall insists that Biblical patterns of discipline include no place for a counselor or parent listening to the child, of any age. In the letter already cited, Lindvall said to twenty-one-year-old Daniel,

You assume that it is a scriptural requirement of a Biblical counselor before advising parents how to relate to their children, that they hear the details of a conflict from both sides. Is this really what the Bible teaches? If you were advising parents about handling their disobedient children, do you believe you would be obligated to ask for the child's "story" before advising his parents to discipline him?...
The passage [Deut. 21:18-21] goes on to direct that after taking their son to the "elders of his city" and stating their accusation, the elders are to do something [stone the son to death]. Interestingly, it never says anything about them pausing and listening to the son's side of the story.

Lindvall is certainly mistaken here since the Bible did command the people to listen to the "other side of the story", particularly when it concerns the weaker party, such as the stranger or the small and weak. In Deuteronomy 1:16-17, Moses wrote,

"Then I commanded your judges at that time, saying, 'hear the cases between your brethren, and judge righteously between a man and his brother or the stranger who is with him. You shall not show partiality in judgment; you shall hear the small as well as the great; you shall not be afraid in any man's presence, for the judgment is God's. The case that is too hard for you, bring to me, and I will hear it.'"

Throughout scripture the Lord shows his character in making special provision for the weak, for children, orphans, aliens, wives and slaves - the very classes that normally would have had no rights in the customs of those days. Lindvall might argue that this injunction to "hear the small as well as the great" refers only to hearing the cases of under privileged men and not a principle that applies equally to sons, daughter's and wives. However, the entire context of this passage relates to judging righteously. If the Lord says "it is not good to show partiality in judgment" (Prov. 24:23) does this principle suddenly cease to apply when it comes to evaluating a father's judgment on his son or daughter? Lindvall says yes, both in cases where the death penalty would have been the result as well as cases today involving parents and grown sons.

The fact that the Lord made provision for cases that were too hard for the people, shows that He was concerned about the details and facts in the judgment. Even though the legal code was very clear about the effects certain behavior would incur, we see that in the actual outworking of the laws each situation was considered on its own merits, as in the case of the man who was caught working on the Sabbath. (Num. 15:32-36) In that case, Moses had to go and inquire of the Lord before they knew how to handle the situation. Although the laws for breaking the Sabbath were very clear, the
application of those laws in everyday situations could only work as the Lord himself directed, which was no doubt because it required an attention to detail, circumstance and motive. As Jason Fletcher observes,

…the Torah was not seen as a flat, wooden or static collection. A discretionary element existed in its application, which helps explain why Moses placed such a premium on appointing judges who were ‘capable men,’ ‘men who fear God,’ and ‘trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain’.44

As should now be clear, following God’s law was never a matter of playing connect the dots, feeding every situation through the same static model and then seeing what result comes out. Take the passage from Numbers 30 that we have already looked at. Many teachers within the courtship movement are often fond of pointing out that because this passage and other laws relating to parental authority make no exceptions in the case of ungodly parents, it follows that parental authority functions across the board apodeictically. Yet instances where parental authority has become corrupt, like other circumstantial anomalies not covered by these laws, are atypical to the images these laws were clearly designed to evoke. As such, these instances would fall under the adjudication of a judge’s wisdom.

In addressing these difficult situations, wisdom does not occur in a vacuum. Even where the Bible does not directly address cases of ungodly parental authority, it does give us general principles about authority that can be studied by those seeking godly wisdom. For example, the Bible shows that our obedience to the authority of human government is contingent on other factors (compare Romans 13:1 with Acts 5:29.) There are examples in the Old and New Testaments where disobedience to civil authority was honored (Exod. 1:15-21; Acts 4:15-21), because the authority had become corrupt. Where disobedience to authority does become necessary, it never absolves one from the obligation to show honor to the authority, as we see from Paul’s example in Acts 23:2-5 or David’s example in 1 Sam. 26:9.

These principles can be applied, in wisdom, to all forms of authority God has ordained, including authority within the family. As with the government of the state or the church, the government of the family is capable of becoming corrupt. Douglas Wilson writes that

In the realm of family government, we have the fine example of Abigail, a beautiful and intelligent woman, who immediately saw that her husband was being a reckless idiot, endangering the whole clan. She, without getting his permission, took it upon herself to save his life, along with the life of every other male in the family.

So we have examples of godly "disobedience" in every sphere of God-given government.45

Elsewhere Wilson writes that “No human authority is absolute, and this includes the authority of the parents in courtship.”46 Genuine authority does not imply unlimited authority.

Although these principles should be clear, it is often difficult to know what to do when parents do presume to exercise absolute, unlimited authority. In one case, there was a teenage girl named Maria whose father was a practising warlock and whose mother was obsessively controlling and possessive. When Maria came to know the Lord, her conversion created an earthquake at home. There followed five years of unbearable tension, manipulation and demonic pressure channeled against Maria. Eventually, the strain of living at home became too much and Maria moved in with another family from her church. Even though Maria was in her twenties at the time, the family that took her in were heavily criticized by other Christians for “usurping the authority of Maria’s parents.”

It is true that the father exercises a generic type of authority over all who are in his household, including guests and grown children. According to Old Testament law, a man was responsible for all his dependents, even strangers that might be living in his home. For example, it was incumbent on the master of the household


46 Douglas Wilson, ‘The Courtship Path’ in 5 Paths to the Love of Your Life (op. cit., p. 65).
to make sure strangers and guests kept the Sabbath. However, this kind of authority is different to the authority a father exercises over children when they are young. Some fathers think that their position gives them the right to use their authority however they choose while their children are still at home. The authority God has invested in the father is inherent just as it is with human governments, but this does not validate whatever rules the father may choose to enforce anymore than it validates the rules a government makes. A father can choose to behave unbiblically and make the lives of his dependents miserable and stunted, or he can fulfil his God-appointed role with wisdom and discretion. A father who fails in the wisdom I have been discussing is not just being a foolish man; rather, he is demonstrating failure to be biblically protective and responsible for those God has given him.

Suffice to say that to apply this biblical principle of authority without wisdom is like a proverb in the mouth of a fool, being as useless as legs that hang limp (Prov. 26:7).

The Meaning of Trust

A chapter on authority would not be complete without saying something about trust. “Trust,” writes Douglas Wilson, “is at the center of all family life. Trust is what makes authority bearable.”

Many parents who advocate courtship have not behaved in trustworthy ways. Because they have not developed a relationship of trust with their children over the years, the parents fall back on insisting upon a kind of blind mechanical trust. One man who wrote a book defending courtship also wrote a letter to his teenagers saying, “Trust is only involved when you don’t see the wisdom of why you ought to place your trust in someone else…. That is something you do by choice.” Elsewhere the same man wrote, “In relationship, trust can be even more important than truth” with the consequence that young people can mechanically "decide to trust your parents" as an act of the will.

As long as trust is divorced from wisdom and truth, then we have no criterion for differentiating between all and any who happen to demand our trust. Like any transient verb, the merits of trusting depend entirely on that to which it is applied. To know whether a person’s trust or submission is virtuous, you must first know the

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47 Wilson, op. cit., p. 45.
direct object of that trust or submission. Am I being submitted to the pride of life and the lusts of the flesh? Am I trusting the devil and his agents? Suffice to say, trust is not something intrinsically virtuous for its own sake.

Godly trust does not take place in a vacuum but flows out of a positive relationship. Because godly trust always relates to the particulars of a given relationship, it follows that one cannot simply make a generalization that young people ought to trust their parents with the decision whom to marry.

If parents have done their job properly, the home will be an environment where sons and daughters talk naturally and informally with their parents about their romantic interests, within the overall understanding of what it means to be submitted to biblical authority in the home. Thus, when the young people are ready to think about getting married, parental involvement will happen naturally and necessarily as a matter of course for there is already an established context of trust, respect and submission to biblical standards. Trust of parents will not have to be artificially mustered up as a spiritual exercise in submission, because it will have been built up over years.

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48 This is even true when it comes to infants and young children, where trust again does not occur in a vacuum but is built up through experience. A baby clings to his/her mother and not a stranger because it is the mother who feeds him/her. If a young child is given to someone who does not act in a loving and gentle way, the child will learn very quickly not to trust that person. Likewise, young children can tend to be wary of strangers until the new person has, so to speak, proved himself trustworthy. Although this all occurs on a precognitive and instinctive level with young children, it illustrates the principle that trust does not occur in a vacuum but is the outcome of a healthy relationship.
Courting Disaster

Many people are more passionate about the process they use than the person God has called them to be. Oftentimes, method is emphasized over theology; process is emphasized over personal maturity; and premarital methodology, which is short-term, is emphasized over marital understanding, which is long-term.

—Rick Holland

The second reason for its appeal, I think, is that it so greatly simplifies things for singles. It makes the pre-marriage period manageable. It gives a safe formula for getting through an extremely complex, confusing and peril-fruited time of life. By putting things on a clear, up-front, rational basis, much of the uncertainty and vulnerability that inevitably accompany “affairs of the heart” is eliminated.

—Kathleen Schaijik

Avoid Some Needless Strife?

Mine eyes have seen the wisdom of a courtship stand for life. It’s a righteous way to live for Christ and find a Godly wife. If you want to serve Christ wholly and avoid some needless strife,

Then lay that dating down.

Thus begins the first verse of ‘The Battle Hymn of Courtship’ (sung to the tune of the ‘Battle Hymn of the Republic’). It is followed by this chorus:

1 Rick Holland, ‘The Guided Path’ (ibid), p. 89.

2 Schaijik, ibid.
Don't be fooled though it seem fancier.
Dating is a deadly cancer.
Courtship is the only answer.
So, lay that dating down.

As the song proceeds, each verse articulates another aspect of why “courtship is the only answer.” Each verse ends with the injunction to “lay that dating down.”

I don’t know whether the song has actually convinced anyone to follow the courtship method, but it serves as a useful example of the rhetorical humbug with which courtship is so often adorned.

Swing of the Pendulum

One of the main objections I get runs something like this: “Okay, Robin, you’ve done a good job at articulating some of the problems with courtship, but you don’t seem to have anything better to suggest.” The hidden premise behind this objection is often this: if courtship is out then we must have some other system or formula to follow if we are to avoid the pitfalls of recreational dating. (The fact that millions of godly Christians throughout history have found love-filled and happy marriages without having a set of techniques to follow doesn’t seem to enter into the equation here.)

To say that the Bible does not offer a set of techniques does not mean that the Bible provides no answers to these questions. However, the answers the Bible gives are in principles, not formulas.3

It is certainly understandable why people feel the need for techniques to guide relationships. History shows that moral licentiousness will often cause a swing of the pendulum whereby people look to legalism for the answer. The ideas about courtship are certainly a reaction against the trends of lawlessness and unaccountability that plague contemporary society. But in reacting against the improper latitude in modern relationships, let us not go into another equally undesirable ditch whereby we put young people into straight jackets with unnecessary rules and limitations. Douglas Wilson has wisely noted that,

3 Anyone wanting to study the Biblical principles governing pre-marital relationships, would do well to read Rick Holland’s entry in 5 Paths to the Love of Your Life. Other books which contribute to the discussion in a helpful way include Dating With Integrity by John Holzmann and Her Hand in Marriage by Douglas Wilson. Douglas and Nancy Wilson have a very helpful series on the family which would be useful for a healthy biblical understanding of relationships that is not technique based.
As the bankruptcy of the modern dating system becomes increasingly obvious, the temptation to react will be present with us on every side. But reactionary behavior is always destructive, and this does not even include the calamities brought on by overreaction.4

It is not really surprising to see courtship gaining a rise of interest as parents and young people are desperate to find something that works. In so far as courtship is seen to be 'unworldly,' it is therefore assumed be holy, and therefore right. Indeed, many people have argued for courtship on just such grounds.

The Way God Has To Work!

I remember when one friend of mine excitedly came to me and said he had just invented “a universal insurance policy” that “almost guaranteed” a successful marriage. His idea was this: when two people want to get married, first make each of them spend a year living under the watchful eye of their future in-laws. Living under the microscope for a while will enable the parents to see if this person really is up to scratch. My friend went even further and suggested that if a young man is unwilling to submit himself to the "testing fires of sacrifice, hard work, and waiting" (as achieved through submission to this one year plan) then, "how true is that love?" He went on to ask, “Would you want to marry someone who is unwilling to give a year of his or her life for you?”

When I first heard about this proposal I thought it sounded like a pretty good idea. But then I began to realize that the will of God cannot be placed within the hands of human control and administration like that. I became uncomfortable with the assumption that whoever would object to this plan must have a bad character, just as it is assumed that any young person who goes against his/her parents' will in marriage is automatically guilty of giving in to 'independence' and pressure from the world. When a humanly staged set of techniques becomes equivalent to the Word of God, there becomes no room for God's will to be something entirely different for an individual couple.

This is the basic principle by which many courtship ideas take root: man decides the will of God and administers it. A certain method is decided upon which, if implemented, must work in a cause/effect progression. The results are predictable according to the extent to which you plug into the man-made procedures.

The Family Context

When family life is lived and breathed in joyful faithfulness to God’s Word, then the guidance, training and discipline the parents administer will equip their children to leave home. It will equip them to establish independent families and lives of their own before God. The biblical standards that the parents have raised up, especially in the area of love and marriage, will gradually become the children’s own convictions. The children will not have grown to simply accept these standards, but to love them as God’s standards. Hence, they will have no desire to frivolously pair off into ‘couples’ because they will know that this is neither a biblical nor beautiful expression of romance and attraction.

This does not deny that teenagers and young adults still need to be instructed. Indeed, when children reach the age of interest in the opposite sex, this is an ideal time for teaching and guidance. This teaching should not be a sudden shift but a clear continuation of an already established atmosphere and understanding that has been nurtured in the home. Consequently, there will be no need for a sudden safety plan because the children will already desire the right sort of relationships. If mistakes are made, these will be made by young adults whose allegiance is the Lord’s, not people in rebellion. Obviously godly parents hope the mistakes their children make will be minimal, but they should not, out of fear, prevent their children from engaging in their own lives independently before the Lord. When children grow up, they must go out and fight their own battles before the Lord with the equipment and weapons their parents have furnished them with.

On the other hand, if this groundwork has not been laid, it will accomplish little for parents to suddenly start panicking when their son or daughter reaches sixteen and then trying to enforce a courtship model of rules. If a young person still needs parents to give them rules in this way, it only reveals that the parents have failed to raise their children to know and love God’s rules for themselves. Whether the children have been prejudiced against Biblical standards through parental ignorance, abuse, indifference or some
other failure, it is no good realizing that a child is ill-equipped for life when it is too late and then hoping to correct matters by pulling the child through a miserable safety plan.

If Paul told fathers not to provoke their children to wrath (Eph. 6:4) and discouragement (Col. 3:21), how much more is this true when the children become young adults. A clear way to provoke a teenager to wrath and discouragement is to suddenly start enforcing a regime of authority as soon as they become marriageable. This will only make the teenager resentful, discouraged and desirous to break away from home for all the wrong reasons. Parents in this position can repent for failing their children when they were young, intercede for their child and seek opportunities to instruct and challenge them as they would any other adult. They can also begin to lay the groundwork for proper adult relationships with their children. But it is too late to instruct through enforced rules. As Charlotte Mason points out,

> though the emancipation of the children is gradual, they acquiring day by day more of the art and science of self-government, yet there comes a day when the parents’ right to rule is over; there is nothing left for them but to abdicate gracefully, and leave their grown-up sons and daughters free agents, even though these still live at home and although, in the eyes of their parents, they are not fit to be trusted with the ordering of themselves, it is too late now to keep them in training fit or unfit, they must hold the rudder for themselves.⁵

For about sixteen to twenty years, parents have the God-given authority and task of bringing children up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, preparing them for adulthood. Grace-filled families are the best ground to nourish a child in the love of the Lord and His ways. Deuteronomy reminds us that a parent’s task is to apply the laws of God constantly to everyday tasks and life. The authority, protection and discipline of children by parents is for the purpose of training them in the ways of God to become people of God in their own right. Parents who have acted in this way have every right to expect their older children to be able, in their various capacities, to hold their own.

On the other hand, there may be families in which the children cannot actually face the world when they reach this age because the parents have not built them up, trained them or made them ready for the battle. If the children get to that age and the parents still feel they have to shelter them as if they were still small children, then something is amiss. If parents do not feel happy in seeing their children leave home and become independent but instead need to keep their children ever dependent on them, then such parents are abusing their role. Parents who have failed in this way must repent and stop perpetuating their failures into the children’s adulthood through oppressive and controlling regimes.

**The Problem of Friendships**

It is not uncommon for the practitioners of courtship to take a negative view of casual friendships with the opposite sex, with the result being that young people become isolated at precisely that time of life when they would normally begin seeking out friendships with the opposite sex. This raises an important question: is there a legitimate place for casual friendship between members of the opposite sex?

Godly parents can certainly exercise a general oversight over their son’s or daughter’s activities and friendships without needing to go to the extremes of segregating them from all casual contact with the opposite sex. In a society like our own, this reactionary approach is all the more damaging given that there are not nearly enough venues for young people to get to know each other within godly family contexts. Parents should be seeking to facilitate opportunities for young men and women to mix and mingle in godly environments, so that an exclusive relationship is not the only ground in which interaction can occur.

In our own family, Esther and I discourage our teenagers from forming one-to-one attachments with members of the opposite sex. As an alternative, we try to facilitate mixed group activities. This enables our teenagers to form friendships with members of the opposite sex within the context of a crowd. They are discouraged from pursuing any of these friendships romantically until they are ready for marriage and have sought counsel from their parents.

In the case of Jonathan Lindvall, not only did he ask his daughter “not to even be friends with boys,” but he did not even

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6 From Lindvall’s taped lecture, “Shamefaced Romance.”
allow her to form individual friendships with members of her own sex. "At first glance", writes Lindvall,

   this will sound incredible, but none of my children have ever had individual friends. Instead, we find our identity corporately as a family and maintain family friendships. Thus, my children only interact with peers in family settings in which we are all involved. They don't have individual friends! WE have family friends!\(^7\)

In a church or community which teaches that a strict version of courtship is ‘the only way,’ it can be very difficult for a man and woman to be friends. I was told of one case with a young woman named Grace, who had a friendship blossoming with a young man named Christopher. It didn’t take very long before Grace’s friends began to share ‘concerns’ about her friendship with Christopher. The reason they were concerned about the friendship was because it was a friendship! In fact, the friendship became such a concern to Grace’s friends that she and Christopher began ‘courting’ just to pacify everyone’s fears. As soon as the ‘courtship’ began everyone was satisfied and happy…except Grace and Christopher. The reason they weren’t happy was because an official courtship was too great a step for them at the time. Their friendship hadn’t developed far enough to start thinking about marriage. Consequently, their relationship was put under so much strain that they decided to go back to being only friends, whatever their peers might say.

   I was told once about an occasion where a father did not agree with his daughter about the man she wished to marry. He wanted her to marry somebody else. The daughter decided to do the ‘right’ thing and submit to her father’s choice. She met her future husband twice before the wedding. At the wedding she sang a song in which the recurring refrain was, “Daddy, you’re the only man in my heart!”

**Recreational Dating**

6  Ibid.

7  Bold Christian Living, E-mail Newsletter #21: Policy explanation, Youthful Romance.
Dating is potentially as ambiguous a term as courtship since it can mean so many different things. It may be help to discuss some of the various types of dating.

One of the most common types of dating is the kind in which there is no thought or real understanding of what an exclusive love relationship is all about. Two people are simply pursuing their relationship as a means for personal pleasure. It is essentially organized flirtation, because it is induced in order to give the parties a thrill through a sort of “emotional foreplay.” It is ‘easy come, easy go’ and intimacy for the sake of intimacy. This kind of dating often leaves people feeling used and uncared for, particularly if it leads to sex.

In this kind of relationship, because the pleasures of an exclusive relationship are enjoyed without commitment, you can simply dump your partner by the way side as soon as the intensity of romantic feelings wane or as soon as the relationship requires more than one is prepared to give.

When two people are dating like this there is an assumed exclusivity to their relationship, as if they have ownership rights on the other. In this context a kiss may mean nothing more than “I am attracted to you.” It has nothing to do with being serious about each other, and if it has anything to do with the potential of marriage it is only through the understanding that the relationship might lead to marriage, though this potential is not essential to the present relationship.

This kind of dating is creeping down to earlier and earlier age groups. Often it is fostered by the mentality that young men are incomplete without a girlfriend and that girls are incomplete without a boyfriend. Having someone to go out with can be a status symbol, while those who don’t have somebody feel like rejects. Sadly, many Christian youth groups encourage this kind of destructive mentality, either actively or passively.

‘Flash in the Pan' Romance

Another form of dating exists where there are genuine feelings of love and unselfish attachment and commitment, but it is short lived. This is what I call ‘flash in the pan romance.’ You genuinely feel that you want to spend the rest of your life with this person and deeply care for them. Perhaps dozens of love letters are exchanged, but then something happens and you break up and go on to another
partner with equal intensity. Often people can go through a dozen dating partners in a year and feel at the time that each one will be their future spouse. It is like a fire of thin, dry branches compared to one of solid coal - very bright and hot, but after it has burned itself out there is little left behind. What often happens here is that a person thought they were in love with someone when in reality they were in love with love. Or it may result from the void that most young people (especially those with innate insecurities or passive dependency needs) experience in the absence of a boyfriend or girlfriend, which often leads to an indiscriminate filling of that void through a relationship.

We do well to caution young people about the dangers in this kind a dating. When you’re swept off your feet by someone of the opposite sex, it is easy to offer undeliberated commitment or to make promises that you are unable to keep. Such a relationship draws a person out of their ego boundaries and allows them to expose their vulnerability to the other as they lower their barriers. When this occurs in a relationship that is halted midway, the people are left stranded in their vulnerability, and often there is hurt as one may have assumed the other was more serious than he or she actually was. After emotionally undressing we are suddenly left stranded in the cold and future relationships may thereby be sullied with doubt, suspicion or fear. As John Powell points out,

Since love can exist on many levels, it is extremely important not to offer a commitment of love that I may not be able to honor. Inexperienced and immature people tend to do this, to say things under the impulse of strong emotions or physical reactions (and under the trees at night), which have a hollow sound the next morning after coffee....

If I have made a premature or overstated commitment, I will later have to take back my promises made to such a person. I will have to explain that I really did not mean what I said, or that I changed my mind. I will leave the person standing painfully naked and unprotected. He or she will return again to the dense forest of a new security operation, go back behind a higher and more impenetrable wall.8

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Powell goes on to say that these considerations should not preclude a person from enjoying a multiplicity of heterosexual relationships, only to guard against overstatement of intentions and premature commitment.

When two friends have a flash in the pan romance, it is very difficult to go back to just being friends after breaking up, and what could have been a good friendship is thereby potentially sullied.

Feeling attracted to someone or even feeling that you might want to marry them, is simply not a good enough reason to put those emotions into speech or action since such speech and action can easily convey unintentional messages to the other person. Sadly, you cannot assume that even Christians will not give verbal and non-verbal implications of commitment (and, therefore, obligation) that they have no desire or ability to fulfill. This is not to say that one shouldn’t feel anything towards a person prior to making a commitment to them; but we must be conscious not to put those feelings into actions. It is no different here than with married people who may inadvertently find themselves feeling romantically attracted toward someone they are not married to. The single person not yet ready or willing to commit to marriage, like the married person, must refrain from acting and speaking as if they are ready or willing to commit to marry the person toward whom they are feeling such desires.

Deep Regrets in Marriage?

More than ever before, young people require guidance and understanding to develop a high value for love and marriage. A correct framework for understanding relationships will help young people to avoid the two approaches considered above. However, it needs to be understood that when there has been hurt in a broken relationship and when further relationships are sullied with doubt and fear as a consequence, that is never something that God’s grace cannot heal in a marriage. Both husband and wife are able to find healing from past mistakes through the love and forgiveness of the Lord.

There is a great deal of fear being generated within young people’s minds by teachers saying that romantic relationships engaged in before marriage with anyone other than one’s future spouse will rob from one’s marriage. One lady recently wrote to me concerned about a teen-age girl she knows whose parents follow
Jonathan Lindvall’s teachings. This lady told me how fearful her young friend has become of experiencing any romantic emotions that are not consummated in marriage. Even the possibility of this happening provoked alarming distress in this girl who replied, “I don’t want to even know about someone being interested in me until we are betrothed!”

This is not one isolated incident. Growing numbers of young people are becoming so fearful of ‘unauthorized emotions.’ One lady wrote that she had been in bondage and fear over this for years. When she went on her first ‘coffee-date’ she feared that she would be damaging her future marriage by going out with someone who might not become her husband. Later she wrote, “I am so happy to be released from this groundless fear.”

Why is there such extreme fear? The answer is because these people have been absolutely convinced that unalterable consequences will follow from such emotions. Thompson says that a woman who has had former boyfriends will “have only a fragment of her heart left to give” to her husband. In Joshua Harris’ first book *I Kissed Dating Goodbye* he refers to a bride's nightmare in which her groom stands at the altar, holding hands with the phantoms of all his previous girlfriends. Lindvall never misses a chance to share that because he and his wife experienced romantic relationships before marrying each other. It has "hindered our emotional unity." We will go on to see that one of Lindvall's central arguments for “betrothal” is the need he feels to spare his own children the deep regrets that he and his wife bear as a result of each other's former boyfriends and girlfriends. Writing of his children, Lindvall says "to the degree that they allow me to protect them from the emotional scars my wife and I bear, they will be spared the regrets we suffer."10

The course of wisdom certainly involves trying to avoid doing things which we will later regret. However, where it is possible to have past relationships permanently harming a present marriage, the problem is probably within the marriage itself. While it is only natural for a man to want to be the only person his wife has ever loved in that special way, and visa versa, we live in a fallen world and this will not always be the case. Does this mean that the marriage will automatically suffer, that the husband and wife will

9 From the taped lecture, *Shaefaced Romance*, ibid.

10 Jonathan Lindvall, from the tract "Youthful Romance: Scriptural Patterns", op. cit.
not be able to love each other as much as they otherwise might have? Does it mean their relationship will be less enriching and fulfilling?

There are certainly going to be insecurities in just about every marriage. Both husband and wife will need to have their partner's love reassured. Insecurities are a result of many things from the thought of past relationships (which can especially be a problem when one or both of the parties has been married before) to one's inability to believe oneself lovable because of abuse as a child. In each case, these are things that a man and wife can work through together and be drawn closer to each other as a result. They need not have a fatalistic attitude which says, "This has happened in my past, therefore my marriage is necessarily going to be less good than it otherwise could have been." Rather, the husband and wife should be seeking ways to let God’s love cover over and heal all the regrets of the past. This even includes situations where one of them may have bad sexual memories, as Nancy Wilson writes.

Perhaps you have had bad sexual experiences in your past that are a hindrance to you enjoying a healthy relationship with your husband. This can be another hindrance that you must overcome. Remember you are a Christian. Christians are people who understand what it is to be forgiven. We are not to drag our past around like a ball and chain. We have been delivered from our past sins. Thank God for His forgiveness, and do not dwell on your sins. Dwell instead on His grace and mercy.11

‘Brother-Sister’ Friendships

Another aspect that needs to be considered in the discussion on relationships is “brother-sister type friendships.” There is a lot of talk among the courtship proponents about this. Some of their ideas along these lines have been positive, to the extent that young people are encouraged to get to know members of the opposite sex and enjoy the pleasures of friendship in exactly the same way that you would develop a friendship with members of your own sex or with your brothers or sisters. Unfortunately, some of the stricter models

render this impossible by excluding any friendships across the
gender divide.

The idea of brother-sister friendships comes from Paul’s first letter to Timothy where he told Timothy to treat the older women as mothers and the younger women as sisters with all purity. (1 Tim 5:2) If this can become one’s basis for how to act with members of the opposite sex (and it needs to be understood by both in order to work), and if one can go out with someone just as you would go out with your sibling, then not only does this avoid the pitfalls described earlier, but it gives one the opportunity to develop many heterosexual friendships long before one is ready to start thinking about marriage. In this way, a boy may be friends with any number of girls, or a girl with any number of boys, because there is no romantic commitment or expectation. It would be hard, though not impossible, to pursue this kind of brother-sister relationship in a date setting, because such settings easily leads to a focus on the ‘couple-ness’ of the two. Because of this, and also because an official ‘date’ setting has connotations attached to it in our culture, a brother-sister friendship is best pursued in the company of others or through external activities.
Emotional Purity and Broken Heart Syndrome

There is no safe investment. To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket - safe, dark, motionless, airless - it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. The alternative to tragedy, or at least the risk of tragedy, is damnation. The only place outside Heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers and perturbations of love is Hell.

—C. S. Lewis

One young woman named Felicity wrote to me about her failed courtship experience. The relationship had been set up by the two sets of parents and was done exactly ‘by the book.’ (One of their ‘dates’ was actually a trip to one of Gothard’s seminars accompanied, of course, by both families.) The only area where it differed from the ideal courtship scenario was the fact that the young man named Trevor happened to still be in love with his former girlfriend, who had unfortunately gone off with another guy. During the courtship Trevor admitted to Felicity that he was still in love with his former girlfriend, but this didn’t bother Felicity. Nor did it bother Felicity that Trevor did not even seem to particularly like her. As Felicity later wrote when reflecting over the whole episode,

Since this didn’t seem to be a problem in my parents’ eyes, I saw nothing unusual with marrying a man whose heart

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belonged to another, and who was not deeply interested in or attracted to me. Of course, since we weren’t supposed to love each other until after we were engaged it was almost an advantage that we didn’t have a lot of emotional attraction for each other.

So what eventually happened with Felicity and Trevor? Fortunately, the courtship did not lead to marriage, but not through any unwillingness on Felicity’s part. Felicity wrote afterwards that she was quite willing to marry Trevor, even though she didn’t love him.

I told God that whichever way it turned out, I would be fine. If Trevor and our parents wanted me to marry him I would say yes, but if not I wouldn’t mind ending the courtship. I really didn’t care which way it went and was willing to live with whatever was decided for me, as my parents indirectly encouraged me to do (telling me to leave it up to God and not push it, etc.).

Felicity is now happily married to a man she deeply loves and who deeply loves her. Every time she remembers her courtship with Trevor she sees God’s hand of protection on her life. She is so thankful that Trevor decided to pull out of the courtship, even though this was to the great disappointment of both sets of parents. “It’s rather sad,” writes Felicity, “that the system and people who were supposed to be protecting me and making sure that I didn’t make a poor decision were willing to let me marry into a situation like that.”

‘Emotional Purity'

“Purity…” writes John Thompson, “means no physical affection or romantic emotions prior to God’s approval.”2 Now it is one thing to argue against physical affection prior to ‘God’s approval’ - which in Thompson’s phraseology refers to parental authorization – but no romantic emotions? Yet, like it or lump it, that is exactly what is

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meant by emotional purity: complete absence of romantic emotions, thoughts, desires or aspirations, until the father says ‘Go!’

I have a friend named Emily who had always accepted the teaching about emotional purity and believed that to have a crush on a boy amounted to nurturing an idol in her heart. However, when Emily actually found herself being attracted to a young man, she was helpless to know how to handle it. Nor were matters helped when friends began to come up to Emily and say, “Don’t you know that you are committing emotional fornication? You’re being promiscuous and I think you should be careful to save yourself totally for your future husband.”

In another instance, a lady named Katie told me about the time her father gave permission for emotional bonding after her courtship period had been officially entered. The problem was, Katie’s father did not give permission for her emotions to be released completely, only somewhat. Katie was still supposed to guard her heart to some extent and not get too emotionally attached. (Katie confessed to me later that she had difficulty figuring out where the line was, but apparently her parents felt she had crossed it.)

Typically, Lindvall manages to find scriptural justification for this odd behavior in the most unexpected parts of the Bible. He appeals to the example of Adam. When, through naming the various animals, Adam realized that he, alone among all the beasts, had no partner, God put him to sleep. Likewise, argues Lindvall, when we get to the age when our interest in the opposite sex is stirred up, God asks us to "go to sleep emotionally!"³

The goal here is emotional virginity, so that when the marriage finally occurs, both people will not only have never had physical relations with anyone else, but will also be emotional virgins, having never felt anything towards anyone else. “Not only are we to be physically pure,” says Lindvall, “but we need to be emotionally pure in our hearts.”⁴

Just because a person feels an attraction that will not culminate in marriage does not make those emotions impure. “Emotional purity” is therefore a bad term since it presupposes that there is something impure or wrong about these emotions, as if to have such feelings defiles a person in the same way as sexual promiscuity.


⁴ From the taped lecture, *Youthful Romance: The Dangers of Dating*, ibid.
It must be understood that this ideal of “emotional purity” does not simply mean that young people should reserve the expression of romantic feelings until paternal authorization, but that the emotions and thoughts themselves must be stifled. As Lindvall clearly states,

I have concluded that God's best for me is to teach my children not to allow themselves to cultivate romantic inclinations toward anyone until they know God has shown them this person is to be their lifelong mate...Ideally they don't even allow themselves to dream about romantic relationships. Certainly there will be struggles, but to the degree that they allow me to protect them from the emotional scars my wife and I bear, they will be spared the regrets we suffer.5

Lindvall explains, always with enthusiasm, his success in imposing this idea on his own daughter.

At age twelve, I took Bethany out to dinner one evening and presented her with a golden necklace with a heart-shaped pendant formed like a padlock. There was a small keyhole and an accompanying key. I presented the pendant and necklace to her and asked her to "Give me your heart." (Prov. 23:26) I explained that I wanted to keep the gold key as a symbol of her trusting me with her emotions. I specifically asked her to not entertain romantic thoughts toward any young man until she and her mother and I together conclude that he is God's choice to be her husband. (There is scriptural precedent for the young people involved to be consulted and consent to a marriage arrangement.) I explained that at the beginning of her marital engagement I would give the gold key to her betrothed, and that although she might not yet love him, she would then be free to aim her heart toward him. Bethany unreservedly entrusted the symbolic gold key into my care, and with it, her heart.6


6 Jonathan Lindvall, from the tract entitled Youthful Romance: Scriptural Patterns, ibid
Some young man is going to come to me and say, 'I believe God wants me to marry your daughter.' And I'll pray about it. And if God shows me the same thing, I'm going to give him that key, and I'm going to say, 'You are authorized, and I'm going to help you woo my daughter, as she will be your help mate forever.'

In that conversation I asked Bethany to take it a little further. I asked her to commit to me that she would not be friends with any fellows. I asked her not to even be friends with boys.

Lindvall started a trend here, and now there is a website that sells “Heart Necklace with Key” designed for this very purpose. According to the website, “This is a meaningful symbol of a daughter giving her dad the key to her heart until he gives it to the man selected to be her future spouse. The inscription on the heart is ‘He who holds the key can unlock my heart.’”

One gets the feeling from all this that romantic emotions are something that can be turned on or off like a light switch. While there can be no denying that our will plays a part in the process, very often the romantic feelings, crushes, and infatuations that young people experience are things that, to a large extent, cannot be controlled by the will. What can be controlled is how the person responds to these feelings that can come and go like the wind. To try to tamper with the emotions themselves, however, is bound to be unproductive. The only way to prevent such ‘unauthorized’ emotions from happening would surely be to build monasteries and nunneries to house our youth. When the time for wedding vows does arrive, the vows can directly follow the introductions.

As a young adult I went to a Bible college where the ideas of emotional purity were strongly advocated. I was one among only nineteen other young adults under the burden of over a hundred written and unwritten rules. One such rule was a universal taboo on anything to do with romance. The staff of this school did their best to prevent the young people from anything that might excite them

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7 From the taped lecture, Youthful Romance: The Dangers of Dating, ibid.

8 Shamefaced Romance, ibid.

8 Ibid.
romantically. Every cassette and CD that a student brought to the school was carefully previewed, and if any love songs were found then the album or the song would be banned. The administrator of the school encouraged us to make fun of kissing when it appeared on videos, even mocking the act with disgusting lip noises like prepubescent boys tend to do. When springtime came the young men were given special instruction to be extra careful, as this was the season when nature causes the hormones to play up (“the mating season” and all that.) There was a ban on private letters and phone calls across the sexes, and Lindvall’s lectures were often played at the beginning of term. If one of the staff members noticed that a man and woman were spending too much time together, they would step in and do something. In one such case, where two people actually fell in love, the staff decided this young man and woman shouldn't be allowed to communicate at all with each other, even from their homes during the summer holidays.

The result of so much concentration on not being tempted by love was interesting. The young women often seemed to treat romance as if it was a big joke and were frequently flippantly flirtatious. The consequence of not treating love and romance seriously in the right way, meant that it was treated flippantly in a totally wrong way. I found that there was not the appropriate care taken by the girls concerning how their actions might hurt the males. On the other hand, whenever any interaction with the opposite sex was at all serious, it was pregnant with self-consciousness, introspection and guilt. A psychotherapist noted that the percentage of sex abuse cases among those who had been to that school was phenomenal - far higher than the percentage among the average non-Christians sector of the population.

Why did these problems arise among those who are instructed so intensely to view romance so cynically and negatively? A similar question might be asked concerning the huge sex scandal that rocked Gothard's Illinois based organization and nearly forced Gothard into retirement.

I believe part of the answer lies in the way these concerns were handled. The devaluation, even the mocking of romance prior to the appropriate time, led to a general misconstruction of attraction, love and sexuality in general. It was very easy to treat these things - whether consciously or unconsciously - as things that were sinful. We tried to bury them in a dark closet and hope they reemerge as infrequently as possible. Often when a person has undergone this kind of unhealthy repression, it causes the thing that has been
repressed to be displaced onto another area of his or her experience, so that the thing that was repressed reemerges with a new shape - a shape that the person does not recognize as stemming from the very area they thought was killed.

Another factor at the school I attended was the false dichotomy between the things of the spirit and the passions of the body, as if they are in competition to each other. You didn’t pursue romance because that took your mind off Christ. We thus had no idea how to give the Lord control of these areas because we expected Him to take them away. These areas were not as important to God as things like Bible memorization, study and prayer meetings and if God was interested in them at all, it was in helping us overcome them.

We have already seen this false divide between human emotions and the things of the spirit in Gothard's treatment of loneliness. We also find this false divide between the earthly realm of romance and emotions vs. the “spiritual realm” throughout Lindvall’s teaching. In Lindvall’s newsletter he once shared a letter from a young man who confessed to “struggling with thinking about a girl” whom he might marry. The man wrote,

I have prayed that God would take these thoughts from me, and have tried to stop thinking them myself, once I become aware that I am thinking about her again…. I am just frustrated, and am feeling powerless against these thoughts. (Even though my mind tells me that I'm wrong, and I do have the power to control them).

Lindvall’s advise to help this man achieve ‘victory’ was that he turn totally to Jesus, fast, pray and try to channel his emotional energy into reading and memorizing scripture. Additionally, Lindvall quoted Colossians 3:2: "Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth."\(^9\) Since the world of romantic emotions is seen as belonging to the inferior realm of “things of the earth,” it is at variance with our pursuit of heavenly things above. A divided field of experience ensues in which a false competition is set up between the spirit and the emotions.

As I found at the Bible College already mentioned, this fragmented and compartmentalized view of our humanity meant that Christ was not Lord of our entire person, and consequently the area of our passions remained outside of His Lordship. Because we were

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made to feel guilty for even having such emotions, we tended subconsciously to assume that there must be something unclean, dirty, naughty, or impure about this area of life, or else treat it clinically as mere animal instincts. Romance and passion were not viewed as something in which our whole person participates, but treated instead almost like a ‘thing’ external to us that we take on and off. It is always dangerous when life is divided into compartments like this since Christ’s Lordship should permeate all areas of life.  

In the rest of this chapter I want to explore one of the main arguments used to compel young people to cultivate this negative and unhealthy view of their emotions.

Broken Heart Syndrome

One of the great benefits of courtship, I have been told, is that it minimizes, as much as is humanly possible, the ‘broken-heart syndrome’ so many young people experience. The need to avoid ‘broken-heart syndrome’ is actually one of the primary motivations behind many families pursuing the courtship method. But to what exactly does ‘broken-heart syndrome’ refer?

This term, ‘broken heart syndrome’ was popularized by Lindvall to describe the painful side of romantic emotions when a person feels that their “heart is broken.” Like the term ‘emotional impurity,’ it is a pejorative description that unfairly typifies certain experiences. If the courtship advocates can get us to think of emotional heartache as a ‘syndrome,’ then they have nearly won the argument, in so far as a ‘syndrome’ usually implies neurosis.

When romantic love comes under censor, the next step is to take a dim view of the experience of heart broken-ness. For what does a broken heart signify other than that one has made the fatal mistake of being disappointed in one’s hopes, of extending oneself too far and putting too much hope or confidence in another person.

Similar reasons have led counselors in the secular climate to despise broken hearts. The self-centered consumerist mentality of today has no understanding for an experience which signifies the capacity to feel disappointed or to have hopes which have not been realized.

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10 Susan Schaeffer Macaulay is very good on this idea of the Lord permeating all aspects of life. See, *For the Family’s Sake*, (Wheaton, ILL: Crossway Books, 1999), especially p. 34.
Sharon Thompson tells us that many girls are unhappy with the casual sex they are expected to have. The reason for their unhappiness is because they are still “condition[ing] sexual consent on romantic expectations.”

When one girl was so traumatized by her first experience of premarital sex, the girl vowed to save sex until marriage so she could be sure the relationship meant as much to the man as it did to her. Thompson concludes that by this decision Tracey “had gone back...to the very same convictions that had set her up to become a victim of love in the first place.”

In other words when we enter into sexual experiences with romantic expectation, we become a victim of our own illusions. As a solution Thompson suggests girls learn to treat love as something ephemeral and play the field with the kind of emotional detachment that will save them from heartbreak. This is called 'unencumbered sex.'

Although the context is different, the motivation is the same as we find in much of the courtship movement. Those who push courtship begin the discussion of broken hearted-ness at the same point as Sharon Thompson, namely, the need to avoid being a victim of the heartache and disappointment that romantic expectation can foster. The solution of the former is to encourage all manner of loose behavior without the expectation or need of a secure exclusive relationship; the solution of the latter is to try to eradicate any emotions that might lead to romantic expectation prior to the security of marriage. In both cases they are trying to avoid what Capon refers to as “the ultimate risk of giving oneself to another over whom we have no control.”

The solution is neither to reject romance nor to embrace a sentimental romanticism. Debbie Maken put it well when she wrote:

I’m not fighting against romance; I am fighting against what I call reckless romanticism, the kind of romanticism where we think we will be overjoyed with spontaneous surprises, one after the other. The danger of such recklessness is that little in the relationship matches any of our hopeful and grandiose expectations. Romance is vital

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12 Ibid.

for any lover’s relationship, whether courtship or marriage. At its core, romance is not flowers or candy or a good candlelit meal; it is the feeling of being pursued by your love. It’s what we see in the Song of Songs.  

**Emotional Sterilization**

Lindvall draws our attention to the fact that in the typical dating pattern when a person enjoys a series of temporary dating relationships, each relationship must endure a breaking up process before moving on to the next. “However,” he writes,

As their hearts are wounded, and then heal after each episode, they develop emotional calluses as a defense against the depth of grief that would be useful in motivating married couples to shore up the performance of their union.

The more often they experience this [breaking-up], the more scared their emotions are, and then we wonder why when we marry we have a difficult time becoming vulnerable and open with our husband or our wife.

Israel Wayne has argued similarly, comparing the emotional pain of breaking off a relationship to sticking on and then ripping off a piece of tape on your arm: at first it hurts, but eventually, if you repeat the process long enough, the hairs that originally acted as pain sensors eventually cease to register pain to the brain. Similarly, it is argued, the more we experience the emotional pain of breaking up a relationship, the more desensitized we become. Eventually our emotions become hardened as an instinctive defense against future pain. “It may seem good to have our emotions hardened,” Wayne writes,

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15 Bold Christian Living catalogue, article titled ‘Do Teen Dating Practices Prepare Young People For Marriage or Divorce?’ (Springville, CA: Bold Christian Living).

but this doesn’t work very well in a marriage. Who wants to have a spouse who is uncaring, unfeeling, and guards themselves so they won’t be hurt? We all want spouses who can freely give and receive love.  

The solution that both Lindvall and Wayne give is not merely to reject the typical dating pattern of in/out relationships. Instead, they say, we should also pursue emotional purity. Emotional purity guarantees that you won’t get hurt since you don’t release your emotions until it’s safe.

Not for the first or last time, Lindvall and Wayne have presented us with a false dilemma. The choice they give us is between a series of in/out dating relationships vs. shutting down the emotions completely until it is ‘safe.’ This gives them the perfect platform to persuade young people to be emotionally ‘pure,’ since the young people they are addressing already have an antipathy to the typical pattern of irresponsible relationships. Forced into this false choice, the model of emotional purity is clearly the only option for a biblically-minded young person or parent. However, this solution not only excludes irresponsible dating but any romantic emotions or desires outside the betrothal paradigm. They are teaching that romantic feelings, emotional desires and expectations are wrong if felt at anytime while there is still a risk that the object of those desires may not become our future spouse. We must safeguard our life against the potential of any emotional pain in the very first place.

It is interesting that this basic argument hinges, not on an appeal to scripture, but on pragmatic and utilitarian concerns, as it promises to maximize the agent’s future happiness in marriage. Even with these pragmatic concerns, however, the shoe is on the other foot. We are being told that marriages will be happier and more emotionally liberated if both parties have practiced these principles prior to engagement. We would do well to question this basic assumption. Surely those who go through youth trying to avoid emotional pain, trying to prevent the possibility of suffering, trying to protect their emotions, are not as a result suddenly going to be emotionally vulnerable and open as soon as they get married. If anything, they will be the ones who have developed the emotional hardness and unable to respond appropriately to emotional conflict and pain.

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within marriage because they have been trained in the art of emotional detachment.

Imagine a young girl who is first learning to walk on her own two legs. The father notices and realizes that there might be falls and the potential of physical pain, before she can finally walk without error. Suppose the father, wanting to prevent his girl from the possibility of this pain, comes and offers her a wheel chair for her to sit and be pushed around in until she is nine. At nine years old, he thinks, her mind will have developed a level of control and sophistication to enable her to learn to walk without the errors that invariably confront the toddler. Now if a father really did that, what would happen when the girl finally reached the day where she was authorized to walk? She would be a cripple since her legs, through continual neglect, would have lost the ability to function.

In a very similar way, a father who successfully disallows his daughter or son from experiencing natural human emotions until he or she is able to do so without the possibility of hurt, will very likely have damaged their very ability to experience normal emotions. If an adolescent is influenced to greet the arrival of romantic emotions with suspicion and guilt, they will likely find it difficult to experience these emotions properly when they are suddenly told it is legitimate. The positive side is that the Lord is able to heal and make whole, but this can be a torturously difficult process if one has years of opposite brain patterns to contend against.

**The Trade-off**

Parents who have this destructive mentality will not only prevent guilt-prone youths from falling into the 'sin' of having a crush on someone, or of admitting it if they do, but they will prevent that child from the natural healing of that broken heart. Parents who are trying to tie up their youth's emotions are not, at the same time, able to help their children come to terms with their feelings, to face them, accept them, grow from them, and grow out of them within the providence of God.

I am not saying that having a broken heart is an inherently good thing because we can grow from it, or that we should try to get our hearts broken in order to learn lessons. Far from it! A boy who is learning to ride a bicycle will likely have a few falls to start with, and learn from the painful experience of falling how to properly manage the bicycle. It would be stupid, however, if the boy took this fact and fell off the bike on purpose in order to learn from it. The
parent who says his teenagers mustn’t have friendships with members of the opposite sex because there is then the possibility of the emotional pain of a broken heart, would be like a father who didn’t let his son learn to ride a bicycle because of the physical pain of falling off.

I am saying what is true of any kind of suffering, that although it is not something that we should go out of our way to try to experience, neither does God always want us to go out of our way to try to prevent it. Creating a plan for life that will safeguard us from pain, from our own emotions, and those of others, does not help us grow. Nobody likes pain, nobody wants a relationship to end in tears, but if that does happen, does that automatically mean we were sinning? Does that mean we should make sure we protect our children from such an experience by attempting to exercise tight control over their emotions? Does it mean we should allow fear to turn us into something like a computer that automatically backs itself up at every point?

It is the job of a parent to nurture growth in the Lord and His ways, not to dictate it, to help young people approach relationships with integrity and honor and to help them if things go wrong. It is the job of parents to help young people grow from their suffering and broken hearts, not to try to artificially create situations to prevent any possibility of heartache. The only way to prevent the possibility of a young person getting a broken heart is to prevent that child from ever feeling love, and that is the most tragic thing a parent could do to a child. It is not sensitive and caring when Lindvall talks about wanting to spare his children the suffering of a broken heart, for if you want a heart that cannot be broken, what you need is a heart that cannot love. C.S. Lewis puts this well.

I believe that the most lawless and inordinate loves are less contrary to God's will than a self-invited and self-protective lovelessness... We shall draw nearer to God, not be trying to avoid the sufferings inherent in all loves, but by accepting them and offering them to Him; throwing away all defensive armor. If our hearts need to be broken, and if He chooses this as the way in which they should break, so be it.19

18 Edith Schaeffer is very good on this point, and I would highly recommend her book Affliction (Hodder and Stoughton, 1978), particularly chapter eleven where she addresses the temptation to abort affliction.

19 C. S. Lewis, op. cit., p. 279.
When the New York Times did a front page feature on the courtship movement they quoted from a “betrothed” man who said, “I can begin to emotionally connect because it’s safe.” Safe? What in life is really safe? If these people are looking for an emotionally safe existence, they need to go a lot further to guard themselves. Hell is the only place where you are perfectly safe from all the dangers and perturbations of love, as C. S. Lewis brings out in the passage I cited at the opening of this chapter.

With regard to the particular pain of a broken heart, if this must be avoided at all costs, why stop at a prohibition on relationships with the opposite sex? Why not also prohibit all friendships with members of the same sex since it is always possible that someone we have grown to love - perhaps a best friend that we have shared our heart with in a special way - may die, may change, or may do something that leaves us hurting?

After the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center my wife, Esther, was talking to a woman about it. The woman mentioned that she had heard on the news that a boy had telephoned his mother from the airplane just before the crash to tell her that he loved her. Esther’s friend said that she would not have been able to cope with that sort of thing if she was a mother. She has chosen not have children in order to avoid the potential pain. It's certainly true that if you're not prepared for the possibility of a broken heart, you shouldn't have children. After all, children may die, they may suffer, they may go through experiences that make the parents weep.

In the end, if we really want the security of knowing our heart will not break, if we really want a life that is emotionally safe, we must carefully guard our heart from becoming attached to anyone - man, woman or animal.

If all that is being sought is some formula for a mistake-free, pain-free life, then the message these teachers are preaching is that mistakes are sin, and pain is sin, and we must not allow either a place in our lives. This is not the gospel that produces a lightness and freedom and trust in God. Instead this places such a huge burden of responsibility on a person to get every detail right one hundred percent of the time that to fail is weakness, and weakness is despised. The emphasis is placed on our control, not God's. The emphasis is that the fewer mistakes you make the more pleasing you are to the Lord. The implication of this is that we are loved for what
we are rather than for *who* we are? If we feel that that is the way God 'loves' us, then we will never understand true love in our human relationships either.

**The Shoe is on the Other Foot**

It is a paradox worth considering that although these proposed solutions to “broken heart syndrome” are meant to reduce or eliminate emotional pain, in practice we often find the reverse operating. When young people do “slip” and express themselves romantically, the persecution and “discipline” that is often levied upon them is certainly a far greater source of broken hearts than any hypothetical effects that pre-engagement romance is supposed to have in future marriage. To illustrate this I’d like to share what happened in one church that was progressively taken over by followers of Gothard and Lindvall.

The sad incident I am about to relate concerns a young man (whom I will call Mark) whose parents were hard-core Gothardites, and a young woman (whom I will call Rachel) whose parents were not so legalistic but still had strict standards when it came to relationships. Events transpired whereby Mark and Rachel developed a relationship. They never went further than to hold hands on one occasion for a few minutes. However, when Mark’s parents found out that they had held hands, they were horrified and said that they had both committed spiritual adultery against their future spouses. The parents of Mark decided to follow the advice for such situations, namely to make sure that all ties between the two were severed. Never again would their son be allowed to speak to Rachel. I do not mean that Mark was not allowed to speak to Rachel for a period of time; I mean that Mark was *permanently* banned from ever having anything to do with Rachel for the rest of his life! Rachel’s parents were horrified, especially since she was being treated like an adulterer.

Think of this and all the other broken hearts that this teaching has caused, and it becomes ironic that this teaching is being propagated on the grounds that it will *reduce* emotional pain. Surely the shoe is on the other foot.
This Business of Betrothal

... the most disturbing thing [about betrothal] is the way writers have taken their fanciful interpretations and imaginative ideas and attributed them to the Word of God. I have read books and articles that are half Scripture, yet with close examination, nearly every quote proves to be misapplied or skewed in some way. The Bible clearly defines Christian conduct, which of course applies to the processes of marriage and "giving in marriage," but it does not give us a betrothal plan....

“If one wants to create a program to be followed in taking a wife, or in giving your daughter in marriage, that is perfectly fine, but let us be honest with the Scripture. You can call it betrothal, and you can give it any kind of twist you like, but don’t call it “God’s plan for taking a wife.” If God wrote a book of great length and did not choose to give a rigid order for taking a wife, let us not put words in his mouth nor pretend that our words are Scripture.

—Michael Pearl

Time to Kiss Courtship Goodbye

I couldn't believe my eyes! In my hands I held a letter from a man I had been corresponding with who was himself a champion of something called “betrothal." Up till now, I knew this man had some strange ideas, but this. Surely this was going too far! I continued to read the letter as this man explained that two young men had approached him asking permission to marry his daughter. She did not know about the proposals, nor the fact that her father and mother were in the process of praying to determine which of the two men to choose for her, if either. It did not seem to enter into this father’s

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1 Some of the material in this chapter originally appeared in my article, The Dating Game, “Midwest Christian Outreach, Inc. Journal”, Volume 6 No 3, Summer 2000 and is reprinted here with permission.

head that perhaps his daughter should have some say in the decision. Instead, he will merely give his daughter the freedom to accept or refuse whichever proposal he decides to present to her. She will never be told about the other proposal.

At the same time as I received that letter, my wife was corresponding with a married couple. This couple had only met each other twice, for a very short interval, before getting married. They are now teaching others how to follow similar procedure, which they called betrothal.

What is this new teaching? To answer that question we must first back up. Courtship has been in vogue for many years. Many people have practiced it, with a variety of results. Some of the advocates of courtship have felt disappointed that the model has failed to offer the solution they had originally hoped. Since some people have 'courted' multiple individuals in succession before landing on one that the parents were happy with, those who saw courtship as a means to ensure that romance only occurred with one person were disillusioned.

The result of such disillusionment has been that some former advocates of courtship have abandoned the idea for the stricter and more consistent theory of betrothal, urging other Christians “to discard experimental ‘courtship’ as an ideal, in favor of the scriptural model of irrevocable betrothal.”

Lindvall and his followers teach that betrothal is a kind of halfway house between marriage and engagement. While you can back out of an engagement you can’t back out of betrothal. It is an irrevocable commitment to marry a person of the father’s choosing. Prior to the betrothal, the couple should have no feelings for each other. In some cases, they may hardly know each other. It is during the betrothal period that the couple actually fall in love.

There are many horror stories about people who are being burnt by the betrothal system. Many young men who have sought to marry a girl have submitted to the betrothal system, only to fail in the end at passing through the tricky betrothal obstacle course. Other testimonies tell of daughters being totally shocked at the men their fathers choose for their future husbands. Many young men who have been home-schooled, have very high standards and would normally

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3 See Israel Wayne’s article, ‘Betrothal: Should We Kiss Courtship Goodbye?’ and Skeet Savage’s article, ‘Courtship: Dating In Desguise (sic)’, available online at http://www.biblicalbetrothal.com/.
4 Lindvall’s email newsletter, #88, 2001.
be attracted to the kind of conservative women whose families do betrothal, are scared off by the whole process. They consciously avoid any girl whose family professes betrothal since they feel they must court that woman’s father rather than the women herself, and must make a commitment before they know what they are committing to.

So what exactly is betrothal and how does it differ from courtship? I’d like to answer that question by examining the teachings of the main proponent of betrothal, Jonathan Lindvall.\textsuperscript{5}

**False Dilemma**

Lindvall typically begins his case by attacking the mentality that says, “Let’s date just for the fun of it and when we get tired of each other we can just move on to somebody else.” Lindvall then portrays scenarios where recreational dating is practiced in a way that any mature Christian would find objectionable, and then juxtaposes this with his method. Likewise, he describes a “love” that is based merely on lust and then juxtaposes this with his idea of betrothal. In this way, Lindvall reaches his conclusion through the use of false dilemmas. When he makes out that these are the only options from which we must choose, we are hardly left with much of a choice! By employing these false dilemmas, along with an emotional appeal to high standards, Lindvall is able to target that segment of young people who most sincerely desire God's will but are unable to recognize the logical fallacies inherent in his reasoning. Those who have responded in disagreement to Lindvall's ideas (including myself) receive exhortations from him to commit ourselves wholly to pleasing God rather than man,\textsuperscript{6} as if it is inconceivable that anyone whole-heatedly committed to Christ could hold any other viewpoint.

The definition of betrothal is best left to Lindvall’s own words.

\textsuperscript{5} Jonathan and I have known each other since I was a small boy, as he used to stay at my parents' house whenever he gave seminars in our town. Nothing I have to say in this chapter is meant to be a personal attack on Lindvall himself, but a heartfelt plea for him and his followers to re-examine these ideas in the light of scripture. I sent Jonathan a copy of an earlier draft of this book so he could have the opportunity to reply to my concerns, but to date he has chosen to ignore my request.

\textsuperscript{6} See for example, *Home School Digest: The Quarterly Journal for Serious Homeschoolers, Volume 10, Number 3*, "Contention Regarding Emotional Purity" by Jonathan Lindvall (Covert, MI) p. 23.
In the Biblical model of ‘betrothal’, the decision to marry is made based on God’s will, confirmed by parents and other authorities, rather than emotional and hormonal impulses. The betrothal period is provided for the emotions to catch up to the irrevocable decision made prayerfully and rationally. Our emotions are not to lead us, but to follow us.\(^7\)

Notice that Lindvall makes the alternative to betrothal one in which marriage is based solely on emotional and hormonal impulses. Elsewhere Lindvall writes (speaking of his marriage),

> Our marriage is not based on love, our marriage is based on the will of God, and the love followed the decision to surrender to God's will.\(^8\)

We have an either/or situation here as prayer, spiritual submission and rationality are contrasted to emotionally felt love. The idea that prayerful submission to God’s will is opposed to emotionally felt love is simply assumed.

**Love is not the Foundation**

Lindvall likens love occurring as an act of the will to the act of the will involved in praising the Lord and choosing to be joyful whether we feel like it or not. When we make that choice the emotions will follow, for "God's intent is that emotions would follow the will...that the will would dictate to the emotions."\(^9\) He quotes Colossians 3:13 ("Put on love") and says, "Put your will in gear and say, 'I WILL love!'...Love is an act of my will to put someone else first."\(^10\)

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\(^7\) Lindvall, 'Do Teen Dating Practices Prepare Young People For Marriage or Divorce?' Ibid.

\(^8\) From Lindvall's taped lecture "Shamefaced Romance", ibid.


But hold on. If Lindvall believes that the definition of love is a volitional commitment, and that such a commitment must form the foundation for marriage, then what of his frequent statements that "Love is not to be the foundation of marriage"? Part of the problem is that Lindvall frequently uses inconsistent definitions of love interchangeably, depending on which conclusion he is arguing for at the time. His ideas have a fundamental lack of coherence which makes systematic evaluation challenging.

**Bail Out Mode**

Lindvall suggests that when a person experiences a series of temporary romances, the breaking up process that is necessarily involved develops bad habit patterns. “Though ‘breaking up is hard to do,’” he writes, “the more you do it the easier it gets. This is more accurately preparation for divorce than for marriage.” Wayne has argued similarly:

After a while, a deep-rooted pattern of leaping out of relationships is developed. Once such a person is married, if things don’t go their way in the relationship, they revert to default mode: bail out!

Is this true? It depends. If the reason a person moves through a series of boyfriends or girlfriends is because of a fundamentally wrong approach to relationships – whether because they are flirtatious, or seeking the thrill of short-term intimacy rather than the potential of marriage, or because they are unwilling to stick it out through the difficult as well as the positive seasons of a relationship - then of course these sinful attitudes, like any sinful attitude, are going to become easier the longer they are practiced. However, consider the case of a woman I know who approached relationships very conscientiously and prayerfully, but who, through a

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12 Bold Christian Living catalogue, article titled ‘Do Teen Dating Practices Prepare Young People For Marriage or Divorce?’ (Springville, CA: Bold Christian Living).

combination of misfortunes and mistakes, went through two boyfriends plus one broken engagement before she found the man she finally married. This woman did not create for herself ‘a deep-rooted pattern of leaping out of relationships.’ In fact, the opposite was true: the more this woman broke up with various boyfriends, the more desirous she became to find a relationship that would be permanent. It is nonsense to suggest that now she is married she must find it more difficult to remain with her husband because she had a series of short-term relationships prior to marrying him.

Based on the construction of this false problem, Lindvall is able to argue that we need an alternative method for conducting relationships. At first he taught that the solution to dating was courtship. Eventually Lindvall concluded that courtship has unscriptural flaws because "it does not go far enough."\textsuperscript{14} This is because there is still the opportunity for either person to bail out if they find they are not emotionally compatible, which Lindvall suggests sounds "vaguely similar to the rationale for a couple living together for a time before marriage - to find out if they are compatible..."\textsuperscript{15} Thus, according to Lindvall, the whole idea of courtship being a 'testing ground' is flawed.

Lindvall concludes that the only answer is betrothal. This includes a complete prohibition on all personal friendships with the opposite sex prior to the betrothal period. If breaking up during a romantic relationship will really lead to all the damaging consequences that Lindvall suggests, then we need to be sure that our children don't fall in love or experience any romantic emotions or thoughts prior to knowing with absolute certainty who they will marry. Once the match is determined, it needs then to be impossible for either party to back out. To fully understand why Lindvall believes this is necessary, let’s have a look at his teaching about the pre-betrothal period in which romantic emotions and thoughts are disallowed.

Retroactive Marriage


\textsuperscript{15} Ibid
Lindvall postulates a rather convoluted argument that I have taken the liberty of calling “the theory of retroactive matrimony.” This idea implies that marriage works backwards, so that behavior that would be inappropriate for Lindvall's wife to exhibit towards other men (i.e., going out with them, having a romantic relationship, etc.), would be equally wrong before she ever married Lindvall. He maintains that whether a person is actually married or actually single is irrelevant to the fact that it is wrong to have romantic emotions towards them, unless you know for sure that this person will one day be your spouse. Thus, to an imaginary young man going out on a date, Jonathan says

So tonight you're taking out a girl that probably will not be your wife, and in fact, someday she'll probably be someone else's wife. So you're taking out somebody else's wife tonight....16

The assumption here is that if a woman might someday be someone else's wife, then to take her out is the same as taking out somebody else's wife. This assumption is absurd, for the obvious reason that the marriage has not yet occurred. Or has it? Lindvall’s mentor, Bill Gothard, has argued

Being a ‘one-woman man’ or a ‘one-man woman’ means that we have accepted the lifelong commitment of marriage. The wisdom of proverbs praises the one who does the partner good all the days of his life (including before marriage). (See Proverbs 31:12.)

We do this by remaining morally pure in our thoughts and actions for the one we will one day marry. Because this commitment to reserve ourselves for one individual, every person is like a ‘strange-man’ or a ‘strange woman’ to us except the one God directs to marry through the confirmation of parental authority and the love He places in our own hearts.”17

No one would dispute that you should keep yourself pure for your future spouse even before you are married, but this is very

16 From the taped lecture, Youthful Romance: The Dangers of Dating, ibid.

different to what Gothard means by “lifelong commitment of marriage.” To assume that marriage works backwards in time as well as forward, gives rise to all sorts of absurd and unnatural situations, such as Lindvall’s scenario of “taking out someone else’s wife.” Another consequence is Lindvall’s suggestion that Paul's words in 1 Tim. 3:12 and Tit. 1:6 that a church leader should be literally a "one-woman man" might be referring to premarital emotions as well.18

In the Old Testament the sin of adultery was considered more serious than that of fornication, and incurred a greater penalty.19 The reason for this was because adultery is a transgression against an existing marriage covenant, one that did not exist until it was ratified.

Because Lindvall implies that the marriage covenant extends, not only into the future, but retroactively into the past as well, he is able to argue that the same standards which apply to relationships among married people apply equally to relationships among unmarried young people. He says,

I am convinced if there is something that is inappropriate for me to do with a woman I'm not married to, it is also inappropriate for my son to do this with a woman he is not married to.20

Somehow we have been brainwashed into thinking that we can have one standard for married people and another standard for single people.... We've got a double standard here.21

Of course, there are abundant situations where Lindvall is totally correct that the same standards that apply to a married person also transfer over to the unmarried. For example, both married and single people must avoid lustful thoughts, must maintain sexual morality, honor God in all their relationships, and so on. However,

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21 From the taped lecture, Shaefaced Romance, ibid.
there are clearly other situations where a married person has a
different set of obligations and responsibilities to that of a single
person.

Ideally we hope that romance will always lead to marriage, yet
we acknowledge that because we live in a fallen world, this ideal
will not always be realized. There are times when engagements must
be called off, for whatever reason. When this does happen and a
person ends up having successive romances, though this may be
regrettable, it is in no way comparable to a married person being
romantic towards someone who is not his or her spouse.

Your Emotions Belong to Dad!

Lindvall carries his theory to its consistent conclusion: no young
person should have any romantic feelings for anyone until they are
engaged to their future spouse. This brings us back to the concept of
‘emotional purity’ which I looked at in the preceding chapter.
“There's a time for romance,” writes Lindvall, “but it’s not before
their decision, it's after the decision has been made.” Essentially,
Lindvall says to his children, “Do not stir up nor awaken love until
the father so desires” - to make a variant of Song of Songs 2:7.

Just as we teach our young people to reserve themselves
physically for marriage, I believe the scriptures call us to
train them to reserve their romantic emotions for the
betrothral period immediately preceding marriage, having
enjoyed the benefit of God-ordained protectors (parents)
in helping them seek and find His will for their lifelong
companion.

Part of Lindvall's motivation for doing this with his children is
that he and his wife "bear deep regrets" from the fact that they each
had romantic relationships with others before they married each
other. Even when Lindvall was in his fifties, he said,

22 From Lindvall's taped lecture, "Shamefaced Romance."

23 Jonathan Lindvall, from a tract entitled Youthful Romance: Scriptural Patterns, (Springville, CA: Bold Parenting, 1992.)
I sometimes ponder wistfully what a wonderful thing it would be if I were the first man she had knitted her heart with. She wishes the same about me, but with pain I recognize that I didn't save my heart for her. It is my intention to spare my own children the regrets I bear.  

Building on the fact of his particular deep regrets, Lindvall suggests that no young man would want the woman he will one day marry to be dated by another man or to have romantic feelings for anyone else other than himself. Consequently in keeping to the Golden Rule of doing to others as we would have them do to us, he thinks we ought to restrain any romantic feelings until we know for certain who we will marry. A woman, he says, is the property of her future husband, and therefore we should think in terms of property and ownership when it comes to romantic relationships. When a woman is 'given in marriage' by the father to the groom, this symbolizes a transfer of ownership. But to have a romance with a woman before her ownership has been formally transferred, is for that man to "defraud his brother" (1 Thess. 4:6) since he is stealing something that properly belongs only to the woman's future husband. "God intends for them to marry," says Lindvall, “but God wants them to experience authorized romance. Authorization, not only for the physical but for the emotional ownership of one another.”

It’s Up to God to Make It Work!

So when does this authorization for emotional ownership occur? First of all, God reveals who the son or daughter is supposed to marry. How does He reveal this? He reveals it to the parents. As Lindvall writes,

As we go through the right way, I think there are enough safeguards that we can be pretty sure that you're not going to get the wrong person if you do it the right way. How are we going to know it's the right person? God

24 Jonathan Lindvall, from the tract entitled Youthful Romance: Scriptural Patterns, ibid

25 From the taped lecture, Youthful Romance: The Dangers of Dating, ibid.
...the decision of whom to marry is based entirely on God's will confirmed by our authorities, with a confidence that God would bring romance to us as a blessing of our obedience…

...God wants young people to honor their parents...by voluntarily submitting their choice of a marriage partner to them.

We see from the above quotations that the entire betrothal system hinges on the assumption that God is going to make it work. I have observed earlier how unhealthy it is for parents to straight-jacket young people into the one-and-only-way for getting married. The question might now be considered from the Lord’s point of view. I wonder how God feels when told that He has to work within the confines of this system – that the whole plan hinges on His cooperation.

Despite the emphasis placed on God’s participation, His exact function in the betrothal system remains ambiguous. Lindvall says that the young person can say, "It's in God's hands, God's speaking to my parents, and I'm just resting." When I was a boy and discussed this issue with Lindvall I happened to refer to "the father choosing" who his offspring would marry, whereupon Lindvall corrected me. "No," he said, "it's not the father who chooses. It's God who chooses. God reveals His will to the father." As these statements seem to suggest, God’s prescriptive will exists independently of human agency. There is a “right person” out there which only God knows, and which He then divinely reveals to the


father. This being the case, it seems rather erroneous for Lindvall to go through long lists of criteria for helping parents to decide (see chapter 2), analyzing the conditions each of the four parents must keep in mind when making the decision, and presenting dozens of safeguards and prerequisites along the way as a sort of insurance policy. This would seem to imply that it is not so much a matter of direct Divine revelation as analytical deliberation on the part of the parents. Furthermore, the idea that if any of the six people involved (i.e. both sets of parents, both young people) choose to veto it, the marriage can't happen, hardly seems consistent with the supposition that God has mandated the match through a special revelation to Dad.

Lindvall wants it both ways: in order for young people to be persuaded, Lindvall wants to be able to have the father claim that God has revealed the rightness of the match to him. Yet Lindvall also wants the father to have the subsequent possibility of the match not being of God if one of the six people choose to veto it. As he says (and remember, this is before the young people are allowed to have any feelings toward each other).

It would seem to me that any one of the parties involved, either of the mothers, either of the fathers, and either of the young people has a possibility of vetoing the whole thing and everything is off at that point.\footnote{Jonathan Lindvall, from the taped lecture, "Scriptural Betrothal: God's Design for Youthful Romance." op.cit.}

A possible way out of this problem would be for Lindvall to say that all of the checks and balances are God’s means of revealing His will, or that God’s will adapts itself to the conditions set by the parents. This would be similar to when I tell my children to clean their rooms. As soon as I issue the command that my children have to clean their rooms, it becomes God’s will that they clean their rooms since He has commanded that they obey their parents. Had I told my children to clean the bathrooms instead, then that would have been God’s will for them at that time. Unfortunately this option is not available to Lindvall since he speaks of God’s choice of a marriage partner as a static reality which the father must discover through prayer and testing (similar to if I “discovered” that God’s will was for my children to clean their bedrooms and not the bathrooms.) Further, if Lindvall did see God’s will for a marriage
partner in the more flexible sense as something which adapts itself to the conditions set by the parents, then why is the betrothal system necessary at all for ascertaining His will? Parents might equally choose any other set of conditions in which God’s will can be manifested, just as I might choose any of rooms in the house to ask my children to clean.

**Veto Power: a Generous Concession?**

Typically if one points out that this scheme involves forcing unwilling marriages upon people, Lindvall will point out that this is not the case because of the veto-power with which the son and daughter are invested. However, a further look reveals that veto power is not the generous concession it at first seems.

One has to remember that in order for the betrothal system to work in the first place, in order for it to even make sense to the young people involved, they must have grown up under conditions that most people would consider quite abnormal. In short, the children must have been discouraged from developing a sense of their own independence, and they must not be nurtured towards spiritual maturity (that would jeopardize the whole system). Rather, the children must have been taught from a very early age to accept their parents’ judgment on everything. The anecdotal evidence from people who have escaped from such families confirms this basic picture. It is normally the case that such a person finds independent thinking scary and, in many respects, cannot even function as an individual before God. Given this background, it sounds good in theory to say that such a person has the ability to veto their parents’ choice of a mate, but if they have been trained never to disagree with Dad and Mom, if they have been told that God speaks His will directly to the father, if they have been taught that they must obey their parents in everything even as adults, then to tell them they have permission to veto the person their parents have chosen for them to marry, is like telling a person in a wheel chair that he has permission to walk after I have crippled him. Veto power is hardly the generous concession that it seems.

Someone I know who grew up under a similar system had some very insightful observations to make regarding this, so called, ‘veto power.’ Looking back over her own experience, she pointed out that we must
take into account that these young people have never had any kind of close bond with anyone outside their family, and have never even had same-sex friends that weren't family friends. All their social interactions were in the context of their own family, and they were expected to have their only really close friends within the family (parents and siblings.) So they don't know what really connecting with someone or having a healthy relationship with the potential of deep emotional intimacy looks like. If their parents don't have an exceptionally good marriage, they haven't seen what real connection, love, and respect looks like, or how a man and woman who deeply love and respect each other treat one another.

Since these young people have heard all their lives that love is not a necessary prerequisite for marriage, and that married love is really no different from "brotherly love" or the love all Christians should have for each other, they really see no necessity for any connection beyond that of faith, similar convictions, and liking each other reasonably well. So it would make no sense for a young person to reject the first person that comes along that their parents like, as long as that person is godly, has the correct views and character traits, and seems nice enough. That's really all that's considered necessary.

**Keep the Woman In The Dark**

I have suggested that the young person’s ability to veto the proposed match is not the generous concession that it seems. This becomes even more evident when we consider the fact that the young lady, according to Lindvall and many other advocates of betrothal, should not even be informed that the match is under consideration until it has passed all the other five people. The reason for this is so that the lady is not tempted to release her emotions towards the man prematurely (in case he doesn’t “pass the test.”) Therefore, she "should be the last one to know unless God sovereignty speaks to her first."

As Israel Wayne puts it,

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31 Ibid
If she knows that this man desires to marry her, she will almost inevitably give her heart to him (assuming he is a decent man.) This would be dangerous if the young man fails to follow through with the needed preparation.  

Once the Betrothal Begins

If the young lady says yes, then the betrothal starts and "the young couple can begin to safely release their emotions to each other." At that point "this is an irrevocable commitment" which Lindvall suggests is initiated by presenting it to the congregation. The congregation is then required to hold the young people responsible for a number of things, such as staying morally pure, not touching each other, not spending time alone together and

Another thing that we would ask the congregation to hold them accountable to is cultivating that emotional bond, that during this period even though, you know, they're saying, 'Hey, we know that God wants us to get married, we're not in love with each other and so we're asking the congregation to pray for us, to reinforce us, to push us together emotionally, to cultivate that romance so that we will, in fact, be in love, deeply in love, before we marry.'

God wants our young people to experience a 'no risk' commitment.... God's design is that we would encourage them to fall in love only after the commitment is made.

Because of a basic confusion about the meaning of various kinds of love, together with an unrealistic view of human nature,

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32 Israel Wayne, Ibid.

33 Ibid

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid.
Lindvall assumes that falling in love is something a person can just decide to manufacture - that two people can choose not to fall in love until God's will has been revealed, and then as an act of the will, decide that they are going to fall in love as soon as the father gives the green light. As Wayne puts it, "if you determine to love someone, the emotions follow." Human beings are thus treated like robots controlled by gadgets and buttons. But there is no button on human beings that can be pressed to make one person truly attracted to someone that they do not.

Lindvall suggests that the betrothal period differs from the normal idea of engagement in that, while one may break an engagement, a betrothal is irrevocable. Although the betrothal is not legally binding, and although consummation has not occurred, it is still just as binding as a regular marriage. It thus entails a 'no risk' commitment, because there is not the risk that you will 'defraud' your future spouse through experiencing emotions towards another person or through bailing out in the middle of engagement. Once the betrothal ceremony has occurred, your chance of backing out is gone. During this period, the young people are authorized to fall in love, and indeed, are required to do so, despite the fact that they must constantly be chaperoned.

In his taped lecture "Scriptural Betrothal" Lindvall gives suggestions (allegedly based on Biblical patterns,) for the betrothal period and wedding. Lindvall does say that these are only suggestions for us to think about. Though he hopes his children will take the following suggestions, he does not advocate them with the same dogmatic adherence as he does the basic principles of betrothal.

One such suggestion is that the parents decide the date of the wedding without telling the two young people. This enables the parents to wait until they feel the young people are ready and then arrange the wedding sort of like a surprise birthday party. To support this idea Lindvall appeals to Christ's words that "not even the Son knows the day nor the hour, only your Father who is in heaven" which he says is a reference to Jewish marriage customs.39

37 Israel Wayne, “Don’t Kiss Before the Wedding!”, Ibid.

38 Ibid.

39 I have not been able to learn whether this was in fact a Jewish custom. Some Jews have told me that it was and others have said it was not. Perhaps one of my readers may be able to help me on this point.
Another suggestion is that the wedding should happen at the parents’ house, with the service being officiated by the father. Regarding sexual instruction, Lindvall suggests it is best for this to occur on the day or a few days before the wedding. Regarding the honeymoon, Lindvall asks "What is the scriptural precedent? Going to the groom's house - going to their home." Lindvall says that hopefully during the betrothal period the man will have been making or preparing a home he can take his wife to.

The reason Lindvall believes some of these suggestions have “scriptural precedent” is because they were practiced in the Jewish culture at the time the Bible was written. As this is the same ground from which Lindvall argues for the betrothal, we must consider whether the argument holds. In short the following three questions must be asked.

1) Is betrothal, as Lindvall defines it, actually an ancient Jewish practice?

2) Does scripture give any indication that the traditions of Judaism are accompanied with a divine endorsement?

3) Thirdly, and most fundamentally, is betrothal Biblical? That is, does the Bible actually teach it.

These are the questions I would like to explore in the next two chapters.

40 Lindvall, Scriptural Betrothal, Ibid.
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Is Betrothal Jewish?

To be aware of the sexual possibilities inherent in every relationship is not sick; it’s a mark of humanity.

—Manis Friedman¹

Abusus non tollit usum.²

Does the idea of betrothal, as it is being advocated today, have any Biblical support? That will be the question that this and the following chapter will seek to address. Those who teach betrothal not only claim that the Biblical evidence is there, but they claim that the evidence is so overwhelming that you have to either be blind or dishonest not to see it. There are certain standard texts, terms and stories in the Old Testament that the advocates of betrothal commonly cite to substantiate this. However, when one actually analyses these passages, we see that far from supporting such ideas, they actually refute them.

Brief Survey of Old Testament Culture

The Old Testament culture was a patriarchal society, which meant that the rights of women were very minimal compared with today. However, as we have already seen in chapter five, the Lord established laws that showed an acute concern for the protection of women. Thus, Israelite women had considerably more protection than women in the surrounding nations of the day.

In Ancient Near Eastern culture marriage was often treated more like a business contract than a relationship, the wife being an object of property. A man could have many wives just as he would have


² “The abuse does not abolish the use.”
many heads of cattle, although women were not allowed to have multiple husbands. If a man grew tired of his wife he could write her a certificate of divorce for an offense as trivial as cooking a meal in the wrong way. A woman was not granted the same privilege, however, and could only divorce her husband under special circumstances.

In Ancient Near Eastern culture, the bride had to be ‘bought,’ if you will, by the bridegroom's father, either by money or service offered in exchange for the bride’s father being willing to part with her, while the bride herself received no dowry. In that culture, when the bride was 'given in marriage' there was a transfer of ownership from her father to her husband.

It is only against this cultural backdrop that we can understand the custom for parents to authorize or, in some cases, to arrange their daughter’s marriages. In Ancient Near Eastern culture, if a man wished to marry a girl, he had first to procure the permission of her father. This necessity for parents to authorize a match only applied on the woman's side. Like everything else, this was a function of the patriarchal society, as well as economic and social conditions. Economic conditions were such that dependence on parents and the larger pedigree played a crucial part in the establishment of a new family. People tended to think much less about the union of individuals and much more about the union of families or family groups. It is not difficult to see how this led naturally to some of the customs regarding parental authorization of marriage. It is a gross anachronism to suppose the need for such authorization derived from a network of ideals about emotional purity. When we consider the fact that fathers had the right to sell their daughters into slavery as a concubine if they wished (a practice referred to in Ex. 21:7-8,) it becomes absurd to suppose that the role a father also exercised over his daughter's marriage was a corollary of any doctrine of marriage. It resulted, rather, from the simple fact that a daughter was considered her father's property, to do with as he liked whether that meant marriage or slavery. Women were completely dependent on their fathers or family until that dependence was transferred to a husband. You couldn't just move away from home when you were eighteen and support yourself. The sense in which women lacked economic autonomy led to lack of independence in other areas as well, not least in the marriage decision.

In the Hebrew culture of the Bible and Apocrypha, we find continuity with this basic cultural structure. While young men did not always gain approval from their parents to marry, young women
always did (i.e., Jacob had to get Lebanon's permission to marry Rachel, but not his father Isaac's; Tobias had to get Raguel's permission to marry Sarah but not his father Tobit's permission) except for cases when the woman was self-supporting, as in the case of Abigail's marriage to David.

Because society during Bible times was structured like that does not necessarily mean that such structure was derived from a divine mandate. Yet some Christian teachers are now picking certain aspects out of this culture (such as arranged marriages) and arguing that these customs have a divine precedent simply because they were practiced in Old Testament times. Such an argument is not only grammatically naïve (since it confuses indicative statements with imperative statements), but it is meaningless as long as we cannot also return to the whole network of social and economic conditions that lay behind those customs. Such conditions involved not simply an entirely foreign way of life, but many practices that would be objectionable to try to reintroduce into our society (such as the custom of raising up seed to your brother's widow.) The fact that the Lord gave commands to show His people how to operate within their existing social context, does not mean that this society always got it right. To use an obvious example, the fact that Deut. 21:15-17 gives laws to govern situations where a man has two wives in no way gives God's stamp of approval on the men of today taking multiple wives.3

It is against this cultural backdrop that we must understand a verse like Exodus 22:16-17. Here the Lord commands that if a man has premarital relations with a virgin, the father may refuse to give his daughter to him in marriage, though the young man must still pay the bride price. This scripture is often pointed to in order to prove that parental veto power "is not simply a cultural practice that is neutral in God's eyes. God didn't just permit it, but required it."4 It may or may not be true that God intends fathers to veto marriages they believe will harm their daughter, but we cannot infer such a

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3 While polygamy is not forbidden in the Old Testament, the implication can be drawn that monogamy was still God's ideal from verses such as Ps. 28; Prov. 12:4; 18:22; 19:14; 31:10-31, Is. 62:5). “…because God created just one woman for Adam, the pattern of monogamy is clearly set and displayed to us. The polygamy found in the Old Testament among the saints of God does not alter this. Polygamy was instituted by man, and not by God. The first record of a polygamous union was Lamech (Gen 4:19), with no hint of divine approval. But most important, polygamy does not fit with the creation ordinance of marriage or with the picture given in the New Testament of Christ and the church.” Douglas Wilson, Reforming Marriage (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 1995), pp. 16-17.

4 Jonathan Lindvall, personal letter to author.
position from this passage alone. The passage assumes a society in which a father had the power to veto his daughter’s marriage, just as Deut. 21:15-17 assumes a society in which men have the power to take more than one wife. But just as the laws governing polygamy or slavery do not tell us, one way or another, whether that was God’s ideal, neither does Exodus 22 tell us whether paternal veto power is God’s ideal.

Michael Pearl explains how Exodus 22:16-17 shows that fornication was viewed in terms of its economic implications since it guaranteed that the father was not defrauded of the bride price that accompanies betrothal. It also discouraged a young man from lying with a girl for temporary pleasure since he would have to pay the bride price anyway and might even be forced to marry her. The bride price was clearly intended as a protection for the woman. The fact that the father could still say no to the union would have prevented a man from lying with a woman in order to manipulate an automatic marriage.

When we look at the Exodus passage in this broader context we find that the whole point of it is not to do with marriage at all, but the fact that there is a responsibility that a man acquires when he sleeps with a woman, and therefore he must pay the bride price even if they do not marry. There are many applications we might draw from this principle for our culture today. On the other hand, to read into this passage a Divine sanction for a certain procedure for getting married, is to make it into nonsense and to completely miss the whole point of what the passage is trying to tell us.

Marriage & Betrothal in Jewish Culture

In defining what betrothal meant in the ancient world, it is necessary to spend equal attention to defining what it was not. Betrothal, as it was practiced in the Jewish and Israelite culture, was very different indeed to 'betrothal' in the new movement.

At the time of Christ the Jews had very defined marriage customs, just as any culture has distinct forms connected with their nuptial rites. These customs had evolved gradually as the culture matured and would not have been present in the ancient times of the patriarchs.

We tend to think of historical betrothal as similar to engagement, or maybe a halfway house between engagement and marriage. In the Jewish culture of the first century, however,
betrothal ("ERUSIN") was marriage. There were two stages to the marriage. During the betrothal stage, though they were legally married, they did not cohabit together. The wife remained in her parent's house preparing herself for the move to her husband's house. This lasted a month. If the wife was under twelve years of age, however, this period lasted a whole year, to give her time to prepare a trousseau. In some parts of ancient Judea, the man and wife were allowed intimate physical contact once during the betrothal period, to wet their appetite and to help the husband appreciate and desire his wife more. After the final wedding ceremony took place, the wife returned to her husband's home for the consummation of the marriage.

Just as Jewish betrothal was equivalent to marriage, so their "SHIDUCHIM" would correspond to what we would call engagement, in so far as it was either a non-formalized agreement to get married or a formalized contract to enter at a later stage into a marriage (betrothal) contract.5

What Betrothal Was Not

So much for what betrothal was. Now I must say what it was not. It had nothing to do with a father receiving direct revelation for who his child would marry; it had nothing to do with restriction on cross-gender friendships; it had nothing to do with denying all romantic feelings until the betrothal period. On the contrary, Hasting's Bible Dictionary tells us "that in ancient Israel the association of the sexes was comparatively unrestrained, and naturally led to personal attachments which sought satisfaction in marriage..."6 And again, as the respected Hebrew scholar Alfred Edersheim wrote,

5 As the Encyclopedia Judaica states, "In Jewish law shiddukhin is defined as the mutual promise between a man and a woman to contract a marriage (betrothal) at some future time and the formulation of the terms on which it shall take place. In general parlance, as opposed to legal terminology, it is known as erusin (Kid. 63a, Tos.), which is in fact part of the marriage ceremony proper. The concept of shiddukhin can entail either a promise by the intending parties themselves or one made by their representative parents or other relatives on their behalf (Kid. 9b; Sh. Ar., EH 50:4-6 and 51).... Shiddukhin as such has no immediate effect on the personal status of the parties - it being only a promise to create a different personal status in the future (Resp. Rosh 34:1; Beit Yosef EH 55). In the middle ages the Jews combined the betrothal ceremony with the wedding ceremony because it was inconvenient to have an interval between the two ceremonies where the parties were prohibited from cohabiting yet all the stringency of the married status applied to them. (Encyclopedia Judaica, Volume XI, p. 1036.)

Where the social intercourse between the sexes was nearly as unrestricted as among ourselves, so far as consistent with Eastern manners, it would, of course, be natural for a young man to make personal choice of his bride. Of this Scripture affords abundant evidence.  

In his taped lecture, "Scriptural Betrothal," Lindvall goes through every single verse in the Bible where the word betrothal occurs. As Lindvall simply tells us what the word betrothal meant (namely, the essence of his ideas in the previous chapter), he is then able to take all these scriptures as support for his position. Effectively, he reasons to his conclusion based on premises which assume his conclusion. His initial assumption, however (i.e., what betrothal meant in Bible times), is not subject to investigation or argument. Lindvall simply announces to us that,

The scripture talks about a pattern that it calls betrothal.... In the Bible there were two steps, with a fairly long period of time in between. During that lengthy period in between the couple was encouraged to cultivate their romantic feelings towards one another but not be physical with one another. And it was during that period that they fell in love, but it was after the commitment had been made. So they were free and secure, they were not at risk emotionally of giving their heart to someone and then being defrauded. That is God's design. Let's look at the Biblical model of betrothal. God wants our young people to experience a no risk commitment.... God design is that we would encourage them to fall in love only after the commitment is made."  

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8 Here is a complete list of all the places where the term appears in scripture: Ex. 22:16; Lev. 19:20; Deut. 20; Deut. 22:23; Deut. 22:25; Deut. 22:27; Deut. 22:28; Deut. 28:30; 2 Sam. 3:14 ; Ho 2:19; Ho 2:20; Mt. 1:18; Lu. 1:27; Lu 2:5.

9 Lindvall, Scriptural Betrothal, Ibid.
Based on this definition of betrothal, Lindvall is able to argue that the ‘betrothal’ of Mary and Joseph was an irrevocable period (apart from adultery) for “them to mentally and emotionally prepare for marriage...”\textsuperscript{10} The ‘betrothal’ of Mary and Joseph is in fact one of Lindvall’s main arguments.

“Even if one doesn't hold that betrothal is to be practiced today,” says Lindvall, “it is at least clear what the Bible means when it uses the term.”\textsuperscript{11} So what does the Bible mean by the term? According to Lindvall, “A biblical betrothal was an irrevocable covenant made at the beginning of the romance, authorizing the parties to bond emotionally.”\textsuperscript{12} And again, “the parties keep (guard) their hearts from romantic involvement until after the commitment is made and then use the betrothal period to cultivate emotional attachment to one another...”\textsuperscript{13}

I have never seen any documentary evidence to suggest that the above definitions of betrothal were part of the Jewish custom of betrothal referred to in the Bible, especially as concerns no risk emotions. In fact, there is actually a wealth of evidence to the contrary. One piece of evidence is the fact that a betrothal, like ordinary marriage, was not irrevocable and did not require an act of physical unfaithfulness for it to be terminated. Thus, to suppose that the concept of 'a no risk commitment' or 'emotional purity' lay behind the betrothal custom, is inconsistent with the fact that if a couple "fell out of love," or the man found another woman more beautiful, he could simply divorce his wife, whether it was during or after the betrothal period.\textsuperscript{14} To this we must add the fact that a

\textsuperscript{10} Lindvall’s newsletter, #87

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid

\textsuperscript{12} Newsletter, issue #88.

\textsuperscript{13} Newsletter, issue #85.

\textsuperscript{14} Because a betrothed couple were officially man and wife, a divorce was needed to break it, as we see in the story of Mary and Joseph. Divorce was not uncommon in those days, and in fact it was easier to get a divorce than it is today. A man needed only to write his wife a certificate of divorce and then send her away. At the time of Christ there were two rival rabbinic schools, the school of Shammai and the school of Hillel. Both schools had differing interpretation of the Biblical text (Deut. 24:1) that allowed divorce. The scholars of Shammai argued that the phrase in Deuteronomy "he has found some uncleanness in her" or "unseemly thing", literally means "nakedness of a thing" and thus refers to unfaithfulness as the only grounds for divorce. But the school of Hillel understood the phrase to mean anything unseemly and declared the famous words, "He may divorce her even if she spoil his cooking, or as Rabbi Akiba put it, "He may divorce her even if he found another woman more beautiful than she." Some Talmudic sages went so far as to say, "A bad wife is like leprosy to her husband. What is the remedy? Let him divorce her and be cured of his leprosy.... If one has a bad wife, it is a religious
degree of free association between the sexes was enjoyed and often led to romantic love occurring prior to any commitment. Such customs would be out of place in a culture that put the kind of premium on emotional protection which Lindvall suggests. It emerges that, whatever betrothal might have meant in Jewish culture, it was very different from the principles behind modern ‘betrothal,’ especially as concerns the protection of emotions.

Lindvall's teaching that children should be allowed veto-power but no positive volitional fiat in the decision whom to marry, is again very unjewish. In the Jewish Talmud we read that

A man is forbidden to give his daughter in marriage while she is a minor, until she is grown up and says, 'I wish to marry so-and-so'...”15

As far as law was concerned, however, though a father could marry off his daughter while she was still a minor (less than twelve years and one day), she could annul the marriage upon reaching twelve years and a day without needing a divorce, if she did not love the man.

Sex, Marriage & Modesty in Judaism

Because Lindvall appeals to Jewish traditions in support of his ideas, when I first listened to Lindvall's tape on betrothal I decided to contact some Jewish scholars to ask what they thought of it. I wanted to know whether Lindvall had his history right. I must say that speaking with various Jews and rabbis was the highlight of all my research. As this chapter was one of the last ones I wrote, my conversations with Jews made a refreshing and fitting conclusion to

duty to divorce her. Cited in Dr. A. Cohen, Everyman's Talmud, (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1932) p. 162. Despite the boldface audacity of these words, nevertheless the Hillel position was supported by Deuteronomy 24:3 where a second divorce can occur simply if the "husband detest her", and also from the fact that divorce would not have been necessary in cases of adultery since adultery was punishable by death. It was the Hillel view that found its way into state law, and the historian Josephus confirms that divorce was common for "any cause whatever". Nevertheless, many who endorsed this as jurists understandably condemned it as moralists. Likewise, when Jesus was presented with the question, while he sides with the ethics of the Shammai view as being God's original intent, he nevertheless recognizes the Hillel position to be the correct interpretation of Moses' words (He acknowledged that the Mosaic law gave more latitude on the matter because of the people's hardness of heart). Jesus in fact reforms the law (Mt. 19:1-12), rather than appealing to an existing law.

15 Cited in Dr. A. Cohen, op. cit., p. 162.
my study. It is difficult to impart in mere words the whole spirit and
dynamic behind the Jewish way of life, but I shall briefly try.

In the orthodox Jewish tradition, marriage is held incredibly
highly - much more so than in the historic Christian tradition. The
role of romance, love and attraction are also held in high esteem by
traditional Jews since these things are viewed as central to a lasting
and therefore happy marriage. Two famous Jewish sayings are, "an
unmarried man is an incomplete human being" and "an unmarried
woman is an incomplete vessel."

The Christian tradition, at least historically, has tended to view
singleness as a sign of piety. Among the Jews the opposite holds
ture: singleness is seen as a curse. Not only is a priest who is
unmarried disallowed from administering as High priest on the Day
of Atonement, but

"He who, by denying his legitimate instincts, fails to
produce children 'is as if he shed blood, diminished the
Image of God, and made the Shekinah depart from
Israel" (Sh. Ar.. EH 1:1, based on Yev. 63b-64a), and he
will have to account for his actions in the world to come
(shab. 31a). Marriage is so important that a man may sell
a Torah scroll in order to marry (Meg. 27a) and a woman
will tolerate an unhappy marriage rather than remain
alone (Yev. 113a, Kid 7a). One should never approach
marriage lightly. To make a successful match is as hard
as the parting of the Red Sea (Sot. 2a. et al.), and it
requires the infinite wisdom of God himself (Gen. R.
68:3). Hence, although in one view a person's marriage
is predestined (Sot. 2a), the individual must choose
wisely: "Hasten to buy land; deliberate before taking a
wife" (Yev. 63a).16

It is precisely because the Jews regard sex as sacred that it is
guarded so carefully. "The Hebrew word for marriage, 'KIDDUSHIM',
comes from KADDOSH, the word for holy. But 'holy' for the Jew does
not mean 'put on a pedestal', removed from everyday life. It means a
special gift, to be enjoyed and appreciated to the full."17 The Jews

16 Encyclopedia Judaica, volume XI, p. 1028

certainly know how to enjoy themselves. Michelle Guinness, author of *A Little Kosher Seasoning*, observes that Orthodox Jews who walk around with side-curls and top hat by day, abandon themselves to unbridled eroticism at night. And what about the women? Believe it or not, the Rabbi will often give preparation courses to young men before their wedding to instruct them in the art of giving their wife sexual fulfillment. Traditionally, in fact, the Jews have put more emphasis on a woman's sexual pleasure than the man's. The emphasis is on the man's duty to his wife, and if he fails in his sexual duty towards her it is such a serious matter that she is allowed to divorce him. The Torah's 'laws of marriage' develop elaborate systems out of concern for female sexual satisfaction. The Lord shows concern about this aspect of marriage, as seen in such passages as Exodus 21:10, where marriage rights are classed along with the food and clothing that a husband is obligated to provide for his wife. The centrality of conjugal obligations in Judaism is not directly linked to the need for procreation. Central as the raising of seed is to the Jewish mind, they nevertheless see procreation as a secondary end of sex: the primary end for which love-making exists is to cement a marriage relationship together.

The centrality of marriage in Judaism has certain practical ramifications. For one, orthodox Jews are opposed to modern practices of dating, immodest apparel and the loose eroticism so commonplace in today's society. However, the reason why they are opposed to these things is polar opposite from why the betrothal group opposes them.

For orthodox Jews, marriage, love and sexuality are so sacred that they must be nurtured with care. The distinction between nature and nurture is important here. Orthodox Jews treat our sexuality and passions very naturally, without any sense of embarrassment or repression; at the same time, however, Jewish parents try to nurture an atmosphere in which our sexual instincts are not encouraged in the wrong way through exposure to erotic images and lack of modesty. The eroticism of our culture creates temptations for young people that would never exist within a traditional Jewish culture. The necessity of modesty, of holding back rather than flaunting one's sexuality, is summed up in the Jewish term *tzniut*. To understand

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18 Along this line it is interesting to note that the famous custom of breaking a glass at Jewish weddings is said by medieval commentators to have had its origin at a wedding in which the father took to breaking expensive glasses in an attempt to reduce the unseemly hilarity of rabbis present. It is also reported that at one wedding the husband astonished the rabbis by dancing with his bride on his shoulders. Not only that, but the Talmud justified his behavior entirely! (*Encyclopedia Judaica*)
the ethos behind these ideas, one must return to the Jewish concept of marriage. Since marriage is the structure God created for the fulfillment of our passions and sexuality, there is a strong desire for young people to be landed within happy marriages. It is to this end that immodesty and flirtation are discouraged within a traditional Jewish social atmosphere.

To the traditional Jew, modesty does not imply a sort of general shame and embarrassment connected to anything sexual. Neither does it imply what we might call attitudes of 'prudery.' It is because they have no illusions about the strength and power of our sexual urges that they recognize the need for it to be protected rather than flaunted.

It is difficult to view another culture without some sense of bias generated from the cultural presuppositions that permeate one's own age and climate. It is easy, for example, to approach differing cultural traditions with a degree of suspicion at best and demagoguery at worst. Nor can I claim exemption from this tendency. When I began this present study I had a preconceived idea that arranged marriages were always bad. But after receiving a Jewish perspective on the matter, I came to realize that this is not necessarily always the case. One rabbi with whom I had the privilege to speak told me that when Jewish parents arrange a marriage for their son or daughter, it is never a selection made exclusively by the parents. Rather, it is an attempt by the parents to find and then bring people together who might likely be compatible. At that point, the parents stand back and watch whether something 'happens.' If nothing does happen, then another relationship is attempted, until the right one is found. The role of parents is more like a screening process to eliminate relationships that would likely lead to marital breakdown. The feelings of the young people, and often the suggestions of their peers, play a central part in this 'matchmaking' procedure.

As Christians we could learn a lot from the Jewish emphasis on proactively seeking a spouse. Using churches, families and even the internet, there is a lot Christians can do to cultivate godly matchmaking.

This brings us back to the teaching on 'betrothal.' Without exception, every Jew that I spoke to said that Lindvall's idea of no-romantic-emotions-prior-to-betrothal was extremely unjewish. One rabbi, after hearing some of Lindvall's misrepresentations of ancient Jewish practice, asked rather bewilderedly, "How can you restrict
Sexuality to the Jew is an enduring adjunct of the personality, and can no more be switched on or off than we can change the color of our hair at the push of a button. The Jewish emphasis on modesty is effective since it builds from this realistic foundation. Instead of telling young people that they shouldn't be feeling or thinking this or that, the traditional Jew will address how one should handle these passions and where to seek Godly fulfillment.

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Is Emotional Purity Biblical?

Love actually dates before the 19th century. Not only can you find stories of people who loved each other in the Bible and in Ovid's poetry, but you can find stories of love in many non-Western cultures as well. There were tales of romance combining chivalry with love in China, for instance, even in the Early Han Periods (c. 300-120 B.C.). If you're like me and you've been hearing your whole life that love-is-a-Western-nineteenth-century-construct-so-just-get-over-it, you might find James J. Y. Liu's survey of The Chinese Knight Errant to be enormously encouraging, as well as interesting. Of particular interest with respect to modesty is A Tale of Chivalrous Love (Hsia-yi Feng-yueh Chuan), a story of the romance between T'ieh Chung-yü and Shui Ping-hsin, whose personal name means "Ice Heart" - ice here signifying purity, not coldness.

—Wendy Shalit

“Set me as a seal upon your heart,
    As a seal upon your arm;
For love is as strong as death,
Jealousy as cruel as the grave;
Its flames are flames of fire,
A most vehement flame.

Many waters cannot quench love,
Nor can the floods drown it.
If a man would give for love
All the wealth of his house,
It would be utterly despised.

1 Wendy Shalit, op. cit, p. 181.
When Agur, son of Jakeh compared the way of a man with a maid to that of an Eagle in the sky, a snake on a rock, and a ship in the midst of the sea (Prov. 30:19), it is hardly something that can be construed as a pejorative description, despite the snake. Yet if, as Lindvall maintains, all ways between a man and a maid should be prohibited until after betrothal, this verse must be heavily qualified to ensure that the terms 'man' and 'maid' do not refer to persons of a single or un-betrothed status. (The Hebrew term for maid that is used indicates a virgin.)

One interpretation of this passage is to see it as referring to the insidious nature of men 'having their way' with maids. The justification for this interpretation is thought to rest in the following verse, “This is the way of an adulterous woman: She eats and wipes her mouth, and says, “I have done no wickedness.” (Prov. 30:20) Seen in the context of verse twenty, therefore, some have interpreted the reference to ‘the way of a man with a maid’ to be referring to immorality. According to this line of thought, the four things the writer mentions all have one thing in common: An eagle leaves no trace of its passage through the air, a serpent leaves no trail upon a rock, a ship leaves no path in the midst of the sea, and a man leaves no trace of having ‘his way’ with a maid when he commits fornication with her. All this is said to be like the way of an adulterous woman (verse 20), because her infidelity leaves no trace, no trail, no path. After "she eateth, and wipeth her mouth," she can say "I have done no wickedness," and who can prove otherwise?

There are many reasons for rejecting that interpretation. Starting at verse 15 in the chapter, the writer begins to give several groups of four for our contemplation. They may be listed as follows –

1. Four things that are never satisfied. v15-16
2. Four things too wonderful. v18-19
3. Four things the earth cannot bear. v21-23
4. Four things that are little but wise. v24-28
5. Four things that are comely. v29-31

Groups 1 and 3 are of negative import, but groups 2,4 and 5 are definitely of positive import. The group that is of main interest to us is group 2, four things that are WONDERFUL. Now that word translated as wonderful appears in several places in the O.T., the following of which clearly set out its meaning.

2 Sam.1:26 David speaks of Jonathan as follows - Your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women.
Ps.40:5. Many, O Lord God are your wonderful works.
Isa.9:6 And His name shall be called Wonderful . . . .

It would be superfluous to add any more. I would therefore say that all four of the items in group 2 are WONDERFUL, in the fullest possible positive sense. What then of those who attach verse 20 to the end of verse 19, to make it into something evil. Verse twenty reads, "This is the way of an adulterous woman . . . ." Advocates of this interpretation are quick to say that "This is the way ." refers back. But according to the rules of grammatical interpretation, "This is the way . . . " in Hebrew, points forwards to what follows. In order to be sure, the author gives us one other parallel in verse 17, an interlude that separates group 1 from group 2. The context of this, dealing with the mocking eye, has nothing to do with the things mentioned in group 1. Therefore, verse 20 has no immediate bearing on verse 19, except to show by contrast the difference between the wonderful way of a man with a maid with the adulterous way of a harlot with a man.
Is Emotional Purity an Historical Concept?

Consider the following words, written by Jonathan Lindvall, about the concept of emotional purity.

...in many parts of the world today, and certainly in the not-so-distant past world-wide, the concept [of emotional purity] has been assumed. In the modern west, we...have entirely forgotten the idea of saving one's heart for the one we will marry.3

If Lindvall is prepared to make such an assertion, we would expect him to attempt to provide some historical verification. Although there is a growing quantity of published tapes and literature on this subject, I have yet to see an advocate of betrothal cite even one historical example showing the idea of 'emotional purity' to be anything other than a modern invention. Instead they are content merely to assert dogmatically that emotional purity is an historical concept. The following quotation is a typical example. After positing the false problem of broken-heart syndrome and emotional impurity, Israel Wayne writes

What is the answer...? My wife and I found it in the Bible. You see, the ancient Jewish people held to the belief that your emotions should follow you, rather than you following your emotions. The Old Testament is filled with stories of young people who chose to marry their spouses before romantic love had begun. They made a decision to love the person they married. Our culture tells us to 'marry the person we love...'4

Lindvall argues similarly: “the norm of scripture is that a couple becomes bonded emotionally after becoming committed to one another.”5 Is this true? Is the Old Testament really literally 'filled' with such stories?


4 Israel Wayne, Ibid.

5 Lindvall’s email newsletter, #88, 2001.
One scholar, after I asked him if he knew of any documentary evidence that could be used to prove the unjewish-ness of ‘emotional purity,’ pointed me to the Bible, which is full of examples of love occurring prior to commitment. We shall be examining some of these examples in this chapter, but first it must be emphasized that because the Bible stories were not written to specifically address this subject, any bits we are able to extract should not be turned into a model for one method or another. This is precisely the mistake that the advocates of courtship and betrothal frequently make in approaching narrative scripture from a statistical pattern to try to determine right practice. It is always dangerous to turn the descriptive passages of scripture into prescriptive commands. A descriptive passage tells us what happened while a prescriptive passage tells us how something should happen. An example of this is the prayer of Jabez in 1 Chronicles 4:10, which is descriptive, vs. the prayer which Jesus taught his disciples to pray which is prescriptive. Now, of course, we can gain wisdom on how to live from studying the descriptive passages, but they should never be approached as blanket models for us to automatically apply in our own situations.

Having said that, I would like to now look at some of the descriptive passages of the Bible where we read about people getting married and having relationships. My purpose in the following survey is to show that the theories of emotional purity do not have a pedigree dating back to the Bible or ancient Jewish practice. (And even if they did, this would not itself prove that such ideas are normative, based on the above distinction between description and prescription.) In so doing we shall also see how completely untenable is the assumption that romantic love is a modern invention - an assumption so pervasive in the literature of the courtship and betrothal movements.

Isaac and Rebekah: Betrothal Blueprint?

The relationship between Isaac and Rebekah is a favorite among many advocates of courtship and particularly betrothal. I cannot begin to count the amount of times I have seen Isaac and Rebekah’s relationship cited as a paradigm of “God's way.” Referring to the Isaac and Rebekah narrative in his book Dating vs. Courtship, Paul Jehle writes, “In principle it is an authoritative guide
for us to follow…” However, when we look at what the Bible actually says about Isaac and Rebekah, nowhere do we find God sanctioning the pattern of courtship, betrothal, emotional purity, or anything of the sort.

To fully understand the story, we must back up and consider what God had been doing with Abraham. The Lord had set Abraham apart in order to form a nation that would be God's representative on earth. It was very important that Abraham's son, Isaac, should not procreate seed that was defiled, that is, that was contaminated by the seed of other peoples. Nowadays we see this principle applied in the New Testament where we are exhorted not to be unequally yoked to unbelievers. Racial purity is no longer an issue as it was back then. Abraham made his servant

swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and the God of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell; but you shall go to my country and to my family, and take a wife for my son Isaac."

"And the servant said to him, 'Perhaps the woman will not be willing to follow me to this land. Must I take your son back to the land from which you came?'

"But Abraham said to him, 'Beware that you do not take my son back there. The LORD God of Heaven, who took me from my father's house and from the land of my family, and who spoke to me and swore to me, saying, 'To your descendants I give this land,' He will send an angel before you, and you shall take a wife for my son from there. And if the woman is not willing to follow you, then you will be released from this oath; only do not take my son back there.' (Gen. 24:3-8)

We do not know what was behind Abraham's reluctance for his son to travel to his homeland, although we can speculate. The betrothal lobby have suggested that this was because the custom was for young men not to be involved in their own marriage decisions. But notice the servant's reluctance to go without Isaac, together with his doubt that the woman would want to go and marry a man she had never met. The implication is that under normal circumstances Isaac

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would have sought his own wife. But this was an unusual situation, and that very fact never seems to be taken into account when the betrothal advocates appeal to this example. In fact, it was so unusual an occurrence that a miracle needed to happen. The servant had no idea which girl would be the right one since there was no knowledge of, or interchange with, these far off relatives. Hence, he had to rely solely on an act of divine intervention. Because this was part of the Lord's plan, in fulfilling the mission to found a chosen people through the patriarchs, the Lord moved directly in these affairs, bringing the girl of His choosing to the servant before he had met anyone else. It was all part of the Lord miraculously fulfilling his original word to Abraham. The servant recognized this marvelous act of mercy and praised the Lord for it, saying,

"Blessed be the LORD God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken His mercy and His truth toward my master. As for me, being on the way, the LORD led me to the house of my master's brethren." (Gen. 24:27)

What was Rebekah and her parents' response to this unusual proposal of marriage to a man she had never even met? Her parents recognized that "The thing comes from the LORD..." (Gen. 24:50) though they desired that their daughter remain with them for at least ten days before leaving. (24:55) Despite her parent's wishes, Rebekah desired to depart the very next day. (Gen. 24:56) In this Rebekah showed a degree of autonomy that is discouraged by the advocates of betrothal.

The Lord blessed their faithfulness, for we are told that Isaac loved Rebekah (Gen. 24:67). This love was obviously emotional, for we read that it comforted Isaac after his mother's death. (24:67)

Nowhere do we find this story set out as a blue print for selecting a spouse. Rather, it is a story of Abraham, Isaac and Rebekah's trust in God's faithfulness. Abraham's faith in the Lord's word regarding his progeny is shown to have substance in the way God went before and prepared this young woman for Isaac and then miraculously engineered the circumstances necessary to bring them together. To try to find from this story some divine methodology for finding a spouse reduces its power and significance.

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7 The Talmud states, "A man is forbidden to take a woman to wife without having seen her, lest he afterwards perceive in her something objectionable and she becomes repulsive to him..."
Take a Wife

If a divine precedent for finding a spouse had been set through these events, then one would confidently expect Isaac to continue the procedure with his son Jacob. However, with Jacob we find a very different set of circumstances.

We are told in Genesis 26:34-35 that Jacob's brother Esau "took wives" which "were a grief of mind to Isaac and Rebekah." Advocates of betrothal like to take this verse and point out that Esau took wives for himself rather than letting his father select them. They point out further that the result brought grief to Esau’s parents. Thompson refers to this passage by commenting that "every example where the father did NOT initiate and oversee the relationship (such as Esau/wives, Shechem/Dinah, Samson/Delilah, etc.) the outcome was either mixed or disastrous."8

But just hold on a second. The unifying factor in the three relationships that Thompson mentions, and which also accounts for their disastrous outcomes, is that each involved union with a Gentile, which God had forbidden. The grief Esau brought upon his parents was not because he “took wives” for himself, for that same language is used of Abraham, a generation earlier, taking a wife for himself: "Abraham again took a wife, and her name was Keturah." (Gen. 25:1) The grief was not because Esau took wives, but because, as Rebekah says,

“I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth; if Jacob takes a wife of the daughters of Heth, like these who are the daughters of the land, what good will my life be to me?” (Gen. 27: 46)

The grief Esau caused his parents was not because of the procedure for getting married, but because he took wives from among the pagans. So Isaac instructs Jacob not to take a wife from the daughters of Canaan, but to go find one amongst his own family.

Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him away to Padan Aram to take himself a wife from there, and that as he blessed him he gave him a charge, saying,

8 John W. Thompson, "God's Design for Scriptural Romance Part 1: Rediscovering the Timeless Truths", ibid.
"You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan." (Gen. 28:6)

Isaac simply sent Jacob away to find a wife. Even I favor more parental involvement than that! Isaac had no idea who his son was going to choose, he simply asks that it be from his own kinsmen. When Esau heard of this he was jealous and went and took another wife from Abraham's family too (Gen. 28:9).

Jacob: Love Before Commitment

It is interesting that in Jacob’s case at least, emotions occurred prior to commitment. Notice that "Jacob loved Rachel" (Gen. 29:18) before he asked Leban if he could marry her. The love preceded the commitment. As Jacob was penniless, and therefore had no means of supporting a wife, he had to work before he could earn her. So deep was Jacob’s love for Rachel that these seven years “seemed only a few days to him because of the love he had for her.” (Gen. 29:20)

Jacob’s story makes sense against the backdrop of a culture in which the father of the bride had to give consent. Now Leban was a scoundrel who took advantage of Jacob's penniless state, maneuvering things to get fourteen years work out of him. Jacob was tricked into marrying Leah thinking he was marrying Rachel. It is interesting that, in this case at least, the arranged marriage (Jacob and Leah) was actually a disaster. Why was the arranged marriage a disaster? Quite simply because Jacob didn't love Leah (Gen. 29:31). On the other hand, the relationship that Jacob himself chose, prospered and was a love-match.

Lindvall acknowledges that “there are several instances in scripture of men and women clearly being drawn emotionally to one another prior to their marriage,” BUT he hastily adds, “these seem to be not only exceptional, but to invariably result in unique problems.”9 I wonder what sort of ‘unique problems’ Lindvall imagines resulted from the fact that Jacob loved Rachel before gaining permission to marry her. He doesn’t say.

Dinah and Shechem

9 Lindvall’s email newsletter, #88, 2001.
The story of Dinah and Shechem (Gen. 34) has been cited as an example of the disasters brought about by a man choosing his own marriage partner. The incident proves nothing either way, but it does serve to demonstrate the difference between the proper way that Jacob handled his emotions versus the improper way of the Gentile Shechem. Jacob was in love with Rachel just as Shechem was in love with Dinah, but Shechem wanted physical satisfaction immediately while Jacob showed restraint. Jacob obviously desired Rachel physically too (Gen. 29:21), but he waited. Jacob’s attitude runs contrary to the consumerism of our materialistic age, where a premium is placed on instant gratification.

It is interesting that even Shechem went to his father to ask him to obtain Dinah for his wife. This shows that parental involvement was a protocol observed by the godly and the ungodly alike, by the pagans as well as the children of Israel.

**Samson**

We see this again in the story of Sampson. (Judges 14) Although Sampson found a girl that "pleased him well" and whom he desired to marry, it was still necessary for cultural customs to be observed. So Sampson said to his parents, “get her for me as a wife.” (Judges 14:2) The parents initially refused on the grounds that she was from among their enemies, the Philistines. Again we see that the authority of the parents to make the plans was an intrinsic part of that culture. It was not simply a custom observed by righteous people who knew it was “God's way.”

**David**

Another person who needs to be studied is David. In 1 Samuel 18:20 we read that "Michal, Saul's daughter, loved David. And they told Saul, and the thing pleased him." Notice here again that the love preceded the commitment. It is obvious that this was how people lived then as we do today. Also notice that the father was informed subsequent to the love.

Saul’s interference eventually destroyed David and Michal’s marriage. David eventually took the widow Abigail to be his wife (1 Sam. 25:39-42). David and Abigail certainly didn't follow any procedure of parental authorization. David asks directly for Abigail
to be his wife (through messengers) and she accepts immediately. We also read that “David also took Ahinoam of Jezreel” (25:43), but we are told nothing about it.

The ‘Sons of God’: Dating Relationships?

In Genesis 6:1-5 we read about “the sons of God” who saw that the daughters of men were beautiful and so came down to take wives of them. In his defense of betrothal, John Thompson cites this in his list of “significant relationships to study.” The passage is usually thought to refer to angels (“sons of God”, see Job 1:6) who disobeyed God by coming down to take wives of humans, which led to the production of giants. The procedure for conducting a relationship is not the issue here; the issue is disobedient angels and wicked humans. Nevertheless, Gothard somehow manages to see this as an example of "dating-type relationships..."10

Christ's Betrothal to the Church

John Thompson writes,

Perhaps the most compelling reason for recognizing betrothal as transcultural is our Lord's use of this standard for His relationship with His own "multicultural" bride, the church. As the spiritual father of the Corinthians, Paul declares: "...for I betrothed you to one husband, that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin." (2 Cor. 11:2) Why would Christ choose betrothal if it were not God's own prescription for premarital fidelity? Indeed, Paul suggests that its primary purpose is to "present you as a pure virgin." Just as Christ doesn't want us "dating around" in the spiritual realm because it leads to physical, mental and emotional impurity, so likewise in the natural realm.

To say that betrothal must be God's way because He drew upon it to illustrate His relationship with the church, is a fallacious

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10 Establishing Biblical Foundations For Courtship, ibid, p. 6.
argument, for two reasons. First, the argument only works if we assume some approximation between historical betrothal and modern betrothal. Secondly, Jesus and the apostles used whatever material was around at the time for their illustrations. They drew upon everything from living in tents to using swords in warfare. Does that mean that fighting with swords is more godly than fighting with guns because God used the former and not the latter as an illustration? Is it godlier for farmers to plant vineyards of grapes rather than fields of oats because God used the former as an illustration and not the latter?

The attempt to see Christ's relationship with the church as an illustration of modern betrothal has actually led some teachers to implicitly deny the basic gospel message. To show how this is so it is first necessary to review the four-fold progression in betrothal once the go ahead has been given for a match.

1. First an offer of marriage/love is made to the woman
2. Then the woman accepts an irrevocable commitment.
3. Then the couple 'falls in love.'
4. Finally, there is marriage and consummation.

The advocates of betrothal are teaching that the above progression parallels Christ's relationship to the church. First, they say, Christ makes us an offer of marriage through the gift of salvation. Then after we accept comes the betrothal period. During this time Christ woos us and we fall in love with Him. Also during our ‘betrothal period’ we are linked irrevocably to Christ apart from spiritual adultery, which would be turning our back on Him. Finally, when Christ returns, there is consummation of the marriage.

This idea is not Biblical. Scripture declares that Christ's love for us preceded our commitment to Him. “In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His son to be the propitiation for our sins... We love him because he first love us." (1 Jn. 4:10-19) And again, "God demonstrates His own love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). Why did He die for us to secure our salvation? Out of love (John. 3:16). Therefore His love cannot be the effect of our commitment to Him, but the other way round. When we say “yes” to Christ's marriage proposal, it is because He has wooed us by His great love through the Holy Spirit (John 6:44), instead of in the modern betrothal method where the husband woos the woman only after she
has made a commitment to him. Christ's relationship to us is the very antithesis of the pattern of modern betrothal.

**What About 'Defrauding'?**

There are two other verses from Paul's letters that are frequently cited by both courtship and betrothal advocates. One is 1 Thessalonians 4:3-6.

> For this is the will of God, your sanctification: 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; that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified.

This is one of the main verses cited as a proof text for betrothal *a la* Lindvall. Lindvall argues that Paul's words that no man should take advantage of (or 'go beyond', as some translations have it), is referring to the sins of sexual impurity, while the word 'defraud' is referring to the sin of emotional impurity. “We can all recognize," writes Lindvall, "that 'going beyond' applies to physical impurity. This is important, but it's not all there is. He also said not to 'defraud' one another.”

Lindvall argues that defrauding applies when a person's emotions are drawn towards someone they do not end up marrying. They are defrauded because they expected something that was not given. Hence, emotions should only be released after a commitment to marriage.

Surely this is to artificially impose a distinction in Paul's words that the syntax does not allow. The use of the inclusive conjunction, together with both phrases being linked into 'this matter' of sexual immorality, indicate that 'taking advantage' and 'defrauding' are part

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11 Bold Christian Living E-Mail Newsletter, Issue #26: Introduction to Emotional Purity--Part One: Courtship?

12 Lindvall writes, “It is just as defrauding for a young man to draw your daughter's heart before betrothal as it would be for me (a married man) to draw the heart of some woman other than my wife (no matter how physically pure such a flirtatious relationship might be). God is calling both married people and single people to both physical purity and emotional purity.” (Bold Christian Living E-Mail Newsletter, Issue #93)
of the self same thought rather than a distinction between different forms of sin. Furthermore, since defrauding involves deceit, it cannot apply to cases where there is simply emotional attachment that is not culminated in marriage, but only to those cases where a person flatters or flirts with a person who believes they are being genuine when they are not.

Lindvall tells us that the words “possess his own vessel” means “acquire his own wife.” Scholars disagree whether the words 'vessel' are referring to a wife or one's own body. If they refer to a wife (which is unlikely from the context of the passage,) it is interesting that the emphasis is not on the father acquiring a spouse but the individual in question.

Lindvall claims that the words “passion of lust” refers to the process of pursuing a partner through romance and dating rather than God's method of betrothal. But let's not forget that the whole passage - the whole book of 1 Thessalonians in fact - is talking about personal sanctification versus sexual immorality. If this passage is read in the context in which it occurs, it becomes obvious that it is not instruction to unmarried people about how (or how not) to get married. When Paul intended to give specific advice to unmarried people, as in 1st Corinthians 7, he made it clear what he was addressing. But 1 Thessalonians 4:3-6 is a passage about the general wrongs of sexual immorality, similar to Paul's exhortation in 1 Corinthians 6:18-20. He emphasizes the seriousness of sexual purity and the sinfulness of following the passion of lust. Seen in this context, when we read not “to take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter,” it is clear that “this matter” is the sexual immorality spoken of in verse 3, and more specifically adultery. It has nothing to do with pre-marital emotions, as Lindvall would like us to think.

**What About Brothers & Sisters?**

Another passage that these teachers are quick to point to is Paul’s words in 1 Timothy 5:2, where Paul instructed Timothy to treat “younger women as sisters, with all purity” and to treat the older woman as if they were mothers. Lindvall argues that this

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13 'Shamefaced Romance', Ibid. Also Lindvall's email Newsletter #26: Introduction to Emotional Purity--Part One: Courtship?
passage indicates that Paul disapproved of romance before engagement.

Paul is telling Timothy to show respect to young women as he would his sister, even as he should respect elderly woman as he would his mother. It is not difficult to find ways of applying this to our own culture. One application would be not to mess around or flirt since the bottom line in all relationships must be AGAPE love. If Paul had wanted to tell Timothy that romance was wrong or that Timothy should be pursuing an agenda of emotional purity, he certainly did not say it here. Further, it is interesting that Paul’s words only make sense if you assume that there was at least some level of casual interaction between the young men and women as there is between brothers and sisters.
Courtship and the Sovereignty of God

Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations...according to the commandments and doctrines of men? These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.

— The Apostle Paul¹

To this day millions of Christians simply can't believe it. They persist in thinking of God as a stern judge and of their road to heaven as the onerous piling up of good deeds for the day. They've read the New Testament a dozen times and missed the whole point. If they hadn't missed it, how could they go around with long faces and worried consciences all the time? It wasn't worry warts who won the world. Nor was it iron wills. It was doubting Thomases and foot-in-mouth-disease Peters and persecuting Pauls who became little Christs by believing the good news of the big Christ...

— Peter Kreeft²

Referring to some of the same oppressive relationship paradigms I have considered, Kathleen Schaijik writes,

The problem with it is that it is drastically lacking the fullness of truth about the mysteries of love and sexuality. And the lack here is not a mere

¹ Colossians 2:20-23

² Peter Kreeft, Heaven: The Heart’s Deepest Longing, p. 184.
incompleteness—so that if a few additions or adjustments were made, we'd have it in full. Rather, it is the kind of lack that entails a reduction and distortion of reality. And any distortion on the philosophical level is bound to work its way into the practical realm, doing damage in human lives in proportion with the seriousness of the error. 3

Schaijik goes on to suggest that we should teach single men and women a sense of reverence by holding up to them the value of marriage and the beauty of love as God designed it. One is reminded here of Plato’s words that “the object of education is to teach us to love beauty.” (The Greek word rendered ‘beauty’ in Plato’s sentence can equally be translated ‘good.’) Schaijik goes on to point out that by nurturing young people in the love of truth, beauty and goodness,

they cannot help but long for it, and, under Grace, aspire to it. Their aching desire for authentic love gives them courage and insight; they begin to recognize intuitively and shrink from the impurity that threatens their chance of attaining it. 4

Creation Ex Nihilo

One father who has written a book defending courtship also wrote some more general books on parenting when his children were young. In these books the father argued that “Whether you're a Christian or not, if the principles are applied, the results will be predictable.” What were these principles? In the father’s own words,

If we want him to turn out a certain way, then we must visualize him that way, believe in that vision, and act so as to bring it to fulfillment. ...'loving' our children is not a sufficient goal to yield a workable plan....

Parents must do the same [as a contractor]. They must first decide what they want to build and then draw up

3 Schaijik, ibid.

4 Ibid.
plans for the actual construction. ... Once they have visualized the end result, they must map out a plan in order to achieve that result.

From this father’s perspective, things looked so simple. Raising his children was just like building a house: if you follow the right rules then the result will be predictable. As he wrote elsewhere, “The maturing of characteristics in our children is predictable according to the extent to which we follow these procedures.... They can mold him into any shape they choose...” These, so called, ‘procedures,’ amounted to using discipline as a pragmatic conditioning technique instead of God’s means for teaching conviction of sin within the context of love, acceptance and biblical authority.

I knew this father and his children, and it was interesting for me to see what happened as his children grew up. The children were never allowed to grow in any area outside the pre-designated plan of the father's mind. This ‘plan’ was not limited merely to issues of morality and spiritual growth, but involved the timetabling and careful management of every area of who they were as people, including what they thought and felt. Even love and affection would be dispensed or withheld depending on the extent to which the children conformed to the fixed idea in the father’s mind. However, because children, like all life forms, grow from the inside-out rather than from the outside-in, they did not turn out as the father had planned. Unfortunately, the father learned when it was too late that raising children is not as simple as building a house. He then retracted and destroyed all his parenting manuals (which is why I have preserved his anonymity.)

The mistake this father made was to assume for himself a sovereignty that belonged only to God. He believed he had absolute power over the child’s life. It is revealing that he once wrote, “Of course I cannot control and predict every detail of my child's life. But I must behave as if such were indeed possible...”

**Sovereignty of God**

While the implication of this man’s teaching clearly denied God’s sovereignty, the sovereignty of God ostensibly plays an important role in most courtship and betrothal schemes. As one advocate of courtship says on his website, if you truly believe in a sovereign God who answers prayer, then there is no problem in needing to have full consent from all the key authority figures before
you marry a girl. In the literature of this movement I have read
dozens of similar statements where the sovereignty of God is
appealed to as the reason why a seemingly unworkable game-plan
will have to work. Typically this false dilemma will then be pushed
to the next and final absurdity that everyone who objects to such a
plan merely reveals that they do not fully trust God’s sovereignty.

But who is really failing to trust God’s sovereignty here?
Consider what they are actually saying: that if you don’t follow the
rule that all authorities must give consent then you don’t trust God,
that your God isn’t really sovereign.

**Fear-Based Approach**

A friend of my pastor once said that “Wisdom moves forward,
joyfully learning from mistakes. Folly looks back, second-guessing,
joylessly accusing and worrying.”

A fear-based approach to life drives young people to stand on
the sidelines of life rather than entering into the fray where they
might get hurt.

In much of the literature of the courtship movement, we get the
impression that one wrong move here, a mistake there, a sinful
thought about that person, a sinful deed with this girl, and God
suddenly cannot cope. It is as if God does not understand our frame
but is shocked at our sin. They are afraid to embrace the wonderful
freedom of being totally secure in the Lord’s control in spite of their
own weakness. They cannot see the Christian life is an adventure
with inherent risks and unknown terrain that should be exciting.

To even attempt to invent a risk free, pain free system fails to
understand the true nature of our human condition and the condition
of the world as defined by the Bible. However, the Lord is under no
illusions about our condition even if we are. He knows the incredible
complexity of each individual’s life; He appreciates each unique mix
of circumstances. He knows how utterly incapable we are of
managing our own lives in our own strength, even when we deceive
ourselves and others by appearances.

**Modern Day Pharisees**

Like the Pharisees of the 1st century, some of those within the
courtship and betrothal movements have heaped on many sundry
laws, rules, check-lists and methods for evaluating maturity, all of which become burdensome and fail to address the true nature of ourselves before God. An entire body of qualifications is being built up that one feels pressured to judge spirituality by. Although some of these things may be Biblical, they are being practiced for the wrong reasons. People are being pressured to conform to man-made barometers of spiritual growth in order to keep up the appearance of godliness.

We know of one lady who’s courtship had been hailed as well nigh perfect who, after having two children within two years of marriage, was shell-shocked, lonely and miserable, still having to project herself as the perfect mom and wife to the outside world. In other cases, older daughters are becoming embittered surrogate mothers to their younger siblings since their own mothers are exhausted by the multiple pregnancies they feel compelled to have in order to fulfill the expected ideal. One girl who contacted us told how, amongst the families she had grown up with, there was an unspoken competition regarding the number of children you had. Further, she told how certain traditional styles of dress and hair (i.e., the *Little House on the Prairie* paradigm) were considered to be inherently more godly. In short, holiness had a “look” to it. Jeff Van Vonderen commented on this sort of thing when he observed that,

The measuring stick becomes: how things look; what people think; religious behavior….Children must learn to act like miniature adults in order to avoid shame…fault and blame are the order of the day.5

Fundamental to the problem is a mistaken idea of what constitutes godliness. The Lord is not looking for families burdened down by an exacting load of perfectionism. Rather, the Lord is looking for love, obedience, growth, faithfulness, joy and laughter within the context of our fallen world. To forget in practice what it means to live in a fallen world by God’s grace leads to one of two things. Either we end up successfully forcing ourselves into a mold that projects a façade and allows us think we have attained a measure of godliness, or we are constantly broken on the rocks of disappointment and guilt by trying to attain the ideal and failing.

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The courtship and betrothal teaching, on the other hand, so often fails to accept the reality of the life God has given us. They have scheduled the timing of things, made check lists to evaluate ourselves, devised schemes for being in complete control of everything that happens to us. Then they dictate to the Holy Spirit how He is allowed to work.

Certainly we should do everything we can to set our children in the direction for life and to equip them for independence. At the same time we should realize that they may not always overcome. But it is the struggle that matters. We struggle daily in the knowledge that when we fall, the Lord, in his mercy, will pick us up. We struggle within the security of our loving Father’s arms, not in order that we might gain His love and acceptance. We struggle against the whims of our flesh, the temptations of the world and the influence of the devil within the context of the freedom purchased for us at Calvary. This should give us a sense of being gloriously safe – not the pseudo safety that comes from having a risk free, mistake free, pain free plan for our lives, but the true safety of having peace with God in the midst of a stormy world.

Idolizing Singleness

One of the chief errors of many within the courtship movement is that they do not take a high enough view of marriage, just as the practitioners of recreational dating also do not adopt a high enough view of marriage. This can be seen in the way singleness is frequently idolized as an end in itself throughout the literature of the courtship movement.

In Elisabeth Elliot’s *Quest For Love* she positively cites the case of one Christian couple who were counseled to wait about six years before getting married. While this may certainly be extreme, it is not uncommon to hear young people being urged to ‘be content with singleness’ or to take advantage of the ‘gift’ or ‘opportunity’ of singleness at precisely that time of life when they ought to be looking for potential spouses.

Consider the following comments.

“...unless we are content with the Lord in singleness, we will not be content with another person in marriage.”

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6 Elisabeth Elliot, *Quest For Love: True Stories of Passion and Purity* (Revell, 2002).

7 Gothard, *The True Significance of The Wedding Covenant*. 
“Having been discontent while single, satisfaction in marriage becomes elusive… She should enjoy the Lord with gladness and contentment. Should God send marriage, it will be a wonderful gift. For now, encourage your daughter to serve her Savior without distraction where God has placed her; that too is a beautiful gift from Him.”

“Are you unmarried at thirty or forty, filled with that sinking feeling that perhaps you never will find a mate? Don’t be dismayed or despair. God’s best gifts are never rushed. Perhaps his best for you is to remain single. Perhaps you will marry when you are fifty…. Do not waste your single years pining after what is not. Rejoice for what is. Use these years to do what you could never do if you were married. …give thanks to God for such an opportunity. …He is in control.”

“For a long time I did not consider that my single status was a gift from the Lord. I did not resent it – to be frank, in my earlier idealistic period I thought that because I had chosen singleness I was doing God a favor! But in later years I was severely tested again and again on that choice. Then…it gently dawned on me that God had given me a superb gift!”

“If there are singles who find the waters of singleness dark and deep, who feel, ‘I sink in deep waters; the billows go over my head; all his waves go over me,’ this is my message to you concerning singleness: ‘Be of good cheer, my brother, my sister; I feel the bottom, and it is good.’”

While not denying that there may be elements of truth in some of the above statements, they all represent a general tendency to

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promoting singleness as an end in itself and even, in some cases, a
devaluing of marriage by implication. However, the Bible expressly
declares that singleness is ‘not good’ (Gen 2:18). It also commands
us to ‘be fruitful and multiply.’ (Gen. 1:28) It follows that the
normal pattern should be to seek marriage. Singleness, like hunger,
is a privation of what is normative to God’s established order. As
Debbie Maken puts it, “By being dissatisfied with singleness, we’re
simply agreeing with God!”

God made human beings to need marriage, just as he made
human beings to need food. Telling someone who is single to “be at
ease with singleness because the Lord is enough” is like telling
someone who is starving, “be satisfied with hunger because the Lord
is enough.” If the Lord’s perfect fellowship with Adam wasn’t
enough for him, why should it be enough for us? The answer to
starvation is food just as the answer to singleness is marriage.
Debbie Maken points out that,

“Condoning singleness from the pulpit is in large part
responsible for causing singles to resign themselves to their
unfortunate and less-than-ideal fate. With the benefits of
marriage systematically downplayed and the supposed
freedoms and hyper-sanctification of the single lifestyle
glorified, protracted singleness becomes a self-fulfilling
prophecy.”

“If we sincerely do not believe that God’s presence makes
up for physical hunger, then why do we often pretend that
service activities or God be in the husband of his people
makes up for singleness? When we deny that our bodies,
souls, and emotions are made for a real marriage here on
earth, when we suggest that a real marriage is not that
important, or when we suggest that singleness is as
honoring to God as marriage, we show contempt for our
Creator-designer. Much of today’s Christian culture
repeatedly informs (or misinforms) Christian singles that
marriage is unnecessary, singleness is good, there is no

12 Debbie Maken, ibid, p. 24.

13 Ibid, pp. 17-19. See p. 112 for a good discussion on why discontentment with singleness does not
equal sin.
problem with protracted singleness, and singles should be content in their state and embrace it wholeheartedly.”14

Why do so many Christians believe that the state of singleness should be exalted? Why do they encourage our young people to act like widows in the prime of their lives?

One of the reasons is a misapplied notion of God’s sovereignty. Because marriage is something God sovereignly provides, many people think that a single person does not have to do anything but wait. Again the analogy with food may be helpful: all Christians recognize that it is the Lord who provides food, and that is why we thank him before each meal. I have never met a believer, however, who thought that trusting God to provide food was incompatible with earning money to buy it and going out and doing the grocery shopping. Similarly, a single person can both trust God for a spouse and do what they can to find someone. To put the matter more theologically, if the Lord wills an end, He also wills the means to that end. Sitting at home and waiting for the Lord to bring the right person along is simply irresponsible. If a father has marriageable daughters in the home, he has a God-given responsibility to be proactive in finding husbands for them. Singleness, like hunger, is something that we can and should try to rectify Biblically rather than passively accept.

Another reason why singleness is often idolized in the courtship and betrothal movements is because of the common idea that denying ourselves good things must be approximate with growing in righteousness.15 Consequently, the ability to “die to marriage” represents a true test of one’s love for God and growth in sanctification. This assumption springs from a network of assumptions about self-denial which I will address in the next chapter.

14 Ibid, pp. 79-80. Readers may be wondering how 1 Corinthians 7 fits into this picture. See Maken pp. 87-91 for a good discussion of 1 Corinthians 7 and the difference between singleness and celibacy.

15 “…there is some warrant for thinking that the kinds of self-denial involved in singleness could make one a candidate for greater capacities for love in the age to come.” John Piper and Wayne Grudem, Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism (Wheaton, ILL: Crossway Books, 1991), p. xviii.
Man's Chief End

...all departments of life are governed and breathed into by the 'Lord who is Lord of all of life.' ...life cannot be divided into compartments with one labeled 'religious' - the Lord made the whole of life, and He has a place in each part.

- Susan Schaeffer Macaulay

“No mention is made of tenderness, romance, reverence, self-donation. Physical intimacy is reduced to sexual foreplay, and sexual morality [is reduced] to its negative aspect of sin avoidance.”

- Kathleen van Schaijik

Self-Denying or Christ-Affirming?

I am currently teaching my children the Westminster shorter catechism. The opening question of the catechism is, “What is the chief end of man?” The answer is, “Man’s chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.” That’s not the answer you expect after coming away from a Bill Gothard or Jonathan Lindvall seminar. When I came away from my first Gothard seminar I thought that man’s chief end was to deny the self and enjoy nothing, let alone God. Self-denial, we are told, is a positive end in itself, a quality that represents the very essence of sanctification.

There are many testimonies in the courtship and betrothal literature where young people are praised for dying to relationships that are acknowledged to be good and healthy, simply as a sort of spiritual exercise. Lindvall tells the story of a father who emotionally

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1 Susan Schaeffer Macaulay, *For The Family's Sake*, op. cit., p. 34.

2 Schaijik, ibid.
manipulated a couple into giving up their interest in each other in order to test them, all the while fully intending for them to marry.³

In his tape, *Training Godly Teens*, Lindvall speaks about his own experiences as a youth. He shares how the Lord used his loneliness to draw him closer to Christ. So far so good, but then Lindvall makes the leap and concludes “one of the best things that can happen to our young people is to experience that emotion of loneliness...” He goes on to say that the natural inclination to be with others, which makes us feel good, is to be denied because it does not teach us to be full-time servants. I do not deny that if the Lord in His providence places us in a place of loneliness, then He is lovingly teaching us something through that.⁴ However, we would do wrong to conclude that loneliness, or any kind of suffering, is something we should deliberately *seek* to experience.

The constant emphasis on denying the self for its own sake leads one to feel that it is wrong to desire our own joy, that God does not want us to be happy in this life, or that happiness is at least irrelevant. These teachings can seem to be virtuous simply because they are hard on our feelings and personal desires.

In his sermon, “The Weight of Glory,” C. S. Lewis pointed out that although the New Testament has a lot to say about self-denial, in almost every case this is accompanied with an appeal to desire or purpose. For example, Jesus said that “everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands for My name's sake, shall receive a hundred fold and inherit eternal life.” (Mt. 19:29-30, Mk. 10:29-30) Jesus appeals to our desire for reward, happiness and the good life as a motivation for following Him. Jesus does not present self-denial as a virtue in itself, but as the means to a better end.

I was once having a conversation with a woman whose husband owned a Christian bookstore. The lady told me that the Christian church would be better off if all the books were removed from the shelves of their Christian bookstore and, in their place, signs were put that simply said “crucify yourself” (to be metaphorically applied...presumably). But nowhere in the Bible does the Lord ask us to perform “self-crucifixion.” We are not to seek suffering for its own sake. Not even Jesus crucified himself. Taking up one's cross


⁴ For a good discussion on the positive approach to trials, see Elyse Fitzpatrick, *Overcoming Fear, Worry and Anxiety* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishing, 2001).
and following Jesus is not a form of masochism, it is simply the acceptance that to be a Christian involves cost. It involves the willingness to choose the will of Christ even when that means having to forego something that might be good in itself. When that happens, the emphasis is not on the denial of self but on the affirmation of Christ. We do not follow suffering, we follow Christ which sometimes results in suffering along the way.

In their book *Being Human*, Macaulay and Barrs explain that sanctification is not a matter of negation, of trying to get rid of everything that is enjoyable, crushing whatever inner impulses one has simply because they are part of human experience. To teach such is not Christianity but Buddhism.

**Lord over All**

The incarnational vision that lies at the heart of Christian theology necessarily glories in the richness of our physical human experience. This is because we recognize that God took on flesh and died to redeem all creation, including our material human experience. From this it follows that the distinction between what is sacred and what is secular, or between what is religious and what is ordinary, is in fact a false distinction. Since Jesus is Lord over all of life (Mt. 28:18), working hard is just as spiritual as playing hard if we do it unto Him; having a feast is just as spiritual as having a fast if we do it unto Him.

Obvious as this may sound, it is a concept that is frequently denied. I once read the entries on a mother's panel on an internet e-group devoted to discussing the ideas of Bill Gothard. A number of ATI mothers were discussing the various parenting methods they had learnt, such as the effectiveness of eliminating their children’s playtime. What interested me was the presupposition that play was somehow less spiritually valid than work, and hence to be turned away from in the life of a child. One mother of eight children - from twenty-two to three years of age - wrote about the way she

...encouraged [her children] to turn away from playfulness toward work. We are to do our work heartily onto the Lord, not unto our pleasures (legos). We had a "play fast." It was

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for one week and then we tried it another week. So we've adopted the old-fashioned idea that children play on Saturday afternoon only.

Certainly I have no problem with children sharing in the work of the home. The problem I have is with the underlying assumption that God is less apart of our lives when we are playing than when we are working. If a child plays with their Lego, they should be told to do it unto the Lord no less than when they are doing their work. This is because the Lord requires us to do everything unto Him.

The idea that the Lord is more a part of our work (what is difficult) than our pleasure (what is fun,) reinforces the impression that God’s ways are stoic and straight laced. Worse than that, however, it implicitly denies the lordship of Christ over every aspect of our experience. Consequently, when we feel pleasure or enjoy anything in life, we expect there to be a catch, as if we're not quite spiritually pleasing. But this is not how God made us to be. Being human, enjoying life, play, love, sex, nature (or Lego if we are children!) are all an expression of being made in God's image as He originally intended Adam and Eve to be. 6

In his analysis of Bill Gothard's theology, Bockelman shows that Gothard subtly depreciates our physical side by creating false dilemmas between the spiritual and the physical. For Gothard, God becomes part of a Christian's total experience, not by discovering the fingerprint of God that already exists in any intrinsically good activity, but by artificially attaching an explicitly religious significance to everything in life. Gothard has failed to realize that the Christian-ness of any intrinsically good thing or activity lies, not in how it can be related to a didactic Christian message, but in what that thing or activity is in itself as part of God's creation.

Nowhere is this truncated application of Christ’s lordship seen more clearly than the approach to sexuality taken by some of those in the courtship and betrothal movements.

Shame-Faced Sexuality

Wherever the universality of Christ’s lordship is not applied, sexuality is usually the first casualty. This is exactly what we are

6 See Deuteronomy 20:5-7 to see some of the natural pleasures to which God gives just as high a priority as fighting the enemies of Israel.
finding in some of the writings in the courtship movement, where there is a general devaluing of sexuality, together with a general shame and embarrassment towards the whole subject.

One courtship apologist, who wishes to be unnamed, condescendingly refers to romantic and sexual feelings as "so-called natural feelings of attraction..." This is later qualified by saying that "Perhaps for some it [feelings of attraction] is natural", though "natural" in the same way that being selfish and needing to use the toilet is natural.

A toddler is recognized as growing up when he can control the natural impulse to go to the bathroom and can reserve that natural phenomenon for the proper time and place.... Yet somehow when it comes to the so-called "natural" feelings of attraction toward the opposite sex that begin at ten, twelve, fourteen, or sixteen, society does not consider them in the same light as potty training, controlling anger or selfishness, and independence. At this point they say, "Ah, the hormones have kicked in, these are natural feelings, and we must let young people express them however and whenever they want."

The implication here seems to be that if we accept the premise that it is natural to have feelings of attraction towards members of the opposite sex, we are somehow sanctioning the expression of these feelings in any way shape or form. Thankfully, this is a false dilemma. While our sexuality and all that it entails (i.e. romantic instincts, preoccupation with the opposite sex, etc.) is a natural part of us, there are still biblical guidelines we must operate under in how we respond and express (or don't express) these natural inclinations. These guidelines do not mean that there is anything wrong with sexuality itself - as if it could even be compared to anger and unselfishness - but precisely the opposite: it is because our sexuality is a gift from God that it must be protected with God’s own guidelines. This is precisely why modesty is important. We veil our sexuality behind modest attire and behavior, not because our sexuality is ugly but because it is beautiful. Just as my valuable silver is too precious to put to common use, so the gift of my body and sexuality is too valuable to use in any but the appropriate
context. It is the wrong use of the silver or the body that we should object to, not the thing itself.  

The pessimistic approach reduces sexual morality to negation: you must not do this, you must not wear that, etc. While it is true that to affirm anything is also to deny something else, it is crucial to begin with the Biblical affirmation. The motivation for modesty and moral purity should always start from a desire to be responsible with the treasure of our sexuality that God has given us, in order that we may glorify God.

The pessimistic or shamed-faced approach to sexuality is actually not that different to the reductionist approach to sexuality so common in the world. Whether the reductionist approach leads to promiscuity or the shamed-faced approach leads to prudery, the effect in both cases is to fall short of the joy that biblically legitimate sexual experience has to offer those whose orientation is neither shame-faced nor reductive, promiscuous nor prudish. Both unbiblical extremes have the effect of disenchanting sex, one because it turns sex into something embarrassing and shameful, the other because it turns sex into something commonplace and trivial. Biblical modesty and morality, on the other hand, preserve our sexual dignity against these errors by keeping our sexuality, in a sense, secret. However, because the veil of secrecy results from the sacredness of sexuality, it follows that this secretness must be understood as being qualitatively different than mere concealment. If mere concealment were the goal then women should dress in clothes that obscure any aspect of shape, even to the extent of going completely veiled as they do in some Islamic nations. Kathleen van Schaijik has suggested, on the other hand, that the sacredness of female sexuality is as much a justification for dressing beautifully as it is for dressing modestly.

Part of Our Relationship With Christ

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7 For a more detailed discussion of this subject, see my other book The Decent Drapery of Life (Lulu, 2008).

8 “If we revere something, we do not hide it. Neither do we flaunt it in public. We cherish it; we pay it homage; we approach it with dignity; we adorn it with beauty; we take care that it is not misused.” Kathleen van Schaijik, ‘A Different Perspective on the Modesty Question’, The University Concourse, Vol. IV Issue 5, March 11, 1999. See also Wilson’s discussion of female modesty and attire in Her Hand in Marriage, op. cit., pp. 47-58.
Because Gothard and those like him live in a world carefully divided between the natural and the spiritual, the latter being more valid than the former, it is not surprising that they find it difficult to know what to do with sex. This can be seen in Gothard’s list of intercourse rules for married couples. These rules include such things as abstinence during and seven days after menstruation and abstinence the evening prior to worship. Gothard quotes bizarre statistics to prove that abstinence increases the likelihood of having strong children and decreases the likelihood of being barren or of having children with genetic abnormalities.

The person who takes the shame-faced approach to sex will never be able, however hard he might try, to fully reconcile sexuality with his Christian experience. It will remain something outside the Lordship of Christ. The Biblical solution is to reject this divided field between the natural and the spiritual. When we allow sexuality be fully integrated into the wholeness of our Christian experience, we realize that by rejoicing in our bodies, we give glory to the One who formed us. Sexuality is one of the ways by which we can glorify and enjoy God. Douglas Jones articulates this truth.

Celebration is worshipping God with our bodies, with the material creation He has set up around us. Celebrating - whether in feasts, ceremonies, holidays, formal worship, or lovemaking – are all part of obeying God's command to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength" (Deut. 6:5; Mk. 12:30). We are to show our love for God not just with one portion of our being, the spiritual aspect; we are to love God with our whole body, heart and strength and legs and lips.9

Sex in Courtship & Betrothal Marriages

Although Lindvall and other betrothal advocates have not expressed the same direct pessimism of sexuality that we find in Gothard’s teaching, the outcome of their ideas lead to an equal degree of negativism. Because the doctrine of “emotional purity” denies the God-givenness that feelings of sexual attraction play in the process of finding a spouse, sexual attraction is collapsed into an

external condition we choose to adopt after the commitment has already been made. The assumption of emotional purity is that we can somehow be a-sexual before a certain point. By default, this reduces sexual attraction, and by default sex itself, to a function rather than an intrinsic part of our humanity. Since sexual attraction is something we learn, as an act of the will, after we have submitted to “God’s choice,” it is not surprising that when they speak of love and romance it usually sounds artificial and contrived. For example, Lindvall speaks of romance being a by-product of our obedience to God.10

This orients one to think of sexual and romantic attraction as something external to the people themselves – something they can put on like a rain coat. Rather than being seen as an integral part of the very relationship, sexual and romantic attraction are reduced to mere ‘by-products.’ This should not be surprising coming from teachers who emphasize a person's strength of character and lack of personal weaknesses over and above attraction and intimacy. Essentially, marriage becomes nothing more than a partnership that is consummated.

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No Safe Investment

"Is he – quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion….”

“Safe?” said Mr. Beaver; “don’t you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? ‘Course he isn’t safe. But he’s good. He’s the King, I tell you.”

—C. S. Lewis

…great joy through love seemed always to go hand in hand with frightful pain. Still, he thought, looking out across the meadow, still, the joy would be worth the pain – if, indeed, they went together. If there were a choice – and he suspected there was – a choice between, on the one hand, the heights and the depths and, on the other hand, some sort of safe, cautious middle way, he, for one, here and now chose the heights and the depths.

—Sheldon Vanauken

At the opening of chapter seven I quoted C. S. Lewis on the risks inherent in all love. I was very moved the other day when a young man named Paul wrote to me about the effect that quote had in changing his life. Let me share Paul’s experience as he recorded it.

In the name of safety, I myself have wrapped my heart carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries, avoided entanglements, and locked it up. It has not been broken.

1 C. S. Lewis, The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, (First published in 1950 by Geoffrey Bles).

But it has begun to change. It has started to become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. Thankfully, I don't think I've reached that point, and I am confident that God can undo the damage I have done.

What am I talking about exactly? When I was about 13, I was introduced to the teachings of a man named Jonathan Lindvall. I listened to his tapes and attended one of his seminars. One of the primary beliefs I accepted from his teaching was that I should avoid and suppress romantic emotions before I make a lifelong commitment with my future wife. Notice that the idea was not that romantic emotions should be understood and controlled, but rather avoided and suppressed.

Though it seems to make sense at first, especially to the American "safety and security" mindset, it is really a lie. And I recognized the lie when I read Lewis's words: "If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one...The alternative to tragedy, or at least the risk of tragedy, is damnation." Tragedy, pain, brokenness, can all result from giving your heart to someone that isn't fully committed to you. But THAT'S OK! "We shall draw nearer to God, not by trying to avoid the sufferings inherent in all loves, but by accepting them and offering them to Him; throwing away all defensive armor. If our hearts need to be broken, and if He chooses this as the way in which they should break, so be it."

…I realized last night that avoiding or suppressing my emotions is never a good idea, because they are an integral part of why God made me.... What has changed is that the process by which I choose my wife will no longer be devoid of emotion. It will be full of emotion, and risks will be taken for the sake of love. However the change of my mind extends beyond my view of pre-marital romance, into my view of love in general.

…there is the concern that if a couple's relationship is based on emotions, then when the emotions are lost, the relationship will be abandoned. But it is a false dichotomy to say that a relationship is either based on commitment or emotions. Why can't it be both? Aren't married people
supposed to cultivate and share deep emotions for one another? And can they not, at the same time, be fully committed to one another? Sure there is the danger that emotions will fade and the relationship will lose its vitality. But that doesn't mean we should abandon emotions entirely! The answer to infidelity is not subtracting emotion, but rather adding commitment to the emotion.

Though I've still got a long way to go, I think that God has started unlocking my heart, and I trust that He will redeem the years I've spent trying to keep it intact. I pray that God would help me to "throw away all defensive armor" and that He would make me willing to have my heart broken. May my love be dangerously passionate!

As Paul realized, no true relationship is safe, whether it be a love relationship or just a relationship of friends. That is why the philosophy of safeguarding ourselves against emotional hurt can only lead to the death of relationships. Indeed, if the principle on which betrothal and many courtship schemes are based were to be consistently applied to its full extension, then all forms of relationships must be denied us, for that principle is that the possibility of emotional pain must be removed at all cost.

I am reminded of Christ’s parable of the talents. Recall that the man who was given one talent feared lest he lose it. While the other servants were out trading with their capital and seeing it increase, the fearful servant dug a hole and buried his talent in the ground. It was his fear of losing what he had that prevented him from using it. As a friend of mine observed, fear of failure is one of the greatest motivations to failure that ever existed. Every trade involves a risk. It is only by overcoming our fears and risking ourselves that the Lord is able to use us to bless others.

We have seen the way certain teachers have attempted to create a pain-free world, where one never gets heart-broken and every element of risk and unpredictability is systematically eliminated from the equation of human relationships. In this way, what is created is a world where ostensibly you have nothing to fear, yet the paradox remains that it is fear that drives people to submit to such regimes in the first place. As with the man who had one talent, something is buried in the ground. In this case, however, what is buried in the ground is not money…it is our own hearts.
C. S. Lewis himself confessed a struggle with this very issue. In *The Four Loves*, Lewis says that in one sense it seems like perfect advice not to give your heart to anyone but God.

“Don’t put your goods in a leaky vessel. Don’t spend too much on a house you may be turned out of. And there is no man alive who responds more naturally than I do to such canny maxims. I am a safety-first creature. Of all arguments against love none makes so strong an appeal to my nature as ‘Careful! This might lead you to suffering.’

To my nature, my temperament, yes. Not to my conscience. When I respond to that appeal I seem to myself to be a thousand miles away from Christ. If I am sure of anything I am sure that His teaching was never meant to confirm my congenital preference for safe investments and limited liability. I doubt whether there is anything in me that pleases Him less.”3

Lewis goes on to suggest that the most lawless passion that prefers the beloved to happiness is more like ultimate Love Himself than this search for safe-investment-relationships. Lewis points out that even our love for God does not offer safety and security. Was Christ’s love for us a ‘safe investment’? It cost Him His life! And as Christ lay dying for us, He felt that His Father had forsaken Him.

So what happens when one of these ‘safe’ relationships does lead to marriage? Presumably it is imagined that the resulting marriage will be an emotionally safe frontier. Marriage can be emotionally safe, but only in the same way that pre-marital relationships and life itself can be made emotionally safe: remain in the safety of the shallows and do not allow yourself to be discovered, to be known by yourself or another in all your nakedness, vulnerability and weakness. Harden up when that little voice says, “Watch out, you might get hurt.” Marriage conducted on such a basis may certainly be free from pain, but it will also be free from joy, intimacy and glory. Allender and Longman observe that

Marriage is an institution of joy and grief. And the glory often comes through the struggles in communication, goals, priories, child rearing, and sex. Anyone who expects

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3 C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* in *The Inspirational Writings of C. S. Lewis*, op. cit., p. 278.
glory without a fight is foolish. In a fallen world, problems, both small and great, will arise.

If we recognize that we are both sinners and if we expect that conflict will happen, we can avoid thinking something is uniquely wrong with our marriage. …we can have hope that we will find joy in the midst of pain.4

Joy in the midst of pain. That is something that applies not merely to relationships but to all of life. It is through the struggle, conflict and pain that we grow closer to the Lord and each other. The betrothal movement and many courtship models have denied people this adventure.

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