

Courtship & Marriage article 10

Dear Young People:

I want in this installment of our discussion to discuss what Rev. Hanko wrote in Chapter 4 of *Leaving Father and Mother*. That chapter dealt with the problems of single persons. It dealt with the problem in considerable detail, and I see no reason why I should repeat what was said in that book. I hope, however, that you all have read the book, for it contains some very interesting and important truths.

There is one aspect of this problem, though, that I want to write a bit more about. There are young people who want to date and eventually marry, but who are never given the opportunity. This problem seems to be very common in Singapore, for there are many young girls in the church in Singapore who would like to date and eventually get married, but for whom the Lord has not provided a mate. They are, frequently, so concerned that they have made it a matter of earnest prayer that the Lord will give them a boyfriend – I mention especially a boyfriend for this seems to be more common among girls than among boys.

Leaving Father and Mother speaks of such girls and discusses the problem. The chapter warns against the dangers of a young girl, so concerned about becoming an “old maid” that she throws herself into the arms of anyone who comes along and shows her a bit of attention – even if the man is outside the church and even an unbeliever. Mistakenly, these think that anything is better than the loneliness of a single life. It is true, as the book emphasizes, that there are worse things in the world than being single. I myself have had to work with young women who have married just to escape a single life, but who have come to regret it bitterly. They spend a lifetime in an unhappy marriage because of the foolishness of their youthful desire to marry at all costs. But the cost is very high, and they live with many regrets.

Young people are not always willing to listen to any advice that warns them against hasty and unwise marriages. They try to salve their consciences by various excuses. “Well, what was I to do? No one in the church would ask me to date him.” “He is, after all, a very nice young man and though he may not go to our church, he is a good Christian. We must be tolerant of other religions and must not be hasty in condemning others to do not agree with us.” “I am sure that after we are married I will be able to change him into a better man.” “I have a right to be happy, do I not?” And so the excuses go on. But experience itself proves these excuses empty and hollow.

I am not saying that one may never date outside his or her own church. As I mentioned earlier, if we are persuaded that God does not have a mate for us from the church, we may prayerfully seek one elsewhere or consider going with someone who is not of our faith. But this can be dangerous spiritually.

If we embark on such a voyage, we ought to get the matter of the church settled during the early time of courtship. And by “settled” I mean that the one whom I am dating comes to my church – not occasionally, but regularly and agrees to be instructed in the truths that I love and cherish. And I must be sure that such a one actually joins the church before engagement and marriage. He or she must join, not because they see that joining your church is the only way to “get” one they desire to date; then there is no principle involved. But they must be sure that the one they consider marrying comes to the church out of principle.

But let us return to the problem of those in the church who are single, not by choice, but because they never had opportunity to date; or, at least, if they did date, the courtship never worked out.

In the first place, it is well to remember that God is sovereign over the whole of our lives. We believe this truth and confess it. Our Heidelberg Catechism, in Lord's Day 10 where God's providence is discussed teaches us:

*"What advantage is it to know that God has created, and by His providence doth still uphold all things? **That we may be patient in adversity, thankful in prosperity; and that in all things which may hereafter befall us, we place our firm trust in our faithful God and Father, that nothing shall separate us from His love; since all creatures are so in His hand, that without His will they cannot so much as move.**"* (Lord's day 10, question and answer 28.)

Even Lord's Day 9 has instruction for us when it teaches that **"God . . . is my God and Father; on whom I rely so entirely, that I have no doubt but He will provide me with all things necessary for soul and body: and further, that He will make whatever evils He sends upon me, in this valley of tears, turn out to by advantage; for He is able to do it, being Almighty God. and willing, being a faithful Father"** (q. & a. 26).

This truth is also the teaching of Scripture. I have only to refer you to Psalm 73:23, 24, for to be guided by God's counsel means that everything in life which happens to us is because of God's counsel. But it also means that God's counsel, controlling all our life, is the one and only way to be received into glory.

We must receive singleness in life as from God; indeed, from the God who loves us and will do everything necessary for our salvation. We must learn to submit to His will and pray for grace that we may submit to His will cheerfully and with praise to Him.

Second, I know that there is a real danger in young women worrying too soon about the possibility of remaining single. Not every girl has a boyfriend at twenty or even twenty-five. And not every boy has found a girlfriend when he is relatively young. God brings some together later in life than others, although He is always good. And so we must learn to wait upon Him: "Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord" (Psalm 27:14). This is not easy to do, for we are frequently impatient and tempted to think that God has forgotten us, does not hear our prayers, and is not good to us. This is a sad mistake.

But, thirdly, in the process of time it may be clear to us that it is God's will for us that we remain single. Many face that. I find that difficult to understand. I know girls who are attractive, godly, and desirous to marry and from every point of view would make good wives and mothers, but who are ignored by the boys. I can't really figure that out, although I fear that sometimes at least the reason is that boys are not looking for the right girls to date, and have other than godly motives for dating. But be that as it may, it happens as you all know that singleness is a reality in the church. What then?

I have not only had experience with such a problem, but it has appeared in my own family. I had a daughter who was, with the passing of the years, concerned that she would never marry. She had not had even one date. We talked about it from time to time, and finally, when I saw that it was really beginning to bother her, suggested to her that if she was coming to the conclusion that God had no mate for her, that she would do well to ask the Lord: "Why? Is there something else in life He wants me to do?" I suggested to her that she might be called to

be a Christian school teacher and that perhaps she should go back to school to prepare herself for this calling. She agreed and enrolled in a local Christian college. She enrolled in June and was preparing for entering college in September when some young man called her and asked her for a date. She immediately dropped her plans to enter college. The Lord blessed their relationship and they have now been married for many years and are, in fact, grandpa and grandma.

The point I want to make is this: If it is the Lord's will that we do not marry, He has a good reason for this, and He must want us to be busy in some work in His kingdom, in which it is better to be single than married. We must ask ourselves this and prayerfully seek God's face to learn what He would have us do. We must ask as Saul (later Paul) did: "Lord, what would thou have me to do?" If we pray sincerely and earnestly, willing to submit to His will, He will also reveal to us what His purpose is with us.

Submitting to the will of our heavenly Father, we will find a peace and joy that would have eluded us if we had entered hastily into an ill-advised marriage.

Greetings to you all in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Prof Hanko