

Facing the Problems of Dating

This interview with David A. Huston appeared in the Plainly Speaking section the *IBC Perspectives* magazine (June 2007, Vol. 17, No.6).

Bro. Huston, what are your concerns about apostolic young people and dating?

My concern is not about dating per se, it is about teenagers and young adults falling into sin and turning their hearts away from God. It is about parents failing to inform and supervise their children. It is about the dangerously naive presumption that a young person who has never been married understands the potential for yielding to sexual temptation. It seems to me that we have allowed the world's concept of dating to infiltrate the thinking of our young people and many apostolic parents are caving in to the pressure they feel to let their children make their own decisions.

So are you saying that young people should not be making their own decisions about dating?

Yes, that's exactly what I'm saying. We need to acknowledge the reality that regardless of the purity of their intentions, under certain circumstances any young couple can find themselves doing things they never thought they would do. This is not to say they are bad kids; it is simply to recognize that they are human. And when you combine raging hormones with the exposure so many young people have had to Internet pornography and the sexuality found in even many PG-rated motion pictures, the idea of two single young adults going off together is fraught with the potential for immorality. Most simply do not have the strength of character to stop themselves once the heat starts rising.

Some parents seem to believe that young people simply cannot be stopped from dating. Do you agree?

This is the kind of defeatist attitude that concerns me the most. Apostolic parents better have the ability to stop their children from dating. The Bible instructs children to obey their parents in all things (Colossians 3:20). Until they are married or have graduated from school and are living outside the home, children have an obligation to obey their parents "in all things." This includes college students. But this also means that parents must step up to the plate and start making it clear what they expect from their children. Sure, children can sneak around behind their parents' back and do what they want. But the point is, parents need to take a stand for what is proper and spiritually safe. Decisions about being alone with a member of the opposite sex must not be left to the children to make. They don't have the wisdom born of experience. To me, the real issue is helping to keep our well-meaning young people from damaging themselves spiritually by engaging in premarital sex.

What then do parents need to be doing?

The first thing they need to do is teach their children from the earliest age that the purpose of dating is not having lots of fun or filling up on pleasurable experiences. The purpose of dating is marriage. This means that if there is no immediate possibility of marriage, then there is no purpose in dating. And dating someone who is not even saved makes no sense at all. These people need a Bible study, not dinner at a nice restaurant.

Young people need to understand that the reason they should be very careful about both who they date and how they date is because human beings have the capacity to become emotionally connected to one another. This is something God has put within us for the purpose of holding us together in close, loving relationships. And this is especially true in relationships between males and females.

Most people think of dating as a necessary prerequisite to engagement. Do you agree with this?

No, at least not dating in the way it commonly takes place. Contrary to the popular belief promoted by Hollywood, there does not need to be a deep emotional connection for a man and a woman to get married. Throughout history, many marriages have been arranged by parents and the bride and groom barely knew each other before the wedding. Once married, however, it is vitally important that they become deeply connected emotionally. This is because we all tend to care about and treat well the people for whom we have strong feels of affection. These deep feelings (not raw passions) are what bind a couple together.

Hollywood teaches that emotions are the basis for getting married, but God teaches that they are intended to be the result of marriage. This why Moses taught, “When a man has taken a new wife, he shall not go out to war or be charged with any business; he shall be free at home one year, and bring happiness to his wife whom he has taken” (Deuteronomy 24:5). During the first year of marriage a man should be completely intoxicated by the feeling of being in love with his wife (thereby making himself useless as a soldier or businessman).

But Hollywood has taken what God intended to be a sacred aspect of the first year of marriage and moved it out of the marriage relationship all together. This is why so many young couples are quickly disillusioned after the honeymoon. Because they experienced their rapturous feelings of love prematurely, there was nothing new to experience after the wedding except the struggles of learning to share life with another person.

Bro. Huston, what would you say apostolic young people need to know about dating?

They need to be taught that God reserved the deep emotional connection between a man

and a woman for marriage. This is because deep feelings lead to the desire for physical connection (sex), which when experienced leads to even deeper feelings. This is God's plan for keeping married couples together. This is also why it is both wrong and dangerous to become deeply connected to anyone you are not married to. Deep feelings toward a member of the opposite sex cause you to want to be close to that person. But that is not appropriate outside of marriage. Most extra-marital affairs do not begin with sex but with a deep emotional connection.

How do young people avoid forming deep emotional ties prematurely?

Emotional connections form and intensify by physical contact (hugging, kissing, holding hands, etc.), by talking for long periods of time (especially self-revealing talk, whether in person, on the phone, or over the Internet), and by staring directly into each others eyes. If young people want to avoid the temptation to engage in sexual activity, then they should avoid the things that foster emotional connection. And if they want to avoid the things that foster emotional connection, then they should not get in situations where those things can happen (i.e. they should not be alone with a person of the opposite sex).

Most people think that for a couple to get to know each other they need plenty of alone time. But this is untrue and can serve as a rationalization for risky behavior. Parents who want to keep their good kids from going bad need to be supervising all potentially dangerous activities.

What kind of dating should young apostolics be allowed to do?

There are two dating alternatives. The first is "improper dating," which provides opportunities for touching, excessive sharing, and staring to take place. These activities lead to emotional connections and frequently sexual immorality. The other is "proper dating," which allows for no opportunities to touch, excessively share, or stare into each others eyes. Proper dating is fully supervised. When practiced, the order of events should be: supervised time together, engagement, marriage, touching, deep emotional connection, physical connection, and even deeper emotional connection.

How can we help to keep our young people pure?

Anyone who wants to enter marriage pure needs to know that it all starts with making sure he or she is never in a situation where deep emotional feelings can be sparked. This means there may be occasions when it is necessary to move farther apart, to leave the room, to end the conversation, to hang up the phone, or to make your eyes look somewhere else. This is called having boundaries. It is also called exercising self-control.

Paul wrote, "Flee sexual immorality" (1 Corinthians 6:18). This requires self-control. He instructed, "For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from

sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God” (1 Thessalonians 4:3-5). This requires self-control.

We have been called to live by a higher standard than the godless Gentiles, which is why young people need the close involvement of their parents. Passive parenting is no parenting at all. Young people need to be continually reminded that their choices today will impact the quality of their tomorrow.

What would you say to those who say it is okay to engage in holding hands and maybe a little kissing?

I would say what Paul said, “It is good for a man not to touch a woman. Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband” (1 Corinthians 7:1-2). Touching leads to sex. This is why God says, if you want to touch, get married. Any person who is not ready to get married should not be touching members of the opposite sex, which means not placing himself in a situation where he could touch.

You seem to believe that good parenting is the answer to the problems associated with dating.

Experience has convinced me that even if a person is filled with the Spirit, when raging hormones are combined with immaturity, you have a prescription for reckless behavior and spiritual damage. Parents must take on the responsibility of overseeing their children’s relationships with members of the opposite sex. Until young people are able to assess risks in a mature way and stay yielded to the Spirit, someone older and wiser needs to be assisting them in their decision-making.

In my opinion, many apostolic parents need to toughen up. They need to take a stand with their young people and hold to it. It’s not the pastor’s job, it’s the parent’s. When my daughters were teenagers, there were times when I’m sure they hated me intensely. I can still hear the words, “Dad, you’re always so hard on us.” Even people in our church told me I was being too hard on them. But I never saw it as being hard; I saw it as being firm. I’m sure they snuck off behind my back at times and did things they shouldn’t have. But there were two things they always knew for certain: 1) Dad really loved them, and 2) Dad was totally committed to Jesus and would not compromise any element of holiness. Today all three of my daughters are married to men who are involved in the work of God. Plus, they have each thanked me over the years for taking a stand on what is proper and right and refusing to compromise, regardless of how much they whined, cried, and carried on.