



*What Is
A “Christian”
Marriage?*



Heritage Baptist Press

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ; and it is written primarily for the edification and instruction of those dear people whom God has graciously given me the privilege to pastor; that is, the faithful members of the Heritage Baptist Church of Singapore.

This work is also dedicated to my loving wife, Ginger, who has been such a loving source of joy, encouragement, and friendship through out the years of our marriage together since 15 June 1973.

Appreciation

My sincere thanks and deep appreciation to my daughter-in-law, Grace Crocker—who is on the faculty of the Pensacola Christian College, Pensacola, Florida, as an English teacher—for her invaluable assistance in proof reading, correcting, and assisting me in the finalizing of this manuscript.

Foreword

A young man once asked me, “Pastor, what is a Christian marriage?” Now, I must confess that at the time (and without a whole lot of thought), I gave this young man a rather quick answer. But in the following weeks, the question which he had asked me continued to nag me. After much careful consideration, I finally became convinced that this was an honest question that was worthy of—and that certainly deserved—more than just a quick response.

As a missionary/pastor who has served for twelve years here in the Republic of Singapore, I have observed that the majority of Singaporean couples are married at the *Registry of Marriages* (a government office which is commonly referred to as *ROM*). In my own country (the USA), this would be comparable to a couple being married by a justice of the peace.

Under this system, I have observed that many Christian couples will first have their civil ceremony at the ROM. This is so that they can register with the Housing Development Board (commonly called *HDB*) and begin the process of purchasing an apartment right away. Then, after some time, the couple will host their “*Christian*” ceremony—an event that

will typically create a great expense. This ceremony is officiated by their pastor, who has the newlyweds repeat the same vows that they had made earlier at the ROM.

Now, this practice raises some important questions. For example: Is this practice wrong? Is this practice of double ceremonies really necessary? Is the couple married at the ROM living in sin if they choose not to have a Christian ceremony in a church? Is the couple that has been through both ceremonies “more married” in the sight of God?

These are all questions that should naturally concern those who are thinking of getting married. But these questions should also greatly concern pastors who are called to give counsel and to officiate in these wedding ceremonies.

Therefore, with God’s grace, it is my sincere desire that through this little volume, I might be able to clearly show and explain what God wants us to know concerning the question, “*What is a ‘Christian’ marriage?*”

Ray Crocker, Ph.D.
Missionary/Pastor

Table of Contents

Old Testament Marriages	Page 7
Inter-Testament Marriages	Page 28
New Testament Marriages	Page 43
Marriage in Church History	Page 53
Concluding Thoughts	Page 84
Appendix A	Page 101
Bibliography	Page 104

All Scripture references
are taken from the *King James Version*
(Cambridge: Cambridge) 1769.

Old Testament Marriages

Chapter 1

When we consider the marriage ceremonies that are recorded in the Scriptures, we must confess that there is little to no information given to us. To illustrate this point, let us divide the Old Testament into two parts. In other words, let's consider the marriages that were made (1) *before* Israel received God's law; and then (2) we will notice those marriages that were made *after* the giving of God's law.

Marriage: Before the law

As we consider those marriages that were made before the nation of Israel received God's law, we find that there are only five marriages that are recorded in the Bible.

Adam & Eve

It is interesting to notice that the first marriage ceremony to be mentioned in the Scriptures is the ceremony that the LORD God Himself conducted in the Garden of Eden. After creating Adam in His own image and likeness

from the dust of the ground, the Bible quotes the LORD God as saying,

It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet (i.e., suitable, fitting) for him. (Genesis 2:18)

The reason the LORD God needed to make a suitable helper for Adam is clearly stated in the next couple of verses. The Bible says,

And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet (i.e., suitable, fitting) for him. (Genesis 2:19-20)

Since no suitable partner was found among the birds of the air or the beasts of the field, God performed the very first surgical procedure. The Bible states the following:

And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and

closed up the flesh instead thereof;
And the rib, which the LORD God had
taken from man, made he a woman,
and brought her unto the man.
(Genesis 2:21-22)

Obviously, this was a marriage which was acceptable in the eyes of God because God is absolutely holy and, therefore, would never do anything that would be contrary to His holy nature. That is why the psalmist declared that

The LORD is righteous in all his ways,
and holy in all his works. (Psalm
145:17)

Adam and Eve's marriage might then leave us with some important questions that beg to be answered. For example, what was the procedure that God used in performing that first wedding? Was there a formal ceremony, with the exchanging of vows? The truth is, after looking at the Scriptures, we must humbly concede that the Bible is absolutely silent on those matters.

Isaac & Rebekah

The next wedding we find mentioned in the Bible is the wedding of Isaac and Rebekah (Genesis 24). You will recall how that Abraham did not want his son, Isaac, to marry a woman from any of those idolatrous nations

that were dwelling in the land of Canaan; therefore, Abraham sent his most trusted servant—a man named Eliezer—to find a wife for his son in the land of Mesopotamia—a distance of some 500 miles (i.e., 804 kilometers) away.

After the long journey, being directed by the providence of the LORD God (Genesis 24:27), Eliezer arrived at the well located just outside the city of Nahor. There, the LORD directed him to a beautiful young lady named Rebekah. After being introduced to her family, according to Mesopotamian custom, Eliezer then made the proper arrangements for Rebekah to become Isaac's wife and sealed the agreement by giving to Rebekah's family some "precious things" as a dowry (Genesis 24:53). And when they sought Rebekah's consent to this proposition, she willingly agreed that she would go with Eliezer and become Isaac's wife.

Therefore, the Scriptures record that Rebekah was sent away from her home with the blessings—and the very best wishes—of her family when they said,

Thou art our sister, be thou the mother of thousands of millions, and let thy seed possess the gate of those which hate them. (Genesis 24:60)

After this, Eliezer immediately took Rebekah and made the long journey back to the land of Canaan. As they neared the home place of Abraham, the Bible says that they saw a man walking in the field. When this man saw Eliezer's caravan approaching, he began to walk toward them. This evidently startled Rebekah, as the Bible records the following account:

[Rebekah] said unto the servant, What man is this that walketh in the field to meet us? And the servant . . . said, It is my master: therefore she took a vail, and covered herself. (Genesis 24:65)

Upon arriving at Abraham's dwelling place, the servant then gave a full report to his master; he told him how the LORD God had prospered his journey by directing him to Rebekah (Genesis 24:66). Then, almost immediately after this, the Scriptures inform us of the following:

Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her. (Genesis 24:67)

Again, was there some type of formal ceremony when Isaac and Rebekah came together as husband and wife? And, once

again, a simple reading of the text seems to suggest that while the engagement process was quite detailed and drawn out, the actual wedding ceremony simply involved Isaac taking Rebekah into his mother's tent and having sexual relations with her. Regarding the details of any wedding ceremony that may have taken place, we must once again humbly acknowledge that the Scriptures are absolutely silent.

Jacob & Rachel

A short time later in the Biblical record, we find the marriages of two brothers—Jacob and Esau, the sons of Isaac. Apparently, Isaac allowed his two sons to actually choose their own wives. As a result, Esau foolishly chose to marry two women who were Hittites, a pagan people who were deeply idolatrous (we are told that the Hittites claimed to worship a thousand different gods.¹) It is also interesting to notice that the first use of the word “grief” in the Bible is used in this passage, regarding the heart-ache that Esau's unwise choice brought to the hearts of his parents, Isaac and Rebekah (Genesis 26:35).

Therefore, it was for this very reason that we find the following instructions were given:

Isaac called Jacob, and blessed him,
and charged him, and said unto him,

Thou shalt not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan. Arise, go to Padanaram [in Mesopotamia], to the house of Bethuel thy mother's father; and take thee a wife from thence of the daughters of Laban thy mother's brother. (Genesis 28:1-2)

And just as the family of Rebekah had blessed her before she had gone to be joined in marriage to Isaac, so Isaac blessed his own son, Jacob. Isaac said,

And God Almighty bless thee, and make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, that thou mayest be a multitude of people; And give thee the blessing of Abraham, to thee, and to thy seed with thee; that thou mayest inherit the land wherein thou art a stranger, which God gave unto Abraham. (Genesis 28:3-4)

So Jacob left his father's tent and made the long journey to Padanaram, where he soon met the "love of his life"—a beautiful young lady named Rachel. As Jacob had basically come with only the clothes on his back, he had no suitable dowry to offer to Laban for Rachel's hand in marriage. Therefore, Jacob sold himself into seven years of servitude. And so the Bible records that

Jacob served seven years for Rachel;
and they seemed unto him but a few
days, for the love he had to her.
(Genesis 29:20)

Finally, at the end of those seven years of
tending to Laban's flocks and herds, Jacob
asked for Rachel's hand in marriage. But the
Bible declares,

Laban gathered together all the men
of the place, and made a feast. And it
came to pass in the evening, that he
took Leah his daughter, and brought
her to him; and he went in unto her.
(Genesis 29:22-23)

Even those who are only faintly familiar with
this story will remember the cruel
deceitfulness of Laban on this special
occasion. Instead of giving Jacob the girl that
he loved so much and had worked so hard to
win, Laban gave Jacob his other daughter,
Leah. The next morning, when Laban's cruel
duplicity was discovered, we can only imagine
Jacob's anger as he confronted Laban and
said,

What is this thou hast done unto me?
did not I serve with thee for Rachel?
wherefore then hast thou beguiled
me? And Laban said, It must not be
so done in our country, to give the

younger before the firstborn. (Genesis 29:25-26)

Then, to Laban's great delight, Jacob declared that his love for Rachel was so strong that he would willingly work seven years more in order to have her as his wife. After the agreement was made, what had simply begun as a wedding ceremony with one week of feasting turned into a double wedding ceremony with two weeks of feasting—and Jacob was the groom in both of the weddings!

But again, we are left to wonder if there was some kind of formal ceremony involved when Jacob married his two wives. The text seems to indicate that the wedding ceremony was actually nothing more than a great feast during which Laban gave his daughters to become the wives of Jacob; and Jacob took his brides into a tent to consummate their relationship. Other than that, once again, we must humbly confess that the Scriptures are totally silent.

Joseph & Asenath

After his brothers had sold him as a slave, Joseph was taken down into Egypt. There, he worked in the house of Potiphar, a royal Egyptian officer who served under Pharaoh as the captain of the guard (Genesis 39:1). Even though Joseph was only a slave in Potiphar's

house, his faithfulness to the LORD God caused him to be blessed so that everything he did was prosperous and successful. As a result of this, Joseph was soon promoted and given authority over all of Potiphar's house. Because every thing Potiphar owned had been entrusted to Joseph, even Potiphar did not know how much he was worth (Genesis 39:6)!

As a result of all this, Joseph soon caught the lustful eye of Potiphar's wife. She began to burn with a sensual desire for this good-looking, talented slave, and began trying to seduce him into an immoral relationship. However, because Joseph had a strong faith in the LORD God, he continually rejected the seductive advances of Potiphar's wicked wife. Someone has well said, "Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned." So, unsurprisingly, Mrs. Potiphar did not take Joseph's rejection very well—she quickly accused him of a crime which he did not commit, and Joseph was sent to prison.

Yet, even while he was in prison, the LORD God continued to bless Jacob and caused him to prosper and successful in everything that he did. Therefore, it was not long before Joseph was noticed by the prison staff; in fact, he was soon running the place and was placed in charge of everything that was done in the prison (Genesis 39:22).

During this period of incarceration, Joseph had the opportunity of interpreting the dreams of the Pharaoh's chief butler and chief baker. Since the interpretations that Joseph gave concerning their future proved to be exactly credible, he was eventually brought out of the prison so that he might interpret some troubling dreams for the Pharaoh himself.

Then, when Joseph once again demonstrated his great wisdom during an interview with the Pharaoh, Pharaoh promoted Joseph to be over all the land of Egypt; in fact, no one but the Pharaoh himself was greater than Joseph in all of the land. And therefore, as a nobleman in Pharaoh's court, the Bible says that

Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zaphnathpaaneah; and he gave him to wife Asenath the daughter of Potipherah priest of On. (Genesis 41:45)

It has been noted that in ancient Egypt, marriage was never considered to be a religious ceremony. In fact, the Egyptian term for marriage was simply "to found (i.e., establish) a house." Therefore, a man and woman became married in Egyptian society by simply setting up house together.²

However, I believe that we may safely assume that in this case, the setting up of Joseph's new house certainly involved all the pomp, splendor, and ceremony which the laws and customs of Egypt afforded a ruler of his stature. But when it comes to the Biblical record concerning the description of that royal wedding ceremony, we must once again humbly concede that the Scriptures are absolutely silent.

Moses & Zipporah

Some years after Joseph's death, a new king came to power in Egypt who had not known Joseph (Exodus 1:8). This leader's rule marked the beginning of a time when God's chosen people suffered hard bondage under the hands of cruel and abusive taskmasters. It was into this world of bitterness and slavery that Moses, a Hebrew, was born.

Through a series of miraculous events which are recorded in the Bible, Moses ended up in the Pharaoh's palace being trained and groomed for greatness as one of the Pharaoh's grandsons. But there soon came a day when Moses, by faith, made a life changing decision—he determined that he would take his stand with the people of God (Hebrews 11:24-26). The Scriptures record that

it came to pass in those days, when Moses was grown, that he went out unto his brethren, and looked on their burdens: and he spied an Egyptian smiting an Hebrew, one of his brethren. And he looked this way and that way, and when he saw that there was no man, he slew the Egyptian, and hid him in the sand. (Exodus 2:11-12)

But the very next day, Moses sadly found that his “secret sin” was actually no longer a secret! Remember, there is a Biblical principle that comes into play that says, “Be sure your sin will find you out!” (Numbers 32:23) So somehow—though we are not told how it all came to pass—Pharaoh learned that Moses had killed one of his men. As a result, Moses, fearing for his life, fled from Egypt and crossed the Sinai Peninsula and entered into the land of the Midianites (present day Saudi Arabia).

When Moses arrived in the land of Midian, by the providence of God, he met the daughters of the “priest of Midian” (Exodus 2:16). Because Moses showed those young ladies kindness by helping them with the watering of their flocks, he was invited to go to their home where their father then invited Moses to stay with him. The Bible records that

Moses was content to dwell with the man: and he gave Moses Zipporah his daughter. (Exodus 2:21)

Again, we might ask if there was some kind of formal ceremony when this couple came together as husband and wife? We might logically assume that the laws and customs of the Midianites were followed in the wedding ceremony. But, once again, we must humbly confess that, on this subject, we can only speculate because the Scriptures are totally silent.

From these Biblical examples that we have noted, we may conclude the following:

In the pre-Mosaic times, when the proposals were accepted and the marriage price given, the bridegroom could come at once and take away his bride to his own house (cf. Genesis 24:63-67). But in general the marriage was celebrated by a feast in the house of the bride's parents, to which all friends were invited (cf. Genesis 29:22, 27); and on the day of the marriage the bride, concealed under a thick veil was conducted to her future husband's home.³

Marriage: After the law

With the introduction of Moses into the Biblical narrative, we come to the second half of the Old Testament. Here we are told how the LORD God selected Moses to lead the children of Israel out of Egyptian bondage and to the land that the LORD God had promised to the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. After a miraculous deliverance from Egypt and a journey that led them across the Sinai Peninsula and through the depths of the Red Sea, the Israelites soon arrived at Mount Sinai where they received the laws of God. These laws included the moral, the ceremonial, and the civil laws—all of which they were expected to obey as God's chosen people. And it should be noted that, within these laws, God gave His people two important stipulations regarding marriage that they were to observe.

Marrying a non-Israelite

The law of God clearly stated that the Israelites were not to choose a mate from any other nation; instead, Israelites were to only marry Israelites. Though this law may seem to be harsh and racially prejudiced, it was actually given because of the spiritual dangers that God knew those marriages would create for His chosen people. This point is clearly portrayed in the following Scriptures:

And thou take of their daughters unto thy sons, and their daughters go a whoring after their gods, and make thy sons go a whoring after their gods. (Exodus 34:16)

Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son. For they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of the LORD be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly. (Deuteronomy 7:3-4)

Of course, any time men foolishly choose to ignore or disobey God's laws, there will always be tragic consequences. This is clearly seen in the story of Solomon—the wisest man who ever lived (1 Kings 3:12). However, the sad record shows how that the wisest of men became the greatest of fools. You see, because of his love for women from other nations, Solomon ignored the law of God and the result is clearly stated when the Bible declares

it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his

God, as was the heart of David his father. (1 Kings 11:4)

Because of the fact that his heart had been turned away from the LORD his God, the Bible declares (1 Kings 11:7-8) that Solomon—the same man who had built that glorious Temple for the LORD God in Jerusalem—built temples for Chemosh and Molech, and joined with his wives in worshipping their pagan gods.

When the leadership of the nation was involved in such things, it certainly comes as no surprise to find that the people of Israel also

were mingled among the heathen, and learned their works. (Psalm 106:35)

Bottom line: Because of the spiritual dangers that come from marrying people of a different faith, it is no wonder that this same principle is very clearly reiterated in the New Testament, when the Apostle Paul declared that Christians should only marry other Christians. He said in very clear terms that believers in Jesus Christ should not be

unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness?

and what communion hath light with darkness? (2 Corinthians 6:14)

So the law of God was very straightforward—no man or woman among the children of Israel was to choose or marry a spouse from any other nation. And the reason was because of the grave spiritual dangers that would be involved in such relationships.

Marrying a near kinsman

According to the commandments of God's law, the Israelites were not only prohibited to marry people from other nations, but they were also banned from marrying a near kinsmen from their own nation. It is no secret that in Biblical times, men would sometimes marry their sisters. This is the obvious answer to the age-old question, "Where did Cain get his wife?" (Genesis 4:16-17)

Since Adam lived 930 years (Genesis 5:5), it does not require a stretch of the imagination to understand that Adam and Eve certainly had more than those three sons who are named in Scripture (Cain, Abel and Seth). During the centuries of their married life together, Adam and Eve certainly had many other children who are not named in Scripture; and certainly some of those children would have been females who would have grown up to become wives for their brothers, so that

they might reproduce and fill earth with people as the LORD God had commanded (Genesis 1:28).

As the number of humans and families increased on the earth, it then became common for a man to marry a half sister. That was exactly what Abraham did when he married Sarah (Genesis 20:12). However, with the giving of the law on Mount Sinai, this commonly accepted practice became strictly forbidden. In no uncertain terms, the LORD God made very clearly declared,

None of you shall approach to any that is near of kin to him, to uncover their nakedness: I am the LORD.
(Leviticus 18:6)

The chapter then goes on to specifically prohibit sexual relations (and thereby an marriage relationship) between a man and his mother, his father's wife (i.e., his stepmother), his father's sister, his father's brother's wife, his mother's sister, his wife's mother, his sister, his half sister, his brother's wife, his wife's sister, his daughter, his wife's daughter (i.e., his step daughter), or his daughter-in-law.

Today, we would classify these relationships between close family members as being incestuous—and, in many nations even today,

incest is not only against the laws of God, but is also against the laws of civilized lands.

However, in the law of God, there was one exception to this law prohibiting a man from marrying someone of near kin. And that exception was in the case of a man who died childless and had no heir to carry on his name. In such a case, the LORD God commanded that a surviving brother was to marry his departed brother's wife, and to produce a child that would carry on the name of his brother (Deuteronomy 25:5-9). One Bible Dictionary has noted that

The law which regulates this has been named the 'levirate,' from the Latin *levir*, 'brother-in-law.'⁴

While the Scriptures go to some length in discussing the laws surrounding the institution of marriage, we can clearly observe that—in all of the laws and statutes that the LORD God gave to the nation of Israel—there is nothing that can be found regarding how the actual marriage ceremony was to be conducted. However, even though the Bible is silent on these things, many Bible commentators have written numerous pages discussing various aspects of the Jewish marriage celebration which may be very interesting, and even, to some degree, instructive.

However—since the Scriptures, as we have just mentioned, is silent on these things—we must ask where these Bible commentators got all of their information concerning the customs and traditions of a Jewish marriage? George B. Eager very candidly answers that question when he stated,

There is a disappointing uncertainty as to the exact ceremonies or proceedings connected with marriage in Bible times. We have to paint our picture from allusions or descriptions, and from what we know of Jewish and Arabic customs.⁵

So the simple fact is this: When it comes to the Old Testament Scriptures—before and after the giving of God’s law—there are absolutely no instructions that are given concerning the performing of the wedding ceremony.

Inter-Testament Marriages

Chapter 2

After the ministry of the prophet Malachi (which ended around 425 BC), we come to a period of Bible history which is known as the “four hundred silent years”—a period when there was no new revelation from God. This was the tragic period that was foretold by the prophet Amos when he wrote,

Behold, the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD. (Amos 8:11)

Now since this was the period of God’s silence, it is obvious that no new laws or instructions would be added to that which we have already seen. Therefore, in this section, I want us to consider the development of the marriage customs that were held by three key societies during this period of world history—that is, the marriage customs of the Greeks, the Romans, and the Jews.

The Greeks

Around 400 BC, the Greeks saw marriage as being simply a matter of convenience. In other words, marriage was the way men could fulfill their duty to produce the next generation of male citizens who would contribute to the economic and military growth of their nation. Therefore, in most of Grecian society, the woman was considered to be the inferior sex whose only purpose was to bear legitimate children for the future good of the nation.¹ As a result, the Greeks considered adultery to be a crime punishable by death—not because they viewed it as a wicked sin against God; but simply because they viewed it a interference to the harmony of the state.

However, around 450 BC, the morality of the Grecian society began to change. Since the men of Greece were not allowed to marry foreign females (as that would destroy the purity of Grecian blood), those foreign women were left to provide for themselves. And one of the ways that they were allowed to take care of themselves was by choosing a life of prostitution—that is, to make their living by working as a professional companion or courtesan. It was because of this, some years later, that Demosthenes (384-322 BC), who is claimed to have been the greatest orator of ancient Greece, clearly stated the popular attitude of his day by saying,

Mistresses we keep for the sake of pleasure, concubines for the daily care of our persons, but wives to bear us legitimate children and to be faithful guardians of our households.²

So, for the most part, the idea of a man's fidelity and faithfulness to his spouse was a concept that was totally foreign to the people of Greece. For them, the marriage ceremony was nothing more than a formal, legal ceremony that would give them the legitimate children needed for the growth, defense and stability of their nation.

In the Grecian culture of those days, a girl was considered ready for marriage around the age of fourteen. The man, however, would usually not marry until after he had fulfilled his military obligations and was around thirty years of age.

The marriage of a girl would be arranged by her father or guardian. At the betrothal ceremony, both families would make a formal declaration of intent and a dowry would be specified. The value of the dowry, according to the custom of that day, was to be equal to at least one-tenth of the bride's father's estate. But the betrothal was not a binding agreement and it could be broken by either side without damage.

On the day of the marriage celebration, a ceremony and wedding feast would be prepared at the home of the bride. The bride's father would pay the promised dowry and then the great feast would be enjoyed. Along with the feasting, there would be a religious ceremony. This ceremony naturally involved the offering of sacrifices by the bride and the groom to the various Grecian gods. For example, they would offer sacrifices to Hymen (the god of marriage) and Aphrodite (the goddess of fertility who they believed would make their marriage to become a fruitful union with many children).

Following the wedding feast, the groom would take his bride's hand and the father would officially give his daughter away by saying, "In front of witnesses I give this girl to you for the production of legitimate children." Then, the family and friends would form a procession which was followed by a bridal chariot. This procession—accompanied by the playing of musical instruments with singing and dancing—would escort the couple to the groom's house.

When the party arrived at the groom's home, his mother would welcome her daughter-in-law to her new home. After this, the new couple would engage in a mock battle which was always ended by the victorious groom

carrying his “captured bride” over the threshold into his own house. Once inside the house, in the presence of family and friends, the groom would then remove his bride’s veil, which was the symbol of her virginity. The couple then entered the bridal chamber and the families and friends would wait outside until the announcement was finally made that the marriage had been successfully consummated.³

The Romans

Historians have told us that the ancient Romans were originally more virtuous and chaste than their Grecian neighbors. This is because, in the early days of Roman history, marriage was monogamous and even seen as a sacred institution. In fact, in order to encourage their citizens to be married, the Romans passed a law in 413 BC which levied a special tax on all bachelors.

However, as time passed, Rome began to sink into a moral abyss. After the Punic Wars (265-241 BC and 218-211 BC), the morality of Rome continued its downward spiral from bad to worse. Even though the official penalty for adultery was death, according to the thinking of their perverted minds, the Romans did not consider sexual encounters with slaves or public prostitutes to be adultery.

Eventually, the keeping of a “concubine” became legally acceptable and morally respectable. The status of a concubine was considered to be somewhat below that of the legal wife, but still higher than a mere prostitute. This practice of keeping a concubine became so firmly entrenched in the Roman culture that even St. Augustine—we will say more about him later—did not dare to condemn it *if* the legal wife was found to be barren and unable to produce an heir for her husband.

Similar to the Grecian culture, in the Roman culture girls would marry at a young age—usually at the age of fourteen. The girl’s father or guardian would choose a husband and make the required arrangements, including the size of the dowry to be given, with the family of the man who had been chosen. While a formal betrothal was considered good form, it was not legally necessary—and, just like in Grecian traditions, the betrothal was not considered to be legally binding.

At the betrothal, the man would present his promised bride with a ring which she would wear on the third finger of her left hand—a custom that is still followed today when the man places an engagement ring on the finger of his intended bride. The reason for this was simply because the Romans romantically

believed that a nerve or sinew ran directly from that finger to the heart. Additionally, it was also customary for the promised bride to give a gift to her intended husband.

On the day of the marriage itself, the bride would be dressed by her mother in a white wedding tunic and veil. The white-colored dress and veil were to symbolize her purity and virginity—a custom that is also still followed today. Along with her wedding dress, the bride would wear a belt around her waist that was tied in the “knot of Hercules”. In Roman tradition, Hercules was the guardian of married of life; therefore, this knot could only be untied by the groom—a similar tradition is observed in today’s weddings when the groom removes a garter from his bride’s leg.

According to Roman custom, no marriage license was issued by the state. Roman marriages became legal when the bride and groom publicly showed their consent to the marriage union. This act showed that they were not being forced into the marriage union against their will, and it was normally done by the couple simply joining hands in the presence of at least ten witnesses. After this, the couple would stand before a priest and chant vows, promising to be loyal and faithful companions to one another.

Once the vows of faithfulness were exchanged, the bride and groom would then sit on stools, facing an altar. The priest would offer a sacrifice—usually a cake—to the god Jupiter. After the sacrifice was offered, the bride and groom would then eat the cake in the presence of the witnesses. Again, this is a tradition of cutting and eating cake is still seen in many wedding ceremonies even today.

Once the religious portion of the wedding ceremony had been completed, a great feast would be served. When the feasting was finished, the mother of the bride would hold her daughter in her arms while the groom pretended to wrestle her away. All of the guests would then join in a festive procession to the home of the groom.

After the procession arrived at the groom's home, he would carry his bride over the threshold—a custom that is still followed by many today. There, the bride and groom would once again offer prayers to their various pagan gods, and then they would proceed into the bridal chamber where they would consummate their marriage.⁴

The Jews

Like the Greeks and the Romans, the Jews also married at a young age—the norm was around the age of thirteen. However, in

considering the marriage customs of the Jewish peoples, there were several points in which they clearly differed from their Grecian and Roman counterparts.

In the betrothal agreement

As we have already pointed out, the betrothal of a man and woman in both the Grecian and the Roman cultures were actually non-binding agreements that could be broken by either party, at any time, and for any reason. However, this was not the case in a Jewish betrothal. In the Jewish culture, a betrothal was actually a legally binding agreement. One writer has accurately stated that

Betrothal with the ancient Hebrews was of a more formal and far more binding nature than the 'engagement' is with us. Indeed, it was esteemed a part of the transaction of marriage, and that the most binding part.⁵

When a couple was betrothed, there would be a feast which mainly served as a setting for the paying of the dowry to the bride's parents. This was also different from the practices of the Greeks and Romans because, in their cultures, the dowry was paid to the parents of the groom.

The reason for this difference was simply because the Jewish people understood that the family of the bride were giving their flesh and blood to this new union that would in reality enlarge the family of the groom. Therefore, the payment of the dowry was a compensation to the bride's family and was considered as a wedding gift.⁶ One writer has well pointed out that when the marriage was consummated, the husband received a wife, and the family of the wife had a dowry.⁷

Once the dowry had been given in the presence of witnesses, the betrothal was officially concluded and could not be changed without major considerations. The reason for this was because, in the Jewish betrothal ceremony, the future bride and groom would actually exchange vows. These vows were promises made to one another, that they would be loyal and faithful during the period of their betrothal. This is why, the Bible states that

the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused (i.e., betrothed) to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a publick example, was minded to put her away privily. (Matthew 1:18-19)

In other words, when Mary became pregnant out of wedlock, Joseph—her fiancé and intended husband (notice in the text he was already called her “husband” *before* they had come together)—had two choices available to him: (1) he could make an example of Mary by having her publicly put to death for her infidelity (Deuteronomy 22:23-24); or (2) he could quietly put her away by going to the officials and getting a writing of divorcement that would officially break their engagement.

In the religious setting

We noted before how that, in both the Grecian and Roman cultures, the religious aspects of the marriage ceremony were very prominent. In both cultures, going to pagan temples and offering sacrifices to the various gods was an important part of the marriage ceremonies. However, nothing of the kind was ever found among God’s chosen people. In fact, H.D. Preuss makes this point abundantly clear when he states,

There was no religious rite that was performed with the concluding of the marriage, although there was a feast at the conclusion of the festivities. ⁸

In other words, for Jews, there were no trips to the Temple and there were no sacrifices

offered on the altar. However, this should NOT be interpreted as meaning that the Jews did not consider marriage to be a sacred and holy institution. The fact is, the Jews held an extremely high view of marriage. They were strongly opposed to infidelity or unfaithfulness in marriage. In fact, they—in both the Old Testament and the New Testament—considered infidelity to be a terrible sin against the LORD God which was punishable by stoning the guilty persons to death (Leviticus 20:10; John 8:4-5).

It might be noted here that some have foolishly imagined that the Lord Jesus was actually condoning adultery when He refused to pass judgment on that woman who was brought to Him in John 8. However, that is an absolutely false and foolish supposition. A simple reading of the account will reveal that this woman had been caught in the “very act” of adultery (John 8:4). Now if the accusation was indeed true—which, apparently it was because Jesus did not dispute the claim—then, according to the law, *both* the man and the woman should have been stoned to death (Deuteronomy 22:22-24).

Therefore, if they had really been caught in the “very act”, as those religious leaders claimed, why weren’t they accusing the guilty man as well? My own personal opinion is that he was one of their colleagues! Why?

Because of the motive behind their actions, which is clearly stated for us in the text – i.e., they were not really interested in seeing God’s law obeyed; they were only seeking to find something that they could use to find fault with the Lord Jesus (John 8:6). In other words, John 8 does not teach or even imply that the Lord Jesus excused adultery—in fact, the very opposite is seen when He commanded the woman to go and sin no more (John 8:11). Rather, the point of the whole story is to simply show how deeply the Lord Jesus hates the hypocritical deceitfulness of religious men!

However, be that as it may, the high view of marriage which was held by the Jewish people was clearly reflected in the teachings of the Rabbis. They taught that wedded life was the most natural and exalted state—that the unmarried man would be doomed to live without joy, without blessing, without good, without the Torah, without a wall of protection, and without peace. In fact, they considered marriage to be so important that they even permitted men to sell a scroll of the law—something considered to be extremely sacred and holy—if the money received from the sale was used for the purpose of getting married. The Rabbis even went so far as to foolishly declare that at the marriage ceremony, all sins were forgiven!⁹

In the marriage ceremony

Even though their betrothal ceremonies were quite different, the Grecian, Roman, and Jewish marriage ceremonies were very similar—the only real difference being, as we have already noted, the religious aspects of each.

According to the Jewish wedding traditions, on the wedding day itself, the bride's family would prepare a huge feast at their home. During this time of feasting, both the bride and groom would have attendants to serve them like they were royalty.

After the feasting was over, there would be a procession that would escort the couple from the home of the bride to the home of the groom. Upon their arrival, the couple would retire to the bridal chamber where the marriage would be consummated. The next morning, the evidence which showed that the bride had truly been a virgin when she went to the marriage bed would be presented to her family. This would serve as a type of "insurance" to protect the bride from later being slandered by her husband, and put away unjustly (Deuteronomy 22:13-19).

As we bring this chapter to a close, our obvious conclusion can only be that during this period of God's silence, no new

commands concerning the marriage ceremony were given. However, during this period of history, I am quite certain that men might have—and probably did—add many of their own traditions and customs to the marriage ceremonies within their respective cultures. However, there were absolutely no new instructions from the LORD God concerning the marriage ceremony.

New Testament Marriages

Chapter 3

The four hundred years of silence (which we dealt with in the previous chapter) finally ended with the birth and the ministry of John the Baptist. John came on the scene preaching the message of repentance toward God (Matthew 3:1-2), and introducing to the nation of Israel their long awaited Messiah, the living Word of God (John 1:29-30).

Just as we demonstrated in our discussion of the Old Testament, we are also going to notice that the New Testament may be divided into two parts. The first part deals with the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself; the second part deals with the ministry of the Apostles.

The ministry of Jesus Christ

When it comes to a discussion of the four Gospels, it is important for us to remember that they are actually part of a transitional link between the Old and New Testaments. That is why the Scriptures make it very clear that while John the Baptist was the first preacher of the Gospel of Jesus Christ (Mark 1:1-4), he

was also the last of the Old Testament prophets (Matthew 11:13).

Therefore, since no new commands or instructions were given during the four hundred years of God's silence, it is safe to conclude that during those days when Jesus Christ walked on this earth, the marriage customs were basically the same as those that we outlined in the previous chapter. As far as we know from the Gospel record, on at least one occasion, the Lord Jesus honored the traditional Jewish customs of marriage by attending a wedding celebration with His disciples (John 2:1). In fact, He used that most happy occasion as a platform where He accomplished two great things: (1) He performed the first of His many miracles when He turned the water into wine; and, (2) He revealed His power and glory to His newly chosen disciples (John 2:11).

Later on, we find the Lord Jesus gave a very clear statement concerning the permanence of the marriage relationship when He said,

What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.
(Matthew 19:6 and Mark 10:9)

Some would take this to conclude that God's joining together of a man and wife must be done through a religious ceremony, standing

before a pastor or priest, under the sanctions and/or authority of a church. However, that point cannot be proven; in fact, the context of the verses in question clearly paint a totally different picture. Consider the context where Jesus states,

Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?
(Matthew 19:4-5)

This threefold statement of Jesus Christ is very clear. It states that (1) the man leaves his parents, (2) the man cleaves to, or is joined to, his wife, and that (3) the two of them become one flesh. In other words, God does not make them to become one flesh until they have taken steps one and two.

Now men may read into this whatever they like (that is between them and God), but based on a historical, grammatical, and literal interpretation of the Scriptures, it is absolutely impossible to use this passage as a “proof text” that Jesus Christ was turning the marriage ceremony into a religious rite or—as some will teach—a sacrament of the church.

Therefore, in our search for the “Christian wedding,” we must honestly confess that even during the earthly ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, there is absolutely nothing that is said about it. At no time during His earthly ministry of some three and a half years did Jesus ever change the rules, or add anything new, to the traditional marriage customs that were followed in the Jewish nation.

The ministry of the Apostles

Like the Lord Jesus Christ who preceded them, it should also be noted that, even though several of the New Testament writers spoke about the relationship between a husband and wife after marriage, none of them wrote anything concerning how a couple should become husband and wife.

The greatest example of this is seen in the most prolific of the New Testament writers—the Apostle Paul. He is credited with having been used of God to pen some fifty-one percent of the New Testament (i.e., 14 out of 27 books, if you credit the book of Hebrews to his pen). But even so, in all of his writings, the Apostle Paul never laid down any guidelines or instructions concerning how to conduct a “Christian” wedding. Therefore, I would have to agree with George Eager when he states,

There is nothing in the record of the teachings of Jesus and of His apostles to indicate that they gave to marriage any new social content, custom or sanction. They simply accepted it as it existed in the conventionalized civilization of the Jews of their day and used it and the customs connected with it for ethical or illustrative purposes.¹

In fact, I will even dare to take this one logical step further. The Apostle Paul was the great missionary of the first century AD who carried the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles and established Gentile churches throughout the Roman world. Then, as he was led by the Holy Spirit of God, the Apostle Paul wrote epistles to those Gentile churches that he had started in order to give them instructions and directions in various doctrinal matters. But, in studying those church epistles—which outline for us the doctrines and the polity of a New Testament church—it is obvious that the Apostle Paul never instructed any of those Gentile churches to adopt Jewish, or any other kind of, wedding customs.

To support this evidence, we might consider the judgments which were issued during that first church counsel (Acts 15). You will remember that there were certain Jewish elements in those days who believed that in

order for Gentiles to really be saved, they first of all had to become Jewish—i.e., they had to be circumcised. This was clearly the position of those men that are mentioned in the Bible when it states that

certain men which came down from Judaea [and] taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.” (Acts 15:1)

Now it is interesting to notice that these men were referred to as “certain men.” In other words, they were not true “brethren” simply because they had no understanding of God’s saving grace. That is why the Apostle Paul (Galatians 2:4) very candidly referred to those same men as “false brethren.” However, the sad fact is that those unsaved men began teaching “the brethren,” and the result was that “the brethren” began to be affected and led astray in their thinking. It is most certainly a terrible tragedy indeed, when God’s people begin to allow unsaved teachers to shape their theology and church polity! Therefore, because of the influence of those unsaved teachers, we are told that

there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise

them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses. (Acts 15:5)

Why did those believing men (men who had actually been saved) think it was “needful” for Gentiles to be circumcised and keep the law? It was simply because, even though those believers rejected the idea that Gentiles had to become Jewish in order to be saved, they could easily give their consent to the idea that Gentiles could never really be the “good Christians” (i.e., spiritual Christians) that they ought to be until they had submitted to the laws and regulations of Judaism.

As a result of this conflict, a meeting was called in Jerusalem so that this matter might be settled once and for all. In the course of that meeting, we are told that the Apostle Peter stood and gave his testimony of God’s workings in the house of the Roman centurion named Cornelius (Acts 15:6-11). Then Paul and Barnabas gave their testimonies of all that God had done among the Gentiles that they had met in various places during their first missionary journey (Acts 15:12). And once the evidence had been heard, James, the pastor of the church in Jerusalem, made his judgment and gave his verdict. He said the

sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: But that we write unto

them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood.
(Acts 15:19-20)

Of course, the purpose of these four requests was *not* an effort to bring Gentiles under the bondage of the Old Testament law; rather, it was so those Gentiles might not, by the liberty they had in Christ, become a stumbling block that would hinder Jewish people who were living in Gentile lands (Acts 15:21) from accepting Jesus Christ as their Saviour. That is the very reason why James continued by saying,

For (i.e., because of the fact that) Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day.
(Acts 15:21)

As a result of that decision, it was determined that letters would be sent to the Gentile churches—and in those letters we find the following advice was given:

For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from

which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well. (Acts 15:28-29)

Now, of the four things that James asked the Gentile believers to observe, there is only one that applies to the topic of our discussion, and that is abstaining from fornication. This term comes from the Greek *porneia*, which refers to all kinds of illicit and perverted sexual activity. In other words, it would cover all such sins as adultery and fornication (i.e., sexual relations outside the bonds of marriage); and it would also include those sexual acts of incest, homosexuality, lesbianism, bestiality, *etc.*²

In other words, the leaders of the Jewish church were not requiring that Gentiles follow Jewish customs in their marriage ceremonies; rather, they were simply asking that those Gentile believers would abstain from living in immorality and practicing sexual sins so that the salvation of other Jewish peoples might not be hindered.

So this is why the Apostle Paul never wrote any instructions to the Gentile churches which he started concerning the idea of a “Christian marriage” ceremony. He was obviously content with allowing Gentile men and women to be married according to the laws and customs of their own lands and cultures, without any interference, as long as those

laws and customs did not violate any clearly stated Biblical principles.

Therefore, we may conclude, as far as the Apostles and the early church were concerned, the way a wife submitted to the authority of her own husband (Ephesians 5:22-24), and the way a man loved and honored his own wife (Ephesians 5:25-29), as Christ loved the church, were more important than the marriage ceremonies that they may have gone through in order to become husband and wife. That is why, in all of the New Testament, no commands or instructions were ever given concerning how or where a marriage ceremony was to be conducted.

Marriages In Church History

Chapter 4

To the merely curious student of history, it becomes clearly obvious that the actions and mistakes of past generations are often times seen being repeated by the subsequent generations. This, of course, perfectly agrees with what the wise man, King Solomon, said in Ecclesiastes when he wrote,

The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun.
(Ecclesiastes 1:9)

Throughout history, men have tried to add to—or take away from—the Word of God in order to force the Scriptures to lineup with their own way of thinking. Of course, this is done in spite of the fact that God has very clearly warned us against trifling with His Word on at least four different occasions (cf. Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:32; Proverbs 30:6; Revelation 22:18-19).

For example, during the Old Testament period, God gave His people a set of laws which He required them to obey. However,

with the passing of time, certain men came on the scene—men who were greatly loved and highly respected by the people—who began to introduce some of their own ideas. The ideas and opinions of those beloved Rabbis soon became “Jewish traditions” which eventually became deeply entrenched in the lives of the Jewish people. The depth of those roots is clearly seen when we consider the burning question of Jesus when He asked,

Why do ye . . . transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? (Matthew 15:3)

Then came the stinging accusation when the Lord Jesus declared that those teachers who were so beloved—and thought to be so highly spiritual by the people—were actually guilty of having

made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition. (Matthew 15:6)

In other words, the traditions of those religious men had become so deeply entrenched in the lives of the Jewish people that their traditions were esteemed to have an authority that was equal with—or superior to—the Scriptures. And it was that attitude toward God’s Word which, in fact, canceled out its effectiveness to work in their lives. That is why the Lord Jesus

went on to condemn those religious men by declaring that their worship was not acceptable to God because they were guilty of “teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (Matthew 15:9).

The great tragedy is that this same error that was found in the Jewish nation can also be found in this church age. And one of the points where this tragic truth is most clearly seen is in the matter of the church’s teaching on the subject of marriage.

We have seen in the preceding chapter how that neither the Lord Jesus, nor the Apostles, ever gave any hint or suggestion that marriage was to become a ministry or sacrament of the church. But with the passing of the Apostles (the Apostle John was the last to die in 100 AD) a group of men came on the scene who are known in church history as the *Apostolic Fathers*. These were basically good and godly men. In fact, many of them died as martyrs for their faith in Jesus Christ. But these men, as great as they were, were just men. Therefore, we find in their writings that they began to sow some wild theological seeds by adding their own ideas and traditions to the Word of God.

For example, two of these *Apostolic Fathers* were Polycarp (69-155 AD) and Ignatius (80-115 AD). Both of these men had been

disciples of, and coworkers with, the Apostle John. Both of these men would eventually die a martyr's death rather than deny their faith in Jesus Christ. But, because they were fallible men, Ignatius wrote an epistle to Polycarp in which he said that it

becomes both men and women who marry, to form their union with the approval of the bishop (i.e., their pastor), that their marriage may be according to God, and not after their own lust. Let all things be done to the honor of God.¹

Now, on the surface, this certainly was—and still is—some really good advice! I would most certainly recommend that any young couple who is seriously contemplating marriage ought to seek Godly, spiritual counsel from their pastor. However, there is not one single verse to be found in all of the Bible which declares that a marriage ceremony must be approved of, and performed by, an ordained pastor in order for that marriage to be clean and acceptable in the sight of God!

However, regardless of that fact—as has been demonstrated time after time in history—the advice of great men may be (and, unfortunately, often times is) carried to an unhealthy extreme by their followers. As one

friend of mine has often times said, “What parents do in moderation, their children will do in excess.” And that was certainly true in this case. Both Ignatius and Polycarp were men who were very highly esteemed and honored by the first century saints. The truth of that statement is clearly evident when we consider the statement of church historian Philip Schaff who wrote

The church at Smyrna counted the bones of Polycarp more precious than gold or diamonds. The remains of Ignatius were held in equal veneration by the Christians in Antioch.²

Because of the great adoration and respect that was held for those good and godly men, the advice which they gave was gradually elevated to a high position. That is, because of their influence, the “idea seeds” which they sowed (e.g., of turning a marriage ceremony into a religious rite just as the Greeks and Romans had done) soon began to grow into a great forest of outright lies and heretical teachings.

The growth of marriage as a “sacrament”

As a first year student at Baptist Bible College in Springfield, Missouri (1972), I remember Dr. Noel Smith would say, “Gentlemen, before you discuss any subject, define your terms.”

Even though that advice was given many years ago, I am convinced that it is still wise and valid counsel which we should all gladly seek to follow.

So, what exactly is meant when we hear of a “sacrament” within a religious institution? To answer that question we might turn to *The Oxford English Reference Dictionary* (Oxford University Press; Second Edition; 1996), where we will find that a sacrament is clearly defined as

a religious ceremony or act of the Christian Churches regarded as an outward and visible sign of inward and spiritual grace.

The *Catholic Encyclopedia* will basically give us the same definition; however, there is one deadly addition that will be found. It states,

According to the teaching of the Catholic Church, accepted today by many Episcopalians, the sacraments of the Christian dispensation are not mere signs; they do not merely signify Divine grace, but in virtue of their Divine institution, they cause that grace in the souls of men.³

In other words, according to the tenets of Roman Catholicism, the observing of the

various sacraments of the church is the means whereby men might receive the grace of God. That is certainly the meaning that is clearly expressed in the Roman Catholic Catechism. In discussing the sacraments of Roman Catholicism, their Catechism claims that the sacraments of their church

are efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the church, *by which divine life is dispensed to us* (emphasis mine).⁴

So the grace of God, and the spiritual life which we have, according to Roman Catholic teaching, must come through the sacraments of the church. This heresy, of course, flies in the face of the clear teachings of the Apostle Paul. In writing his Epistle to the Romans, the Apostle Paul declared

at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace. And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work. (Romans 11:5-6)

In other words, to say that God's grace is received as the result of our works is to literally and absolutely deny the existence of God's grace. The truth concerning the giving

of God's grace was clearly stated by the Apostle John when he wrote,

For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.
(John 1:17)

The Apostle Paul also explains that this grace is activated not by man's works (i.e, the keeping of certain sacraments) but by faith in Jesus Christ. That is the wonderful truth that was so plainly stated when the Apostle Paul declared,

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

Therefore, according to the plain and consistent teaching of God's Word, God's grace has come to us through the person of the Lord Jesus Christ; and that grace of God is made to be a reality in our lives when we put our faith and trust in Him.

However, in spite of the clear teachings of the Scriptures, the writings of influential men—like Peter the Lombard (1100-1160 AD) and St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274 AD)—led to a series of church councils in the 13th century AD which produced an official listing of seven sacraments by which, so it was claimed, men

might receive God's grace. These were the sacraments of (1) baptism, (2) confirmation, (3) Eucharist (i.e., the Mass), (4) penance (i.e., confessing sins to a priest and receiving forgiveness), (5) extreme unction (i.e., the anointing of the sick and dying), (6) Holy Orders (i.e., ordination to the priesthood), and (7) marriage.

As we have already shown, there is no Biblical basis for the existence of any of these sacraments. However, an even greater wonder is why would men ever think of declaring marriage to be a sacrament of the church? Obviously, such an idea was simply the fruit that grew out of that "idea seed" that was sown back in the first century AD.

Be that as it may, however, there were times when the exaltation of marriage as a sacrament or rule of the church met with some opposition. For example, history records for us the following:

At the general council of Nice, 325, it was proposed indeed, probably by the Western bishop Hosius, to forbid entirely the marriage of priests; but the motion met with strong opposition, and was rejected.⁵

However, in spite of the opposition that was sometimes raised against the church banning

its ministers from being married, many church leaders held a negative sentiment toward marriage and felt that it was a barrier to effectively serving God and should therefore be disregarded.

Therefore, the seed that had been sown so many years before continued to grow. Now in order to trace the growth of marriage as a sacrament of the church, let's go back and consider several key figures that we find in church history.

Tertullian

Tertullian (160-220 AD) was born in Carthage which was located on the coast of North Africa. His father was a Roman centurion and, as a young man, Tertullian had returned to Rome where he was trained for a career in law and, for a time, practiced that honorable profession. However, between 190 and 195 AD, Tertullian was converted to Christianity and, a few years later (197 AD), he returned to Carthage where he was married and became the pastor of the church. Later he aligned himself with the Montanists (207 AD) and became a key figure in that movement.

As a devout and zealous champion of Christianity, Tertullian wrote many theological treatises which were designed to either defend Christianity, refute heresy, or argue

some practical point of morality or church discipline. One of the books which Tertullian wrote was dedicated to his wife. At the close of that book, he wrote,

How can I paint the happiness of a marriage which the church ratifies, the oblation [taking 'holy communion'] confirms, the benediction seals, angels announce, the Father declares valid...⁶

The point we want to observe is simply this—after only one century, the “seed idea” of Ignatius was clearly beginning to take root in the minds of men. Therefore, even in the early days of the church, the solemnization of a marriage had already become a religious act, though not yet a proper sacrament, which was sealed by the observing of the Lord’s Supper in the presence of the church.

St. Ambrose

One of the most celebrated of the “Fathers of the Church” was St. Ambrose (339-397 AD). In his early life, he studied law and then entered into civil service. In 370 AD, Ambrose was appointed as governor and his headquarters was located in the city of Milan. Because of his great kindness and wisdom in administering the affairs of that local government, Ambrose was greatly loved by

the people. In fact, he was so beloved by the citizens of Milan that he was called to be pastor of their church (374 AD)—the same church that was said to have been started by Barnabas, the missionary partner of the Apostle Paul.⁷

After becoming the pastor, Ambrose thought it would be a good idea for him to be baptized and become a member of the church that had called him to be their pastor. Of course, it should be stated that Ambrose knew nothing of the saving grace of God because he believed it was the waters of baptism, not the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 John 1:7), that would cleanse him of his sins.⁸

It should also be noted that, contrary to the position stated by some scholars, history proves that Ambrose never espoused the seven sacraments of Roman Catholicism. In fact, we are told that

Ambrose of Milan, in the six books *De Sacramentis* ascribed to him, mention[ed] only three sacraments: baptism, confirmation, and the Lord's supper.⁹

Therefore, we may conclude that during the first four hundred years of church history, even though the marriage ceremony had been turned into a religious rite, the “sacrament of

matrimony” was not yet really a sacrament at all. However, that would change very soon.

St. Augustine

During his ministry in the city of Milan (in the year of 387 AD) St. Ambrose baptized a young man by the name of Augustine (354-430 AD). This man eventually became St. Augustine, who is most noted as being the Latin Church Father who did more to establish Roman Catholic doctrine than any other “Christian” theologian.

In his early years, St. Augustine, proclaimed that the “chief sacraments” of the church were baptism and the Lord’s Supper. However, it was with St. Augustine that we begin to see a real change taking place, because it was not long before he added to his list of sacraments the following—confirmation, marriage, and ordination.¹⁰

Based on the works and writings of St. Augustine, marriage was not only a ceremony performed by the church, but it became one of the sacraments of the church by which God’s grace could be realized in the lives of people.

Pope Gregory VII

An amazing thing about religion (i.e., any system of belief that is based on man’s

teachings instead of the Word of God) is that it always proves to be inconsistent. And such was the case with the sacrament of matrimony. Church historian Philip Schaff speaks of this inconsistency when he writes,

Many of the early fathers had endeavored to establish the connection between celibacy and sanctity, and to persuade men that those who were wedded to the church should avoid the contamination of an earthly union. Several of the popes had also advocated celibacy; but, unless under the severest personal discipline or in the strictest monastic communities, it was little observed and probably never enforced beyond the bounds of Italy.¹¹

However, Pope Gregory VII, in March, 1074 AD, called for a large council to be convened in Rome for the purpose of declaring war against two great vices which he had observed in the church. These vices were the marriages of the priests and simony (i.e., the buying of a religious office or position). As a result of that council, it was unanimously decided that no priest should ever marry, and that those priests who were already married should either put away their wives or renounce their priesthood. Gregory's reasoning was that if the priest were allowed

to marry and have children, the priesthood would certainly degenerate into a hereditary caste which would never be completely loyal to the pope or the church.¹²

Naturally this did not set well with those priests who were already happily married. In fact, in a Paris synod which was quickly called after the counsel's decision was made, Pope Gregory's decrees were declared to be unbearable and unreasonable. However, in spite of their sentiments, the will of the pope was eventually obeyed and the law of the church prevailed.

The sadly interesting thing in all of this is that now we find the so-called "vicar of Christ" actually commanding what the Apostle Paul had referred to as "doctrines of devils" (1 Timothy 4:1-3). Similarly, we notice that the very thing which the Apostle Paul set down as being a qualification for pastors (1 Timothy 3:2), the pope denounced as an intolerable vice!

The German reformer, Martin Luther (1483-1546 AD), made a clear reference to this very thing when he said,

The pope . . . has three crowns; and for this reason: the first is against God, for he condemns religion; the second against the emperor, for he

condemns the secular power; the third is against society, for he condemns marriage.”¹³

Another reformer, John Calvin of Geneva (1509-1564 AD), also commented on this same thing when he wrote,

Certainly, when marriage was interdicted to priests, it was done with impious tyranny, not only contrary to the word of God, but contrary to all justice. First, men had no title whatever to forbid what God had left free; secondly, it is too clear to make it necessary to give any lengthened proof that God has expressly provided in his Word that this liberty shall not be infringed.¹⁴

That is a powerful statement that is certainly worthy of a second reading! But, in spite of the fact that Pope Gregory’s commandment was totally contradictory to the clear teachings of God’s Word, a mere 49 years later, at the First Lateran Council (1123 AD) called by Pope Calixtus II (1119-1124 AD), the official position of the Roman Catholic church to forbid the marriage of all priests was ratified and made to be the law of the church.

What a gross inconsistency it is that marriage, which is believed to be a sacrament of the

church that brings God's grace to men, should be denied to the priests of that church! Doesn't that sound just a bit illogical? Absolutely! But such is the way of all religious thought that is not firmly founded on the unchanging truths of God's Word. This should certainly serve as a warning to us all!

The rejection of marriage as a "sacrament"

Even though Roman Catholicism was staunchly claiming that marriage as a sacrament of the church, there were others during that same period of church history who totally rejected those positions that were so obviously contrary to the clear teachings of Scripture.

The Waldenses

One such group were the Waldenses. In spite of their reputation as heretics (according to Roman Catholicism and the pope), these simple believers in Jesus Christ, who loved and honored God's Word above the traditions of men, continued to survive and grow in France, the Piedmont, and Austria. By the way, you can tell an awful lot about people by noticing who their friends are; and by noticing who their enemies are!

Around the year 1100 AD, the bishop of Leige—a man named Deodwinus—wrote a

letter to the king of France. In that letter, he complained against the Waldenses saying,

There is a report come out of France, and which goes through all Germany, that these two [Waldensian preachers named Bruno and Berengarius] do maintain that the Lord's body [the host—the bread that is used in the Mass] is not the body, but a shadow and figure of the Lord's body; and they do disannul lawful marriage, [deny that marriage is a sacrament]; and as far as in them lies, overthrow the baptism of infants.¹⁵

Because they were people of faith who followed the Scriptures alone in all matters of faith and practice, the Waldenses were naturally hated by the Roman Catholic system of religion and by all those who were loyal to the pope. Therefore, in 1119 AD, at the Council of Thoulouse, a sentence was placed against them, and those who would befriend or defend them. The sentence proclaimed,

Moreover, we exclude as heretics from the church of God, and we condemn those who, under the semblance of religion, deny the sacrament of the Lord's body [transubstantiation], the baptism of children, the priesthood and other

ecclesiastical orders, and the bond of legitimate marriage, [or marriage as a sacrament]; and we order that they be delivered over to the secular power. We also bind in the same chain of damnation, their defenders, until they repent.¹⁶

The Albigenses

Another group which we should mention were the Albigenses. This group of true believers in Jesus Christ were primarily found in the south of France. Because of their love for the Word of God and their refusal to bow to the authority of the papal throne, Pope Innocent III denounced them as heretics and, in 1208 AD, launched a crusade of cruel persecutions against them.

Church historian William Jones quotes a Mr. John Gifford, who wrote of the Albigenses in a mean and most slanderous way in his *History of France* (Vol. I; pg. 412). The tirade which he made against those simple believers in Jesus Christ will not be reproduced here except to say,

They represented the Church of Rome as the scarlet whore mentioned in the Revelations. They regarded the sacraments as frivolous things;

considered marriage as a state of prostitution.¹⁷

Of course, this accusation was not totally accurate; it was a half-truth. The Albigenses most certainly *did* believe the Roman church was that “great whore” spoken of by the Apostle John (Revelation 17:1-6). However, the rest of the accusation is absolutely false. The Albigenses were a people who truly honored marriage as an institution which was ordained by God; the problem was, however, that they totally rejected the Roman Catholic teaching that marriage was a sacrament of the church which brought God’s grace to men—and it was that sentiment which brought the wrath of Roman Catholicism, and all those who were loyal to the pope, down on them.

But one the loudest voices to cry out against the Roman Catholic sacrament of marriage was yet to be heard.

The Reformer

On October 31, 1517 AD, a young German monk named Martin Luther nailed his *Ninety-five Thesis* to the door of his Wittenberg church. Three years later, in 1520 AD, Luther officially severed himself from obedience to the pope and the seeds of the “Great Reformation” were sown in Europe.

The next year, in 1521 AD, Martin Luther was excommunicated by Pope Leo X at the Diet of Worms and was imprisoned at Wartburg. One of those who strongly supported the Pope's actions against Luther was the English king, Henry VIII. In fact, King Henry actually wrote a book denouncing Martin Luther. As a result of that display of loyalty to Roman Catholicism and the Roman pope, Henry VIII was rewarded by being given the title, "Defender of the Faith"—a title that is still used today by England's royal family.

One of the complaints which the Roman Catholics had against Martin Luther was that, among other things, Luther plainly taught that "marriage was not a sacrament but a 'worldly thing.'"¹⁸ In other words, the position of Martin Luther was simply that the marriage ceremony between a man and woman was a civil matter over which the church had absolutely no Biblical authority.

With the Biblical teaching of Martin Luther concerning marriage—as well as the other great doctrinal issues that were being discussed during this time concerning the grace of God—the attitudes of the people of Europe began to change toward the teachings of Roman Catholicism. As the years passed, the pope of Rome began to see the proverbial "handwriting on the wall" as their controlling

power over the lives of the people began to gradually slip away.

This departure from Roman Catholicism became more than just a clamoring of passionate rhetoric when, in 1563 AD, the *Heidelberg Catechism* was published and declared to be the official creed of the German Reformed Churches. In the section of that creed which deals with the sacraments of the church, we find

Question 68. How many sacraments has Christ instituted in the new covenant, or testament?

Answer. Two: namely, holy baptism, and the holy supper.¹⁹

In other words, by their creed, those German believers were showing that they absolutely rejected the position of Rome concerning the seven sacraments—and, you need to know, rejection is something that Roman Catholicism will never tolerate. Therefore, it was determined by the pope that something needed be done to stop this “Protestant Reformation.” As a result, the Council of Trent—i.e., the 19th ecumenical council of the Roman Catholic Church—was called to order.

The purpose of this council was twofold: (1) to make a show of dealing with their gross

corruptions and reforming the church of Rome; and (2) to clearly define Roman Catholic doctrine. This council stretched over three distinct time periods: the first, from 1545-1547 AD; the second, from 1551-1552 AD; and the last, from 1561-1563 AD. During those three periods, a total of twenty-five sessions were held dealing with various doctrinal issues. As a result, on January 26, 1564 AD, Pope Pius IV confirmed each of the articles and declared them to be Roman Catholic law.

It was during the twenty-fourth session of the Council of Trent that the Roman Catholic position on the sacrament of marriage was dealt with and clearly defined. In the opening statement, it was written

Whereas therefore matrimony, in the evangelical law, excels in grace, through Christ, the ancient marriages; with reason have our holy Fathers, the Councils, and the tradition of the universal Church, always taught, that it is to be numbered amongst the sacraments of the new law; against which, impious men of this age raging, have not only had false notions touching this venerable sacrament, but, introducing according to their wont, under the pretext of the Gospel, a carnal liberty, they have by

word and writing asserted, not without great injury to the faithful of Christ, many things alien from the sentiment of the Catholic Church.²⁰

It should be noted that in their written statement—look at it again—the pope’s representatives were at least honest enough to say that their position on marriage as a sacrament was based on “our holy Fathers, the Councils, and the tradition of the universal Church.” They did NOT dishonestly claim that their position was based on clear teachings of the Word of God! We should give credit where credit is due.

However, be that as it may, the document then goes on to pronounce twelve “anathema” against anyone who might dare to disagree with their position. Now it should be stated that an “anathema” is the most severe form of excommunication from the Roman Catholic institution because it is something that can never be reversed. Therefore, the Roman church was in fact damning to Hell anyone who would dare to disagree with their view of marriage as a sacrament of the church. The curses placed on those who would dare to disagree with Rome were as follows:

On The Sacrament of Matrimony

CANON I. If any one saith, that matrimony is not truly and properly one of the seven sacraments of the evangelic law, (a sacrament) instituted by Christ the Lord; but that it has been invented by men in the Church; and that it does not confer grace; let him be anathema.

CANON II. If any one saith, that it is lawful for Christians to have several wives at the same time, and that this is not prohibited by any divine law; let him be anathema.

CANON III. If any one saith, that those degrees only of consanguinity and affinity, which are set down in Leviticus, can hinder matrimony from being contracted, and dissolve it when contracted; and that the Church cannot dispense in some of those degrees, or establish that others may hinder and dissolve it; let him be anathema.

CANON IV. If any one saith, that the Church could not establish impediments dissolving marriage; or that she has erred in establishing them; let him be anathema.

CANON V. If any one saith, that on account of heresy, or irksome cohabitation, or the affected absence of one of the parties, the bond of matrimony may be dissolved; let him be anathema.

CANON VI. If any one saith, that matrimony contracted, but not consummated, is not dissolved by the solemn profession of religion by one of the married parties; let him be anathema.

CANON VII. If any one saith, that the Church has erred, in that she hath taught, and doth teach, in accordance with the evangelical and apostolical doctrine, that the bond of matrimony cannot be dissolved on account of the adultery of one of the married parties; and that both, or even the innocent one who gave not occasion to the adultery, cannot contract another marriage, during the life-time of the other; and, that he is guilty of adultery, who, having put away the adulteress, shall take another wife, as also she, who, having put away the adulterer, shall take another husband; let him be anathema.

CANON VIII. If any one saith, that the Church errs, in that she declares that, for many causes, a separation may take place between husband and wife, in regard of bed, or in regard of cohabitation, for a determinate or for an indeterminate period; let him be anathema.

CANON IX. If any one saith, that clerics constituted in sacred orders, or Regulars, who have solemnly professed chastity, are able to contract marriage, and that being contracted it is valid, notwithstanding the ecclesiastical law, or vow; and that the contrary is no thing else than to condemn marriage; and, that all who do not feel that they have the gift of chastity, even though they have made a vow thereof, may contract marriage; let him be anathema: seeing that God refuses not that gift to those who ask for it rightly, neither does He suffer us to be tempted above that which we are able.

CANON X. If any one saith, that the marriage state is to be placed above the state of virginity, or of celibacy, and that it is not better and more blessed to remain in virginity, or in

celibacy, than to be united in matrimony; let him be anathema.

CANON XI. If any one saith, that the prohibition of the solemnization of marriages at certain times of the year, is a tyrannical superstition, derived from the superstition of the heathen; or, condemn the benedictions and other ceremonies which the Church makes use of therein; let him be anathema.

CANON XII. If any one saith, that matrimonial causes do not belong to ecclesiastical judges; let him be anathema. ²¹

With this doctrinal statement, the Catholic church officially declared what had been taught for many centuries—that marriage is a “holy sacrament” of the church that can only be properly administered, in way that is pleasing and acceptable to God, by the church.

However, just eighty-three years later, in 1646 AD, a group of Presbyterian leaders put together their own statement of faith in a collection of thirty-three chapters, called the *Westminster Confession of Faith*. In this Protestant document, chapter twenty-four

(perhaps to show that this was their answer to the twenty-fourth Session the Roman Catholic Council of Trent) clearly stated their position on the subject of marriage (see *Appendix A*). Again, the Biblical position of marriage was stated, and absolutely no mention was made of marriage being a sacrament entrusted to the authority of the church.

However, even though those early Protestant leaders took a stand against the heresy of Rome in the matter of marriage, there were many back then—and now—who would not dare to strongly stand against or defy the official Roman Catholic teaching on the matter. This is why John Ryan states that

all Protestant sects have continued to regard it (i.e., marriage) as religious in the sense that it ought normally to be contracted in the presence of a clergyman.²²

It should be stated, however, even though the majority may do something that does not make it right; nor does the great numbers of people wrong automatically make their position to become God's position. In other words, we do not follow what some have referred to as a "consensus theology"—that is, a system of belief that is determined by whatever the majority may think is right and appropriate. Remember the clear warning

that was given to the nation of Israel when the LORD God said,

Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil. (Exodus 23:2)

The fact is, to argue in favor of the sacrament position—i.e., that a “Christian marriage” must be performed by a priest/pastor and sanctioned by a church before it is valid and honoring to God—is to argue from a position which is marked by a deafening silence from Heaven. As we have clearly demonstrated, there is absolutely nothing in either the Old or the New Testament to support such a position.

The only way to successfully support the sacramental view of marriage is by going back into church history and building a case that is based on the shakey foundations of human logic, the decrees of Roman popes, and the pronouncements of various church councils. There is absolutely no other foundation that will support the sacramental position.

When I come to the end of my life and have finished my course, I would like to be able to say (as the Apostle Paul said to the brethren from Ephesus),

I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. (Acts 20:27)

Therefore, with that as my goal, I do not want to become guilty of adding to what God has said, or arrogantly insisting on something that God has not said, simply because the majority of “Christians” have come to believe that it is the right thing to do!

My constant prayer is that my faith, my convictions, and my preaching, shall always be firmly rooted in the unchanging truths of God’s Holy Word. As someone far greater than I once said,

Unless, therefore, I am convinced by the testimony of Scripture, or on plain and clear grounds of reason, so that conscience shall bind me to make acknowledgment of error, I can and will not retract, for it is neither safe nor wise to do anything contrary to conscience ... HERE I STAND. I CAN DO NO OTHER. MAY GOD HELP ME. AMEN.²³

Concluding Thoughts

Chapter 5

My good friend Dan Freeman, missionary to Taiwan, once told me, “Sin sure does complicate things!” And the tremendous truth of that statement is clearly seen when we begin dealing with the question of a “Christian” marriage. So with that in mind, I would like to deal with just a few of the complications.

Common law marriages

There are some who may look at the Old Testament Scriptures—which we mentioned in the beginning of this discussion—and conclude that since no ceremony is mentioned, those people must have just fallen in love and started living together (i.e., cohabitation) as husband and wife without officially being married.

That was the lifestyle of the woman that the Lord Jesus met by Jacob’s Well, just outside the city of Sychar, as He was traveling through the land of Samaria. This is recorded in the following passage:

Jesus saith unto her, Go, call thy husband, and come hither. The woman answered and said, I have no husband. Jesus said unto her, Thou hast well said, I have no husband: For thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband: in that saidst thou truly. (John 4:16-18)

While it was true that this woman was living with a man, their relationship was not viewed as a proper husband and wife relationship—not in the eyes of men, nor in the eyes of God. Rather, they were simply viewed as two people who were shamefully living in a state of sinful cohabitation with one another.

However, in the United States, for example, 16 of the 51 states (i.e., 31%) have laws which declare that heterosexual couples may become legally married without a license or ceremony if they meet certain qualifications. According to the laws of those states, the couples who wish to have a “common law marriage” must meet three requirements: they must (1) live together for a significant period of time; (2) hold themselves out as a married couple, which typically means that they need to be using the same last name, referring to each other as “my husband” or “my wife”, and filing a joint income tax return with the IRS; and (3) have the intention of becoming legally married at some future date.

Of course, this raises a logical question: If the couple is willing to meet all of those governmental qualifications in order to have a recognized “common law marriage,” why not simply go ahead and be legally married according to the laws of the state? It would certainly be a wise choice because—during that period of time when they are simply living together before their union is recognized as a valid marriage (just like the man and woman in John 8)—they are actually living in a sinful relationship before man and God.

Certainly I realize that there are some, in our so-called “modern and enlightened” age, who would say there is nothing wrong with a man and woman simply living together. In fact, I have actually heard of this arrangement being referred to as, “Trying on the shoes before you commit to buying them.” But while this kind of behavior may be acceptable within certain segments of our society, it is still most definitely NOT acceptable to God.

The Apostle Paul made this abundantly clear when he declared,

“Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge. (Hebrews 13:4)

In other words, the sexual union of a man and woman within the parameters of a marriage relationship is pure, good and nothing to be ashamed of; but those who abuse and misuse the sexual union which God designed to be enjoyed within the husband/wife relationship, by partaking of it outside of God's established parameters of marriage, will face the judgment of a holy God. Again, the Apostle Paul said,

Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators . . . nor adulterers . . . shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God. (1 Corinthians 6:9-11)

The point the Apostle Paul was making was simply this: Within the church at Corinth, there were some who had been acting like husband and wife in their sexual relationship even though they had never actually been married and made to be husband and wife. But the Apostle points out that once those individuals were saved, things totally changed in their lives and in their relationship (2 Corinthians 5:17). In other words, they either stopped living together as a husband and wife; or, they separated from one another until they could

legally be joined together as a husband and wife.

So our conclusion is this: Even though the government may say that it is legal for a couple to live together without a wedding ceremony, the Word of God very clearly disallows it. And, as believers in Jesus Christ, since the Word of God is our final authority in all matters of faith and practice, we must reject the concept of the common law marriage.

Civil ceremony marriages

While it is true that no verse in the Bible commands that a couple must have a civil wedding ceremony, there are plenty of verses which declare that—as believers in Jesus Christ—we *are* to obey the civil laws in the land of which we are citizens. So, as we consider the Biblical teaching dealing with this matter of the power and authority of civil government, there are three main points that we need to consider, and these points need to be fully understood by every true believer in Jesus Christ.

Civil government is ordained by God

The Bible teaches that there are three great institutions that were created and established by God Himself—the home (Genesis 2:18-25),

human government (Genesis 9:5-6), and the church (Matthew 16:18-18:17).

The establishment of capital punishment, for example (Genesis 9:5-6), presupposes the establishment of a government authority with the God-given responsibility to administer that punishment. This is why the Scriptures very clearly teach us that governments are ordained by God for a twofold purpose: (1) to provide protection and stability for our lives (1 Timothy 2:2-3); and (2) to punish with a sword those who do evil (Romans 13:3-4).¹

Civil government leaders are placed by God

The evolution of human government is very clearly observed as we study through the Scriptures. We can clearly see that

The basic unit of government among the Hebrews was the “father’s house” or primary family (Genesis 12:1; Numbers 1:4). Above this was the clan (Numbers 36:6) and then the tribe, governed by a leader who was chosen by representatives from the tribes (Numbers 1:4-16). Over all these units was a central leader. In early days, Moses or Joshua . . . served as central leaders among the Israelites.²

Then there came the day when Moses—and later on, Joshua—were made to be leaders in Israel because of they had been chosen for that position by the LORD God (Exodus 3:9-10; Deuteronomy 31:14). And now, the very same thing is true in all the nations of the world; whether we like it or not, the national leadership in every nation has come to power because God Himself has raised them up and placed them in that position. That is the very point the Apostle Paul was making when he said,

Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained (i.e., determined and appointed) of God. (Romans 13:1)

This great truth is also very clearly stated some three times in the book of Daniel. We see the prophet, as he was inspired by the Spirit of God, saying,

he (i.e., the most High God) removeth kings, and setteth up kings. (Daniel 2:21)

know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men. (Daniel 4:17)

know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will. (Daniel 4:32)

And, of course, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself referred to the very same truth when He told the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate,

Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above. (John 19:11)

So not only has God established civil government, but, according to His infinite wisdom, He also raises up and takes down those who rule over those civil governments. And since all of this is done according to God's will, it naturally follows that there is a God-given burden of responsibility that is placed on all of those citizens who are under the authority of that government.

Civil government is to be obeyed

At the beginning of this section, I stated that, as believers in Jesus Christ, we *are* to obey the civil laws of the land in which we have been made to be citizens. The truth of this statement is clearly observed when we consider such statements as,

Let every soul be subject unto (i.e., be in submission to) the higher powers. (Romans 13:1)

Put them (i.e., the believers in Crete) in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work. (Titus 3:1)

Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; Or unto governors. (1 Peter 2:13)

So the Bible makes it very clear that, as believers in Jesus Christ, it is our God-given responsibility to obey the civil government that He has—in His omniscient wisdom—ordained to rule over us. The Apostle Paul tells us why this is so important when he states,

Whosoever . . . resisteth the power (i.e., the authority of civil leaders), resisteth the ordinance (i.e., the arrangement or plan) of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. (Romans 13:2)

Now we must understand that there is a “balancing factor” that must be carefully noted in this regard. That is, we are not expected to

blindly obey the laws of the land, if those manmade laws are commanding us to do things that are diametrically opposed to God's laws. This point is clearly observable when we notice two clear statements that were made by the Apostle Peter. On the one hand, as we saw just a moment ago, he said,

Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; Or unto governors. (1 Peter 2:13)

But then, on the other hand, we find that when he was called to stand before the leaders of the Jewish nation and commanded that they should not preach Jesus Christ, the Bible says that

Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men. (Acts 5:29)

So the balancing factor is simply this—as followers of Jesus Christ, it is our duty to obey the laws of that government which our God has ordained and raised up to rule over us *until* those laws contradict and oppose the laws of our God.

Now here is the question: Since the laws of our land—concerning the marriage of a man and woman—do NOT command us to do or to

say anything that is contrary to God's Word, and, since the Word of God itself (as we have already demonstrated) does NOT lay out any clear instructions for how a "Christian" wedding ceremony is to be conducted, upon what grounds then do some pastors claim the authority to say that a civil ceremony is not legitimate or recognized by God? The fact is simply this, they have absolutely NO Biblical grounds to support their position. The only foundation that can be found to support their position is in those manmade traditions that have been passed down through the centuries by the institution of Roman Catholicism and by the will of Roman popes.

Christian church marriages

I have used the above mentioned title (even though, as I have just shown, there is no real evidence that such a thing exists) simply because of the traditional mindset that is held by so many Christians today. My purpose in this section is to show the tragic failure that comes to those who hold the traditional view that the marriage ceremony must be performed by a pastor in a church in order for it to be a valid marriage that is acceptable in the eyes of God.

The tragic failure that I have mentioned is the failure of consistency. If you will remember, earlier in this volume, I said,

An amazing thing about religion (i.e., a system of belief that is based on man's teachings instead of the Word of God) is that it always proves to be inconsistent.

In the context of that statement, I was speaking of the fact that, because Roman Catholicism was following manmade traditions instead of God's Word, they showed a great and irrational inconsistency—i.e., they claimed on the one hand that marriage is a sacrament that brings God's grace while, on the other hand, they forbade their own priests to marry and become partakers of the grace that the sacrament would impart.

But we must understand that this can certainly cut both ways! You see, if we—as Bible believing Christians—begin to treat manmade traditions, which have no solid foundation in the Scriptures, as though they were actually Biblical truth, then we will also be found doing things that are tragically and foolishly inconsistent.

That fact is most glaringly obvious in the matter of the marriage ceremony. Let me give you an illustration to prove my point. Suppose you were to meet and become friends with a family who are Buddhist in their faith. Being filled with a sincere concern for their eternal

souls, you begin to pray for them and—in answer to your prayer—the Lord wonderfully opens a door of opportunity for you to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with them. Then suppose that, as a result of your witnessing, the Holy Spirit of God begins to work in their hearts and it is your joyful privilege to kneel with that man and his wife as they pray the sinner’s prayer, trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ alone for the salvation of their eternal souls.

Now, suppose that after their salvation, this couple comes to you and says, “Tell us, now that we have trusted Jesus Christ as our Saviour, what should we do—what is the next step?” I am sure that your heart would be full of joy as you would tell them about the need of following the Lord Jesus in believer’s baptism. And then you would certainly explain to them the importance of being faithful in reading the Scriptures, praying, and attending the services of the church, so that they might grow strong in the Lord.

But wait a minute! If you *really* believe that only a marriage ceremony performed by a pastor in a Christian church is a legitimate marriage that is acceptable to God, then the first thing you must teach this man and his wife is that they are actually living in sin, that their little children have been born out of wedlock, and that they need to be properly

married in a church with a “Christian” ceremony in order to escape the pollutions of the wicked one!

Now, to be perfectly honest, I don’t know a single person or pastor (there may be one out there somewhere, but I have never met him) who would do such a thing. Therefore, I can say with all confidence that—even though I know many pastors who claim to believe that a marriage ceremony must be performed by a pastor in order for that couple to have a proper Christian marriage—I do not know of a single pastor holding that position who is consistent in his stand! My question to those pastors is simply this: Why do you demand one standard for those young people who are raised in your church and yet you espouse a totally opposite position for those who were raised in a Buddhist temple? If something is *really* true and right, then it must be equally true and right for EVERYONE; otherwise, it must not really be true after all.

Christian marriage advice

Based on what we have seen in the previous pages of this little volume, I would like to bring this to a conclusion by giving my personal advice to two groups of people.

For those who are pastors

To those pastors who may pick up this volume, as your brother in Christ and fellow laborer, I would like to humbly offer two words of advice:

First, remember your calling. Understand that you have been called of God to preach and to hold forth those truths that are securely founded on the Scriptures (2 Timothy 4:2). In other words, remember that you were not called of God to preach, or teach, or defend the manmade traditions that are rooted in, and have been passed down by, the Roman Catholic institution.

Second, always strive for consistency. It was the English nurse, Florence Nightingale (1820-1910 AD), who spoke of, “The silent power of a consistent life.”³ And what a wonderfully effective and powerful thing it is when the *preaching* and the *practice* of a pastor are clearly consistent. It is certainly possible for a shepherd to confuse the sheep God has entrusted to him by giving them mixed signals. That is, on the one hand, proclaiming that all of their beliefs and practices are based on the foundation of God’s Word; but then, on the other hand, turning around and teaching a marriage position that is based on a mixed foundation of manmade traditions and Roman Catholic

teachings that are totally foreign to the clear statements of Biblical truth. Therefore, I would humbly urge every pastor to strive for a real consistency in their preaching.

For those contemplating marriage

If you are a young couple who loves the Lord and sincerely wants to do His will, then please understand that it is God who, in His loving kindness, has brought you together. His great desire is that your two separate lives might be merged into one and made to be a home that will honor and glorify Him. But please understand that this does not come as a result of merely having what might be called an approved church wedding; rather, it comes from both of you loving God and putting Him first in your lives and in your home, and then loving one another as He has commanded.

If you should decide to forego a church wedding and only appear before a justice of the peace at the Registry Of Marriages (Singapore), then I rejoice with you and pray that God will bless your union, and give you many fruitful years to serve and glorify Him together!

However, if you should choose to announce to your family and friends that you are going to have a “Christian marriage,” then my advice to you is that, after you have gone to the

Registry Of Marriages (Singapore), you should NOT live together as husband and wife. The reason is simply because of the fact that, since you have publicly stated your desire for a “Christian marriage,” you should jealously guard your testimonies by abstaining from all sexual relations until after your announced “Christian” wedding date.

The key passage of Scripture to be remembered here would be

And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ. (1 Corinthians 8:11-12)

In other words, since you now have knowledge of God’s truth concerning the marriage ceremony, do not use your knowledge in a way that will offend the “weak brother” who is still trying to build their doctrines concerning marriage on manmade traditions and the decrees of Roman Catholicism. It is important for you to understand this because, even though they are the weaker brother, they *are* brothers, and to offend their weak conscious is to sin against the Lord Jesus Christ.

— The End —

Appendix A

The Westminster Confession of Faith – 1646 AD

Chapter 24

Of Marriage and Divorce

I. Marriage is to be between one man and one woman: neither is it lawful for any man to have more than one wife, nor for any woman to have more than one husband, at the same time.

II. Marriage was ordained for the mutual help of husband and wife, for the increase of mankind with a legitimate issue, and of the Church with an holy seed; and for preventing of uncleanness.

III. It is lawful for all sorts of people to marry, who are able with judgment to give their consent. Yet it is the duty of Christians to marry only in the Lord. And therefore such as profess the

true reformed religion should not marry with infidels, papists, or other idolaters: neither should such as are godly be unequally yoked, by marrying with such as are notoriously wicked in their life, or maintain damnable heresies.

IV. Marriage ought not to be within the degrees of consanguinity or affinity forbidden by the Word. Nor can such incestuous marriages ever be made lawful by any law of man or consent of parties, so as those persons may live together as man and wife. The man may not marry any of his wife's kindred, nearer in blood than he may of his own: nor the woman of her husband's kindred, nearer in blood than of her own.

V. Adultery or fornication committed after a contract, being detected before marriage, gives just occasion to the innocent party to dissolve that contract. In the case of adultery after marriage, it is lawful for the innocent party to sue out a divorce and, after the divorce, to marry another, as if the offending party were dead.

VI. Although the corruption of man be such as is apt to study arguments

unduly to put asunder those whom God has joined together in marriage: yet, nothing but adultery, or such wilful desertion as can no way be remedied by the Church, or civil magistrate, is cause sufficient of dissolving the bond of marriage: wherein, a public and orderly course of proceeding is to be observed; and the persons concerned in it not left to their own wills, and discretion, in their own case.

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Chapter 2

- 1 To be fair, it should be stated that there were areas in the Grecian Empire where women enjoyed a better status. For

example, in Sparta, women were educated and esteemed; and, in Crete, women were allowed to own property and keep all that they were able to earn in business.

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⁷ H.D. Preuss; *Old Testament Theology*, Vol. 2; pg. 104.

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Chapter 5

- 1 The “sword” mentioned in Romans 13:4, which is used as a “revenger to *execute* wrath upon him that doeth evil,” speaks of the God-given authority for governments to administer capital punishment on those who commit such crimes as are worthy of death.
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