

# Courtship While in School

Introduction: Should Seventh-day Adventists hoping for Jesus to return in this generation stay single so they can devote more time to the cause of God? What was the intent of Ellen White's counsels concerning courtship while in school? How do I know whether I am behaving appropriately with those of the opposite sex? What exactly *is* Hartland's courtship policy, and what is its intent? What are the critical readiness factors that determine when a young person is ready for courtship and marriage?

Body:

- I. Paul's Counsel to the Corinthian Church
  - a. Why did Paul counsel single people in Corinth to remain single?
  - b. Paul's counsel was, "I say therefore to the unmarried...It is good for them if they abide even as I" (1 Corinthians 7:8).
  - c. For reasons we can only speculate about, Paul *did* recommend that young unmarried Christians in Corinth should remain single
  - d. In the following verse, Paul makes an exception to his own rule by stating that for some, a single-lifestyle is not something they can maintain and still remain morally upright (1 Corinthians 7:9).
  - e. He also states that if a man marry his "virgin," "he sinneth not" (1 Corinthians 7:36).
  - f. Why would Paul, who had a high regard for the sanctity of marriage (Hebrews 13:4), suggest that the unmarried remain single?
  - g. Paul believed it was "good for [in light of] the present distress" (1 Corinthians 7:26).
  - h. Paul warns that marriage is not ideal at the present "time," "but and if thou marry, thou has not sinned," but "such have trouble in the flesh" (1 Corinthians 7:28, 29).
  - i. Married couples in all times, places and circumstances will have certain anxieties related to marriage, especially in the first years.

- j. Newlyweds have to sort through issues related to finding a place to live, earning money to pay for the necessities of live, and much more.
  - k. Though it still happens to day, it was much more common in ancient times for a couple's first child to be born within the first year of marriage.
  - l. It is safe to assume that the primary reason for Paul's counsel was the fact that it was particularly dangerous to be a Christian during the formative years of the Christian Church.
  - m. No matter where a Christian was living during the first century A.D., dangerous persecution could break out at any moment.
  - n. It is with this reality in mind that Jesus said, "But woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck, in those days! for there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people" (Luke 21:23).
  - o. Paul was in constant danger for his life as a Christian missionary (2 Corinthians 11:26, 27), and for this reason could have never been married.
  - p. In the Old Testament, God's counsel to His people was that men should not go to "war," nor "be charged with any business," but should "be free at home one year, and shall cheer up his wife" (Deuteronomy 24:5).
  - q. Marriage is serious business, and Paul's advice in 1 Corinthians 7 was given to Christians living in serious times.
  - r. It is hard enough to stand for truth and remain a Christian when one's life is being threatened. Imagine the pressure for a married person who if martyred would leave behind a spouse and children without support!
  - s. Paul, recognizing that some would stubbornly prefer to marry even under such conditions, did not consider it a sin to disregard his counsel.
  - t. What would be Paul's counsel to young Seventh-day Adventist Christians today?
  - u. He would probably encourage them to consider their circumstances and proceed with caution in the area of courtship and marriage.
- II. Intent of Ellen White's Counsel on Courtship While in School
- a. In October 1845, James White had written that marriage was "a wile of the devil."

- b. In his mind, for an Adventist couple to get engaged meant that they had “denied their faith.”<sup>1</sup>
- c. This view was held by most Adventists at the time, for, they reasoned, “such a step seemed to contemplate years of life in this world” (James White, *Life Sketches* (1888), p. 126).
- d. Ellen White did not counsel against marriage in the light of the nearness of Christ’s coming.<sup>2</sup>
- e. Ellen White had many reasons to discourage people from getting married, but the nearness of Christ’s coming was not one of them.<sup>3</sup>
- f. Ellen White stated that a “youth not out of his teens is a poor judge of the fitness of a person as young as himself to be his companion for life” (Adventist Home, p. 79)
- g. She also spoke negatively of “men and women uniting in marriage whose ages widely differ” (*Mind, Character and Personality*, vol. 1, p. 138).
- h. It is important to note, however, that Willie White, her youngest son, married a twenty-one-year-old when he was forty.<sup>4</sup>
- i. Young people are not to be distracted while preparing for a life calling.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Day Star*, Oct. 11, 1845

<sup>2</sup> “In regard to marriage, I would say, Read the Word of God. Even in this time, the last days of this world’s history, marriages take place among Seventh-day Adventists... We have, as a people, never forbidden marriage, except in cases where there were obvious reasons that marriage would be misery to both parties. And even then, we have only advised and counseled” (*Mind, Character and Personality*, vol. 1, p. 219).

<sup>3</sup> Motivated by passion (MYP 458, 459), With no idea of parental responsibility (MYP 461), Without Means of Support (MYP 461), Of Persons Whose Ages Widely Differ (2 SM 420, 421), Selfishly planned (AH 48), Unequally Yoked (5T 13)

<sup>4</sup> “All, every member of the family, dote on May, and they feel highly honored to take in Willie to their family circle. They all highly esteem Willie. He is 40 years old and May is 21” [4 BIO 195.5 (Letter 120, 1895)].

<sup>5</sup> “The school is not to be regarded as a place for courtship or marriage, but as a place where the youth are to be educated and disciplined for practical life. Flirtation or special attentions between young ladies and young men cannot be permitted in the school” (*Manuscript Releases*, vol. 13, 145).

“While at school, students should not allow their minds to become confused by thoughts of courtship. They are there to gain a fitness to work for God, and this thought is ever to be uppermost” (*Counsels to Parents, Teachers and Students*, p. 100)

- j. Young people are not develop commitments or emotional attachments before being sure of a life calling. They are not to take on responsibilities before being ready to fulfill them. <sup>6</sup>

### III. Principles of Proper Reserve

- a. Paul counseled young Timothy to “entreat” the younger women “as sisters, with all purity” (1 Timothy 5:2).
- b. Abimelech identified that Rebekah was not Isaac’s sister because he witnessed Isaac “sporting with Rebekah his wife” (Genesis 26:8).
- c. The word “sporting” comes from the Hebrew word *tsachaq*, which means to play, laugh, mock.
- d. Ellen White warned against trifling with hearts. <sup>7</sup>
- e. Not only is this practice a sin against our neighbor, but also bad habits are established for our marriage. <sup>8</sup>
- f. Christians should shun even the appearance of undue familiarity. <sup>9</sup>
- g. Familiarity is defined as relaxed friendliness or intimacy between people, or the inappropriate informality of behavior or language.
  - i. Familiarity allows us to give each other nicknames.
  - ii. Familiarity allows us to hug each other.

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<sup>6</sup> “The rules of this college (a school located in College City, California) strictly guard the association of young men and young women during the school term. It is only when these rules are temporarily suspended, as is sometimes the case, that gentlemen are permitted to accompany ladies to and from public gatherings. Our own College at Battle Creek has similar regulations, though not so stringent. Such rules are indispensable to guard the youth from the danger of premature courtship and unwise marriage” *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 62).

<sup>7</sup> “To trifle with hearts is a crime of no small magnitude in the sight of a holy God. And yet some will show preference for young ladies and call out their affections, and then go their way and forget all about the words they have spoken and their effect. A new face attracts them, and they repeat the same words, devote to another the same attentions” (*The Adventist Home*, p. 57).

<sup>8</sup> “This disposition will reveal itself in the married life. The marriage relation does not always make the fickle mind firm, the wavering steadfast and true to principle. They tire of constancy, and unholy thoughts will manifest themselves in unholy actions. How essential it is, then, that the youth so gird up the loins of their mind and guard their conduct that Satan cannot beguile them from the path of uprightness” (*The Adventist Home*, p. 57).

<sup>9</sup> “While men and women in an institution for health should be kind and courteous, while they are required to be affable and congenial toward all, they should shun even the appearance of undue familiarity.” *Medical Ministry*, p. 145

- h. It is not easy to remain courteous while avoiding undue familiarity, but it is possible.<sup>10</sup>
- i. Hugging and kissing individuals of the opposite sex is not the best practice.<sup>11</sup>
- j. Young ministers should err on the side of caution when it comes to familiarity with ladies.<sup>12</sup>
- k. Avoid being alone with a person of the opposite sex.

#### IV. Hartland's Courtship Policy

- a. "Emotional attachments, discussions about future possibilities, or "understandings" between men and women are not appropriate until one has completed his/her educational preparation for God's service. This includes on-or-off-campus internship assignments." (*Hartland College Catalogue and Student Handbook*, 2011-2013, p. 94)
- b. "To provide a training environment in which young men and women may learn and experience God's standards of Christian deportment free from the pressure of dating or courtship." (Ibid)
- c. "To protect young or inexperienced students from the bewitching and often overwhelming influence of free and easy association and to help them focus on their high calling." (Ibid)
- d. The intent is not to prevent good, healthy relationships from developing among its students.

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<sup>10</sup> "The only way for us to become truly courteous, without affectation, without undue familiarity, is to drink in the spirit of Christ, to heed the injunction, 'Be ye holy; for I am holy.' 1 Peter 1:16. If we act upon the principles laid down in the word of God, we shall have no inclination to indulge in undue familiarity." *Counsels on Health*, pp. 341, 342

<sup>11</sup> "The slightest insinuations, from whatever source they may come, inviting you to indulge in sin or to allow the least unwarrantable liberty with your persons, should be resented as the worst of insults to your dignified womanhood. The kiss upon your cheek, at an improper time and place, should lead you to repel the emissary of Satan with disgust. If it is from one in high places who is dealing in sacred things, the sin is of tenfold greater magnitude, and should lead a God-fearing woman or youth to recoil with horror, not only from the sin he would have you commit, but from the hypocrisy and villainy of one whom the people respect and honor as God's servant. He is handling sacred things, yet hiding his baseness of heart under a ministerial cloak. Be afraid of anything like this familiarity." *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, p. 458

<sup>12</sup> "When among the sisters, be reserved. No matter if they think you lack courtesy. If sisters, married or unmarried, show any familiarity, repulse them. Be abrupt and decided, that they may ever understand that you give no countenance to such weakness. When before the young, and at all times, be grave, be solemn." *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 437

- e. The intent is not to make students feel guilty if feelings develop between students.
  - f. Not all may agree with Hartland's application of the Ellen White's counsel concerning courtship while in school, but any policy that does not force you to violate your conscience should be obeyed.
  - g. If it is not possible to do so in good conscience, the honorable thing to do is to leave.
- V. Readiness Factors
- a. Am I financially prepared to provide for a family?
  - b. Am I emotionally stable to handle the conflicts and frustrations that even the best of marriages go through?
  - c. Have I developed my own individuality and spiritual experience in Christ, and am I independent of other people in my walk with Him?

Conclusion: God has never discouraged marriage among Seventh-day Adventists, except in cases where there were obvious reasons that the marriage would be a misery to both parties. Ellen White encouraged our schools to adopt policies related to courtship with the intent that Adventist youth be guarded from the danger of premature courtship and unwise marriages. Christians should shun relaxed friendliness, intimacy, and inappropriate informality of behavior or language, with those of the opposite sex. Hartland College has a courtship policy that is designed to honor the intent of Ellen White's counsel on courtship. Financial stability, emotional maturity and spiritual independence are critical readiness factors that determine when a young person is ready for courtship and marriage.