

To Betroth or Not to Betroth?

In the last year, since we announced that our daughter Rebekah was getting married, many of you have asked if we practiced betrothal.

Our children were raised in (for want of a better term) “an old fashioned Christian culture” where dating is understood to be nearly synonymous with fornication. Not that we think everyone who dates will commit fornication, but recreational dating, at its best, is foreplay—psychologically and emotionally, if not physically.

Rebekah was twenty-six when she married, and she never had a “boy friend”—never shared any kind of emotional or physical relationship with anyone. Her husband need not be concerned that someday a man may walk up to him and say, “Your wife and I used to be very special to one another.” He is her first and only.

Not that she didn't get offers. She had more proposals than fingers and toes. She traveled the world and freely circulated and worked around many men. She was not naive, as are most home-schooled kids. We insulated our children from within, and therefore, as they got older, did not need to be insulated so well from without. They

have never been houseplants.

As Rebekah's father, I turned away about five or six men before they ever got close to her. She turned down at least a dozen others. In addition, there were three young men that approached me, asking for Rebekah's hand in marriage. I would have been proud to have had each one of them as a son-in-law. I said to them, "Hey, it is fine with me, but you must convince her." But Rebekah never gave any of them the time of day. I am sure that if I had been of the current betrothal persuasion and had commenced proceedings with the young men, eventually presenting her with my choice, being a dutiful daughter, she would have worked hard to surrender to my choice. But I did not speak to her on behalf of these young men, for I would never disrespect my daughter by commencing an arrangement without her knowledge. If my kids come on hard times in their marriages, I want them to know that it is they who chose this one to be their life's partner, not me.

He came seeking a wife

The man Rebekah eventually married, Gabriel Anast, came to me wanting to get acquainted with Rebekah. She was overseas at the time, and, without making promises, I invited him to come and work for us in the office—which he did for several months. We got to know him and his family well. I told him that he passed muster as far as I was concerned, but that it was his job to win my daughter's favor. After about six months he moved back to New Mexico without ever meeting Rebekah. Rebekah returned home for several months. I thought maybe he had lost interest. Then she went to Israel for a year. It was not until several months after her return that they finally met. I had never

spoken to Rebekah about his possible interest.

After they met, he began to communicate with her regularly by email and telephone. After several weeks, he called one night to speak to me. By the way he was stuttering and “beating around the bush,” I knew it was “another one of those” phone calls. After about two minutes of garbled, random irrelevancy, I was certain of his intentions and began to laugh at his stress. He had always been so intellectual and logical. During a break in my laughter, I was able to utter, “Just say it.” He said the stupidest thing, “I want to date your daughter.” He was 1300 miles away, so I said, “What do you mean?” He answered, “I want to consider her for marriage; Ugh...I mean...I...Ah...do consider her. I mean...Ah, if it is OK with you. What I mean is...Ugh...,” and from there it went downhill. I am thankful now that I didn't subscribe to one of those complicated, multi-layered betrothal schemes. He would never have gotten past the first step. He had several friends who have been burnt by the betrothal systems, and he was not willing to go that route.

I finally said, “Look, the two of you are old enough and mature enough to determine the will of God and make up your own minds. If you can get her to agree, you have my blessing.” They communicated on the telephone and by email, and warmed a plane seat a couple times between Nashville and Albuquerque. In a few weeks Rebekah approached me, seeking my permission for her to accept his proposal of marriage. Deb and I consented, and they announced their agreement to marry. They were married four months later, which I considered a rather long engagement.

They made an agreement between themselves to abstain from kissing until after they were married. It didn't seem to have set them back any. As

part of the wedding event, I told them that I expected to have a grandkid nine months and one week after the wedding. They didn't disappoint me. They tell me it is due nine months and two or three days after she threw the bouquet. I always taught my children that if it needs doing, don't fool around; get it done—pun intended.

Gabriel was, and remains, her first and only boy friend and lover. That is as it should be. They did all things in truth and honor to God, their families, and each other. We are proud of them and delighted in every way and looking forward to being grandparents.

On the scout

In our travels, we have met several young girls or fellows that seemed suitable possibilities as spouses for our children. On occasions I have arranged for my kids to meet prospects, but they usually don't like my pick. The other siblings also get involved in seeking a good match for their brothers and sisters. It is a family endeavor. However, the choice does not have to originate with us. The kids can come to us with a choice, and if we think it is appropriate, we aid them.

Our son, Nathan, met his wife-to-be at a missions conference in Texas. He came to us asking if it was all right if he got to know her better. At that early stage, he was not making a commitment to marry. He just didn't want to go in a direction that could potentially lead to marriage unless it was with our approval. He approached her father about coming to visit, and was well received. After she had visited with our family and successfully passed “the test,” he asked us if we would approve of his approaching her father about marriage. We readily approved, and he asked her father if he could marry his daughter. I don't remember the order of events, but I do remember that Nathan

had to do extensive home repair and remodeling down in Texas on the Zicheck home, but he eventually got the agreement to marriage.

Until a few weeks before marriage, they were always chaperoned by at least one, usually two or three, of their brothers and sisters. When Deb and I took them out to dinner, we “made” them sit at a table by themselves. We did not guard Rebekah and Gabriel so closely because they were much older and more mature. But then, living 1300 miles apart, and with a short engagement, they did not have protracted opportunities to be alone and develop frustrated drives.

The dating game

The modern concept of betrothal is a long overdue swing of the pendulum away from the licentious practice of recreational dating. The liberties taken by “Christian” couples in the modern dating game would have been viewed as philandering or immorality in former generations.

Most “Christian” young people are “damaged goods.” Church youth groups are hotbeds of immorality. And I am not limiting my evaluation just to those that have copulated. Would you buy a candy bar that had not been eaten but the wrapper had been partially removed? What if it had not been handled, just displayed in a partially unwrapped condition? Would you buy the candy bar if it had not been eaten but just licked on? After all, licking by one or more persons would leave the proud, new owner plenty of candy bar to take home for his own.

Let me ask you another question. If you saw your preacher walking through the mall, holding hands and rubbing up against a lady that was not his wife, would you call it sin? Suppose they didn't “go too far?” Suppose your preacher just needs