

I Kissed (The Term) “Dating” Goodbye!

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On November 10, 1483, Martin Luther was born. He entered an Augustinian cloister in mid-1505. “A loyal son of the Catholic Church, he was later to shatter the structure of medieval Catholicism. A devoted servant of the Pope, he was later to identify the Popes with Antichrist.”¹ His religious journey proved to be one of migrating **away from** the staunchly held Catholic dogma and **toward** Biblical truths. Admirably, he was willing to challenge the well-entrenched beliefs of his peers. Regrettably, his journey ended having never fully abandoned all vestiges of his monastic past. How hard it can be to free ourselves from long and widely held notions!

Fast forward about five centuries, and we turn our attention to a different topic. We find a well-established practice, particularly in American culture, whereby many approach **mate selection** only after protracted “dating.” Teens, and even pre-teens, are seeking “trial” and “recreational” relationships, often with the coaxing of gloating parents. These parents often seem eager to have their teen and his/her date be the hot topic of tabloid-type discussions.

Amidst this backdrop of the “dating game,” voices began to be heard which challenged the status quo. Among these was Joshua Harris in his book titled *I Kissed Dating Goodbye*.² Serious concerns began to be discussed about the whole dating scenario. Some, with a Martin Luther-like courage, seemed willing to question a long-standing practice. However, equally reminiscent of Luther, some seemed reluctant to totally abandon the paradigm. They seemed to realize the need for change but were unwilling to make radically deep alterations.

Some parents find themselves in a thorny dilemma. Their children are already well practiced at “starting relationships” and “breaking them off.” It seems nigh to impossible to call for a complete abandonment “in the middle of the stream.” Many see the need for more emphasis upon purity but are reluctant to give up all the trappings related to dating. For example, some Christian parents know their teens want to attend “the prom.” Their improvised solution is to “sanitize” or “Christianize” the prom experience. These well-meaning parents offer a special

boy-girl banquet, often held in the church building's fellowship hall, where their not-yet-ready-for-marriage children can bring their dates. Each participant arrives in formal attire and enjoys a prom-like atmosphere, minus dancing and alcoholic beverages. The entire evening, however, is still stirring the "feelings" for the opposite sex when no fulfillment is intended, nor should it be. These youths are set up to "play the part" of a couple out for the evening. The emphasis is upon the guy/girl, romantic evening together, and attention to outward beauty. The attendees are in no way anticipating an eminent wedding ceremony. **He** may not even have a job, and **she** may have agreed to attend even though **he** was not her first choice.

However, such small changes in thinking are not really addressing the underlying issue of recreational/trial relationships before one is ready for a mate. Even though some are **verbalizing** they are no longer in favor of "dating," in reality, their offspring are still following the same basic dating approach. Hence, notice the title of this article. In actuality, some have merely kissed the **term** *dating* goodbye!

Dating versus courtship ought to be fundamentally distinguished. Not merely semantically, but in application. Courtship ought to be a period of "final investigation" on the part of a single man and a single woman who are in a position and disposition to marry. Prior to the beginning of the courtship, there should be thoughtful and prayerful consideration, primarily of the spiritual qualification of the prospect. Dating, in contrast, might be characterized by having a boyfriend/girlfriend before one is really ready for marriage and/or without the serious intent of finding out whether the person would be a suitable mate. One is purposeful with a specific goal in mind. The other is more casual with no stated or implied expectations.

May I respectfully suggest that many parents in the church are really not yet ready to broach this issue, since their training approach first needs work on a more fundamental level. Parents must begin with a deep resolve to present a personal example and teaching which flows from a spiritual-first paradigm. Romans 12:1, 2 might have become shallowly overworked in cliché style, but it contains the key. From their youth (cf. 2 Timothy 3:15), the souls entrusted to us must see that purity and spirituality are our foremost concern. There must be no doubt in the minds of our children that we want them to know the Bible **even more** than we want them to excel academically or socially. There should be no doubt that "as for me and my house," we will

serve the church above all sporting events, music and art performances, etc. Parents must speak often and passionately about being **different from the world**.

As mentioned above, many Christians are reluctant to completely abandon the practice of dating. Therefore, parents must also be willing to speak with knowledge and passion about being **different from some brethren**. They must show their children, based upon Scriptural principles, **why** certain “norms” are unchaste and harmful. When we hear Christians debating whether a young person should date a non-Christian or not—it indicates a lack of resolve to have Christ fully enthroned as Master. The question “to date or not to date” is still too advanced for such a questioner. Children who have not been given the sure foundation, from their youth, of spiritual priority, devotion, and purity, and being different from the world, will be hard to steer into a path of “waiting—not dating.” See Proverbs 22:6.

We plead with our readers to open their minds to the possibility of complete abandonment of the modern methods. Realize that to do so also opens the possibility of abandoning the sad consequences that have been so closely connected with dating, i.e. teen pregnancy, later failed marriages, apostasy from the church, etc. Let’s not mimic the world while we **call** it something different; let’s **be** different than the world!

¹ Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand – A Life of Martin Luther* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1950), 15.

² Joshua Harris, *I Kissed Dating Goodbye* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 1997).