

## **Courtship & Marriage article 7**

Dear Young People,

Before I continue our discussion of dating, I have received a question that needs to be answered. The question reads: “How do we deal with Christian ex-boyfriends/girl-friends in the church?”

The answer to the question depends in large measure on the circumstances. It is easy to see, for example, that the problem is more easily solved in a large congregation than in a small congregation. The reason is simply that the larger the congregation, the less one sees of an “ex” and the fewer know of a break-up.

But other circumstances also make a difference. The break-up may very well be mutual. A dating boy and girl may simply come to the conclusion that they were “not meant (by God) for each other.” Various reasons could be given for this, but frequently it is a growing feeling that things are not what they ought to be in dating and would probably not be what they ought to be in marriage.

In this case of mutual parting, it is good if the boy and girl talk together about their break-up, how they are going to handle it when telling their friends, how they will act towards each other when they meet, and why they have decided that a break-up is best. They are both Christians; their break-up is without bitterness; they want to remain friends and fellow saints. By talking about it the problem can easily be handled.

But such break-ups are not usually that way. It frequently happens that either the young man or the young lady sees that they ought to break up, but the other does not agree and wants to keep the relationship going. This increases the tension and aggravates the problem.

But both are Christians and presumably from the same church. The one who is desirous of the break-up has, it seems to me, the responsibility to be frank and open about the reason why he/she wants to break off the relationship. I know these things are not always easy to put into words: they are frequently a sense that it isn't going to work, that life together for 40 or 50 years is going to be difficult. Nevertheless, he/she who is breaking the relationship must be as frank about it as possible. If there is, for example, a habit in the other that is annoying and harmful for the relationship, the person ought to be told – in as nice a way as possible. It isn't quite fair not to make the reason clear. And, especially when one goes to his/her friends, one will probably give the reasons more clearly to the friends; but that would be backbiting. That must not be done.

Once again, even if one disagrees with the break-up, the two ought to talk about how they are going to act towards each other in public and when they meet. The one not in favor of the break-up ought to be understanding enough to make every effort to part as friends and to remain friends after the break-up. The hurt is great at first; but, as with all wounds, the hurt goes away and the wound is healed. In the future, when one can look back at the break-up in a more objective way, the one hurt usually says, The Lord was wise and good that He led us to break-up – even if at the time it hurt so much.

In short, especially within the church, but even in relation to a Christian in another church, the break-up must be handled in such a way that respect for each other continues and friendships are not broken.

But, if I may add this word, parents must not interfere in such things, for that usually compounds the problems. The role of parents is to point their children to the sovereignty of God and the greater wisdom of Him who brings to each man His wife. Also break-ups are under His sovereign control. That is true comfort when the hurt is great.

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In my last letter I renewed my discussion of dating. I emphasized particularly that our dating practices were determined by our view of marriage. I want to continue that subject of dating in this letter.

Quite obviously, a discussion of the relation between dating and marriage presupposes that young men and young women want to get married and are dating with a view to finding a spouse. Perhaps in the world this is not true. I have read of men who consider marriage to be a drag on their pursuit of pleasure. They want to date, and, sad to say, they want all the privileges of marriage, but they do not want to be tied down. The same is true of some women. Perhaps they have graduated from a university and want to pursue a career. To be married is to put an obstacle in the way of their career and advancement in it. And so they choose to live a single life, although they too want the pleasures of marriage without marrying, and so live in immorality.

This is not to say that sometimes a young adult may very well decide not to marry for reasons of serving the cause of God's kingdom. A woman may want to devote her life to teaching covenant children in a Christian school. She may forego marriage to devote her life to that end. A man may want to do missionary work in some foreign field and may decide that he can better do his work if he remains single. Paul speaks with favor of this in I Corinthians 7. But as a rule young adults choose marriage.

The strange part of it is that those in the world who decide to marry decide at the same time to put off having children, or perhaps never to have children, for children are too costly and are certainly in the way of a life of socializing and pleasure-seeking. God's rule is: If the purpose of dating is marriage, the purpose of marriage is having children.

The sad part of it is that sometimes one finds the same spirit in the church as in the world. A young couple decides to marry, but they decide beforehand that they will put off indefinitely having children. This decision will enable the wife to work as well as the husband, and so they will be able to live a more luxurious life with two incomes. Or, before they have children, college debts have to be paid, enough money has to be saved to buy a nice house or flat; there are too many payments to be made on all the new furniture that they purchased for their house, etc., etc.

On the whole, covenant young people want to marry. Their reasons for wanting to marry are love for the church of Jesus Christ and for the cause of Christ's kingdom. They marry because God has ordained the institution of marriage for the purpose of having children. This means especially that they understand and love the truth that God saves His church in the line of generations. God's rule is: Salvation is for believers and their seed.

This truth does not mean that God does not save on the mission field among those who have not, in their past generations, belonged to the church. Mission work is a crucial part of the church's work because God saves a church from every nation and tribe under heaven. We call this the doctrine of the catholicity of the church, and we confess this every Lord's Day with the words, "I believe an holy, catholic church.

But the fact remains that even on the mission field God does not simply save individuals; He saves parents and children. Paul answered the Philippians jailor's question: "What must I do to be saved?" by telling him: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shall be saved **and thy house.**" So the children of believers are also part of the church.

Now any mature Christian knows that the church is composed of a very definite and fixed number of people, for God has chosen His church from eternity and written the name of everyone to be saved on the pages of the Book of Life. Every mature Christian knows too that when the whole church is born and every one chosen by God is brought to faith and repentance, Christ will return to take His church to heaven. Christ won't come before that happens, and He won't wait a second after that happens.

Maybe it is better if we put it the other way around. Christ will come again on the clouds of heaven at that time when the last person for whom He died on the cross has been born and brought to repentance and faith in Him.

You can understand, therefore, that the people of God who have learned to pray, "Thy kingdom come" want very much for the whole church to be born and saved. The great wonder of all this is that God has given to His people the privilege and calling to bring forth that church. And the church is brought forth within the institution of marriage. And so, the desire on our part to marry is tied to the desire to have children. And the desire to have children is tied to our desire for the coming of Christ.

I know that the desire for Christ to come is not always very strong in young people – and also in adults, for that matter. After all, when we are young, we think we have our life ahead of us; and usually we do. We want to get a good education to earn a lot of money so that we can get the things of this world we want. We want to live our life here to enjoy all that the world has to offer before we go to heaven. Of course, we want to go to heaven too; we do not want to go to hell. But we hope that we can have and live a full life first. And so we pray, "Come Lord Jesus, but not yet." It is after all only when we get old and have lived our life that the coming of Christ begins to take on some reality and our longing for that day gets stronger.

But covenant young people, deep down in their hearts, are concerned for the gathering of the church and the coming of Christ. And, although perhaps they do not think long and hard about it, nevertheless, they have that desire to be a part of bringing forth the church of our Lord Jesus Christ. And so they look forward to marriage; and they look forward to dating as preparation for marriage.

There is an exception here, about which I ought to say something. In the church, at least, I have discovered that in some cases young ladies are more concerned about marrying than young men. Young men sometimes get to be twenty, twenty-five and even older and do not even date. They seem to be wholly uninterested in dating and marriage.

I do not know all the reasons for this, but have observed that it happens in the church here in the States, but it also happens in Singapore

If the reason is worldliness and the desire to enjoy all the pleasures of the world before “settling down” and marrying, it is very wrong. If, on the other hand, a young man wants to finish his education first or perhaps finish his term of military service, one cannot criticize this. It is not always, however, a legitimate excuse even then.

When Mrs. Hanko and I were married in 1953, I was still going to Seminary and had, in fact, two years left of my Seminary training. We decided to get married, for we had been going together for five years. We didn't have any money, but my wife was a teller in a bank, and we thought we could manage to live on what she made. It didn't work that way, however. The split came to our churches within a month after we married and there were many churches whose pastors had been unfaithful, and these churches needed someone to preach for them. Since I was the only one with a year of study behind me (Other students in my class left our churches), I was sent out to vacant churches to preach, teach Catechism and do the pastoral work. Of a school year of about twenty-five to thirty weeks, I was gone for sixteen or seventeen. So we did not have any income any more – other than what the church in which I preached gave us. But God is wise and it proved to be a rich blessing; God showed us that He approved of our marriage. We were sent, one time almost 800 miles from home, and another time over 2400 miles from home. Because we were married, we could go together. That gave me a lot of experience as a minister and my wife a lot of experience in being a minister's wife. And although financially we had to borrow money during my last year in school and accrued a debt that took twenty years to repay, we never regretted it. God blessed us and we were very happy.

In fact, God gave us an outstanding example of His care. My wife had to have some necessary dental work done; the bill came to \$60.00. That was not a lot of money by today's standards, but it was a lot of money then, and we didn't have \$5.00, much less \$60.00. We were sitting in our apartment that we rented talking together about how we would pay that bill. Borrow the money? Ask the dentist for permission to pay it off a couple of dollars a month? We were not sure what was best. As we were talking the mailman came with our mail. Among the various items was an envelope from our congregation in Grand Haven, Michigan. There was a note in the envelope that told us that the deacons of this congregation had a surplus in the benevolent fund, and thought maybe we could use it. Can you guess how much the check was made out for? Yes, you guessed right: \$60.00. It was not more than \$60.00, but it was not less than that either. We marveled together at the Lord's care.

`But the letter is long enough for this time.

May God bless you all,  
Prof Hanko