

Dating and Ethics

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Introduction

In order to understand our topic better we will take a brief moment to define the terms. Ethics is defined as "...the field of study of morals or right conduct..." (Webster 337). Dating is defined as "...an appointment with a person of the opposite sex for a social engagement..." (Webster 255). Thus, our study will be to see what is morally right or wrong when two people of the opposite sex go out together to a social engagement.

First, let's point out that moral truths do exist. Jesus said, "And ye shall know the truth and the truth, shall make you free." (John 8:32). Truth is not relative and situational. We can and should know what is right and wrong in the area of dating.

The main objective of dating is to pick a spouse. It is also a given fact that we will marry someone we date. In light of this, we need to understand a few things about marriage. Marriage is an honorable relationship (Hebrews 13:4) and it is good for a man to obtain a wife (Proverbs 18:22). Marriage is one of the three divinely created institutions on earth (Genesis 2:18-24). The other two are the church (Matthew 16:18) and civil government (Romans 13:1-2). The purpose of marriage is at least threefold in nature. It provides companionship (Genesis 2:18), reproduction of the human race (Genesis 1:28), and fulfills the physical needs of man (1 Corinthians 7:1-2). Understanding why God created the marital realm and its purpose should help us determine what is ethically correct when we date.

Ethically, Who Can or Should a Christian Date?

When we reflect back to a text previously noted (Genesis 2:18-24), we can see that it is not ethically right for a home to be comprised of two people of the same sex or two different species of animals. The beasts of the field were not suitable mates for mankind and God didn't create another man for Adam but a woman. Therefore, it would not be ethical to date another person of the same sex or to practice bestiality. This is wrong! Since the revisionist of our age would like to change this truth we need to remember that even Webster's definition of a date confirms our statement.

I personally believe that it is not ethically wrong for a Christian to marry a non-Christian but I do believe that it is an unwise decision. There are those who would disagree with me on this issue. Some may wonder why we would even bring this issue into the discussion. But, it is the purpose of this study to determine what is ethically right and wrong in dating, and since we are going to marry someone we date, we need to know whom a Christian can and should date. After all, if it is wrong for a Christian to marry a non-Christian then it would only follow that it is wrong for a Christian to date a non-Christian.

Since all sin is to be repented of (Luke 13:1-5) and repentance means to turn and go in the other direction, if a Christian's marriage to a non-Christian is wrong this marriage would have

to be set aside. This doesn't seem to be consistent with other scriptural teaching. Those at Corinth who were married to non-believing spouses were told to remain with them (1 Corinthians 7:12-13). Peter told Christian women how to win their unbelieving spouse to Christ (1 Peter 3:1-2). He never suggested that this was an unacceptable union and that it should be dissolved. If it was lawful for those at Corinth and those to whom Peter wrote to have unbelieving spouses, why would it be unlawful for other to have an unbelieving spouse? Why would some of these marriages need to be repented of and set aside and other held intact?

Some believe that since widows are instructed to marry "...only in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 7:39), all other Christians must marry "...only in the Lord" too. I do not argue with this theology. But what does the phrase "...only in the Lord" mean? Sometimes it means a believer (Revelation 14:13), at other times it means as God's word teaches (Ephesians 6:1). I believe the phrase "...only in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 7:39) means the widow can marry only those who are eligible for marriage as God's word instructs.

There is another text that has to be taken into consideration when discussing this matter. What does it mean when we are told not to be "...unequally yoked together with unbelievers..." (2 Corinthians 6:14)? Note, the key is "...unequally yoked...". The text doesn't state that we cannot be yoked to others but not to be so yoked to them that we would partake of evil with them. After all, "...what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness..." (1 Corinthians 6:14-16). So, while it may not be wise for a Christian to marry a non-Christian I do not believe it to be ethically immoral.

Now, let's consider why it is not wise for a believer to marry a non-believer. Sandra Humphrey, in her book entitled "Don't Kiss Toads" list some interesting statistics. She states that "Four out of every seven Christians who marry unbelievers eventually lose their own faith" (12). She also says, "...the divorce rate for religiously-mixed marriages is three times higher than for marriages in which the husband and the wife have the same faith" (12). Furthermore, she points out that "...while the national divorce rate is now over 25%, married couples who met at a Christian college have a divorce rate of only 1/2 of 1%" (15). Since our marital relationship affects our spirituality (1 Peter 3:7), why would we choose a mate or date a person who could potentially threaten our own relationship with God? Paul warned "...evil communications corrupt good manners" (1 Corinthians 15:33). Not only does our choice of a mate affect us but also our future children. Mrs. Humphrey points out once again that "...two-thirds of the children of interfaith marriages find the decision too difficult and consequently don't accept the faith of either parent" (12). Since it is the duty of Christian parents to raise their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4 and 1 Timothy 5:14) why endanger their future spirituality by dating or marrying a non-believer?

We need to be especially careful that when we marry we pick our mate not just for their outward beauty alone but also for their inward beauty (1 Peter 3:3-4). Physical beauty will eventually fade and then we will be left with the inward man. Many marriages end in divorce because of the ugly character of the person that we failed to see when dating. Ladies, when you've won a spouse through outward beauty alone don't be surprised when your "prince in shining armor" leaves you because your beauty begins to fade. The same will hold true for young men.

Proper Ethics When Dating

Fornication is wrong (Ephesians 5:3-5). It is unethical. Therefore, any kind of conduct when dating others which puts them or us in a compromising situation should be avoided at all costs. Paul said that we should flee youthful lusts and exhibit a pure heart (2 Timothy 2:22). Inappropriate touching also referred to as petting, and kissing outside the marital realm is not in keeping with proper Christian conduct. Younger women are to be treated as sister in Christ in all purity (1 Timothy 5:1-2). Our kisses should be holy in nature, not lustful or passionate (Romans 16:16). This type of behavior leads to fornication and therefore is unethical.

Our dress also becomes a factor to be considered when going on a date. There are some questions that we need to ask ourselves. Is our dress provocative and lewd? Does it promote sensual lust in others? Older women are told to teach the younger women to be discreet and chaste (Titus 2:3-5). All Christians should adorn themselves in modest apparel with shamefacedness and sobriety (1 Timothy 2:9-10). This isn't always easy to do when we live in a promiscuous society but it can and should be done. Not only are we to control our own lustful desires, but we also need to be sure that our dress doesn't cause the one we're dating to be filled with lust. This could cause both parties to engage in fornication (Matthew 5:27-28). When going on a date with others, our conduct and dress should always be ethical in nature.

Ethical Places and Actions

All Christians should seek to abstain from fleshly lust which war against the soul (1 Peter 2:11). Some of these lusts, which we need to be mindful of, are lasciviousness, drunkenness, revelings, banquetings, etc.etc. (Galatians 5:19-21 and 1 Peter 4:1-3). Those who practice these things will not inherit the kingdom of God. These things are always wrong and should be avoided when dating, since they can lead to other sins, namely fornication. Modern day dancing is designed to arouse sensual feelings in the dancer as well as the observer. Christians must not only be mindful of their own desires and emotions but also of all those around them. To create lustful desire in the heart of others is wrong (Matthew 5:27-28). While we may not be an actual participant in this activity just being there can still cause our heart to be filled with impure motives. Furthermore, Christians are to control their desires and emotions at all times and in all situations. We are not to allow outside elements to dictate our behavior (1 Corinthians 6:12). This is why it is unethical for Christians to use mind-altering drugs. The drugs control us; we don't control the drugs (Proverbs 31:4-5). As already noted not only is excessive drinking condemned but banqueting as well (1 Peter 4:3). The banqueting of yesteryear is equivalent to the social drinking of our own day and age (Daniel 5:1 and 10). Those controlled by liquor or other mind-altering drugs do things that they would never do when free from the influence of these drugs. It is never wise, and it is always wrong and dangerous for a Christian to partake in this type of activity, especially while dating.

We should also be mindful of the movies we view while dating. Pornography is rampant in today's society and arouses the lust in many. The Psalmist said "I will set no wicked thing before my eyes..." (Psalm 101:3). To avoid fornication we need to have the same attitude.

The same could be said of the music and lyrics of the songs we listen to. Christians should not listen to songs or watch programs which are filled with filthy jokes or jesting (Ephesians 5:4). Such things are not ethical and when dating tend to stimulate sensual thoughts, which in turn can lead to sinful actions.

Conclusion

As a Christian we should be careful who we date, what we wear on that date, where we go, and what we do. Just because we live in a world that is void of morality doesn't mean we should act like the people who are in it. We are to be transformed by the renewing of our minds rather than conformed to the image of those who live in this world (Romans 12:1-2). We need to set an ethical example before everyone around us especially in the realm of dating (1 Timothy 4:11).