

## **A Christ-Centered Marriage**

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### **I. God Institutes Marriage - Genesis 2:18-24**

#### **What did God intend when He created the woman and instituted marriage?**

God's purpose was to give the man someone to love. God created us to love us. He desired to be in this loving relationship by loving us. He created the woman as a suitable helper. Adam found no suitable creature to be the object of his love because none had yet been created. So God made the woman. In so doing, He gave us a reflection of the relationship He desired to have with us. He created us to be the object of His love and in perfect harmony with Him.

#### **How would the relationship between Adam and Eve in Paradise have been a reflection of the relationship we would have had with God before the fall into sin?**

What marriage would have been like in Paradise is difficult, if not impossible, to imagine. We don't fully understand what a perfect relationship with God would have been like, therefore we cannot imagine how a perfect marriage would have reflected it. They had a perfect relationship and walk with God which they would have reflected in their perfect walk.

#### **How is marriage a reflection of our relationship with God since the fall into sin?**

We know what our relationship to God is now and how that is expressed. This is the relationship between God and His people/church. This relationship is the covenant of salvation which God made with us at the fall (Genesis 3:15), and which He has confirmed throughout the ages. This is the Gospel promised of old and fulfilled in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This covenant of salvation is the definitive marriage of which all marriages are to be the reflection. While we cannot speculate on what this would have been in Paradise, we clearly know it to be our relationship to God in Christ. The covenant of salvation (gospel) is the marriage of God and His church.

#### **Where is this written?**

References, positive and negative, about the marriage of God are found, among other places, in the Song of Songs; Isaiah chapters 1 and 62; Jeremiah chapters 2, 3, and 31; Ezekiel chapters 16, 20, and 23; Hosea chapters 1-3; Malachi 1; Matthew chapters 9 and 25; John chapter 3; 2 Corinthians chapter 11; Ephesians chapter 5; Revelation chapters 19 and 21.

## **II. Genesis 2:18-24 Revisited**

### **How does the biblical teaching on the marriage of God affect our understanding of Genesis 2:18-24?**

What we see in the rest of scripture is the mind of God on what this relationship is and what God intended when He established it.

### **What did God intend by creating us male and female and instituting marriage?**

God intended that we live in a relationship with one another that reflected His marriage to us as His people. He intended men to understand that they were to be like Him to their wives. He intended women to understand that they were to be like His beloved to their husbands. He intended our love for each other to be a living declaration of the relationship He has with us and we with Him. By this He would renew His covenant with us each day as we remembered His love by loving each other. He also intended that in that confession we would live in His love with each other.

### **How does this view of marriage relate to the general teaching on marriage in society?**

Marriage is primarily taught using the law. Each partner in the relationship is assigned his or her duties and told what his or her responsibilities are. Certainly, responsibilities exist in marriage. But the scriptures do not focus on the responsibilities, but focus on the grace of God in the covenant of salvation. Marriage is not a legal requirement, it is a reflection of the Gospel. As such, our motivation for how we conduct ourselves in this relationship is not what God requires, but what God has done for us and shown us in the marriage covenant of salvation between Himself and His bride. Our gospel reflection of that relationship will accomplish our marital responsibilities as we show Christ's love to one another.

### **What does this tell us about God's reason for creating us?**

God created us in order to have someone to love. Being love, He desired that we be the object of that love. His desire is that we respond to His love by loving Him back. He does not try to force us to love Him, but loves us, that we may respond to His love by love.

### **How is this reflected in the creation of Adam and Eve?**

God states that it is not good that man be alone and resolves to provide a helper suitable for him (verse 18). But before He creates the woman, God parades all the animals before Adam so that he might name them. In so doing, God points out to Adam that he has no one to love. As God created us to love us, so He now reflects that in Adam. It is after naming all the animals that Adam is made to sleep and Eve is brought

forth. Adam immediately takes her to himself as wife, that they may reflect the relationship they have with God by their love for one another.

### **What is this relationship we have with Him?**

As was stated before, we don't know exactly how that relationship would have been expressed in Paradise, because we aren't there. The biblical definition of the relationship for which He created us male and female is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Ephesians 5:22-33 specifically refers to Genesis 2 in describing this gospel relationship. God clearly intends us to understand the creation of male and female in the light of the Gospel.

### **How is the Gospel specifically related to what happened in Genesis 2:18-24?**

Augustine, in his work on the Gospel of John and on the Psalms, specifically applies this account to the account of the crucifixion. He maintained that as Adam slept at the creation of Eve, Christ slept in death. As from Adam's side came that with which God formed Eve, so from Christ's side flowed the blood and water with which Christ formed His church (Augustine specifically refers to the Sacraments). What God did at the beginning, He did in a much greater way on the cross. The marriage He had established between He and His bride, reflected in this creation account, He reestablishes for time and eternity at the great wedding of Calvary.

### **How does marriage as a reflection of the Gospel shed light on modern controversies on marriage and the relationship between men and women in society and the church?**

At present there is considerable discussion about marriage and the role of men and women based on the Order of Redemption and the Order of Creation.

### **What is the Order of Redemption and how is it seen to be relevant?**

The Order of Redemption is the fact that Christ has redeemed us all. He has not redeemed some differently than others. This is being promoted by some as the reason why men and women in the home and the church are basically the same in the eyes of God. They should not have distinctions in what each can do. Equality in redemption is said to mean equality in task, as far as opportunities are concerned. Most quote Galatians 3:28 to support their claim.

### **What is the Order of Creation and how is it seen as relevant?**

The Order of Creation is the fact that Adam was created first, then Eve. This is being promoted by some as the reason why distinctions between men and women must still exist in the home and the church. They primarily cite 1 Corinthians 11 and 1 Timothy 2.

### **What is the controversy between these two?**

Those promoting no distinctions between men and women contend that relationships between men and women are determined by the Order of Redemption. Therefore, the Order of Redemption trumps the Order of Creation. Those promoting the Order of Creation contend that the Order of Creation is supreme in these matters and trumps the Order of Redemption.

### **How does the marriage of God assist in this discussion?**

The teaching on the marriage of God is the covenant of salvation. Therefore redemption is at the heart of our understanding of marriage. All doctrines are defined by the central article of faith; that we are saved by God's grace in Christ, through faith. So we must contend that our redemption in Christ defines our creation. Does this eliminate the distinctions between husband and wife? No! It defines them. Our redemption does not eliminate our distinctions, it defines them in a Gospel manner that enables us to see our life as husband and wife as a confession of faith in the redemption Christ has accomplished for us.

### **How is this relationship applied in our daily lives?**

This is applied as we see our relationships in our homes as more than just a human institution with God's blessing, but as a wonderful expression of our faith. Husbands and wives have a wondrous privilege to declare their faith to God and each other by the love shown at home. More specific application will be made in the following section.

## **III. The New Testament Teaching on the Marriage of God**

### **What does the New Testament teach concerning the marriage of God?**

The New Testament includes, among other things, Jesus as the Bridegroom of the church, the church as the Bride of Christ, preparation of the church as the Bride of Christ, the wedding feast, and marriage as an earthly reflection of the marriage of Christ and His Bride.

### **What does it say about Jesus as the Bridegroom?**

Jesus is specifically referred to as the Bridegroom in Matthew 9:15; 25:1-13; Mark 2:19; Luke 5:34; John 3:22-36; 2 Corinthians 11:1-2; Ephesians 5:22-33; Revelation 19:7-9; 21:2.

These references refer to Jesus in His role of Savior. This confirms the Old Testament teaching that this marriage is the Gospel; the covenant of salvation.

### **What does the Bridegroom do?**

In Ephesians 5:25 Paul, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, says that Christ, as Bridegroom, "loved the church and gave Himself for her." This is the heart of the Gospel. Jesus serves His husband's role by laying down His life for His bride.

Paul goes on to say that Christ does this "that He might make her holy, cleansing her with water along with the Word." This is a reference to the fact that He has placed the blessings of His death and resurrection into baptism as a gift to His bride.

He then continues by stating the purpose, "that He might present her to Himself as a glorious church, without any spot or wrinkle, or any such thing." He glorifies and magnifies her by giving Himself for her.

(Note: We use "her" instead of "it" in Ephesians 5. The Greek allows either one. We prefer "her" because no bride should ever be called "it" or "a thing". Christ has not made His bride an object. He has loved her with the most incredible, intimate love ever known.)

What is described here is clearly the Gospel in which Christ is the One who does everything to establish this relationship with His bride. That this is the Gospel is affirmed elsewhere in the New Testament. In Matthew 25:1-13, Jesus is clearly talking about the kingdom, which comes in the Gospel. In John 3:22-36 John the Baptist affirms Christ as the Bridegroom, then testifies that He is the source of eternal life. Everything points to the role of the Bridegroom as that of Savior, and nothing in any way contradicts it. Jesus is the Bridegroom as Savior.

### **How is this related to, or a fulfillment of, the Old Testament teaching on the Bridegroom?**

This is the fulfillment of the words of the Old Testament. Jesus, the Bridegroom, deals with Israel's sin, clearly described in the Old Testament condemnation passages. He takes responsibility for her and restores her as He promised. The Old Testament identified this marriage as the covenant of salvation, which the New Testament clearly affirms in the marriage of Christ and the church. The New Testament even uses the same images of washing and adorning the bride. The remarkable thing about Ephesians 5 is not how much it says, but what it does not say. Paul does not establish that there is a marriage between Christ and the church, he simply applies it. His words clearly indicate that this marriage has been established elsewhere and need only be applied to Christ and the church. This is clearly established in the Old Testament and he is merely applying those truths to Jesus and His bride.

### **How does Jesus define "Husband"?**

As was stated in the section on the Old Testament, the marriage of God and His people is the marriage that defines marriage. He does not use our relationship to give meaning to His. He uses His relationship to give meaning to ours. He defines husband by His actions toward us.

As the Bridegroom, Jesus takes responsibility for His bride. He bears her sins and their punishment in her place. He in every way takes responsibility for her to unburden her so that she can live in the freedom of His love.

He also defines the role of a husband as He places Himself between His bride and all that threatens her. He does not hide behind her. He allows her to hide behind Him. He takes all the darts of the devil, the world, and our sinful nature, and triumphs on her behalf. His reward is her glory.

Jesus also defines a husband as one who loves unselfishly by denying Himself and exalting her. He considers His own needs of no importance whatsoever. He climbs into the pit of her despair and raises and glorifies her. Jesus practices chivalry in the purest sense. He does not think of Himself, but serves her in love, that she may be magnified.

### **How does Jesus define "headship"?**

Headship is one of the most misunderstood concepts in scripture. The world assumes that to be head of something is to be the boss or dictator. The world generally associates perks and power with headship. This is a view dominated by the law. We are not dominated by the law, we are children of the gospel. Jesus is the gospel. The "good news" is that Jesus has laid down His life and is risen again that we might receive the forgiveness of sins, through which we are made children of God and heirs of eternal life. Any understanding of Jesus' headship must be a gospel understanding.

Jesus defines His headship in Matthew 20:28 where He says, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many." Jesus defines His gospel role as servant. Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18). He defines the exercise of that authority, or headship, as service. Thus the head is the greatest servant. Jesus affirmed this to His disciples in Matthew 20:26-27. He also demonstrates this definition of headship in John 13:1-17 when He washes the disciple's feet. The focal point of that text is the exchange He has with Peter. Peter is unwilling to have Jesus humiliate Himself in this way. Jesus tells him that if He doesn't wash His feet, he will have no part in Him. This seems a strange reaction. But if Peter is not willing to receive this small service, how will He respond to Jesus' serving Him by dying for Him? Jesus, as head, serves us unto death, that we might be glorified in Him. In this act of salvation, He gives the ultimate definition of headship. Jesus' exercise of headship is the gospel itself. Thus it is from this gospel act that we derive the meaning of what it is to be "head". Headship is not legal power, it is gospel loving service.

### **What does this have to do with husbands?**

More specific application will be made later. For now it is enough to say that the picture Paul draws in Ephesians 5 could hardly be clearer. The exemplary model of the love of the male spouse for his wife is the totally selfless love and servanthood of Christ, unto death, for His bride, the church, for whom He bears complete responsibility.

## **What does it say about the Church as the Bride?**

The New Testament teaches that the church, as the Bride of Christ, is subject to Jesus in all things. She places herself under His authority and responds to His love by being the means through which He gives life (evangelism) and sustains life (spiritual care).

## **How is the church subject to Christ?**

Jesus has taken full accountability for her sins and has served her by dying for her. He continues to serve her by His continual grace, poured out in Word and Sacraments. She is subject to Him by her reception of His service. Her primary subjection to Jesus is not what she does, but what she receives. She sees His act of salvation and does not try to interfere, but joyfully receives His grace. Only after receiving does she act. Her actions toward Him are a response to the gospel. The love she shows Him, by loving others, is not what brings about her marriage, it is a response to, and a result of, that marriage. Any other conclusion denies the teaching of salvation by grace alone. This marriage is the gospel. Therefore this is her subjection.

## **How is this related to, or a fulfillment of, the Old Testament teaching?**

Israel is on the receiving end of this covenant. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are all chosen by grace, and made righteous the same way. God's deliverance in the Exodus and the wandering in the wilderness are grace. God's faithfulness to Israel, despite her unfaithfulness, is grace. The way He continually restores her to Himself is grace. His continual renewal of the promise of the Messiah is grace. In all the Old Testament, grace is the key, especially in those sections dealing with the marriage of God.

## **How does the church define "wife"?**

Since the marriage of God and His church is the defining marriage, the church defines "wife" in marriage. Since that is so, we must conclude that a wife is one who receives the loving service of her husband, and then responds by loving him.

## **What is subjection?**

Within the marriage of God, subjection is the willing reception of Christ's love. The church willingly acknowledges His headship and its exercise in His sacrificial love. It is not primarily obedience, but reception followed by loving response.

## **What does this have to do with Christian wives?**

This subject will be dealt with in greater detail later. For now it will suffice to say that the church serves as the model for the love of the female spouse. The church, made up of its members, believes in, and submits in saving faith to, the self sacrificing servanthood of Christ. We see this in the disciples' submitting to the menial service of foot washing offered them by none other than their Lord and Master in the humblest ministry (John

13). The submission to which Jesus was leading them was certainly not a matter of their bowing in obedience to His imperial command but rather their willingness to receive from their beloved and revered teacher, the King of kings, the service of a slave.

### **What is the relationship between the marriage of God and our earthly marriages?**

As has been discussed so far, the marriage of God and church is a real marriage. Not only that, it is the marriage that defines what marriage is. Christians should not understand marriage as a mere law or command. Marriage should be seen as a reflection of the saving gospel of Jesus Christ. Men should see their attitudes and actions toward their wives as an opportunity to show the love of Jesus as they represent Him in this relationship. Wives should see their attitudes and actions toward their husbands as an opportunity to show the love the church has for Jesus as they represent her in this relationship. There are commands in scripture concerning marriage. But marriage is not law, it is a reflection of the gospel. Thus marriage is an opportunity to show the love between Christ and His bride. Viewed in this light, marriage is a confession of the gospel in action.

## **IV. The Old Testament Teaching on the Marriage of God**

### **What does the Old Testament say concerning the marriage of God?**

The Old Testament has many clear references to a marriage covenant between God and Israel. These references basically fall into two categories: condemnation of Israel for breaking this covenant and God affirming His promises in this covenant.

#### **What does it say about unfaithful Israel?**

Jeremiah—In chapter 2 verse 2 He refers to her as His betrothed or bride. He shows how she was praised by Him. He then condemns her for her unfaithfulness, calling her a prostitute or harlot in 2:20. He accuses His bride of forgetting Him in 2:32. He accuses her of adultery and prostitution in Chapter 3:2, calling her to repentance in 3:14-20.

Ezekiel—In chapter 16 the Lord shows how He has loved Israel and adorned her as His bride. But she takes the beauty He has given her and has committed adultery and prostitution by her idolatry 16:15-34. In chapter 23 He tells of marrying the two kingdoms, and how, one at a time, they committed adultery and harlotry with other nations, trusting in alliances instead of God. He condemns them for this.

Hosea—In this prophecy, God commands the prophet to marry a prostitute because He is married to one (Israel). He then specifically accuses her of adultery and harlotry for her seeking after nations and idols, and not God.

These are some examples of the condemnation of unfaithful Israel in her marriage to God. Others could be given, but these are, perhaps, the best examples.

### **What does the Old Testament say about the blessed marriage of God?**

Isaiah—In 54:4-8 God calls on Israel to not fear for He, her Maker, is her husband and Redeemer. He affirms that He left her for a moment so that she might realize her sin, but now He will restore her through His mercy. In 62:1-5 God promises to restore Israel. This is a Messianic promise. He promises to call her married and rejoice over her as a bridegroom rejoices over a bride.

Jeremiah—In 31:31-34 God promises a new covenant in which He will restore Israel to Himself after she had broken the covenant in which He was a husband to her. This is a clearly a reference to the Messiah.

Ezekiel—In chapter 16:6-15 God describes the grace shown in making this marriage covenant with Israel in the first place. He does everything to make her what she is. After condemning her sin, He affirms His promise to forgive and restore in verses 59-63.

Hosea—In 2:14-3:5 God speaks of His undying love for Israel and promises to restore her to Himself.

Song of Songs—This is a love poem of Yahweh and His bride Israel as they anticipate the marriage ceremony and their life together.

### **What reasons do we have to believe that the Song of Songs is about the marriage of God?**

The best argument is that of scripture itself. As we have seen in the other passages, scripture clearly teaches this marriage of God in many places in the Old Testament. There are few, if any, references to earthly love receiving such praise. When this type of relationship is discussed in the rest of scripture, it is almost always, if not always, about the marriage between God and His people. For the Song to be about anything else would mean that it stands in contrast to the rest of scripture.

This belief is affirmed by the early church fathers who, when referring to the Song of Songs, acknowledge that it speaks of Christ and the Church. Most of these references (from Tertullian, Ignatius, Augustine, Jerome, and others) use the words of the groom in the Song of Songs as words of Christ Himself. The belief that the Song of Songs is about the marriage of God is the ancient teaching of the church. All other interpretations are later ideas.

### **What is this marriage?**

This is the covenant of salvation which God made with His people. We see in almost all of these texts, references to this covenant. In the texts where Israel is condemned for

adultery it is trusting in idols or others nations that has caused the condemnation. Where God affirms the marriage, He does so with Messianic promise. This is the covenant God made with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, etc. It is seen in the worship practices and the sacrifices. This marriage is God's one great covenant with His people.

### **Is this literally a marriage or is God using a metaphor?**

Clearly some of these references contain the use of metaphors (such as the physical attributes of Israel in Ezekiel 16). But God in no way indicates that this is not a real marriage. In fact, the language is quite literal in most of these texts, leading us to conclude that this is a real marriage. In fact, it is the marriage that defines marriage.

### **Is this Old Testament covenant a betrothal or is it the actual marriage?**

The language of condemnation is most emphatic that this is a binding covenant. On that basis, some would argue that it is a literal marriage. The Gospel language seems more of a betrothal, fulfilled in the Messiah.

### **Is there a contradiction between the texts that condemn and those which affirm on what this relationship is?**

Not necessarily. Betrothal in Israel was a serious thing. It was as binding as the actual marriage, requiring some form of divorce, as we see in the case of Joseph in considering what to do about Mary (Matthew 1:19). None of the texts in the Old Testament eliminate the possibility of betrothal. Therefore, the best argument is that the Old Testament covenant of salvation is a betrothal to be fulfilled in the mission of the Messiah.

## **V. The Marriage of God as Reflected In Ancient Wedding Practices**

### **What are references to such things as the preparation of the bride, the marriage feast, the approach of the Bridegroom, etc., referring to?**

These are references to the ancient wedding customs and ceremonies practiced in Israel prior to, during, and after the ministry of Jesus.

### **What are these wedding practices?**

These include events taking place over a considerable period of time, culminating in the wedding feast. The various parts of this process were . . .

1. The betrothal: a binding covenant to marry.

2. The betrothal period: in which the groom prepared the bridal chamber while the bride assembled her dowry.
3. The call to the wedding: the best man would be sent into the town to announce the coming of the groom. The maids were waiting with the bride.
4. The bridegroom would come and take her to the wedding ceremony.
5. The wedding ceremony.
6. The wedding feast: held by the couple inside the bridal chamber, and celebrated outside by the invited guests.

### **What do the scriptures say about the betrothal of God and His people?**

God tells Israel in Hosea 2:19-20 that He will betroth Himself to her forever. This would seem to be the covenant described in Ezekiel 16, where God watches her grow, and when she is a young woman, He makes a covenant with her, dressing her in glory, etc. It could also be argued that God's covenant to Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, Moses, etc. served as a betrothal to be fulfilled when the Messiah would come.

### **What do the scriptures say about the betrothal period?**

There is no specific reference to this in any of the marriage of God passages. This was the period where the groom built the bridal chamber onto his father's house, while the bride's family assembled the dowry. The bride would have some idea when the wedding might be by how close the groom was to finishing the bridal chamber. While there is no specific reference to this period in the marriage of God, it must be said that both the Messiah and Israel experienced this period in the Old Testament times.

### **What might the building of the bridal chamber be?**

The bridal chamber of the Messiah was built by His faithfulness in delivering His people from generation to generation, which brought them into, and preserved, their relationship with God, which would have its final fulfillment in the mission and ministry of Jesus. In that sense, He built this chamber with the deliverance of Noah and his family, the sparing of Isaac, the promise to the fleeing Jacob, the exodus from Egypt, the manna from heaven, the water from the rock, the taking of the promised land under Joshua, etc. It also would include His building of the Temple, His institution of the sacrifices, His instituting of the Passover, and the covenant of circumcision. In these instances, and so many more, God was building His bridal chamber by delivering them from their trials, and giving them a foretaste of the deliverance He would bring when Messiah came as their Savior from sin.

### **What might the assembling of the dowry be?**

The dowry is another matter. If we look at the Old Testament account of God's people, we find a curious, yet fitting dowry. The dowry assembled to be given to the Messiah was the sins of Israel. They were brought into the Holy of Holies each year in the blood of the sacrifice as a foreshadowing of Jesus' sacrifice as the Lamb of God. The only thing Israel has to offer is what the Messiah comes to take.

### **What do the scriptures say about the gathering of the maids?**

Matthew 25:1-13 is a parable of Jesus about maids waiting for the Bridegroom. Five have what they need to wait, five do not. The Bridegroom is obviously Jesus. The five wise maids go in to the feast, the five foolish do not. This is a lesson about faith and membership in the kingdom. All of these maids are looking for the kingdom.

Rejoicing in anticipation of the coming of the Bridegroom is found in Revelation 19:6-9. The bride is dressed for the feast while rejoicing takes place in her presence. This is also present in the Song of Songs. In the Song, the maids prepare for the coming of the Bridegroom by their conversation with the bride.

### **Do these texts refer to the same event in the kingdom of God?**

The context of the Song of Songs would lead us to believe that this is anticipation of the coming of the Messiah to redeem Israel. The Revelation text refers to an accomplished righteousness and a present feast. This argues for salvation in Jesus. The Matthew text falls within a series of references to the coming of Jesus for judgment.

### **Is there a contradiction?**

No. We tend to view Jesus' death, resurrection, and coming again as separate events. God does not seem to share that view. Where we deal in what is and what will be, God deals in the now and not yet. Heaven is our inheritance now, but we aren't there yet. Worship is an earthly reflection of the heavenly reality, because heaven is ours. We have salvation now, to be more fully realized in glory. In Matthew 25, the foolish maids come when the door has been shut. Heaven is open and shut by the death and resurrection of Jesus. Faith is our wedding garment. You cannot discuss judgment day apart from what Jesus came to do. For people, the cross and resurrection, and judgment day, are two events. For God they are inseparable.

### **What do the scriptures teach about the sending of the best man?**

In John 3:26-36, John the Baptist identifies himself as the best man and Jesus as the Bridegroom. John was sent into the world to announce the coming of the Bridegroom. He uses this occasion to tell his followers that he (John) must decrease while Jesus increases. The best man is not the focus, the focus is the Groom whose coming begins the wedding. John announces the marriage of God by preparing Israel for the coming of her Lord.

## **What do the scriptures teach about the coming of the Bridegroom?**

The most prominent mention is in Matthew 25:1-13, the parable of the wise and foolish virgins. It is also the anticipated event of many of the references to the marriage of God. Matthew 25 clearly refers to Jesus as the Bridegroom.

## **What is the coming of the Bridegroom?**

Arguments can be made for Jesus' coming in the flesh to save us, or His coming again in glory to take us, body and soul, to heaven. The immediate context of Matthew 25 seems to be about the last day. But the Old Testament references, and the sending of John the Baptist as the best man, argue for Jesus' coming as Savior. Matthew 25 could certainly be understood as referring to salvation which opens heaven to those who have faith, and closes it to those who do not. Regardless, it is clear that the majority of references to the coming of the Bridegroom clearly refer to Jesus coming to Jerusalem to save us.

## **What do the scriptures say about the wedding of the Messiah and people?**

St. Paul, in 2 Corinthians 11:1-4, speaks of presenting the church in Corinth to Christ as a chaste virgin. He mentions betrothal, but this seems to be the actual presenting of the bride. In Revelation 21:2, John describes the New Jerusalem coming out of heaven adorned as a bride for her husband. These seem to refer to the actual presentation of the bride.

## **What is this wedding?**

The majority of the scriptural teaching on this subject points to the salvation of Israel as the moment of the wedding. The Old Testament texts clearly speak of the covenant of salvation accomplished by the saving action of the Messiah. Nothing in the New Testament contradicts this, and most of the texts confirm it. The bride in Revelation is adorned with the righteousness of Jesus, given to her by His death and resurrection, in which He takes the filthy rags of her sins to the cross and dresses her in the righteousness He has earned by His obedience to the law.

In this context, it may be helpful to examine Jesus' words at the wedding feast at Cana (John 2:1-10). Jesus makes a very curious statement when His mother points out that they have no wine. He tells her that His hour has not yet come. Most commentators assume that He means the time for His ministry. But His ministry began at His baptism, which had most certainly taken place. Others contend that it was not time for Him to manifest His glory by performing miracles. If that was the case, He would not have performed one here. So what does He mean? It may have something to do with manifesting His glory. Jesus' glory was manifested in different ways, culminating in His death and resurrection. It is in the use of the word "hour" that another possibility arises. Jesus refers to His hour coming in John 12:23, 27; 13:1; 16:32; and 17:1. These all refer to His suffering and death. So the hour He speaks of in John 2 may not be the

beginning of His ministry, but its culmination. The bridegroom was to provide everything for the feast. Jesus' hour to do that as the Bridegroom of the church was to be in His death and resurrection. At that moment He fully manifested His glory in that He glorified the one for whom He lived, suffered, died, and rose.

### **What do the scriptures say about the wedding celebration?**

This celebration should be divided into three categories: the celebration in the bridal chamber, outside in the household of the Bridegroom, and the final celebration where these two are joined. Ephesians 5 describes the loving relationship, and expression of that love, between Christ and His bride. Jesus tells a parable about wedding feast, to which God extends invitations and has guests (Matthew 22:1-14). The glory described in Revelation 21:9 and following are a wondrous picture of the final portion of the feast.

### **What does it say about the celebration inside the bridal chamber?**

That all depends on what you consider that celebration to be. This is an intimate celebration for just the bride and Groom. The scriptures do not directly identify this activity. However, the scriptures do discuss the marriage of Christ and the church in comparison to our earthly marriages. This is a comparison to our earthly marriages because there will not be such relationships in heaven (Luke 20:34-36). If there is a biblical counterpart to the celebration in the bridal chamber, it would be the description of the relationship between Christ and the church in Ephesians 5. There we have a description of how Christ provides for her, and how she responds. Christ and His earthly bride gather inside His house to express their love for one another. Christ comes with His grace in the Word, in baptism by which He cleanses her and adorns her, and by the Sacrament of the Altar, in which He feeds her with His body and blood and, thus, bestows His grace on her. She responds with praise, then offers herself as the means by which He gives life (evangelism) and nurtures the lives of God's children (Word and Sacrament ministry). This celebration goes on while the banquet feast of heaven is going on.

### **What is the biblical equivalent of the marriage feast going on outside the bridal chamber?**

In Matthew 22:1-14 Jesus tells a parable of a wedding feast to which many were invited. Some made excuses not to come, so the Master sends His servants to call others. The Master sees to it that all are worthy to enter into the feast. Jesus compares this to the kingdom of heaven. In Revelation 19:9, God pronounces a blessing on those invited to the marriage feast of the Lamb. These refer to the practice of the wedding feast at the home of the groom's father, while the couple is in the bridal chamber.

The scriptures clearly teach that the celebration of this feast is going on in heaven while we celebrate here below. There is only joy and thanksgiving in heaven. This joyous celebration is best described in Revelation 7:9-17.

## **How does Jesus fulfill His role within this festival?**

The groom would go back and forth from the bridal chamber to the feast. He was the main link between the two celebrations. Jesus joins heaven and earth by His incarnation. He is the reason for the celebration in the first place and has provided for it by His death and resurrection. When the church on earth gathers for worship, He comes with His grace to which she responds. He literally brings heaven to her by His presence. He joins these two celebrations until the time when there will be only one.

## **What about the end of the wedding feast?**

As the celebration is about to end, both the groom and the bride appear to bring the celebration to its proper conclusion. All parties then join in the full celebration of this marriage.

Revelation 21:9 and following describe the church coming out of heaven from God adorned for her husband. It then speaks of the glory of heaven. At the last day Jesus will complete this marriage feast by bringing His bride fully into the joys of heaven, there to abide in joy forever.

## **VI. Husbands**

### **How does the marriage of God affect husband's relationships with their wives?**

Husbands need to understand that they stand in the place of Christ in the relationship with their wives. By his love for her, the husband confesses his faith in Christ, and shows that he understands Christ's self sacrificial love for His bride, the church.

### **What does that entail?**

That entails understanding that the fulfilling of this relationship is not a response to the law, but showing the Gospel love that Christ did. He then reflects Christ, and His love, by his love for his wife at home.

### **Why is it important that he understand the Gospel aspect of this?**

In order to properly reflect Christ, the husband must do so with the sense of love and compassion that brought Christ to the cross. Too often the responsibilities are borne as yokes around men's necks, if they are borne at all. Men are driven by "have to" which causes resentment and disunity. When fulfilling these responsibilities is seen as an act of Christ-like love, it removes the yoke of burden, and empowers the husband to greater service. It also allows him to see his actions as a joyous response to the love shown him by Christ, and as a means of showing that same love to his wife.

### **What does this mean to his conduct as a husband?**

It means that he sees his love for his wife as a confession of His faith in Jesus who sacrificed Himself for His bride, the church. The husband seeks to show Christ to his wife by his self sacrificial service. He makes himself vulnerable in order to make her secure. He places himself between her and danger, serves her needs with no thought to his own, and looks for opportunities to lead by serving her in love. These acts vary with the personalities of the man and the different needs of their wives.

### **How is he head of his wife?**

The husband is head of his wife as Christ is head of the church. Christ took primary moral accountability for His bride. The head of the household recognizes his accountability before God for the whole body. This is not a yoke around His neck, but an opportunity to love as Christ has loved us.

### **How does he express his headship?**

Christ came as a servant. He expressed His headship by serving us to death (Philippians 2:5-8). Jesus taught us that to be the head is to serve (Matthew 20:20-28; John 13:1-17). So husbands lead by serving in love, as Christ has served us in love. So headship is not privilege or a burden, but service in love, having been first loved by Christ.

### **What does serving her mean to his own self fulfillment?**

Human wisdom would assume that serving her would leave him unfulfilled. Our sinful nature leads men to want to shift responsibility on to the woman, as Adam did in the Garden (Genesis 3:12). But men truly find their greatest fulfillment when they channel their aggressive nature toward filling the life of their wives in particular, or women in general. To show self sacrificial, Christ-like love is the most fulfilled a man can be.

## **VII. The Definition of Male and Female**

### **How does the marriage of God affect the definition of male and female?**

If we conclude that marriage is defined by the marriage of God, and that the role of husband and wife derive their definitions from Christ and the church, then it must follow that God defines male and the church defines female.

### **How are male and female defined?**

Male and female derive their meaning from God Himself. Male is defined by *what* God does. Female is defined by *why* God does it.

### **What are some examples of the *what* as male?**

Redeemer, Savior, grace, mercy, and other such concepts are male. We see male accountability in scripture (Adam blamed for sin, etc.). We see such practices as circumcision, the sacrificial lamb, the scapegoat, etc. as being the sacrifice of the male. God's action in saving us is male.

### **What are some examples of the *why* as female?**

The love which brought Jesus to the cross to save us is feminine. When God speaks of His love for Israel it is in the feminine. He rejoices over her as His beloved bride, the joy of His life. The reason He does what He does is the object of the what; His beloved.

### **Does this mean that women were not created in the image of God?**

Not at all! The image of God was perfection, which was lost at the fall into sin. God sent His Son to restore us to Him (why) by dying and rising (what).

### **Are women inferior to men, according to this definition?**

No. God created us different, to reflect His purpose in making us and redeeming us by the blood of His Son.

### **Does this mean that men and women aren't equal in God's sight?**

No. We must not confuse equality with being the same. God loves both equally. Jesus died for both equally. Heaven is given by grace to both equally. But God did not create men and women the same. They were created different to express the wondrous relationship He has with us. The present emphasis on equality is an attempt to make men and women the same. It includes the same roles and responsibilities shared by both. This is an absurd notion that sets aside the unique gifts and abilities of the two, created for the purpose of making the other whole and complete. God desires that we rejoice in the differences and use them to His glory and the well being of others.

### **Is the order of creation (first Adam, then Eve) significant?**

Yes. It reflects God's purpose and process in creating and redeeming us. God was first, then created us as the object of His undying love. Jesus came and loved us by dying to redeem us, thus making us His beloved forever, as the scripture declares in 1 John 4:19.

### **Does being created first give males their authority and responsibility?**

Males have their authority and responsibility because they stand in the place of Christ. That was the purpose of the order of creation. This is not a childish chant of "I was

first!", it is the privilege of showing Christ by our understanding of what it is to be male and our practice of the same.

**Do these definitions of male and female apply only to marriage, or to all relationships where Christian men and women are concerned?**

These definitions apply to all relationships, the only difference being a matter of degree. Do they apply exactly to relationships in general as they do in marriage? No they don't. Do they apply? Yes they do.

**Where does God's Word indicate this?**

This is specifically stated in 1 Corinthians 11:3. Paul establishes a general principle describing the comparative relationship of men and women with God in Christ.

**What does this text tell us about God?**

This text clearly shows headship to be a matter of accountability or responsibility lived out in service. Christ acknowledges the Father as "head" because the Father takes responsibility for the Son as He sends Him out (which Jesus constantly acknowledges). Jesus, then assumes His headship by taking responsibility for our sins.

**How does this text apply this to relationships between men and women?**

Here the principle of headship is applied from the Father to Christ to men. The men referred to here are not a specific group of men, nor are the women a specific group of women. This is a general principle applied from God to men. Thus there is a general sense in which men are responsible to God for the general conduct of life under God, in a way that women are not. Women are accountable for their own stewardship. Men are accountable for the general stewardship of the whole. They are called to a greater service in general than women because they are held accountable for more. This is not to be viewed as a yoke around their necks, but as a wondrous privilege to serve these precious gifts of God as Christ has His bride.

**What about those who contend that this text is speaking of husbands, and not men in general?**

If the Greek term used here is meant to refer to only husbands, then we must come to some startling conclusions. We must conclude that Christ is only head of married men. The text says "every man." If that means married men, then Christ is not the head of single men. Thus His headship is not total, but partial. No one in their right mind would make such a claim. We must stand on what the text says. It says that every man is head of every woman in some sense. It is not our task to explain away the scripture to suit our purposes. We must seek to understand what God means by these clear words.

**What is the application of this headship of men in general?**

It has general application for society in terms of what society ought to expect in these relationships in general. The applications become far more specific in the life of the church.

### **What applications in general should society recognize?**

Since male and female derive their meaning from God and His love for us, we ought to bear certain things in mind as we encourage one another in relationships. Male aggression needs to be channeled in a positive way that contributes to the welfare of all. Society in general, and women in particular, need to encourage positive use of this natural tendency. If it is not encouraged, or women improperly use their natural receptive nature to encourage irresponsibility, or to improperly discourage positive behavior, explosive results are probable. Ultimately, in a fallen world, the man will either take moral responsibility for the woman, or he will take immoral advantage of her. We see this being played out in the press each day. Let's stop ignoring the differences and see how we can make positive use of them for the good of the whole.

### **What applications are there for the church?**

That is found in the biblical examples found where the distinction between male and female is demonstrated. It includes such things as head covering, preaching and teaching.

### **What lessons can be learned from Paul's discussion of head coverings?**

In the verses following 1 Corinthians 11:3, Paul says that as Christians gather for worship, all men (males) are to do so with uncovered heads. To cover is to protect; to uncover is to make vulnerable. In the image of Christ, who made Himself totally vulnerable and accountable for us all, each man is to uncover his head as the members of Christ's body assemble to worship the Lord in His name. In doing so the man gives silent witness to God's Word under which he is to be accountable and vulnerable in his headship under Christ. He is there to serve and not to be served, to be an example to the flock, to be obedient unto death, to find his highest honor in service to Christ. If, however, the man instead covers his head, he is by his action stating his unwillingness to lose his life for Christ's sake and Christ's people. He would then be despising the very sacrificial service of Jesus for which His name is honored above every other. He would be disavowing the very meaning of his maleness which reflects God's mightiest and most gracious deed, the self giving sacrifice of Christ. He would be dishonoring the very head on his physical body, the head that is responsible for every other member of his body and to which all those members are therefore responsible in turn.

The woman, on the other hand, is to witness the corresponding aspect of this truth. She is to cover her head in willing testimony to her grateful regard for the mantle of protection and dignity provided her by God. How she is to cover her head is not specified in Scripture (Paul says it may even be her long hair). Nor need it be specified, because it is apparent that that is not at issue. What does matter is that she testify to

this truth before all. Her testimony is a reminder to every man assembled of his highest responsibility in Christ. Her covering speaks of the man's highest honor, second only to his redemption by Christ, that of offering himself for the security and fulfillment of all God's people, first and preeminently so for his own wife and family. In this way both confess Christ and the church in the assembly, as well as in their homes.

### **How is it applied to preaching, teaching, and leading in worship?**

In 1 Corinthians 14:33-36 and 1 Timothy 2:8-15 St. Paul says that the visual expression of the distinctive glory and authority of males and females is to be accompanied by a consistent and distinctive verbal witness to the same truth. As the man's uncovered head indicates his ultimate accountability before God, so he is to bear the burden of leading in prayer and teaching. The primary responsibility for teaching the Word of God and teaching it properly rests on him. This is not to say that the woman has no responsibility to pray, teach or speak in the church. Indeed she does. 1 Corinthians 11 makes that clear. But the Lord keeps her free from the burden of being accountable for the spiritual instruction and discipline and shepherding of the church in general and the men in particular (1 Timothy 2:12). She is quietly, and in good conscience, to let the burden rest where the Lord has placed it, namely on the head of the man. She has enough burden of her own to carry. For, in potential or in practice, she is the life-bearer, and the conduct of her life is governed by that fact throughout her days (1 Timothy 2:15). Childbearing is the absolutely vital function of humanity without which neither temporal nor eternal life is possible. Childbearing is not, of course, a substitute for saving faith, but ever since the Fall and the first Gospel (Genesis 3:15), it is undeniably a prior condition to it.

### **Why should women insist on this distinction in the church?**

Bearing the child (potentially or actually) is a heavy burden not to be made heavier by the woman's also bearing the burden of the man who sired the child (potentially or actually). This is part of every woman's Christian liberty. She should stand firm in it and not let herself be burdened by a human yoke of servitude. By her modesty and propriety before all she is to testify to her God given right of honor, dignity, and protective favor from every man. The Lord has shielded the man from the physical responsibility of bringing humanity into the world, and he has shielded the woman from the spiritual responsibility of leading and bearing humanity through the world. To those men (and women, for that matter) who believe and teach that the women can and should do both, the words of Jesus are as fittingly spoken as to the Pharisees and theologians of His day, "They tie up heavy loads and put them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them." (Matthew 23:4)

### **Why can't men and women serve as they want?**

Christianity is not ruled by what we want, but by God's will. He has given us the privilege of reflecting His relationship to us by defining male and female as He has. The living out of His will brings the greatest fulfillment we can imagine. Our challenge is to

enjoy these gifts as He has given them, not as the sinful world would have us abuse them.

### **Why are these roles so confused these days in the church?**

This is mainly the result of men abdicating their responsibilities and placing these burdens on the women. This is done by men luring our sisters in Christ into servitude with the pious words of enticement of opportunity to speak and control or at least to serve the Lord in a larger way. The seduction proceeds on the assumption (whether in ignorance or malice, God knows) that a person may exercise the privilege of asserting the will without assuming the corresponding responsibility of the consequences of that assertion. It assumes that the burdens of leadership, that is, of ultimate moral accountability, in the home and church above all, are optional. God's Word shows that they are not optional. These burdens must be carried, and carried by the man who stands in the place of Christ, who carried them to the cross. They may not be avoided by the man without his committing sin. He must lead. He must preach. He must teach. He must give final answer to God. And the woman, in following the example of the church, must let him. She must not attempt to shield him (whether in pride or in sympathy) from his God given final responsibility. To do so is to lead him to sin by denying Christ who gave Himself for us, and to lead herself to a burden of guilt which she needs to leave at Calvary and not take up again, as the church has.

### **Does the woman have no responsibility in these areas?**

Indeed, she does share the responsibility of teaching and leading children and other women in the Lord. But the Lord specifically frees her (indeed, forbids her) from the impossible burden of moral responsibility for the discipline of the man.

### **How are we to view these differences and their responsibilities?**

We are not to view these as burdens or yokes around our necks. We are to see the gracious Gospel of Christ in these relationships and rejoice in the privilege of who we are and how we can confess our faith by our lives as men and women.

## **VIII. One Flesh**

### **How are husbands and wives "one flesh?"**

In the Garden of Eden God created woman from the rib of man and Adam declared her "bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh." They are not two, but one. This is the justification for marriage. It is the joining together of the two who are of one flesh.

### **How is the "one flesh" expressed?**

It is expressed in their giving themselves totally. He leads by showing her the sacrificial love of Christ. She responds by completely loving him as the church does Christ. His desire is for her welfare and her desire is for his. They express their oneness by being concerned primarily with the welfare of the other. They see the spouse, and the spouse's needs, as being of greater importance than their own. Each one finds the greatest satisfaction in loving and serving the other.

### **What happens when they don't think first and foremost of the other?**

Sin is always with us and threatens our relationship to God and to each other. The last thing Satan wants Christians to do is focus on the Gospel in their love for each other. He will constantly tempt us to focus on self in this relationship and all spouses will, at times, succumb. Our selfish nature calls us to the world's 50-50 skewed sense of fairness. Such sins will take place in any marriage.

### **How does this sinful nature affect men and women in these relationships?**

Our sinful nature calls us to shift the primary accountability from the man to the woman. When God called to Adam to give an account of himself, he tried to blame Eve for what had happened. Eve could have told Satan that she had not been given primary accountability where the tree was concerned, and sent Satan to Adam for the conversation. She laid on her shoulders a burden that wasn't hers and Adam cast off the burden that rightly belonged to him. This nature holds true today. Men tend to pass off their primary accountability to women in the home and the church. Women tend to see things undone and take on themselves burdens that rightly belong to the men.

When these situations exist, men tend to get angry when they can't get their way, despite the fact that they have abdicated their responsibilities. Women tend to get angry at having to do things that they took on themselves, whether for valid reasons or not.

### **What is to be done about these situations?**

Repent. Each partner in marriage needs to humbly confess sins to the other and ask for forgiveness. Couples should never hesitate to say, "I'm sorry," and never hesitate to grant forgiveness to each other. They then must return to the Gospel to see that their nature lies to them in shifting accountability. They will genuinely find fulfillment as they live out the reflection of the marriage of Christ and the church in their love for each other. Devotion to the Gospel is the food for their souls and the means by which they reaffirm their wedding vows. This is the tie that binds in homes and in the kingdom of God.

## **IX. Wives**

## **How does the marriage of God affect wives' relationships with their husbands?**

Wives need to understand that they stand in the place of the church in the relationship they have with their husbands. By receiving, and responding to, the loving service of their husbands, wives show that they understand the relationship we (the church) have with Christ.

## **How is this a Gospel understanding?**

It is a Gospel understanding because the relationship between Christ and the church is the Gospel. If we are to pattern our marriages after Christ and the church, it must be a Gospel understanding and practice.

## **How does the Gospel understanding affect wives' attitudes and practices?**

Wives must see that the church does not submit to coercion or dominance from Christ, but responds willingly, in love, to His loving service. Wives are to receive and encourage the loving service of their husbands. They are then to respond to that love by giving themselves in love to the one who has loved them. This is in keeping with the model of the church who offers herself in love to Christ who loved her and gave Himself for her (Ephesians 5:25). The point is that the wife willingly loves her husband in response to his love for her. He leads in love and she responds in love for him.

## **What does this mean in her conduct as a wife?**

It means that she confesses her faith by her love for her husband. She does not receive his service and leadership in one area of life and refuse it in another. She sees in his love for her the love of Jesus and responds to it in kind. She uses her difference from him to be a blessing to her loving husband who has blessed her.

## **How does she reflect the church as the body of Christ?**

The church, as the body of Christ, offers herself as the means through which Jesus gives life (evangelism) and sustains life (spiritual nurture). The wife, in the light of the Gospel, is the means by which God blesses their union with children. She is the means of bearing and nurturing that life. Of all the blessings God gives humans, this is among the most prized. She places herself in a position of total vulnerability, even risking her life, to give birth. She then places her heart in total vulnerability in her love for her children. Her husband faces all other vulnerability in her stead in order that she might live in love toward her family.

## **What does this mean to her own self fulfillment?**

She will find fulfillment in being loved with the love of Christ, and will find that living in that love will liberate her to be the wife and mother she desires to be.

## **X. Worship**

### **How does the marriage of God affect our worship?**

Christ, the heavenly Bridegroom, has built us into a spiritual house (1 Peter 2:4ff). We are, in essence, in His bridal chamber, His tabernacle. He comes to us as we gather for worship and is present in the Word and the Sacraments. He gives us His gifts (Word and Sacraments) which feed our souls and make us ready to face our lives as God's children. Our worship should reflect that reality.

### **How should our worship reflect this reality?**

Worship should be seen as a conversation between Christ and His bride, the church. As the bride, we should recognize and acknowledge His presence, receive and rejoice in His gifts, and offer our love in response to His.

### **What does it mean to recognize and acknowledge His presence?**

Our worship should reflect the fact that Jesus is here. Instead of talking about Him, we should talk to Him. No bride in her right mind, if her husband came home laden with gifts and wanted to spend time with her giving these gifts to her, would respond by going next door to talk about what a wonderful husband she has. She would stay and participate in this wonderful blessing. Likewise, our worship should be structured in recognition of His presence and carrying on interaction with Him.

### **What does it mean to receive and rejoice in His gifts?**

Our worship should reflect the fact that Jesus comes in, and with, the Word and Sacraments, to nourish and strengthen our faith. He comes to bless His bride with these precious gifts, that she may be strengthened and empowered. She receives what He brings in joy and uses them as a means of showing her love and devotion to Him. Our praises should be specifically for those things He brings. Our focus should be on Him and what He has done, not on us. From God's point of view, worship is all about us. From our point of view, worship is all about God. This is a reflection of the relationship spelled out in Ephesians 5.

### **What does it mean to offer our love in response to His?**

Love is defined by Jesus' death on the cross. God doesn't merely talk about love, He demonstrates it, and defines it by that demonstration. God shows us His love as we worship. Our worship is centered on the cross. There we see His love. Seeing it, we then respond by showing Him love. We show that love by our response in worship, and by our seeing our love shown to others as an extension of that worship of Him. The

love seen and expressed in worship is then lived out and we see Christ's life and love as our way of life in faith. We love because he first loved us.

### **What is a good example of such worship?**

The best example we know of is the ancient liturgy of the church.

### **How does it reflect this?**

The ancient liturgy is a conversation with God. It is an acknowledgment of His presence and an interaction with Him. Its focus is on His coming in Word and Sacrament, and the responses are responses to what He says and brings.

### **Should the liturgy always remain the same?**

The liturgy has not always remained the same. It has been sung in various musical settings, and will, no doubt, be sung in more. It has been used in various languages, and still is to this day. What has remained the same is the substance of the conversation. These words, with the above mentioned changes, have edified Christ's people for nearly 2000 years. Such a lasting conversation with God should be examined for how well it reflects the reality it confesses and practices.

### **Is the ancient liturgy the only way to express this interaction between Christ and His bride?**

No. It is the best way we have seen. So far, nothing else comes close. If you have such a wondrous tool to express this relationship, you make use of it.

### **How can we keep from taking the liturgy for granted as we worship Sunday after Sunday?**

Any use of the liturgy must include constant teaching, reminding the saints what is going on. That can be done by the way it is presented, by reminders in bulletins or brochures, by relating it to life in sermons and bible classes, etc. There is a tendency on the part of many to go through the motions of the liturgy. Instead of scrapping this wonderful conversation with our Lord, we need to find ways to continually hold before the saints the blessings taking place. Worship is a wonderful privilege, given by a gracious God. Let's make the most of our worship time to celebrate with Him the grace He gives.

### **What does this mean as live within the marriage covenant of salvation?**

We must first see worship as the expression of the heavenly Bridegroom. He comes with His blessings, and in them reaffirms this covenant. This is our reason to rejoice and worship. Our worship is our loving response, as the Bride, to His grace and love. We have constant opportunities to express the love of the bride for her Bridegroom. Worship also serves as a reminder of the marriage covenant God has made with us.

We live in the covenant of salvation, not only as individuals, but as the body gathered in His bridal chamber. In that recognition, we also are reminded of the privilege we have of reflecting that love as husband and wife in the home. So worship is about our life with God and our confession of that covenant as we live in His love. God is gracious indeed!