

Expressing the Image of God in our Dating (as Adam and Eve did in Theirs)

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There is something special about being in a relationship. The desire for companionship, already present in childhood, takes on more urgency as we pass through adolescence into adulthood. To desire a relationship is good and natural. Solomon says that “*Whoso* findeth a wife findeth a good *thing*, and obtaineth favour of the LORD” (Prov. 18:22). God expressed the goodness of relationships to himself in the creation week. “And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him” (Gen. 2:18). Next, God made the value of relationships evident to Adam as Adam named the animals. The cattle, the beast of the field, and the fowl of the air were all paraded before Adam. In the process of naming the animals, Adam quickly realized that no creature was similar to him. None were rational and moral as he was. None could walk and talk with God at the spiritual level that he could. None were created in the image of God as he was. Such was Adam’s great need for companionship that although Adam had a right relationship with God, Adam was unfulfilled as the only human. He was alone. The Holy God, himself said so! “It is not good that the man should be alone” (v. 18). After Eve was created, Adam expresses the joy of having another like him with the words, “This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man” (v. 23). It was not good that Adam was alone with no one created as he was. Now with Eve as the second image bearer of God, Adam had companionship. That was good...even very good.

The fact that both Adam and Eve were created in God’s image impacted their relationship. The character qualities that God’s image imprinted on their souls enhanced the relationship that they enjoyed. The instruction of Colossians 3:10 and Ephesians 4:24 define the image of God as possessing true knowledge, true righteousness, and true holiness. The verses following these texts give abundant practical examples of “image qualities” that benefited their relationship. Some examples include speaking truth, not holding grudges, edifying one another, being kind and tenderhearted, forgiving one another, having humbleness of mind, and using the greatest gift of charity.

Think about dating relationships as you read what the Canons of Dordt, Head 3/4 Article 1 says about the image of God. “Man was originally formed after the image of God. His understanding was adorned with a true and saving knowledge of his Creator and of spiritual things; his heart and will were upright; all his affections pure; and the whole man was holy.” Their hearts were full of love (true knowledge) for God and one another. They lived to serve God (true holiness). They enjoyed living according to God’s will (true righteousness).

Let’s focus on true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness as they can be applied to our relationships. The result of this study ought to demonstrate that the relationships that Christians have with one another are of a higher quality and different character than the relationships of the

ungodly. Please note that the examples given are by no means exhaustive and that each example given could easily be applied to the other aspects of the image of God.

The Christian's whole life, but also his dating ought to demonstrate true knowledge. True knowledge has to do with knowing God in a personal way such that we love him. True knowledge is informed love that comes by the instrument of faith. "For whom he did *foreknow* he also did predestinate" (Rom. 8:29) means; "For whom he did for love." When the Bible speaks of Adam *knowing* his wife Eve (Gen. 4:1), it means that Adam loved Eve.

True knowledge of God gives us both a motivation for serving the other, and it gives us discernment in our dating. To love is to be determined to work for the good or benefit of another. Knowing and loving God is also knowing and loving his body, the church...and our friend. In serving the least of these our brethren, we serve (love) Christ (Matt. 25:40). Rather than dating to fill our needs and our desires we date to serve the other. The world dates to satisfy self—the Christian dates to serve other. Marriage is not for you. Instead, marriage is a relationship that better enables you to serve another. True knowledge also equips the Christian to know what God likes and dislikes. We are conscious to live as God requires of us in his word. With true knowledge (informed love) we will have the discernment only to pursue relationships with other Christians—whom we desire to serve.

The Christian's whole life, but also his dating ought to demonstrate true righteousness. True righteousness has to do with delighting to live wholly in harmony with God's will. As a couple, we will delight to live in devotional life. Perhaps we provide and encourage other couples to join us in good, creative, and entertaining group activities. In righteousness, we could take long walks enjoying and commenting on God's good creation. Together we may try to capture creation's beauty in photography, painting, or even poetry. Enjoying working with God's good creation is a narrow aspect of the righteousness that we already have. Together we could craft an end table, a rocking chair, or a dresser. The man will delight in beginning to take headship and lead and nurture his friend, while the woman delights in being a creative loving responder. In righteousness, we might together take out a special needs friend or enjoy a meal with one of our aging grandparents.

Finally, Christian dating ought to demonstrate true holiness. True holiness has to do with a purity of mind and dedication to God's service. Holiness is not just avoidance of sin but instead has a positive consecration quality to it. The holy instruments of the temple were those set aside exclusively for the direct service of God. Our relationships demonstrate holiness when they are dedicated to God, to church, and one another. Christian couples express holiness when they have devotions. They may also trace the news-worthy events of the day toward God and admire him in the movement of men and nations. A musically talented couple should consider playing and singing together as a way to worship God; not necessarily in an old people's home, not necessarily in public, but instead as an act of private devotions. A dating couple could also demonstrate holiness by joining a group like Young Calvinists and prepare for the discussions together.

In Paradise, Adam and Eve had a fullness of earthly fellowship that will remain unparalleled until the new heavens and earth are created. Because they had the image of God without sin's corruption, they were united emotionally, physically, and spiritually in a way that our relationships can't be. Emotionally, they shared joys, shared the excitement of their faith, and shared an eager anticipation for their future. Physically, they embraced one another, desired to serve each other, and worked harmoniously in the garden. Spiritually, they loved God, lived consciously for him, and were amazed at his good creation. With his image imprinted on their souls, Adam and Eve were very good. Our relationships will not quite be like theirs was before the fall into sin. We will have to work at it. Be prepared to forgive one another's sins, to forebear with one another's weaknesses, but also be prepared to foster your relationships through the activity of your faith. Live in true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness with each other and toward God. Be united in faith and live out of that faith towards each other and your God.

The Christian's personal relationships ought to be different from the relationships of the people of the world. We are new creatures. Our souls have new qualities. We have the image of God!

Originally published in: Vol. 78 No. 3 March 2019