The American Dating System and the God of Monogamy

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Dating, or more explicitly, the American dating system, is a distorted version of Gods intended way to bring a man and woman together. God is a God of monogamy and dating directly opposes this principle on almost every front. Through factual information, historical truths, and biblical principles, I will show how the American dating system is not Gods tool for bringing a man and woman together as husband and wife, but rather a perversion of His intended way.

"What do you mean 'dating' is a perversion of Gods intended way? How else can a man and a woman begin a romantic relationship and eventually get married?" Before I answer this question, the term dating should be clearly defined. Dating is the system in which a man tries to find a woman (or vice-versa) who is compatible enough, according to his or her own personal standards or requirements, to become his or her spouse through multiple dates with multiple partners. It is a system in which you "try out" different partners on an effort to find one that you would like to spend the rest of your life with. According to the dating system, when you find yourself in a relationship with a partner that you decide is not "the one" that you would like to marry, than you simply "break-up" with him or her and move on to the next partner. I have also heard dating defined as two friends of the opposite sex just going out together as friends with no intention of a romantic relationship. I do not consider that situation dating. I call it friendship; nothing more. Having clarified what I mean by dating, lets talk about this system. Many people consider dating a vital part in a person's preparation for marriage. They feel it prepares them for the situations and problems they will face in marriage. I disagree. Dating prepares you for divorce! In a dating relationship, because there is no lifelong commitment made, if a serious problem arises (or even a not so serious problem in some cases) the couple can deal with it by simply breaking up. In turn, the two partners then go and find new partners and hope that their new relationships will go

perfectly somehow. In contrast, marriage is a lifelong commitment, for better or worse, till ***death*** do us part! Unfortunately these vows are broken just as many times as they are kept.[1] Through the dating system people become accustomed to breaking up when a problem occurs rather than working it out. It is no wonder America has the highest divorce rate in the world. A person becomes so accustomed to breaking up that breaking up a marriage comes easily.[2]

"Dating leads to intimacy but not necessarily commitment."[3] By having intimacy in a relationship without commitment, what good could possibly come from it? What happens when you break up with someone who you have developed an intimate relationship with? It leaves you disappointed and hurt emotionally. It produces a lack of trust and a fear of getting hurt again. As a result, each new relationship you have is started off with problems![4] You are bringing in your hurts, fears, and insecurities from past relationships which, in turn, hurts your new relationship. It is a vicious cycle that offers no real solution. Now what happens when a dating couple decides to get married? Do the wounds and fears from past relationships magically disappear? Unfortunately they do not. These fears and insecurities remain and continue to cause problems, and in half of the marriage relationships in America, contribute to divorce.[5] Does this sound like a system divinely created by a loving God? Does it sound like a system that the people of God should be involved in?

As one source states, "The American Institution of dating is not improving the church or the family".[6]

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[1] James Dobson, Romantic Love (Ventura, California: Regal Books, 1989), 22.
[2] Richard Crisco, It's Time (Shippensburg, Pennsylvania: Destiny Image Publishers, 1997), 73.
[3] Joshua Harris, I kissed Dating Goodbye (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, 1997), 32.
[4] Brent Earles, The Dating Maze (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1984), 7.
[5] The World Book Encyclopedia, 1987 ed., s.v. "Divorce"
[6] Jim West, Christian Courtship vs. the Dating Game (Palo Cedro, California: Christian Worldview Ministries, 1993), 34.

The American dating system is named so because it was originated in America. Up until the late 1800's a system known as courtship was the only accepted means for a young man and woman to come together in a relationship destined for matrimony. In courtship, couples would never leave the presence of parents, pastors, or authorities, while together and would rarely be alone together, if ever. But, as the country began to grow and more women found themselves in schools with men, "dating" emerged. It was called "going somewhere". Couples would take some form of public transportation and go see a show together.[7] By the time cars and movie theaters came about courtship had pretty much been replaced by dating. People began to go from one partner to another showing little or no commitment. Since couples could easily be alone their standards for how they acted towards one another had greatly declined. Jonathan Edwards, leader of Americas "Great Awakening", is described by his biographer as,

> … a great enemy to young peoples unseasonable company-keeping and frolicking, as he looked upon it as a great means of corrupting and ruining youth. And he thought the excuse many parents make for tolerating their children in it … was insufficient and frivolous; and manifested a great degree of stupidity, on supposition the practice was hurtful and pernicious to their souls.[8]

Amen to Jonathan Edwards!

Okay, so if dating is a perversion of Gods intended way, what is Gods intended way? I believe it is courtship. Courtship, unlike dating, has been used since the beginning of time with little variation. The idea of courtship is centered around Proverbs

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[7] Benny Phillips and Sheree Phillips, Walking With the Wise (Gaithersburg, Maryland: People of Destiny International, 1994), 86.

[8] Samuel Hopkins, The Life and Character of the Late Reverend Mr. Jonathan Edwards (1776), quoted in Benny Phillips and Sheree Phillips, Walking With the Wise (Gaithersburg, Maryland: People of Destiny International, 1993), 34.

18:22 which says, "He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor from the Lord." In the original Hebrew language this scripture depicts a vivid scene. It alludes to a man who is walking toward a specific destination and, along the way, sees a quarter on the side of the road. He picks up the quarter and continues on toward his destination.[9] He was not looking for the quarter, nor did he have to "try out" the quarter to see if he would keep it. He simply found it along the way and kept it. Courtship is the system where instead of you trying out different partners until ***you*** pick one, you allow ***God*** to choose for you. Throughout history God has used this system. It only makes sense that the same God who knew you before you were formed in your mothers womb and who sanctified you before you were born (Jeremiah 1:5) would already have chosen who your spouse would be. If God has already chosen a spouse for you, why would He have you "try out" or "date" different partners? He wouldn't.

In order to fully understand courtship we need to first understand that God is a covenant-making, monogamous God. His very word is founded on love, faithfulness, commitment, and trust in Him. Therefore His system for bringing together a man and woman will be one that reflects and upholds these virtues. If you are trying out different partners, and breaking up with each one when you decide they are not the one, are you reflecting and upholding the virtues of love, faithfulness, or commitment? I would certainly say no! Courtship, on the other hand, does just that. It upholds the covenant-making, monogamous nature of God. It allows, ideally, for only one romantic partner in a lifetime. This partner is already chosen by God. It is your job to trust that He will bring your future spouse into your life in His perfect timing. Courtship allows for nothing less than absolute trust in God, and a loving, faithful commitment to the partner He brings to

[9] Crisco, It's Time, 78.

you. It involves trusting that God knows who will be best for you, including physical appearance! These are the basic ideas behind the system of courtship. The actual period of courtship begins after a couple has prayerfully made a decision, together with a spiritual authority, that it is Gods will for them to get married. Until this decision the couple has only been friends. This period of courtship, which is the time between the decision and the wedding, is for the emotions to catch up with the prayerful and rational decision.[10] This way our emotions do not lead us into the decision, but rather follow after the decision. After all, as Christians we are to be led by faith and not by feelings.

Hebrews 13:8 says that God is the same yesterday, today, and forever; He never changes. Neither do His ways. This is the reason we say that good theology always goes back to the beginning. The way God did things then is the way He does things now. If the dating system did not come about until the late 1800's, than how could it be Gods chosen way? Did God ***change*** His way of bringing couples together, from the way He had been doing it, in the 1800's? According to Hebrews 13:8 He didn't. So, if God does not change, lets look at how He originally brought a man and woman together. In the first two chapters of Genesis we read about the creation account. I believe there are some key principles of courtship found in this account. The bible says that God created Adam and put him in a garden, alone. Every day God would come visit Adam and walk with him in the cool of the day. God was building a love relationship between Adam and Himself. As we read on we see that God looked on Adam and decided that it was not good for man to be alone. This is shocking news! Did God make a mistake and forget to create a partner for Adam? Certainly not! God does not make mistakes and everything He does has a purpose. So what was His reason for not creating a partner for Adam right away? I believe it was because God is a jealous God (Deuteronomy 5:9) and He

[10] Ibid.

wanted to make sure that Adams first love was set on Him alone. That is why God walked with Adam everyday, building a mutual love relationship between them. This is an important principle of courtship. God will not bring His chosen partner to you until your affections have been committed to Him first. Only after God saw that Adam loved Him above all else did God say that it was not good for man to be alone. God decided to do now what He had already planned; He made a partner that was just for Adam and no one else. Then He brought her to him. God did not create ten women and give Adam a choice. Nor did He create ten women and tell Adam to try each one out and see which one he was most compatible with or which one was the most attractive. He created ***one*** woman who was created just for him. Then, according to Genesis 2:22, He brought her to the man. Notice the fact that Adam was not looking for a partner. Adam was completely satisfied with his relationship with God, and Adams eyes were fixed on God alone. Just like the man who found the quarter on the way to his destination, so Adam woke up and found that God had brought a partner to him. This is a divine principle. God intentionally created us without partners, knowing full well whom He planned for us to eventually be with, so that we could develop a deep relationship of love with Him first. Once He feels that He is the number one love in our life, then He will bring His divinely predestined partner to us. This was Gods way at the beginning and it is Gods way today!

Gods way of bringing together a man and woman for marriage are reinforced in the story of Isaac and Rebekah. In this story, Abraham, the father of Isaac, sends his servant to bring back a wife from Abraham's homeland, for Isaac. The servant goes to Abraham's homeland and there he prays for help. Genesis 24:14 says that he prayed, "Now let it be that the young woman who … replies, 'Drink, and I will also give your camels a drink – let her be the one You have ***appointed*** for Your servant Isaac…". The servant then goes on to bring this woman, named Rebekah, back to Isaac to become his

wife. These scriptures reinforce the fact that God has "appointed" a partner for us ***and*** He will bring that partner to us.

Is God dating? In Ephesians 5:27 Jesus relationship with the church (us) is represented as a love relationship. In Ezekiel 16 Gods relationship with Jerusalem (His chosen people) is represented as a love relationship. In either case, is God dating? "The last time I checked, He was still looking for a bride, not a girlfriend…"[11] I thank God that He is not dating! If God were dating His people then He would have broken up with us a long time ago! He would have said that we gave Him to many problems or we were not compatible enough for Him. He, more than anyone else, Has the right to break up with His current partner – but He doesn't! God has made a commitment to us and promised that He will return for us as His pure and spotless bride. Right now God has placed us in the period of courtship between the decision to marry us, and the actual marriage. He is developing an intimate relationship with His bride to be and preparing us for eternal unity with Him. He has promised that He will never leave us or forsake us and He is not a man that He would lie. He is a covenant-keeping God who gives us a divine example of the commitment that should be found in any relationship of love and intimacy. God does not date and neither should we.

Benny and Sheree Phillips say it best when they ask,

> Do you want to experience Gods best for you? Then save yourself for that one person. Save your emotions, and your heart. Save your 'I love yous' and your devotion. Save your affection and handholding. When Gods' will becomes clear and you discover that special person, you will see that it was well worth the wait.[12]

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[11] Tommy Tenney, The God Chasers (Shippensburg, Pennsylvania: Destiny Image Publishers, 1998), 77.

[12] Phillips, Walking with the Wise, 96.

Many Christian couples and single people find themselves agreeing with the previous quote as they begin to realize that the American dating system is not Gods chosen tool to bring a man and woman together, but rather a perversion of Gods intended way, known as courtship.