

Holy Matrimony



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Preface

Between Abraham and the coming of the Messiah, there stretched an age spanning two thousand years. Sadly, by the time Israel had realised this prophetic fulfilment, she had degenerated to an all-time spiritual low. As a consequence, the Lord Jesus Christ was provoked into a scathing condemnation of Israel's leaders, labelling them, among other things, "white sepulchres" and "wolves in sheep's clothing". They had no room for God's blessed Son and despised His "narrow way."

Nowhere was He further estranged from that generation than was He in His stand upon the holiness of matrimony. His strict adherence to His Father's word, "from the beginning" shocked His hearers who had long since strayed from the holy commandment. "But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Matthew 15:9).

Since then, another age has all but passed by. This time, the church has had two thousand years, but is the church any better prepared for His imminent second coming than was Israel for His first? The Lord Himself asked: "when the Son of man cometh, shall He find faith upon the earth?" (Luke 18:8)

The reading of this little book will shock you, for you shall discover that the church in general is today under an even greater blindness than was Israel.

Nothing upon Earth typifies Christ and His church as does "Holy Matrimony," and nothing is under greater attack.

Dedication

"House and riches are the inheritance of fathers: and a prudent wife is from the LORD" (Proverbs 19:14).

God showed me the girl that was to be my bride on the day that He heard my prayer and gave me the above verse. Phyllis Ruth Tuxworth, a beautiful eighteen year old with long hair that flowed gloriously below her waist.

These past twenty five years she has been my wife, my true love and my best friend; a woman who has poured out her life and her love for God, her husband and her children. I am so grateful to God.

"She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness." (Proverbs 31:26).

"Her children rise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her." (Proverbs 31:28).

God bless you, my dearest. I lovingly dedicate this book to you.



P.S The author and his late wife.

Dirk and Phyllis Evenhuis on the occasion of their 25th Wedding Anniversary, February 1996.

Introduction

I was born in post-war Holland in 1949, the younger son of Reinder and Hermina Evenhuis. A few years prior to my birth, my parents had been in the Dutch underground, a dangerous vocation indeed. They had further jeopardised their lives by hiding a man for years in a wall cavity of their home. My father also experienced a Nazi prison while our nation reeled under the massive destruction of life and property. Yet there was one particular matter that disturbed my father more than any other: the brutal and senseless murder of almost all of Europe's Jews. Holland and other nations lost up to 98% of their Jewish communities. My father's search for answers as to why this heinous Holocaust had taken place was fruitless until he attended a birthday party in 1947. There, two men startled him by insisting that the Jewish people were still in a covenant relationship with God. Since childhood, my parents had been taught that because the Jews had rejected Jesus, God had in turn rejected them and had replaced them with the church. Carefully, these two men showed further just how flawed this replacement theology was. They revealed to him from the Bible that God fully intended bringing the Jews back to their land and back to Himself. Father went home armed with a list of Scriptures, which after careful study, fully persuaded him as to the rightness of the testimony of these two brethren. Now he understood that Hitler, Pharaoh, Haman and Herod were all instruments under satanic control in the devil's on-going but vain attempt to thwart God's plans. Now for the first time, my father realised the error of teaching that God's covenant with Israel was subject to sin or circumstance. "Thus saith the LORD, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, which divideth the sea when the waves thereof roar; The LORD of hosts is his name: If those ordinances depart from before me, saith the LORD, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me for ever. Thus saith the LORD; If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, saith the LORD" (Jeremiah 31:35-37).

When I was a toddler my parents immigrated to Tasmania, Australia. My earliest memories take me back to the family altar, where upon my father's knees I was taught to love and trust God. My father's love for God shone out in his love for my mother and the family. Every meal time was accompanied with a reading from God's word. He always maintained a loving care for the Jewish people and prayed steadfastly for their salvation and for the peace of Jerusalem. After finishing my schooling, my father, who was an excellent smallgoods-maker, taught me his trade. My brother and sister, fourteen and eleven years my senior, had long since married and moved to the south of our island. In 1969 I met my true love Phyllis, and we were married in 1971. We were soon blessed with five precious children: Maria, Lazlo, Daniel, Jared and

Samuel. We were also blessed with good business opportunities and were in full swing when our lives took a sudden turn. Only three days after Samuel's birth and upon my thirtieth birthday, the Lord called us. We immediately sold our home and business and moved to Melbourne. In 1980, we began our work in the Jewish community. I also travelled extensively, nationally and internationally. Our ministry was threefold. We sought the good for Israel, shared the gospel with Jewish people and taught about Bible prophecy in churches. These were years of great opportunity; we saw, heard and learned so much through experiences as diverse as sitting with remote Aboriginal tribal leaders and sitting down with the president of Israel in his home. In 1988 we were called back home. I was now able to return to my work as a grazier of a property we purchased as an investment before leaving in 1980. After Samuel's birth, Phyllis began to have trouble with her voice. This puzzled us and the doctors, but a decade and many symptoms later, Phyllis was diagnosed as having multiple sclerosis. We were daily proving the blessedness of trusting in God in every situation. It was so good that after a very busy eight years in Melbourne, we could now return to the quietness of our country home. We were also much blessed in being able to care for my ageing parents. By 1990, they had both passed away. After fifty-four years of marriage, father survived mother by only ten weeks. That same year we published a book dedicated to the memory of my father entitled 'Israel's Destiny'. The quieter lifestyle also afforded us far more time with our growing family as we saw them through school, college and university and into their vocations. These were wonderful times when the whole family came home. As it was in my father's house, the family altar still stands. Here too, the Jewish people are remembered as we earnestly pray for them and the peace of Jerusalem. We just love being grandparents.

I was led to write 'Holy Matrimony' by events that took place in 1984. Beginning in August that year and in the space of twenty-one days, I experienced three separate encounters of a spiritual nature. The first came in our bedroom, while my Bible lay open upon my lap and Phyllis lay beside me asleep. The second was in a hotel room in Athens, and the third in the Judean hills. We could say a great deal about these experiences, but it is our earnest desire to build upon God's word and not upon the personal experience of a man. It will suffice to say that even as my father learned that Israel's adulteries could in no way dissolve the covenant between God and them, so too have we learned that a man's marriage covenant with his wife is not subject to sin. Death and death alone can dissolve that oneness spoken into being by Almighty God. "The two shall be one", "they shall no more be two", "the wife is bound to her husband as long as her husband shall live." In a previous quotation from the Scripture, we heard God calling upon the sun, moon, stars and earth to bear witness to the immutability of His covenant with the house of Israel. In the same way, the Son calls upon heaven and earth to witness to the fact that the marriage of "whosoever" is governed by the

same eternal principle. “And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail. Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery” (Luke 16:17-18).

Recently, a team of men and I felt that these principles should be committed to record. We asked the Lord to confirm to us His will in the matter by giving us fifty believers to stand with us in this most sensitive of ministries. We then reverently set before the Lord a deadline, and with only one day to go, we only had forty-nine names. On the final day, one more letter arrived, making the number exactly fifty. Thus this book was written and scrutinised by God-fearing people.

We give our special thanks to all involved. We now humbly present this work to you and wish you the rich blessing of Israel’s covenant-keeping God.

“For this God is our God for ever and ever” (Psalm 48:14).

Chapter 1

“In The Beginning”

"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Genesis 1:1).

If we have faith to accept this fact in the Bible's opening verse then nothing found upon its pages will pose any problem. However should one be plagued with doubts and fears there will be many and often insurmountable obstacles which will hinder such troubled souls from entering into the rest of faith.

Four thousand years after creation, One was born of a virgin, of whom it was written: "without him was not anything made that was made" (John 1:3). He, the Lord and Master, delivered to us the key which could open the door to the Kingdom of God. "Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein" (Luke 18:17). Without the key of childlike faith, no man could open the door that separated man from God. If God Almighty is indeed "our Father in heaven," then it is only fitting that we should be childlike. A "little child" does not question the validity of what his father tells him. However, earthly fathers are fallible, and often inadvertently and sometimes purposely do not relay truth to their children. The Heavenly Father is infallible; it is impossible that He should lie or mislead in any way. A little child is totally dependent upon his parents for all his material needs, so too are we totally dependent upon our Heavenly Father for all our spiritual needs. A little child trusts his parents to provide all that he needs; so too should we trust God to provide all that is needed.

If God has not breathed into being and constantly preserved His word for each successive generation, then He is not the loving, all-providing God He declares Himself to be. We are promised better things than this from God. Not "almost persuaded", but totally. God's children rest in their childlike faith. Please note that we are not promoting a childish attitude. Childlike faith is a mark of a man's maturity and wisdom, and stems from putting trust in what God has said.

"The fool says in his heart there is no God." It is just as foolish to agree that God exists, but then not believe Him or trust what He says. Again it is a fool who says in his heart, The universe came into being by chance through a big bang. What child would believe that a watch came into being by putting a cracker into a tin of minerals? Even a little child knows that a watch is made by a watchmaker. By the way, this universe keeps much better time than any man-made watch! Even a little child could tell you that a universe must have a universe maker.

These facts are simple, elementary and upheld by every science truly so called. If you do not agree that all order and life proceeds from a Creator's hand, there is little point in you continuing to read this. Because it is written by faith, it will only irritate you. Perhaps you do possess enough faith to believe that God is, "and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Hebrews 11:6). Then you may cry as a father who once and long ago cried: "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief" (Mark 9:24).

I found through my Bible teaching in state schools that children instinctively believe about God. They also strongly sense God's love. This is borne out by the fact that their favourite song was always: "Jesus loves me this I know." There was never any doubt in their minds that they were being taught the truth or that God had made them and loved them. However, should this childlike faith be destroyed by some hell-deserving adult, a radical change for the worse will be immediately observed in the child's behaviour. Thus we see that faith and true happiness are linked inseparably. It is the true and undoubted love of God that dictates to us the fact that the Bible is true. Well you may ask: how can you be sure that the Bible has not been tampered with? The God who upholds all things by the power of His might is able and has kept His word for us. You can count on Him.

These opening lines are not merely preamble; for if we are to effectively address our title, we must at first conclude that all authority on this subject rests with God. The opening pages of the Bible suffice to prove that human emotions and human reasoning's have been corrupted and are totally unreliable. We cannot be governed by the five senses or by what man thinks. God, and God alone, can govern; His word alone is our constitution.

Pontius Pilate once questioned the Lord, asking: "what is truth?" The answer is clear: truth is whatever God says about a matter. Pilate had the truth right there before him, for Jesus Christ is God's word, God's truth and God's life. Thus He, the Word of God, is the foundation upon which we will seek to build as we study this fundamental subject.

We will close this chapter as we began: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). If we have faith to accept this fact in the Bible's opening verse, then nothing found written upon its pages will pose us any problem.

Chapter 2

"They Shall Be One Flesh"

We established in our opening chapter the facts that the redeemed accept all the Holy Scriptures with childlike faith; and that the Creator, having preserved His word, made it possible for us to know all that we need to know. Paul wrote to his beloved Timothy, assuring him that the holy scriptures were able to make him "wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:15). Let us therefore continue our study of them as we pursue our subject, "Holy Matrimony".

Over a five-day period, God brought into perfect function and harmony a world that only a few days earlier had lain void and without form. However, on the sixth day He began to create in a different way. He formed from the ground animals as He had formed birds the day before, but finally God said: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Genesis 1:26). This time God took of the dust of the earth and moulded into shape a body that was to house a unique being with both soul and spirit. The lifeless form carefully fashioned by God's loving hands lay there on mother earth as the Godhead communed among themselves as to this wonderful body's function. Upon completion of His masterpiece, God himself bent over the lifeless clay and breathed into its nostrils the breath of life, "and man became a living soul". By this time there were many creatures living upon the earth, but none possessed a spirit. No other creature among the millions on God's earth could bow its knee and pray or worship its Creator. No other could answer to Him that had made it. Now there was finally a creature who could. Worship, adoration and love flowed freely from man to God.

Man indeed was God's glory and was subject to Him in all things, and in turn earth's creatures were to be subject to man. I believe that man's "likeness" and similar "form" to God had far more to do with his god-consciousness and ability to rule than it had to do with any physical likeness. Not only did man possess this but the God-imparted breath caused him to immediately become a partaker of eternity. Once being, he could never not be. This is an awesome concept, for whether he is eternally with God or eternally doomed he can never not be. These principles, too, brought him into the "image and likeness" of God. After the Sabbath day of rest in beautiful Eden and in the company of his Creator came Adam's first day at work. He was to manage and preside over a complete and perfect creation. A special garden was planned and laid out by God east of Eden, and it was there that Adam's first day at work began.

There was no need for the sweat of Adam's brow among thorns and thistles, for no weeds or thorns were to be found there. However, everything in the garden grew vigorously, and the garden needed to be dressed and kept. Adam was not alone in this beautiful garden. The animal kingdom flourished all around him. Two by two, God introduced to him each "after their kind" to see what Adam would name them. God was content for Adam to name all that He had created; Adam with his perfect wisdom, wit and mind not only aptly named but perfectly remembered each and its name. God, of course, had a purpose in all of this, for it was while Adam was thus employed that he became acutely aware of the fact that he was without a mate. It was not that Adam did not love God, His creation or his employment; to the contrary, yet he felt incomplete. As it is written: "...but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him" (Genesis 2:20).

Even before bringing the animal kingdom before him, God had declared: "...it is not good that the man should be alone;..." (Genesis 2:18). It seems that God intended that Adam experience his aloneness so that when God brought in woman, Adam would not take her for granted as mankind is so quick to do. Though Adam was made in the image and likeness of God, God was far from being his fellow. Perfect man as he was, familiarity or equality with God was out of the question. Neither was there any in the animal world to answer Adam's need. Yes, Adam was alone and it was not good.

"And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Genesis 2:21-24).

What a touching scene this must have been, when God himself brought in the crowning glory of His whole creation. Adam immediately perceived that this woman who was taken out of him was the most beautiful creature in all of creation. Twice removed from the dust, she seemed to him to be out of this world. It is clear, from a reading of verse 23, that Adam was fully aware of what God had done and that God had taken her from his side to be at his side. Eve was just the one Adam was looking for. She perfectly answered his every need and left nothing to be desired. Not only was she made from him, but she was made for him. However, there is more to this holy union between man and woman than first meets the eye.

God was not merely setting out the pattern for man and his wife; He was also setting out His

eternal purposes. You see, dear reader, both the Father and the Son are, in the ages to come, to each take a bride from this earth. Therefore, the Son's words on the subject some 4,000 years later: "...so then they are no more twain, but one flesh" (Mark 10:8), have underlined the standard that God had set not only for time but eternity. In due time God the Son came to the earth as "the second Adam" to redeem Himself a bride from Adam's fallen race. Even as Adam's side was opened up, so too was Christ's, and out of His pierced side came "blood and water" (John 19:34). Our Lord and blessed Bridegroom began His miracles at a wedding in Cana of Galilee (John 2). He began with the words: "mine hour is not yet come," and immediately commenced His work with the water (the word of God) and the wine (His precious blood). Three short years later "when the hour was come", Jesus sat down with His disciples (Luke 22:14). Again we see the same emblems but in reverse: the wine and the water.

Yes indeed, even as Eve was taken from Adam's side to be at his side, so too is the bride of Christ taken from her Lord's pierced side to be eternally at His side and to sit with Him in His throne (Revelation 3:21). There is more: as well as presenting us, His "betrothed virgin" to Himself as a bride "without spot and without blemish." The water and the blood are also the washing and redeeming agents that will present Israel eternally at the Father's side. He who cannot lie or change said to her: "I have loved thee with an everlasting love" (Jeremiah 31:3). He also declared: "For thy Maker is thine husband; the LORD of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; The God of the whole earth shall he be called. For the LORD hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth, when thou wast refused, saith thy God. For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee" (Isaiah 54:5-7).

So then, dear reader, when we speak of holy matrimony and the word of God which governs it, not only do we speak of a man and his wife, but we also touch upon the eternal purposes of God. Though human marriages only foreshadow the divine plan, the principles employed by God are one and the same and are absolutely immutable. However, there is one notable exception. In the eternity ahead, there shall be no more death to part Israel from Jehovah, or the church from Christ. Hallelujah, for both the holy remnant of the house of Israel, as well as the virgin anti-apostate church, shall be eternally one with their divine husbands in the enjoyment of eternal marital bliss.

"...and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

Chapter 3

"And God Said"

The glorious days of Eden soon dissipated into days of sorrow and grief. The simple prohibition that God had put upon the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil proved too much for Adam and Eve, who wilted under the tempter's power. The devil's tactic was to question God's word. Many times it is written: "And God said." Subtly the serpent comes in: "Hath God said?" He is as cunning a master of this tactic today as ever he was. The aim of the tempter's question was to destabilise the trust that man enjoyed so unreservedly with his Creator. I believe Eve had never before questioned God's motives in forbidding the consumption of this one fruit. Now, suddenly she had it suggested to her that God was selfish and unfair. Also, Satan called God a liar: "Ye shall not surely die." We are all familiar with these historic events which led first Eve, and then Adam, to be poisoned through their acts of disobedience. "The wages of sin is death." Satan, as is common to him, did have a half-truth. Adam and Eve did not die instantly; however they were already "dead in trespasses and sins." This death would in due time lead to physical death, and would return them to the dust from whence they came.

Adam and Eve were devastated as they stood before God in their flimsy fig-leaf aprons. Their heads bowed ever lower under the weight of the curse. The ground which had produced such an abundance in the days of their honeymoon now lay before them, cursed. Joy had given way to sorrow. "...in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life" (Genesis 3:17). Yet even in the midst of this great darkness there was light, sown by God: "the seed of the woman." Buoyed by this solitary shaft of light, Adam named his wife "Eve; because she was the mother of all living" (Genesis 3:20). It was in this promised seed, sensed the man and his wife, that the answer to their dilemma lay. An antidote, as it were, to the poison that had worked death within them. The fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil was one day to be replaced by the fruit of the womb. Even as they had tasted death upon eating the forbidden fruit, man, in obedience to God and partaking of this promised fruit, could eat and live. Standing there before God, shivering with fear and shock, a further comfort was afforded them. God graciously replaced the fig leaves with animal skins, a symbol of the fact that one day, the lamb of God would bleed and die to cover man's spiritual nakedness.

The stark realities of all that God had said were soon to hit home to this devastated couple. God drove them out of their garden home to live among thorns and briars. Now blood, sweat and tears were shed just so that they could eat bread; earth produced nothing that could

keep them from returning to the dust from whence they came. Eager to procreate in order that the woman's promised seed might emancipate them, Eve bore a son. However, instead of a "man from God", a life-giver, she got a man from Adam, a murderer. Eve was not to be that blessed woman, for the seed in her womb was corrupt even as every man born from Adam's seed would be. It is elementary: death cannot procreate life. Whoever this promised fruit of the womb would be, one thing was clear: He must be "the Son of God". Adam's seed could have nothing to do with Him. The womb of this promised woman must be blessed with seed from God. One day a man-child would be born of woman, who would be the perfect answer to man's great dilemma. This man from glory would Himself sweat over this God-cursed earth with blood sweat and become His family's breadwinner, winning for them bread from Heaven. He would remove the curse and the thorns by taking them upon his own head. Finally, this man from glory would hang on a tree, even as did once that fruit of old. Adam and Eve disobeyed and died, but those who would obey and eat of the fruit of this tree at Calvary would eat and live. Now instead of eating bread procured by man's sweat and returning to the dust, man could eat heavenly bread for which Jesus had sweated blood, and have everlasting life. "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever" (1 Peter 1:23). As Adam's sons, we are hopeless, but being born again of seed from the second Adam, we possess a "sure hope" – we have His eternal life pulsing within us. That is why we call Him Jesus, "for he shall save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21).

But who is the woman of Genesis chapter 3 and Revelation chapter 12? Ah, some say she is Mary, the queen of heaven. "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel (God with us) " (Isaiah 7:14). Though we would lift up our voice as did that woman and say, "Blessed is the womb that bore thee," we would emphasise the fact that at Christ's birth Mary was a virgin, and not the above-mentioned woman. The woman of Genesis 3 is clearly identified in Revelation chapter 12 as the nation of Israel, and the promised seed is clearly identified as being Jesus.

The Revelation of Jesus Christ (chapter 12:1) shows the promised woman "...clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars:" An examination of Joseph's dream in Genesis chapter 37 will reveal that the prophet and patriarch Jacob identifies this woman as his own family, "the house of Israel". "And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up to God, and to his throne" (Revelation 12:5). Who but our Lord Jesus has sat with His Father in His throne?

Furthermore, this woman so strategically placed in the purposes of God did not give birth to an

illegitimate Son born out of wedlock. God, of course, has honoured every one of His laws in the birth of His Son. Israel, the woman and bearer of the holy seed, was legitimately married. Speaking to Israel, God the Father says: "for I am married unto you:" (Jeremiah 3:14). Earlier, God said to her, "I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness" (Jeremiah 2:2). Indeed, Jehovah claims both to have espoused and married His beloved Israel. It is in this way and in complete harmony with His eternal word that He has brought in the promised seed so that Israel may legitimately claim: "Unto us a son is born, unto us a child is given." Mary, the blessed virgin, herself a member of the body referred to as "the woman," was, as it were, a womb within that body. This woman is made up of many members, all of them Israelites indeed that have been circumcised not only of body, but also of heart. Christians are not members of this body but are members of a totally separate body. This body, in contrast to Israel, is never called a woman by the Holy Ghost, but always referred to as a virgin. Again contrasting with the married woman Israel, this virgin body is not married to Jehovah but is espoused to be married to His Son, the seed of the woman. We strongly emphasise the fact that the church is not Israel, nor is she spiritual Israel. The church is a body of international and born-again believers made up of both a small Jewish remnant as well as the Gentiles. The church, or "called out ones", is called out of apostate Israel and the Gentiles to be born again into that body called "the bride of Christ". "For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones" (Ephesians 5:30).

So then, the Lord Jesus is God's legitimate Son, as Jehovah was married within the framework of His law governing marriage before the Son was conceived. May we continually be reminded, dear reader, of just how fundamental marriage is in the purposes of God. To adulterous Israel her Son had to say, "Ye neither know me, nor my Father:" (John 8:19). Though Jesus was born of Israel, she at that point rejected both her husband and her son. "He came unto his own, and his own received him not" (John 1:11). At the conclusion of His ministry the Lord Jesus sadly announced, "your house is left unto you desolate" (Matthew 23:38, Luke 13:35), even as Jeremiah prophesied you are "divorced". Paul emphasised this truth by declaring that Israel would be "broken off", "because of unbelief they were broken off" (Romans 11:20). However adultery, desolation, divorce or separation, none of these are scriptural grounds for the annulment of a marriage covenant. Holy matrimony is an institution of God and is governed solely by His word. Therefore marriage is not governed by sin or circumstance, nor is it subject to them. Death, and death alone, can dissolve the marriage covenant. Knowledge of these facts helps us understand why Satan is so intent on the genocide of Israel. If all Jews were dead (Haman's and Hitler's dream), then Jehovah's covenant with them would cease. But God says, "...though I make a full end of all nations wither I have scattered thee, yet will I not make a full end of thee..." (Jeremiah 30:11).

Even though Israel today is in apostasy and as far away as ever from her husband and her son, yet her husband will not marry again. Her continuous adultery has not dissolved the covenant. Just hear these immutable words spoken by her blessed and faithful husband: "Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the LORD; and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, saith the LORD, and I will not keep anger for ever. Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the LORD thy God, and hast scattered thy ways to the strangers under every green tree, and ye have not obeyed my voice, saith the LORD. Turn, O backsliding children, saith the LORD; for I am married unto you: and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion" (Jeremiah 3:12-14). Oh, how Israel has shamed her husband. What a cosmic scandal as Satan and his demons laugh at the breakdown of Jehovah's marriage. In love He took a wife, who conceived and bore Him a son. Now this greatly favoured wife and mother totally rejects both husband and son. She cries out, "Crucify, crucify" and mocks a mid jeers as the son who is born to her hangs dying. Oh, the love of God, for the Godhead had planned man's redemption in the full knowledge of all this even before the foundations of the earth were laid. "who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame" (Hebrews 12:2).

Now it is important to note that Jehovah's covenant with the Jews dissolves at death unless each individual Jew has been circumcised of heart also: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David, Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Malachi, Zacharias, Elizabeth, Simeon, and Anna, to mention but a few. These were all members of that body called "the woman" and were in covenant relationship with Jehovah. These were all circumcised of heart and true Israelites. It was to apostate Israel that the Lord delivered His Father's bill of divorce. "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate" (Luke 13:35). This declaration has led to the suspension of Jehovah's intimate dealings with His covenant people.

Now the faithful remnant of Israel which included Mary, the Apostles, the penitent thief, the Pentecostal converts, and many others were born again and baptised into another body. No longer were they counted as Israel, the covenant people, the wife of Jehovah. The age of grace had now begun and its people, Jew and Gentile, were gathered together into the body and bride of Christ. The church and virgin bride is not yet married, but espoused to be married to Him who came forth out of Israel. Upon the completion of His body and bride, the Lord Jesus will appear in the air to take His bride to His Father's house. His betrothed then will be married to Him. However, the virgin's exit will open a time of unprecedented tribulation upon earth and in particular upon the woman Israel who has for so long been separated from her

husband. These seven years, known as "the great tribulation", will ultimately lead the surviving remnant of the house of Israel back to her intimate relationship with Jehovah. Her admission of fault and repentance will lead to an unprecedented time of national and international blessing when her King, our Bridegroom, will come to "sit upon the throne of His father David...to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from old, from everlasting" (Micah 5:2).

"and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn" (Zechariah 12:10).

Do you see, dear reader, just how fundamental holy matrimony is to the eternal plans of God? Do you think God is able to understand if one is suffering marital problems? Does God want us to abide by His word on holy matrimony regardless of the cost? Yes! Yes! Yes! Oh God our Father, keep us from this Babylon which threatens to consume us and may our Bridegroom, your dear Son present us faultless before the presence of your glory with exceeding joy. Oh God of Israel, what amazing love, grace, faithfulness and patience you have bestowed upon your covenant people the remnant of Israel and upon us the church. Your steadfast love, oh God will be our eternal song.

In summing up this chapter then, dear reader, when the tempter comes along and asks us, "Hath God said?" may we answer him with, and only with, God's word. "The two shall be one" (the testimony of the Father), "they shall no more be two" (the testimony of the Son), "the wife is bound to her husband as long as her husband shall live" (the testimony of the Holy Ghost). It is childlike faith and obedience to God's commands that will keep us safe from being ruled by the devil's questions. Our wisdom shall be to rest, and rest only upon God's commands. The world, the flesh and the devil will echo the age-old plot that brought down Adam and Eve. They will accuse God of being hard, selfish and unfair.

I once had a leader of a large national church body say to me: "Dirk, I once believed as you do, but I have come to realise that people simply cannot live up to those standards." That is a lie; we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us. Others have changed God's word to make it appear that God has slipped a couple of concessions into the Gospel of Matthew.

The aim of this little book is to expose the fraudulence of Satan's claims coupled with humanism, and to uplift the holiness and love of God's immutable commandments. To go soft on the clear word of God governing marriage is not love but a recipe for disaster, and will

eat away to the third and fourth generation. We will not entertain that age-old question, "Hath God said?" but will rest only upon the "And God said" of our righteous, loving and unchangeable God. "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments: and His commandments are not grievous" (1 John 5:3), "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (Mark 10:9).

Chapter 4

Fundamental to Bible Typology

When the Lord Jesus walked with the two on the road to Emmaus, He used Bible typology to reveal Himself in "all the Scriptures" (Luke 24:27). The blessed Holy Spirit has interwoven Christ and His central role in the redemption of man throughout the scriptures. A careful study of these types of Christ is essential for a balanced understanding of His person and work.

For instance, Genesis chapter 1 opens with the words, "In the beginning." These introductory words then open up the revelation of God in regard to the creation of all physical light and life. The sun to "rule the day" and the moon to "rule the night." Clearly the sun is a type of Christ, for even as the sun is the centre and source of all physical light and life, so too everything evolves around Christ, for in truth He is the centre and source of all spiritual light and life. The moon, however, has no light of its own but merely reflects the sun's glory. The moon is typical of the people of God, separate from the world and deriving all their light and power from the Son of God. Saint John, in introducing Christ, also chooses these same words: "In the beginning." He, however, is not referring to the physical light and life but the spiritual. "There was a man sent from God whose name was John... He was not that Light, but came to bear witness of that Light" (John 1:6-8). We see here how John the Baptist plays the part of the moon; for like us, John was not that Light, yet both he and we may bear witness of His glory. Like the moon we were dead matter, but the Light shone upon our darkness. We, like John, are thus brought into a position of influence and power as we reflect our Lord's glory. Now the moon is not always visible, as we can only see that part of the moon that is looking at the sun. So too must we be looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. If the earth comes between the sun and the moon, the sun's light is hindered or eclipsed, causing the moon to be in total darkness. So too is the world our enemy. If we allow the world to come between Christ and us, the end result will be no light, witness or power. "Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in His wonderful face, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim, in the light of His glory and grace." May we each be "fullmooners" for our Lord, for never was the world so needy or so dark a place as now.

Abraham and Isaac, too, play vital roles in typology. In them the Father and the Son are set forth. We have all been intrigued with that breathtaking story about Abraham and Isaac, the son of his old age. We too have shuddered with Abraham when we heard those dreadful words from God: "Take now thy son Isaac, thine only son whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering..." (Genesis 22:2). What a pitiful and

sorry sight as this old man, crushed with grief, led his beloved and only son to the slaughter. How typical of God the Father was Abraham, as he carried the knife and the fire. How could he be party to the slaying of his son – yet two thousand years later the Heavenly Father's culpability in the crucifixion of His own Son was evident?

The Psalmist reveals the Father's hand in the matter with these prophetic words: "deliver my soul from the wicked, which is thy sword: From men which are thy hand" (Psalm 17:13-14). Though it was the hand of wicked man that so mishandled Christ, the matter lay ultimately in the Father's hand. As surely as the knife lay in Abraham's hand, so too was Christ "smitten of God, and afflicted" (Isaiah 53:4). Oh, who can question the love of "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all" (Romans 8:32)? Who can fathom the love and the grief endured by both Father and Son when propitiation was made for our sin? Even as Isaac carried the wood, so too did Christ as He took up His cross. How happy and relieved we were when first hearing this dramatic story, we heard God's call to Abraham: "Lay not thine hand upon the lad" (Genesis 22:12). We felt the joy and relief of the father and his son, and were glad with them that God had provided Himself a lamb. For Christ, though, no substitute was found; for He was Himself the Lamb of God's provision. Furthermore, even as the ram was caught by his horns in the thorns, which are the physical manifestation of man's sin, Christ too had His head in the thorns. In both cases, it was probably the long sharp spikes of the acacia tree so common to that region. By the way, God's only Son was crucified on that self-same Mount Moriah, as Isaac was given up by his father two thousand years earlier. Even so Abraham prophesied by calling the name of that place: "Jehovahjireh...In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen." (Genesis 22:14). Abraham did not say 'it has been seen', but 'it shall be seen' What shall be seen? It was displayed there in Christ, that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. No one can ever question God's love. Our love may be questionable, but God's love is beyond question. Yes indeed, Abraham typifies the Father even as Isaac typifies the Son. So too are Sarah and Rebekah typical of Israel and the church, respectively. Also Eliezer, Abraham's steward, speaks to us so graphically of the person and work of the blessed Holy Spirit.

Remember the lovely story about Abraham sending out Eliezer to find a bride for his son? How beautifully Eliezer here sets out the work of the Spirit in gathering the Bride of Christ! Eliezer chose Rebekah not on appearances but by the divinely revealed fruit of Rebekah's kindness. He then told her all about the father and his son; she believed in him whom she had not seen, and was espoused to him whom she had never met. Eliezer then, in common with the Holy Spirit, gave her many and precious gifts. What a romantic conclusion we find to this love story! Isaac is meditating in the field one evening, when suddenly his bride appears before him. He immediately takes her into his longing arms and, in his late mother's tent,

consummates a long and happy marriage. Oh blessed consummation, when we the church shall suddenly be embraced by "Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins" (Revelation 1:5). As the Apostle Peter puts it in 1 Peter 1:8, "whom having not seen ye love, in whom, though now you see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." Yes indeed, Bible typology gives us many wonderful insights into God's word. It is most important that we carefully study the whole Bible.

So then, Abraham in typology speaks of the Father and Isaac of the Son. Eliezer, Abraham's steward who has no wife, is figurative of the blessed Holy Spirit. Likewise, Sarah speaks to us of Israel who after a long marriage bore a Son, and Rebekah speaks to us of the church, the bride of Christ. An understanding of Bible typology is most important and a valuable aid in rightly dividing the word of truth. For instance, many fail to discern the Trinity and would have us believe that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all one person. True, they are perfectly one; but just as Abraham, Isaac and Eliezer are three persons, they too are three individual persons. On the other hand, many who have a good understanding of the trinity cannot differentiate between Israel and the church. To teach that God has put away Israel and taken the church is like saying that Abraham divorced Sarah to be espoused to Rebekah. To say that the church is Israel is like saying that Isaac married his mother. Such teaching is nothing other than Babylonish confusion. Israel shall be in an eternal union with Jehovah, and the church will be in an eternal union with Christ, for she is espoused to one Husband, even Christ. A realisation of these simple and elementary facts will keep us from misappropriating Israel's covenant relationship with Jehovah, and lead to a sound understanding of the church's union with Christ. These spiritual roles are as clearly defined and governed by God as are the physical, for God's eternal and unchangeable standards and laws are "for ever... settled in heaven" (Psalm 119:89).

Surely holy matrimony is a part of biblical typology, and woe be to those who seek to change His eternal law. In closing, we may return our thoughts to the sun. "...In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun... Which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber..." (Psalm 19:4-5). Our glorious hope for, "unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings;" (Malachi 4:2). He will come "...out of his chamber, and rejoicing as a strong man to run a race" (Psalm 19:5), and gather to Himself His beloved bride, "...so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:17). "Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Revelation 22:20).

"For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6).

Chapter 5

Is Every Marriage Governed By God?

When my wife and I were married in 1971, we had a good knowledge of our local population of about 5,000. However, we personally knew of only one divorce and remarriage case. Today, the tranquillity of our isolated country district has been shattered. Even while writing this chapter, a local man told me that he had been summoned to appear in court as his wife had filed for divorce, to find that he was one of twenty such cases on the day. Longstanding family businesses which had been built up over three or four generations come to ruin as one or other party walks out with half. Not just our little country district, but our whole nation, in fact the whole Western world, is reeling from the disastrous consequences of sin. This departure from God's law to Babylon's looseness is Antichrist's cue. God's definition of Babylon is: broken covenants, broken promises, fornication, and adultery; i.e. confusion. She is the mother and head of all world empires, a confederacy between the world, the flesh and the devil and the arch-enemy of both the Israel of God and the church. Jerusalem on the other hand speaks to us of faithfulness, forgiveness and fidelity. God has ordained that Babylon must first run her course; and even now she wraps her insatiable tentacles about this present world. Indeed, the church in our time has come under siege. Questions that were never asked and standards that were never questioned have all exacted their huge toll. In most cases, the bastions and battlements of the faith have given way under this barrage of Babylonish fire.

In the major part of Protestantism today in the West, there is no such principle as a wife being bound to her husband as long as her husband shall live. The following are some of the concessions the churches have dreamed up. 1] Marriage does not count for non-believers. 2] Adultery dissolves the marriage covenant and allows the (innocent party?) to remarry. 3] The adulterer need only confess his sin then he can go on living in his adulterous relationship; for God, after all, they say, is a loving and forgiving God. This unholy trio of concessions has effectively wiped out, in one generation, God's law on holy matrimony. Today you can find justification for any kind of marriage, and all are accepted at communion. How sad, for we know that God's laws will not be broken by concession or by any other means; it is the concessionists who will be broken. Those of us who continue to declare that marriage is an unconditional command of God and that it stands till death do us part, are made to look like nothing more than legalistic bigots. The salt has lost its savour and there is no holding the world or the apostate church as they sink into the abyss. Not Britannia, but Babylon rules the waves over this troubled sea of humanity, but Christ Jesus can and will still the storm. He will sit

upon the throne of His father David in Jerusalem, and bring this world back to God and to His righteousness. Our principle aim? "seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness" (Matthew 6:33). Generally speaking, the churches have become ashamed of Him and His words in this adulterous and sinful generation, where God's beautiful commandments are not the fashion or fancy of the masses. Yet even now, the door of grace still stands open. Anyone who will confess and turn from his sin, no matter how bad, can be washed in the blood of the Lord Jesus and enter in.

Our particular aim in this study is to emphasise the fact that marriage – that is, whosoever leaves his father and mother and cleaves to his wife – is bound by God's law till death. Regardless of creed or custom, be they black or white, God said "the two shall be one." Not one of Adam's sons has been or ever will be exempt from God's command in this matter. His word from the beginning will stand to the end. Any nation, family or man that submits to His eternal law will reap blessing, but any who resist will come to nought. Pharaoh was fully aware of the immutability of the marriage covenant four thousand years ago. God plagued him; and as he searched for the reason, he discovered with horror that a woman whom he had taken into his harem was a man's wife. "...What is this that thou hast done unto me? why didst thou not tell me that she was thy wife? Why saidst thou she is my sister?" (Genesis 12:18-19). As is common to all mankind, the law of God was written in Pharaoh's heart. He had not become earth's mightiest man without realising that the crown soon toppled from the head of him who did not take account of God's law. Abraham was expelled from Egypt and took his lovely wife with him, but soon found himself in trouble again. This time it was Abimelech who swallowed the "she is my sister" line. However, when Abimelech took Sarah into his house, great trouble fell upon him and his family (Genesis chapter 20). "...Lord, wilt thou slay also a righteous nation?" (Genesis 20:4) asked Abimelech in great anguish. Sodom and Gomorrah had gotten their just deserts for their godlessness, but would God slay them for the sin of ignorance? Because of the integrity of his heart, God had kept Abimelech from touching Sarah. Yet He addressed him with these solemn words: "Behold, thou art but a dead man" (Genesis 20:3). God revealed to Abimelech his perilous position and then warned, "If thou restore her not, know thou that thou shalt surely die, thou, and all that are thine" (Genesis 20:7). We see here clear evidence that God holds man responsible and expects him to keep His commandments. Abimelech rose up early in the morning to secure his family's well-being by obedience to God.

Oh that we too may rise up early! Our nation, our families are in great peril and in mortal spiritual danger. No man will resist God and live. From Genesis to Revelation, God's word and standard are the same. Not only did God hold Pharaoh and Abimelech to His marriage laws, but we

find no exceptions. God has always held both Jew and Gentile responsible once the man left his father and mother and clave to his wife. Regardless of race, religion or lack of either, we will find no exception to His law. The apostle Paul very clearly confirms through the Spirit the legitimacy of non-Christian marriages in 1 Corinthians 7:6. When Greek converts were added to the church, they were often bound by marriage to pagan partners. These marriages were of the same value as any Jewish or Christian marriage and were governed under the same rules. "The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth." In later chapters we will examine the concessions that Moses gave to the hard-hearted. In no way could or did these concessions bring any change to God's eternal laws or lower the standard that He has set. Try to envisage this hypothetical scenario: I am a grazier and have neighbouring farms around me. John and Judy and their three children on one side, and Bill and Mary and their little girl on the other. John's parents also live on the property, and Bill's live just down the road. Both John and Bill have tended to neglect their wives through their preoccupation with their farms but, and as is so common today, John and Mary claim to have fallen in love with each other leaving Judy and the three children and Bill with his little girl. Within twelve months, divorce and remarriage have taken place, and a most complex legal battle is underway as the properties are divided. Judy is entitled to half, Bill also, and John and Mary are trying to get all they can. The bitterness is incredible. The grandparents are in great distress, not to mention the confusion and distress of the deserted partners and children. Then one day as I am cutting thistles near John's boundary, he confides in me and tells me of the mess that has become his life. He knows that I love the Lord and admits that he is envious of my joy and peace. I have from time to time shared the gospel with him and again begin to share the gospel of repentance and forgiveness of sins. John, now totally at an end of himself breaks down and cries, "I want what you have got!" Wonderful, but what do I say? Do I say, "Old things have passed away, all things have become new"? If you, John, and your new wife Mary would like to be saved, all you must do is repent of the past and we will baptise you both and you can be in happy fellowship. Judy and Bill can be classed as those "old things that have passed away because marriage doesn't count for non-Christians." Hey, wouldn't it be nice to invite Judy, Bill, the children and the grandparents to the baptism? Then they can see just how loving and forgiving God is. God forbid that I preach such a gospel and sin against Him, Judy, Bill, the children, the grandparents and my whole community. To class their former spouses and children as old things that have passed away and unrecognised by God is abominable. No, this is the message I would share with John. You have sinned against God, against Judy, against Bill, against the children, the grandparents and the whole community. Mary is not your wife, for Jesus said: "Whosoever puts away his wife and marries another commits adultery." She is Bill's wife as long as Bill is alive. If you will repent and turn from your adultery you have two options. You can live alone, or you can return to Judy and the children. God will not receive you if you

continue to live in adultery. Mary too if she wants to take the narrow way and follow Jesus, can live alone or return to Bill and her daughter.'

I think you get the drift of what we are saying. Never, and not under any circumstance will anyone enter the kingdom of God and continue to live in contradiction to God's law. You may succeed in justifying yourselves before man, but before God no such person shall be justified. Solomon rightly said: "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whosoever confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy" (Proverbs 28:13). No one ever yet entered heaven by keeping the law, other than Christ. Abraham, Moses and David were all saved by grace. God's grace is available to anyone who will confess and turn from sin and put their trust in Him. David, after repentance, shed the blood of sacrifice for his acts of adultery and murder and looked for Christ to come and ratify that blood, even as we may look back at the Lamb of God and through confession and forsaking be justified before a righteous God. Listen to these eternal words written by Ezekiel in chapters 3, 18 and 33. "When I shall say to the righteous, that he shall surely live; if he trust to his own righteousness, and commit iniquity, all his righteousness shall not be remembered; but for his iniquity that he hath committed, he shall die for it. Again when I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; if he turn from his sin, and do that which is lawful and right, if the wicked restore the pledge, give again that he had robbed, walk in the statutes of life, without committing iniquity; he shall surely live. He shall not die. None of his sins that he hath committed shall be mentioned unto him: he hath done that which is lawful and right; he shall surely live." Whether it be a Christian or a non-Christian who sins the sin of adultery or any other sin, we must repent and turn from that sin, or we like Abimelech are dead men. We repeat, you cannot live in contradiction to God's law and have eternal life. In complete harmony with these truths, John the Baptist called Herod to repentance. Herod was neither a Jew nor a Christian, but an Edomite put on the throne to demoralise the Jews. Nevertheless he was subject to God's word from the beginning. Herodias is never referred to by God as Herod's wife though she had married him. She is always and only referred to as "his brother Phillip's wife". John did not preach a watered-down gospel and misquote God's word by saying, "old things have passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17). John lost his head because he spoke the truth. As long as Phillip lived, by God's law Herodias would be his wife. So we see again that though Herod, Phillip and Herodias were neither Jewish nor Christian, it made no difference at all. They were answerable to God and to His law. "The soul that sinneth shall die."

We are eternally grateful to God that there is a narrow way, and a loving Saviour to lead us down that narrow way of self-denial and obedience. "that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations...Teaching them to observe all things

whatsoever I have commanded you" (Luke 24:47, Matthew 28:20).

Could you imagine preaching this gospel to your non-Christian neighbours and when they responded, telling them not to go to bed together again until they had a Christian wedding? Would you seek to persuade them that non-Christian marriages do not count and that their children are illegitimate? Utter nonsense! "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). "And they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh" (Mark 10:8). Pharaoh? Abimelech? David? Herod? Whosoever? "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (Mark 10:9). There is no Babylon or confusion in God's eternal law, no need to change, no room for compromise or concession. His yes is yes, and His no is no. Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel who has in these last days spoken to us through His Son. "And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail. Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery" (Luke 16:17-18).

Won't you come to Jesus the King of Jerusalem, the Prince of Peace, and find the peace that comes through repentance and turning from sin? He is our Passover Lamb but His way is narrow and He demands obedience – that is, repentance and the forsaking of sin.

Chapter 6

“Amazing Grace”

“Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me.” How beautifully these words sum up the hearts cry of every poor lost sinner who has tasted the sweetness of God's forgiveness! We all need to know that in spite of that which so freely causes us to refer to ourselves as wretches, there is a Father who will love and forgive. God's love has made provision for me, the chief of wretches, and I know that there is a heavenly home awaiting all who will put their trust in God. This so great a salvation is available on account of what Christ has done at Calvary. Our Lord carried our sins with Him there and bore all our grief's and sorrows. At Calvary our Lord Jesus totally satisfied the righteous demands of a holy God, and at the same time made it possible for Adam's poor spiritually bankrupt descendants to inherit eternal life.

The New Testament is the lawful last will and testimony of the Son of God made valid by His death, and made sure by His resurrection. "For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth" (Hebrews 9:16-17). Had Christ remained in the grave, all our hopes would have died with Him. He laid down His life to validate the New Testament and then He did something that no son of Adam could ever do: He took it up again to become the executor of His own will. As well as His offices of Testator and Executor, He added the further office of Advocate so that He personally may attend to the needs of any poor sinner who by faith responds to His offer of a legally inherited eternal life. The terms of His will are simple and straightforward so that even a child can understand: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ," which incorporates acknowledgment of and repentance from sin and the following of Christ as Lord. To any who will follow the Lord Jesus down the narrow way, an "...inheritance incorruptible... and that fadeth not away" (1 Peter 1:4) is reserved free from charges or encumbrances. By its very nature, an inheritance requires no labour on behalf of the beneficiary. It is given, not earned; Christ has done the work, a work that we could never do, so that we may be the recipients of His amazing grace.

Our adversary the devil has been totally frustrated by the legal provisions made by our loving Saviour. Paul therefore exhorts the Galatian believers that nothing can be added to our salvation by the observance of the Mosaic Law. However, both then and now, many assumed that this also included the Law of God saying such things as “let us live in sin that grace may abound” Nothing could be further from the truth. The truth is that "Circumcision is nothing, and

uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God" (1 Corinthians 7:19). In other words, circumcision and the Law of Moses cannot add or take anything from our salvation; but failure to keep the commandments of God can. Those who seek to cover wilful transgressions against the commandments of God with grace, are willingly ignorant of the fact that right here in Galatians chapter 5, Paul gives a list (headed by adulterers) of people who will not inherit the kingdom of God. Is Paul then claiming that no former adulterer, murderer, witch or drunkard will go to heaven? Definitely not! Heaven is not closed to sinners, but only to those who will not repent and turn from sin. By the grace of God, a repentant sinner can be washed clean by the shed blood; but by no means do grace or the blood act as a covering over sin. It is hard to imagine how anyone who has gained an insight into what it cost the Lord to be able to wash our sins away – we repeat, it is hard to imagine how they could tolerate wilful sin. How could we further taunt Him who so hates sin with the request that He use His precious blood and amazing grace to cover the sins that we are not prepared to forsake? This is heresy, so Paul concludes this list of people barred from heaven with these grave words: "of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:21). "Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46). Sadly, the amazing grace of God is often frustrated by the wilful sinner who wants to take his sin with him on the narrow way.

Let us examine some prime examples of God's grace. In Genesis chapter 38, the beginnings of the Messianic tribe are documented. Humble beginnings to say the least, as God rejected all three of Judah's legitimate sons and chose the illegitimate Pharez. Subsequent to his wife's death, Judah made love to one he presumed to be a prostitute by the side of the road. In due time it was told him that Tamar, his twice-widowed daughter-in-law, was pregnant. Judah revealed hypocrisy at its worst when he ordered the pregnant widow to be burned at the stake only to find to his great amazement and shame that he had been her partner in fornication. He had failed to recognise the veiled, perceived prostitute as his daughter-in-law. Shocked and shamed, Judah acknowledged his sin and repented. By the grace of God, healthy twins were born out of this roadside encounter. Amazing grace, for far from being burned at the stake in his mother's womb, indeed little Pharez grew up to be the first link in the Messianic ancestry.

Another wonderful example of God's grace is the story of Rahab the harlot. When Jericho fell, the only building left standing was a brothel. Not only was the brothel proprietor and her whole family saved, but by the grace of God she married Pharez's great-great-grandson Salmon. God blessed them with a little boy who in time married Ruth the Moabitess. Ruth became the great-great-grandmother of David. So we see already two prostitutes in the lineage of Christ as well as Judah's illegitimate son, but there is more. God said to David, "And I gave

thee thy master's house, and thy master's wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things. Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord...?" (2 Samuel 12:8-9). What amazing grace that God could take the murderer David and his adulterous partner, then his wife Bathsheba, and bless them with four sons, two of which (Solomon and Nathan) were to be the forefathers of Joseph and Mary respectively.

Many times in our witness for the Lord, we have met with people who were living in contradiction to God's law on holy matrimony. Although some would admit to being plagued by guilt, they were prepared to allow men who would tell them what they wanted to hear to rock them to sleep. These unjust stewards, making a living out of giving concessions to God's debtors, told these misguided people that they could keep living in contradiction to God's holy laws on matrimony, as the blood and grace had them covered. In time both these corrupt leaders and their followers had their "consciences seared with a hot iron" (1 Timothy 4:2). If the Holy Spirit can still get through to you, then fall upon your knees while you can, and ask God to help you out of the mess that has become your life. There may seem to be insurmountable costs in order that you may do what God has written in your heart. The world, the flesh and the devil will do what they can to hinder you, but don't listen to them. Listen to the Lord Jesus before it is forever too late. The grace of God is amazing indeed to those who will repent from and forsake sin. This grace will by no means act as a plaster over the putrid sores of sin.

What are we saying, or should I ask, what is God saying to us through all this remarkable information? Does God wink at sin? Does He simply have a benevolent smile for prostitutes and adulterers, and somehow overlook their sins? God forbid! Nowhere in God's word will you find God condoning or blessing fornication, prostitution or adultery. Judah, Rahab, David and Bathsheba would be among those who Paul listed as being barred from heaven, had they not repented and forsaken their sin. No, this is not a story of God's tolerance of sin, but of God's amazing grace in the forgiveness of sins. Not only the human ancestors of Christ, but all of us and our ancestors are tainted with sin. If we knew the truth about our family trees, we would blush with shame all the way back to Adam. It is into the midst of this mess that God has sent His only begotten Son. He who was born of a virgin is without sin and could cast the first stone and destroy us all. By the grace of God, though, He has not come to condemn nor cast stones at us, but instead He casts out a lifeline. All He asks is that we confess and forsake our sins, take up our cross, and follow Him. Won't you come and join Judah, Tamar, Rahab, David, Bathsheba and countless others and follow Him who was born of poor sinful Judah's tribe? There was, though, none of Adam's or Judah's corrupted blood in

His holy veins. He is God's Son and is able to save to the uttermost all that come to God through Him. In the light of such amazing grace, we are not embarrassed to place before you God's righteous demands, nor are we ashamed to stand with John and cry, "...Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:17). Just look at what it has cost God to cleanse us from our sin!

May the love of God constrain us to forsake all sin, and daily follow the Lord Jesus Christ. Love, joy and peace lay in the wake of those who tread the narrow way.

Chapter 7

The Law of Moses

"When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favour in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house. And when she is departed out of his house, she may go and be another man's wife" (Deuteronomy 24:1-2). Yes indeed, these concessions allowing divorce and remarriage were penned by Moses during that forty-year period when he sought with God's help to govern the fledgling nation of Israel. Are we to understand from these scriptures that "marriage till death do us part" is simply an ideal? And if so, does this mean that God accepts varying standards for those who claim to be unable to live up to His ideals? God forbid! Those who would use the above scriptures to strengthen their argument for divorce and remarriage do so in total ignorance of the jurisdiction and context of the above quoted verses. The Almighty, the God of Israel is to be feared and revered. He does not set ideals, but He gives commandments. His only begotten Son is just like Him. He is the "express image" of His Father. His yes is yes, and His no is no in perfect submission to, and in absolute harmony with, the Father. He who "thought it not robbery to be called equal with God" (Philippians 2:6) is not an idealist either. The Pharisees, who were well aware of Christ's narrow stand on marriage, mocked and derided Him. Any man, thought they, who desired popular acclaim would most certainly make such acclaim untenable by taking what they had judged to be such an unrealistic stand. Just imagine how far one would get in Australian politics today with marriage - "till death do us part" as part of one's platform.

Our Lord, though, stood far above politics and popularity ratings. The Pharisees, instigated by Satan, sought again and again to tempt our Lord in this most sensitive and difficult of earthly matters. "The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?" (Matthew 19:3). Far from being tempted, our Lord resisted the devil and gave answers that stunned His hearers, adding to His Father's clear word: "the two shall be one," further confirmation of the immutability of the marriage covenant, "they shall no more be two." If His yes means yes, and His no means no, then His "no more" means "no more" – Christ had clearly contradicted Moses. Thinking that such alienation from Moses would undermine His influence, the Pharisees tried hard to accomplish just that. However, their alienation from God was revealed by Christ instead. And Jesus answered and said unto them, "For the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept. But from the

beginning of the creation God made them male and female. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; And they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (Mark 10: 5-9). These religious leaders, who had long since in their hypocrisy forsaken God, were blind to the difference between Genesis chapter 2 and Deuteronomy chapter 24. Nor had they discerned the difference between the leadership of Moses and the Lordship of Christ. "For this man was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as he who hath builded the house hath more honour than the house" (Hebrews 3:3).

To understand Moses and the concessions he gave, it must be understood that at any one time, only a small remnant of the nation he governed, were the Lord's people and the heirs of eternal life. Nevertheless, this hard-hearted majority had to be governed, hence the concessions. A careful scrutiny of God's word will reveal that the "Israel of God" and the "circumcised of heart," were always governed by Genesis chapter 2. No man ever approved of God, lived by Moses' concessions. This includes David the forgiven murderer and adulterer. We hope to examine David's life more carefully later.

Please allow me to give a modern day example: Ireland is a largely Roman Catholic nation. Like Israel, Ireland is merely a nation with no doubt a godly remnant. It isn't possible in this age to combine church and state and presume that all Ireland will keep God's commandments. To believe that all Irish citizens will go to heaven is as naive as believing that all Jews of Moses' time went to heaven also. Recently, a referendum was brought before the Irish people. They were asked: should Ireland recognise divorce and remarriage? A resounding "no" vote was the result. As commendable as this may first appear, this did not solve the problem of what to do about the many Irishmen who have refused to comply with state law. A nation cannot be governed solely by the laws that govern the church. As more and more children are born without right, record or recognition, the nation threatens to become ungovernable. Sooner or later Ireland will be forced to recognise the "hard-hearted" and to pass concessionary laws. However, Irishmen who truly follow the Lord Jesus will walk in His narrow way. I respect the Irish for seeking to hold to God's law but repeat, it is not possible to combine church and state. As the Irish government grapples with these mounting and perplexing problems, our mind goes back to dear Moses and his government as they grappled with the same. The hardness of heart in that generation forced from Moses' pen the concessions that we have recorded before us to this very day.

The Lord Jesus, however, whilst acknowledging Moses' concessions to the hard-hearted, totally and utterly alienated such concessions from His body, His holy bride. We the "Bride of

Christ" – even as was the "Israel of God" – are governed and only governed by that word "from the beginning." The hard-hearted who adhere to concessions and not to God's commandments will be lost if they do not repent.

In conclusion, the Old Testament begins Genesis chapter 2 and ends Malachi chapter 2 with God's word on holy matrimony. Nowhere in either Testament does God the Father or God the Son ever condone or accept divorce and remarriage. However, Moses, because of the hard-hearted, did give certain concessions. Though concessionists were tolerated as part of the physical nation of Israel, they were never counted among the "circumcised of heart." So too today, citizens of Australia or any other nation may live under the concessions that they have forced out of their governments. By no means shall such concessionists be included as part of the "espoused virgin," the Body and Bride of Christ. Yet heaven's door stands open to anyone who is living in contradiction to God's eternal word, but only if they are prepared to acknowledge, repent and turn from sin. If there was a 1% chance that God would not receive a man who had put away his wife and married another, or that God would not receive a man who had married her that was put away from her husband – if there was a 1% chance, we say we should sound the alarm. No one in their right mind would take a 1% gamble with eternity. We are sounding the alarm as loudly as we can, for there is not one chance in a million that God will change His word, "From the beginning"? No, not even to accommodate the most sympathetic of cases. He is not an idealist but has given commandment; and who will resist or change when He has said, "The two shall be one"? We repeat: "And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail. Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery" (Luke 16: 17-18). Wherefore (as the Holy Ghost saith, Today if ye will hear his voice, Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, In the day of temptation in the wilderness: When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years. Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do always err in their heart; and they have not known my ways. So I sware in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest) (Hebrews 3:7-11).

P. S. Since the writing of this chapter, the Irish government has changed the law to accommodate divorce and remarriage.

Chapter 8

God's Love of Restoration

(Deuteronomy 24:3-4)

"And if the latter husband hate her, and write her a bill of divorcement, and giveth it in her hand, and sendeth her out of his house; or if the latter husband die, which took her to be his wife; Her former husband, which sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after that she is defiled; for that is abomination before the LORD. And thou shalt not cause the land to sin, which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance."

It would be grossly irresponsible if anyone were to take the above verses and enforce them as church doctrine. Doctrine can only be established when it has been clearly confirmed in God's word, for sound doctrine is not based upon an isolated text. The above Mosaic injunction against the return of a remarried wife is indeed an isolated concept. It has one subsequent mention in God's word, and this mention is by no means a confirmation. To the contrary, through this latter reference God clearly distances Himself from the above and reveals that He is not the concept's author. It never ceases to amaze us that many Bible teachers who insist that they are under grace and not under law, now and again find something in what Moses has said to suit them. They pounce upon these texts and enforce them with great vigour, while at the same time explain away and pervert the clearly established word of God through Jesus Christ His Son. Before examining God's reference to Deuteronomy 24:3-4, let us examine an interesting case in point.

David won the right to marry Michal, King Saul's daughter, after killing Goliath plus one hundred Philistines. However, the newlyweds were soon separated as David was driven by his envious father-in-law into the wilderness. To add insult to injury, Saul took Michal and remarried her to Phaltiel. More than a decade later, David returned with his subsequent wives, and was crowned King of Judah in Hebron. Seven years after his coronation, Abner, Israel's General, came to offer David the kingship over the eleven tribes also. David, however, refused to negotiate an alliance with Abner and Israel without one precondition being met first. "Deliver me my wife Michal," David commanded (2 Samuel 3:13-16). Clearly David had bypassed Moses' injunction to be governed by the word: "from the beginning." In David's view any subsequent remarriage after the two had become one was illegitimate and to be counted null and void. He was right. This case in point shows us that David ignored what Moses had to say and before all Israel took back the wife who for many years had been married to another.

Let us now examine what God has to say on this subject. "They say, If a man put away his wife, and she go from him, and become another man's, shall he return unto her again? Shall not the land be greatly polluted? But thou has played the harlot with many lovers; yet return again to me, saith the Lord" (Jeremiah 3:1). Please note that God immediately distances Himself from this Mosaic injunction with the words, "they say." He concluded with, "Saith the LORD." In our previous chapter, we saw that Deuteronomy 24:1-2 were refuted by Christ who relegated those verses to be mere concessions to the hard-hearted. Now verses 3 and 4 are refuted by the Father as He highlights His loving anticipation of Israel's return to Him. God, through Jeremiah, gives us one of the most touching accounts of Israel's restoration. In chapter 2, verse 2, God looks back yearningly to their espousal, when she followed Him into the wilderness. It was at Sinai that the marriage covenant was ratified when Israel answered "we will" to the "I will" of God. From that time on, God has referred to Himself as Husband and Israel as Wife. Sadly, the honeymoon ended all too soon and problems began to emerge. God asked, "Why?" (Jeremiah 2-5). How sad that Israel could forget Him who loves her so, and forsake Him for other lovers. Regardless of all this, God commences chapter 3 with a plea for her return. In this chapter, a loving Husband hangs out all His dirty linen for the world to see. Yes, Israel had rejected Him, and gone after others. Judah made some pretence of marital faithfulness, but it was a broken-hearted Husband who was forced to confess that He preferred Israel's blunt denial and open adultery to Judah's feigned marital faithfulness. Oh how shameful to treat Him so, after all He had done! How the devil and his hordes rejoiced and taunted God with the failure of His marriage. A proud and legalistic husband under lesser circumstances would have cried: "You are finished, I will never take you back," and begin looking for another. What humility and what meekness we discern here in Israel's Husband! Despising the shame, He humbly endures the pain, sorrow and ignominy and refuses to give up. He is as good as His word.

Yet a divorce is pronounced: "And I saw, when for all the causes whereby backsliding Israel committed adultery I had put her away, and given her a bill of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah feared not, but went and played the harlot also" (Jeremiah 3:8). Some have gloated over this. These avowed spiritual Israelists claim that Israel is no longer His covenant people; for, say they, God has now chosen the church to be His new covenant people. These are ignorant of the fact that divorce cannot dissolve a marriage covenant. Divorce is merely an acknowledgment of separation. Only death can dissolve a marriage. Though God has divorced Israel, yet is she His covenant people. His foreknowledge dictates that she will come to an end of herself and then return to Him. Please examine carefully the following: "Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the LORD; and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, saith the LORD, and I will not

keep anger for ever. Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the LORD thy God, and hast scattered thy ways to the strangers under every green tree, and ye have not obeyed my voice, saith the LORD. Turn, O backsliding children, saith the LORD; for I am married unto you: and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion" (Jeremiah 3:12-14). We note here that though Israel had been divorced, her Husband still recognises her as His wife, "for I am married unto you." How can this be, "divorced" and yet "married"? God is simply abiding by His word "from the beginning." Dare we say it again: "The wife is bound to her husband as long as the husband shall live." Nothing but death can dissolve the oneness spoken into being by God. Note too that the only precondition to the restoration of this marriage (or any legitimate marriage) is an acknowledgment of iniquity and transgression. Upon any fulfilment of these requirements, the repentant transgressors may return with God's blessing, to their legitimate mates. What a day that will be, when this marriage is restored to the glory of God. "Fear not; for thou shalt not be ashamed: neither be thou confounded; for thou shalt not be put to shame: for thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth, and shalt not remember the reproach of thy widowhood any more. For thy Maker is thine husband; the LORD of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; The God of the whole earth shall he be called. For the LORD hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth, when thou wast refused, saith thy God. For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the LORD thy Redeemer" (Isaiah 54:4-8). Then the Kingdom shall come, and His will shall be done. In that day the Son too and His bride, the church, and all that love God shall rejoice.

The Holy Spirit through Paul declares: "And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband: But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife" (1 Corinthians 7:10-11). Here we see again that reconciliation of a legitimate marriage is a sanctified option. "But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace. For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? Or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?" (1 Corinthians 7:15-16). If you, dear reader, have suffered the loss of an unbelieving loved one who like Israel has forsaken you for others, know that God understands. Don't be under the bondage of spending your days in bitter recriminations and indulging in self-pity and self-justification. Your Heavenly Father understands the pain of rejection. He will comfort you. Be at peace, dear troubled soul, and follow your God in faithfully seeking the restoration of your marriage, no matter how dark the circumstances. In God's case, Israel His wife crucified their

only Son, and still spits at the mention of His name. God's foreknowledge though reveals to us that even she will return to the loving embrace of both her Husband and her Son. Will you then not patiently wait, be at peace, and hope and pray? God will never reject you, leave you, or forsake you. The God of Israel leads by example. Yes, reconciliation of a legitimate but broken marriage is a sanctified option, as is abiding alone when this is necessary.

Chapter 9

What about David?

Generally, such a question as the above carries with it the inference that God somehow tolerated or overlooked the crime of David's adultery with Bathsheba. God's word does indeed present us with a remarkable insight into David's public and personal life, but God's attitude toward sin remains constant. God's great love for the man after his own heart was based on His foreknowledge. God foresaw David's preparedness to admit his faults and his continual turning in true repentance back to Himself. Though we would not seek in any way to excuse David's much publicised adultery and subsequent act of murder, we would point out that David, during his lifetime, enjoyed few of the blessings that flow so freely to the happily married. Unlike his parents who no doubt came together as virgins and enjoyed a long and happy marriage, David's first marriage was for him the beginning of sorrows. "Whoever kills the giant gets the King's daughter," the words flowed hastily from the fearful King's lips. He, a man who stood head and shoulders above the rest, was desperate enough to send out a lad to do his bidding. However when the pressure was off, the cowardly Saul humiliated his devoted servant by giving the promised Merab to another. As an afterthought, David was offered the younger Michal in the hope that he would not live to present Saul's gruesome dowry demand. David survived to claim his bloody bride, only to be driven off and further humiliated when Saul took Michal and married her off to another. From this point on, marital bliss was nothing more to David than an elusive dream.

The virginity of both bride and groom is a fundamental part of God's design for a happy and fulfilled marriage, hence God's strict laws against fornication. Made in the image of God, a man needs to be believed in, respected, revered, honoured and obeyed. The virgin bride is wonderfully created by God to fulfil these needs. Conversely, the bride who in type represents the church, needs her bridegroom's devotion, gentleness, appreciation, patience and above all his love. These needs provoke the scriptural commands in Ephesians chapter 5: "husbands love your wives," "wives see that ye reverence your husbands." There is, of course, more to marital bliss than that just mentioned. The workings of the human body, soul and spirit, and the fusion of two individuals into what God has called and made one, are both complex and yet beautifully simple. The virgin bride is sealed by God with a seal that is to be broken by her husband only, and upon the marital bed. By God's design, this breaking of the hymen brings about a fusing or bonding that is enormously powerful, especially when accompanied by the appropriate commitments, trust and love. The virgins are thus joined by a million invisible strands, a bond that grows ever stronger while life shall last. A mateship, thus bonded by God's design,

is the highest and most noble form of friendship known to man. We plan to study these sensitive and precious truths in more detail in later chapters, with special emphasis on God's love toward those who admit failure and look to Him for healing and restoration. For now, it will suffice to say that David's chances of enjoying life with the wife of his youth were forever ruined by his jealous and hate-filled father-in-law.

In the wilderness, David tried hard to be brave in what seemed to be a hopeless situation, but when news reached him of Samuel's death, his feelings of helplessness were heightened. He feared that his hopes and aspirations now lay buried with his friend and patron at Ramah. In his desperation, David sent some of his young men to a rich and influential farmer name Nabal. Alas, and as is usually the case when we seek recognition, Nabal merely insulted and mocked David. Upon hearing of these events, David began to rage. This rage led to the further error of seeking vengeance. With a rather crude choice of words, David vowed the death of Nabal and all his house. It was Nabal's beautiful and gracious wife Abigail who in the power of her humility brought David down from his high horse. "I pray thee, forgive the trespasses of thine handmaid: for the LORD will certainly make my lord a sure house; because my lord fighteth the battles of the LORD, and evil hath not been found in thee all thy days. Yet a man is risen to pursue thee, and to seek thy soul: but the soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life with the LORD thy God; and the souls of thine enemies, then shall he sling out, as out of the middle of a sling. And it shall come to pass, when the LORD shall have done to my lord according to all the good that he hath spoken concerning thee, and shall have appointed thee ruler over Israel; That this shall be no grief unto thee; nor offence of heart unto my lord, either that thou hast shed blood causeless, or that my lord hath avenged: himself but when the LORD shall have dealt well with my lord, then remember thine handmaid" (1 Samuel 25:28-31). Oh, how David needed to hear these assuring and comforting words, they sounded like music to his ears! David, though, was so overcome by Abigail's words of wisdom that he seemed to have overlooked the fact that it was not Abigail but the Holy Spirit who had so richly blessed him. Thinking to join to himself the source of this great blessing, he wedded Abigail immediately upon hearing of her husband's death. The marriage of course was legitimate and we can be sure that this widow was to David an honourable and faithful wife, but she could never be to David the friend and companion his soul longed for. Subsequently, David married many times and many young virgins were bonded to him, but the ensuing complexities of life had made it impossible for David to realise his dream. What had seemed so simple, when as a boy he observed his parents' love and contentment, now seemed to David unattainable. His disillusionment could be read between the lines of his famous words regarding Jonathan: "thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women."

David rose to great heights with God and with man, yet he was lonely. The great conquests and victories that studded his life could not fill the vacuum in his heart and soul. The higher David rose, the more vulnerable he became. The Lord of course could have more than filled this vacuum, but David had not yet discerned his need or the danger he was in. Satan however was well aware of David's frustration, and exploited his weaknesses masterfully through Bathsheba. Hence, the balcony of relaxation and repose became a most dangerous place for the vulnerable King. Suddenly and in the scant light of evening, a tantalisingly beautiful body appeared before his eyes. Soon David began to delude himself into thinking that the bathing beauty before him was the one he had been looking and longing for. So smitten was he by her beauty, so overpowered by his lust, that he was prepared to turn his back on God and His loving commandments. David's course was set; covetousness, adultery, lies, deceits and murder soon lay in his wake. Oh, the depth to which a man can sink when he turns his back on God! Stunned and numbed by the magnitude of his sins, David sunk down in his throne as the man of God pointed and cried, "Thou art the man" (2 Samuel 12:7). And for what? It had all been a mirage, for even as he had stooped to drink, he had only found the dry sands of disillusionment. "Look upon my affliction and my pain; and forgive all my sins" (Psalm 25:18). Yes, the goodness of God had led David to repentance. The broken heart and the contrite spirit God did not despise. Though the strokes of judgement had lashed from Nathan's tongue, they were followed by the balm of Gilead. "And David said unto Nathan I have sinned against the LORD. And Nathan said unto David, The LORD also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die" (2 Samuel 12:13). David's ultimate marriage to Bathsheba was legitimate, since Uriah was dead; but the child born out of adultery died in fulfilment of God's word through Nathan. Do we thus conclude from these events that murder is an acceptable way out of adultery? God forbid! Anyone who plans and practises sin in the hope of exploiting the goodness of God will find themselves in diabolical trouble. "Be not deceived: God is not mocked!" (Galatians 6:7). Yet the truth remains that those who make shipwreck during the storms of life, may be rescued and saved by David's merciful and forgiving God.

David and his family suffered painful consequences, both during David's lifetime and in the generations following. It is certainly a sobering thought that an undisciplined act from us will affect our children and future generations. Yet time and time again, there were those of David's descendants who also followed his example in repentance, and on bended knees found peace and immortality through the forgiveness of sins.

To my knowledge, David never did find marital bliss; to the contrary, David struggled and suffered much until his body was laid to rest at the age of seventy. However, David found, in the Heavenly Bridegroom, One who answered all his want; for marital bliss is, after all, only a shadow

and brief foretaste of what God has reserved for those who love and trust Him. As you and I are struggling with life, dear reader, may we meditate upon David's immortal words: "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want." Blessed be the Lord Jesus Christ, both David's Shepherd and ours.

Chapter 10

God Hates Divorce

Throughout the preceding nine chapters we have selected such material as we have deemed necessary in the laying of firm foundations. Now as we conclude our studies on holy matrimony in the Old Testament we wish to honour an important law for Bible students: the law of "first and last mention." "First Mention," of course, is that initial word from God in Genesis chapter 2: "and they shall be one flesh." However, Malachi, some 3,600 years after Adam, is forced to acknowledge the chaos amongst his people as a result of their departure from God's original commands. Neither Malachi nor the Lord Jesus, who came some four hundred years later, made any attempt to patch up the mess, but pointed straight back to what God said "in the beginning." The Lord Jesus "came unto His own" after two thousand years had been fulfilled upon them and found Israel in a pathetic state: "His own received him not" (John 1:11). Now the church's two thousand years have been all but fulfilled. Those who have been so quick to call Israel blind are blind indeed to the pitiful state of things in our time. For we are presiding over the greatest chaos in marriage and the family that the world has ever witnessed.

Malachi opens his 2nd chapter with these words; "And now oh ye priests, this commandment is for you." God has always demanded the highest standard for those who represent Him. Though Moses allowed low standards in order that the hard-hearted may be accommodated within the secular nation of Israel, God had no room for them in the "Israel of God," the "circumcised of heart." To those who would claim that God's high standards were set for priests only, we would say that in the church, we hold to the priesthood of all believers. Malachi continues with his startling revelation and declares that God had cursed the priesthood of his day because they had "profaned the holiness of the LORD which he loved" (Malachi 2:11). As a consequence of their profanity they were to be "cut off" both great and small, teacher and scholar alike. They had "gone in the way of Cain" (Jude 1:11). God had "no respect" to their offerings and totally ignored their tearful intercessions. Then in verses 14 - 16 God reveals the grave matter that had precipitated their fall from grace. "Yet ye say, Wherefore? Because the LORD hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant. And did not he make one? Yet had he the residue of the spirit. And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth. For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away: for one covereth violence with his garment, saith the LORD of hosts: therefore take heed to

your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously" (Malachi 2:14-16).

The consciences of these priests were "seared as with a hot iron" (1 Timothy 4:2), for when God strove with them they looked up in amazement crying, "wherefore." The Lord then pointed out that He had been a witness at their weddings. In fact, every son of Adam who shall "leave his father and his mother and shall cleave unto his wife," has God to his witness. Please note also in verse 14, that the treachery of these men had in no way annulled or dissolved their marriage covenant. God still counted them "one" with the wife of their youth. You see, dear reader, God's word cannot be made subject to treachery or any other sin or circumstance. If He says "the two shall be one," that then is final. The prophet's question, "And did He not make one?" demands a positive answer. God's faithful servant then continues and impresses upon his audience the fundamental role that holy matrimony plays in the raising of children. If this holy foundation be destroyed, total confusion and anarchy will break out, for the children's ability to fear, to trust, to respect and to obey will be destroyed. "Take heed to your spirit and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth." Marital unfaithfulness is spiritual suicide, for no unrepentant adulterer can be a priest before God, nor shall they enter into His holy presence. Malachi continues in verse 16 to emphasise that "God hates divorce." We have heard some agree that this is not His perfect will, but His grace causes Him to tolerate our weaknesses and abide with what He hates. There is nothing new though under the sun; they were saying such things in Malachi's day also. "Ye have wearied the LORD with your words. Yet ye say, Wherein have we wearied him? When ye say, Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and he delighteth in them; or, Where is the God of judgment?" (Malachi 2:17). If the mighty God of creation declares that vow breaking is evil, who then will dare say, "everyone that doeth evil is good." Solomon gives us grave warning of the woman "Which forsaketh the guide of her youth, and forgetteth the covenant of her God" (Proverbs 2:17). The marriage covenant we see here is not ours to do with as we please; it is the covenant of our God. How terribly hard it must have been for Malachi to stand before his fallen people! By the time our Lord Jesus came among them, things were even worse. It caused his disciples great amazement when the Lord stood with Malachi and pointed back to Genesis chapter 2. Not even the strictest interpretation among the Pharisees had dared to go that far; many were offended, but true-hearted men knew that He was true and just.

But what about the church? We have now had our two thousand years. Have we done better than Israel? Soon the Lord Jesus will come again, and what will He find? The so-called priests of our day have mauled and manipulated His word to allow for virtually any kind of marital conduct at all. Humanism and worldly ways have dictated the pace of the most rapid slide down the broad way that this weary old world has ever witnessed. However, even as God had

preserved a remnant of righteous men in the day of Israel's visitation, so too will there be a remnant in the church in that day when the trumpet shall sound. The time has come again for those who stand with Malachi and their Lord to declare, "the two shall be one," "they shall no more be two," and "the wife is bound to her husband as long as her husband shall live." Yes, the time has come to be despised and rejected. It was Asaph who has so well summed up the state of things to which we are referring. "But unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth? Seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee. When thou sawest a thief, then thou consentedst with him, and hast been partaker with adulterers...These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such a one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes. Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver. Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me: and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I show the salvation of God" (Psalm 50:16-18, 21-23). "And hast been partaker with adulterers." Even those who have not been treacherous in their marital relationships, but quietly go along with the treachery of others, are culpable. When friends, relatives or church members divorce and remarry, it is much easier to remain silent and just go along with it. We have spoken to many who, against their better judgement, have gone along with divorce and remarriage. Such have become [a] "partaker with adulterers." If we have been convicted of this, we should repent by confessing our sin before God and man.

God's greatest wrath is reserved for church leaders who have looked out of their windows to see which way the wind is blowing and then gone along with it. How awesome will be the judgement of those who bless what God has cursed, Throughout the ages people have sought to represent God and at the same time make alliances with "the mammon of unrighteousness" (i.e. money, prestige, power and influences). "No servant can serve two masters" (Luke 16:13).

So we see that there is no variance at all between God's first and last mention of holy matrimony in the Old Testament. "The two shall be one flesh," is God's first and last word. Will we bow our knees, our backs, our heads before a righteous God, or will we bend over backwards to please the people? Any who choose the latter will break their backs, along with their power and authority, with God's holy word. Should we choose the former, we will be "hated of all men." Yet our God-given power and influence shall remain. "...If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also" (John 15:20). Have mercy upon us, oh God, in this most dreadful time. May we continue to be "salt" and "light" until He comes. "Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

Chapter 11

"Except It Be For Fornication"

As we carry our study into the New Testament, I find a phrase from the Old lingering on my mind: "...the holiness of the LORD which He loved" (Malachi 2:11). It is clear from the context of the above text that God's love and delight are bound up together in making holy matrimony His master plan and the crowning glory of His creation. There is a wondrous beauty that unfolds when husband and wife, with true love, begin to raise a family. All the battles and busyness of child raising, the nappies and the noise all pale into insignificance compared with little things like hearing your child say "mum-mum" and "dad-dad." Yes indeed, a host of memories flood our minds when we parents hark back to those never-to-be-forgotten days. The teenage years too, though sometimes trying, are so interesting as the love between parents and children deepens through the joys and trials of life. Time passes so quickly; we turn around and there stands a beautiful young lady, or a handsome young man. Soon too, courtship and marriage start the cycle all over again, and all the while "God is watching us," but not "from a distance" for this is "the holiness of the Lord which He loveth." Of the wicked days of Noah it is written: "and it grieved him at his heart" (Genesis 6:6). Since those perilous times, God's heart has been often grieved by man's conduct; but never have the beautiful things of life been so corrupted as now. How God's loving heart must ache with the gross perversion of that which He delights in, in our time.

In this chapter, we will again observe the law of first mention, and it comes to us early in Matthew. Here we find the espousal and marriage of Joseph and Mary, and there is much for us to learn through this window into Jewish life. Along with the principles of first mention we have here another principle also, that of "the Jew first." Hence Matthew the gospel, especially written to the Jews, comes first. An understanding of the innate Jewishness of Matthew's gospel will help us understand things that might otherwise be overlooked; for here in Matthew chapter 1, we find certain principles of Jewish life not commonly known or understood by Gentiles. Joseph, as an eligible bachelor in harmony with Jewish custom, had betrothed Mary. This betrothal was a complex and carefully governed agreement made between Joseph and Mary's father with of course Mary's consent. The espousal bond was ratified only after the dowry payment in either silver or gold had been made. In this way a Jewish man secured his bride through an immutable espousal bond. From this point on, he was referred to as the husband and she as the wife, even though the marriage bond had not yet been entered into. Yet, there was one possible exception to the immutability of the espousal bond: fornication. If the bride-to-be had willingly submitted herself to a sexual act with another man, yet continued to pose as a virgin, the man lawfully referred to as her husband could upon discovering the truth,

demand back his dowry payment, put away his wife and take another. Furthermore, a proven case of fornication violating the good faith of the betrothal bond could spell death to the bride-to-be and bring great shame upon her father's house.

Hence an elaborate system of chaperoning was devised. An espoused virgin such as Mary was never left alone with any man, not even the man now known as her husband. You will find a detailed account of that which formed the foundations for these customs and laws in Deuteronomy. "If any man take a wife, And go in unto her, and hate her, and give occasions of speech against her, and bring up an evil name upon her, and say, I took this woman, and when I came to her, I found her not a maid: Then shall the father of the damsel, and her mother, take and bring forth the tokens of the damsel's virginity unto the elders of the city in the gate: And the damsel's father shall say unto the elders, I gave my daughter unto this man to wife, and he hateth her; And, lo, he hath given occasions of speech against her, saying, I found not thy daughter a maid; and yet these are the tokens of my daughter's virginity. And they shall spread the cloth before the elders of the city (Deuteronomy 22:13-17). We have mentioned previously the sensitivity of virginity and the fundamental role that the breaking of the hymen plays in the bonding of husband and wife. As a consequence of these facts of life, proof of virginity was of paramount importance. Hence, virginity was certified by the spreading of a white cloth over the honeymoon bed. The breaking of the hymen would inevitably leave bloodstains on this cloth. This was all carefully governed by the bride's father under the watchful eye of the chaperones appointed by him and answerable to him. In the event of a complaint being lodged by the bridegroom against the chastity of his bride, the sheet was called for. If the bride's virginity was upheld after the elders had made inquisition, the bridegroom had no further recourse. He though was severely chastised for insulting his bride's father. However, should his complaint be sustained, the bride, in accordance with Mosaic law, was stoned to death for her deceit and for the shame she had brought upon her father's house.

Thus, one and a half thousand years of Jewish custom preceded Joseph's betrothal of his virgin. Mary was obviously one of the most pure, sweet and lovely young virgins ever taken by any man to wife. We can imagine the shock to Mary's parents her pregnancy must have been. Their very lack of mention in the gospels and Mary's extended visit to her cousin Elizabeth makes one wonder as to whether her parents understood. Joseph too was a good man and no doubt shattered by the news. He could not, however, bring himself to a public denunciation of Mary, choosing to put her away privately. "Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a publick example, was minded to put her away privily" (Matthew 1:19). Joseph was just and quite within his rights to do so. The private divorce of Mary would have freed him to take another virgin, and this would he no doubt have done had God not

intervened. Joseph was clearly a true son of Abraham, for he never doubted once God revealed to him the truth. He immediately took his pregnant virgin in a marriage bond. How grateful Mary would have been for Joseph's love and his faith and trust in God and in her while she was in the fulfilment of the most blessed role ever had by any mother. It was against the background of these laws and customs so clearly understood by Israel that Matthew, and Matthew alone, addressed the Jews in regard to Christ's confirmation of the destructive effect fornication could have on the espousal bond.

As mentioned, these principles were well understood in Israel in the time of our Lord. However, to apply these principles to Gentile marriages where no such structure exists would be, in our view, unjust and totally without the substantiation of God's word. Such principles would be ungovernable without community awareness and strict compliance with every aspect of the laws so carefully formulated and practiced in Israel at that time. Also, in our modern day of strenuous exercise and tampons, I am led to believe that it is quite possible that the hymen be broken even though virginity has been maintained. It is clear though that these principles dating back to Moses and sanctioned by Christ had a purifying effect upon Jewish life and marriage. Such firm foundations for holy matrimony would exalt any nation. May we add here that though our Lord upheld the right of Jewish men to marry virgins who were physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually able to bond into full union with them, He in no way upheld the death sentence for either fornication or adultery. We may add too that non-virgins, both male and female, may legitimately marry. However, it must be understood that fornication has led to illegitimate bondings. Both male and female carry enormous problems with them into their ultimate marriage. Such cases must be understood and dealt with in the greatest love and gentleness. Covered sin leads to serious problems; only the truth can set us free. However, great care and caution should be taken. Only godly and humble men who understand the delicate nature of these matters should be entrusted to escort these troubled souls through the minefields of the aftermath of fornication. We will seek later, by God's grace, to devote a chapter to this highly sensitive subject.

Let us now examine Christ's words to Israel through Matthew. "It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery" (Matthew 5:31-32). Recent translators have displayed their ignorance of Jewish life and taken licence to substitute the words "marital unfaithfulness" for the clearly understood word "fornication." They have argued, from the Greek, their right to such licence. However, we would make this fact perfectly clear: never once does our Lord say fornication when He means adultery, and never

once does He say adultery when He means fornication. In Matthew, and Matthew only, Christ deals with the exceptive clause of fornication for the Jews for they understood perfectly what He was saying. Nowhere in all scripture has adultery ever had any dissolving or annulling effect upon the marriage bond. Christ clearly resisted Moses' concession to the hard-hearted and introduces absolutely no such grounds as "marital unfaithfulness" for the dissolving of a marriage covenant.

If adultery could dissolve a marriage, then how much adultery does it take? "But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Matthew 5:28). If adultery has annulling power, then the above verse alone is sufficient to dissolve most marriages, for Christ makes it perfectly clear that looking and lusting are equal to the act of adultery. "Oh, no, no, no," you say, "a man must first go to bed with another woman before his marriage covenant is broken." Do you mean that a man or woman trapped in a weak moment with one act can dissolve the oneness spoken into being by God? Others say, "Oh, no, no; it must be two or three acts." We have met scores of men, each with a differing theory as to exactly what breaks a marriage bond. However, we have never met a man who can tell us exactly when the one became two again. Please let us explain with this hypothetical example: Jack and Jill were married on the 10th of March at 11 a.m. in 1975. In 1987, after the birth of their fourth child, Jack became involved in an extra-marital affair. Now Jack and Jill were pronounced man and wife by their pastor who, in stewardship for God, pronounced them man and wife. What man will pronounce them two again, and if they became one at 11 a.m. on March 10 in 1975? Who will nominate the time and place they have become two again? Was it in 1975 when Jack first looked and lusted, or was it in 1987 when Jack first got into bed with another woman? Tell us what man has been ordained of God to pronounce the one to be two again. And if Jack is no longer one with Jill, are his children still his children? I think you see the folly of this whole affair. "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (Mark 10:9).

We have been amazed in our crazy, mixed-up world as we have witnessed teenagers divorcing their parents. It is equally as impossible to dissolve the fact that your parents are your parents on the grounds of bad behaviour, as it is to dissolve the fact that your spouse is your spouse. Good behaviour will bring blessing and bad behaviour will bring grief and separation; but there is no such thing as behaviour, sin or circumstance altering that which came out of God's mouth. "The two shall be one." How dare any man lift himself above God and nominate the time and place when and where the "one" spoken into being by God Almighty have become "two" again? God alone has reserved this right through death.

We will be confirmed in the rightness of these matters when we examine the man chosen of the Holy Ghost to represent Holy Matrimony to the church. Paul clearly allows marriage after the breaking of the espousal bond, but strictly forbids remarriage while a husband or wife still lives. We reiterate: an espousal bond may be broken by sin, but nothing can break the marriage bond other than death. Contrary to the rhetoric of many theologians, we do not need a degree in the Greek language in order to ascertain whether marriage is permanent or not. God has not spoken to us through vague concepts nor has He veiled His will. Rather, the matter is clear so that even a child can understand, for holy matrimony is "the holiness of the Lord which He loveth."

Chapter 12

The Lord Calls It Adultery

Having re-emphasised the fact that death alone can break the marriage bond, we now continue with our Lord's teaching from Matthew chapter 5. Here is the same scripture portion that we examined in our previous chapter, but with the fornication clause set aside even as Mark, Luke and Paul have done. "It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: but I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife...causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery" (Matthew 5:31-32). Christ's "it hath been said" is a clear reference to Moses' concessions; however, the Lord follows this up with His all-powerful "but I say unto you," thereby dismissing what Moses had said. Rather than govern a nation out of which a small remnant came unto God as Moses did, Christ is addressing His church as a "holy nation," His "body" and His "bride." He will, in a day to come, present her to Himself as a bride without spot and without blemish. His body and bride is made up of those who have answered the gospel call, repented and turned from sin. In fact right here in chapter 5, the Lord is addressing those overcomers who are destined to reign with Him forever, namely: "the poor in spirit, they that mourn, the meek, they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers" and "the persecuted for righteousness' sake." We feel sure that the above would prefer to be in the enjoyment of happy family life. However, those who have truly come to repentance and have by grace gained an interest in their Saviour's death are not about to submit a "bill of rights" to God. Such are content to suffer loss if need be, rather than be found living in contradiction to God's holy word. In contrast to the world's "bill of rights" the truly repentant possesses a humble gratitude coupled with self-denial and obedience. The prayer of such is: "Lord please forgive me and my spouse for all our sins and please restore our family that your Holy Name may be glorified." Such realise that the spirit of divorce and remarriage is Babylonish and entirely foreign to the kingdom of God and all that it stands for.

Dear friends, the Lord has set before us a "narrow way", asking each of us to take up our cross and follow Him. There is nothing in the beatitudes about a life of ease and self-will. We are following "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" (Isaiah 53:3). There will be time enough for celebration when He takes us home, but while we are in the world we will have tribulation. Yet we possess a hope that is steadfast and sure. The obedient child of God possesses a deep and overflowing joy that the world cannot give nor take away. Those who possess this joy unspeakable have no desire to sing: "I did it my way," but in a day to come they will sing: "we did it His way." Sadly, many religious people at the time of Christ's earthly

ministry were not prepared to lay down their life, their selfish aspirations, their “bill of rights.” They wanted to enter heaven but were loath to crucify the flesh. Christ lovingly warns us against the peril of this “way that seemeth right unto man.” “For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:20).

True salvation is “Not of works lest any man should boast” (Ephesians 2:9). This exceeding righteousness referred to by our Lord is His own which we poor sinners may inherit. But the terms of the will demand death to all that is contrary to God's commands. We cannot live in contradiction to His word and at the same time claim our inheritance.

Now it is clear from Christ's commands that a man who puts away his wife is the cause of her becoming an adulteress should she remarry. It was extremely difficult in Christ's day for a lady to survive alone, especially if she had no brothers or if her father was deceased. The pressure to remarry was enormous. Christ adds to this that any man who marries the woman unfortunate enough to have been divorced also commits adultery. No matter how badly her husband has behaved, she is – and will be as long as he lives – his wife. Any man who seeks to deny this fact by marrying the divorced woman also cuts across God's immutable command and is called by God an adulterer. Remember, it is not sin to marry after a broken engagement bond, but it is sin to violate the immutable marriage bond. This obviously is a most serious matter and worthy of our closest scrutiny, seeing we have it on authority that no practicing adulterer will enter into the kingdom of heaven. We know of many church leaders who admit to Christ's definition of adultery. They counsel their followers to confess their sin and repent. However, their credibility collapses totally after they then claim that these once-illegitimate relationships became legitimate upon confession and so-called repentance. That would be like a thief confessing to his crime and claiming to have repented, and then insisting that he gets to keep the money.

Please consider this hypothetical example: I am preaching the gospel and a man comes forward under conviction of sin and begins to confide in me. He was involved in an armed hold-up of an armoured car ten years ago. In the ensuing scuffle he shot a guard, but he and his accomplice managed to escape with \$800,000. He then explains that he was able to launder his share of the money. Since then he has married, purchased a business, is raising a family and appears to be a respectable citizen. Yet he has no peace, for he is continually haunted by his crimes. “I am a sinner,” he cries, “can I be forgiven?” Now, in receipt of this knowledge I have immediately become an “accessory after the fact.” How do I honour God, the law and this man's confidence? Do I say: “Sure, don't tell anyone else. Just confess to God and repent.

Old things will pass away and all things will become new when you become a Christian. Just be good from here on." God forbid that I should ever represent the gospel of repentance and remission of sins in such a loose way! No, my advice will be consistent with the gospel of repentance: upon the confession of our sins and our preparedness to forsake them, the blood of our Lord Jesus will wash us clean. His precious blood, though, will not cover sin. It is a washing agent, not a covering. If true repentance is at work and true conversion has taken place, this former robber and murderer will not leave a stone unturned as he faces the consequences of his crimes: the indictment of his accomplice and also the man who drove the getaway car and the money launderers, the public humiliation, all that he possesses sold to pay back the bank, letters of deep contrition to the shot guard's family, his wife and children destitute, plus thirty years in prison! Yet, though he is a prisoner, he will be a free man. His wife and children will respect and honour him for having the sincerity and courage needed to put things right with God and man. Their husband's and father's true repentance will comfort them even while facing hardship. He has done even as that great repentance preacher preached long ago: "Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance" (Matthew 3:8).

Yes it is hard, but it is right. To the carnal mind, this would seem to be the end; but God will honour this forgiven man, and his family will be blessed even though he is not personally able to care for them. In prison he will sing psalms and spiritual songs; he will have a powerful ministry with all he comes in contact with. No, he hasn't saved himself any more than that robber saved himself while hanging next to Christ. He has, though, shown fruit of the true work of God in his life and is in possession of a conscience that is void of offence before God and man, a great treasure to have in possession. We affirm: a robber cannot keep stolen money, a murderer cannot cover his crime, and an adulterer cannot continue to live in contradiction to God's law. Repentance means not just confession but also a turning from sin, followed by restoration and restitution wherever possible. We do not convict people; the Holy Spirit does that. But woe be to us if we hinder convicted people from salvation and peace by turning them away from bringing forth works appropriate to and consistent with true repentance.

Often, children are used to excuse illegitimate relationships and keep them together. As sad and touching as such cases may be, children can never legitimise what Christ has defined as adultery any more than our example's children could be used to legitimise his committing murder and robbery. Nevertheless, a man who divorces his wife and marries another, or a man who marries a divorced woman while her husband yet lives, will upon true repentance not only forsake the adulterous relationship but do all within his power to provide for his children, both legitimate and illegitimate. Love and care, with all holiness and purity too, should be

shown toward that person with whom they were previously in an unlawful relationship. If Christ would have us love our enemies, how much more should we love those who have lived in sin with us! A truly repentant adulterer or adulteress may return to their legitimate mate; or if this is not possible, should abide alone. The children born out of illegitimate relationships have a far better chance of spiritual rebirth if they have witnessed their parent's true repentance rather than that they continue to suffer under the heavy load of their parent's continued adulterous relationship. It is totally false to continue in sin and claim that it is for the children's welfare.

Rather than sanction what Christ has defined as adultery, the church should spring to the aid of repentant adulterers. They need all the love and support that we can give. Sadly, deserted partners and repentant adulterers are generally neglected by the church, rather than being taken for the valuable church members that they are.

In conclusion then, the Lord's judgement in Matthew chapter 5 is that any man who puts away his wife puts her in serious jeopardy of committing adultery. Also, any man who marries her that has been put away from her husband, also commits adultery. Our cry to those living in contradiction to the clear word of God is: repent and turn from your sin while you can. Don't listen to the false justifications of man, as attractive as they may sound, but listen to the clear and loving warnings of your Creator before it is forever too late. Our warning to church leaders who have in the past aided and abetted those committing the crime of adultery: repent! You won't be able to blame your denomination or your congregation for your sin, when ultimately you answer to the One who has spoken these righteous laws into being.

Finally, to those of us who have been true to our spouses and upheld Christ's testimony, may we remember that merely looking and lusting is as serious as the crime of adultery, according to our Lord. Let us admire our beautiful ladies with pure minds, and cast down every thought and imagination that exalts itself above the word of God. Anything short of that needs to be confessed and repented of, so let us walk honourably before God and man; and in godliness and meekness, seek to help one another as we with patience run the race.

Chapter 13

The Great Temptation

(Matthew 19:3-12)

"The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: And they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. They say unto him, why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery. His disciples say unto him, If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry. But he said unto them, All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given. For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it."

"The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him" (v. 3). At the outset of our Lord's earthly ministry, He was led of the Holy Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. However, Satan was thoroughly frustrated in his futile attempt. Yet, and as is common to him, he did not give up. This time he came to tempt, veiled in human flesh. Mark also emphasises the fact that this question about the permanence of marriage is a temptation. There is no other matter in human affairs that cuts so close to the bone. Israel's leaders had long since succumbed to this temptation and had cunningly devised concessions to what God had said. As earlier mentioned, any man seeking popular acclaim would commit political suicide by insisting upon the permanence of marriage as part of his platform. With few exceptions, Israel's leaders had turned to mammon which is based upon the popular acclaim of man coupled with the security that tangible riches seem to bring. The acclaim of God and that security which comes by faith alone only attracts despite and rejection from this world which is at enmity with God. Man being dead in sin and refusing to admit it, plays right into Satan's hands. The devil masterfully exploits man's ill-founded faith in the government of the five senses. Thus he captivates man to work with him in his hatred of and rebellion against God.

Down through the ages, religion has often been used by unregenerate man as a vehicle for his carnality and fleshly desire. Such were the Pharisees who fed upon the acclaim of man and worldly security, so becoming ambassadors of Satan in his attempt to tempt the Lord. The church too is similarly plagued, the difference being that instead of Christ being tempted, now it is His body. Only those born again of the Spirit of God into that body would and could dare subject themselves to the scorn and rejection of this present world and the apostate church, to walk the narrow way of faith and obedience. Well may we examine ourselves and meditate upon these words written for us by the beloved Apostle. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever" (1 John 2:15-17).

The Lord Jesus did not in any way try to humour the humanism of the Pharisees. He always pointed straight back to the beginning and the One who made them one. Look again at verse 6 above. When the Lord declares, "they are no more twain," He adds no ifs or buts. "No more" simply means "no more!" Nothing done subsequent to the two becoming one can add or take anything from the Master's "no more." "Ah," said the Pharisees, "now we have him. The people will not tolerate Moses being contradicted like that." Gleefully, they fired the loaded question: "Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and put her away?" The Lord was not intimidated in the slightest by their satanically inspired question and immediately turned the tables upon them by linking the Mosaic concessions to their hard hearts. We have already in an earlier chapter explained these concessions and the fact that they were designed to keep a hard-hearted and stiff-necked people in some semblance of order. These concessions though had nothing to do with the household of God, for the circumcised of heart never did live by concessions, "but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). Christ emphasised this fact with the words "from the beginning, it was not so" (v. 8). He didn't say: "in the beginning," but "from the beginning". That means that it had never been any other way, nor would it ever be. Hard-hearted people may have forced concessions from Moses, but the truth stands eternally and is unchangeable. The Pharisees were forced to back off as they wilted under that irresistible authority which comes when the truth is spoken. "And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery" (v. 9). Here the exceptive fornication clause is mentioned for the second and final time by our Lord. However, He adds additional information here in verse 9, naming the man who puts away his wife and marries another for any other cause than pre-marital unfaithfulness, an adulterer. We repeat: the word "fornication" as Christ uses it denotes sexual sin without the marriage covenant, while the word "adultery" denotes sexual

sin within the marriage covenant. We have dealt with this subject in our eleventh chapter.

Now think carefully about this. If verse 9 truly includes the grounds of marital rather than pre-marital unfaithfulness, as numerous modern translations of the Bible would have us believe, how can it be that the man who marries a divorced woman also commits adultery? For the concessionists claim that her divorce and the remarriage of her husband would set her free for remarriage herself. Our adversaries have no leg to stand upon; they are in trouble whichever way they turn. If they say: "Only if she had been divorced without the grounds of adultery would adultery be committed by the man marrying her," they would have to abandon their "innocent party" doctrine. On the other hand, if they continue to insist that adultery breaks a marriage, then the remarriage of the husband should indeed have freed the wife for remarriage. To the concessionist, there is no such thing as adultery in the remarriage of the divorced woman, and yet the Lord declares: "whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery." The only two verses (Matthew 5:32 and 19:9) upon which the enemies of the permanence of marriage base their entire doctrine are indeed further substantiation of the very truth which they vainly seek to deny. Fornication and fornication alone left partners free for marriage to another. Outside this one clause of fornication or pre-marital sex, so clearly governed and understood in Israel, there remained absolutely no grounds for divorce and remarriage. Any remarriage subsequent to the two becoming one is called adulterous by God. Death and death alone can bring release from the marriage bond, and this is in God's hands, not man's.

The disciples well understood the fornication clause, but having grown up in an Israel where divorce and remarriage were common, they were initially shocked by their Master's seeming severity. "His disciples say unto him, If the case of a man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry" (v. 10). Far from being left to weigh up their options, their spontaneous reaction revealed their understanding that Christ upheld the permanence of marriage unconditionally. Seeing that marriage was indissoluble while husband and wife were alive, the disciples questioned the wisdom of getting married at all. However, the Lord went on to explain to them that celibacy was a God-given gift that not all men enjoyed or something that man forced upon himself for the sake of the Kingdom of God, or had forced upon him by others (verses 11-12). So we see again here that though the Lord upheld the fornication clause before His Jewish audience, He did not leave them in two minds as to the permanence of marriage. When our Lord employed the word "whosoever", he meant any man and every man who puts away his wife and remarries shall be called by God an adulterer. When He employed the word "whosoever", He meant that any man and every man who married a divorced woman, while her husband yet lived, would also be called an adulterer by God. There are no exceptions to this rule. Even so,

the Lord Jesus who is the Eternal Word resisted the devil and his temptations. He didn't win many friends that day among the Pharisees. No concessions, no politics, no ifs and no buts.

The world, the flesh and the devil call this God's hardness. We know better, for we know that "... his commandments are not grievous" (1 John 5:3), but they are true love. We have seen the confusion and grief that follows in the wake of the concessionists and their ill-advised constituency. God sees all the agony and grief that divorce and remarriage bring with them – not only to the grandparents, but in particular to the children, to the third and fourth generation. Through short-sightedness, man is easily tempted to justify concessions. Through faith, we are kept safe from such foolishness. It will yet be wisdom to us who trust and obey God in this adulterous and sinful generation, for so shall both we and our households be kept safe from the destroyer.

How peaceful was this teaching to the disciples once they grasped the rightness of it. It was an end of all strife in their hearts and minds in regard to this fundamental subject. We too, who teach the unconditional nature of the marriage covenant, have great peace, for was not this truth written in the hearts of the disciples, in our hearts, indeed in the hearts of all men? Why should we lie against this truth that God has written upon the fleshly tables of our hearts, a truth confirmed to us also by His dear Son? Oh dear Heavenly Father, "lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" (Matthew 6:13, Luke 11:4).

"The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever: the judgements of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward. Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression. Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer." (Psalm 19:7-14)

Chapter 14

The Unjust Steward

Moving on from Matthew, that Gospel written especially to the Jews, we come to Mark and Luke, who were anointed of God to bear the gospel to us Gentiles.

"And the Pharisees came to him, and asked him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife? tempting him. And he answered and said unto them, What did Moses command you? And they said, Moses suffered to write a bill of divorcement, and to put her away. And Jesus answered and said unto them, For the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept. But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; And they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. And in the house his disciples asked him again of the same matter. And he saith unto them, Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery" (Mark 10:2-12).

Mark's burden for those living outside of Israel soon becomes evident. His Gospel reminds me of a man with a video camera panning across the full spectrum of what Jesus did. He wanted everyone to know and see the great power of God as it was manifest in His Lord. Though Mark was well informed about Jewish life and conversant with Jewish tradition and custom, he chose not to mention the exceptive clause employed by Matthew. As well as Mark and Luke, Paul too shared this special burden for us Gentiles. Each of these men give clear teaching to the church regarding the permanence of the marriage covenant and each of them purposely omit that clause, "except it be for fornication" (Matthew 19:9). It is inconceivable to us that these men should take the gospel to Asia Minor, Asia, Africa and Europe believing that adultery dissolves a marriage covenant and yet fail to mention a matter of such weight. They, as Jews, well understood the exceptive clause and its implications within Israel; but being led by the Spirit of God, they judged this matter a teaching unsuited to the Gentile world who were ignorant of the Mosaic restraints upon virgins.

The Gentile world, however, had its own set of unique circumstances. For instance, Mark raises a matter not mentioned by Matthew, for in Israel it was not possible for a woman to divorce her husband. The Lord, of course, knew that abroad they would face such situations and addressed the matter accordingly - see verse 12 above. Yet Mark holds many things in common with Matthew as he addresses these sensitive matters regarding marriage. One is Christ's clear

rejection of the Mosaic concessions; another is His emphasis on God's word on matrimony, "from the beginning." To these we may add Christ's emphasis: "so they are no more twain but one flesh." All three of the Gospels are emphatic about the fact that holy matrimony is none of man's business but God's alone. "What then God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." God will not tolerate interference from any man in this His business. He alone will arbitrate over what He has made and named one, and death is His only instrument of separation. Any man employed by the owner of this business who dares to contradict the Master or appoint himself judge, will, according to Luke, be judged along with the adulterers. No man makes them one and no man will make them two again. Adultery, which too is an act of man, has absolutely no power to break the oneness that is spoken into being by God.

God, and God alone, may abort babies; any man who dares do so is guilty of murder. God, and God alone, terminates the life of the aged; euthanasia too is murder. Likewise, God, and God alone, can break a marriage. Any man who seeks to play God has fallen prey to the tempter. Yet it is true that God employs stewards in His business. Of course, a steward does not make executive decisions but is answerable in everything to him who sets the standards and makes the rules. A faithful steward cannot be tempted to over-rule his master or allow self-interest to enter into his considerations. Nor does he dare to misrepresent his master but will carry out his master's business without fear or favour. A faithful steward is not affected by his master's competitors or debtors; he fears only him to whom he is answerable.

Yes indeed we, the stewards of God's business here upon earth, will be called into question by the world, the flesh, and the devil. They will taunt us and tempt us to over-rule our Master's commands by taking the law into our own hands. It is the fear of God that will keep us safe from this unholy trinity's wiles. Our own thoughts and feelings too must be daily crucified as we in child-like faith bring all things into subjection to the word of God. God alone is our Master and Keeper; we do well to fear only Him.

Holy matrimony is so sacred a part of a just steward's role that Luke encases his entire teaching on matrimony around a steward's responsibility. Please take a careful look at this often-misconstrued portion of scripture.

"And he said also unto his disciples, There was a certain rich man, which had a steward; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods. And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? Give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward. Then the steward said within himself, what shall I do? for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship: I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed. I am resolved what

to do, that, when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses. So he called every one of his lord's debtors unto him, and said unto the first, How much owest thou unto my lord? And he said, An hundred measures of oil. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty. Then said he to another, And how much owest thou? And he said, an hundred measures of wheat. And he said unto him, take thy bill, and write fourscore. And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light. And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations. He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much. If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shalt give you that which is your own? No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. And the Pharisees also, who were covetous, heard all these things: and they derided him. And he said unto them, Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God. The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it. And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail. Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery" (Luke 16:1-18).

At first glance, verses 17-18 would seem to be unrelated. Look again and you will see that our Lord is sending out a grave warning here. The unjust steward, armed with a benevolent smile and his master's account books, makes friends of his master's debtors. His is a friendship that is built upon the hefty concessions he makes regarding their debts to his master. The first eight verses are clear enough even to the casual reader. Problems arise when the lord commends his former steward for lying, cheating and stealing. This commendation cannot be understood until the reader realises that the Lord is here using irony. Then to top it all off, the Lord Jesus advises those who wish to follow the unjust steward's example to make to themselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness so that when they fail, they may enter with the debtors into their everlasting abode. Again, the Lord is speaking ironically. It is not *if* they fail, but *when*, for all who persist in giving concessions to God's debtors will surely fail. The word "mammon" is not just to do with the love of money but includes also the love of power, prestige and the praises of man rather than the praise of God. Such self-seeking at the master's expense is a most serious crime indeed. God has made it abundantly clear that none may enter into His holy presence without true repentance and the

forsaking of sin. Those who, out of feigned kindness, give concessions to the Master's debtors not only doom such debtors, but are themselves doomed to share the debtors' "everlasting habitations".

Yes, indeed: "friendship of the world is enmity with God" (James 4:4). The Lord continues His commentary by warning us that no man can serve two masters. He will either serve the Lord, which means being despised and rejected by this present world; or he will choose the broad way of being subservient to mammon. The Pharisees who understood Him well tried to ease their growing discomfort by deriding the Lord, but the Lord warned them that no matter how much success they had in attracting the justification of man, they were an abomination to God. Then and while they tried to avoid His piercing gaze, the Lord set before them that prime example of their blatant concessionism - "And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass than one tittle of the law to fail. Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery" (Luke 16:17-18). The Lord puts holy matrimony at the top of His agenda when dealing with concessionism. We have laboured much throughout each chapter to emphasise the fact that holy matrimony is fundamental and central to the plans and purposes of God. If He who from the beginning made the two one, should once allow one of His stewards to give one concession to one of His debtors, His credibility as Lord and Master would be destroyed.

It would be easier to remove the heavens and the earth than to bring change to anything that the Master has decreed. Unjust stewards will not have to beg or dig, for they will be kept in this present world by their justifiers, at great cost in the eternity to come.

Hence Christ's words in verse 8, "for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light." For instance, John was a child of light and he was foolish enough to insist that Herodias was yet Herod's brother Phillip's wife. A child of this world would have gotten on with Herod better than that. It is far easier from a worldly point of view to tell people just what they want to hear. You are more likely to keep your head, make friends and influence people. They will take you into their habitations and feed you goodies. The snag is that they have no goodies at all in their "everlasting habitations" – a point that the unjust steward had obviously over-looked. His fool's paradise was soon to be followed by a fool's hell. Long ago, Satan persuaded Eve that God was unjust and selfish in His demands. He tempts us too to make us a god in our own image: a god who will accommodate and justify divorce and remarriage. Just stewards, however, are not affected by Satan's accusations against their Master and His just demands and commands.

This writer is fully persuaded that the God of Israel who changes not is righteous and right. There is absolutely no other way to deal with holy matrimony righteously than the way He has dealt. Let us never be ashamed to own Him and His way. He who stands upon His rock-solid word stands sure. "Thank you, dear Heavenly Father, that you sent your Son to teach us how to do just that."

"Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels" (Mark 8:38).

"He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels" (Revelation 3:5).

Chapter 15

The Virgin Bride of The Lord Jesus Christ

It is John who, in his second chapter, gives us a unique insight into a Jewish New Testament wedding. This then is followed in chapter 3 by a revelation of Christ Himself as Bridegroom. "He that hath the bride is the bridegroom" (John 3:29). Here, John the Baptist reveals that he has not himself a part in the "Bride of Christ"; rather, his joy is in standing by as "the friend of the Bridegroom", announcing Him. John was, of course, already bound in a covenant relationship as a member of that body, "the Israel of God" even as were Zacharias and Elizabeth, his parents. That body, referred to as a woman throughout Scripture, is in covenant relationship with the Father. It is we, the virgin, who are espoused to the Son through being baptised into a separate body, the body and bride of Christ. Once we are able to differentiate between Israel and the church, we will better be able to understand God's plans and purposes.

It was commonly held among the disciples that Christ would at this time restore the kingdom to Israel, prompting that big post-resurrection question: "Wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). Christ is indeed "the Lion of the tribe of Judah" (Rev. 5:5) and He will most certainly "sit upon the throne of his father David" (Luke 1:32). However, the Lord Jesus did not come to fulfil these scriptures during His first advent. Yet His plans with Israel were at the same time not at all threatened by Israel's rejection of Him. To the contrary, room was thus made for us Gentiles, who were till then without covenant to come into a relationship with Him as His body and bride.

As an appropriate backdrop to His first miracle, the Lord Jesus chose a wedding. "And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there: And both Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the marriage" (John 2:1-2). A book could be written on the subject "the third day." The Lord Jesus rose from the dead early on the third day. "Him God raised up the third day" (Acts 10:40). The nation of Israel too will rise up from the dead and come up out of their graves after two days. "Therefore prophesy and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, o my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel" (Ezekiel 37:12). "Come and let us return unto the LORD: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up. After two days will he revive us: in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight" (Hosea 6:1-2). Prior to this event, the church will be raptured and be presented to her Bridegroom. Though Christ's resurrection took place early on the third literal day, these events are set to take place after two millennial days. The fulfilment, then, of

two great prophetic events is about to take place.

- 1) The rapture of the espoused virgin church to be married to her Bridegroom.
- 2) The restoration of regathered Israel to Jehovah her covenant keeping Husband.

"Fear not; for thou shalt not be ashamed; neither be thou confounded, for thou shalt not be put to shame: for thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth, and shalt not remember the reproach of thy widowhood any more. For thy Maker is thine husband; the LORD of host is his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; The God of the whole earth shall he be called. For the LORD hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth, when thou wast refused, saith thy God. For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the LORD, thy Redeemer" (Isaiah 54:4-8).

Satan going around "as a roaring lion" would desire to devour the saints who are living at the Bridegroom's return, but the gates of hell shall not prevail against the bride of Christ. A pure and faithful virgin will be looking and longing for Him. Yes, that exciting day is at hand, when again "Jesus shall be called, and his disciples to the marriage" (John 2:2).

Let us together examine more closely this important coverage of Christ's first miracle.

"And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come. His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it. And there were set there six waterpots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins apiece. Jesus saith unto them, Fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them up to the brim. And He saith unto them, Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast. And they bare it. When the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and knew not whence it was: (but the servants which drew the water knew;) the governor of the feast called the bridegroom, And saith unto him, Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now" (John 2:3-10).

As a child, and later as a young man, I was puzzled by what seemed to me to be our Lord's curt answer: "Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come" (v. 4). However, I knew that our Lord was sinless and without fault, and that if I could gain an understanding

of His words, I would also gain an insight into their meaning. It was not until a certain day, when I was asked as a newly married young man to address a Sunday school in a local fishing village, that light fell upon these scriptures for me. I had left home early that morning to gain a vantage point on a rocky outcrop by the sea. As the sun rose, so too did my hands in worship to God. During these moments of prayer and praise, a gentle breeze blew over the leaves of my Bible, arresting the breeze's action to John chapter 2, I reverently asked the Lord if He would reveal to me the meaning of the words that all my life had puzzled me. Instantly, the blessed Holy Spirit illuminated my mind and I saw immediately the significance of what, for so long, had been a puzzle to me.

As mentioned earlier, the Lord Jesus had come to earth at His first advent not to become King of Israel, but to take to Himself a bride who would dwell with him forever. It was not His plan to gather this bride exclusively from Israel. His bride was to be made up out of earth's every tribe and would be chosen from among the nations scattered around the globe. There was of course, no father of the bride to present such a bride, as Adam the father of the human race was dead: a dead head of a dead body. There was also no wedding dress. All we, His bride to be, possessed were filthy rags. The poisoned fruit had long since done its work; oh, how we needed a Prince Charming to give us the kiss of life. Yes indeed, this is earth's most touching love story. Jesus, the Prince of Peace, loved us; "while we were yet sinners" He died for us. He gave us the most glittering engagement ring: the Holy Spirit. "In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory" (Ephesians 1:13-14). It is He who has "washed us from our sins in His own blood." We who were full of putrefying sores from head to heel in our walking-death were cleansed and made whole. This is the glorious truth and much more wonderful than any fairy tale.

The Lord began His earthly ministry with the words, "mine hour has not yet come." Throughout the Gospels we are constantly reminded: "His hour was not yet come." By and by Jesus revealed that His hour had come. Here are just a couple of verses signifying this fact from John's Gospel.

"Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end" (John 13:1).

"These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is

come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee" (John 17:1).

Luke records in chapter 22:14: "And when the hour was come, he sat down, and the twelve apostles with him." During this hour, the Lord Jesus instigated that precious love feast. The unleavened bread speaking of His sinless flesh which was to be "meat indeed," and the wine widely used in His day as a cleansing agent, to represent the cleansing power of His blood. This instigation hour was to be followed by "the hour" when and while nailed to the cross, He gave His life as atonement for us all. It was "this hour" that rested so heavily upon Him throughout His ministry until it was finally accomplished at Calvary. This then was the hour to which He made reference in the beginning at Cana. There at the outset were the water and the wine. Again in the hour of instigation there was wine and water. Finally, when "the hour was come," there was a spear thrust into His side and out gushed "blood and water."

Even as Eve was taken from Adam's side to be at his side, so too is the bride of Christ. Everything we are or could ever hope to be is of Him and from Him. The water, of course, represents the word of God which is for the washing of the outside, but Christ's bride needed not only "clean hands" but also a "pure heart". Jesus is that water; "the word of God." He too gave that wine, for the water by itself was not sufficient. There had to be cleansing within as well as without.

As we earlier noted, there lacked a father of the bride to present this radiant beauty to her Husband. In his absence, the Bridegroom will present us to Himself, as a bride without spot and without blemish. "For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:2). "That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Ephesians 5:27). It was there, seated on the rock by the sea, that I realised what the Lord was saying. He knew the world had no wine – no cleansing agent – that would make a bride presentable to a Holy Husband. He had come for that very purpose, but the hour to do that work had not yet come. Not only was His blood shed that He might present to Himself a holy helpmeet, but His blood too is that cleansing agent that has made "the Israel of God" presentable and fit to be the helpmeet of His Father. Indeed Israel, the church, and all the redeemed shall be washed with that one blood. All shall come through that one Door.

"This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him" (John 2:11). What is the glory that is here made manifest by Christ through His first miracle? It was not merely that He could turn water into wine, no,

far much more; He could turn poor lost sinners into a glorious bride. That little Sunday school was exposed to the full measure of my excitement as I revelled in the beauty of the word revealed. Yes indeed we are His glory, His bride to be, His beloved. While we were as dead as Snow White – or should we say, Pitch Black – He came and gave us the kiss of life. Oh, wonderful, wonderful gospel.

Holy Matrimony indeed is sacred: most wonderful and holy is that union through which we may justly and with jubilation cry out, "And so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:17). Of course, we are not yet married but at this present time are espoused to Him. The dowry, though, has been paid in full. Not silver or gold, as in a traditional Jewish espousal, but our Fiancé has redeemed us with His own precious blood. "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:18- 19).

Chapter 16

"So Long As He Liveth"

Our title for this chapter has been taken from the seventh chapter of the book of Romans and is yet another powerful confirmation of the permanent nature of the marriage covenant. The above too is one of the scriptures upon which the traditional Christian marriage vows are based. As Paul pens this letter to the church at Rome, it becomes clear that the Holy Spirit has much to communicate and not just to those to whom the letter is addressed. Paul here reminds us that all mankind have God's law "...written in their hearts..." (Romans 2:15) and that God judges all to be "...without excuse" (Romans 1:20). As a consequence, "who will render to every man according to his deeds" (Romans 2:6). The contentious and rebellious will inevitably be subject to God's "...indignation and wrath, Tribulation and anguish..." (Romans 2:8-9). Earlier, though, Paul speaks of "the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering" teaching us that it is the "...goodness of God..." which leads us to repentance (Romans 2:4). Those who have come to repentance and have thus become the recipients of His goodness may then enjoy the blessedness of God's "...glory, honour, and peace..." (Romans 2:10).

Seeing, then, that without "...respect of persons..." (Romans 2:11) all men are held responsible before God, it is totally inexcusable that any man carries his former sins with him and be in union with Christ. A man who divorces his wife and remarries, or a man who marries a divorced woman while her husband still lives, is in flagrant violation of God's law. Religion or lack of it, race or creed, old or young, nothing will alter the fact that God is being contradicted and that His law is being transgressed. We have heard many and varied excuses made by those living in contradiction to God's law as well as by their justifiers. They seek to legitimise illegitimate relationships by insisting that they were not Christians or real Christians when entering into illegitimate relationships. At this point the Scripture, "...old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2Corinthians 5:17), is generally produced in justification of their stance. It is false to use this scripture in such a sense.

When as a young man I put my trust in the Lord and was baptised, the just-quoted Scripture was fulfilled in me. However, this did not mean that my parents were no longer my parents, for my family ties had not changed in any way. The things that had passed away, though, were the controlling powers of the world, the flesh and the devil. Denying myself and following the Lord Jesus had broken the power of the old and made "all things new." True, I was born again, and God was now my Father, but God's command to honour my earthly father had not been rescinded. Likewise, rebirth does not in any way annul a legitimate

marriage, nor does it legitimise any marriage that has been made in contradiction of God's law. God simply cannot and will not have His word "from the beginning" changed in order that sin may be excused or accommodated. The Lord Jesus did not die in order that sin might be legitimised. His death though has opened the door of heaven for any who will repent and forsake their sin.

We have, in our ministry, travelled to many countries and sat down with people from many walks of life, but never have we met a man who did not have God's law written in his heart. The tribal Aboriginal people, amongst whom we have worked, were far from ignorant of God's law. I'll never forget a godly Aboriginal man who had come to Jesus after being a tribal elder. He told of the many murders, the witchcraft, of bone-pointing and payback law. His greatest sorrow, though, was the fact that the tribal elders were accustomed to helping themselves to the innocent young twelve and thirteen year old girls. Even after marrying them off to other men in the tribe, they continued to exercise power over these families through the invisible cords of bonding. He wept for his people and the way Satan had them bound. He always knew in his heart that this was not (Najee's) God's way. He cried out to God, and the goodness of God led him to repentance. Evil spirits were replaced by the Holy Spirit. Old things had passed away and all things had become new. Yes indeed, also the remotest tribal people of the Australian desert have God's law written in their hearts.

Our humanistic government and the apostate church go on blindly giving out handouts and concessions. Together they are wilfully ignorant of the fact that holy matrimony is at the foundation of any governable family, tribe or nation. Help the Aboriginals? To the contrary; they are falling over one another to break their own marriage vows and are destroying the churches and this nation, let alone helping our Aboriginal people. When this present Babylon has run its course, the kingdom of God will come. Until then, the commission remains to preach the gospel of repentance and remission of sins, the baptising of converts (and the teaching of them to observe whatsoever Christ has commanded). We speak with His authority if we are under His authority. We reiterate: not the undermined authority of an idealist, but the unquestioned authority of Him who is Lord of all. Oh happy resting place, found of those who have resisted apostasy and humanism! One day beneath His blessed sceptre, beautiful young Aboriginal maidens will be espoused to handsome young virgin Aboriginal men. Thus and only thus shall the vicious cycle of heartbreak, confusion and satanic control be replaced by the "glory, honour and peace" of God. 'Oh, hasten the day Lord Jesus, all nature is groaning and longing for your reign!'

Before moving on to Romans chapter 7, there is one further matter that we should address, and that is the use of the word “fornication” in chapter 1:29. Here the word is arguably used in a general sense, intimating all manner of sexual immorality. Many have seized this possible general use of the word in such contexts and applied it to Christ's teaching in Matthew. However, the Lord Jesus never did use this word in a general sense, using the words “fornication” and “adultery” consecutively and separately. The Roman Catholic Church has never, to this day, taken the word “fornication” in Matthew to mean "marital unfaithfulness," but insists on its singular pre-marital interpretation. The early church and church fathers did likewise. There is clearly documented evidence of this for any who may seek it. In conclusion then of this matter, we agree that the word “fornication” may have been used outside the gospels in its general sense; but for want of a better word, it is also used for Christ's exceptive clause in Matthew. Christ only ever used it in its singular pre-marital sense. The Lord too makes a clear distinction between the words: "adulteries, fornications...lasciviousness" (Mark 7:21-22). Each of these words denotes sexual immorality of a particular kind. Not here and not anywhere else does the Lord lump these sins together under the common heading of fornication.

Furthermore, the Pharisees in John 8:41 used this same word “fornication” in its singular pre-marital sense, while taking a back-handed swipe at our Lord in regard to the fact that He had been conceived while Joseph and Mary were merely espoused. To cite marital unfaithfulness as grounds for divorce and legitimate remarriage is totally false and does violence to every law and principle pertaining to the Kingdom of God.

"For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man. Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God" (Romans 7:2-4). We see here again that the wife is bound unconditionally to her husband as long as he shall live. Behaviour can have no effect upon this oneness spoken into being by God, for the permanence of the marriage can only be interrupted by death. Paul, as is his custom, is here using marriage as a metaphor, using a physical law to explain a spiritual one. The union of a man with his wife reflects the union of Christ with His church.

Upon conversion we come into a relationship with Christ, which Paul refers to as espousal.

"...for I have espoused you to one husband..." (2 Corinthians 11:2). Our espousal to Christ though, can only be ratified upon the acknowledged and effective death of the flesh with which we were formerly in union. The Lord Jesus cut off the flesh which is that "...circumcision made without hands" taking the flesh out of the way, "...nailing it to his cross" (Colossians 2:11, 14). Henceforth we are to be dead to the old, and through rebirth come under the power of the new. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit" (Romans 8:1). We must at this point warn again that this espousal bond is not unconditional. It would be presumptuous to the extreme to assume the status of marriage while merely engaged. The unconditional and eternal marriage covenant is at hand and assured to all who believe in and follow their beloved Fiancé to the end. Nevertheless, our true allegiance to Christ is first to be tested by our journey through life. Christ's letters to His fiancée in Revelation chapter 2 and chapter 3 convey many warnings to His bride exhorting her to be true to Him and not to fornicate. He even graciously gives "space to repent." "And I gave her space to repent of her fornications; and she repented not" (Revelation 2:21). Oh, how perilous to fornicate while one is betrothed to the Son of God! These are they of whom Jude speaks when he says: "...trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots" (Jude 1:12), even as Christ warned. "If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered" (John 15:6). The writer to the Hebrews gives many stern warnings about the danger of fornicating during this betrothal period. The consequences of wilful sin, followed by a refusal to respond to Christ's call to repentance, are too fearful to contemplate and have been the main motivation in our writing of this little book.

Thus, Paul in Romans chapter 7 teaches us a most important truth. No woman can be married to another man while her husband still lives. No one will be married to Christ who refuses to mortify the deeds of the flesh. Those who teach and hold that our present betrothal bond to Christ grants us eternal unconditional security are guilty of a most dangerous violation against the very nature of a betrothal covenant. Only the most gullible of fiancés would go about fornicating with others, all the while chanting, 'Once engaged, always engaged; my fiancé (e) has no option but to marry me!'

In due time, all who have followed Christ down the "narrow way" during their espousal to Him will enter with Him into that eternal state called marriage. In the eternity to come, there shall be no sin to separate and no death to break. Let us then faithfully and daily take up our cross and follow Him together with a wife or a husband – or if need be, alone – but never in contradiction to His commandments. The Lord Jesus warned that those who try to save their lives will lose them, but they who lose their lives for Christ's sake will find life everlasting. We who are espoused are presently being tested and tried. Will we be ashamed of Him and His words during this sinful and adulterous generation?

Our hearts go out to many of our friends who are suffering as a result of a troubled marriage and broken dreams. God will comfort them. It may seem ironic, but it is these patient sufferers whom we have found living in love, joy and peace. He who created the heart and wrote His laws upon it continues to whisper peace to it, even after it has been broken.

Those who claim that His way is too narrow and demanding, obviously have no concept at all of what it has cost God to redeem us. Nor have they any concept of what it will mean to be eternally wed to the Lord Jesus Christ. "Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins" (James 5:19-20).

In closing, we would reiterate that though God has given man jurisdiction in regard to the espousal bond, man has no jurisdiction over the marriage bond at all. Whom man has put together let man put asunder, but "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (Mark 10:9). To break God's law on marriage is for a Christian to live in spiritual fornication. As we have seen in Revelation chapter 2, if they do not heed Christ's calls to repentance such shall be cast out. Who will stand before God in that day and declare that the wife is not bound to her husband "so long as he liveth"? (Romans 7:2)

Chapter 17

"I Command, Yet Not I But The Lord"

(I Corinthians 7:1-11)

"Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman. Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband. Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband. The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife. Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency. But I speak this by permission, and not of commandment. For I would that all men were even as I myself. But every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that. I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I. But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn. And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, let not the wife depart from her husband: But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife."

Here we find that principal chapter through which the Holy Spirit communicates God's will in regard to holy matrimony. Everything that we need to know is covered in this chapter, together with that perfect love and wisdom which characterises the Spirit of God. The needs of the unmarried, widows, those who have had to depart from a spouse, deserted spouses, virgins and espoused couples, all are considered here.

Baffled by the many problems faced by the young Corinthian church, the elders had sent an S.O.S. to Paul who was by no means tardy in his response. He begins by stating that it is "good for a man not to touch a woman" (v. 1), a principle which he elaborates upon throughout the chapter. However, he is careful to avoid the kind of legalism on this subject that in our view has troubled the Roman Catholic Church. Singleness is carefully advised as the most effective state in which to be fruitful for God. Paul, though, is quick to add that any who have trouble maintaining this ideal should not feel bound. Any individual who feels overwhelmed by an intense desire to marry is most certainly free before God to do so.

Verse 3 adds a most sensitive dimension to the words "due benevolence." Here, the Holy

Spirit shows us that God wills it that a husband should carefully plan to satisfy the sexual needs of his wife; and that the wife, too, should be careful of her husband's needs.

My wife and I were married in 1971, when I was twenty-one and she a blushing bride of twenty. I will never forget the beauty and sweetness of those early days. We had no faith in the pill, wondering what damage could be done to my wife's body, or what effect it may have on the unborn. Together we committed our bodies to God, and were blessed eleven months later with a beautiful baby daughter. By the time Maria was eight years old, she had four little brothers. Oh, how good and wise it is to trust God with childlike faith! He has blessed us beyond measure. It is not that life for us has been a bed of roses. The last six years, Phyllis has first gradually and now dramatically felt the effects of multiple sclerosis. This debilitating illness has at times threatened to crush us. We have suffered deep pain through the losses, which the MS has incurred upon us. Nevertheless, my sweetheart has continued to render to me due benevolence, and I to her. Our marital bed has always been a blessed and happy place where once our children bounced, laughed and played; and where, God willing, one day our grandchildren may do the same, secure in our love for God, each other, and for them. Yes, King David; we have been "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14). God forbid that we should boast about personal achievement; but rather let us boast about the goodness of God that has made us so rich, and our lives so full. As we conclude this paragraph on due benevolence, might we just add that we have learned to be sensitive to each other's needs. Benevolence has to do with giving, not getting. There is a rule that emanates from the throne of God and permeates all of His works: "Giving is living." This world, the flesh and the devil are takers, but the Spirit can transform us into givers. "Oh, transform me afresh today, blessed Holy Spirit."

Verse 5 instructs us that we should never sexually defraud one another, except it be by mutual consent. Even then, the Spirit only advises a limited refrain while the couple is engaged in prayer and fasting. It is fitting that full attention be given to these without distraction. Upon the conclusion of this agreed time of prayer and fasting, the Spirit advises a return to "due benevolence" which, says He, is a protection against satanic attacks and temptations. Though Paul, in verses 6 and 7, strengthens the argument for celibacy, he is again most careful to avoid legalism. He is ever mindful of his Master's exhortation. "All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given... He that is able to receive it, let him receive it" (Matthew 19:11-12).

Paul continues to encourage this desired state in verse 8 and carefully follows this with advice to marry for those who realise that celibacy is not their gift. "It is better to marry," says Paul,

"than to burn" (v. 9). In our view, the word "burn" is in reference to an intense desire to have a marriage partner. It is not referring to lust, which the Lord puts on an even footing with adultery. See Matthew 5:28. In no way should Paul's words be interpreted as, "It is better to remarry than to burn with lust." That would merely replace one form of adultery with another. Rather than be the servants of sin, we may claim with Paul, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Philippians 4:13). Sickness may render "due benevolence" impossible, as might bereavement or separation. Those afflicted with the above should not feel excused to commit fornication or adultery simply because they lack God's gift of celibacy. Paul is not seeking to gratify the lusts of the flesh here nor degrade us to animal standards, but he is simply saying that if we are not given the gift of celibacy, we are wise to seek a marriage partner.

Up until verse 10, Paul has advised under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, but now he invokes his Master's command. Firstly Paul advises that a wife should not leave her husband, making it clear that every effort should be made to keep a marriage together. As desirable as continued togetherness may be, this though is by no means the command to which Paul is referring; for the Spirit immediately inserts here a "but and if", effectively making allowance for a separation when continued co-habitation becomes intolerable. There are many grounds for such separations: physical or emotional abuse, drunkenness, unfaithfulness, homosexuality or incest to name but a few. Clearly there are limits to what a wife or husband can tolerate. We have already studied Jehovah's sanctified separation from Israel, His continuously adulterous wife. No, God does not command unconditional cohabitation here in verses 10 and 11, but reserves His command in regard to the immutable nature of the marriage covenant. There are no 'buts' and 'ifs' in God's word in regard to the permanence of the marriage covenant. Co-habitation may be subject to sin or circumstance, but the marriage covenant is subject to death alone.

Satan and his hordes detest husbands and wives dwelling together in love. Each happy and sanctified union reminds them of Christ's eternal union and happiness with His bride, in which they shall never have a part. They are working feverously to destroy every earthly foreshadowing of that glory which is to come.

Sexual purity during childhood and adolescence makes way for a most powerful marriage bond for such virgins as have been kept for each other. Even unbelievers are powerfully bonded for life when God's laws are honoured. The satanic forces are frustrated by the defensive wall that bonded virgins enjoy for their protection. Thus, every effort is made by that dark and highly orchestrated spirit world to breach this defensive wall. Once breached, this powerful

defence is neutralised allowing the satanic hordes to enter at will and lead captive those who have fallen prey to their wiles. Fornication, adultery and homosexuality are all big guns in the satanic arsenal. However, their deepest dungeon is reserved for the victims of incest. There is no greater confusion than that of a young girl who has been bonded to her father, brother or grandfather. This crime is paramount to locking away a child in prison and throwing away the key. Thank God, Jesus holds the key to every situation and is in the business of setting prisoners free.

People who have been physically, emotionally and spiritually damaged by sexual impurity will often be rendered incapable of living a full and settled married life. We have found that sexual impurity is usually at the base of any marriage problem. There is no point, in such a case, in treating the symptoms. Not until the cause of the instability is found and addressed, can there be peace and a permanent solution. Only after confession and true repentance can the offender enjoy God's forgiveness, which in turn empowers the forgiven to both forgive themselves and others. The young victims of incest are, of course, innocent of any wrongdoing. However, feelings of worthlessness and uncleanness coupled with a festering hatred of the offender are usual. Hatred is in itself a powerful prison, often leading its inmates to a repetition of the very crimes perpetrated by those they hate. Only God's love and forgiveness can break this vicious cycle of satanic control and set the plagued free to live and to love as God intends.

In the previous chapter in verses 9 and 10, Paul gives a list of sins that will disqualify those who practice such from the Kingdom of God. You will notice that sexual sins make up half of the list. "And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Corinthians 6:11). We repeat, God's forgiveness coupled with the power to forgive those who have trespassed against us or with us, are essential components for peace and power over the enemy. "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed" (John 8:36). It is He who has washed, sanctified and justified the heavy laden, who have come unto Him and found rest.

There is absolutely no profit in climbing onto the "innocent party" platform and begin justifying and excusing oneself. It is so easy to blame our spouse or others and exonerate ourselves. Our energies are far better spent in self-examination under the direction of the Holy Spirit. Such self-examination shall not lead us to self-condemnation and despair, for the Spirit always points to Jesus who is the answer to every need. The Spirit of God too will always sensitise us to our own faults and lead us to the foot of the cross, where we will learn to be forgiving in regard to the faults of others. Once we see ourselves for what we are in the light

of God, we will be fully occupied in this honest self-examination. No energy will remain for the accusation of others. It is the spirit of this world that causes us to blame and judge others, but when we have denied ourselves, taken up our cross and followed the Lord Jesus we will be dead to this world, its spirit and its ways. Then, and only then, we may begin to seek reconciliation in the same Spirit as He "which hath loved us" (2 Thessalonians 2:16), "while we were yet sinners" (Romans 5:8).

So then, whilst it is good for a man not to touch a woman, it is also lawful and blessed to take a wife. "Marriage is honourable...and the bed undefiled" (Hebrews 13:4). The spirit advocates "due benevolence" and sanctifies refrain only on the grounds of a mutually agreed season of prayer and fasting. Special care and consideration should be taken if one or both partners have suffered as a result of sexual impurity. The enemy will mercilessly hone in on any weakness exposed to him by lack of repentance or a refusal to forgive.

God, too, sanctifies separation when intolerable difficulties arise. His "buts" and "ifs", though, should only be invoked when every avenue of resolve has failed. However, should separation become a necessity, God – not Paul – commands such victims of circumstance to "remain unmarried or be reconciled" (1 Corinthians 7:11). There are only two options sanctified by God for those who are married: 1) to live alone, 2) to be reconciled. Remarriage while a spouse still lives, is not an option but is classified as adultery by God. Those who have suffered loss under attack from the satanic arsenal can come to Jesus who will, upon true repentance, forgive, heal and restore. Then, in the blessed assurance of His love, we may seek the restoration of a sanctified relationship, or we will be strengthened to serve God alone. Jesus will never leave us nor forsake us. HE WILL FILL OUR HEARTS AND OUR LIVES.

Chapter 18

"Not Under Bondage"

(1 Corinthians 7:12-24)

"But to the rest speak I, not the Lord: If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away. And the woman which hath a husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now they are holy. But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace. For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? Or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife? But as God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk. And so ordain I in all churches. Is any man called being circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised. Is any called in uncircumcision? Let him not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God. Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called. Art thou called being a servant? care not for it: but if thou mayest be made free, use it rather. For he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's freeman: Likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ's servant. Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men. Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God."

Having studied both Paul's spirit-led advice and the Lord's commandments, we now seek to deal with the central portion of this poignant chapter. Verses 12 and 13 re-emphasise the fact that the sanctity of the marriage covenant is not dependent upon one or both spouses being in the faith. This is an important principle, for much is made by many of their stated fact that non-Christian marriages do not count or have the same value as Christian marriages. Such affirmations are clearly false in the light of God's word. Paul here recognises no difference, putting the same value on both Christian and pagan marriages. Many of the Corinthian believers had come to Christ subsequent to their pagan marriages, and some had obviously raised questions in regard to the value of such marriages. Paul quickly allays any doubts regarding this question confirming the legitimacy of pagan marriages. The jurisdiction of God's word "from the beginning" is comprehensive and a command to every soul and every generation from Adam to the end. Consequently, Paul insists that a believer should not put away an unbelieving spouse who is happy to abide within the marriage.

Verse 14 shows us the sanctifying effect that a Christian spouse will have upon the unsaved members of the household. Some hold that children without at least one sanctifying parent cannot upon death during childhood enter heaven. It is a dangerous practice indeed to rest heaven and hell destinies upon isolated scriptures out of context. Let us leave the judgement of those who die before attaining the age of understanding in the hand of Him who said: "suffer the little children to come unto me." The context of these verses is in regard to the sanctity of marriage, and not the salvation or otherwise of children. Nevertheless, it is clear that a Christian parent has a sanctifying effect upon a family, enhancing the opportunities of salvation for unsaved family members. Every encouragement should be given to the Christian to continue within the marriage, in order that the family be blessed by the sanctifying influence with which the Christian may permeate his beloved family.

Verse 15 is devoted to relieving a spouse from bondage should the unbeliever leave. The deserted Christian should, in such a case, be at peace and not be under the bondage of maintaining co-habitation. Such are equally acceptable to God whether or not cohabitation is possible. Many have pounced upon this word "bondage," seeking to prove that the marriage covenant is not unconditional and that people are not bound in marriage, should things not work out. Such reading between the lines may suit the short-term wants of some, but we do not formulate sound doctrine from what is read between the lines. Nor will God, on the day of judgement, hold us responsible for what we claim to have read, or have failed to read between the lines. This verse simply teaches that the Christian should not be under the bondage of maintaining co-habitation when this was no longer possible. The peace referred to here is the peace that abides when one is in right standing with God. In no way should this blessing be polluted by a suggestion that the deserted may remarry in peace. Have these no fear of God, who pluck the word "bound" out of its context and use it to directly contradict the Lord of Glory who commands, "Whoso marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery" (Luke 16:18)? Yes, we may be at peace with God and with ourselves regardless, even if we have been deserted or if we have been forced to leave an impossible situation.

God, who grieves continuously over His unfaithful and unbelieving wife Israel, understands those who suffer. There is peace in heaven even as God looks and longs for the return of His prodigal wife, and there may be peace in your home and heart also. Peace in the knowledge of a right standing within the commandments of God, peace in faithfulness to vows made, peace to single-mindedly care for needy children and grandchildren, peace to do God's work in the fellowship of the Holy Ghost and the beloved saints of God.

There is, however, no peace in a remarriage that treads underfoot the commandments of God. There are today many so-called pastors who are nothing more than highly paid soothsayers. Their consciences have been long since seared "as with a hot iron." Rather than preach repentance and obedience, such seek to persuade troubled souls that God will accept and bless divorce and remarriage. "Peace, peace" they say, where there is no peace (Jeremiah 6:14, 8:11).

On the day of judgement, Israel will not be able to blame the Pharisees and Sadducees of the day of Christ; nor will we be able to blame corrupt leaders and soothsayers. If we claim to have a personal relationship with the Lord, then we are personally responsible to follow Him. Those who follow Him, serving God "in spirit and in truth," will have peace regardless of life's circumstances. Love, care and much prayer for the unbelieving and departed spouse will continue to flow as long as God spares them; for such are all ingredients of true peace.

Verse 16 asks the question: will the unbelieving and departed be saved? No man can answer this question without revelation from God. Love, though, "hopeth all things" (1 Corinthians 13:7). The believing spouse will manifest faith, hope and love in the midst of even the greatest trials, and resist every temptation to close the door or give up on their erring spouse. God, through His foreknowledge, has revealed to us that His wayward wife will ultimately admit her fault and return to Him, and God only knows what the outcome will be for you. Even if God should free you, and God forbid that we should ask Him to kill a spouse in order that we may be freed, if God should free you by terminating the life of your wayward spouse, singleness is still strongly advised by the Spirit of God. There is a wonderful peace and fulfilment in serving God single-mindedly. Even if the marriage has been childless, much more can be achieved for God alone. Remarriage after the death of a spouse is legitimate but often proves troublesome to children from both sides and to the partners themselves who are striving to recapture the blessedness of their initial bondings. Comparisons and frustrations, without the shock-absorbing powers of bonding, often lead to friction, and disturb the peace of the home. These elements tend to frustrate the effective ministry of the legitimately remarried, sapping away strength and energy through these unproductive pressures. [See 1 Timothy 5:1-15.] We repeat that remarriage is legitimate but generally proves troublesome. God, Paul and we would spare you this trouble, yet we dare not be legalistic other than to insist that such a woman not "be taken in to the number" (v. 9). She shall, if she follows Jesus, be numbered with the redeemed; however, meanwhile she should – for her own good and for the good of the assembly – not be numbered among those in responsible positions, lest her frustrations taint her ministry and de-stabilise the assembly. A single-minded widow though, according to Paul's letter to Timothy, who has been the wife of one husband can be an invaluable

force for good within the assembly.

"O how I love thy law! it is my meditation all the day. Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies: for they are ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts" (Psalm 119:97-100). All who submit to the clear instructions, ordinances and commandments of God without bringing into play human wisdom will find themselves wiser by far than their enemies, the teachers and ancients of the school of humanism.

In verses 17, 18 and 19, Paul emphasises the fact that there is no difference between Jew and Gentile, circumcised and uncircumcised. It is not the Law of Moses, says Paul, that he is here enforcing, "but the keeping of the commandments of God" (1 Corinthians 7:19). Though Moses allowed concessions in order that the hard-hearted might be accommodated, God allows for no such concessions among those who are His. The circumcised Jew could be part of secular Israel even while living in contradiction to God's commandments, but no one living in the breaking of God's commandments will be counted as a member of the body of Christ.

Verses 20 to 24 remind us that we have been "bought with a price." We therefore do not belong to ourselves or anyone else but God. It matters not whether we are successful businessmen, wage earners, unemployed or bankrupts; we belong to God and should live in absolute obedience to Him. Again, the above verses have suffered much abuse at the hands of those who take it upon themselves to read between the lines. These manage to bring in teaching here that if you have been divorced and remarried before coming to Christ, you should stay in that state. The lengths that these twisters will go to in order that they may justify the breaking of God's commandments never ceases to amaze us. These have not been "bought with a price," but are still their own; but we who are Christ's will keep the commandments of God. We will confess our sins, repent from our sins, turn from our sins and follow the Lord Jesus. Then, in absolute obedience to Him to whom we belong, we will walk the narrow way. No reading between the lines, no ifs and buts, no humanistic rights; for we have abandoned everything that contradicts the commandments of God and have found peace. "Peace, perfect peace in this dark world of sin."

Chapter 19

"Now Concerning Virgins"

(1 Corinthians 7:25-40)

"Now concerning virgins I have no commandment of the Lord: yet I give my judgement, as one that hath obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful. I suppose therefore that this is good for the present distress, I say, that it is good for a man so to be. Art thou bound unto a wife? seek not to be loosed. Art thou loosed from a wife? seek not a wife. But and if thou marry, thou hast not sinned; and if a virgin marry, she hath not sinned. Nevertheless such shall have trouble in the flesh: but I spare you. But this I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none; And they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; And they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away. But I would have you without carefulness. He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord: But he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife. There is difference also between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit: but she that is married careth for the things of the world, how she may please her husband. And this I speak for your own profit; not that I may cast a snare upon you, but for that which is comely, and that ye may attend upon the Lord without distraction. But if any man think that he behaveth himself uncomely toward his virgin, if she pass the flower of her age, and need so require, let him do what he will, he sinneth not: let them marry. Nevertheless he that standeth stedfast in his heart, having no necessity, but hath power over his own will, and hath so decreed in his heart that he will keep his virgin, doeth well. So then he that giveth her in marriage doeth well; but he that giveth her not in marriage doeth better. The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord. But she is happier if she so abide, after my judgement: and I think also that I have the Spirit of God."

As we commence our final chapter on 1 Corinthians chapter 7, we find Paul addressing virgins. He would seem to us to count himself among them "as one that hath obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful" (v. 25). Rather than boast about his chastity, Paul here humbly thanks God for His enabling grace and mercy. Note, though, the word "obtained", for we must all covet and obtain from God this mercy. When Joseph of old declared to Potiphar's wife, "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:9), it was abundantly clear that he had already obtained mercy. Nevertheless, Paul gives God all the glory for the

blessedness of his sexual purity. It was this genuine humility, and the giving of glory where it was due, that made Paul such a fruitful and effective man of God. Conversely, those who boast in their self-righteousness are not only intolerant and unforgiving towards those who have fallen, but are fruitless, ineffective and headed themselves for a fall. "And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors" (Matthew 6:12). This vital prayer, of course includes those who have trespassed against us through their immoral behaviour. Such may have brought great shame upon the church or the family – yet we must forgive. If we do not, we are in great danger, for the following phrase in this vital prayer states: "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" (Matt. 6:13). Nothing could touch our Lord when He was tempted. But we, if we walk in boasting, pride, intolerance and unforgiveness, will be easy prey for the tempter. While we "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness," are content with our daily bread, forgive and are forgiven, we are safe and sound; but if we are boastful and unforgiving, God could well lead us into temptation. God of course does not tempt us, but allows the devil to tempt in order that we might humble ourselves and turn from our disastrous course. If we will learn that, "in me, (that is in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing" (Romans 7:18), and forsake our sin, our vanity and our unforgiveness, we may then humbly return to the "narrow way" of the forgiven and forgiving. "But if ye forgive not men their trespass, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 6:15). Oh, how we should tremble at the sins of pride and unforgiveness, for many never recover after they have been tempted. Of course, being forgiving towards those who fall does not in any way mean tolerance of sin. We must abhor sin in our own lives and in the lives of others. No one knows better than the forgiven of God how unmerited His forgiveness and favour are; yet we will not tolerate sin but live with a forgiven and forgiving heart. If we, the proponents of marriage till death do us part, will humble ourselves before God and man, we may yet be used by God in the salvation and blessing of many.

Paul also in another place taught us how to behave when others have fallen: "Brethren, if any man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted" (Galatians 6:1). It was in this very spirit of meekness that Paul took up the word of God with such authority and power.

Here again in 1 Corinthians chapter 7 and verse 26, Paul touches on celibacy, and again he carefully avoids legalism. Life was tough for Christians in Paul's day, and he had learned by experience to value his celibacy. In these closing days of the age of grace, it may well again be a good time to maintain celibacy for those who have been so called and gifted by God.

Verses 27 and 28 are among the most misconstrued and abused of all the scriptures dealing with holy matrimony. These two verses coupled together and, taken out of context, are then misused. Rather than uphold the sanctity of the marriage covenant, these perverters then twist these Scriptures, seeking to authorise the breaking of the marriage covenant. Not only do they cite here the breaking of a previous marriage covenant, but boldly claim the right to marry again without sin. How is it possible that people dealing with such fundamental issues could be ignorant of the fact that Paul here is addressing virgins? Surely it must be clear to those who read these verses in context that Paul is here addressing the espousal bond, and not a marriage bond at all. The fact that Paul is addressing these virgins as husbands and wives has been dealt with by us in chapter 11 when we explained that Joseph and Mary were addressed as husband and wife while merely espoused. Unlike holy matrimony which is an immutable bond governed by God, "as long as they both shall live," espousal is a bond governed by man and may be dissolved, for instance by fornication. In espousal one could say, whom therefore man hath joined together man may put asunder; but in holy matrimony, it is "what therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (Matt. 19:6). How dreadful it will be on that day for those who have fallen into temptation and tampered with the holy things of God, and have not repented!

Paul himself had been a most eligible bachelor. He was the son of a wealthy Jew from Tarsus who boasted full Roman citizenship – a rare boast for any Jew. Paul had also been sent to the top religious university in Jerusalem, sitting at the feet of the highly esteemed Gamaliel. Any leader among the Pharisees would have – and one probably had – espoused his daughter to this man. It is my personal view that this indeed did occur and that this espousal was promptly broken upon news of his conversion. The truth or otherwise of my personal views on this matter set aside, leave it perfectly clear that Paul deals with these matters in a highly sensitive way. It is also clear that Paul well understood his subject, and that he greatly valued his freedom as a virgin.

In verse 29, Paul reminds those who have wives that they should be "as though they had none." This of course in no way negates that holy commandment; "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it" (Ephesians 5:25). What Paul is saying is that time is so short and workers so few that nothing should stand in the way of God's work. Likewise, verses 30 and 31 remind us that pleasures, sorrows or business interests should not be allowed to stand in the way. Nothing, and that includes our marriages, should stand in the way of the great commission.

Verses 32 to 34 speak to us of the demands that holy matrimony places upon us. We who are married are much pre-occupied with our spouses, but virgins can give themselves with a single heart and mind to God.

In verse 35, Paul again reassures virgins that he is in no way seeking to be legalistic in regard to these matters, nor is he seeking to cast a snare upon them. He is motivated by nothing but a holy jealousy so that God's work may be carried out without distraction. Paul, who has led by example, sees great merit in such self-sacrifice; but at the same time, he takes nothing away from the sacredness and blessedness of holy matrimony.

In verses 36 and 37 Paul addresses a seeming dilemma. Paul had already in verse 27 said, "Art thou bound to a wife? seek not to be loosed." The breaking of a promise, vow or covenant has always been cited as a sinful act in God's word. Joseph, being a righteous man and just, would never have considered breaking his espousal bond with Mary for any other reason than for fornication. This honouring of promise and covenant saw to it that espoused virgins never sought to break their engagement. Instead, they chose mutually to serve the Lord as virgins while at the same time honouring their betrothal. However, if after years of honouring the Lord and their espousal bond, they felt strongly inclined towards marriage, they were most certainly free to do so. It is not a sin, says Paul. Nevertheless, Paul cannot resist reminding them that he who maintains his virginity for the gospel's sake "doeth well." Then came his concluding words in his address to virgins, and he gives his final words to their fathers. "So then he that giveth her in marriage doeth well, but he that giveth her not in marriage doeth better" (v. 38).

Finally come verses 39 and 40, drawing Paul's teaching on this subject to its conclusion with clear and concise words. "The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth." Unlike the espousal bond, which could be influenced by immoral behaviour, the marriage bond is in no way at all subject to sin or circumstance. Whether they who were party to the marriage bond behaved well, badly or with indifference, it was death and death alone that could break their God governed union. This immutability stood "by the law." Paul is not here referring to the law of Moses or the law of the land, but to the law of God "from the beginning." If her husband be dead and only if her husband be dead, is she free to marry again. Furthermore, even if there is a fine Christian man available and willing to marry such a widow, Paul strongly advises that the widow would be happier if she continues within the status of widowhood. We have earlier mentioned the struggle that ensues the remarriage of widows. Though such a remarriage is perfectly legitimate, the couple will not be able to recapture the bondings that

were inherent when they were first bonded as virgins. Paul here is not deriding legitimate remarriage but is stating his Spirit-led concern in regard to the happiness of the Lord's people, and thus their effectiveness in their service for God. Remarried widows are precious among the saints, but they will be much preoccupied with the task of rebuilding their second marriage.

Paul seeks faithfully to impart an understanding of the laws of nature as well as the law of God. If we have understanding, we can then effectively deal with matters physical, emotional, mental and spiritual. With love and understanding, much can be achieved.

Upon the conclusion of our study of these forty verses, we can be assured that there is not so much as a hint of divorce and remarriage found here. Paul upholds the sanctity of marriage, the honour of the marriage bed and the lawfulness of a remarriage upon the death of a spouse. He also highly recommends singleness to those who earnestly wish to maximise their effectiveness in the work of God, but not at the expense of a broken engagement. But if the other party breaks the engagement bond, they are free also to marry without sin. Paul blesses and speaks peace to those who have had to walk out of an impossible marriage, and also blesses those who have been deserted, but he does not as much as countenance divorce and remarriage.

These unjust stewards who are the advocates of divorce and remarriage are left without a single verse. In vain do they twist God's word and take scriptures out of context. This is a most wicked crime against God and their fellow man. "A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land; The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof?" (Jeremiah 5:30-31). Israel did not have the monopoly over this kind of behaviour, for the churches are full of it. The thought of a virgin fornicating while her bridegroom was on his way to take her to be his wife is an abhorrent one indeed. Nevertheless, far from that broad Babylonish road traversed by physical and spiritual adulterers and fornicators, there is a "narrow way" of love, obedience, purity and self-denial. This narrow way via the cross, so despised by the world and the apostate church is patiently traversed by a virgin bride. She has no eyes for such false lovers as the world, the flesh and the devil, for she only has eyes for Him who is her Lord. Soon, her faithful and true love will come and take her to be His lawfully wedded wife. "Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore." (Psalm 16:11)

Oh hasten that day, blessed Bridegroom! Well may he who was baptised into the body of this chaste virgin conclude, "And I think also to have the Spirit of God." Yes we agree Paul, this teaching is not of man with all his politics and unholy concessions, but this teaching is of God. Some may be tempted to think that God's ways are hard, unfeeling and unfair, but the lying tempter has no power over a pure and trusting virgin bride. We know that he is a liar from the beginning and that the ways of our Fiancé are love, justice and righteousness.

Chapter 20

"Because of the Angels"

(1 Corinthians 11:1-16)

"Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ. Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you. But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God. Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoureth his head. But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven. For if the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn: but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered. For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man. For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man. For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head because of the angels. Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord. For as the woman is of the man, even so is the man also by the woman; but all things of God. Judge in yourselves: is it comely that a woman pray unto God uncovered? Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him? But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering. But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God."

As we together have examined God's word, we have become acutely aware of that unfolding mystery: Christ and His church. We have caught glimpses of the divine Bridegroom and His bride in the creation of the sun and moon, in Adam and Eve, and in Isaac and Rebekah. But the full glory of this wonderful mystery is still only seen by us, "... as through a glass, darkly..." (1 Corinthians 13:12).

On earth, though, there is not a place of more intimate communion between these two lovers than when they meet at the Holy Communion table. Here she remembers all that He has done for her, and He gently reminds her that He loves her and that He is coming to take her home. There is no place on earth she holds so dear.

It is in the full recognition of the central and vital part that the Lord's table plays in the life of the church that the Holy Spirit seeks to guard this table with the appropriate decency, order and reverence. As a child and teenager, I had never witnessed a lady sitting at communion with

her head uncovered, but today the opposite could almost be true. Many judge head-coverings to be a trivial matter and argue that the condition of the heart is far more important than attention to such details. We agree that the condition of the heart is indeed more important than outward appearance, but if the condition of one's heart is truly sound, will not such a person readily submit to whatever God requires in outward appearance?

This writer, too, in times past, sought to justify his non-compliance by conveniently quoting a portion of this very chapter out of context: "her hair is given her for a covering." I was never at ease though with my use of verse 15, for I knew that Paul had clearly stated that if a woman did not want to cover her head she should be shorn, but if this was considered a shame, she should cover her head. My out-of-context Scripture, put in context, simply demonstrates that even nature teaches us that it is proper for a woman to be covered. In my ignorance, I too thought the matter to be a trivial one, until such time when the Holy Spirit convicted me as to the rightness and importance of this gracious ordinance.

At first it was a struggle for us both to return to an ordinance that we had for so long neglected, especially as very few of the younger ladies covered their heads. Soon though and as with every step of obedience, we began to enjoy the rich blessings that flow so freely to all who will "trust and obey." God has ordained it thus and he should be honoured with our obedience. We are not claiming that strict observance of the ordinances is a necessary part of salvation, but we do claim that humble obedience to God's order has great reward. His commandments must be kept and His ordinances should not be neglected. However, the ordinance of head coverings is not the only ordinance that is suffering neglect.

Take, for instance, the ordinance of baptism. There is not one word about the sprinkling of babies in Scripture. Where then did this illegitimate practice stem from? The early church witnessed the destruction of Jerusalem and the dispersion of the Jewish people. Soon after these events, the church became predominantly Gentile. Paul had painstakingly warned Rome about the danger of not recognising God's wonderful plans for Israel. In Romans chapter 11, he carefully warned of the danger of ignorance regarding these matters; a warning that such ignorance would lead to the same blinding pride that Israel had suffered from. Paul was most anxious that the church would not become wise in their own conceits. Sadly, the growing and predominantly Gentile church soon lost sight of God's plans and purposes for Israel, and were governed by what men thought and felt rather than what God had said. They saw Israel scattered and felt that they could never recover. They then decided that the church had replaced Israel and that baptism had replaced circumcision. One error leading to another soon had them establishing false supposition as church doctrine. They claimed that just as the

Jews had become part of Israel through circumcision, so too would the children of Christians become part of the "new Israel"; "the church" through sprinkling. They were wrong, of course, at every turn.

God had not finished with Israel, nor will he ever. Nor had circumcision been replaced by baptism, for both are abiding and legitimate practices. God has never rescinded His agreement with Abraham. His covenant stands with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and God commanded that only such as were circumcised would be counted among that covenant people. "And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant" (Genesis 17:14). Of course a Jew must be born again before he can inherit the kingdom of God, and this means that he must believe in his heart and confess with his mouth that Jesus Christ is Lord. He then is baptised by one Spirit into one body, even the body and bride of Christ. Believers' baptism by immersion is then an appropriate step of obedience. In this way, his public identification with the death, burial and resurrection of his Lord completes the outward ordinance that so beautifully shows forth the inner workings of the Spirit. It is the work in the heart that the Lord refers to as being "born again". Jesus said: "Ye must be born again" (John 3:7). We re-emphasise: baptism by immersion should follow rebirth. It is an ordinance, a step of obedience that follows the salvation of a soul. Baptism takes place after salvation has been completed, and is not a part nor completion of it.

Baptism is not just for born-again Jews; it is for all who follow the Lord Jesus. It is, of course, impossible for an infant to exercise belief in the heart or confession with the mouth. To dedicate such infants to God is a noble act, but infant baptism is a misconception. Jews are confirmed as Jews at infancy through birth and circumcision, but Christians must be born again. Rebirth is brought about by God in the heart of the believer, and natural birth or the keeping of an ordinance cannot add or take from this.

So we can see the confusion that has plagued the church through its misappropriation of God's covenant with the house of Israel. The truth is that no man will ever enter the kingdom of God through circumcision or baptism. Each of us, as children of Adam, must be "born again" of that incorruptible seed which is the word of God, even our Lord Jesus Christ. "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever" (1 Peter 1:23).

Even after considering believers' baptism, some may be tempted to ask, "If going under the water is merely symbolic, why should we then insist that this be done?" True, it is not the water

that saves us; yet again there is a blessedness in simple faith and obedience. This symbolic burial and resurrection carries with it valuable spiritual, psychological and emotional blessings, leaving the believer better equipped to withstand the attacks of the evil one. The Jews will do all they can to stop a Jewish believer from being baptised. Having failed to do so, they will then write them off as dead. Even they in their blind and carnal condition realise that there is more to baptism than meets the eye.

Ultimately, Israel will be regathered from the four winds and "all Israel shall be saved: as it is written " (Romans 11:26), for after "Jacob's great trouble" the surviving remnant of the circumcision will turn to God and be circumcised of heart. God has not cast them off forever and the church has not replaced them, for He is Jehovah, the covenant-keeping God. Let us conclude this portion with another quotation from Romans. "For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins" (Romans 11:27).

Even the ordinance of communion has become an amazing example of man's inability to follow clear and simple instructions. Again, if the church had not lost touch with its Jewish roots, it would have realised that the Passover bread with which our Lord instituted the supper was strictly unleavened. The wine though was clearly alcoholic, as the last of the autumn grapes had been harvested five months previously. The absence of leaven, of course, represents the sinlessness of Christ; while the presence of spirit in the wine represents the cleansing power of His precious blood. Why then is it so difficult to set a table with the emblems He so carefully prescribed? Humanism is often brought to bear here, with people virtually telling the Lord that He made a mistake in using wine, as people with past drinking problems are offended. Strange, isn't it, that the Jewish people have celebrated the Passover feast for three- and-a-half thousand years with unleavened bread and alcoholic wine without deviation. Even after two thousand years of blindness and the rejection of Christ, a Jewish woman would never pray nor light the Passover candle without covering her head. Again, we emphasise that these ordinances are not fundamental to the salvation of our souls, yet we lose so much through our departure from these simple instructions.

The ordinance of head covering, too, has great spiritual significance. You too may have wondered at those words "because of the angels," asking what had the angels to do with a woman covering her head?

Long ago, the angels were deeply shocked when Lucifer, the fairest of them all and his followers uncovered themselves before Almighty God. Thus, in open rebellion they refused to submit themselves to God's order. Instead Satan planned to climb into, even above, God's

throne. Having then been eyewitnesses to Satan's rebellion, the angels are most anxious that order be kept in the church. It is a principle most precious to them when a woman, in humble obedience to God, covers herself in full recognition and acceptance of that order in which God has placed her. Of course, all, that is male and female, all are one in the body of Christ; but God, for good reason, has placed us under ordinances. Blessed are all who keep and walk in them because they love and trust God.

The husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church. The covering of women symbolises this truth; but when the woman is uncovered it is as though the church is claiming that Christ is not her Lord. We have all witnessed the devastation caused by that satanic grasping after equality with God, and this should be avoided in the church and in the home at all costs.

In an amazing contrast to Satan's fall from light into darkness, stands the bride of Christ who has been brought by her Lord out of darkness into light. We will better understand Satan's consternation and jealous rage when we realise that the church is to be brought by her bridegroom up into His throne to sit with Him there, an honour so coveted by Lucifer himself. From the beginning, Satan has tried desperately to keep man in bondage to sin; but all his frantic and futile attempts have played right into God's hand. How better could God's amazing grace be highlighted than through the church's rags-to-riches story? Let the world, the flesh and the devil accuse God and the brethren, yet will we not be ashamed of Him in this adulterous and sinful generation. Nor will He be ashamed of us for He will confess us before the Father and the holy angels. While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Little wonder then that our full allegiance be to Him who has loved us and washed us from sin. We and the angels will give Him the glory forever, for what He has done.

Please take note of the succession of glory and order in our text. God the Father the head of Christ, Christ the head of man, and man the head of woman. Man the image and glory of God, woman the glory of man, and finally "But if a woman hath long hair, it is a glory unto her" (v. 15). It is thus fitting to give glory to a woman by saying, "Your hair looks lovely." Likewise, you may give glory to a man by saying, "Your wife looks lovely." But Christ's glory is made manifest in His bride, and the Father is glorified in His "well-beloved Son."

Thus the love of God is revealed in the beauty of holiness, accompanied by trust, honour, respect and godly fear. All things are submitted to the God of Jacob who sits upon the throne. Sadly, today the fear of God has given way to worldliness and the fear of man. Wherever and whenever this takes place, our churches and families will fall apart at the seams. When a man

fears God, his household will be permeated with peace and concord. The church fellowship, too, will be in such a state if its elders fear God.

Our bodies have been designed by God to bow in worship and full submission to Him. Our knees, backs, hands and heads will all bend and bow freely. However, when the fear of God is over-ruled by the fear of man, this illegitimate fear causes those overcome by it to bend over backwards, as it were, to please people. Once such a one bends over backwards far enough, his back will break and along with this all power and authority. But when a man fears God alone, his wife will fear and reverence him; and in turn the children will fear and reverence their parents. We are not promoting in any way dictatorship based on fear here, but rather the true love of God reflected in the man and in turn in his wife and then in the children. Obedience, honour, trust, reverence and respect all come together in godly fear, and all are companions of true love. Solomon taught us that "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom" (Proverbs 9:10), but "The fear of man bringeth a snare" (Proverbs 29:25). Many today hang helplessly in such a snare and are totally without power or authority. Like the Pharisees of old, these man fearers speak without authority and desperately try to bolster their broken-down state "which receive honour one of another" (John 5:44). May God spare us such misery.

By the way, when the church comes together for Holy Communion, it is not the woman's glory, her hair, that should be noticed. It should be covered. Nor is it the woman, the glory of man, that should have the pre-eminence, for she should be modestly dressed and be found in full and evident submission to her husband. It is the man, the head, even as Christ, who should lead in the priestly work of the church. The church is ministered to by priests, not priestesses. It is a shame for a woman even to pray or prophesy with her head uncovered (v. 5), and it is totally unlawful for her to teach or usurp authority over the man. "But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence" (1 Timothy 2:12).

I was deeply touched during my stays in India to witness the order of the church and the family there. No matter how great their poverty, there was trust and respect with dignity. The men were honoured as noble heads of their families, and their ladies walked and talked with such modesty and poise. The children had respect for their elders and were so happy and contented. This godly cohesion and fusion was carefully maintained, and included strict adherence to the ordinance of head covering. As soon as I or any other man sought to pray or read a portion of God's word, the women would immediately stop their work. Quickly they would take the head coverings that were part of their beautiful saris and cover their heads as a respectful silence fell upon the household. I wept deep inside when I perceived what we in the West have lost. I grieved too to see the inroads that the West was making through the cinema and

television upon these orderly people. Influences from people without God, without His laws and without His ordinances. Perhaps, though, their greatest danger lies in disorderly missionaries.

You see dear reader, when there is proper order in the home and in the church, the fear of God, of elders, of parents, will preserve our precious teenagers from fornication. When in the family and in the church there is that loving submission to God and to His order of things, our loved ones are kept safe and sound. The order that emanates from the throne of God, through Christ to god-fearing and gentle men, reflects itself in modest and beautiful women. In turn the veil or head covering, which symbolises the church's submission to her Lord, reflects upon the children. Even babes and sucklings can speak with authority when they are under authority. Thus contented, safe and sound, our teenagers are found under the secure care of god-fearing parents and church leaders. Thus too, that most sensitive of earthly veils, that veil of flesh, the hymen, is kept unmolested and unbroken until that happy day when a god-fearing bride is bonded to her god-fearing bridegroom with the full blessing of God, the bride's father and all concerned. Let Satan roar like a lion seeking whom he may devour, but those who submit themselves to the laws and ordinances of God are safe and secure in the rock of all ages, and His banner over us is love. We will never give up hoping for a genuine and holy revival in our time. This will only be experienced when truly repentant believers return again to a life of love, self-sacrifice and obedience. Obedience to God's holy commandments, and obedience to His statutes and ordinances. Oh, that we might be revived once more, lest the Lord Jesus come and find us in disorder!

“For your holy name's sake, for our children's and grandchildren's sakes, and ‘because of the angels,’ hear our cry, oh God.”

Chapter 21

God's Purpose Fulfilled

(Ephesians 5:21-33) Husbands and Wives

"Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God. Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband."

In this our closing chapter, we wish to consider carefully God's commandments regarding husbands and wives, and examine just how these commands impact upon the family and the body of Christ. In the above text, Paul highlights two major principles, showing just how fundamental they are to the well-being of any God-fearing household. 1] Wives should submit to their own husbands "in everything" even "as the church is subject unto Christ." 2] Husbands are to love their wives "even as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it."

Man, who is made in the image of God, reveals the nature of Him whose image he is in many and varied ways. It is thus fitting that he stand in awe of his God, displaying the highest levels of love, trust, reverence and respect. It is God who has ordained that man should fulfil a position of trust and authority at the head of all things under God. The Romans recognised the power of man's headship. They had a form of godliness, but denied the power thereof, for the power of godliness is invested only in such as recognise the headship of the Almighty over all. It was a fallacy to worship the headship of man, for such worship of man with his feet of clay is doomed. Nebuchadnezzar was the architect of such worship, with his ninety-foot high idol of a golden man. This Babylonish worship of man's headship has infected every world empire and is yet to reach its zenith in Antichrist, who also will make himself God.

Nevertheless, God has placed within the heart of man certain characteristics that are typical of Him, the great and eternal antitype. As a consequence, man too needs to be respected, revered and believed in. When his wife recognises these needs and fulfils them respectfully, she goes a long way towards seeing her man fulfilled and at peace. Sadly, the man who, for one reason or another, does not realise these basic needs will be severely weakened. It is with a full understanding of these principles that Paul sums up the above scriptures with the words: "and the wife see that she reverence her husband" (v. 33).

Nowhere is the wife commanded to love her husband, for the nature of a wife's love is reflective. The moon cannot shine until the sun first shines upon it, even as Christ first loved us while we were in the darkness of sin. We could never have loved without His leading love; so too in the love between husbands and wives. The wife, though, is commanded to submit and be subject to her own husband with reverence and godly fear. It is the husband who is commanded by God to love His wife. So we see that the wife needs the love of her husband, even as the husband needs to be revered and obeyed by her. When these principles are not understood or fulfilled, both husband and wife will manifest their lack of fulfilment in the strangest ways, both in the home and abroad. The husband who is not respected, revered and obeyed will be twisted emotionally, mentally, physically and spiritually; likewise the wife who suffers under a loveless relationship. It is ever so easy to rob each other of the love and beauty encapsulated within the bonds of holy matrimony.

In turn, these lacks lead to a dangerous vulnerability, as such seek in vain to bolster their weakened state. Let us, though, who are loved by the Lord Jesus, not make excuses claiming that our spouse cannot or will not fulfil our desire; for even in the midst of the most unhappy marriage, Christ can and will fulfil all our needs. We can shine even without a wife's reverence or a husband's love. Yet we will conclude this paragraph with Paul's exhortation; "let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself" (v. 33).

The man who lets go the rudder of his ship by abdicating his God-ordained position of headship does so at the peril of his family. Upon the stormy seas of life, whipped up by the world, the flesh and the devil, he may at times be tempted to throw his hands in the air and cry: "Anything for a peaceful life," but yielding to such temptation will lead to anything but a peaceful life. A true captain on his ship will resist all such temptations. Even though his crew may threaten to mutiny, deep down the family will only feel secure if a firm hand governed by a loving heart holds the helm. God has ordained that headship should be the responsibility of godly men, who in turn derive their authority through their submission to Christ as their

Head. This is a far cry from the self-imposed dictatorship that follows in the wake of a man who seeks to usurp authority over his family. The consequences of such illegitimate and usurped authority are truly disastrous.

Yet there is much dead wood in the fallen nature of even the best and godliest among men, and this must be continually pruned out if a man is to enjoy the fruits of a happy family. Not only must he be the protector and provider, but he too must lead by example and become the servant of all. His position too will be strengthened and not weakened by admitting freely when he is wrong. Apologies, when appropriate, will strengthen the family's trust and respect. Only God is never wrong, and it is vain and weak if any man seeks to project infallibility in his headship. He thus raises a little golden image of himself, even as did Nebuchadnezzar. Such headship cannot stand. Christ, the Lord, and undoubted Head of the church, did not feel in the slightest threatened by taking the towel as a servant. In true and gracious humility, He lovingly served those under His headship. Thus, leading by example, He made perfect His love, His leadership and His glory. In the beauty of holiness, our Head became our Servant, washing away our sin with His own precious blood and the water of His word. It is this humble Servant, and not some usurping dictator, who has captivated those who call him Lord. How noble, how gracious, how lovely He is, this Jesus who is both Lord and Head of His bride, the church.

Peter also speaks to us of a husband's headship over his wife and refers to the true beauty of womanhood which is not dependant upon jewellery, makeup or fancy clothes, but rather the beauty that radiates from within.

"Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; While they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear. Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands: Even as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement. Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered" (1 Peter 3:1-7).

Sarah possessed an irresistible beauty, coveted by kings and rulers. Peter here reveals the secret of her success: she called Abraham lord. In the West, we tend to equate such meekness with weakness; while in the East, this meekness is often used like a doormat. It is God and those ruled by Him who give us that perfect balance: a loving, gentle and noble husband giving himself for his wife, coupled together with a submissive and irresistibly beautiful woman reverencing, honouring and obeying her husband. This is God's masterpiece and will be perfectly and eternally realised in Christ, and His eternal bride.

When a husband and wife dwell together in such a way, they are truly a force to be reckoned with. Satan of course is fully aware of the damage done to his kingdom by such couples. He will try desperately to destroy these units of power. Wily as he is, his tactics are predictable. The devil will always resist God's order for the family, for his ends are met by the subjugation and destruction of man's headship. Each and every couple living in a sanctified marital relationship and seeking to maintain godly order drives him into a jealous rage, for they remind him of the church's destiny. When a virgin is bonded to a loving and gentle husband, it is very hard for Satan to get his way. Thus a gentleman who honours God, his parents, his fiancée's parents and his bride-to-be by patiently awaiting the time for love, lays for himself sure foundations on which to build their house. Nevertheless, Satan will prowl around constantly seeking to devour even the best of households. "Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil."

We have previously mentioned the devastating effects of incest, fornication and adultery with their illegitimate, yet powerful bondings. When such deep wounds are compounded by the bruising effects of a violent and frustrated man desperately seeking to usurp his authority, the situation may appear to be hopeless. Then there is the damage done in childhood and adolescence by a father who could or would not head his family, or a mother who "wore the pants," or was forced to take over because of her husband's abdication. Yet the Lord has guaranteed us a way of escape from every temptation common to man. The struggling husband and father who truly regrets his failures and genuinely wishes to bless his wife and family can find in Jesus all he needs to do so. The Lord Jesus taught us to pray: Father, "forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." When one has seen his own fallen state and has pleaded the blood of Jesus in order that his sins might be washed away, this repentant sinner may rest assured that the blood has power over sins. The same holds true for any who have cut themselves deeply through sexual immorality, or who have been injured by the same. No sin other than blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is beyond the pale of God's forgiveness. But if we ourselves will not forgive those who have trespassed against us, how can we be forgiven? It is futile to go to God pleading His forgiveness, if we will

not in turn forgive any who have trespassed against us.

When our Lord was crucified, two criminals were crucified with him. One said to our Lord, and we put his words in modern vernacular: "If you are so almighty and smart, why don't you get us out of this mess?" How often have these words been repeated? His partner in crime was every bit as much a robber, yet he rebuked his fellow and acknowledged his own crucifixion as the just reward for his deeds. Not only did he confess his own guilt, but he went on to proclaim these eternal words: "but this man hath done nothing amiss" (Luke 23:41). Not content with these dual truths of guilt and innocence, the penitent malefactor then began to plead for mercy and help. "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom" (Luke 23:42). With what love and tenderness came Christ's instant reply: "Verily I say unto thee, today shalt thou be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). With his hands and feet tied, this man could do nothing, not even one good deed; yet his faith had made him whole. He had been eternally freed from sin and its power simply by confessing his sinfulness, confessing Christ's sinlessness, and then publicly owning Christ as Lord. It is true that both these criminals, the pardoned and the unpardoned, died that day after suffering the further anguish of having their legs broken. One no doubt still cursing and blaming God, the other with the same radiance on his face as Stephen was soon to display, for he had been preceded by his redeemer and Lord. How amazing is the grace that saves wretches like him and us; but could you imagine that one who had obtained so great a salvation would then cry, "Lord, can I keep my stolen money? Can I continue to live in a relationship that you have judged to be adulterous?" There is no doubt in our minds that had this man lived longer upon this earth, he could never again have lived in the sin that had caused his Lord such great anguish and pain. "The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity" (2 Timothy 2:19).

There is one further matter we must seek to make clear here, and that is the subtle plan of the enemy in regard to the redeemed. A sinner has come to Jesus and by faith has been washed in the blood of the Lamb. He has believed in his heart and confessed with his mouth that Jesus Christ is Lord. He is following his Lord and prays daily, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who have trespassed against us." Though this man has been forgiven and daily forgives any who may trespass against him, Satan still employs his subtle plan in order that this believer may be hamstrung in his spiritual life in that he will not forgive himself for past sins. The devil does all he can to precipitate this state of self-condemnation, ever fanning the flames of self-blame. But if the Son has set us free, we shall be free indeed. Free because God has forgiven us, free because we forgive any who may trespass against us, free because we have forgiven ourselves. Continued self-guilt and self-blame are major obstacles to both the effective headship of the husband and the effective submission of the wife. Let us be most careful, too, to forgive each other for any failure or sin of the past. The love of God will speak

peace to all who follow the Lord Jesus Christ. Oh happy home, where dwell forgiven sinners who forgive all who trespass against them, and who have forgiven themselves!

Yet we can never speak peace to any who would try to use this precious blood to cover wilful and continued sin. God's grace is amazing indeed, but it simply will not apply if we will not confess and forsake our sins. The Lord Jesus has said: "And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail. Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery" (Luke 16:17-18). How then could one claim Him to be Lord and yet live in contradiction to His commandments? Our final cry to such is, live alone, or return to or take a legitimate spouse. It is absolutely impossible to change what God has said. No matter how exceptional we believe our particular case to be, God can and will not change His eternal word in order that He may accommodate our sin. We have done all we can to warn you of your peril, and must now finally cease our pleadings. The Lord Jesus said of Jezebel, "And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not. Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works" (Revelation 2:21- 23). How much space God will give you to repent and turn from your sin is only known to Him. Please do not tempt God.

We now return to dealing with those who have truly repented and turned from sin. How wonderful and peaceful it is to be forgiven of God, to forgive those who have trespassed against us, and to forgive ourselves! We may now live the rest of our days in peace and bearing fruit for our Redeemer.

May we then, who are men of God, courageously take up the headship over our households with true nobility and dignity. May we truly seek to love our wives even as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it. May the God-fearing wives, too, submit themselves to their own husbands in all things, even as unto the Lord. In turn, children will honour such parents and live in the fear of the Lord. Even if some turn away to the broad road after coming to the age of understanding, it is imperative that prodigal sons and daughters have a home to which they may return. Proper order in the home is so very important. The church began in the home and could well finish there also.

We began in Genesis twenty-one chapters ago by highlighting the beautiful typology revealed in Adam's open side out of which God took a rib: Eve taken from Adam's side to be at his

side. We, the bride of Christ too, have been taken from the opened side of the second Adam to be eternally at His side. "For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones." "This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church" (Ephesians 5:30, 32).

Now at the conclusion, we wish to again draw your attention to that holy eternal wonder, "And there came unto me one of the seven angels...and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife" (Revelation 21:9). Prior to this, John declared: "And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (Revelation 21:2). Having seen the new Jerusalem as a bride, John now sees the church the radiant bride and lawfully wedded wife of the Lamb. Thus we see the central role that holy matrimony plays in time and in eternity. God begins His word in Genesis with this blessed institution, and concludes in Revelation with the eternal state: Christ and His bride the church, espoused and finally married, to the glory of God the Father. "The two shall be one,"... "They shall no more be two," ... "The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth." Hallelujah, this is the church's eternal destiny.

Bible prophecy students see not only the church's destiny, but we too recognise Israel's destiny. The Israel of God, too, is destined to dwell with Him who so lovingly refers to her as His wife.

"For thy Maker is thine husband; the LORD of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; The God of the whole earth shall he be called. For the LORD hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth, when thou wast refused, saith thy God. For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the LORD thy Redeemer" (Isaiah 54:5-8).

Thus Jehovah gathers also to Himself a body and bride out of the circumcision, who too have been circumcised of heart. For almost two thousand years the Father has suspended His intimate dealings with the house of Israel, during which time His Son our Lord Jesus calls to Himself a body and a bride out of both the circumcision and the Gentiles. When the full number has come in, the Lord Jesus will call His espoused virgin to come up with Him, where in the presence of the Father and the holy angels, He presents her unto Himself as His eternal bride and helpmeet. After this, the Father will fulfil His dealings with the house of Israel. The reader will notice that in Revelation chapter 21, the New Jerusalem includes the twelve tribes of Israel represented in her twelve gates, and the twelve apostles of the Lamb represented in the twelve foundation stones. "And I saw no temple therein; for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it" (Revelation 21:22).

So we see that in the Father's house there dwells His wife and helpmeet Israel, and dwelling in the same house we see the Lamb with His bride and eternal helpmeet, the church. If then God has appointed to holy matrimony so central and eternal a place, how ought we to live in this present world? May we who are husbands earnestly seek to so love our wives, even as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it. And those who are wives, may they be subject to their own husbands in everything and see that they reverence their husbands. May God preserve us from entertaining even the thought of contradicting His holy commandments, or going along with those who have contradicted Him. Thus forgiven and forgiving, we will live in love, joy and peace and in the great anticipation of the coming again of Him who has loved us and washed us from sin. "Blessed Lord Jesus, your betrothed is looking and longing for you to come, we love you so, dear Lord Jesus."

"And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." "He which testifieth these things saith, surely I come quickly. Amen Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Revelation 22:17, 20).

AMEN