

# The covenant of marriage

I WILL BE THE GOD OF ALL THE FAMILIES  
JER 31:1

COURTSHIP SERIES | PART ONE

## THE COVENANT OF MARRIAGE

*I will be the God of all the families. Jer 31:1*

### COURTSHIP SERIES | Part One

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# Chapter I

## The marriage of Adam and the woman

The purpose of this series is to consider how a man and a woman, from any culture, once they have grown to maturity, are able to leave the house of their father and mother, choose one another in the freedom that belongs to faith, and *become joined by the Lord in godly marriage*. Furthermore, we will see how a husband and a wife in godly marriage then participate in *multiplication through offering* to bring forth godly seed and fruitfulness in their family and household.

In this book, we will take our instruction from *three marriages* in Scripture – the marriage of Adam and ‘the woman’, the marriage of Abraham and Sarah, and the marriage of Christ and the church. We will also consider specific lessons from the marriage of Moses and Zipporah and the marriage of Boaz and Ruth.

The marriage of Christ and the church is the pattern in which every godly marriage is to be established. Explaining this point, the apostle Paul wrote, ‘For the husband is the head of the wife, *as also Christ is the Head of the church*; and He is the Saviour of the body. Therefore, *just as the*

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*church is subject to Christ*, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, *just as Christ also loved the church* and gave Himself for her.' Eph 5:23-25.

To properly understand the covenant of marriage that has been established for us by the Lord God, we need to *first* understand the purpose of Their Everlasting Covenant, which was summarised in the first chapter of the book of Genesis. We read concerning the Everlasting Covenant, 'Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness".' Gen 1:26. God's intention is that we would be born again as sons of God the Father, and then progressively be brought to glory, in Christ, as sons of men in the image and likeness of God.

To bring about Their covenant purpose, each Person of the Godhead made offering to reveal the Other. The Father and Son gave the seven Spirits of God to the Holy Spirit, establishing Him as the Helper. Joh 14:16. The seven Spirits of God can be understood as being *the full expression* of the one Spirit by which They live as Yahweh *Elohim*. Rev 1:4. Isa 11:2. As the Helper, the Holy Spirit then *enabled the Son* with the capacity of seven Spirits, so that He could empty Himself to reveal the Father by becoming the Father's Son. The Holy Spirit also *enabled the Father* with the capacity of seven Spirits, so that the Father could bring forth Yahweh Son as His Son. In Gethsemane, the Holy Spirit strengthened Christ with the capacity of seven Spirits (also called *Eternal Spirit*), enabling Christ to offer Himself through the entirety of His journey to the cross and, in so doing, to fulfil the will of the Father. Heb 9:14. Luk 22:42-44.

*The key point is that this same fellowship of offering is to become the basis for every godly marriage.* Through the fellowship of offering enabled by Eternal Spirit, a husband and wife can participate in the outworking of God's Everlasting Covenant in their own lives and in the bringing forth of godly seed. Mal 2:15. This includes, through the miracle of *procreation*, the bringing forth of children who are then born again as sons of God while in the womb of their mother; as well as the multiplication of godly seed through *the evangelistic ministry* of a network of firstfruits houses. 1Co 7:14. These networks, or communities, of worthy houses were described by the apostle John as 'elect ladies' who belong to the corporate bride of Christ. 2Jn 1:1.

Let us look at the first marriage between Adam and 'the woman' (who was later named Eve), because their marriage is a type, or picture, of the marriage of Christ and His bride, the church. For this reason, it provides

us with a foundational pattern which God intends to establish in every godly marriage.

Jesus explained that in order to understand the covenant of marriage by which God joins a godly couple, we need to first understand the creation of man, or mankind, as male and female. Jesus said, 'Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning "made them *male and female*".' Mat 19:4. Furthermore, we need to understand the season of godly courtship leading to marriage, by which a man and a woman leave their father and mother and choose one another. Mat 19:5. We shall now address each of these points.

## The creation of man

The present heavens and Earth were created as the context in which God's Everlasting Covenant purpose would be accomplished. In the unfolding of Their covenant plan, Yahweh *Elohim* created man on the sixth day of creation. Moses summarised God's creation of man by writing, 'So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; *male and female [in identity] He created them*'. Gen 1:27. Clearly, the creation of the first man was not complete until the woman was taken from the man and they were joined as 'one' in marriage. Gen 2:22-24. Gen 5:2. The creation of mankind as male and female happened through the offering work of the Son of God. Joh 1:3. The Son created all things on behalf of God the Father, for the Father is the source of all creation. Eph 3:9. Let us consider further the steps by which this took place.

The creation of the man's biological body preceded the creation of his spirit and soul. The Son of God firstly created the man's body from the dust of the ground. Then, through a second creative action, the Son of God breathed *the breath of Yahweh* into the man's nostrils. Gen 2:7. Through this action, the man became a living being with a spirit and soul. Zec 12:1. Thus, man was created *triune* in nature – *body, soul and spirit*. 1Th 5:23.

The formation of the man's gender, as male, belonged to the creation of his biological body, as well as to the formation of his soul and spirit. His body was created first as male, and then his spirit and soul were also created as male. However, the full expression of the man's gender as male could only be adequately appreciated following the formation of the woman, as female.

When the Son breathed into man the breath of Yahweh, He committed to him the potential for all the identities who would ever be born through procreation. Gen 1:28. Gen 2:7. We note that a bride needed to be brought forth from the man before identities could be multiplied through procreation.

The man, as a living soul, had received possession of his own identity. He was therefore accountable for his own expression and decisions. As such, he had the freedom to choose sonship and the fellowship of headship at the tree of life. With freedom came responsibility, as well as accountability, meaning that Adam would need to give an account for his responses.

The man's name as a son of God had been discussed by the Lord God before the foundation of the world. This name was entrusted to Yahweh Son when He was begotten by the Father as the Son of God. Although Adam had possession of his own identity, he had *not yet received his sonship name*, by which he could be born as a son of God. New birth was possible only after Christ completed the sonship works of every person, on His offering journey.

### The nature of man

As we have already considered, the LORD God created the first man, and every person thereafter, as triune in being – that is, with a body, soul and spirit. The Scriptures highlight that for a person to be blameless, they must receive the Lord's sanctifying work in their body, soul and spirit. 1Th 5:23.

The physical *body* is referred to in the Scriptures as 'the outward man'. 2Co 4:16. The *spirit* and *soul* of a person are the indivisible, yet distinguishable, aspects of the inward man. We note that the apostle Paul explained that the word of God exposes the distinction between soul and spirit, even though they cannot be separated. Heb 4:12. The Scriptures describe 'the heart' as being *the meeting point of a person's body, soul and spirit*. Their heart is the very centre of their person and expression. Pro 4:23. Much of philosophy and many alternative gospels consider man as having only the dual elements of soul and body, without any understanding of a person's spirit, which must be born again. 1Pe 1:23.

Our *spirit* is our identity. It is who we are. The faculties of a person's spirit include their intuition and their conscience, as well as their capacity for worship, for fellowship and for meeting. *Intuition* is the faculty of our



spirit by which we obtain knowledge that is not gained through cognitive reasoning but, rather, comes by illumination as we receive the word of God. The apostle Paul described intuition as 'the eyes of our understanding'. Eph 1:18. Our *conscience*, then, is the faculty through which we know ourself. Specifically referring to our conscience which is within our spirit, Paul stated, 'For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him?' 1Co 2:11. Significantly, the state of a person's conscience depends on whether their spirit has been illuminated to *know God*. Heb 10:22. Heb 13:18. In the New Covenant, we each become a temple for the Holy Spirit when He comes *into our spirit*. The Holy Spirit worships the Father and the Son at the altar of our conscience, enabling us to participate in Their fellowship of worship! Rom 9:1.

Let us now consider the faculties which pertain to our *soul*. These capacities include our *will*, our *mind* and our *emotions*, and they influence how we behave, make decisions, communicate, and interpret our environment in and through our body. Who we are, or want to be, is expressed through the faculties of our soul. That which belongs to our spirit is communicated through our soul. Having been made either male or female, our soul will have a distinctly masculine or feminine expression, respectively. The masculine expression of a man's soul conveys his identity according to the unique emotions, affections and perceptions that pertain to his expression as a man, brother and father. The same principle applies to the feminine expression of a woman.

The faculties of our *body* – which include our senses, physical capacities and appetites – are the means by which our soul expresses itself within the physical, material and biological world. We communicate and relate with one another through the utilisation of our body with its physical expression and capacities. The expression of our soul through our physical body needs to be governed by our spirit, otherwise our soul can be tied to the various appetites and desires of our body. Psalms 119:25. 1Co 9:27. When this happens, a person endeavours to know themselves through what they do in their physical body – either through the exercise of their fleshly capacities or through the information collected through their senses. Our soul is *revived* as our spirit clings to the word of God and to our fellowship with the Lord in one Spirit with Him. 1Co 6:17.

*Gender* – male or female – is essential to every individual's identity. In the same way that Yahweh *Elohim* created the first man and woman as male and female respectively, when a child is conceived within the womb of

their mother, the *gender* of their *spirit (identity)*, *soul and body* is determined by the seed of their father. According to that seed, a person is either exclusively male or exclusively female – in their spirit, soul and body.

We observe that *a male's expression* of his identity through the faculties of his soul is different from *a female's expression* of her identity through the faculties of her soul. Moreover, each one's physical body is crafted to be the most adequate vehicle through which their gender is expressed. Psa 139:13-14.

Sexuality is a function of our gender and is fundamentally linked to our identity. For this reason, each person guards and protects the expression of their sexuality according to the culture of sanctification and honour. 1Th 4:3-4.

### Finding a helper comparable

Having created the first man, Adam, the LORD God instigated a search with the intent of finding a helper comparable for Adam, saying, 'It is not good that man should be alone; I will *make* him a helper comparable to him.' Gen 2:18. Adam needed a comparable person for *fellowship* so that they, together, could know and participate in God's Everlasting Covenant purpose. As part of their participation in this Covenant, the man and his comparable helper would multiply identities through procreation. The process of looking for a helper who was comparable to him was a season of instruction from the Lord, as Adam named and integrated all the animals within creation. Gen 2:20.

Adam's *participation in the offering of Christ* would be necessary for the multiplication of spirit and life beyond himself. The Lord caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, which was Adam's connection to the three hours of darkness belonging to Christ's offering on the cross. Gen 2:21. Mat 27:45. Through this participation, Adam was being formed by Christ as the vessel of headship and, at the same time, Christ was forming a helper comparable for him. Gen 2:22.

*The search for, and subsequent forming of, a helper who was comparable to the man is symbolic of the season of godly courtship before marriage.* As we read in Proverbs, 'He who *finds* a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favour from the Lord'. Pro 18:22. The season of godly courtship is a process whereby a man and a woman are finding one another, and are then being formed individually, by Christ, as an appropriate vessel

for marriage. As we shall discuss in later chapters of this book, the season of godly courtship involves five phases of relational growth and choosing – friendship, romance, courtship, bonding and marriage preparation.

## The formation of woman

The LORD God took a rib from Adam's side, from which He *formed* the woman. Gen 2:21. We note an important distinction here between the Son of God first *creating* the man and then later *forming* the woman from the man's rib. The woman was not created separately, or independently, from the man! Rather, the woman was taken out of the man and formed 'from the man'. Gen 2:23. 1Co 11:8. The Son of God formed the spirit, soul and body of the woman, uniquely as female, from the life that was multiplied to her from the rib taken from Adam's side.

The woman's comparability to the man would happen in two phases of offering. The first aspect of offering involved Adam – as he laid down his life, in a deep sleep, so that the Lord God could draw the woman from his side. The second aspect of offering would require the woman's participation. She would need to lay down her life to reveal her husband. As we shall consider later, Sarah is a good example of the offering of a woman through which she is made comparable to her husband.

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Having formed the woman from Adam's rib, the Son of God then brought her to the man. Gen 2:22. In this regard, Christ, figuratively, walked the woman down the aisle at the tree of life, to the man. Here, Adam received, or 'possessed', the woman 'in sanctification and honour'.

1Th 4:4. That is, as a man who had been made to be the vessel of headship, Adam, in the *freedom that belongs to faith*, chose the woman, taking her by the hand as he received her from the Lord. The woman was, likewise, *choosing in freedom* to be drawn from the one-Spirit fellowship of Yahweh to be given to Adam. As such, this was not an arranged marriage – rather, the man and woman both freely chose each other.

Adam then declared, 'This [one] is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.' Gen 2:23. With this statement, Adam was bearing witness to the work that Christ had done: first, to draw the woman from his side as a new and *unique identity*; and, second, to form her as the *vessel of comparability*, to be later revealed also as the *vessel of multiplication*. To emphasise a

key point, we see that it is *Christ* who forms the man as the vessel of headship and gives him to the woman; and likewise, it is *Christ* who forms the woman as the vessel of comparability and multiplication, giving her to the man. Helpfully, we note that they neither form themselves, nor form one another, as suitable vessels for marriage. Rather, it is Christ who forms each one.

Adam's statement, 'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man', also encompassed the *definition* and the progressive *fruitfulness* of their marriage covenant. Gen 2:23. Through the covenant of marriage, Adam and the woman were made to be 'one', by the Lord. Their oneness, which was described by Adam as 'bone of bone and flesh of flesh', was the union of their biological flesh, as well as their union in soul and spirit. Adam also understood that, in time, the woman would become the vessel through which his family and house would be multiplied.

The woman is, therefore, firstly of her husband as *wife*, to later proceed from her husband as *wife and mother*. The apostle Paul further explained that the woman came *from the man*, was joined *to him* in marriage, and would then *proceed from him* to become a mother. Significantly, the man's family and household would multiply only *through her* – for she was to become the community of the word in his house. 1Co 11:8-11.

Having received the woman from Christ, Adam declared that she would be called 'Woman' (Heb. *Ishshah*) and that he would be called 'Man' (Heb. *Ish*). Gen 2:23. Prior to this time, he was referred to only as Adam (meaning 'from the dust'). Gen 3:19. The names Man and Woman defined a package of works for them, as husband and wife, in relation to their marriage covenant. The man was redefined in relation to his wife and the woman was redefined in relation to her husband. His name as Man described the package of his works as head, brother, companion, friend and husband to the Woman. Her name as Woman described the package of her works as helper, sister, companion, friend and wife to the Man. Gen 2:18. Gen 12:13. Mal 2:14. Son 5:16. Gen 2:24. Later, the woman would receive a further expression of her name – when she was named 'Eve'. Her name, Eve, described her works as 'the mother of all living'. Gen 3:20.

The man and the woman having chosen each other in freedom and expressing faith for marriage, the Lord God then joined them as husband and wife in marriage by *covenant*. Mal 2:14. The covenant of marriage is summarised succinctly in the book of Genesis in the statement:

'Therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.' Gen 2:24. It is important to recognise that *the covenant of marriage* was created by the Lord God from the beginning of creation in relation to mankind's participation in the Everlasting Covenant. Mar 10:6-9. The covenant of marriage came from Him - it did not originate from mankind. The prophet Malachi described the covenant of marriage as 'the Lord's holy institution which He loves'. Mal 2:11.

### The fellowship of headship

Adam and his wife had been made one by the Lord, through the covenant of marriage. They would continue in this *oneness* on the condition that they remained joined to the fellowship of headship at the tree of life. From their fellowship with Yahweh *Elohim* each evening, they could proceed together in the fellowship of *one Spirit*, to do the works which Christ had given to them. Adam's works were to cultivate and guard the garden of Eden. Gen 2:15. The woman was a comparable helper to the man in his work.

As the vessel of headship, Adam would receive from Christ the headship order of life which originates from the Father. Mal 2:10. As the apostle Paul stated, 'I want you to know that the Head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man [her husband], and the Head of Christ is God [the Father].' 1Co 11:3. Christ was the Head of Adam, and Adam was the head of his wife. Adam would receive from Christ the agenda for their marriage and household, as well as the capacity to make offering according to his sanctification. Adam received this agenda and capacity as he and his wife communed with the Lord at the tree of life each evening. Gen 3:8.

As they met Christ together at the tree of life, the woman, individually, would also receive from Christ a reflection concerning her sanctification, and an understanding of the nature of her works as the wife and helper of Adam. Through her submission to the lordship of Christ, she would receive capacity to submit to her husband as unto Christ. She would honour her husband and walk in fellowship with him as they participated each day in the will of God for their marriage.

Adam and the woman were able to have *one mind* together, even though their souls and the exercise of their minds, individually, were uniquely masculine and feminine respectively. The 'one mind' refers specifically to the mind of Christ, which He demonstrated by emptying Himself to

reveal the Father. Php 2:5. Having this one mind within them, which was also in Christ Jesus, Adam and the woman could participate in *offering* through which they could reveal the Lord and one another.

Having individually received illumination regarding their sanctification, Adam and his wife were able to fellowship together in the order of headship and to lay down their lives to reveal each other. As they walked together in one Spirit, the woman would be the glory of the man – and we note that he does not have glory apart from her. 1Co 11:7. We could say that before the woman was enabled to bring forth children as a mother, she would be hidden, or indistinguishable, in relation to the man as she revealed him and his work. That is, she was to reveal the glory of her husband through offering, laying down her life to reveal him.

That which Adam received from Christ was then ministered, by offering, to his wife. The apostle Peter explained that when a husband and wife are joined to the fellowship of headship in this way, they will be heirs together of the grace of life and their prayers will not be hindered.

1Pe 3:7. That is, as Adam and his wife joined the conversation of prayer with Yahweh *Elohim* at the tree of life, they could participate in the will of God being outworked in their lives and in their family. As the woman honoured the Lord and her husband, the life of God would be ministered through her to their family, and then from their household to others. This is the pattern of life for every husband and wife who are joined in one Spirit.

The *tree of life* in the garden of Eden is a symbol for *the fellowship of headship*, within which Adam and the woman were to meet and know the Lord and one another. The life and expression of Adam and the woman were dependent on their ongoing connection to this fellowship. To become a comparable helper in Adam's work, the woman would need to choose, by faith, to participate in the fellowship of headship at the tree of life according to her sanctification as being of her husband, in one Spirit with him.

However, we know that the woman had *not* personally chosen the fellowship of headship with her husband. This lack of clarity was subsequently exploited by Satan. Gen 3:1. Notably, neither had Adam personally chosen the fellowship of headship, because he chose to receive another word, *which did not come from Christ in the fellowship of headship*. He, instead, received an alternative word from Satan through his wife. Gen 3:6.

## The mandate of procreation

After the woman was formed from Adam's side, and they were joined by the covenant of marriage, God blessed them and said, 'Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth.' Gen 1:28. In this, God gave to them the mandate and blessing of *procreation*. This was to be a co-participation (or co-creation) with God the Father, by which they could bring forth *godly seed for the Father*. Mal 2:15.

The bringing forth of children, for Adam and his wife, was according to the pre-appointed timing of the Father. We note that there were approximately 4 000 years from the time when Adam and the woman were married until they were enabled to bring forth children through procreation. The fall of mankind occurred *immediately prior* to the Lord's pre-appointed time for the couple to bring forth children. Accordingly, we read in the book of Genesis that, following their fall, Adam called his wife's name 'Eve', indicating that her works were to be 'the mother of all living'. Gen 3:20.

Adam and Eve needed to receive provision from the Lord for the multiplication of their marriage to become a family and household. The *provision* of the Lord for their household was exemplified in the Feast of Passover as 'a lamb for a household'. Exo 12:3. We see that immediately after the fall, the Lord made an animal sacrifice and gave tunics of skin to Adam and his wife. Gen 3:21. This animal sacrifice made by the Lord was, for Adam and his wife, their participation in the Feast of Passover. It is important for us to recognise that the timing of this sacrifice was in accordance with the *predetermined* purpose and timeline of God the Father. It was *not* God's reaction to the fall of mankind. Nevertheless, Christ's offering on the cross, of which this animal sacrifice was a picture, was fully adequate to minister redemption to Adam and Eve.

After they received the Lord's provision for multiplication, Adam and Eve would be able to fellowship together in relation to the blessing given to them by God. Their knowing of one another was to be their participation in the Everlasting Covenant, by which identities were to be multiplied, with the promise of each one becoming a son of God and a glorified son of man.

It is amazing to consider that, through the physical and biological action of procreation, an *eternal identity* is brought forth! And while this identity *did not exist* prior to conception within the womb, he (or she)

*was foreknown and named* by God in the fellowship of Yahweh from *before* the foundation of the world.

King David understood the miracle of his conception as an eternal identity and the reality that he was named and foreknown by God before his conception, testifying, 'For You formed my inward parts [spirit and soul]; You covered me [wove my physical body] *in my mother's womb* ... Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed [lit. embryo within the womb]. And in Your book they all were written [before], the days fashioned for me, when as yet there were none of them.' Psa 139:13,16.

The fruit of offering between husband and wife, motivated by the love of God, is the conception of an eternal identity. The spirit and soul of a child is *formed* because of the offering of the man and is *nurtured* through the offering of the mother. Notably, *the mother names the spirit (identity) of the child* according to her fellowship (or lack thereof) with her husband in the order of headship.

### The dynamic of the fall

We note, however, that, concerning the first marriage, *before* Adam and the woman were able to bring forth godly seed according to the predetermined timing of God, *Satan gained access* to their marriage relationship. Satan gained advantage because Adam and the woman had not adequately chosen the fellowship of headship at *the tree of life*. Adam and the woman fell from fellowship with Yahweh *Elohim* because they had, instead, chosen the fatherhood of Satan. As a result of the fall, all the identities who had been named 'before' by God the Father, and committed to Adam by God the Son, were now *lost* to God – they had been given over to the fatherhood of Satan.

The resulting enmity within their marriage was described by the LORD God when He said to the woman, 'Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.' Gen 3:16. The woman would be driven by the romantic desire for her husband to be, for her, what she needed him to be for her sense of approval and security. *The fallen marriage dynamic for a woman* involves cultivating a romantic ideal for her family according to her own fleshly perspective. She then imposes this *desire* upon her husband as though it is 'the best thing' for her family. She then seeks to control her environment to obtain this 'good' outcome.

*The fallen marriage dynamic for a man* involves being driven by his desire for identity verification from his wife, which he seeks to satisfy



through the exercise of *dominion* over his own life and over others around him. The fallen marriage culture for a man, as he turns his face away from the Headship of Christ, is to uphold the romantic culture that his wife promotes; or, alternatively, to react against the obligations that she places upon him.

Unequivocally, this same fallen dynamic is the default mode of relationship between *every husband and wife*, unless they are *progressively recovered* to the fellowship of offering that exists within Yahweh *Elohim*.

After they departed from the garden of Eden, Adam 'knew' Eve his wife, and she conceived and brought forth a son. Gen 4:1. Eve nurtured the identity of her first son within her womb according to her misaligned perspective of what God had prophesied to the serpent. Gen 3:14-15. She viewed Cain as being the manchild who would overcome the serpent and would have dominion over the curse which God gave to them for their deliverance. Gen 3:17-19. Gen 4:1. Largely, this nurturing of Cain happened independently from fellowship with her husband. Cain subsequently chose to murder his brother and then departed from fellowship at the gate of the garden of Eden where the family received the word of the Lord.

In order for Adam and Eve to bring forth a lineage of sons of God who would call on the name of the Lord, they would *first need reformation within their marriage relationship*. Gen 4:26. We note that Eve *did* eventually obtain faith and chose the fellowship of one Spirit with her husband. The fruit of this relational recovery was the birth of Seth. Gen 4:25. To further consider the means by which a husband and wife participate in marriage recovery to bring forth godly seed for the heavenly Father, we will turn our attention to the marriage of Abraham and Sarah.



## Chapter 2

# Other marriages in the Scriptures

### The marriage of Abraham and Sarah

The marriage of Abraham and Sarah is a particularly helpful example for us, and we will draw several lessons from them in relation to the establishment of a godly marriage covenant and the bringing forth of godly seed. The key point is that *reformation in their marriage* enabled them to bring forth godly seed. Notably, however, the ‘fruit’ of their marriage covenant *prior* to this reformation was Ishmael – a son brought forth *according to the flesh*. Gal 4:23. It was only *after* Abraham and Sarah had joined a process of marriage reformation initiated by God that they were able to bring forth Isaac, who was born *according to the Spirit*. Gal 4:29.

Importantly, we see that all the identities who had been ‘lost in Adam’ were now *recovered in Abraham* through faith! As the Lord said to Abram, ‘In you all the families of the earth [through which these identities are born] shall be blessed.’ Gen 12:3. Every person would need to first become a son of Abraham through faith in order to inherit the promise of the Spirit, and then be born again as a son of God. Rom 4:16.

Through the faith of Abraham and the faith of Sarah, we see a numberless multitude of sons of men, likened to 'the dust of the earth', who could be born of God. Gen 13:16.

### *Submission to her husband*

The Scriptures teach us that Sarah obeyed her husband, 'calling him Lord'. As the apostle Peter stated, 'For in this manner, in former times, the holy [sanctified] women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands, as *Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord*, whose daughters you are if you do good [the works of sonship] and are not afraid with any terror.' 1Pe 3:5-6. Sarah's obedience to Abraham marked her connection, through faith, to the order of headship. She was sustained by the faith that she received from the word that was declared to Abraham; it had become *her* faith. Gen 12:2-3.

As they went to Egypt, which is a type of the world, Abram made a request of Sarai, saying, 'Please *say you are my sister*, that it may be well with me for your sake, and that I may live because of you.' Gen 12:13. Abram was calling his wife to stand with him in faith for God's promise concerning their household, and to join him in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings as the context for their deliverance. Sarai did not *demand* the romantic fervour of Abram for her protection, expecting him to deliver her from her predicament. Neither did she use her beauty to *take control* of the situation and bring deliverance through her own endeavour. Gen 12:11. As a prophet, Abram foresaw that if she took either of these actions, motivated by the fear of death, his life would be lost, and their household would be destroyed. Gen 20:7.

Sarai's obedience to her husband, in submission to the lordship of Christ, was her protection as she was taken into the harem of Pharaoh. As she submitted to her husband in this perilous setting, her chaste conduct, 'without a word', revealed that the fear of death had been replaced with the fear of the Lord. 1Pe 3:1-2. Accordingly, the Scriptures describe a believing woman who submits to her husband in the fear of the Lord, and who forsakes the conversation and conduct that is motivated by fallen desire, as 'awesome as an army with banners'! 1Pe 3:1. Son 6:10. Through offering, Sarai became a comparable helper to her husband and, as a result, she preserved his life and was able to build her house, rather than pull it down. Pro 14:1.

We note in this account of Abram and Sarai that the beginning of their marriage reformation was the establishment of their relational

sanctification as '*brother and sister*'. Jesus explained that His brothers and sisters are all those who are obedient to the will of God the Father. Mar 3:35. The will of God is our *sanctification* – and we obtain sanctification through obedience. 1Th 4:3. Rom 6:22. The apostle Peter explained that a marriage and household are built upon Christ through obedience to God's word. 1Pe 2:4,7-8. The point is that *relational obedience to the will of God* establishes a couple upon Christ, the Rock; and thus they are Christ's *brethren*. Isa 51:1. It is from this *foundation* that they relate as husband and wife.

In the apostle Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, he wrote, 'Do we have no right to take along *a believing wife*, as do also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas?' 1Co 9:5. We note here that the term that Paul used for 'a believing wife' literally means, '*a sister, a wife*'. The point is that a godly wife is first *a sister* to her husband. Every marriage is to be built upon Christ through obedience; this is what it means to be brother and sister.

### *The capacity of El Shaddai*

Abram and Sarai had received faith from Christ that they would receive a child from the Lord. Gen 15:4. However, after many years, they remained childless. Driven by fallen, fleshly desire, Sarai endeavoured to verify her identity as a mother by obtaining a child *for herself* from Abram's body through a surrogate. Gen 16:2. Abram heeded the voice of his wife and conceived a child through Hagar, Sarai's Egyptian maid. Gen 16:3-4. Hagar and her child, Ishmael, represent the influence of carnality within the household of faith. Ishmael was born 'according to the flesh and he *persecuted* him who was born according to the Spirit'. Gal 4:29.

Clearly, the realisation of the promise of godly seed *required a further aspect of reformation* in the marriage of Abram and Sarai. This reformation would occur through the Lord's initiative toward them as *El Shaddai*. This happened when Yahweh appeared to Abram and said, 'I am Almighty God [*El Shaddai*]; walk before Me and be blameless.' Gen 17:1. Through this encounter, the Lord gave Abram and Sarai new names. These new names of *Abraham* and *Sarah* were the outcome of them both receiving the *same* portion of *Yahweh's name* through His initiative toward them as *El Shaddai*. Significantly, the name *El Shaddai*, or God Almighty, means 'the Lord, the Covenant God, who possesses the *power* to realise His promises'.

The portion of Yahweh's name given to Abraham and Sarah endowed them with power to be one and enabled them to fellowship together in one Spirit. They were joined by Christ to *the fellowship of headship*, enabling them to participate in God's covenant purpose of bringing many sons to glory. *Having been made one* by the Lord, Abraham and Sarah then proceeded to become two as they manifested, by offering according to their sanctification, *the diversity* that sprang forth from their unity. The fellowship of offering that exists within Yahweh *Elohim*, which the prophet Ezekiel saw as 'a raging fire enfolding itself', became a reality within their marriage relationship through the capacity for offering given to them by *El Shaddai*. Eze 1:4. This is how a godly married couple participates in *the order of headship*, which belongs to *the offering fellowship of Yahweh*.

### *Faith for motherhood*

Sarah ceased from her quest for identity verification through bearing children as she was established in *fellowship* with Abraham at the tree of life. In the context of the *agape* meal with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, it became evident that Sarah had accepted her inability to bear children. Gen 18:2. In the context of this *agape* meal, Abraham and Sarah met the Lord, and she personally received from Him the word concerning her motherhood. Gen 18:10. She received faith for her unique participation in the next phase of God's will for Abraham's household. The Lord's initiative toward her included the appointed time in which He would enable her to conceive a son. Gen 18:14.

Before the time when Sarah would bring forth a son from her own body, she was taken into the harem of Abimelech. Abimelech is a type of the world in the church. Abimelech sought personal gain and fulfilment through connection with this woman, who was an heir of the grace of life. The *faith* of Sarah was her protection, and *the judgements of God* were her defence. Particularly, we notice that Sarah did *not* use the word of the Lord concerning her imminent motherhood to justify a course of action in an attempt to preserve her life and the life of the promised child. Had she done this, it would have been a carnal endeavour motivated by fear, even though it was informed by the word of present truth.

Rather, Sarah's *faith* was demonstrated by her *chaste conduct* in the midst of these challenging circumstances. She turned from her natural inclinations for control through seduction and manipulation and, instead, trusted in God, judging Him to be faithful. Again, Abraham lived because of her *obedience of faith*, which she exercised in the fear of the Lord.

Moreover, through faith, she sanctified, protected and delivered her household from the ravages of the world. And, significantly, she became the vessel of multiplication, bringing forth 'the child of promise'. Gen 21:2. All believing women will need to lay hold of the same faith that belonged to Sarah, marking them as 'daughters of Sarah'. 1Pe 3:6.

### *The father and mother of the bride city*

The apostle Paul contrasted the motherhood of Hagar with the motherhood of Sarah. Gal 4:23. Hagar represents a carnal way of living within the household of faith. The children of her motherhood are in bondage; *they are not free*. Gal 4:25. In this regard, Ishmael represents the presumption and conduct of those who live according to the flesh.

Sarah was delivered from walking according to the flesh – she is a type of the church, the Jerusalem from above. Gal 4:26. The children of the Jerusalem from above *are free*; they are citizens of the heavenly city. Sarah made a clear distinction between the ways of the flesh and the ways of the Spirit when she said to Abraham, 'Cast out the bondwoman and her son; for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, namely with Isaac.' Gen 21:10.

Paul told us that, by faith, Abraham was illuminated to, and waited patiently for, the city that has foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God. Heb 11:10. By faith, Abraham and Sarah confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on Earth, for they believed for their citizenship in the New Jerusalem, the heavenly city that God had prepared for them. Heb 11:16.

Even more than this, Abraham and Sarah found grace and faith to become *the father and mother* of 'a daughter'; that is, they became the father and mother of *the bride city*, the New Jerusalem. Rom 4:16. 1Pe 3:6. Rev 21:2. The Lord, through the prophet Isaiah, identified Abraham and Sarah as the father and mother of the bride of Christ, declaring, 'Listen to Me, you who follow after righteousness, you who seek the Lord: look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the hole of the pit from which you were dug. *Look to Abraham your father, and to Sarah who bore you*; for I called him alone, and blessed him and increased him. For the Lord will comfort Zion [the mountain upon which the heavenly Jerusalem is built].' Isa 51:1-3.

According to this same faith that was demonstrated by Abraham and Sarah, a courting couple can likewise believe for their marriage to become

established as a newly-formed house *within the city* of the heavenly Jerusalem, the corporate bride of Christ.

### The marriage of Moses and Zipporah

Building upon the lessons learned from Abraham and Sarah, let us now consider the marriage of Moses and Zipporah. This scriptural account, albeit brief, reveals *an important lesson in relation to sanctification in marriage and family relationships*. The sanctification of every individual and every relationship is obtained only through *obedience from the heart* to the way of living (or form of doctrine) to which we have been entrusted by Christ's messengers. Rom 6:17,22. This way of living is a culture that signifies the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings, into which we are immersed through baptism. Paul described this dimension of baptism as 'the circumcision of Christ', writing, 'In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, *by the circumcision of Christ*, buried with Him in baptism'. Col 2:11-12. Through the circumcision of Christ, Moses and Zipporah were delivered from the fleshly ways of relating in their marriage, and were able to stand in their sanctification as a husband and father, and as a wife and mother, respectively.

As a young man, many years before he was married, Moses had personally chosen this godly way of living for himself. That is, by faith, Moses had chosen to be immersed in the fellowship of Christ's offerings and sufferings, which is also called 'the reproaches of Christ'. As we read in the book of Hebrews, 'By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, *choosing rather to suffer affliction* with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, *esteeming the reproach of Christ* greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward'. Heb 11:24-26. Despite having personally chosen the circumcision of Christ as a young man, it was incumbent upon Moses to continue to choose this culture in each subsequent phase of life. As we shall see, this became a pertinent issue for him in the season of family life with young children, and its accompanying pressures.

When he was forty years old, Moses departed from Egypt and went to the land of Midian. Act 7:23. There, Moses married a Midianite woman named Zipporah – and they had two sons. Exo 2:21. Exo 18:2-4. Act 7:29. In the book of Exodus, we read that the LORD God met Moses while he was tending the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law, appearing to him in a flame



of fire from the midst of a bush. Exo 3:1-2. In this encounter, the Lord called Moses to become a messenger to Pharaoh and to deliver the children of Israel from their bondage and oppression under the hand of the Egyptians. The Lord said to Moses, 'Come now, therefore, and I will send you [as a messenger] to Pharaoh that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.' Exo 3:10. Moses was initially reluctant to accept the call of God upon his life, which provoked the Lord to anger. Exo 4:14. Nevertheless, Moses finally accepted the call of God upon him to become a messenger and a deliverer for the nation of Israel.

In obedience to the call of the Lord, Moses then took Zipporah his wife, and their two sons, and began the journey back to Egypt. We see that, despite his calling to be a messenger of God to the ruler of the current world kingdom and to be a deliverer for the children of Israel, *Moses was not excused from his personal disobedience and lack of sanctification in relation to his own family*. Consequently, on the way to Egypt, at the encampment, the Lord took hold of Moses in order to kill him! Exo 4:24. That is, Moses was under judgement because of the lack of sanctification within his marriage and family.

The particular issue of disobedience which precipitated the Lord's judgement upon Moses was that he had disregarded the need to circumcise his second son. By failing to circumcise his son, Moses had not observed the covenant that the Lord had made with Abraham. Gen 17:10. Moses could have sanctified both himself and his sons through his obedience, despite any degree of resistance that he may have experienced from his wife toward him and toward the covenant of circumcision. 1Co 7:14. Plainly, regardless of his wife's responses, the issue for Moses was his own lack of sanctification.

From the scriptural account, we can reasonably conclude that Zipporah had been unwilling to allow Moses to circumcise their second son. Although both sons were with them on the journey to Egypt, it became apparent that only *one* of the sons had not yet been circumcised. Exo 4:20,25. Exo 18:2-4. For Zipporah, there could have been numerous reasons why she justified her resistance to Moses on this matter. Perhaps the second son was already struggling with health-related frailties or difficulties. Perhaps their first son had previously experienced health problems as a consequence of his circumcision, and Zipporah did not want this scenario to recur with her second son.

We could also surmise that Zipporah was demanding to raise the children according to *her* native culture as a Midianite – and, as a Midianite, it was

*not her culture* to circumcise every male infant. She evidently did not agree with it, even though she had compliantly conceded with the circumcision of their first son. However, even more fundamentally, Zipporah's underlying reason for her resistance to her husband was that her *inherent maternal instinct* was to *protect her children from suffering*. She simply did not want her children to experience the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings!

As a result of Moses' disobedience to the Lord, and Zipporah's disobedience to her husband, neither of them was walking blamelessly before the Lord; nor were they of one Spirit together. Gen 17:1. Their marriage covenant was not 'of the Spirit'; rather, it was 'of the flesh'.

### *The blood of the circumcision*

When the Lord took hold of Moses to kill him, Zipporah came to understand the issue which had provoked the Lord's judgement upon her husband. Zipporah took a sharp flint of stone and cut off the foreskin of the younger son, connecting him to the offering and sufferings of Christ, and she cast it at Moses' feet. And, remarkably, as soon as the blood of the circumcision, a type of the blood of Christ, was sprinkled upon Moses, *the Lord let him go*. As we read, 'And it came to pass on the way, at the encampment, that the Lord met him and sought to kill him. Then Zipporah took a sharp stone and cut off the foreskin of her son and cast it at Moses' feet, and said, "Surely you are a husband of blood to me!" So He let him go. Then she said, "You are a husband of blood!" - because of the circumcision.' Exo 4:24-26.

This whole account provides us with a somewhat graphic, yet highly beneficial, exemplification of the *pain and difficulty of family life when the circumcision of Christ is operative*. The blood of Christ's circumcision came between each relationship within their family - the relationship between Zipporah and Moses, the relationship between Zipporah and her son, the relationship between Moses and the Lord, etc. Amazingly, Zipporah was able to save her husband *through her obedience*. The apostle Peter emphasised this key understanding regarding a wife's capacity to save her husband through her obedience when he wrote, 'Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, *may be won [or saved] by the conduct of their wives*, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear'. 1Pe 3:1-2. Zipporah's obedience, in the fear of the Lord, saved her husband, her marriage and her family!

Once she had flung the foreskin at Moses' feet, Zipporah made *two* distinct points of confession in relation to the circumcision and her marriage. First, Zipporah exclaimed to her husband, presumably in an emotive and reactive manner, 'Surely you are a husband of blood to me!' Exo 4:25. This was her initial response to the personal impact of the sufferings which she was experiencing and witnessing within her family because of God's intervention upon their household. That is, in the heat of the intensity of this suffering, she voiced her upset at the imposition of having to undertake such a massive cultural shift in relation to the culture of circumcision! However, as soon as Zipporah recognised that the Lord let her husband go and that he was saved from death on account of her obedience, she became illuminated to see her own sanctification! Thus, she confessed a second time, 'You are a husband of blood – because of the circumcision!' Exo 4:26. This was an *articulation of her illumination* concerning her unique participation in the circumcision of Christ in her marriage and in her family. She realised that the blood of Christ's circumcision would be the ongoing provision of life for herself, for her husband and for her children!

At this point, Zipporah, herself, was joined to the covenant of circumcision, which marked her participation in the Everlasting Covenant. As the Lord said to Abraham, 'I will establish My Covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you ... *My Covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant.*' Gen 17:7,13. We understand that circumcision touched Zipporah in her flesh as she was circumcised from her own culture, so that she could be joined to Moses' culture. Their participation in the cross of Christ became the defining characteristic of their marriage covenant and of their family. They had become 'a worthy house'.

How is circumcision expressed in a marriage? That is, how does circumcision become the manner in which a husband and wife live together in their marriage and family? The covenant of circumcision is manifest in the one-flesh union of a husband and wife *as they live by offering, and as they release each person of the family* to their unique participation in the cross of Christ. Gen 17:13. Undoubtedly, this would have been Sarah's expression of faith toward Abraham and Isaac as she urged her husband and son to the offering that they were to make on Mount Moriah.

Furthermore, in a married couple's daily life together with their family, the covenant of circumcision is extended beyond the parents toward each of their children through *chastening*. The regenerating effect of the cross ministers *healing* and *chastening* to each child. Importantly, however, as with Sarah and Zipporah, we see that this is a reality only when a mother, because of her faith concerning the covenant of circumcision, is *freeing and commending* their child to the chastening hand of their father. The covenant of circumcision is expressed by the father as he brings chastening to his child. Specifically, he believes that, through discipline, with prayer, the child can be healed of their genetic predispositions, and will be released from the bondage of unclean spirits.

From the account of Moses and Zipporah, we learn that the blood which Christ shed during the seven wounding events of His offering journey *is the provision and multiplication of life* for every person, every marriage and every family. This illumination needs to be the confession of every husband and of every wife. When illuminated to this reality, a husband and wife accept that the blood of Christ's circumcision *first comes between them* in their marriage relationship, severing them from the demands of their former, fallen romantic ways of relating with one another. Consequently, they are individually delivered to their sanctified participation as a godly husband or as a godly wife within the marriage relationship. Furthermore, they accept that the blood of the Covenant that Christ shed in seven wounds is the provision of life within *every* relationship, including in their relationship with their children. Mar 14:24.

The further implication is that a household will be hindered from truly meeting *from house to house* within the four foundations of *agape* fellowship (the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, breaking of bread and prayers) unless the blood of Christ's circumcision has been allowed *to first sanctify their marriage relationship and each relationship within their family*. Act 2:42.

As we are illuminated to this truth, and learn to acknowledge our need for the blood of Christ to sanctify *all of* our relationships, we will testify in the same manner as the apostle Paul, who said, 'But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.' Gal 6:14. Paul's statement exemplifies the culture of choosing the cross of Christ and its sanctifying impact upon every relationship. Like Paul, we are able to accept the reality of the relational fallout (for example, the potential loss of relationship) that may occur as a result of our choice to be *sanctified* in

our relationships – as the cross of Christ comes *between* us and every other person. This relational distress may be experienced within the marriage relationship and within the relationships in our family, in the church, and in the broader community.

## The marriage of Boaz and Ruth

Let us now turn our attention to the subject of remarriage. The biblical account of Ruth provides us with a helpful example of *the freedom* that a widow needs to obtain prior to considering *remarriage*. Ruth was a Moabitess whose first marriage, to one of Naomi's sons, ended because her husband had died. Rth 1:1-5,22. Naomi, with her husband and two sons, had resettled in the land of Moab many years earlier – having left their hometown of Bethlehem, in Judah, during a time of famine. While they were in Moab, Naomi's sons chose to marry women of a foreign culture and a foreign god and, in so doing, each son *profaned the covenant of marriage* which the Lord had established from the beginning. As the prophet Malachi later proclaimed regarding the nation of Judah, 'Judah has dealt treacherously, and an abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem, for Judah has profaned the Lord's holy institution which He loves: he has married the daughter of a foreign god.' Mal 2:11. In this manner, Naomi's sons had dealt treacherously because each of them had chosen to marry a foreign wife.

Following the death of her husband and the subsequent death of both of her sons, Naomi, the mother-in-law of Ruth, recognised her need to leave the land of Moab and to return to Bethlehem. Naomi acknowledged that she was under the judgement of the Lord, and she was therefore returning to Israel in *mourning and repentance*. Rth 1:20-21. Naomi instructed each of her two daughters-in-law to return to their mother's house in Moab, and to find other husbands there among their own people. Rth 1:8-9. However, Ruth clung to Naomi and chose not to return to her people and their foreign gods. Rth 1:14-15. Instead, Ruth was determined to join Naomi in her return to the Lord's people, saying, 'Entreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following after you; for wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried. The Lord do so to me, and more also, if anything but death parts you and me.' Rth 1:16-18.

Ruth's confession of faith to Naomi was significant because it demonstrated that she had not only been *released* from her former

marriage covenant but that, also, she had *died* to it! This is an important distinction which we will consider in more detail later. In the first instance, we note that Ruth had already been *released* from her marriage covenant on the grounds that her husband had died – that is, she was free to find another husband. Nevertheless, her ensuing confession of faith to Naomi showed that Ruth had *died* to her marriage covenant, along with all of the vestiges of the expectations and obligations which she had no doubt placed upon her first husband in her endeavour to ensure that their marriage and lifestyle aligned with her former culture as a Moabite. She had also become joined, by faith, to the offering and sufferings of Jesus Christ – evidenced by her willingness to abide with Naomi in the afflictions of the Almighty. Rth 1:21.

Once she arrived in Bethlehem, Ruth, who was a widow, gave herself to the work of caring for her aging mother-in-law, who was also a widow. We note here that, during this season of her life, Ruth was not primarily focused on being remarried, but that, rather, she had given herself to the works of hospitality and care toward her mother-in-law and also for the people of Israel. As a result, she was known and commended among the people for these good works, as Boaz testified, ‘It has been fully reported to me, all that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband, and how you have left your father and your mother and the land of your birth, and have come to a people whom you did not know before.’ Rth 2:11. 1Ti 5:10. Ruth’s hospitable conduct in caring for her widowed mother-in-law and for others, for which she was well reported, aligns with the instructions that the apostle Paul gave to Timothy concerning how to recognise a genuine widow. 1Ti 5:4,10,16.

Ruth’s conduct as a widow was the reason why she was noticed, and cared for, by Boaz. Rth 2:10,19. Boaz appreciated that Ruth was a virtuous woman. Rth 3:11. Ruth also demonstrated her own appreciation for the name and works of Boaz by remaining in his field until the end of the barley and wheat harvests. Rth 2:23. Boaz testified of Ruth, ‘Blessed are you of the Lord, my daughter! For you have shown more kindness at the end than at the beginning, in that you did not go after young men, whether poor or rich.’ Rth 3:10. Soon after, Boaz chose to marry Ruth. Rth 4:10. The elders and people of the city bore witness to Boaz’s desire to marry Ruth, and they commended him to the marriage covenant which they were both choosing, saying to Boaz, ‘The Lord make the woman who is coming to your house like Rachel and Leah, the two who built the house of Israel.’ Rth 4:11.

### *Dead to the Law*

Let us now reiterate our key point concerning remarriage for a widow. In his letter to the Romans, the apostle Paul explained this matter in more detail when he emphasised the important *distinction* between a woman being *released* from the law of her husband when he dies, and this same woman then becoming *dead* to the Law through her connection to the crucifixion of Jesus. Specifically, Paul stated, 'For the woman who has a husband is *bound* by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is *released* from the law of her husband.' Rom 7:2. As we have already stated, a woman whose husband has died is *released* from her former marriage covenant and is *free* to remarry without being considered an adulteress. Rom 7:3. Importantly, however, like Ruth, a godly widow needs to first become *dead* to her former marriage covenant through her connection to the death of Christ, so that she has the liberty to be properly joined to another.

The apostle Paul continued further by describing the relationship between Christ and His bride, the church, as being *two different marriages*. Paul stated that the *first* marriage covenant between Christ and His bride was the Law Covenant, which he called 'the oldness of the letter'. In contrast, he described the *second* marriage covenant as 'the newness of the Spirit'. Rom 7:6. During the first marriage, the church, which was the nation of Israel, was married to Christ through the Law Covenant that was made on Mount Sinai. The Law Covenant was made with the flesh of man. Exo 19:8. This marriage proved to be a failure on account of the weakness of the flesh and because of Israel's propensity toward idolatry. Thus, under the Law Covenant, Israel was an unfaithful wife for the whole of their marriage to Christ. Hence the Lord lamented, 'Surely, as a wife treacherously departs from her husband, so have you dealt treacherously with Me, O house of Israel.' Jer 3:20.

*Christ ended the Law Covenant* (i.e. the *first* marriage) when He nailed it, with Himself, to the cross, and He *died*. Col 2:14. With this understanding in view, we see that the woman, who is the church, has the liberty to be married to Christ a second time *only* through her connection to the death of Christ, so that she likewise becomes *dead* to the first Covenant (dead to the Law). The church was married to Christ according to the New Covenant of the Spirit (i.e. the *second* marriage). Thus, Paul stated, 'Therefore, my brethren, you also have become *dead* to the Law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another.' Rom 7:4. That is, to be *remarried to Christ*, as part of His bride, *we too* must also become

dead to the Law through the body of Christ! The blood, water and Spirit that flowed from Christ's body on the cross are bringing us forth as part of the bride of Christ, the church. Let us now reflect further on the New Covenant of the Spirit, which is our participation in the *new* marriage covenant between Christ and the church!

### The marriage of Christ and the church

The apostle Paul explained that the first man, Adam, was '*a type* of Him who was to come' – Jesus Christ. Rom 5:14. A 'type' is simply a prophetic picture of a reality that is yet to be revealed. With this understanding in mind, we note that the marriage of Adam and the woman was a type of the marriage of Christ and the church. The apostle Paul then explained that *the marriage of Christ and the church is the essential image into which every marriage is to be recovered*, writing, 'This is a great mystery [a man and woman made one in marriage], but I speak concerning [the marriage of] Christ and the church'. Eph 5:32.

We also recognise that when the Lord God determined together, saying, 'It is not good that man should be alone, I will make him a helper comparable to him', the Father, Son and Holy Spirit were *not* referring principally to Adam – rather, They were referring firstly to the creation of a helper comparable *for Jesus Christ*. Gen 2:18. *Evidently, the marriage of Christ and the church was necessary for the fulfilment of Their Everlasting Covenant*. The formation of a bride as a helper comparable to Christ was necessary for the work of bringing to birth, and nurturing, a multitude of sons of God who would be brought to glory as sons of men in the image and likeness of God.

The formation of the woman from the rib of Adam *foreshadowed* the establishment of the bride of Christ, the church, on the cross. Gen 2:21-22. The blood, water and Spirit that flowed from Christ's side constituted the figurative rib from which the bride of Christ was formed. Joh 19:34. Zec 12:10. On the day of His offering, Christ was married to the church as His comparable bride. Eph 5:30-32. For the entirety of the church age, the corporate bride of Christ is being sanctified and cleansed by Christ, so that she will be prepared for the wedding feast with her Husband. Eph 5:26-27. Rev 19:9.

It is important to note that the bride of Christ is *not* formed *separately* from the body of Christ; rather, the body of Christ is the context in which the bride of Christ is being formed. The key point is that we are *first* made members of His corporate *body* and are subsequently established



as part of the corporate *bride* of Christ. Eph 5:30-32. The blood, water and Spirit, which are operative within the fellowship of the *body* of Christ, are the elements through which we are processed, washed and established as an overcoming, firstfruits people who comprise the *bride* of Christ. We see that the bride of Christ is a multitude of *overcoming families and households*. Jer 31:1.

### *The vessel of multiplication*

The church was married to Christ on the day of His offering. However, the corporate bride of Christ was indistinguishable from Christ until the Day of Pentecost, when she was manifest as 'a bride coming down from heaven'. Rev 21:2. Through baptism into the Holy Spirit, those who belong to the corporate bride are enabled by the seven Spirits of God (Eternal Spirit) to join Christ's travail. The corporate bride receives this capacity to travail with Christ so that others can be born of God. Act 1:8. In this way, the Holy Spirit enables the bride of Christ to be a helper comparable to her Husband, Christ.

As we noted earlier, the bringing forth of identities who are born again as sons of God happens in *godly families* who are firstfruits houses. These families are an expression of the bride of Christ, the church, who is a virgin although already married to Christ. *Her work*, as a virgin bride who is proceeding from the spiritual body of Christ (as Eve proceeded from Adam), *is to bring forth sons of God by the Holy Spirit*. Luk 1:35. The bride of Christ is the vessel of multiplication. She is described in Scripture as 'the Jerusalem from above' who is the mother of all those who are born as sons of God, and also as a city that is set on the top of Mt Zion. Gal 4:26 Psa 48:1-2.

As those who are part of the bride of Christ, we are proceeding forth from the body of Christ, the Son of Man. *This happens through our participation in the seven wounding events of His offering journey*, which culminated in the completion of His redemptive work and His death on the cross. In this regard, we are drawn from His body as the bride of Christ, in *each* wounding event.

The apostle John described the bride of Christ in the time of the end. The wife of the Lamb (i.e. the bride of Christ) travails to bring forth a great multitude, making her 'the mother of nations and kings'. Rev 21:9. Gen 17:16.

*The new heavens and the new earth*

Following the judgement of the great white throne, the only things that will remain will be *the throne of God and the Lamb*, and *the administration of the bride city*. The apostle John recorded that he saw no temple in the New Jerusalem, for the Lord God and the Lamb will be its temple. Rev 21:22. Time, as we presently know it, will also be done away with. The Father and the Son will bring forth the new heavens and the new earth, by the Holy Spirit, through the administration of the New Jerusalem. It is remarkable to consider that the new heavens and the new earth will be populated by the bride city!

The bride of Christ will then bring forth a never-ending multitude of mature sons who have spiritual bodies. The righteousness of sonship will *increase forever*. Isa 9:7. 2Pe 3:13. Uniquely, the mechanism of multiplication in the new heavens and the new earth will *not* be procreation. In relation to the new heavens and the new earth, the apostle John recorded, 'He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new".' Rev 21:5. The ministry of the bride city by the Spirit will be the river of the water of life that will proceed from the throne of God and of the Lamb to multiply the life of God forever. Rev 22:1-5. Significantly, the multiplication of identities in the new heavens and the new earth will be the final phase of the fulfilment of the mystery of God. It will be the final manifestation of man in the image and likeness of God where 'God is all in all'. 1Co 15:28.

## Chapter 3

# The format of a Christian wedding service

### Background

Over the past few years, the Lord has been urging us, as a presbytery and as a community of people, to turn in repentance from our sacramental approach to pre-marriage counsel and the conduct of wedding services.

We recognise that many people have mistakenly believed that ‘the church’ marries a couple. Where this understanding has prevailed, the marriage celebrant has been viewed as being the minister of God’s blessing to the couple through the administration of a ‘seven blessings’ wedding service.

The misinterpretation of the scriptural symbolism associated with the seven blessings service has promoted a sacramental approach to the conduct of wedding services, and has also influenced our approach to pre-marriage counsel. In the absence of illumination, a couple may believe that the foundation for their marriage is established through the blessings that are imparted at their wedding service, rather than through their personal commitment to walk in obedience to God’s covenant purpose for marriage.

This confusion has highlighted the need for a clear statement regarding the process of preparation for Christian marriage, and the format of a Christian wedding service. The purpose of such a statement is to provide clarity to all concerned regarding the accountabilities that belong to the elders of the church; to the families of the couple; and to the couple themselves as they seek marriage according to the order that has been established by God.

### The laws of the land

The law in Australia defines marriage as being the union of two people, voluntarily entered into for life. It is important to note that, while this definition has been deliberately altered in recent years to allow for same-sex unions, the law recognises the right of Christian churches and ministers to uphold the biblical understanding of marriage as being between a man and a woman.

Restoration Fellowships International (RFI), a legal entity established from the initiative of the presbytery, is recognised by the government as an organisation with the authority to nominate marriage celebrants who can solemnise marriages according to law. In accordance with this designation, we are obliged to comply with the requirements of the law as we support couples in their desire to enter Christian marriage, including offering pre-marriage counsel.

Those who offer Christian counsel to courting couples are commended to this care by the presbytery. While the presbytery's function in relation to courtship counsel and marriage does not derive its definition from governing authorities, it comprises men who are RFI marriage celebrants and/or recognised as ministers of entities affiliated with RFI.

A couple is legally joined in marriage through the service conducted by RFI marriage celebrants. However, it is essential to remember that a Christian couple effectively marry *themselves* by making covenant with each other before the Lord and His people.

### The nature of pre-marriage counsel

During courtship, a couple may seek support from the church to establish the foundations of a genuinely Christian marriage. In this instance, the role of a Christian leader (including a marriage celebrant) is to minister the gospel of sonship, proclaiming to the couple God's covenant purpose for marriage. This ministry includes providing counsel

to the couple as they process the culture of their relationship toward the establishment of a Christian house in Christ. Leaders nominated by the presbytery offer this counsel to the couple as a fellowship, rather than as a service.

The input provided by counsellors will be based on the biblical understanding of Christian marriage. Our understanding of the nature of Christian marriage is discussed in detail in the earlier chapters of this publication.

Fundamental to this understanding is the knowledge of how to court in a godly manner, which the Scripture refers to as 'in sanctification and honour' as distinct from 'the passion of lust'. 1Th 4:3-8. The brief comments that follow in this section are a summary of the content of a companion publication called *An overview of godly courtship* (2025 edition).

Sanctification and honour are hallmarks of fellowship. Fellowship in the body of Christ should be the setting in which Christian disciples meet and relate with one another. Within this context, which is established by the proceeding word of God, they are able to initiate relationships that reflect the culture of friendship that was espoused by Jesus. He taught, 'Greater love has no-one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.' Joh 15:13-14. When founded in this culture, friendships that become exclusive are able to progress to courtships that are distinguished by sanctification and honour.

A relationship that is initiated on any basis other than fellowship in Christ will be carnal. Such a relationship will merely service a person's desire for identity verification through projection. By this, we mean that the image that they have of themselves is informed and affirmed through the relationships that they pursue, and by how they are received by others. They are unable to truly worth, or even to perceive, another because they see them only through the veil of their own projection.

The motive for initiating a courtship must not be identity verification; nor should it be based on a person's projections. Relationships that proceed in this mode often have religious overtones, but are inevitably carnal and dysfunctional. This is because a projection is a lie that prevents two people from meeting in the truth. Where this is the impetus for a courtship, the relationship will eventually degenerate to the conquering mechanisms that often give rise to licentious behaviour.

With this understanding in mind, an astute counsellor will direct a couple to sanctification and honour. Early on, they will lead them to reflect on the motivations for their relationship, including its initiation. Such a conversation provides an opportunity for the identification of any personal immaturities and identity frailties that may have unhelpfully influenced the couple's commencement of an exclusive relationship. If left unchecked, these developmental limitations will hinder the future viability of a courtship. Where an individual's or a couple's readiness for courtship is uncertain, the counsellor is able to refocus the conversation, and to encourage them to give attention to the matters of personal development that are necessary for meeting another in sanctification and honour. Heb 12:12-13.

The guidance that a counsellor provides to a courting couple will include, among many things, a clear understanding of the need to avoid all promiscuity. Sexual dissipation is a symptom of relational failure within a courtship. The foundations of trust and respect are violated when a couple is promiscuous prior to marriage. In these instances, one person uses the other for self-gratification, and conquers them as an identity-verifying exercise.

The dysfunction and corruption resulting from sexual promiscuity during courtship is not resolved by a marriage covenant. Instead, the physical union of the couple after marriage only exacerbates the relational failures of their courtship.

The union of a man and woman in marriage should be the expression of 'giving-love'. This is possible only as the couple lay down their lives by the capacity received from *El Shaddai*. They are then able to proceed to become one flesh, as an expression of their marriage union.

Importantly, a couple will not be made 'one' by the Lord while ever the cause and effects of their promiscuity in courtship remain unconfessed and unresolved.

During the season of pre-marriage counsel, the minister or celebrant will also speak to the couple about other matters related to Christian discipleship. Counsellors will encourage the couple to keep a journal of their courtship journey. They will be able to draw from the content of their journals as they prepare the testimonies that they will share on their wedding day.

By way of summary, this season of preparation for marriage comprises five identifiable phases of growth and development: friendship; romance; courtship; bonding; and marriage preparation.

## Engagement

At the point of their engagement, the couple are beginning to covenant together toward marriage. That is, they are preparing themselves, culturally, for their life together as a new family within the relational setting of an extended family. We note, in this regard, that Jesus defined a household as comprising three generations. Luk 12:51-53.

During this season of engagement, the man does not express headship toward his fiancée. Rather, he exercises headship toward his own ground. That is, the Christian bridegroom will be motivated to maintain clear and open fellowship with his fiancée, her family, and his family. Such an initiative demonstrates the man's commitment to preparing their house for fellowship from house to house once they are married.

During their engagement, the couple will prepare the testimonies that will be shared in the wedding service. Their testimonies should reflect the faith that they have personally received during their courtship and through their ongoing fellowship with the celebrant. The couple will also prepare the prayers that they will offer to the Lord following their confession of faith. Their testimonies and prayers are prepared in fellowship with the celebrant.

To support this preparation, it is important that the couple understands the distinction between their personal sonship, and the grace that is received from the Lord to be one Spirit and one flesh.

We note, in this regard, that every person who is born of God receives His divine nature. Furthermore, through the Holy Spirit, sons of God are made one with the Lord and with the other members of the body of Christ. Eph 4:4.

However, on their wedding day, the Lord makes the couple 'one' so that, together, they are heirs of the grace of sonship life. This unity gives them the privilege and capacity to bring forth and nurture godly children who are born with the divine nature.

These are children who are born and raised as spiritual, or holy, sons of God. 1Co 7:14. Being made one in this manner was signified in the lives of Abraham and Sarah when their names were changed by receiving a

portion of Yahweh's own name. Gen 17:5,15. The Lord did this for them so that they could bring forth Isaac according to the Spirit. Gen 17:16,19. Gal 4:29.

Having been made one, the woman then proceeds from the man. This principle was revealed in the very first marriage, which was between Adam and the woman. Christ formed the woman from a rib, which He had taken from Adam, and then 'brought her to the man'. Gen 2:22. Adam, in the freedom that belongs to faith, chose the woman as his wife, taking her by the hand as he received her from the Lord. The Lord then made them one through the covenant of marriage.

Adam called her 'Woman', not only because she was formed from his rib, but because the Lord made them one and she was now being drawn from their oneness. Gen 2:23.

Moses explained that this 'oneness' is the reason why 'a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh'. Gen 2:24. The apostle Paul further elaborated, saying, 'Man is not from woman, but woman from man. Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man. For this reason the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels.' 1Co 11:8-10.

In this passage of Scripture, Paul was referring to a ten-piece garland, which was customarily worn by Jewish women to indicate that they were married. He explained that this symbol should have signified that a married woman was submitted to, and proceeding from, the authority of the name that her husband had received from Christ. In our culture, the wearing of wedding rings should signify the same understanding and commitment of a husband and wife to the order of headship.

The process of making covenant culminates in the marriage vows and union of the couple on their wedding day. At this point, because of the expression of their choice and their faith, the Lord makes the couple one. They are named as 'one' as the man is redefined to be the head of his wife, and as the woman relinquishes her name, when given by her father to this now sanctified union, to take on the man's name as her husband.

## Wedding service format

Our growing understanding of Christian marriage has precipitated a new approach to the format of our wedding services. Essential to this reform



is the recognition that the couple is asking the leaders and the congregation to witness the covenant and vows which they are making. Reflecting this intent, the structure of a wedding service should include five key elements, all of which are overseen and facilitated by the celebrant.

### *1. Proclamation*

The first element of the wedding service will involve *the ministry of the gospel* of sonship by the celebrant. This declaration should convey the foundational principles of Christian marriage, outlined by the apostle Paul. He announced that the marriage of a man and a woman should reflect the marriage of Christ and His bride, the church. Eph 5:25-29.

The marriage of Christ and the church reveals to us the cultural implications of marriage in the image intended by God for mankind. Paul's statement is built upon God's own declaration concerning the purpose for marriage. As the prophet Malachi recorded, 'But did He not make them one, having a remnant of the Spirit? And why one? He seeks godly offspring. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth.' Mal 2:15.

By commencing the service with the gospel of sonship, the messenger is fulfilling his responsibility and accountability to declare 'the word from the beginning', which reveals the ground of fellowship upon which the couple are enabled to establish their marriage and household. This is the fellowship of the Father and the Son. 1Jn 1:1-3.

Importantly, the celebrant is not accountable for how this message is *received*. The couple themselves are accountable and responsible for their own response to the word. For this reason, they must take heed regarding how they build upon the foundation that is extended to them through the gospel.

### *2. Testimony*

Reflecting this key principle, the second element of the wedding service will involve a confession of faith for marriage by both the groom and the bride. This element of the service will provide the couple with the opportunity to testify of the faith that they have each received during their courtship, to establish their house in Christ.

The testimonies of the groom and bride will not be scripted for them. Rather, they will have been prepared in fellowship with the celebrant

during the season of engagement. The groom and bride will each read the testimonies that they have prepared, which should be each 3-5 minutes in length.

The testimonies of the groom and of the bride should communicate how the couple has found faith for marriage by walking blamelessly before the Lord. That is, they have found faith to walk together as Christians, serving together in the newness of the Spirit and not in the wretchedness of struggling to keep the Law of God as a Christian ideal, without the power that the Holy Spirit gives. They are able to give thanks for the Holy Spirit, who enables joyful and righteous living and courting.

Accordingly, their testimonies should reveal the groom's and the bride's desire to be made one, with one name, by the grace and initiative of *El Shaddai*. They are able to acknowledge the Lord's initiative to join them in this manner so that, as they become one flesh, they are able, within the will of God, to bring forth godly seed. Mal 2:15.

Drawing from the example of the Holy Spirit's initiative toward the reformation of the marriage of Abraham and Sarah, the groom acknowledges that Yahweh is giving to him a unique portion of His name to enable him to form a new household and to bring forth godly seed. This results in a fundamental change to the expression of the man's identity, because he is becoming one Spirit and one flesh with his wife. That is, as he turns to Christ and participates in the conversation of sonship, he will receive specific grace from Christ to be the head of this woman, and to become a father of faith. The two have become one.

Similarly, the bride is able to acknowledge that, as she joins the conversation of sonship offered to her by her husband, forsaking the fallen presumption to name herself and her household in her own image, she is named anew. This will mark a fundamental change in the expression of her identity as she now becomes the helper to this man. To this end, she can testify of her faith to proceed from her husband to become a wife and a mother.

The conversation of sonship, to which the couple is committing, is the will of God for their lives and household, which was declared by the Father, and finished through the offering of the Son as He journeyed from Gethsemane to Calvary. Being joined together in the fellowship of this offering is the yoke through which the couple is able to find deliverance from the wearisome and destructive relational dynamics inherited from the fall of mankind. Furthermore, it is the means by which

they obtain the blessing of rest and life in all of the circumstances that they will encounter as a married couple and as a family.

Inherent in making these statements is the couple's acknowledgement that they are accountable before the Lord for how they marry, and for the culture of their marriage and household.

This relieves the messenger/celebrant of the expectation to bless the covenant that the couple is making. The messenger avoids unnecessary judgements about the cultural acceptability of the couple, and is delivered from the demands to bless a couple whose marriage covenant may be based upon the idolatry of their heart, rather than on the word of truth. Eze 14:9-10.

### *3. The couple's prayer*

Having testified to the faith that they have received by hearing the gospel and its implications for marriage, the couple then asks the Father to make them one by joining them in one name in Christ, as the head of their house.

We note that *El Shaddai* and His faith is already the life and capacity of both the man and woman, as they are already built on Christ. He is the foundation of their lives individually, and the foundation of their house, as well as the power for their lives.

Moreover, the couple is asking the Holy Spirit to sanctify them to their unique expression as a new house within the order of headship that belongs to the fellowship of Yahweh, which includes the capacity to bring forth children who are born with the divine nature. In the fear of the Lord, they acknowledge that any violation of the ground upon which they are being established in one Spirit and one flesh provokes the jealous rebuke of the Spirit.

### *4. Vows*

The couple will make covenant (vows) with each other before the Lord and His people, and will each put on a wedding ring, signifying their union.

Where appropriate, the father of the bride will acknowledge that his daughter, having been drawn from the one-Spirit fellowship of his household, has chosen to be joined to another, who has also been drawn from a household of the same Spirit.

## THE COVENANT OF MARRIAGE

The father can, therefore, give his daughter to the marriage covenant that she and the groom are making, and can commend the couple to their vows and to the Christian culture to which they are committing themselves.

As the couple make these vows, under the direction of the celebrant, each is 'leaving father and mother' and they are made one Spirit and one flesh by the Lord. That is, in response to their confession of faith, and their prayer, the Lord makes them one. The man is receiving this unique portion of the Lord's name, and the woman is receiving this name from her husband.

The vows that the couple makes are simple statements that communicate the reality of this union and also meet the requirements of the law of the land. These statements, outlined below, have been approved for use in accordance with the rites of RFI.

### *Celebrant*

The couple have each testified of the faith that they have received to be joined together in the fellowship and order of headship, and they have sought the Lord in prayer for His grace to be joined as one. Therefore, they will now make their marriage vows to one another, before the Lord and us all.

### *Groom's Vows*

By the faith and grace that I have received from Christ, these are my vows before God and this congregation.

I accept the call to honour Christ's lordship, and to submit to Him within the order of headship, for I know that He is the head of my home.

By the capacity that comes from Christ as I seek Him, I will offer myself in headship to [Bride]. I will love her as Christ loved the church.

I will establish our marriage in the cross of Christ, as the source of the wisdom and power of God.

I will worship in the fellowship of the body of Christ, publicly, and from house to house.

Forsaking all other vows, I take you, [Bride], and you only, in sanctification and honour, as my wife in Christian marriage.

I will love and worship you in body, soul and spirit; in sickness and health; for richer; for poorer; until death parts us.

### *Bride's Vows*

By the faith and grace that I have received from Christ, these are my vows before God and this congregation.

I accept the call to honour Christ's lordship, and to submit to my husband within the order of headship, which flows from the Father and Son to him.

By the capacity that comes from Christ as I seek Him, I will offer myself as helper to [Groom].

I will sanctify myself to the cross of Christ in our marriage, as the source of the wisdom and power of God.

I will worship in the fellowship of the body of Christ, publicly, and from house to house.

Forsaking all other vows, I take you, [Groom], and you only, in sanctification and honour, as my husband in Christian marriage.

I will love and worship you in body, soul and spirit; in sickness and health; for richer; for poorer; until death parts us.

### *Celebrant*

The use of a symbol denoting the sanctification of the marriage union of a man and a woman is acknowledged and blessed in the Scriptures.

Once they have been joined by God in one new name in Christ, God also gives to the couple the capacity, as one Spirit and one flesh, to bring forth godly seed.

They remain heirs together of this 'grace of life' as they abide in the fellowship of headship.

'What God has joined together, let not man separate.'

[Groom] will now put on his wedding ring, signifying that he, as husband, is submitted to Christ his head, from whom he receives

specific grace and authority from Christ to be the head of his wife, to form a new household, and to become a father of faith.

[Bride] will then put on her wedding ring, signifying that she, as wife, is submitted to, and proceeds from, the grace and authority that her husband receives from Christ.

### Groom

By the same faith and grace by which I made my vows before God and this congregation, I wear this ring as a symbol of my sanctification as husband of [Bride], in the fellowship of headship.

### Bride

By the same faith and grace by which I made my vows before God and this congregation, I wear this ring as a symbol of my sanctification as wife of [Groom], in the fellowship of headship.

## **5. Commendation**

The final element of the wedding service will be the prayer of the congregation, led by the celebrant. Through prayer, the congregation commends the couple to their vows.

### **The groom and bride's attendants**

In preparation for the wedding day, the groom and the bride are encouraged to invite the involvement of attendants (for example, groomsmen and bridesmaids) who are able to support, exhort and commend the couple to the union that they are establishing in Christ. This applies to all couples, including those who are older or who are marrying for a second time.

The involvement of attendants as part of a wedding party is attested to in the Scriptures. For example, John the Baptist identified himself as 'the friend of the groom', or Christ's 'best man'. He said, 'He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled.' Joh 3:29.

Similarly, the Song of Songs nominates key parties who are able to encourage the bride and groom to their vows, and to bear witness to the couple's faith for marriage in the image intended by God. For example, Solomon identified the contributions of 'the daughters of Jerusalem',

who are the friends of the bride; the brothers of the bride; the friends of the bridegroom; and the relatives of the couple.

In preparation for the wedding day, the celebrant should engage with the wedding party to instruct them, and to exhort them, toward their support of the couple, and to their sanctified participation in the culture of the service.

## Music

Music is an important feature of wedding services, supporting the entries of the groom and his attendants, and the bride and her attendants, and the exit of the bridal party at the conclusion of the service.

Community choruses during the service also provide a point of participation and worship for the wedding party and guests. For example, a worship chorus could be sung following the proclamation of the gospel and then at the conclusion of the couple's prayers.

Music for the service would typically be facilitated by the church, which would appoint musicians and singers to support the worship expression of the service.

## Post-service celebration

Following the wedding service, the church could also offer to provide an opportunity for all those attending the wedding service to celebrate with the couple.

This post-service celebration time would be a gift of *agape* fellowship from the church to the couple and their families, on behalf of all the households of the church community. It should be an expression of our common Christian culture, with the main focus on fellowship, thanksgiving and celebration, rather than it being some sort of tradition.

This time, which would be hosted by the celebrant, could include the signing of the marriage register, some light refreshments, as well as reflections from a couple of representatives of the church community (perhaps one man and one woman). Where appropriate, those speaking could include an elder who would be able to convey the heart of offering behind this time of celebration, as well as someone who had been involved in supporting the couple during their courtship.

## THE COVENANT OF MARRIAGE

The speakers would not need to include those who would likely be speaking to the couple at the family celebration, such as the parents of the couple and the bridal party.

Those who speak would do so on behalf of the whole church community: to congratulate the couple, to give thanks for their faith and commitment, and to bear witness to the formation of a new house within the bride city.

It is important to ensure that the post-service celebration does not attempt to extend the focus and ministry of the wedding service into this time. Equally, this time should not attempt to replicate the family celebration time. It is not intended to replace 'the wedding breakfast' (that is, the first *agape* meal of the couple with their family and friends).

### Family celebration

While an *agape* meal is not formally a part of the wedding service, the couple would also be encouraged to have such a meal with family, friends, and church leaders following the service, as the first such initiative of their new 'house'.

The focus of this gathering would be on fellowship, and on continuing to commend the couple toward their covenant vows, with appropriate involvement from family and friends. In this regard, the culture of the celebration should reflect the couple's confession of faith for their new house in Christ.