

Picking a Spouse by Randy Cantrell

Recent conversations with people about dating and the prospects of marriage have made me give greater thought to the challenge facing God's young people. Some members of the Lord's Church in another state recently talked about their worries that so many young people in the Church seem to be dating non-Christians. A young man admitted his difficulties in finding a girl who shares his convictions based on the Gospel. A young woman talked of her desires to find a young man desirous of being a strong Christian.

Our future as God's people hinges on the ability of one generation to pass along to the younger generation the wisdom necessary to make one of life's most important decisions – the decision of who we will marry. Brother Gay wrote a wonderful series of articles back in the 1940s. We still refer young people to his words almost half a century later. [Click here to read his articles on building a Christian home.](#)

Young people may confuse the interest of older folks with interference. Often the conversation between older Christians turns toward a concern for the younger Christians. That's only appropriate given the responsibility of the older to pass along the heritage of godly service.

Few conversations stir more concern among older saints. Frustration is easy when talking to a young person about their choice of boyfriend or girlfriend, especially when the selection has been made for all the wrong reasons. Chemistry and good feeling too often overcome good sense and scriptural-based judgment. Although talking to kids about whom they date and who they'll end up marrying may be like talking to a wall, parents and older Christians can't hesitate to issue a few warnings about what is really required to create a Bible-based family life.

Ephesians 6:1-4 "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honor thy father and mother (which is the first commandment with promise), that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth. And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but nurture them in the chastening and admonition of the Lord."

All happily married Christian couples can attest to the change and growth necessary to build a strong Christian home. They can also verify the need to make the selection of a spouse carefully and prayerfully.

We urge young people to come up for air, free yourselves from one another's embrace and look beyond the physical attraction so you can more carefully examine your future.

First, pick a spouse who respects God's Word.

Even babes in Christ understand that God's ways and the ways of the world are always in conflict. God insists that we live by His principles of righteousness. Scriptures show us that the world lives by the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. We're to avoid those things and shun them.

1 John 2:15, 16 “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the vain glory of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.”

People who aren't devoted to God freely devote themselves to the pleasures of the world. God's people have a different devotion.

Many heartaches are caused when a Christian marries an unbeliever. Without a unified purpose for building a home and marriage, chaos often erupts. Moral issues arise because the unbeliever isn't bridled by the Word of God. But it goes deeper. The coupling of a Christian to an unbeliever disrupts God given roles in the home. The duties of each member of a home, if not sanctioned by God, often become unclear and worldly. For instance, what godly woman seeking to be the keeper at home God wants could make a happy home with an ungodly man who pressures her to leave the home and earn money?

Sadly, this problem isn't limited to unbelievers. Young people must be mindful that some of God's people lack the proper respect for God's Word. Dating another Christian isn't the only requirement for seeking a fitting spouse. Find a boy or girl who demonstrates the proper respect for God's Word by obeying it – not arguing against it.

Two, select a spouse who has spiritual values and goals.

You must first have spiritual values and goals. If your life lacks the spiritual focus it must have, first take care of yourself. You can hardly recognize what you need in a spouse if you are not what you should be. Are your goals focused on entertainment, fun and pleasure? Then fix your own life by getting focused on those things that are eternal.

Sadly, I see too many young people in the Church who are interested in nothing other than a good time. As they grow older they sometimes lament how difficult it is to find somebody to date who is spiritually compatible. Well, they've not put themselves in a position to attract the right boy or girl. They've been acting as though Church and serving God were less important than being popular, having fun and enjoying entertainment. You reap what you sow. Take care of business in your own life, then you may find it easier to seek out the person who will serve as a faithful spouse capable of helping you reach heaven.

Values must be directed by God. The goal must be heaven. If the person you date has different values and different goals – STOP! Don't continue to put yourself at risk.

You must not con yourself into thinking that good qualities will suffice. Righteous living is not merely being good morally. There are many good people who are not Christians. Date people who are devoted to the Lord and the Church. Being a good person isn't the same as being a righteous person.

Ask yourself, “Am I made a better Christian by this person? Will this person help me live closer to the Lord and the Church?”

Three, find someone willing to make corrections.

Nobody is perfect. We're all a work in progress. However, some problems are larger than others. It's foolish to think that after marriage problems will be fixed, if they're not fixed before marriage. Too often we've seen somebody, usually an unbelieving boy, attend church services faithfully while dating a Christian girl. After marriage, his attendance stops. Don't bank on changes happening after marriage. If his attendance was merely a front so you'd date him, then you should realize that your relationship is equally shallow.

Drinking, gambling, hanging out at all hours and countless other poor behaviors won't be fixed by marriage. Neither will hot tempers, unkindness, being argumentative, lying and other traits.

Search for a person of Christian character willing to fix those things that are wrong in their life. If they're unwilling to listen to God's Word (disrespect the Word of God) and put their life in compliance with what God wants – STOP!

Four, pick a spouse who is mature.

Marriage isn't for kids. That's one reason why more than half of all teenage marriages end in divorce. Maturity is a requirement for the establishment of a Christian home.

Age won't guarantee maturity. Maturity is something you can gain by working at it. Behave with maturity and you may become mature. Put away childish behaviors. Grow up. Don't just grow older. Be sober (that means, be serious).

Be mature yourself. Being irresponsible and selfish are not qualities fit for marriage. If you are self-centered and immature, then you've got some work to do in your own life. It's likely that your behavior fosters dating people who share your immaturity and self-centeredness. You have little hope of building a relationship that will lead to the establishment of a Christian home.

There is no single secret to having a successful marriage, but one indispensable ingredient is unselfishness. Behave selfishly during dating and you're not likely to behave any differently after marriage. Don't fool yourself thinking the selfish person you date will stop being selfish when you marry.

Again, look in the mirror. What are your displays of maturity? You can hardly expect to attract a mature person if you're not mature yourself.

Some signs that you're immature:

- You think mainly of what you want. You are self-centered.
- You have little awareness of how you affect others. Sometimes you just don't care.
- Your life centers around having fun and being entertained.*
- You're not terribly comfortable being by yourself. Partying and hanging with others consumes most of your time.

- You stay up late as often as possible.
- You sleep late as often as possible.
- You have little structure and discipline in your life.

And you really don't want any.

- Your life has little direction and little purpose.
- You don't regularly read or study the Bible.
- You don't regularly pray.
- You don't regularly consider spiritual things.
- You don't seek the wisdom of others.

It's easier to just follow your own desires.

*Just snoop around at the blogs of many young people in the Church and perhaps like me, you'll be surprised at how going to the movies is widespread among a generation that has never heard how the "old-timers" were warned of them based on the Gospel's demand for purity in our lives. It's difficult enough to guard your heart in today's world without purposefully subjecting yourself to temptations. And don't argue that you only go to PG or PG13 movies. I know better because I've read blog after blog of young people who regularly attend R rated movies. Besides, since when do God's people go by the standards of a Hollywood movie group who establish those ratings? Spiritual maturity has little chance with behavior that feeds on the world.

By the way, watching filth on your own TV at home (via DVD's) is no better. Both are sinful. Neither demonstrate a devotion to guarding your heart! Brethren, somewhere along the way we did a horrible disservice to our kids by failing to show them how important and powerful it is to guard the heart! We stopped preaching it. We stopped warning people. As a result, too many Christians have joined the world in thinking it's foolish to guard your heart.

"It doesn't affect me," they often say. That amounts to calling God a liar. Please consider that the next time you watch some profane filled thing or listen to some profanity laced song. By subjecting your heart to that type of entertainment you display disregard for God's Word. You show your spiritual immaturity – the belief that it will not harm you. Immature people can be fearless to the point of neglecting their own safety. It's true physically. It's equally true spiritually.

Attractive, isn't it? No, of course not. It's quite pathetic, but unfortunately it is the picture of so many lives. Young and old alike are plagued too often by self-centered behaviors that are anything, but mature. We see it at work, at school and at church.

Immaturity is rampant even though the Gospel demands that we live sober lives. Remember, it's a command – not a suggestion. As people grow up, they must become mature. That requires mature behavior. It's a choice. It requires young people begin to behave like adults. It requires responsible conduct. Consider some important verses found in Titus.

Titus 2:1-15 "But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine: That the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience. The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to

love their children, To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed. Young men likewise exhort to be sober minded. In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine shewing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, Sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you. Exhort servants to be obedient unto their own masters, and to please them well in all things; not answering again; Not purloining, but shewing all good fidelity; that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things. For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee.”

Be mature. Be sober. Look for a mate who is, too. Physically, emotionally and most of all spiritually.

Five, pick a spouse who can communicate.

Relationships are impossible where there is poor, little or no communication. Problems go unsolved if a couple cannot clearly communicate with one another. Thoughtful dialogue can help build a relationship. Monologues aren't profitable.

If you find yourself dating somebody who is unable to express themselves to you, STOP! You'll never build the relationship necessary to establish a Christian home. If you find yourself dating somebody with whom you're unable or unwilling to have serious dialogue, STOP!

Talking and listening are both necessary qualities for making a relationship grow. By the way, yelling and arguing are not quality forms of communication. If your communication consists of lots of arguing, STOP! Find somebody else to date.

Six, look beyond physical attraction or physical qualities.

People date specific people for lots of reasons – most of them physical. And I mean more than beauty or good looks. Personality, being fun, being popular and scores of other attributes are part of physical attraction. These are the most shallow attractions.

I've known young men who dated girls because they knew lots of other young men were attracted to them. After all, it's quite satisfying to be dating the girl who is the envy of all the other guys. Ridiculous? Sure, but it happens.

I've known young men who lamented at the dimwittedness of a good-looking girl they dated, but they wouldn't stop dating her because she was so attractive. I've known young men who dated a girl because she was always so much fun. Or because she enjoyed the same entertainment, the same music and so on. None of these things are sufficient foundations for a Christian marriage. In fact, they're not even suitable foundations for dating!

The object of dating is to build a mature relationship. While there is no denying that couples need to find one another attractive, it is hardly the stuff of which strong Christians home are built.

Proverbs 31:30 “Grace is deceitful, and beauty is vain; But a woman that feareth Jehovah, she shall be praised.”

Seven, pick a spouse who will be a good friend, your best friend.

A man’s best friend should be his wife. A wife’s best friend should be her husband.

Too many young people are involved in relationships where they argue, fuss and fight. They’re foolish enough to think the relationship might have a future. Well, they’re right, but the future is going to be the ruination of them both if they don’t stop and move on.

It’s one thing to enjoy somebody’s company. It’s another to find them a person with whom you can share your innermost thoughts and cares.

It’s one thing to find somebody attractive – even kissable. It’s another to find them a person with whom you can improve your Christian life.

Life is routine. Do you find this person your best friend during the most routine times of your life? Make certain that the boy or girl you date are friends, good friends.

Friends help us become better. They benefit us and we benefit them. They seek our welfare in the Church. We seek their spiritual welfare, too. Friends work to strengthen one another.

Does that describe the relationship you are in? If not, it’s time to move on.

Lastly, pick a spouse who believes marriage is for life.

What God joins together can’t be put asunder by man. “Til death do us part,” is not just a phrase uttered by couples madly in love. Those are vows made before God, ordained by His Will.

Problems will arise. You can’t just walk away. That’s what dating is for. That’s why the advice to STOP is given to dating couples who find themselves battling issues that are harmful for them both. Once you are married, there is no stopping. You are in it for life.

The walking away needs to happen while you are dating. It’s not an option in marriage.

Permit a brief comment about intimacy. STOP. Fornication is a sin. Intimacy outside of the marriage union is forbidden by God.

1 Corinthians 6:18 “Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body.”

Know the difference between sex and love. Society bombards all of us with images of sex. While intimacy can be an expression of love, it is restricted between a husband and his wife. TV and the media do us all a disservice by putting sex in front of us. You must take pride in your virtue. You must behave while you date.

Love is mandatory in marriage. Intimacy is not the only expression of love in marriage. Young people must guard their hearts by restricting their passions.

Ephesians 5:25-33 “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself up for it; that he might sanctify it, having cleansed it by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. Even so ought husbands also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his own wife loveth himself: for no man ever hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as Christ also the church; because we are members of his body. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is great: but I speak in regard of Christ and of the church. Nevertheless do ye also severally love each one his own wife even as himself; and let the wife see that she fear her husband.”

As a dating person, behave yourself with all the godly qualities befitting a potentially good spouse. Make sure you possess these positive qualities first. It will make attracting the right prospective spouse that much easier.

Devote yourself to:

- respecting God’s Word
- having spiritual values and goals
- having a willingness to correct the poor behavior in your own life
- maturity and sober thinking in the Lord
- being a good listener and good communicator
- offering more than physical attraction to others
- being a good friend
- the firm conviction that marriage is one man with one woman for life

Doing that will provide you with a superior opportunity of attracting the right Christian person to become your mate.

Pray for wisdom. Pray for strength to overcome the temptations that come with being young. Read and study your Bible. Talk with your Christian parents about your problems and concerns. Lean on others in the Church. Guard your heart by protecting yourself from watching things, hearing things and experiencing things that would harm your soul.

Date only in the Lord. And when it comes to choosing a spouse, be picky – even in the Lord. Select a person who can and will help you reach heaven. Your entire future depends on the choice you will make!