

The Marriage Ceremony

Revelation 19:7-9 [NIV] *“Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.” (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.) Then the angel said to me, “Write: ‘Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!’” And he added, “These are the true words of God.”*

The wedding of lamb [Jesus Christ] with His bride the church.

Marriage is a divine institution and I am going to use the text of the Christian Church’s Marriage Ceremony in this article on marriage itself.

Within this text we find many keys to a successful and happy marriage.

The text reads as follows:-

“Having grown to love each other [the man’s first name] and [the woman’s first name] have chosen to commit their lives to each other in marriage and so today they are asking God to unite them as husband and wife.”

Two points we need to notice in this text.

“Having grown to love one another.”

Love is a process.

Love, as God sees it, is somewhat different to how the world sees love.

We can have attraction at first sight, but we cannot have Godly love at first sight.

We have heard of the expression *“love at first sight”* but what we mean is *“attraction”*.

God’s love by definition needs time to grow, and will take the rest of the marriage to grow.

Attraction and *“chemistry”* can be at first sight but **not** the love God mentions in the marriage ceremony, the *“agapē”* love of the Christian Bible.

Godly love is **not** easy; it would be wrong if it was easily come by.

If people are attracted to one another instantly and nothing grows from that, it remains purely physical.

The basis of that relationship was a feeling, a chemical attraction, and they married on the strength of that feeling but because nothing else was present, there was no enduring love, it was just a feeling that fades with the passing of time.

Godly love grows and will continue to grow for eternity, continually becoming deeper and more fulfilling.

Don’t confuse love with attraction, but having said that there should be attraction in a relationship, something special about the other person.

There should be something that makes the heart beat a little faster.

There is a true story of one young man who was admitted to hospital and they could not understand why his blood pressure used to fluctuate, then they figured out that it always rose higher when it was taken by one certain young nurse; this nurse had an affect on this young man's heartbeat.

They are now happily married.

God built into men and women the possibility of such an attraction, but love has to grow in the relationship if the marriage is to succeed.

The marriage ceremony continues to state:-

*"They have **chosen** to commit their lives to each other in marriage."*

Marriage is a choice, to marry or not to marry is a choice.

Marriage is not necessary for eternal life; if this was so, God would have commanded it in His Word.

Marriage is not essential for eternal life but the marriage union is the highest physical expression of the family of God.

A physical type of the family of God.

Marriage is the physical expression of the spiritual union of Christ and His Church.

Marriage is a choice and as with all major choices in our lives we need to exercise a certain amount of caution, deliberation and wisdom before the choice is made.

God will **not** make the choice for us, marriages are **not** made in heaven, even though marriage is a heavenly ordained institution.

We can look into God's Word and find very few examples of where God arranged for certain people to marry and always it was always for major reasons in the fulfilment of His Master Plan for mankind as a whole.

Only in such circumstances did God make the choice of who was to marry whom and these could be counted on one hand.

It is **not** true that there is only one person whom you should marry to have a happy and fulfilled marriage.

When I state this I am talking to those who do not as yet have a partner.

This doesn't mean we shouldn't give thanks to God for our mate, our spouse.

I do, I don't know if my wife does!

I just hope she does.

We need to pray to God for wisdom in our choice of a partner.

There are also certain principles in God's Word that can help us make a wise choice.

For example, do they pray and study the Christian Bible?

Do they have a personal relationship with their Creator?

Are they dedicated to the Work of God?

Are they concerned for the welfare of others or are they insular?

There are **no** scriptures telling us directly how to choose a mate, but there is a wealth of guidance in God's Word about married life.

God expects us to pray to Him for wisdom in our choice and to seek wise council from others who can give good experiential advice: ministers, parents, happily married friends but still the final choice is ours.

This way, if we marry someone and then they get up and leave the Church, we will **not** be able to say to Jesus Christ in our day of judgement, *"God, you picked the wrong one for me to marry."*

Continuing in the text of the marriage ceremony:-

"Surely there can be no greater human joy than that of a happy marriage, one that is filled with giving and sharing. No deeper friendship than that attained by a husband and wife. Marriage is not only a physical union, it is a divine institution. Marriage was established not by man but by the Eternal God at creation. Marriage derives its authority from the divine laws of God, immutable and unchangeable."

In other words, marriage did not evolve.

Marriage is a divine institution, it is **not** something that man thought up.

Continuing in the text of the marriage ceremony:-

"When God created life on the earth He made humans the pinnacle of His creation, fashioned in His own image. He gave men and women creative minds with the ability to make choices, to develop plans and build their lives upon those plans."

When we make the choice of a mate we together make plans and then build our lives together on those plans.

In a sense we go ahead together and make our plans come to fruition.

Philippians 2:12-13 [NIV] *"Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence, continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose."*

God, through Paul, tells us to work out our future but always remember to involve God in the future.

Continuing in the text of the marriage ceremony:-

"Men and women were created with the marvellous potential of eternal life in the family of God, and as a Loving Father God gave us the institution of marriage. God also gave us the blessing of family life that we may learn to love one another as He loves us."

Notice the emphasis that we may learn to love one another.

Love is a process.

This does **not** mean we should enter a marriage relationship without love being there already.

The two people should already be loving each other.

This love should then grow so that when we look back we see that our original love was not as deep as that love we now have for each other.

That first love was only the beginning of what we now experience in our day-to-day life together.

True love does grow stronger and deeper.

True love is a learning process and at times it can be very hard work to love our partner, to exercise that Godly love.

Remember Godly love is a love that is spontaneous, irrespective of any “rights” we have or the response of the recipient of that love.

This is an attitude of mind that is the direct opposite of our natural human reactions.

It is hard work at times to love our children.

It is easy to love them when they are young, sweet and snugly asleep.

But when they grow up and have attitude problems, loving them is very difficult.

We can face the same difficulties in a marriage relationship.

There are times when it is difficult to exercise true love.

Continuing in the text of the marriage ceremony:-

“After God had created the first man from the dust of the ground God said “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.” [Genesis 2:18] The woman was made equal to the man in both mental capacity and spiritual potential. The perfect compliment to her husband.”

Genesis 1:27 [NIV] *“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”*

Male and female are both in the image of God.

It is **not** just the man who is in the image of God.

Jesus was a male but God is **not** male nor female.

God is spirit and in that sense to our understanding genderless.

We may be surprised when we see God, for we have never seen spirit, but when we become spirit we will see Him as He is.

1 John 3:2 [NIV] *“Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”*

Where does a woman get her feminine characteristics from?

From God.

I'm not saying God is feminine, He is not, but every quality that makes a woman feminine comes from God who also made the man to be in His likeness.

When we see a woman tenderly nursing a child, as only a woman can, she received that ability from the ultimate being, God.

There are references in The Bible to the feminine qualities of God.

Matthew 23:37 [NIV] *“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.”*

1 Thessalonians 2:6-7 [NIV] *“...As apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you, but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children.”*

We know that all the qualities of a man are from God but we tend to forget that all the qualities of a woman are also equally from God.

The tenderness, the gentleness, the ability to relate to those in need and pain.

A woman is equal to the man spiritually and mentally.

Continuing in the text of the marriage ceremony:-

“To emphasise His purpose to Adam and Eve the Creator God did not make the woman directly from the dust but from the very bones of the man. When the woman was presented to him Adam said, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man.” [Genesis 2:23]

“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.” [Genesis 2:24]

In the Hebrew the words for woman and man are very similar.

God took the woman from the man to go back to the man, to be complete in the marriage relationship.

This is the only time you have 1+1 = 1 in God’s Eyes.

We shouldn’t be surprised at this because Jesus Christ said later in times there is oneness in the God family.

John 10:30 [NIV] *“I and the Father are one.”*

John 14:20 [NIV] *“On that day you will realise that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.”*

The oneness in marriage is a type of oneness of the Triune God, and in the church.

There is a reason that a married couple should leave the family home and set up their own home and a new family unit.

Genesis 1:28 [NIV] *“God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”*

This directive to be fruitful is **not** given to every couple on the earth, there was a specific reason for such a command at that time for the only people existing were Adam and Eve.

The other times this command was given was after the flood to Noah's sons and to Abraham, that was to fulfil God's purpose Abraham should have sons and daughters, this was physically and spiritually goal.

Galatians 3:7 [NIV] *“Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham.”*

Also prophetic statements about the world tomorrow give the same command, this is not strange when also prophesied is a decimation of the human race.

This *“go and increase”* is **not** a law for everyone, it is a personal choice, and we should **not** pressure couples into having a family.

We have seen that marriage was a divine institution to prepare us as God's created children to have an intimate relationship with Him as a husband and wife experience in physical marriage.

The love that cements this union is something that grows by working constantly at improving it. Love is not physical attraction but helpful in the loving relationship of marriage. In God's sight men and women are equal spiritually and mentally but have different roles to play in a successful marriage.

Continuing in the text of the marriage ceremony:-

“As marriage is a divine God-given institution it is not just man who joins a husband and wife together but also God. Therefore let us now consider the laws of God governing this union of [man's name] and [woman's name], as recorded in the Holy Scriptures.

Ephesians 5:21 [NIV] *“Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.”*

Submission is **not** just the wife to the husband within marriage.

Continuing in the text of the marriage ceremony:-

“The sacred marriage covenant calls upon you to yield yourselves to God and to one another. To hold each other in high esteem, giving honour and respect to one another, with love and devotion. Always giving preference to the welfare of the other.”

“Outgoing concern is the foundation of the marriage relationship.”

Acts 20:35 [NIV] *“...It is more blessed to give than to receive.”*

The Christian Bible, always says that true love is an outgoing concern for the one who is loved. It is of little use just saying that we love our partner, love is shown by how we treat and relate to them.

Love is **not** love unless it is demonstrated, by an outward going concern for the welfare of our partner.

Continuing the text of the marriage ceremony:-

Ephesians 5:25-29 [NIV] *“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church...”*

This is a sacrifice that the husband is commanded to make for his wife just as Jesus Christ sacrificed His body and life for the Church.

Ephesians 5:33 [NIV] *“However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.”*

The wife also has responsibilities.

Ephesians 5:22 [King James] *“Wives submit yourselves to your own husbands, as unto the Lord.”*

The word “own” is left out in some modern translations but it should be there.

This scripture is **not** a command for women to submit to all men, **only** their own husband.

There are some men around who think that men are some superior species and that all women should submit to their will; such an attitude is **totally out of line**.

Ephesians 5:23-24 [NIV] *“For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Saviour. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.”*

When it says “everything” it means “everything in the Lord,” as we would Christ, this is the context of this scripture.

So if a husband tells his wife to supplement her housekeeping by shoplifting she doesn't submit to such a demand.

The husband has authority over his wife in as much as God has given him authority and no more.

The standard given is “as Jesus Christ would for His Church.”

Ephesians 5:21-33 [Message Bible] *“Out of respect for Christ, be courteously reverent to one another.”*

*“Wives, understand and support your husbands in ways that show your support for Christ. The husband provides leadership to his wife the way Christ does to His church, **not** by domineering but by cherishing. So just as the church submits to Christ as He exercises such leadership, wives should likewise submit to their husbands.”*

“Husbands, go all out in your love for your wives, exactly as Christ did for the church, a love marked by giving, not getting Christ's love makes the church whole. His words evoke her beauty. Everything He does and says is designed to bring the best out of her, dressing her in dazzling white silk, radiant with holiness. And that is how husbands ought to love their wives. They're really doing themselves a favour, since they're already “one” in marriage.”

“No one abuses his own body, does he? No, he feeds and pampers it. That's how Christ treats us, the church, since we are part of His body. And this is why a man leaves father and mother and cherishes his wife. No longer two, they become “one flesh.” This is a huge mystery, and I don't pretend to understand it all. What is clearest to me is the way Christ treats the church. And this provides a good picture of how each husband is to treat his wife, loving himself in loving her, and how each wife is to honour her husband.”

1 Peter 3:7 [NIV] *“Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as **heirs with you** of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.”*

There is a “sting in the tail” to this verse; if husbands do not treat their wives in this way their prayers will be hindered.

The Greek word translated “hindered” is “*ekkopto*” [ek-kop-to] meaning to cut down, such as cutting down a tree or to break up the road to hinder our progress.

Galatians 5:7 [NIV] *“You were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth?”*

The same word is here translated *“to cut in on you.”*

This shows just how serious God looks on the husband’s right treatment of his wife, his prayers will be broken-up.

This works the other way also if the wife doesn’t fulfil her responsibilities her prayers will also be broken-up.

Continuing in the text of the marriage ceremony:-

The essential qualities of a happy and successful marriage are those that express an ever-growing Godly love as described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 [NIV] *“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.”*

Note *“love keeps no record of wrongs”*.

It is an adversary system of government we have in the world today, where both sides, opposition and government, bring up past wrongs and mistakes each has made to batter each other over the head.

This is Satan’s way, Satan is the accuser of the brethren [**Revelation 12:11**].

When we bring up past wrongs and mistakes of our partner to use as a club against them we are doing Satan’s work for him.

We should never beat our partner verbally with their past errors or weaknesses, for this can be even more damaging than if we hit them with a physical club.

Continuing in the text of the marriage ceremony:-

“So we see that the loving relationship in marriage is a type of the relationship between Christ and His Church, and it is in your submission in love to God’s Law that this marriage will be strengthened and protected.”

Make no mistake, when marriages break down sin is always present, sin being the transgression of the law [**1 John 3:4**] and coming short of the glory of God [**Romans 3:23**], that is **not** fulfilling God’s Love in that relationship. **There is always faults on both sides**, perhaps more on one side than the other, but no-one is perfect.

Continuing in the text of the marriage ceremony:-

“God wants us to be happy in this life and to this end God has given you [the woman’s first name] and you [the man’s first name] the gift of marriage. Because marriage is a divine institution and we are asking God to join you as husband and wife it is fitting that each of you should faithfully promise before God, to accept the sacred marriage covenant according to the divinely ordained conditions established by Almighty God. Do you then [the man’s first name] faithfully promise and covenant with God and these witnesses to take [the woman’s first name] to be your lawful wedded wife, for as long as you both shall live, to love her, to cherish her and honour her and provide for her? [Pause for the man to say “I do.”]

Do you know where this comes from?

It is from the covenant between God and His people Israel, which was a marriage covenant where promises were made by both parties.

Exodus 23:20, 22, 25-28, 31 [NIV] *“See, I am sending an angel ahead of you to guard you along the way and to bring you to the place I have prepared.” ... “If you listen carefully to what he says and do all that I say, I will be an enemy to your enemies and will oppose those who oppose you.” ... “Worship the LORD your God, and his blessing will be on your food and water. I will take away sickness from among you, and none will miscarry or be barren in your land. I will give you a full life span. “I will send my terror ahead of you and throw into confusion every nation you encounter. I will make all your enemies turn their backs and run. I will send the hornet ahead of you to drive the Hivites, Canaanites and Hittites out of your way.” ... “I will establish your borders from the Red Sea to the Sea of the Philistines, and from the desert to the River. I will hand over to you the people who live in the land and you will drive them out before you.”*

Here was God the husband saying I will do these things if you will enter into this covenant with me.

Exodus 24:1-3 [NIV] *“Then he said to Moses, “Come up to the LORD, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel. You are to worship at a distance, but Moses alone is to approach the LORD; the others must not come near. And the people may not come up with him.” When Moses went and told the people all the LORD's words and laws, they responded with one voice, “Everything the LORD has said we will do.”*

All the people said “we will do.”

Exodus 24:4-7 [NIV] *“Moses then wrote down everything the LORD had said. He got up early the next morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain and set up twelve stone pillars representing the twelve tribes of Israel. Then he sent young Israelite men, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as fellowship offerings to the LORD. Moses took half of the blood and put it in bowls, and the other half he sprinkled on the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, “We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey.”*

This was the book of the covenant **not** the ten commandments and the people replied the second time “we will obey.”

Exodus 24:8-11 [NIV] *“Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, “This is the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.” Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel went up and saw the God of Israel. Under his feet was something like a pavement made of sapphire, clear as the sky itself. But God did not raise his hand against these leaders of the Israelites; they saw God, and they ate and drank.”*

God appeared in a form that was recognisable but which did not show His full glory or else they would not have lived, to show just how serious He considered this covenant.

When a couple stand before the minister and take these vows God is present listening to what is being said.

Continuing with text of marriage ceremony:-

“And do you [the woman’s first name] faithfully promise and covenant with God in the presence of these witness to take [the man’s first name] to be your lawful wedded husband for as long as you both shall live, to love him, to cherish him, to honour him and as God has ordained to submit yourself to him.” [Pause for the woman to say “I do.”] ***“Would you please join your right hands and with the laying on of my hands I ask the Eternal God to unite you as man and wife.”***

With this joining of hands we will all kneel before God and ask for His blessing on this union.

In the prayer, the minister will mention what each must do for that blessing to be given by God, God will bless us in the measure that we yield to Him.

Continuing with the text of the marriage ceremony:-

Then the minister will say, ***“By the authority given me by Jesus Christ, I pronounce you husband and wife, you may now exchange rings which are an outward symbol of your marriage state and of your love and devotion to each other.”***

Then the bit everyone has been waiting for; ***“You may now kiss the bride”***.

If you do enter into marriage it is the second most important decision you ever make; the first being baptism.

Although it is a very serious decision, it is also a time of great rejoicing.

I want to conclude by reading again a paragraph of the text of the wedding ceremony.

“Surely there can be no greater human joy than that of a happy marriage, one that is filled with giving and sharing. No deeper friendship than that attained by a husband and wife. Marriage is not only a physical union, it is a divine institution. Marriage was established not by man but by the Eternal God at creation. Marriage derives its authority from the Divine Laws of God, immutable and unchanging.”