

EAST
Singapore

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CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

Lesson 5

Why Engagement?

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. There is a Biblical basis for an engagement period.
 1. Isaac and Rebekah (Gen. 24) and Jacob and Rachael (Gen. 29). These engagements were based upon parental consent.
 2. Asking the parents for the hand of their daughter may seem a little old fashioned in our free society, but it is still a sound practice and would be appreciated by the parents.
- B. The best known engagement period in the Bible is that of Joseph and Mary. In those days it was almost mandatory to have a one year betrothal period before marriage. The reason is that the morals were quite low, even among the Jews, and a waiting period of one year gave the potential husband a chance to see whether his bride-to-be would turn up pregnant, having involved herself with some other man. If the young lady was found pregnant, the husband-to-be could have her stoned to death or write her a bill of divorcement.
- C. This betrothal period also gave the couple an opportunity to know one another, giving them all the privileges of marriage except the sexual rights. This is why Joseph was called the husband of Mary (Matt. 1:19), for betrothed couples were thought of as married, yet without the sexual rights.
- D. Today we still have the institution of engagement although it is being replaced by trial marriages by the non-Christian world) and for Christian young people and singles this is a very important period. While methods may have changed throughout the centuries on engagement, principles have not changed. Engagement prepares one for marriage. And engagement is far more than a ring. It is a relationship--a relationship distinctive and preparatory to marriage. Engagement does not take the place of marriage, for there are some privileges which are for marriage only (sexual rights, children, family, etc.)
- E. Engagement in modern society has lost much of its true meaning, for most people are not Christians, and are not interested in the Christian ethic. Many a young lady, out of meanness and pride, has tried to be a ring collector. Many a young man has given a ring to a young lady, thinking that this is a free ticket to premarital sex. POINT: God never intended the engagement period to be a time when young people "play house" without the responsibilities of marriage.
- F. An engagement period is a very exciting time. It is the knowledge that two people have promised to commit to one another- -and having everyone know they have committed--and this brings happiness, joy and satisfaction.

II. THE PURPOSE OF ENGAGEMENT

- A. Engagement is a time of preparation.
 1. Spiritual--it is a time when two Christians become intimate in their spiritual lives, learning to relate Jesus Christ to every area of life. NOTE: If a couple cannot have a spiritual relationship before marriage, they will never have one after marriage.

2. Intellectual--it is a time when there is a fusing of minds and interacting with issues that will involve the future establishing of a Christian home.
 3. Physical--it is a time when a young man and woman should get to know each other more intimately but without doing anything that would dishonor the Lord.
 4. This is the hardest period to maintain self-control over sexual emotions which are very strong.
- B. Engagement is a time of maturation. This is a transitional period from serious dating to a complete marriage relationship. NOTE: This is the time to iron out one's philosophy of marriage and to adjust to the bad points as well as the good points of your partner in life.
1. It is a time to test responsibility. A person committed to marry must show that he or she is ready for marriage.

Full acceptance, in a sense, came only with marriage. It was the responsibility of every father, before giving his daughter in marriage to any man, to satisfy himself and his wife concerning not only the young man's ability to be a provider: 'Have you worked? Have you accumulated the equivalent of three years' wages so that there be capital for the family?' But also, the faith of the young man: 'What do you believe? Are you going to be under God a prophet, priest, and king? Are you going to fulfill your responsibilities as a king (that is, to exercise lordship in the Lord) in your family, in your calling--wherever you are, to be a man under God? Will you be a priest unto God, leading your household in religious worship, taking all that you do and dedicating yourself, your family, and your substance unto God? Will you be a prophet--that is, will you speak for God? Will you stand for Him so that in your particular calling your standards will be godly and you will show forth righteousness?' (R. J. Rushdoony, "The Doctrine of Marriage", Toward a Christian Marriage)

2. It is a time when doubts and conflicts are wrestled with in detail. A person must solve the question as to whether he or she wants to be tied to this person for a lifetime. A lifetime is a long time.
3. It is a time of introspection as well as inspection to see if there is anything that might mar your marriage. Only you know your true motives for wanting to be married.
4. It is a time to determine whether you are really compatible with the person you plan to marry. NOTE: If you have major differences with a person before marriage and are constantly arguing, this pattern will probably not change after marriage.
5. It should be a time of getting more acquainted with the family. You don't just marry an individual, you marry his or her whole family. It is a good chance to see the one you plan to marry in his or her own home environment; it will help you see what you will have to cope with later.

The marriage which takes you apart from your own family also takes you nearer to the family of the one you marry. His folks will be your folks, and your folks will be his folks! Often this is a happy and rewarding time for all concerned. Families gain a son or daughter, and each of the newly married gets a new family.

Tensions can be avoided by getting to know both families before marriage. Then if you find the family is unacceptable you can break away from the relationship without too much difficulty. If you have become engaged and then find the family

situation undesirable, you still have time to make the necessary break before it is too late.

Family visits will show you the background which produced the one you love. Attitudes, spiritual interests, as well as economic, social and educational levels found in the family will be important. Remember the one you love will be much like the family he came from. (Clyde M. Narramore, Life and Love)

6. It is a time to see the “real person”. Every engaged couple should see their future marriage partner at his or her worst in attitude, for there will be more of this afterwards.
- C. Engagement is a time of education. This is a good time to have some serious down to earth discussions about every area of Life.
1. Discussion should take place on the relationship of Christ to the home. Every professing Christian says he wants to set up a Christian home, but what is involved in this? The man must settle the issue of “headship” and its responsibilities, and the woman must settle the issue of “submission.” Without these two elements no Christian marriage can work.
 2. Discussion should take place on the concepts of sex. Every engaged couple should read a well written book by doctors on the physical aspects of sex and discuss it very frankly before marriage. The couple should talk about having a family and about birth control. Now is the time to settle many of these issues.
 3. Discussion should take place on the wedding and the honeymoon. Do you want a big wedding, even though the folks may not be able to afford it?
 4. Discussion should take place about future finances. Who will handle the finances? What about the source of income, and the amount of income, for two can’t live cheaper than one. Do you want the wife to work? If the wife works, and she gets pregnant, can you get through school or can you live on one paycheck instead of two?
 5. Discussion should take place on where the two are going to live. The Bible says to leave parents and cleave to one another. NOTE: There is no home made for two families to live under the same roof.

III. PROBLEMS OF ENGAGEMENT

- A. How Long Should the Engagement Last? This depends upon the individuals involved and their physical age and spiritual maturity. Short engagements can be dangerous, for its possible not to know well the one you plan to marry. You cannot marry a stranger and hope for a happy marriage. Long engagements have their problems also, for it can (and often does) lead to premarital sexual activity, which will affect one’s attitude about his future mate. Any engagement over a year is not too practical and could bring real trouble.
- B. How Does One Break An Engagement? If you become convinced that you should not marry, it is best to break the engagement, even if it is a few days before the wedding. People may think you strange, but it is far better to break an engagement than to break a marriage. The best way to break the engagement is to be honest with your finacee and tell him or her just how you feel. NOTE: This will hurt you and your fiancée and probably other people as well. But far worse then facing a little emotional strain and social persecution for breaking an engagement is to go into a marriage with a person you do not love. Pride has often brought ruination to many a marriage, for people have gone

on and married because they feared what people would think if they broke an engagement.

IV. PRINCIPLES OF ENGAGEMENT

- A. Engagement should always be for the intention of marriage. A promise has been made and we are no better than our word. The only time engagement should be broken is when one realizes he or she has made a sad mistake.
- B. Engagement binds you to one person only, and is a time of complete faithfulness to your partner to be.
- C. Avoid petting. One of the greatest preventives of marriage infidelity is one's purity in the pre-marital engagement. If one engages in this or more before marriage, there is not much left to look forward to in the marriage itself. There is a danger that he or she will start looking around elsewhere.
- D. Cultivate the art of communication in engagement and this will solve many problems later on.
- E. An engagement should be publicly announced, for if it honors the Lord it will be a great testimony to the world of a potential Christian marriage.
- F. While a ring is not necessary for engagement, it is nice and most girls like one.
- G. Always consult your pastor if you are planning to get married, for he can be a great help to two Christians in giving them pre-marital counseling. NOTE: Find a pastor who believes the Bible and will give you the Biblical principles on marriage, not some man-made theories.