

THE WAY OF A MAN WITH A MAID

PURITY

“Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves
From all filthiness of the flesh and spirit,
Perfecting holiness in the fear of God” [2 Cor.7:1]

PURITY & THE WILL OF GOD

Purity of heart and body is to be in the life of every follower of the true God. In every way we are to keep ourselves pure. “The body is not for sexual sin but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body” [I Cor. 6:13]. Sexual relations are only good and pure when engaged in between a man and woman who are actually married to each other as husband and wife.

“It is God’s will that you be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honourable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God;

“And that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you.

“For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you His Holy Spirit” [I Thess.4:3-8].

WHAT IS IMPURITY?

[1] Desires in the heart for sexual relations defile a person and makes him/her impure. “But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart” [Mt.5:28].

[2] Touching a person’s body in any way that arouses lust is immoral and impure. “It is good for a man not to touch a woman” [I Cor.7:1]. Young men are to treat “younger women as sisters, in all purity” [I Tim.5:2]. This informs us of what type of contact may be appropriate. Surely passionately kissing your own blood-sister is not proper; neither is it with anyone who is not your wife.

[3] Caressing a woman’s breasts is the same as prostitution. “They became prostitutes in Egypt, engaging in prostitution from their youth. In that land their breasts were fondled and their virgin bosoms caressed” [Ezek.23:3].

[4] Lying sexually in shameful naked lust is hated by God. “You degraded your body and you spread your legs to anyone who passed by, and multiplied your acts of harlotry” [Ezek.16:25].

[5] Homosexual lust and sexual sin with animals are both unnatural perversions and even more hateful to God than other kinds of immorality. “You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination. Nor shall you have sexual relations with an animal and defile yourself with it. A woman must not present herself to an animal to have sexual relations with it; that is a perversion” [Lev.18:22, 23].

WHAT ENCOURAGES IMPURITY?

[1] Looking at nakedness stirs up evil desires to sin against God. “If a man takes his sister...and sees her nakedness and she sees his nakedness, it is a wicked thing and they shall be cut off in the sight of their people” [Lev.20:17]. Many defile themselves by looking at pictures of naked people in films, magazines, or on the Internet. This is a great evil that must be stopped if you will become pure.

[2] Immodest dressing leads to lust in the heart and then to sin with the body. Clothing was given by God to cover the shame of our nakedness [Rev.3:18]. Any clothes we wear that do not cover the shame of our private parts are evil. Though you may not actually be showing your skin, if the clothing worn is tightly, it focuses the eye upon your shame and invites people to lust after your body. This is how the Bible says that the prostitutes dress [Prov.7:10].

[3] Much of the music that is popular today speaks openly about sexual sin. It fills the heart with lustful desires to commit sin. You should stop listening to its evil words and rhythms.

[4] Wild dancing is nothing more than a lustful way to tell someone that you wish to have sex with them. The movements of the body in public express what you wish to do with them in private. It is an evil that must be

forsaken if you will be pure in mind and body.

[5] Being friends with people who practice evil will corrupt you along with them. “Do not be deceived: Bad company corrupts good morals” [I Cor.15:33].

[6] Evil imaginations and lustful thoughts will lead you into actual sin with your body. “He plans wickedness upon his bed; he sets himself on a path that is not good; he does not despise evil” [Ps.36:4].

GOD’S JUDGMENT ON IMPURITY

[1] If you reject the Word of God about the evils of sexual sins, God will reject you. He will give you up to the lustful ways you have chosen which will bring you into destruction. “Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another...God gave them over to shameful lusts...since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, He gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done” [Rom.1:24, 26, 28].

[2] The Lord expects that we will keep ourselves pure both in body and soul. Sexual relations are meant for a husband and wife alone and with no one else. God will judge all sexual acts outside of marriage. “Marriage should be honoured by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral” [Heb.13:4].

[3] No sexually impure person will ever enter into the kingdom of God. All will perish in the fires of Hell. Even if you are in the church or pray in the mosque, you cannot be saved while continuing in sexual sin. “Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral... nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders...will inherit the kingdom of God” [I Cor.6:9, 10].

[4] In the Old Testament times, all sexually impure people were put to death for their sins; whether fornicators, adulterers, rapists, or homosexuals [see Lev. 20-10-16; Deut.22:20-27]. In the New Testament times, all who do not repent of their sexual evils will be cast into everlasting punishment in Hell. “But the...unbelieving, abominable... and sexually immoral...shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death” (Hell) [Rev.21:8].

SELECTING A GODLY SPOUSE

Godly qualities of life are to be sought for in a marriage partner, not based upon outward beauty and interesting personality, but rather that excellent character which comes from fearing the Lord. “Charm is deceptive, and beauty disappears, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised” [Prov.31:30]. “A good wife is like a crown for her husband, but a disgraceful wife is like a disease in his bones” [Prov.12:4].

The testimony of others regarding the godly character of the one you are considering must be taken into account. What is her reputation among those whom she lives with and know her best? Long before Boaz considered Ruth as a prospect for a wife, he had been observing her and knew the testimony she had in the community. He said to her, “All that you have done for your mother-in-law after the death of your husband has been fully reported to me” [Ruth 2:11]. Sometime later after he had also observed her character firsthand he declared, “All my people in the city know that you are a woman of excellence” [Ruth 3:11]. It was only afterwards that he determined to take her as his wife.

This virtuous character is precisely what Abraham’s servant was seeking above all else as he prayed in Gen.24:12-14, “O Lord God of my master Abraham, please give me success this day...Now let it be that the young woman to whom I say, ‘Please let down your pitcher that I may drink,’ and she says, ‘Drink, and I will also give your camels a drink’ – let her be the one You have appointed for Your servant Isaac. And by this I will know that You have shown kindness to my master.”

He was seeking for a believing woman who possessed certain qualities, and physical attractiveness was not among them. The “test” he had requested of God would demonstrate a remarkable character within the girl. For her to fulfill the requirements of that prayer she must be selfless, concerned for others, and hospitable. She must be strong, willing, and diligent. The good of others would need to have filled her mind. Lowly domestic work must not offend her. Kindness and compassion certainly would possess her soul with love for the stranger and wearied. In short, that fruit which has its source in God Himself is what is to be desired and evident in a suitable marriage partner [Gal.5:22,23].

The person chosen to marry must not only be a believer, but a godly obedient follower of the Lord Jesus. It is what the Bible tells us: “If some people do not obey what we tell you in this letter, have nothing to do with

them so that they will feel ashamed. But do not treat them as enemies. Warn them as fellow believers” [2 Thess.3:14,15].

So, careful consideration is to be taken in this life-long decision before any proposal is made. “He who hurries his footsteps, sins. A man’s own folly ruins his life, yet his heart rages against the Lord” [Prov.19:2,3].

Do not rely on prophets, dreams, or impulsive desires in deciding whom to marry. These are uncertain and unstable bases to make this most important decision of human life. God never says that a pastor or even the person himself must receive a vision from God before a Christian man and woman can marry.

Seek the will and leading of God patiently in prayer in order to find a suitable mate as did Abraham’s humble servant. “Houses and wealth are inherited from parents, but a prudent wife is from the Lord” [Prov.19:14]. “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight” [Prov.3:5,6].

“The Lord is good to those who wait for Him, to the soul who seeks Him. It is good that one should hope and wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord. It is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth” [Lam.3:25-27].

Whether parents actually choose a husband or wife for their children, or if the children themselves choose a marriage partner, the parents’ blessing is to be had on the proposed union. “Honor your father and mother. This is the first commandment that has a promise with it – then everything will be well with you, and you will have a long life on the earth” [Eph.6:2,3]. “A wise son makes his father happy, but a foolish son disrespects his mother” [Prov.15:20].

Seek the counsel of the spiritually mature. “The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man is he who listens to counsel” [Prov.12:15]. “Listen to counsel and receive instruction, that you may be wise in your latter days” [Prov.19:20]. “Plans are established by counsel; by wise counsel wage war” [Prov.20:18].

Like attracts like. Should you be compromising and worldly, you will attract and associate with those type of people. If you want a godly partner, you must be godly yourself. The way to find a suitable godly partner is to devote yourself to what you will be required to be once you are married.

Since the man is required to be self sacrificial in gentleness and understanding once married, seek to have these qualities developed in your life presently. Since quiet submission and domestic devotion is to be found in the godly wife, pursue these characteristics at the moment. As you do, those who have the same aspirations will be attracted to one another and the Lord will lead if a developing relationship is His will.

A GODLY WOMAN

“A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband, but she who shames him is as rottenness in his bones” [Prov.12:4]. A virtuous woman will possess knowledge of the Lord and His ways, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love [2 Pet.1:5-7]. She will not dishonor him in the sight of others by her words or conduct. One way to avoid shaming him is by asking her husband at home rather than speaking in the assembly [I Cor.14:33-35].

“Wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior” [I Pet.3:1,2]. A godly woman will be free from argumentation and contention [Prov.25:24]. Submission to his leadership is to be evident in her as the church submits to Christ [Eph.5:24]. She will be free from impurity and will fear her husband for the place that God has granted him as head [Eph.5:33].

“Adornment must not be external...but let it be the hidden person of the heart...a gentle and quiet spirit” [I Pet.3:3,4]. She does not attract attention to herself by appealing to external beauty. Her precious quality is meekness with its lack of self-interest and self-assertiveness. She is tranquil within, free from agitation and not disgruntled.

Godly women are “to love their husbands, to love their children” [Tit.2:4]. Affectionate devotion to husband and children characterizes the virtuous woman. Bringing up children in the way of the Lord distinguishes her as a godly woman [I Tim.5:10].

They are to be “workers at home...so that the word of God will not be dishonored” [Tit.2:5]. The home is her primary realm of influence where she is to maintain orderliness and purposefulness [I Tim.5:14].

“She continued praying before the Lord” [I Sam.1:12]. Prayer is the atmosphere she breathes [I Sam.2:1-10; Lk.1:46-55; 2:37].

“Older women likewise are...to teach what is good so that they may train the young women to love their husbands, to love their children” [Tit.2:3,4]. Her great sphere of ministry is with women and children that they

might be trained up in the practical truths of the Word of God. She does not usurp authority over men or seek to lead, teach, or be prominent in the gathering of the church [I Tim.2:11-13].

“If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay” [Acts 16:15]. Hospitality and concern for strangers and their practical needs fills her heart [I Tim.5:10].

“This woman was abounding with deeds of kindness and charity which she continually did” [Acts 9:36]. Assisting the poor and unfortunate is her consistent testimony.

“I will make a helper suitable for him” [Gen.2:18]. The primary arena of the Christian woman’s ministry is to her husband and family. From the beginning she was fashioned for this distinctive purpose. She was molded by the hand of God to be a helper for the man. Woman was thus created to assist the man as his companion. Her God-given purpose was to help him to fulfill what the Lord had given him to do. Her contribution is thus complimentary to his objectives and labors.

Helpers, by definition, are not initiators. They do not take the prominent role. They are not the leaders. They occupy a support position and lend aid to those they are associated with. Helpers rarely appear in the public eye, but typically carry on their works behind the scenes.

Her divinely appointed sphere is not public but in private. She is a follower, not the leader. He guides and directs, she responds. He has prominence, she, retirement. The man influences his world, the woman, her home.

This order ordained from Eden’s shade establishes the scope of her ministry in the church. She is to marry, bear children, keep house, and give the enemy no occasion for reproach [I Tim.5:14]. Her focus is to love her husband and children as a worker at home by being subject to her husband so that the Word of God will not be dishonored [Tit.2:3-5].

A GODLY MAN

“Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her. He died so that He could give the church to Himself like a bride in all her beauty. In the same way, husbands should love their wives as they love their own bodies.

“The man who loves his wife loves himself. No one ever hates his own body, but feeds and takes care of it” [Eph.5:25-29]. The husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is the Head of the church [Eph.5:23].

The Christian husband is to love his wife by a self-sacrificing giving for her. He is the leader and head of the home. It is his responsibility to direct his family in the things of God.

“Fathers, do not make your children angry, but raise them with the training and teaching of the Lord” [Eph.6:4].

He is to answer his wife’s spiritual questions at home as the Word of God says to. “As is true in all the churches of God’s people, women should keep quiet in the church meetings. If they want to learn something, they should ask their own husbands at home” [I Cor. 14:34,35].

In addition to this spiritual provision for his wife and family, he is responsible to feed and clothe them as well. It is not the wife’s responsibility to feed and clothe the man and children. The man must do this according to the Word of God.

“If any man does not provide for his own, especially those of his own household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” [I Tim.5:8].

Even though he is the head and leader, he is to be kind and respectful, not harsh and cruel. The Bible commands him, “Husbands, love your wives and be gentle with them” [Col.3:19]. The wife is not the property of the man as if she were some kind of goat purchased in the market. The following tells us how the Christian husband is to treat his wife.

His Christian Wife is:

[1] to be honored, understood, and not mistreated since she is weaker [I Pet.3:7].

[2] to be loved as one’s own body, not treated as property [Eph.5:25,28,31].

[3] a helper, not an animal used as a sexual object for pleasure and to simply provide children [Gen.2:18-20].

[4] not a slave whose labor profits the man. The man is to provide for her [I Tim.5:8]. Man is not king [Gen.3:16].

[5] not to be divorced [Mal.2:16] and barrenness is no cause to do so [Lk.1:7; Gen.11:30; 18:10,11; I Sam.1:5-8]. It may actually be the man who is barren and not the woman [Deut.7:14].

[6] not under the authority of the extended family or clan. They have no rights over the wife of their male relation [Gen.2:23,24].

[7] not the one held responsible for the training of the children; the man is [Eph.6:4; Gen.18:19; Deut.11:18-21; Prov.4:1-4; Ps.78:3-8].

[8] not to be isolated and separate from the man and all that concerns him; no secrets covered up. All is freely shared [Gen.2:25].

[9] a fellow heir of the grace of life, not of lesser privilege [I Pet.3:7; Gal.3:28].

[10] not to be shared among other wives. Polygamy does not have God's approval [Gen.2:18-25; Mt.19:4-6; Deut.17:17].

“Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered” [I Pet.3:7]. If the man is not kind, gentle, and respectful; if he does not sacrificially give himself for her in genuine love, then prayers will be hindered. And if prayers are hindered, his belief in God has become an empty form of godliness only, but without power.

ONENESS

As husband and wife, the man and woman are one. There cannot, however, be two leaders, two heads. Chaos would result. Yet they must not act independently from one another, each in their own isolated realms, or living apart in separate houses or villages.

Two become one in heart. As planned and commanded in the Bible, the home is harmonious. Each partner glorifies God in their appointed areas.

They share all. Nothing is secret between them. There is openness. Their private existence has ended as the two have become one with nothing hidden. Decisions are discussed between them.

“And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed” [Gen.2:25]. They share one purse, one dwelling, one bed, and are united in their instruction to their children.

Oneness goes far beyond the physical union of man and wife; actually, that union is only the fitting outward expression of the deep and profound union of purpose, direction, and desire between them in the truth of Christ [Gen.2:18; Amos 3:3]. When this oneness does not exist, the children grow up in a divided home amidst a deadly and deceiving mixture of the things of God and those of the world [Neh.13:24].

As created by God, she is his helper; and the man truly needs help. The male as head makes decisions by analytical ability given by God tempered with the compassionate input of his wife. He is to be firm yet sensitive through consideration of her concerns. He leads her with understanding and honor while she submits in godly fear. He provides what is needful for the home [I Tim.5:8] while she processes that for the good and blessing of all [I Tim.5:14; Prov.31].

UNEQUALLY YOKED

“What fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever?” [2 Cor.6:14,15]. The unchallenged answer to each of these questions is, “None.” It is for this reason that a Christian believer is forbidden to enter into an unequal yoke with one who does not possess the life of Christ.

A donkey is no mate for an ox if one wishes to harness both to perform the will of a master [Deut.22:10]. The one is stubborn and self-willed while the other is patient with determined strength to perform the service of his owner. There could never be any agreement or harmony between the two. They are of different natures.

The God of heaven forbids His children to marry unbelievers. “You shall not intermarry with them: you shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor shall you take their daughters for your sons. For they will turn your sons away from following Me to serve other gods; then the anger of the Lord will be kindled against you and He will quickly destroy you” [Deut.7:3,4].

“Do not be deceived, bad company corrupts good morals” [I Cor.15:33]. If this is true in the associations of everyday life, how much more so in that of an unholy marriage union? It was this violation of the Lord's will that led to multiplied wickedness in the days of Noah when the sons of God married the daughters of men [Gen.6:1,2]. Casting aside all distinctions of godliness, they saw that these unbelieving daughters from Cain's descendents were beautiful and married whomever they chose. Yes, whomever they chose; that was the problem.

Abraham emphatically and solemnly charged his servant to never select a bride for his son from the unbelieving daughters of Canaan among whom he lived; only one from among his people who were believers [Gen.24:3,4]. Esau selected two wives from among the Hittite inhabitants of the land whose ungodly ways made life miserable for his godly parents [Gen.26:34,35]. Listen to Rebekah's lament, "If Jacob takes a wife of the daughters of Heth, like these who are the daughters of the land, what good will my life be to me?" [Gen.27:46]. Such spiritually mixed marriages bring strife and sorrow into the family [Gen.28:8].

No man is wiser than God, not even Solomon. When the Lord's ways are despised and disobeyed, not even the greatest among mortals will be immune from the defiling effect of violating the standard of God by marrying an unbeliever. What God had fearfully warned Israel of came upon Solomon: His foreign wives turned his heart away to serve other gods, and the Lord's wrath descended upon him [I Kings 11:1-9].

The chilling reality is that his ungodly wives influenced him, and all of his wisdom had no effect upon them. Such is the tragic end of all who deceive themselves in thinking that marrying an unbeliever is no small matter. Even though loved by his God, he sinned greatly in this and suffered terrible consequences while leading others astray by his ungodly example [Neh.13:23-27].

Harsh are the daily griefs borne by those who willfully chose to disobey God in this matter! It is better to dwell in a desert or a rooftop corner than with her who shames you by her ungodliness within. Indeed, it is rottenness to the bones [Prov.12:4; 21:9,19; 25:24].

Brethren, a prudent wife is from the Lord [Prov.19:14]. But only a godly wife is prudent; the others are among the foolish ones who tear down their houses with their own hands [Prov.14:1].

Those contemplating or having decided to disobey God in this way deceive themselves by three deadly snares. Their minds have become deluded when attempting to justify this disobedience when they say:

[1] God is leading. This is error indeed. God only leads in paths of righteousness for His name's sake [Ps.23:3]. He will never lead anyone into an unholy union of believer and unbeliever. He rather forbids this altogether.

[2] We are in love. That is simply not true. You may be romantically involved and emotionally aroused, but you do not love one another. "This is love that we walk according to His commandments" [2 Jn.6]. True love requires obedience to the Word of God. It is disobedience to seek to marry an unbeliever and therefore cannot be genuine love.

Such romantic "love" is nothing more than sentiment, emotional attachment, or actual lust itself. Samson saw a good looking woman from among the ungodly Philistines and demanded that his parents obtain her for his wife because "she looks good to me" [Jud.14:3]. The Scriptures tell us that later he "loved a woman in the valley of Sorek" [Jud.16:4]; the infamous and ungodly Delilah who became the snare to his soul. None of these attractions to Samson's heart was true love; Philistines were the enemies of the Lord that were doomed for destruction under the wrath of God.

Again, listen to Amnon who professed, "I am in love with Tamar" [2 Sam.13:4]; but it was absolutely nothing more than burning lust. After using and defiling her body in illicit sexual sin, he cast her out as despised and unwanted property [2 Sam.13:15-17].

If this type of "love" as viewed in American films is the basis of a couple's commitment to one another, contained within it is its own undoing. For if "love" wanes, paths drift, interests change, dissatisfaction emerges, or conflicts arise, "love's" foundation of sand is swept away as the morning mist evaporates before the noonday heat. This false "love" contains the seeds of its own self-destruction. For if it ever vacillates, all collapses with it. Commitment, life-long covenant, and unflinching fidelity demanded by godly marriage cannot rest upon such an unstable foundation.

We are not to make the commitment of a life long covenant based upon "love;" we do not do so with God. Commitment precedes love. We do not love God to the extent that we decide to commit ourselves to Him. Rather we enter into a new covenant and thus commence to love Him. Commitment is based upon objective realities that we have observed and have become convinced of.

The Holy Spirit portrays to our awakened conscience our own wretchedness, the legitimacy of a salvation obtained through the agonies of the Lord Jesus, the power of resurrection from the dead, and the terrors of eternal torments. We thus decide to enter the covenant. Thereafter, we learn to love our Redeemer.

How good it would be if we entered marriage thus with the foundation of sober commitment to that covenant having objectively weighed the requirements and consequences of so doing with all solemnity. Then, when the waxing and waning of affection, the trials of privations, disappointments, and incompatibility arise, the foundation is unshaken because it is not comprised of these things deemed to be the constituents of "love."

If “love” leads to the commitment of marriage, the lack of “love” will as surely result in the abandonment of that pledge. For, if the “foundation” is destroyed, of what value is the superstructure? In this respect, “love” plants the seed whose fruit is divorce.

[3] He/she will change once we marry. This is the height of deception. First of all, it is you yourself as a believer who has already changed for the worse by being willing to disobey God in entering the relationship in the first place! Then you think to rise to godliness thereafter? It will not happen.

The unbeliever will not then improve towards godliness, it is you who will decline even further from it. Or do you think God Himself is deceived or a liar? He has already told us that the ungodly will exert their influence to draw away the believer’s heart after other gods, not vice versa.

Do not deceive yourselves: “It is a snare for a man to say rashly, ‘It is holy!’ and after the vows to make inquiry” [Prov.20:25]. Beloved, do not rush into an unholy union that cannot have the blessing of God upon it. “It is not good for a soul to be without knowledge, and he who hastens with his feet sins” [Prov.19:2].

May we contemplate and enter into this life long covenant of marriage with soberness and godly sincerity.

WHEN ARE PEOPLE MARRIED?

Two things make a marriage according to the Word of God:

[1]

A culturally recognized ceremony which tells everyone that this man and woman are now husband and wife.

[2]

The sexual union of the husband and wife after the ceremony.

This is seen from the very first marriage at the time of creation. This is what the Word of God says: “The Lord God brought the woman to the man. And the man said, ‘This is now bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.’ So a man will leave his father and mother and be united with his wife, and the two will become one body” [Gen.2:22-24].

There is no one ceremony that God has given to all peoples in all places. The customs and ceremonies in your culture may differ from others. The important thing is that whatever form the ceremony takes, it communicates to all that the couple is now properly married and can live together as husband and wife.

In some tribes, the parents and/or families choose husbands or wives for their children. Some of the marriages in the Bible were done in this way similar to Isaac and Rebekah’s.

Abraham sent his servant to find a bride for his son, Isaac. He said, “Don’t get a wife for my son from the Canaanite girls who live around here. Instead, go back to my country, to the land of my relatives, and get a wife for my son Isaac” [Gen.24:3,4].

After the dowry was paid to them, her father and senior brother said, “Rebekah is yours. Take her and go. Let her marry your master’s son as the Lord has commanded” [Gen.24:51]. They asked the girl if she was willing to be Isaac’s wife as they had arranged for her. “Rebekah’s brother and mother said, ‘We will call Rebekah and ask her what she wants to do.’ They called her and asked her, ‘Do you want to go with this man now?’ She said, ‘Yes, I do’” [Gen.24:57,58].

They traveled back to Abraham’s land. “Then Isaac took Rebekah and she became his wife, and he loved her” [Gen.24:67].

Another type of ceremony is like that of Boaz and Ruth’s; a simple public testimony before witnesses. “Then Boaz said to the elders and to all the people, ‘You are witnesses today...I have acquired Ruth...to be my wife.’ And all the people...and elders said, ‘We are witnesses.’ So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife, and he went in to her” [Ruth 4:9-11, 13].

Though the ceremonies may vary from country to country and tribe to tribe, each one makes it clear to everyone that this man and woman are now husband and wife. Each custom shows that they now have the exclusive right of sexual relations with each other and with no one else.

However, Christians should not and must not include traditional practices in their ceremonies that are against the Word of God. No traditional idolatrous elements should be allowed or practiced.

This does not mean, however, that a marriage ceremony need take place in a church building. Having a marriage ceremony in a church building is one way to become married, but it is not the only way that is accepted by God and need not be done if a valid traditional ceremony has taken place.

DOWRY

In many cultures an exchange of dowry is customarily expected. This is not a biblical necessity in order to become married but may be required in various traditional settings. For a Christian, a simple presentation of the previously agreed upon items [rice, yams, cloth, etc.] from the groom's family to that of the bride can be done without the traditional ceremonies, blessings, wine, and any idolatrous aspects that the believer cannot properly participate in. This will require the Christian to leave out at least certain of the traditional practices in order to be faithful to Christ.

Genesis 24 gives an example of a simple presentation of dowry between the immediate members of the families. There, the actual marriage took place afterwards when Rebekah was joined to Isaac. Dowry is a cultural practice that may even be set aside in coming years when the children of Christians who are marrying now grow up and will marry from other truly Christian families. There should be the avoidance of any suggestion that this is a "bride price" which somehow purchases the woman for the man, for a man's bride is not his property.