

BUILDING A HOUSE
The Culture of Christian Courtship

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Foreword

This volume is the result of many years of the collected experience of a group of ministers throughout Australasia. The source material was principally formulated by Victor Hall, and it is on his behalf that I write this admonition to you.

Our primary intention is to raise the need for an approach to courtship that is uniquely Christian, as opposed to one that is a mixture of traditional and social norms. Note that we are setting out just *one* approach to Christian courtship, one which seeks to honour Biblical principles in defining Christian marriage as a unique institution. We are not suggesting that this is *the* definitive approach, as if all other approaches are invalid.

The approach put forward should not become a check-list by which a man or woman can rush through a courtship by 'ticking the boxes' and answering the questions correctly. The only 'right answers' are the actual foundations themselves. Those who proceed to courtship must accept that they are entering a dynamic, Christian, relational process; one which is intended to produce blessing for all concerned. They must not see it as an examination in which they are being approved or disapproved. A mature couple will treat the content seriously, and will not merely improvise their own program.

Our key proposition is that a Christian marriage is more than just two Christians getting married. Christian courtship is not just two Christians involved in a romance that is identical to any other secular relationship. There is a Christian culture for courtship by which a couple will engage in a proper process to form a Christian marriage.

What is it that makes a Christian courtship unique? Primarily, it is governed by the principles of 'sanctification and honour' as outlined in 1 Thessalonians 4:4. This means that it is not driven by romantic fantasy. There is a proper form of romance, but it must be defined and guarded by

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sanctification and honour so that it serves the relationship. There is a process by which a relationship can be ‘male and female in the image’, as was God’s intention from the beginning.

Our approach is very simple and straightforward. A sound relationship must proceed gradually from friendship to courtship, and must also become bonded and ‘yoked’ in the distinctive Christian mode. For this reason, we have defined five consecutive phases of relational growth as questions to be answered. These five questions have to do with *friendship, romance, courtship, bonding* and *the marriage proposal*.

There are three important things we wish to focus on concerning Christian courtship. We have constructed this volume around these three thoughts. The first is familiar to anyone who has read Christian writings on romance and courtship. The second has been implied in some writings, but is perhaps better clarified here, and the third focuses on our headline – the building of a *house*. We cite these three pillars to give the briefest and clearest possible introduction to the whole manual. These are the three highlights.

1. The exercise of finding, knowing and courting a partner should not be fundamentally prompted and dictated by the ‘chemistry’, or *eros*, i.e. by some kind of ‘spark’ between the two. As other writers have expressed it, the ‘heart’ should not rule the ‘head’. Christian partners should pursue ‘sanctification and honour’, not the secular ‘passion of lust’.¹

2. The Christian couple should understand and ‘bond’ in a culture and mode that is uniquely Christian, *before* marriage. Why? Because once the Lord joins a couple, the basic dynamics in which they join cannot be distorted afterwards except by painful renegotiation, in fact by ‘death’ to the former mode. Whatever is ‘named’ (remembering Adam’s call to name

1. 1Th 4:18

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creation and then name his relationship with his wife) cannot be reversed without a death and a 'new name'.

3. A couple must not only focus on courting and bonding (the two points above), but also on establishing the foundation of a *house*. This is a most important emphasis, one which lifts our view to God's purpose for the future of our homes and also of His house – His dwelling with and in His people.

*'Where is the house that you will build Me?'*² When we read these stirring words from Isaiah, our hearts are filled with a longing desire for the Lord's house. Such prophetic words remind us of the promise of our future destiny, and the present blessing available to us, to every 'house' filled with the life of God.

*'Unless the Lord builds the house, they labour in vain who build it.'*³ God desires the establishment of our 'houses', and also seeks to work with us in their formation.

“For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.⁴ This Scripture brings together our prophetic destiny in the church, and our immediate participation in it within our marriages and families. The marriage and the family are the 'house' that we build for the Lord, and also the 'house' that He seeks to build with us! How is this accomplished? Is there a way in which a man can take a wife in sanctification and honour? Is there a clear process by which a man and woman can understand how to establish their house as part of God's house?

2. Isa 66:1 3. Psa 127:1 4. Eph 5:31-32

Section One

An Overview of Christian Courtship

Introduction

Solomon wrote in his collection of Proverbs that there were a number of things ‘too wonderful’ for him to understand.⁵ The last of these is called ‘the way of a man with a maid’.⁶ The Scripture often uses the theme of a ‘way’ to describe a cultural approach or a course of action taken by men and women as they interact with life. For example, Proverbs 14:12 says, ‘there is a way that seems right to a man ...’. The Scripture also refers to the ‘way of righteousness’, ‘the right way’, ‘the way of Cain’, ‘the way of truth’, a ‘way that leads to life’, and a ‘new and living way’.⁷ The ‘way’ of a ‘man with a maid’ simply describes the manner in which a man and a woman meet, court and marry.

The way in which a courtship is to be conducted is not widely understood as a positive, godly initiative in these days. We shall see however, that the Christian courtship process is a unique relational exercise. Why? It is a unique process because it is conducted through the principles of ‘*sanctification and honour*’. This approach stands in stark contrast to the way of the world that is ‘*passion of lust*’.⁸ The manner in which a courtship is conducted will affect the nature and culture of the marriage that follows. It is our intention with this volume to recommend an approach to Christian courtship and marriage that is practical, relational and able to proceed in a godly manner. To do this, we will first overview the courtship process in five stages: the development of *friendship*, the understanding of *romance*, the processes of *courtship* and *bonding* and finally the proposal to *build a house*, not just a marriage.

In Section Two, we will discuss the roles of parents, civic authorities, celebrants and others in giving care and advice to the courting couple.

5. Pro 30:18-19 KJV 6. Strong’s Hebrew and Greek Dictionary calls this ‘way’ ‘a *course* of life or *mode* of action’. 7. Mat 21:32. Psa 107:7. Jud 1:11. 2Pe 2:2. Mat 7:14. Heb 10:20
8. 1Th 4:1-8

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This section also contains an admonition concerning the type of counsel that will not be productive or helpful to the couple in process. Section Three involves a discussion of cultural bias and the need for couples and parents to address any elements of their family culture that may have a negative impact upon the culture for marriage that the couple are forming. Section Four explains the role of the celebrant in counsel, and the implementation of an appropriate wedding service for the couple. The final section explains the assignment approach and contains questions intended to help the couple to address themselves to the nature of their 'bond', and to facilitate the cognitive processing of the matter of choice and formation of their own unique culture. These questions are designed as an aid for the couple to assess and process their own relationship, and to be able to communicate with each other and with carers on specific content areas.

Courtship overview

We will refer to the five peg-points, or phases, of courtship growth as five propositions, or five questions, to which potential couples must develop answers. The names of these phases will be expressed as questions: the 'Friendship Question', the 'Romance Question' and so on. These questions are descriptive of the principal mode or aim of the courtship process at that given time. For example, the phase called the 'Friendship Question' addresses the reality and development of true Christian friendship. A summary of the five phases is given below. Each of these five phases will vary in length from couple to couple. In fact, the phases will overlap one another, even though there are elements that are exclusive and specific to each phase. Each phase begins with a question, and ends with an answer. These questions must be answered by both the man and the woman. Of course, the questions are only signalling a large

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body of personal and relational content through which each individual must grow.

Five peg-points

The timeline between the early friendship and an engagement can be sketched with five peg-points. (We say ‘engagement’, rather than marriage, because there is really no further ‘process’ after engagement.)

Briefly, a sound *friendship* must be followed by a proper understanding of *romance*. *Courtship* is commenced once there is a commitment to test the relationship toward marriage. Then, ‘*bonding*’ best describes the two being joined by the Lord in one Christian culture, before answering the final ‘*marriage question*’.

For clarity, let us express this five-part development as five simple questions which are asked over time.

1. The Friendship Question: Do we have a genuine *friendship*?
2. The Romance Question: Do we have a godly understanding of love and ‘*romance*’ with respect to marriage?
3. The Courtship Question: As we now test our relationship toward marriage by establishing a *courtship*, do we have a relational basis for marriage?
4. The Bonding Question: Having privately decided to marry, can we now establish a *bond* that is uniquely Christian, i.e. in the power and wisdom of the cross?
5. The Marriage Question: In finally choosing *marriage*, do we believe that God will make provision for us to build a house as His specific will?

The timetable of a courtship

Let us discuss the issues of timetable and overall length of a courtship right at the outset. How long does a courtship need to take? The only wise answer to this question is that a courtship must take as long as it

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needs; i.e. as long as it needs to develop the foundations for a Christian marriage. How long is that? Our only helpful answer is to comment from experience. When courtship is approached as a mature, relational, Christian exercise, and when it holds the goal of '*building a house*' as opposed to '*rushing down the aisle*', the total process toward marriage can require approximately between eighteen months and two years. There are several important things to say on this matter, and these guideposts must be maintained throughout our entire study.

1. It is helpful to observe that the actual length of the 'serious' portion of the courtship program is quite similar in all cases, whether the couples are younger or older.

2. It is the goal of all wise Christian counsellors, to see that a relationship does proceed at the pace that is *real* for that particular relationship, without using other relationships as a guide. No responsible counsellor will ever delay the process unduly, and nor should any influential supporter ever hasten the process by showing undue approval. All interested parties should act without a vested interest in the outcome or in the timing of the outcome. This is sacrosanct. In the end, these two individuals, and only these two individuals, must make the decision as to whether and when they will be married.

3. The variable factors in the length of courtship include the following: the length of friendship before the courtship becomes 'serious'; developmental factors, such as maturity, training and employment; availability of time to invest in the relationship, etc. These factors are sufficiently variable as to make it difficult and unwise to mark out the timetable prematurely.

4. Human nature is such that almost all courtship relationships experience a pressure to proceed too quickly. The associated optimism and haste are the proof of an immature approach to such a serious life issue. In many cases, '*saying all the right words*' begins to work very seriously against any kind of real progress. The advice that needs to be

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written in capital letters is that couples *should set themselves to make the most out of every phase, without hastening to the next*. In plain language, ‘For goodness sake, establish and enjoy a good friendship! You will never pass this way again! Be diligent in the courtship! Take time to develop a sound, Christian foundation! Take time to seek God and walk with Him through this unique time!’

5. Experience teaches us that the forecasting of dates for engagement and marriage *always* has a negative effect on the effective development of the relationship. This is particularly true once the couple become confident that they will marry. Many find it very difficult to give proper attention to the *later* developmental aspects, which are in fact the *most* important. A major emphasis must be stated here, and then repeated at frequent intervals throughout our study. Proper application to *Building a House* (our title) relies on the desire to form a *Christian house*, along specific and *unique* Christian lines. The two may be committed believers, but if at the bottom line, they are merely functioning along social and romantic lines, they will have no desire or ability to give attention to the goals set out here.

6. This means that a couple of Christian friends who are serious about ‘building a house’ should agree *from the very beginning* that they will resist haste and pressure. They should commit to sober patience in the fear of the Lord, and thus allow the Lord to build their house upon the rock – to quote from the well-known Bible story.⁹

7. This element of reverence for Christ, and of complete submission to His lordship, is the very first indication of whether the courtship will be uniquely Christian or not. When romantic goals take over, and the specific authority of Christ, and the specific leading of the Holy Spirit are not clearly evident, it is quite clear that the courtship has ceased to be

9. Mat 7:24ff

fundamentally Christian, and has now become a mixture of religious convenience – self-willed pursuit hidden beneath Christian ‘in-speak’.

Setting a date

A couple of further points need to be made about ‘setting dates’.

1. As we have just implied, courtship is a relational program, not a predictable timetable. The *increments* of progress *cannot* be measured in months, but only in *significant points of growth* in self-knowledge, knowledge of the other, Christian understanding of relationship, and mature apprehension of God’s will. Clearly, the sequence, pace and effectiveness by which these increments of growth will unfold is impossible to predict. Regardless of their excitement and idealism, no couple can surely know what will unfold as they submit to Christ as their Shepherd in this most important life matter.

2. Counsellors do accept the fact that couples *will* begin to discuss times and dates as their relationship matures. It is healthy for these plans to be shared, confidentially, with counsellors. This will avoid the situation where couples and counsellors have two completely different agendas in mind. Commonly, a counsellor is discussing specific content, eg the meaning of ‘bonding’ in Christian culture, while the couple are already fixed upon their engagement date. Such disparity makes their interactions meaningless.

3. This is the only vested interest that counsellors have in the dates. They are only interested to see that the time frame seems agreeable for the achievement of the goals to which the couple is committed. Counsellors also have a duty to see that relationships are not unduly protracted. Couples have a responsibility to be unambiguous toward their counsellors.

4. Beyond the issues of the pressure which dates can exert, and the need for sufficient time to address development, counsellors have no role in approving or disapproving dates. If couples and their families have the

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need to forecast dates for personal reasons, this is a private matter, and outside the counsellors' province. Here is the crucial principle. A secular celebrant has only a social and moral duty to see that marriages are legal and viable. In such cases, marriage preparation might only be minimal. The Christian celebrant approaches the matter with a very different focus, and with a much more substantial program of preparation. A legal celebrant might find no reason to delay a marriage date. A Christian celebrant has every reason to disregard the matter of dates, and to remain focused on relational development before God.

Counsellors, couples and parents

Several implications of the relationship between counsellors, couples and their families, are already suggested by the above points. For practical clarity, let us state a few observations.

As we shall highlight later, by the time the couple commits to a counselling program, the phase of parental development is already past. There is a strong sense in which parents must now support the couple as they move away from parental input toward taking accountability for their own culture, choices and future. Helping adult children understand this 'leaving and cleaving' process should be the primary focus for parents. If the two are held to family loyalty, or if they do not leave their families properly, they will not bond as a new family 'in the image', under Christ's headship. Equally, if the cross of Christ is able to remove enmity, the couple *will* leave home *properly* and also continue in vital Christian, family relationship into the future.

It is common for counsellors to feel that their role is diminished or even invalidated by couples and parents. For example, some couples are so fixed upon declaring their own progress, that counsellors are pressured to merely listen and approve. In other cases, parents who are 'keen to get on with it' start to 'make bookings', and so impose on the all-important development program. Other parents can be so apprehensive

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that they give couples and counsellors no freedom to assess the reality from their own viewpoints.

These comments are brief, but help to show how many factors must be prayerfully understood by all concerned. Finally, the couple themselves must work their way through these factors, and must build their house upon the Rock through repentance and faith, regardless of the quantity or quality of parental and pastoral input. In truth, some couples may receive quite limited assistance due to a shortage of available help, but may still build an excellent foundation. At the same time, others may receive the most conscientious support, but still fail to take genuine accountability before Christ.

Observations regarding timetable

We shall conclude this section on timetable by summarising what has been observed in practical experience.

1. Working from marriage backwards, one thing is certain. A short engagement of between three and five months is to be recommended. A courting couple is well advised to give greater length to the earlier phases, while shortening the engagement to the minimum length necessary.

2. Immediately, this suggestion places pressure on the need to forecast a date from some point earlier than the engagement. Three months is often too short a time for travel and venue preparations to be made. This is a fact of life. In the community at large, it has been thought inappropriate to plan dates and venues until an engagement announcement is made. In turn, this has meant that couples have felt pressure to announce engagements much earlier than they really need to. There are two consequences of this, both of which are unhelpful to the Christian process. Firstly, the vital Christian process, which requires free interaction, is shortened or even stifled entirely. The second point is that

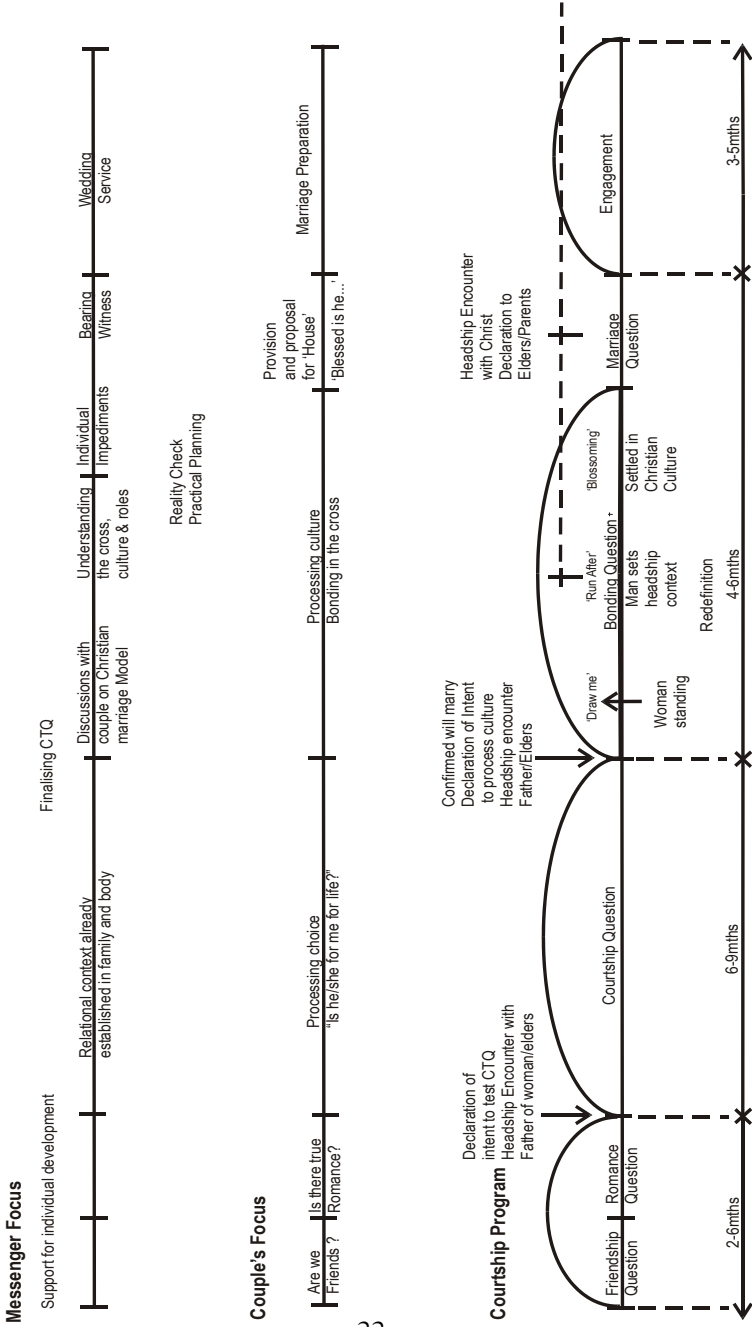
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the long engagement, made necessary by the issue of dates and venues, is counter-productive to the couple.

3. In very broad terms, the period of exclusive friendship, i.e. the ‘friendship question’ combined with the ‘romance question’, can extend anywhere from *two to six* months. A viable courtship phase (the third ‘question’ in our proposal), one which fulfils the goals discussed later, can require from *six to nine* months. The bonding phase, where attention is given to a Christian ‘yoke’ and fundamental culture, overlaps to the ‘marriage question’, and these two combined require between *three* and *six* months. At the beginning we said that engagement should only require *three* to *five* months.

Those intending to court, and good with maths, will have calculated that the shortest combined sum of these timing suggestions is fifteen months – which is certainly too short. At the longest end, the sum is two years and two months – probably too long. Our point is thus made, that because phases overlap, one phase may lengthen, while another may shorten. As we said earlier, every relationship is unique, and the overall right and proper development of a relationship is an unknown pilgrimage. Notwithstanding this, experience shows that a mature program, undertaken by devoted Christian couples, requires between eighteen months and two years from commitment to marriage. Putting the mystery of ‘how long’ behind us, we may now give our attention to the relational program.

Courtship Program



ideal = 20mths - 2yrs

1. The friendship question

There are two friendship phases: a) the broad development of male-female friendship, i.e. with more than one friend, and b) the development of one specific friendship. This process can span two to five months and needs to be understood apart from the question of romance, as we shall discuss. The simple question for this phase is ‘What does genuine friendship mean and do we have a friendship that could last a lifetime?’

Intention to marry

Note first of all that ‘single interest’ friendship leading to courtship is for those of marrying age and maturity. It is counter-productive to individual development and potentially destructive, to engage in romantic friendship unless one is at an age to follow this through to marriage within a two-year period. Christian brothers and sisters will seek to protect and not defraud one another. Hence they are not free in Christ to embark upon serious male-female friendships unless they are of courting age and intending to seek a partner. Christian men and women will demonstrate relational integrity in this whole matter, and will not pursue the fulfilment of self-centred needs.

Learning to be friends

The learning of sanctified friendship as Christian brothers and sisters paves the way for understanding courtship. Sound relating in groups within church life provides a context for developing a wide range of relationships with male, female, younger, and older people. The church environment is rich in relationship opportunities, and provides the setting for men and women to meet, get to know each other, and serve

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together. This context removes some of the need for 'one to one' activities.

The next step for those of courting age is to foster a number of specific friendships with the applicable age group. Once again, healthy relating in the fellowship environment, and constructive group activities, help to facilitate this stage. The step across to 'one to one' relating should still be taken on a broad base, rather than with one exclusive friend. This development from a few good friends to one specific friendship is a challenging one, and has many variables. Certainly, there are situations where the first and only friend that is invited for exclusive 'outings' does follow through to become a marriage partner. However, there are also situations where a couple proceeds in an exclusive relationship too quickly, and where the implied 'courtship' does not continue. Generally speaking, it is sound and advisable for friendships to be broad and for 'one to one' outings to be broad also – reserving exclusive friendship for its right and proper time.

Two comments are helpful here. First, it becomes problematic if young men take no friendship initiatives until they believe they know the 'right one'. A young man is well advised to arrange friendship activities with more than one friend, instead of restricting his interest too early. This contributes to the healthy growth of self-knowledge, allows this same growth in others, and permits an atmosphere of learning how to meet and understand one another. Second, 'one to one' outings should not be numerous and should not show deep 'intent', until a 'single interest' friendship seems timely and appropriate for both.

Some comments on 'one to one' activities would be helpful here.

In the brother-sister area, both young men and women are free to initiate activities that are for the purpose of promoting friendship. However, for this to be genuine, specific romantic interests must be set aside, so that they do not govern activity, and so that they do not complicate brother-sister friendships.

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For those of courting age, there is a further step in the area of ‘one to one’ activities. There is a point where young adults need to be willing to engage in ‘one to one’ activities (of a suitable nature) in the interest of ‘meeting’ one another. In this case, there should be no immediate closure on a single romantic interest, and there should be no expectation that the relationship will proceed to a courtship.

Within this friendship arena, ‘one to one’ relating will only work if it is very casual, based around regular home and church activities. Care needs to be taken that there is no undue expression of interest in the other, and no assumption of the interest of the other toward oneself. Suitable activities in this regard could be family based, or else casual in nature (e.g. brief meal, recreation, attending a sporting event or function). The chosen venue would need an open atmosphere, not supposing a level of disclosure that is inappropriate, i.e. no candlelit dinners.

This is the area that needs care and maturity. Whether in the casual program of interaction, or in ‘one to one’ activities, there is a lot of positive value in learning to meet. If one is unclear and complex in this regard, it highlights the immaturity that is still present. However, the church environment is so rich in relationship that young people can actually get to know three or four others before narrowing the focus to one specific person.

Readiness for marriage

When is a young person ready for courtship? Clearly, when one is aware that he or she is physically, emotionally, relationally and spiritually mature enough for such a challenge. Such maturity is evidenced by the ability to provide for the physical, emotional, relational and spiritual needs of a partner and family. The maturity needed in these areas alone is enough reason to admit that teenagers should not marry.

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When we read the book of Ruth, we can understand the testimony of one woman who came to this maturity. To speak as Ruth did, when she was entreating Naomi, indicates that she had resolved some basic Christian cultural issues. 'For wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die...'.¹⁰ To speak in such a way showed Ruth's maturity. She was ready to give herself to the death. To make such a commitment, she had obviously submitted to a process of godly training. Not long after these words, she was led toward marriage with Boaz.

In our own present situation, given the requirements of both vocational and discipleship training, this kind of readiness is evident somewhere in the 23-30 age bracket. Naturally, there are many variables, including the length of time spent in education, the degree of work experience etc.

Friendship

What is the nature of friendship? C S Lewis, in his book *The Four Loves*¹¹ described friendship as 'the relationship between two people at their highest level of individuality'. This is a useful understanding. Two people share a common insight, interest or taste that leads to companionship. They do not find each other because they are looking for a friend. They become friends because they discover a compatibility of common interests. Their friendship should be free from the self-centred need to be needed, and makes no claim on the other. They share what they have and who they are, without any sense of jealousy toward the other. The relationship is built on a foundation of mutual respect and admiration.

10. Rut 1:16-17

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When such a friendship develops, it can easily (and often very quickly) pass into a romantic friendship with the growing development of attraction. In the non-Christian context, this style of romantic friendship development can become driven by *libido* since it is not protected by sanctification and honour. Unfortunately, the community accepts this behaviour as normal. Christians however, are exhorted to keep themselves sanctified from sin, so as to be untouched by the ‘wicked one’.¹² It is important to Christian development that the unique qualities of Christian friendship are learned – viz. giving, caring, respecting, guarding etc.

As Christians grow in appreciation and affection, they will also learn to bring their ‘members’ (bodies and motivations) into subjection so that they preserve and serve the relationship.

Disciple-friends

Jesus said that true friends were those who did what He commanded. His disciples, those to whom He confided the will of His Father, were His friends.¹³ Indeed, there can be no truer friend than the one who is a firm disciple of Christ. This disciple-friend is set upon denying himself to reveal the other. This kind of friend will not seek his own, and will not interpose an expectation between another disciple and his Master. Discipleship must be the basis of friendship, or else what we think is friendship degenerates to fleshly self-interest and compatibility. Discipleship gives us the basis for being friends, and for testing whether we are genuine friends or not. This is the kind of friendship that forms the basis for Christian courtship and marriage.

11. See Appendix 2 12. 1Jn 5:18-19 13. Joh 15:13-15

Appreciation and affection

Appreciation and affection must become a foundation in the relationship, and the pathway towards the development of mature love. (Lewis also comments extensively on these, and gives ample definition.) Mature identity is displayed by the ability to ‘worth’ or show an appreciation of another person. This ‘worthing’ ability gives us the best measurement of identity and meeting as individuals, and of the potential of the relationship to proceed.

Affection simply indicates and measures our genuine ‘affectedness’ by the other person, and is the foundation to which we add the commitment dimensions of love. We know that there are times when romance as a driving force wanes, and attraction diminishes. ‘Affection’, however, is different. On its own, measured in appreciation, kindness, and carefulness, affection shows itself strong enough to last a lifetime.

The growth of the ability to worth or ‘worship in spirit and truth’ is essential to the whole courtship exercise. The appreciation of the other continues to grow and becomes especially necessary to the ‘bonding phase’. Those who bond must have the two elements of spirit and truth (reality) to be able to worship. This means that they must become ‘one spirit’ and relate in the truth of who they are.¹⁴

As we shall see, sanctification and honour as guiding principles pave the way for clarity in all forms of interpersonal interaction. Sanctification and honour must be exercised right from the very first stages of friendship. Then friendships will be protected from self-seeking, and from premature romantic pressures. The man and woman will thus learn the way of worship, i.e. the way to appreciate one another at a depth that is far beyond romantic feelings. This will allow genuine *agape*

14. Joh 4:24. Mal 2:14-15

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love to develop, a love which lays life down for the other. In this setting, genuine romance will also develop.

Intention to court

Early in a relationship, it is important to be willing to meet without complication. It is particularly important for young women to be prepared to securely meet without having to suppose or avoid romantic interest (i.e. not running away with the idea, or running away from it). This can be a challenging area for those of courting age, and headship guidance is an essential ingredient. What may be suitable for one situation is not suitable for another. Running right through this process, is the theme of sanctification - not just meaning 'holy standards', but meaning separate commitment to the Lord, never imposing on another, either actively or tacitly. We are not free in the Lord to 'claim' each other, and should never behave presumptuously in this regard. Even when friendship, affection, and true romance grow, the ability to be separated to the Lord must underscore the whole process.

A relationship that is proceeding towards an exclusive friendship, and toward questions of romance and courtship, must face the overriding matter of lordship - which also involves family headship. Those committed to Christ as Lord will not deal flippantly with another, and will know that decisions involving friendship commitments must relate to headship as well. The potential impact on the life of another calls for 'up-front' communication, as well as for careful respect of the obligation of a woman to her father's headship under Christ. A young man must be clear, and must know the point at which his own 'faith' should be communicated to a woman's father. She of course will also understand the need to communicate with her own father. In the 'ideal' scenario, they will both communicate freely with parents. Certainly, a young man will 'find his own way' with respect to the friendship question, but is not free to proceed beyond this without communicating with the woman's father.

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Equally, the step to 'court' and to test the relationship cannot be taken without the father's permission. He then embarks, together with the young man, upon a period of testing the matter before the face of Christ – since ultimately it may involve her leaving father and mother to commit to the headship of the young man.

Parental considerations

Comments should be made here about the role of parents. Wise parents will know when the time is appropriate, or inappropriate, for the development of single interest friendship. They will also recognise that while they guide the development of self-knowledge and knowledge of the other, they are not making choices for their sons and daughters. It is in these matters that former culture, mixed culture, unresolved expectations, worldly romantic notions, fears and ambitions can all speak in to what is occurring. Equally, of course, parents must not become neutralised, either by their own sense of inadequacy or failure, or by the confident persistence of their children. At the extremes, the errors of 'courting partners for our children' and 'leaving them to make their own mistakes' are not uncommon. More common however is the kind of subtle discrimination that imposes on young people, or the kind of negligence that assumes the young adults have all the maturity they need.

Friendship difficulties

Consider the following examples of friendship complexities that may be detrimental to the relationship progressing:

1. *Romance dictating*: it is true to say that romantic attraction and preference will occur in any relational grouping, and not many will be completely objective when it comes to the opposite sex. Many young people put themselves under pressure purely because they are still allowing the romantic attraction to dictate whether or not they will respond to offers of friendship. Christian young people should be able to

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take this reality on board and lay romantic attraction aside in an attitude of faith for the Lord's will. In this way, each one can be encouraged to relate widely and not just according to infatuation or attraction, as though these are the measure of reality.

In responding to a friendship invitation, mature adults should realise that a single invitation is not a marriage proposal. They should be free to 'go out' for the purpose of promoting friendship, without being caught up in a confused quasi-courting relationship.

2. *Possessive anxiety*: the primary sign of immaturity is the desire to 'possess' the other as a romantic friend. Once attraction begins, a desire grows to 'win the prize'. This desire is driven by the fear of disappointment, and fuelled by belief in one's ideals. Notably, this kind of possessiveness turns into disinterest once the prize is realised.

The antidote to this kind of romantic mindset is the exercise of sincere Christian faith toward the future. If one truly trusts in the Shepherd of all relationships, then rest and confidence should prevail.

3. *Whether or not to 'go out'*: there are important considerations as to whether a woman should say 'yes' or 'no' to an invitation. For instance, if she knows that the man has an interest in her, her answer instantly has meaning and implications. If she has no interest and after a few outings is still not interested, then she will need to be careful that she is not agreeing to his invitations just because she is flattered or enjoying the romantic adventure. She must understand the lines of sanctification that will protect the relationship. Both parties would do well to remember that 'going out' once or twice does not mean that they are under any obligation to court. There must be a freedom to develop friendship, meet each other in faith, and then seek the will of God concerning marriage.

4. *Family expectation*: in some instances, family expectation can become a problem during the development of a friendship. For instance, where a man visits a woman at her home and is embraced by the family, the friendship can become pressured by the perceived expectation of the

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family. Often the family can assume incorrectly that the friendship is a promise of courtship. Family expectation may increase with every contact, and the couple can feel pressured into a relationship before its time, or one not of their choosing. It would be preferable for the couple to get to know each other in an easy social setting, while still maintaining openness toward the family.

5. *Status ambition*: another problem that can occur in the area of friendship and ‘going out’ is where one chooses a partner based on ministry or service ambition or expectation. The same could be said for lifestyle ambitions. Paul makes a good point about this issue with a few simple verses in 1 Corinthians 7:32-34. He explains that the focus of the single person should be on the house of the Lord, while married partners must expand their focus.

We would agree that service and ministry in the house of the Lord is an exemplary goal for every person. However, courtship is for marriage. Courtship is not a vehicle for one to pursue a ministry or service ideal. If a couple were to marry only because of a ministry or service expectation as a status, then their bond will become tenuous if the expected ministry position is not attained.

Answering the friendship question

If a couple have established a friendship within godly parameters and an interest in each other is realised, it is now time to express further clarity. Where is this relationship going? This clarity is essential, as all relationship is part of the Christian pilgrimage. Do the two have a conviction to proceed forward or do they remain as they are, as good Christian friends? The question that the couple should be able to answer with certainty is, ‘Do we have a genuine friendship, one in which we have properly met one another, and one which can stand the test of time as it continues in Christ?’ The *romance question* now becomes an indicator of whether or not this relationship can move forward.

2. The romance question

Following on from the friendship phase, the question of romance needs to be broached as the second aspect, for several reasons that we shall highlight.

First of all, romance, however we understand it, must not be the first question, as it often is in the minds of modern-day people.

By including this large consideration right here, we deal with something of the mystery surrounding romance and love etc, and thus set a foundation for stable development henceforth.

Raising the question of romance compels us to examine everything that is involved with this question. Of course we must range across a great many questions, some of which have been aroused many years before. What leads a man and woman to be married? Is there a 'special something' that leads couples to marriage? If so, what is it? What is love? What am I feeling? Do I have enough of 'what it takes' to continue on? Why am I still uncertain? Is it valid to be uncertain? What if one intending partner is very much 'in love' and the other is not? What kind of love, what quality of love does one need to have for marriage? How do I know *now*, at this early stage, whether I'm 'in love' or not? Should I be sure? How shall I know if I am sure? How 'dumb-struck' do I need to be? Should Christians rely on the 'Cupid's arrow' style of romance that seems to be common in society? Is there a true, godly 'romance'?

If we are to progress in discussion at all, we must identify, divide, distinguish and develop the aspects of friendship, attraction, affection, romance and 'love' that all impose themselves, rightly or wrongly, upon the developing relationship. The principal 'romance question' is this: Do we understand what constitutes the 'love' upon which marriage is based? To this we might add: do we understand the 'ins and outs' of what is broadly called 'romance'? Is there a special mystique that leads two

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people to be married? What is it that leads us? What is the basis of attraction? Is attraction to be the basis of choice?

Romance

By gathering all these questions together, we draw attention to the fact that couples *must* know what is drawing them together. God does not arrange our decisions, even though He *is* shepherding our lives. Neither is there another god called 'Cupid' who fires an arrow tipped with love-potion. A flurry of affection and infatuation is not enough to lead to marriage. On the other hand, there *is* a love that develops, and which leads a man and woman toward marriage. There is a God-given desire for us to express ourselves in the male-female community of marriage. There is a love that is *unique* to marriage, and the development of this love is what leads us to marriage. We must understand and develop this kind of love. Individuals do not marry *just* because they have a strong brother-sister, Christian love – although in fact, such relationships could be successful marriages. Nor do men and women marry for friendship alone, no matter how strong it is.

When God's purpose is seen as a total picture, leaving aside all the variables of history and culture, it is intended that couples should marry because they *seek*, discover and *commit* to, a unique form of the love of God. All true love is of God, and the varied expressions of this love include the community of a male and female who experience a specific form of 'romance' that is of God. This love-romance is not mysterious, since it must be understood and chosen responsibly. However, what is experienced and chosen does belong to the mystery of predestination, and of the eternal 'knowing and being known', even though marriages are not part of the heavenly order. There is a love that is unique to marriage, since it is clear that we don't share this 'romantic love' with all our Christian friends, whom we nevertheless appreciate and love with deep sacrificial commitment.

Why do people marry?

Let us reason this whole matter through logically for a moment.

Clearly, right from the creation, it was given to mankind as part of his mandate, to be male and female in God's image. In this unique 'image', a man and a woman were to be 'head' and 'helper' respectively. They were to share the capacity of God to love, to offer, to give and receive, to know and be known, to express identity in unity, and to be fruitful.

Across history, cultures, and religions, it has been broadly accepted that the desire to be married is written into the human soul. Men and women do not marry merely because they are obliged to. They desire to be married. The matter that has varied across time and culture is the understanding of this desire. Is it merely 'sexual', as in the animal kingdom? If so, is this legitimate? Is it partly sexual? Is there an appropriate sexual desire that is not immoral lust? If the desire for marriage is *more* than sexual, how it is to be understood?

Across historic, cultural, and social customs, the pathways leading to marriage have fallen roughly into three categories. At one extreme, marriages have been 'arranged'. At the other, marriages have been chosen whimsically based on attraction, desire, or convenience. In between these extremes, marriages have been 'processed' or tested in a variety of ways. The common thread in the last case is that the processes involve some kind of 'meeting', choosing, and commitment to giving.

Specific examples of the three modes mentioned above ('arranged', 'attraction' and 'testing') can be found in history, and in modern-day ethnic groupings. To highlight the diversity, there are social groupings that find 'arranged' marriages unthinkable, just as others find 'attraction' marriages equally abhorrent. We should note that there are many marriages that do not come together because of 'romantic love' in the way that is applauded in the western world. In other words, romance is not necessarily the reason for marriages. Such marriages are not any less valid because of the *morés* that prevail in those instances. Nor are they less

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‘successful’ on a global scale. In all three modes and cases, happiness and unhappiness, justice and injustice, success and failure, cannot be the indices by which marriage is measured.

So what should be the reason for a marriage? Should marriage only take place if there is ‘romance’? As we realise, the weakness of this notion is that ‘romance’ can be difficult to quantify, and if it vanishes, should the marriage be questioned or dissolved? What do the Scriptures say?

Across both Testaments, we conclude that godly marriage does involve some form of ‘testing’. We also discover that proper godly choices and godly process did, and does, produce godly romance. Upon looking for a Biblical expression to sum up the godly approach, the New Testament provides the best terminology. Paul said that ‘each of you should know how to *possess his own vessel in sanctification and honour*, not in *passion of lust*, like the Gentiles who *do not know God*; that no one should take advantage of and *defraud* his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified ... but concerning *brotherly love* you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are *taught by God* to love one another.’¹⁵

The link between this passage and marriage is the expression: ‘possess his own vessel’, which we may apply to possessing, or taking, a partner in marriage – for reasons shown below. A step-wise study of this passage is foundational to our entire study. The following points should be noted.

Taking a partner

The phrase, ‘possessing your own vessel’, has received various interpretations, however the context establishes its reference to taking a partner. How do we know this? The previous verse speaks of refraining from immorality, i.e. involving another individual. If sanctification and

15. 1Th 4:4-9

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honour are to be applied in the matter, rather than the passion of lust, clearly a relationship to *another person* is implied. Adding to our argument, the following verse speaks of defrauding a brother (or sister).

Verse nine of 1 Thessalonians chapter four mentions ‘brotherly love’. Paul said that he has no need to write to them about brotherly love. We conclude from the various points that his earlier discussion on sanctification and honour etc, is about a different expression of love from brotherly love. What love is this? It is the love described as ‘sanctification and honour’, and which must be the alternative to immorality, passion, and lust. This discussion is entirely directed to the godly mode in which we take a partner.

Sanctification and honour

We shall expound this subject in detail later,¹⁶ but a brief comment is appropriate here. If Paul is saying to take a partner in sanctification and honour, then it is the partner and the relationship that are both regarded in this manner. Primarily, sanctification refers to oneself, ‘keeping oneself for God’, while honour has implications toward ‘the other’, we could say, ‘keeping the *other* for God’.

Jesus said, ‘For their sakes I sanctify Myself. This is the best definition of sanctification, and shows its context. If I am acting with sanctification, then I am separating myself, for the sake of the other, just as Jesus said. If I am honouring the other, I am elevating, esteeming, promoting and revealing the other. If we have studied the inherent nature of the zoe-life¹⁷ of the Father, we already understand these qualities of sanctifying oneself, and at the same time revealing the other – all within the seed-like nature of giving that is to the death.

16. See Appendix 1 17. Joh 17:19

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Our task will be to build on this foundation of ‘sanctification and honour’ in order to understand the love that belongs to marriage.

Passion of lust

The ‘passion of lust’ is sharply compared with ‘sanctification and honour’. These two opposing modes are a major focus within our study. Broadly speaking, the worldly, whimsical, ‘Cupid’s arrow’ approach to attraction and romance is the equivalent of ‘passion of lust’, since ‘lust’ is a generic term for all selfish desire.

Defrauding

Taking a broad view of what Paul was saying, it is obvious that the ‘passion of lust’ defrauds ‘the other’, since one steals from the other and takes for oneself. On the contrary, the practice of sanctification and honour does not defraud another, for one does not take for oneself, nor do we take what is not freely given. Paul added that God is the avenger of the one who is defrauded. Thus, he highlighted the sacred truth that God values the whole person, including the sexual being, and regards the defrauder as having stolen what belongs to the holy relationship of each person with his God.

Do not stir love until its time

When the whole person is given in covenant to the other, the expression of sexual love is entirely godly and undefiled. ‘Marriage is honourable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.’¹⁸ However, the expression of sexual love must not be stirred ‘until its time’, to take an expression from Song of Solomon. It is helpful to our discussion to take this expression, and apply it across

18. Heb 13:4

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the whole pathway of friendship and courtship. Just as sexual love must not be stirred until its proper time, so also romantic love must not be stirred until its time.

In the friendship phase, when the first ‘question’ is asked, the couple should not ‘stir [romantic] love’ before its time. In other words, it is not time as yet to raise the question and evoke the stirrings that belong to the expression of romantic love. Taking this thought a step further, as we have said above, the couple must also take care not to stir sexual love before its time. Courtship is not the time to stir and re-stir sexual love in some kind of constant foreplay that overwhelms, confuses, and troubles the development of the relationship.

The step from ‘romance’ to courtship

With this principle in mind, it must be stressed that physical affection in any form whatever, implies an exclusive relationship, and properly accompanies courtship. Symbolically speaking, to ‘take the hand’ in courtship is the commencement of the courtship. Physical affection, without a commitment to courtship, is inconsistent with sanctification and honour. The subject of physical affection is addressed further on in this section.

The step to commence courtship proper, must be a deliberate and calculated one. The man should first approach the father, whether he has done so in previous phases or not, and discuss his intention to test the relationship toward marriage. (Obviously, this approach relates to the woman whose age suggests that she is still under her father’s headship.) In headship terms, it is at this point that the father begins to acknowledge the validity of the man’s mandate to take a wife. Of course, the father does not immediately surrender the headship of his daughter, but begins to navigate this tide of change in a ‘head to head’ relationship and communication with the younger man.

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The endpoint of this journey will see the father yielding the headship dimension to the intending husband. Nevertheless, just as it has been since her childhood, the responsibility for guarding the sexuality of his daughter remains with the father. In this sense, the younger man has no right to commit her to himself in any way, particularly with physical affection, if the father is not in agreement.

While the father will now give consent to the ground of the new relationship that is forming, he is still responsible to guard his daughter and therefore to test the man's headship and to progressively entrust the relationship to the man as he demonstrates integrity. If the younger man should offend or breach this trust at any point, a proper recovery through repentance, remission and restoration must be negotiated. If this entire pathway of 'leaving and cleaving' is not negotiated in a thoroughly Christian manner, through the cross, enmity can build when it should be progressively removed.¹⁹

In the ideal scenario, Christian parents and younger people are able to so function as to remove enmity, and peace is laid as a foundation for their future relationship. We should remember that while the *headship* is surrendered to the younger husband, and the woman leaves father and mother to submit to another, fatherhood and motherhood are still validly offered to the new couple, and may be validly sought and received.

In simple terms, the father and mother will always be the father and mother, and then *grandfather* and *grandmother*. What is important then, is to know how to distinguish between fatherhood and headship, since the latter aspect is given to the new husband. It is also important to know what it actually means to 'leave father and mother' in a Christian context.²⁰

19. Gen 2:24 AV 20. Gen 2:24 AV

The Christian pathway to marriage

Let us examine the Christian view of romance. Do we marry because of romance? Do we marry simply because it is God's will to have children, as some Christians still purport? Do we marry because of 'desire' of some kind? What kind of desire is this? Is it only sexual desire, as in the animal kingdom? Is there a 'special something' that convinces partners to be married? If so, what is it? Is it legitimate, and is it Christian? What is the crucial indicator by which the couple proceeds to courtship?

Ultimate and penultimate mysteries

By the time we marry, we well realise that marriage is only a penultimate reality. What, then, is the *ultimate* reality, of which marriage is a rich but pale reflection? If indeed we only see through a glass 'dimly', what is the full and glorious light toward which we are progressing?²¹ What, then, must we understand about marriage, if it declares to us, teaches us and prepares us for *another* ultimate relational context?

'For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall *know* just as I also am *known*.'²² The final goal is that we might *know* just as we are *known*. There are many useful ways we can interpret this ultimate aim: we shall know *ourselves* as *fully* as we are known. We hope to express ourselves fully, in essential identity. At the same time, we desire to be known in a community where such knowledge exists. We hope to be fully self-conscious, and as equally conscious of others whom we now know only partly. In other words, we long to live in the mystery of *identity* and *relationship*, just as God Himself does, who is absolutely 'three' in terms of identity, while also absolutely 'one' as regards relationship.

21. 1Co 13:12 22. 1Co 13:12

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Identity and community – this is the final mystery, the final statement of man in relation to God. It was to this image that male and female were made heirs. It was written into man's creation mandate that he should experience, as male and female, the image of what God Himself is as a three persons. As we said earlier, male and female were to share the capacity of God to give and receive, to know and be known, to express identity in community and to be fruitful.

True romance belongs to the 'mystery'

It is to this mystery, and in the light of this ultimate reality, that romantic love must be linked and understood. A man and a woman are seeking a mystery. They seek an 'image', a single image, in which male and female as two may be joined as one, each seeking the other, each giving to the other in a mutual discovery of the mystery of identity and community. They desire to know one another and to be known.

Whether we marry or not, we all seek this final mystery of knowing (identity) and being known (in community) – or we may apply the terms the opposite way: knowing (in community) and being known (identity). This mystery will only be fully known in the mystery which transcends all human experience, i.e. in the context of the body of Christ, in complete unity with Christ. We enter this reality here and now in the body of Christ, where our communion with Christ and one another joins us to the ultimate mystery; and we shall know the fullness of this communion as Christ's body in the coming kingdom. Because there is an ultimate mystery, greater than all earthly relational experiences, all men and women live in faith, hope and love, as Paul said, finding 'partial' fulfilment in this life and ultimate identity and community in the kingdom of God.²³

23. 1Co 13:12

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Each marriage is a direct symbol of, and substantial *participation in*, this ultimate reality. That's why Paul could say, 'Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her'.²⁴ We are not told to love with romantic love. For in truth, there is only one kind of 'love', namely that love which is 'of God', which is God and which is 'taught by God' to those who are 'born of God'.²⁵ This love embraces all other forms and expressions of love, the greater possessing the lesser. The love which we call 'romantic love' (using the Greek word *eros*) belongs in marriage. Nevertheless, it draws its essence, either by relationship with God, or by inferior reflection (where men are not God-fearers), *from* the love of God.

We know that this is true, because we read in the Scriptures that God's passionate love for His people, sometimes unrequited but always undiminished, is expressed in the same terms as would apply to romantic love. That God's love includes and encompasses romantic love, is clear in those Scriptures which so evidently describe captivating, romantic love and also sexual love, in such reverent and godly terms (as in Song of Solomon). The further proof of this lies in our own experience, as any man or woman who has ever experienced deep romantic love will testify. Whether God-fearers or not, lovers will attest to the fact that romantic love is godlike in its allure, divine in all its delights, infernal in its desire and evidently eternal in all its suggestions.

The 'demon' of it all, as C S Lewis pointed out, is that, although romantic love is god-like, 'like' is not necessarily 'same'. Just because lovers' love behaves *like* godly love does not mean it is the *same* as the love of God. 'Of all the loves', he wrote, '[Eros] at his height, is the most godlike, therefore the most prone to demand our worship; turning "being

24. Eph 5:25 25. 1Jn 4:7. 1Th 4:9

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in love” into a sort of religion ... the danger is *not* that lovers will idolise each other, but that they will idolise *Eros* himself.’ ‘People in love cannot be dissuaded ... and opposition makes them feel like martyrs.’²⁶

Why do I ‘love’ this particular person?

Against this backdrop, let us now walk through the matter very practically. Why does one ‘love’ a particular person? Is it a helpless, insensible condition that comes upon us, or an ever-growing appreciation that we actively seek? We know that it can be the former, but it should be the latter. Part of our quest is to know how to resist the former and develop the latter. In truth, even some of our junior affections in life may belong, in an immature seed form, to the mature garden of romantic appreciation that will flower later in life. But we must learn how to mature these affections, and guard them from persistent immaturity that can lead to corruption. Learning to distinguish respectful appreciation from habitual, selfish fantasy must be placed high on the agenda of parental training. Feelings of attraction that teenagers experience are *real*, but they are not ‘real love’ in the mature dimension that can support the exercise of courtship and marriage. As we know, infatuation in a young person seeks only to sustain its own *feelings*, without yet having the relational capacity to sustain *the other*.

As Christian parents, we should accept that attractions are normal and that there is a lot for children to learn from the ups and downs of romantic desire. The big mistake is to stand by and allow these early seed experiences to be translated into actual boy-girlfriend relationships that cannot proceed to marriage. Responsible parents will not allow children to experiment dangerously and burn their souls with fiery passions.

26. C S Lewis, 1960, *The Four Loves*, Harper Collins. p102.

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In practice, it is these strong, curious feelings of childhood attraction that tend to dispose us, later in life, toward believing that the idol of romance, the god *eros*, will intervene mysteriously to confirm our romantic destiny. While ever this mindset is nourished by so many books, movies and songs, unmarried young people inadvertently believe that they are waiting for ‘something’. They are waiting for an attraction, and then for a mutual attraction, to arise. To know that this is the ‘right one’, they believe that the feelings must be strong enough to convince them and others, that this is the right choice. It’s not hard to see then, that the basis of such a relationship, if it begins in this manner, relies on the maintenance of these strong feelings, accompanied by a refusal to heed anything that threatens the relationship.

There is a reason why men and women look for, favour, and even *hope* for this kind of romantic injection from Cupid’s arrow. The reason is that one does not have to be responsible to meet the other, to appreciate the other and to responsibly seek the true romance. How does true romance develop if it is not a helpless attraction and involuntary infatuation? Genuine romance arises wherever the *mystery of identity and relationship* is developed by responsible meeting, choosing and giving. But, sometimes, men would rather be ‘smitten’ and women would rather be gorgeously romanced – and they may not even know one another at all. As one old pop song said, ‘Hello I love you, won’t you tell me your name?’

As we know, it is common to see these dynamics of involuntary romance becoming the basis of relationships. If ever a relationship begins in this way, there is then an inherent pressure that it must continue this way. There is a demand that the romance be serviced. The good feelings must be sustained. As another old pop song says, ‘I know that it’s *right* by the way that I feel’. The feeling of *rightness* must be maintained – i.e. that this relationship is right for me! Then the man feels validated and empowered by the woman’s romantic attention, and when she feels empowered by his, a recipe has been mixed for a relationship that is

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entirely based in a self-centred form of romance. This mutual empowerment, where each feels validated by the attention of the other, is the basis of fleshly romance. The Scriptures call this form of relationship ‘snares and nets’.²⁷

Against this somewhat negative background, let us ask the question: Is there meant to be any kind of ‘special thing’ between a particular male and a female? Yes, there is. Is it legitimate; is it Christian? Yes, it is. What is it and how does it happen? Is it senseless? No, it is sought! It is not insensibly fallen into, like ‘falling in love’. Genuine romantic love is sought and chosen, so as to be freely offered and freely received. It is not a captivating snare. Yet, as Song of Solomon noted, our hearts *are* captured.²⁸ But they are captured by the true ecstasy of what is found, chosen, developed, protected and matured by the love of God.

The mystery of choice – choosing the ‘mystery’?

We conclude, then, that it is part of our human experience to discover this quality of romantic love. However, do we choose *one* particular individual and not another? Why do we find the substance of the mystery with one and not another? Can it be found with anyone? Is there only one right choice?

To answer, we must ‘beg the question’ slightly, without avoiding the question or blurring the answer, both of which would undermine our entire proposition. Again, we believe romance doesn’t just ‘happen’ mysteriously; it must be sought and chosen. The choice to marry is not made just once and in an instant. It is made at progressive stages, then tested, then made once again and with increasing accountability. In earlier stages, we know why we choose. We are moving within the

27. Ecc 7:26 28. Son 4:9 AV

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‘general’ will of God to seek a marriage partner and we walk in faith that the Lord will be our Shepherd in the whole matter. By the time we make our final choice, we are doing so believing that this is the ‘specific’ will of God. Once we marry, it is the will of God, no matter how successful we seem to be and no matter what we think about our original motives.

Let us therefore contemplate this matter of ‘choice’. All choice evokes the subject of mystery. Why is this? It is because choice is related to the mystery of our responsible interaction with God in relation to His sovereign will. The mystery is this. His will is predetermined, but our participation in it governs the outcome. Because God is sovereign, the results of our interaction are deemed to belong to God’s sovereignty. From our viewpoint, we choose God. From His viewpoint, He chooses us. The fact is, we merely choose to respond to His choice.

Taking another example, we know that Pharaoh chose to oppose God. However, the event is recorded in different terms: viz. that God ‘hardened’ his heart.²⁹ Equally, of those who are disobedient, it is reported that they were ‘appointed’ to this condition.³⁰ In the most mysterious statement of all, we are told that the ‘vessels’ who ultimately achieve either glory or destruction, were both prepared beforehand for this destiny.³¹ What this means of course is not that God predetermines an outcome which we cannot resist. Rather, we are highly accountable to interact freely across life, in relation to God’s predestination, knowing that whatever outcomes we achieve will be deemed *to be His sovereign will*. This is true of marriage. This creates the ground whereby we are absolutely responsible for the outcome, while God is nevertheless absolutely sovereign as well. This is the mystery in which we are involved in the whole matter of ‘choice’ regarding the will of God, both in small

29. Rom 9:17-19 30. 1Pe 2:8 31. Rom 9:22-23

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details of God's provision, as well as in the weightier matters of marriage partners.

General – specific

The first point, then, is that 'choice' itself involves us in a mystery, the mystery of God's will, in which we interact. Musings on this difficult subject have produced some helpful perspectives, such as the division between the 'general providence' of God; i.e. His providence of legal and medical assistance for our well-being, and the 'specific providence' of God; i.e. His more specific and miraculous provisions for our help. Writers have also distinguished between the 'general' will of God and the 'specific' will of God – meaning that it is the general will of God to marry someone suitable that we know well; it is His specific will that we marry one in particular.

It is precisely because we are involved with this mystery of responsible interaction in the exercise of God's will that our marriage choice is also a 'mystery'. The choice is a mystery because in the end, we simply 'choose'. We do so as part of our responsible commitment to God's mandate, just as we make similar choices for the whole of our lives before marriage, e.g. what schools to attend, where to live, and after marriage, choices of family size, employment, lifestyle.

We choose – what we choose is the 'mystery'

Is the relationship God's will, or is it my choice? We have answered this question by highlighting that choosing itself is part of the mystery of faith – the mystery of interaction. Is my choice of a partner an unexplained mystery? No, the choice itself is not a mystery. But what we *choose* is the *mystery*; we choose the substance of the mystery! And we choose to discover the mystery with this particular individual, because we have begun to experience it.

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What do we mean by mystery? Our desire for each other is not 'illogical', for it is based in sound understanding of marriage and of what constitutes a comparable couple (therefore we don't normally choose someone twenty years older). We mean that the mutual choice is not simply calculable in terms of common interest, compatibility, friendship, common desire to serve God, or any form of 'logical' companionship. We call it a 'mystery' because it belongs to, and takes its form and mystique from, the *ultimate mystery* of identity and relationship. It is not a 'mystery' as to why I chose one and not the other. 'I have chosen 'you' in particular, because there is a mystery which I have sought and discovered *with you* – a mystery which we have both chosen.

It is true to say, and it is proven in 'arranged' marriages by couples who have chosen Christian commitment, that the *mystery can be discovered by any two people who choose one another* and who choose to pursue the mystery of identity in community. It is God's will however, that we should meet one another, test and finally choose the one with whom the mystery will be sought. To clarify the central proposition here, it is essential to make this point: two people who responsibly choose one another can discover the mystery and experience the heights of romantic love.

How does it happen?

Let us simplify the main argument here. Partners choose one another for courtship because they begin to experience, even at this early stage, some elements of the mystery. They experience the joy of knowing and being known, of offering themselves to the other to be known and of joyfully receiving the offering of the other.

What happens is this. As friendship proceeds with appreciation of the other as its base, one begins to be impressed by the mystery of the other person. He/she bears an 'alien dignity' with eternal proportions, which begins to arouse intrigue and affection. Choices to pursue this

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affectation are being consciously made by both parties, and hopefully the choices are still governed by self-giving and not immature infatuation. This explains why one in a 'romance' may desire to proceed further, even to courtship and possible marriage, while the other may not.

Having begun with appreciation, the friends begin to experience affection and even elation upon discovering a small element of the mystery of mutual knowing. A foretaste of the ultimate romance, i.e. the romance of becoming one, has been discovered.

Elements that comprise romance

The best way to describe the matter is to say that the emerging romance has several elements, all of which are present and need to be present for romance to be genuine.

1. Certainly, there is elation upon discovering the mystery of the other.

2. At the same time, part of the elation, part of the romance, is the romance of knowing and becoming myself. This needs careful understanding, since romance must not be *only* self-discovery. Being made to feel good and empowered by a relationship can lead to an entirely false sense of romance. Undeniably though, the romance of knowing and being known means that one is also finding oneself in male-female community and yearning to do so.

3. The element of mutual choice, the choice to engage and be affected by the relationship, is a further component in the equation. This explains why a relationship answering the 'romance question' can be very 'up and down', and very sensitively poised. The smallest hints of eye and body language are being studied for evidence of commitment.

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4. Very essential and central to this phase is the matter of potential comparability – i.e. as husband and wife, head and helper.³² We know that observations about comparability are being made from some time before and certainly during the friendship phase. However, it is true to say that the mystery of knowing one another and the joyous sense of comparability go hand in hand, within the romance question. The effect upon me of the mystery of the other, the elation of mutual knowing, the sense of mutual choice, and now the anticipation of comparability, all begin to build upon one another.

5. Now romance itself becomes defined by the relationship chosen. This relationship is like no other. The two will feel that while romance is a common experience, with generic qualities, this relationship is unique. This relationship will not only survive; they believe that it is heaven-sent. It is here that romantic partners will mostly believe that what has been conceived is almost full-blown. The end is believed to be contained in the beginning. The elation can be so powerful and the sense of affection so convincing, that the two believe they will surely marry. In truth, many have, and still do, become engaged at this point. This is romantic love. This is the discovery of a compulsion to touch the eternity of mystery, and the mystery of eternity.

However! This is just the beginning. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that this romance is genuine, and that it may lead to marriage – while at the same time stressing that this foretaste may *not* lead to marriage and is certainly not the foundation for a successful marriage.

With these thoughts in mind, it's important to look ahead and ask: What is the nature of mature romance? Do these early rewards bear any resemblance to the ultimate inheritance? Yes, they do. In this life and in

32. Gen 2:18 AV speaks of a helper who is 'meet', i.e. 'comparable'.

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the life to come, the ultimate romance is best explained as ‘the ecstasy of offering’, ‘the joy of giving and receiving’. There is no more sublime joy in heaven or earth than to find that the other is unknowable, while at the same time, he/she deems the other to be worthy of such worth-ship, as to freely make himself/herself known. Each is only known because they *make* themselves known. The joyous fellowship of knowing and being known causes the joy of giving to join forces with the joy of receiving in one endless circle of blessing.

Answering the ‘romance question’

A couple proceeds to answer the ‘romance question’ and then proceeds to courtship, for one reason. They proceed because they have sought ‘the other’, because they have met the other and because they are convinced that they have begun to discover the godly mystery of marriage, which itself belongs to the ultimate mystery. In short, they sense the firstfruits of a true romance that will last for the whole of life, a life-long worship punctuated with high points of inexpressible joy, as well with challenging moments of self denial.

It is entirely godly that a couple will feel consumed with one another. For Christians, they will feel an assurance that their preoccupation with one another is from God. For non-believers, they simply believe it is ‘right’. In both cases, the conviction is valid in itself. In both cases, it must be tested. The strength of the former case is that ‘the Lord is [our] Shepherd’.³³ The limitation of the latter case is that *eros* becomes vulnerable, as Lewis aptly pointed out. ‘The grim joke is that this Eros, whose voice *seems to speak from the eternal realm*, is not himself necessarily

33. Psa 23:1

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even permanent. He is the most moral of loves, yet the world rings with complaints of his *fickleness*.³⁴

What we must consider is this. While this strong unfulfilled yearning love becomes the reason for marriage, this romantic love, on its own, is not enough to sustain marriage. 'Eros is driven to promise what Eros of himself cannot perform.'³⁵ It is here that the Christian believer may, if he/she understands and chooses, grow in the capacity of the love of God, the capacity of self-sacrifice, the power to lay down his/her life, which will sustain all human affections at their best level.

Quite obviously, there are non-believers whose courageous love makes others aware of love's god-like quality. This does not of course vindicate their indifference toward God. Equally, there are those who are sincere believers whose love and marriages have failed and whose faith has been ridiculed. On the surface, we could think that the gospel would prosper if love failed in non-believers and prospered amidst the faithful. Gloriously however, all these cases support our principal thesis. *We* are responsible to love. Nothing can make it happen, and no one can do it for us. Love is of God and if we are born of God, we demonstrate it by loving, not in word but in deed. It is our mandate to seek love and to express love. True love is not senseless and helpless. It is not involuntary affectation, responsive feeling. True love is self-giving. Therefore, it is only sustainable through the power of God by which we can deny the fanatical desire for our own justification and lay down our lives for one another. It is in this regard, that we can recommend the Christian gospel, which is the 'power of God unto salvation'.³⁶

34. op cit p103 35. ibid 36. Rom 1:16

Friendship question before romance question

Now we should look back across our study and remind ourselves why it is essential to ask the ‘friendship question’ before the ‘romance question’. As we have emphasised, a couple must not think that romance will arise before they have met one another in friendship and appreciation. To pursue attraction, affection, or even seduction (in the sense of being ‘carried away’), is to vacate and abrogate the responsible attitude with which the entire process must be undertaken. Rather, the couple must choose to meet as people, learn to appreciate one another and seek the romance that belongs to the mystery. Then they must either choose one another if a conviction arises, or proceed no further, having found no confirmation that the romance belonging to marriage has begun.

Physical affection

It is extremely important to examine the matter of physical affection, both before and within marriage. Returning to our theme and key passage on sanctification and honour, we know that there is a line of sanctification which is guarded by the Holy Spirit. ‘For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness. Therefore he who rejects this does not reject *man*, but *God*, who has also given us His *Holy Spirit*.³⁷ The stated truth of this verse is that the Holy Spirit ‘walks the line’ of sanctification, because the Holy Spirit has been given to each one of us. Speaking of marriage first of all, we know that in every respect, the sexual being and all sexual expression of the man and woman belongs within marriage, for

37. 1Th 4:7-8

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marriage is a covenant in which the whole person is given to the other. Indeed, Paul taught that once the person is given to another, a person deprives and defrauds his/her partner if he/she *withholds* sexual expression from the other.³⁸ We can certainly add of course, that sanctification and honour continue as the mode in which the partner is 'possessed'. 'Passion of lust' is excluded and indeed godly sexual expression within marriage excludes the taking of what is not given, as well as the lustful gratification of oneself in any way that is undignifying to the other.

This point provides the basis for understanding physical affection *prior* to marriage. Making the broad statement first: if sexual expression, in every form, belongs exclusively to marriage, then affectionate expression before marriage may not be 'sexual' in nature. With this in mind, courting adults should be able to identify, discuss, agree upon and avoid, all forms of expression which are sexual in nature.

Equally, there are levels, modes and actions of friendship and affection that *are* commensurate with the committed nature of the relationship. The hallmark of these is that they are not driven by sexual desire, but rather by respect for the sacred nature of sexual expression. Even affectionate actions that can quickly *become* sexually stimulating, are kept superficial or avoided altogether. The hallmark of mature respect for one another is the freedom to debar these actions by frank communication. Free and appropriate affection is adequately expressed by taking the hand of the partner, by affectionate embrace and by the kiss of friendship that marks personal relationship, but not intimate sexual stimulation. Let us define clearly the expressions that are of a sexual nature. We are all familiar with the way in which modern advertising tantalises the eyes and the physical desire by using sexual suggestions and partial nudity

38. 1Co 6:8. The Greek words in 1Co 6:8 KJV (deprive, defraud) and 1Th 4:6 (defraud) are not the same; however, the same sense is carried in both.

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etc. The principle employed is that the hint and the partial revelation are more arousing than a full exposure would be, because they hint at the mystery of sexual communication and exploit what is unseen. In this regard, Christian partners who express affection must recognise that hints and *superficial intrusions upon the privacy* of the other, by sight or touch, promote sexual arousal.

Genuine Christian friends should have learned well before courtship, how to monitor their own expression so that it is never of a sexual nature. They also know how to guard against taking what is not given. They do not intrude upon another in a sexual manner, particularly with the eyes. If they have learned this, they will know that their expressions of sight and touch must never intrude past the 'clothes-line'. Whatever is covered most *certainly belongs to the sexuality* of the person. That's why it is covered in the first place. Whatever is *sensitive* in the human body, can also be stimulated in a *sensual* way by the touch of another person. Hence, stroking bare skin, even for the purpose of health massage, tantalising nerve endings and various ways of creating physical pleasure, can almost immediately become sexually stimulating, either for the recipient or the initiator. Respectful men and women, who respect one another, the Holy Spirit and marriage itself, will set themselves to avoid these and will agree together not to encroach upon one another in this regard. They do so because all these elements belong to the mystery of sexual expression which may only be experienced in the context of covenant love. In the words used by Solomon, they 'do not stir up nor awaken love until it pleases', i.e. until the proper time.³⁹

39. Son 2:7

Beware of confused teaching

Before we conclude on this subject, we must take time to warn our readers that teaching on this subject in Christian circles is very diverse and in some cases has degenerated to alarmingly permissive proportions. There are publications and groupings where casual, sexual experimentation has been upgraded from its immoral status. At times, Christians have been misled on these matters, believing that ‘fornication’ and ‘adultery’ only refer to full-blown sexual intercourse. Of course, such frightening ignorance and intentional permissiveness are producing a most regrettable legacy of divorce and remarriage in Christian circles.

Conclusion

We conclude, then, that it is within the compass of the love of God to discover romantic love in the male-female community. The desire to express ourselves in the specific mystery of the male-female community is what propels us toward marriage. Ideally, then, a partner must be ‘met’, romantic love must be understood and sought and the relationship must be chosen. In an arranged marriage, partners can still choose one another and discover the mystery – which proves the validity of our proposition. However, with the contract already made, the freedom of choice to do so may not be mutual. In a whimsical, attraction marriage, the superficial appearance of a romantic mystery will give way quickly to disillusionment, self-doubt and self-centred expectations. The relationship *can* be renegotiated, but once again with the contract already made, a good result is only fifty percent likely.

Romantic love can only be properly discovered if the love of God is first learned. Romantic love is not *another* love and should not be pitted over against the love of God. Within the vast province and providence of the love of God, those who seek it are able to develop any or all of its holy dimensions. They are capable of developing godly romantic love and as

well, they are capable of directing it or refusing it. In fact, sanctification and honour make it possible to express that specific form of friendship, affection, appreciation, or romance that properly belongs to the other, in each specific circumstance.

Love starts and finishes with the capacity to acknowledge, respect and reveal the other. Love is entirely ‘other’ directed within the mystery of identity and community. In the specific case where man and woman desire marriage, they engage in a specific and unique facet of mystery, the mystery of identity and community, of knowing and being known, of giving and receiving, of appreciating and being appreciated.

3. The courtship question

‘Courtship’ is not a biblical word. However, we use it here to link with the idea of *testing* a relationship toward marriage. The Scriptures record and commend the practice of testing a relationship in a godly manner. Christians functioning in sanctification and honour do not ‘court’ someone merely for romantic fun, without the intention to marry. They will only court if there is a sincere belief that this friend could indeed become a marriage partner. As we said earlier, there is no place for physical affection prior to sincere courtship. Even the action of ‘taking by the hand’ has the connotation that the couple are presenting the relationship before the Lord to be developed and tested toward marriage. Without the context of this legitimate ‘testing’ exercise, physical affection is inappropriate.

Courtship, therefore, cannot be embarked upon lightly, as might be the case in the community at large. A couple enter this phase only when they believe they already *have* something which must now be *tested*. The key word for the courtship phase is ‘testing’, while in the later bonding phase, the emphasis is on ‘forming’.

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A couple passes into this phase when there is a clear decision and commitment to court. This phase of relationship focuses on testing the relationship to see whether the foundation exists for a vital companionship in Christ and a viable marriage. Of course, the whole of this five-question process could be called a ‘courtship’, but this particular phase and question has to do with whether or not the foundation exists in their relationship for a viable marriage.

At this time, the couple should be ‘up front’ in their own communication. The man needs to take a lead in indicating his intention to meet her, to know her and to be known by her, so that the nature of their relationship can be tested. He will also need to give a clear indication to those who are of interested accountability; i.e. his and her parents and the elders who have been watching over them as individuals. The point of their help and input has nothing to do with approval or disapproval concerning the choice or the suitability of the match, but to encourage the couple towards the testing process and to help them to know how to proceed. Remember that it is entirely godly to seek a partner in sanctification and honour, so the whole process is legitimate and dignified. In fact, there is an *obligation* upon every young person to seek a partner in the *right* way, so that partnerships do not develop in the wrong way of ‘snares and nets’.⁴⁰ The right way is ‘through the front door’.

As soon as there is an intention to court, the dynamics of a relationship must run down headship and accountability lines. The young man, in submission to Christ, needs to exercise ‘headship’ *accountability* (even though he doesn’t have full-blown ‘headship’). He needs to be ‘up front’ in making known his intention to ‘meet’ (to know and be known), so that the nature of their friendship may be tested. His parents and elders will be involved in

40. Ecc 7:26

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this, but will not necessarily ‘rubber stamp’ his intentions, since he must carry his own accountability. Nor can they speak for the young woman or her parents. The young woman needs to regard the invitation in a sanctified manner (i.e. she will adopt a ‘separated’ attitude), not simply agreeing because he has asked, nor exerting romantic pressure. Her acceptance or permission from parents does not mean she is agreeing to a future and nor does her non-acceptance mean that she is refusing it. ‘Sanctification’ means that each remains accountable before the Lord. ‘Honour’ means that each remains honouring toward the other, without exerting romantic pressure or dishonouring the other by inadequate respect.

If both will maintain this level of accountability and avoid aimless romance, the ‘snares and nets’ error will be avoided. The man’s ability to know his own faith-initiative and the woman’s responding in accountability and freedom are good indications of their maturity and their ability to meet and proceed.

In the courtship phase, then, the couple are considering, in simple terms, whether they have a ‘proposition’ or not, whether the foundations exist for a vital companionship in Christ and a viable marriage. The check points of this proposition phase include:

Identity foundations and maturity; common Christian commitment and goals; relational capacity and integrity; capacity for givenness, respect and appreciation; and understandings of affection, friendship, *eros*, *agape* and true romance (i.e. the worth-ship and appreciation of the ‘other’).

A couple will proceed to test the ‘courtship question’ only if each has freely chosen the relationship and if each is prepared in age and maturity to follow through to marriage within eighteen months to a little over two years. In very practical terms, if there are reasons why it is not timely to embark upon the process toward marriage, then steps may need to be taken to put the relationship on hold.

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When this courtship phase is embarked upon with proper accountability, *it is a valid Christian exercise* whatever the result, since it fulfils the godly call to ‘find’ a partner, as distinct from the ‘snares’ of aimless romantic idealism (Cupid’s arrow). A couple who walk through this process in sanctification and honour and who do *not* proceed further, will learn invaluable lessons within their overall relational development.

The hallmarks of this phase are that the couple are testing one another, they are testing the proposition and they are learning about themselves in relational terms. That is to say, their future together is still fundamentally undecided. However, once this phase leads to one or more proposals of marriage and once this proposal (or ‘proposition’) appears to be mutual, the couple is beginning to ‘bond’ or to be ‘joined’. In this sense, they should commence a process that leads to God’s joining of them in an unbreakable covenant of marriage.

We would recommend that each couple should begin to keep a journal of the history of their whole courtship process as a record of their relational growth and interaction. This should be done individually to preserve the differences of perspective on any given point. Some of this information will prove useful to help the understanding of the celebrant-counsellor on the matter of their courtship process and development.

A new understanding of faith can now be born in each couple as they address themselves to this growing time, but what sort of faith does one need to enter into this process?

As we have said, the courtship question stage begins when there is a mutual decision to court, i.e. to embark upon an exclusive relationship with a view to testing it toward marriage. The courtship question can be simply described as falling roughly into three phases of relational growth and development – early, middle and final. These three phases together will extend for approximately six to nine months. The primary question for this period could be summarised as: do we have a sound Christian relationship and a viable ‘proposition’ for marriage? Is he/she the one for

me for life? This question, answered, signals the beginning of the bonding phase.⁴¹

Early phase of courtship

The beginning of the courtship question phase is often quite tentative and cautious. This is because both of the individuals want the relationship to work, for it to be perfect and to make no mistakes. They are also cautious because neither one is actually certain yet about the answer to the question: is he/she for me for life? As the couple give themselves to meet each other, they will be able to answer the question with certainty.

At this time, the pastoral carer may introduce the couple to the central content to be addressed during the time of the courtship question.⁴² Later this will involve some assignment work for the sake of checking and reporting with the counsellor.⁴³

Middle phase

During the middle phase, the couple find better definition and understanding in the area of their comparability as a couple. They feel confirmed in the integrity of their own initiative towards the relationship and also in the integrity of their partner. A sense of well-being develops in the relationship and they are now comfortable to be seen as a couple.

The discovery of more and more compatibility leads to happy interactions, where they are often very surprised that they do not jar or grate on each other. Often they can be pleasantly surprised because they never ever thought this person would be suitable. Appreciation and affection are growing and deepening.

41. See p 74 42. See section, 'Finalising the courtship question', p 66 43. Section Five, 'Courtship Assignments'

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Now, in the knowing of oneself, and then the other, many preconceptions are being readjusted as the true person is being revealed for the first time. The almost constant, joyful surprise of knowing the other confirms to them that they must be in love. The ‘question’ is now beginning to be answered!

The relationship then blossoms. The couple talk about all the things they have in common and things for and against the relationship. Together they believe they are totally compatible. It is at this point of committed development that the courtship content and questions numbered one to eight should be discussed.⁴⁴

Developmental issues

There are many key developmental issues faced during this formative phase. We have listed some of these below:

1. *Romance vs Reality*: where romantic preconceptions do not accord with reality, any number of preconceptions may exist. For example, one might think that marriage will be all nice and sweet, where romantic notions – hearts and flowers, trees in bloom, green grass, and the like – will be the norm. Compare this sentiment with the reality and there is room for disappointment. Those checking should ask: Are the two real about life or are they ‘tailoring reality’ to suit their own fantasy? It is helpful to note that there will always be a cost when one begins trying to conform reality to a fantasy. For example, ‘tailoring reality’ may lead to all kinds of lifestyle assumptions that are unaffordable. These can be discussed simply by examining what will be needed in marriage to keep those assumptions alive. Will it cost them a fortune to keep up the dream? Does bankcard do it for them? The practical things in life (e.g. finance, career) are often a good indication of reality.

44. See p 67

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2. *Male/Female Perspectives*: there are differences in the way that men and women see and respond to life's many variables. Some discussion with the couple regarding these differences is useful both to help individuals to broaden their own perspective and also to develop understanding of the opposite sex. An important observation to make is that, if, in the course of growing up, a young man comes from an all male family, he will not have developed much of an idea concerning how a woman thinks. The same would be so of a woman from an all female household. It is important to examine the differences as a foundation for understanding and communication.

The aim is for the couple to be able to discuss the differences they perceive in each other as a point of positive communication. Some help might be given in the form of suggestions around such themes as:

- emotional vulnerability (woman) and emotional consistency (man).
- different responses to the same emotions, in both oneself and the other.
- nurturing and care taking and apparent detachment.
- subjective relational definition, i.e. 'fairness for all concerned' and objective action/consequence.⁴⁵

3. *Cultural Differences*: it comes as a surprise to many that other families have cultures, styles, expressions, mannerisms and responses different from their own – yet all within the one sanctified, Christian culture (or at least they should be). Of course, Christian families are still in the process of identifying and putting off fallen cultural modes, and this adds to the challenge facing the new couple. This is an exciting time as each gains a more complete understanding of the other. A better understanding of why things are done a certain way, and what is 'normal' as a family operation that might not be the same as their own culture, can be gained.

45. L M Hall, August 1990, 'Understanding the Nature of Women', BCF notes

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These differences are appreciated and examined with the intent that this couple, as they begin to come together, are laying the foundation for their own family culture. Vain traditions can be put off and godly ones kept, while the shape of their own culture is blended and formed as they move towards the bonding phase.

4. *Personalities Appreciated*: as the cultural discussion takes place, more will be revealed concerning the personality of each of the individuals. Each one can begin to understand himself better through the relational interactions, as well as gaining a greater appreciation of the other. Aspects of a person's thought processes and personality type can be discussed. It may be true that some of these indicators point towards the compatibility of two individuals, but the ability to recognise the limitations of one's own personality traits and see them change is a better indicator of one's personal maturity and readiness for marriage. A couple may need some help and instruction to get started on this exercise, but input here is really just to check the reality of how they see themselves as individuals and how they then can meet as a couple.

Involvement of others

During this phase of relationship, the couple are processing the issue of their own personal choice concerning the other. Is he/she for me for life? While friends and family have interested opinions, it is the individuals themselves who must exercise their choice accountably before God. It is not yet time for 'counsel' as a couple, since the two are still discovering, testing and choosing. Pastoral support will mostly take the form of input to their growth as individuals, to ensure that both are engaged appropriately in the process.

As the courtship testing draws to a conclusion, pastoral input does need to be formalised. Assignment work should be given (see below), and the couple's written responses will help facilitate the involvement of pastoral leaders. Wherever possible, it is useful for two or three caring

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couples to be involved with the late-courtship process. This enables a broad range of insight and experience, and offers help that is both personal and systematic.

A celebrant-counsellor will be asked to take the role of primary counsellor (and may indeed be the wedding celebrant later). His role will be to help the couple to assess the reality of their own relational development. He will also communicate with other carers regarding the couple's courtship program. This will involve at least two other carers in the discussion and broaden the approach to care beyond the experience of any one counsellor. These other carers will be asked to address specific blocks of content with the couple to aid their relational growth and understanding.

One of the counsellors will manage the overall progress of the courtship content and preparation for marriage. This will include specific relational content, planning and preparation for the wedding and married life. Another counsellor will be asked to help by being a contact for specific relational support. He can be a 'sounding board' during times of crisis, reflect on personal and interpersonal development, and give helpful instruction concerning specific content blocks to do with preparation for marriage.

Finalising the courtship question

Once the courtship becomes consolidated (usually after six to eight months), the couple should give attention to various assignments which will help their cognitive processing of the questions of courtship and bonding. The most significant assignment is to make a written response to the following set of content blocks and questions which are intended to summarise the whole process of the courtship and lead the couple through into the bonding content and process. They should complete the assignment individually as though addressed to the other and then work through it again together in order to communicate the content to the

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celebrant-counsellor. With this in hand, he can provide the couple with some helpful discussion regarding their own cultural development and commit them to the way forward for their bonding process.

As to the content, we will list the blocks below. We will look at these blocks in more detail in Section Five. The content blocks and questions could be expressed as follows:

1. Christian Foundations for Relationship

a) Is the essential relational mode of this couple one of givenness? How is this givenness displayed?

b) Is there a foundation of Christian communication operative, free from self-centred manipulation, control etc? Are the individuals free to give and receive as individuals of worth? Describe how this works in your relationship with examples.

c) Is there a genuine friendship continuing as part of the foundation of this relationship? What are the hallmarks of this friendship?

d) What is the unique nature of male/female friendship?

e) Can you see in the other what your compatibilities might be?

f) Is there anything in your partner that you would seek to change as the relationship progresses?

2. Sanctification and Honour

a) Is the relationship proceeding via the auspices of sanctification and honour? Describe how you see the operation of sanctification and honour working in your relationship?

b) Are the two being sanctified to their unique identity and role as head and helper in this relationship? In other words, are you coming to sanctification? Where do you see evidence of this happening?

c) Do you understand *libido* and the need to distinguish between affection and sexual expression? How do you do this?

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3. Romance

Explain your understanding of the development of true romance, and describe how it involves the elements of friendship, affection, *eros* and *agape*?

4. Maturity

a) Does each individual display an understanding of his own personality and that of the other?

b) Describe your partner's temperament. What does this mean for conflict recovery when you compare them with your own temperament?

c) Is male/female perspective finding expression, balance and integration?

5. Fundamental Identity and Worship

a) Is there respect, honour and trust visible? Define how these relational initiatives operate in your relationship.

b) Is there a need to unmask any areas of unreality, seduction and control in this relationship? If so, describe how, if not, describe why.

c) Are you both comfortable with each other publicly? Is there an understanding of why discomfort occurs?

6. Escapism

a) Is there any escape of relational process through hedonism, romance, other ambitions, fantasy (e.g. 'going out' too much or even physical compensation)?

b) Are you relationally diligent? How do you know this?

c) Are you coming to relational rest? What does this mean to you?

7. Understanding Relational Order

1 John 2:1-6 explains that we come to know love through being rightly related to authority. This is true of our relationship with God, and also in

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our families. As this courtship matures, it will eventually become necessary for the relationship to begin to reorder towards the headship/helper mode. A good understanding of authority, obedience and love is needed in order to achieve this reordering successfully. Often this may mean renegotiating the understanding that we have imbibed from our family background and previous experience. With this in view, use the questions given to reflect on your understanding of relational order. What is your understanding of authority and love? Can love be known apart from authority? Is authority just a principled position, or is it personified? Is sin therefore against a person or a principle? The content surrounding these questions is developed in Section Five.

8. Understanding ‘Us’

Have you truly met one another? How much do you know about one another? As you look at yourselves, what are the indicators that the relationship can proceed to bonding and move towards marriage?

The completion of this assignment by discussion as a couple should move the relationship into the bonding phase.

Faith to proceed

The 23rd Psalm and Song of Solomon are descriptive as an overview of the whole of a courting and married relationship. ‘*The Lord is my Shepherd*’ is indicative of the desire in a man or woman to seek fatherhood, and to be shepherded as a couple towards marriage. It is also descriptive of the faith of an individual concerning the Lord’s will towards marriage. When seeking the will of the Lord regarding a specific partner, we note that the matter of choice belongs to the individual. The Lord Himself does not impose on the matter of this choice with a word approving the potential union, and neither should anyone else. A young man finds the will of the Lord through the development of the relationship, as both are being fitted and framed together in one flesh and spirit. As this occurs, the man

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and woman will grow in the capacities that will enable them to live together as head and helper in a joint predestination within the will of God.

When the man is seeking the will of the Lord concerning this relationship, he must have in mind the nature of the 'helper comparable'⁴⁶ who is specifically for him. The Lord leaves the decision of who to marry up to the individuals concerned. Love is a giving choice, which He leaves to us. The decision of a man to proceed with a relationship needs to take into account his understanding of the Lord's will concerning the helper that is 'meet' (suitable) for him. A man knows he has found the will of God when he can say, like Adam, 'Yes, this is the helper for me!' Then a process is required in which each progressively leaves the community of 'father and mother' to be redefined as head and helper in an entirely new corporate context.

Genesis chapter two uses the term 'helper comparable' to describe the nature of the relationship of a specific woman to a specific man. If we tease the words apart, the meaning is simple. She was to be a 'helper' *towards* him. If we link this to what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 11:8-12, that the woman was created *for* man, and that man was to be *through* the woman, we conclude that a 'helper' is a glorious expression of, from, and for the man. This is reflected in that she was taken out *of* man at her creation and should therefore be 'bone *of* his bones'; and she came *from* the man to be a helper comparable *for* him.

A woman is to 'help' the man in the facilitation of their life together. When we read Proverbs chapter 31, we can see the marvellous picture of the woman (helper) of the house. She is central to the facilitation of the life of the house. So essential is she that it appears as if all aspects of life

46. Gen 2:18

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are ‘through’ her. However, she is not just a helper in the practical areas of life; she is a helper as a complete and unique mode of being.

For his part, the man is to be the expression of headship *towards* her. This means that he is to be the expression of the face (authority and grace) of Christ towards his wife and family, overseeing and watching over them, looking to Christ his Head for sight, direction and wisdom to fulfil this accountability.

This ability to be head or helper for the other is part of the question needing to be answered during courtship and bonding. Is she able to be helper to him? Is he able to be head towards her? A courtship and marriage is to be the meeting of two identities, known and defined in relation to the Lord and each other.

Redefinition – ‘for the other’

The need for redefinition comes at the changeover point between the courtship and bonding phases. In the courtship phase, the two are essentially parallel and equal in nature. Why is this? The two are essentially parallel because each individual is actually proving his or her own ‘question’ at this time. They do not begin to process the relationship as a couple properly until this courtship question is answered. Often, the resolution of this question occurs as a crisis point in the relationship, for the relationship cannot proceed until this answer is found.

The man and the woman must both decide as accountable individuals whether or not to pursue the relationship. If the relationship is to be successful, the couple must grow beyond the self-centred question to become other-centred. Much of this redefinition happens during the latter part of the bonding phase. This happens as each person is given to the process of choice and growth in a range of areas, including their cultural ‘way’, or mode of communication, respect and honour, relational diligence, relational order.

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The commitment to bond

The bonding commitment calls for a re-focus of each individual's personal and relational position towards being other-centred. Paul, in 1 Corinthians chapter seven, makes this clear. 'But I want you to be without care. He who is unmarried cares for the things of the Lord – how he may please the Lord. But he who is married cares about the things of the world – how he may please *his* wife. There is a difference between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman cares about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit. But she who is married cares about the things of the world – how she may please *her* husband. And this I say for your own profit, not that I may put a leash on you, but for what is proper, and that you may serve the Lord without distraction.'⁴⁷ What is he saying? It is simply that the one to be married re-focuses from serving the Lord individually, to serving the partner, 'in the Lord'. In this way, the redefinition of the woman as a specific helper and the man as a specific head is clarified.

From two romances to one spirit

As we prepare to discuss the bonding question, we must look closely, in practical terms, at how the two romantic agendas are to become one agenda, 'in Spirit and in truth' so to speak. The points made above about redefinition as head and helper seem straightforward enough. But the shift, in real terms, is not as easy as simply overlaying some new theological terms. Many a 'head' and 'helper' became defined by marriage without making any shift in relation to the single 'image' which God intended. How do two people, prone to be seeking their own ideal, romantic agendas, unite in a single image with a single 'romantic' agenda. We say 'romantic' agenda in this positive sense, because there is no loss

47. 1Co7:32-35 NKJV

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of genuine romance; in fact, the only true, lifelong romance is in the discovery and achievement of what it means to live in ‘one spirit’.

There is a great lot involved in this question, as we shall see in the next section. However, it is most helpful, right from the outset, if we identify the problem. It is true in every case, to a greater or lesser degree, that until a couple bonds or is joined by the Lord in one image, with one agenda, each is ‘having his own romance’. The emerging relationship is mutually agreeable. In fact, each behaves so as to please the other, and avoid jeopardising the ‘romance’. It can appear that they are more and more ‘one’, and in fact the desire to be so increases so dramatically as to appear that waiting is unnecessary. In a great many cases, the expression of physical affection can then become inordinate. These are hallmarks of the fact that each is fulfilling his *own* romance, and is not progressing the relationship forward toward one agenda under Christ. The fellowship has in fact stalled, even though it may look as if it is rushing to a conclusion.

Jumping forward into marriage for a moment, the danger is that if the mode of fulfilling one’s own romantic agenda is not challenged and shifted, this motivation will remain long into married life. In such cases, when routines become tedious, and babies interrupt the pleasure of quiet conversation, either one or both will begin to seek other ways of satisfying the romantic appetite.

Looking back at courtship then, it is at the onset of the bonding phase that this shift must be negotiated. How does this happen? To give a simplistic illustration, let us imagine that instead of spending an hour with ‘doughy eyes’, the man endeavours to define and discuss the culture of their relationship by disclosing his responses to her way of doing things, and by challenging her to share in the same way. For her part, instead of facilitating ‘nice’ outcomes to avoid awkwardness, the woman might disclose her misgivings about the man’s cultural mode. This mutual capacity to profess their commitment and culture will launch the

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relationship forward and inevitably into periods of uncertainty and jeopardy, instead of maintaining constant harmony.

These are only brief comments, but the primary point is that couples must identify the tendency to service the two romances if they are to actively pursue and bond in the cross of Christ.

4. The bonding question

While 'bonding' is not a Biblical word, we use it in association with the image of 'yoking' which is common in the Scriptures. 'Do not be unequally yoked'.⁴⁸ It is useful to introduce the idea of *bonding*, which prepares us for the *yoking* of engagement, before the final '*joining*' in marriage – 'whom God has joined together'.⁴⁹ Our concept here is very different to that taught in 'bonding' sessions for sporting teams and employment groups. Our high point here is the goal of being one spirit 'in the image', as God intended for male and female. The focus is now to be upon moving from an essentially parallel relationship to one which is united in the image through the cross of Christ. This sounds very simple, but involves a large and dynamic development. The emphasis now is not upon '*testing*', but *forming* a single yoke and culture for the future.

Signs of the transition

There are clear signals that mark the transition from courtship to bonding. Once again, note that in broad terms, courtship involves *testing* the viability, whereas bonding involves *forming* the relationship toward the future. The signals that mark the crossover include the following.

1. The questions related to testing (courting) have been answered.

48. 2Co 6:14 49. Mat 19:6

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2. Generally, the relationship from exclusive friendship through to intentional courtship will have been underway between seven and twelve months.

3. The couple are quite resolved that marriage will take place. In a sense, they are 'privately engaged'. The advantages of this step will become obvious as we continue below

4. The couple chooses, however, to apply themselves to the unique Christian dynamic of relationship, as well as to forging the basis for a Christian house, not just for a marriage.

5. The couple should demonstrate an understanding that the central dynamic, culture and mode of operation within the relationship must change. It must shift from the parallel, compatible, 'equal' and romantic mode, to the Christian mode in which head and helper find the supernatural dynamics of Christian relationship. They discover these by invoking the cross as the 'operating system'. In this way, the relationship is shifted onto 'holy ground', and thus the founding rock for a Christian house is laid.

It is notable that the conclusion to the courtship question prompts the woman to own the relationship in a new way. Hence, she is free to express herself much more fully, and to jeopardise the comfort of the relationship by raising the profile of her contribution to a new level. Further on, we shall refer to this as the 'exertion of feminine *eros*, and shall discuss it more fully. Simply, this important signal is that the woman stands up!

Three phases

There are essentially three stages to the bonding process. For convenient reference, we shall refer to these as early, middle and late bonding. Shortly, we shall expand the content of these important landmarks. First of all, however, let us summarise the key elements of

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these stages. For simplicity and brevity, we begin by making a few anecdotal statements linked with these three stages.

In early bonding, the woman stands up and the man 'draws her', to use the words from Song of Solomon.⁵⁰

In middle bonding, the woman 'runs after him', once again using Solomon's words, and the man stands up in specific headship to establish the relationship upon the holy ground, through the cross and as a unique Christian bond.

In late bonding, the two relax and blossom in the chosen culture which will now be maintained into marriage and beyond.

Naturally, the elements of these stages have been anticipated in the earlier courtship phase. However, it is a mistake to think that they are developed simply because they have been understood and discussed. Note also that there is a degree of overlap between these stages, and there are variations from couple to couple. Nevertheless, it is clear from observation that the developments listed are essential to the reforming of the relationship into the dynamics of the cross, and into the distinctive Christian mode.

The three phases and the matter of culture

Adding to the above outline, we now describe from observation what takes place with regard to the distinctive cultures of the families from which the two come. The relationship tends to move from a feminine priority, to a male priority, and finally to the newly established culture of the new family unit. What we mean is this:

Early bonding. Regardless of the style of family to family activity that has taken place up to this point, the early bonding phase finds the man giving a priority to meeting in the house and cultural setting of the

50. Son 1:4

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woman. The reason for this is that the woman's firm 'ownership' of the future frees her to express much more of who she is, both personally and in relation to her family. There is a new freedom for her and her family to receive the man, since the future is now becoming settled. There is also a sense that she will soon be leaving this family setting, and so the man tends to express much more of his acceptance of them, and of their future role as parents-in-law. This accords with the Scriptural pattern alluded to in the Song of Solomon where the woman's attitude is expressed in the words, 'Draw me and [I] will run after you.'⁵¹ In these terms, the woman is standing up in identity to say, in effect, 'What are your intentions? Are you serious about this? Show me what your godly foundations and goals are! What kind of head are you going to be?'⁵² And she even implies, 'What is your response to the culture with which I am already familiar?' Of course, on this latter point, the man fully intends to call her to leave father and mother, just as he must do himself, so that the specific house and culture that Christ has for *them* may be established.

Middle bonding. With the woman now expressing confidence in the future, the time has come for the man to begin to draw the relationship to the new ground of their own culture, under Christ's headship. Furthermore, he must now take his call to headship seriously, looking to Christ to manifest His wisdom and power within him, through the cross. In this way, the woman can be called, progressively, to come to the holy ground that Christ is granting to the man. The second phrase of Solomon's words is now applicable, 'and [I] will run after you'. As the woman responds to the man's headship initiative, he must now stand up to provide a ground and clear direction for her to follow. Culturally, he is now free to call her to enjoy his own family culture and she feels free to

51. Son 1:4 52. To 'stand up in identity', means to fully exercise ourselves as responsible, relational people of worth, in obedience to God.

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do so, as an appropriate measure of her commitment to those who will soon become parents-in-law to her. In this phase, we have observed that more activity takes place in and around the man's family and culture, in a way that was not fully applicable earlier on. This gives a context in which the woman can question and the man can clarify, just what their future culture and relationship will be.

Late bonding. Following this same line of discussion, obviously the time comes when the couple are secure in both family directions, for indeed they are defining, and comfortably expressing, their own prospective culture. This culture is 'Christian' in the general sense, and is also the specific will of God for them as a new couple. If the 'leaving and cleaving' process has been negotiated responsibly, and if associated enmity has been removed through the cross, then family-to-family relationships, as well as child-parent relationships, should be quite secure. The next phase, 'the marriage question', focuses up the final crisis of mature choice, in the will of God, by which the ground of a new marriage and house finds a provision from God.

From self-centred to other-centred

The bonding phase is that time where the relationship moves from the self-centred question, 'What is in it for me?' to the other-centred question, 'What is in it for the other, and for the two of us together?' Note that the 'me' is out of the equation. This phase of re-assessment is essential. If a couple proceed to marriage simply because the courtship question has been completed, there is no guarantee that they will develop a godly culture. Why is this? It is because the earlier courtship question, in real terms, was oriented around a list of self-centred expectations, even though the intentions were other than this. Bonding is the time when the good intentions to take up the cross must be realised. If there is no shift, the marriage will be self-centred.

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This is the value of the bonding phase. This is the time for the nature of the bond, the essential operating dynamic of the relationship, to be understood and tested. The culture of the future must be deliberately developed, and not be a haphazard result to which both default.

Later, we will look at some examples of unresolved marriage cultures that result from lack of deliberate process. The main point to note here is that romantic intensity can be a driving force towards marriage, whereupon the bonding process is stalled. This same romantic optimism can be a deception, creating the illusion that relationship is strongly bonded. If, on the other hand, the couple can bring romance into subjection to Christ, while they address their own culture together, they will be able to proceed with the bonding process in an uncomplicated, sanctified manner.

Installing the mechanism of the cross as the fundamental Christian dynamic (mode of operation) of the relationship is what releases the capacity for total givenness one to another, and is the formation of the true Christian bond. This is the aim of the whole bonding phase, a cultural development that has the cross as its foundational dynamic and bond. Because the cross calls us to reality and obedience, it becomes the means by which we are able to know Christian love.⁵³

Installing the cross as the central dynamic

These responses described above are the first steps in the relationship becoming 'other-centred'. Commitment to the *laying down of life* will allow the couple to put self-centred ideals to death. Here is a description of the shift that must come.

In the earlier courtship phase, many approaches, attitudes and actions were conceded to and allowed for as marks of the individuality of each

53. 'To love is to obey', p 105

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partner. Differences were not deeply examined, in case the overall progress and romance of the friendship was affected. But once marriage is in view, and bonding toward marriage is embarked upon, the central dynamic must change entirely. The whole and entire life of each one, both inwardly and outwardly, will have an effect upon the other. Differences must be understood, deficiencies must be accepted, legacies must be embraced and all cultural traditions that will impact upon the future must be cognitively analysed. Further to this, the supernatural miracle is that the man, while he actually came to birth *from* a woman, must now find Christ's capacity to be head *to* a woman. For the woman's part, she grew up in an entirely different father-mother setting. She had no preparation to be the specific helper to this specific man. The only way that these new and godly capacities can come to birth is through the cross. As there is a growing understanding and revelation of what is required to be head to this specific woman and helper to this specific man, there must be a growing cry of faith-dependence upon the Lord, whereby the baptismal equation of death-life is transacted. What we mean is that the growth of a bonded relationship will begin to show clearly what must die and what needs to live, if this relationship is to become a new unit 'in the image'.

This is quite amazing. At the minimum level, each must find in the cross the power to die to self-centred expectations so that the power of giving is released. At another level again, the cross is the birthplace of a capacity from God to be comparable to one another, when in fact there was no previous training or disposition toward this calling. The redefinition of the relationship according to the $\zeta\omicron\epsilon$ principle enables the relationship to refocus towards a godly order and culture. This is the unique element that should be present in a distinctive Christian marriage.

Bonding – supernatural joining

When approached in the mindset that we are recommending here, the bonding phase makes it possible for a supernatural joining. ‘What God has joined together’.⁵⁴ If bonding is not understood, it is likely that fundamental gaps in identity development and relational capacity, as well as unprocessed expectations, will lead to disparate joining. The basic ‘chemistry’ or anatomy of the union will be flawed, rather as if the two are joined hip to knee instead of side by side. The more serious outcome is that a union that is cast in the wrong mould requires a miraculous, surgical re-setting if it is ever to be renegotiated.

This is why Jesus linked hardness of heart (changelessness) with divorce in His curious discussion in Matthew chapter 19. The Pharisees [said] ‘Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?’ And He answered ... ‘the two shall become one flesh ... therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate ... divorce [exists] because of the hardness of your hearts’ ... His disciples said to Him, “If such is the case of the man with his wife, it is better not to marry”.⁵⁵

Let us think clearly about this interchange. The disciples exclaimed, ‘It is better not to marry’. They realised that without a supernatural joining by God, every marriage would fail due to hardness of heart. Our universal hardness is such that we would be better not to marry. Humanly speaking, if God doesn’t join us, we cannot succeed.

So the central point with bonding is this. The issue is no longer ‘who’ we marry, but how! In what fundamental mode does the relationship bond and become joined? Does it come together, in these late stages, as a joining by God, through the cross? What modes of relating do we approve and thereby ‘name’ as being inherent in the relationship?

54. Mat 19:6 55. Mat 19:3-10

Comparability versus compatibility

In the Genesis account of God's creation of male and female in the image, Eve was made to be a helper who was 'meet', or comparable, in every way for her husband. ('meet', meaning 'suitable' or 'comparable', is an old English word not commonly used.) The key word was *comparable*. The Christian model is based in being comparable one to the other, with a *commitment to being redefined* toward the other through the operation of the cross (baptism, communion and daily reckoning). The man commits to offering headship toward this particular woman, well knowing that the capacity for this does not already exist within himself. He covenants to be her head, understanding that he will need to be transformed 'in the image' so that the expression of his *zoe*-life is comparable as a head toward her. The woman commits to offering herself as helper, well knowing that the capacity for this will require transformation within the realm of the Father's *zoe*-life manifest within her.

This is completely different to the 'compatibility' talk of which we hear so much in regard to romance and marriage. The compatibility basis has the aim of the two remaining as *two*, searching for enough suitability that the threat of failure will be diminished. Christian comparability, on the other hand, has the aim of the *two* being *one*, in the image.

In worldly terms, compatibility offers the best guarantee of success for a marriage. The two who hope to remain as two, will naturally seek the most compatible set of similarities and dissimilarities. Their relationship is largely based on being similar in the areas that are important to them and dissimilar in the less important areas.

Traditionally, in this whole matter, there has been very little difference between the social marriage and the Christian marriage – except that in the latter case, the two are professing Christians. Christians have also been caught up in this popular compatibility drive, when in fact the Christian model of marriage should be unique.

Two becoming one

The crucial factor that should be built in to the Christian courtship can now be identified. If the two are to become one (comparable) in the image of God, and not just remain as two (compatible), the courtship must prepare for this final supernatural joining ('whom God has joined together'). A Christian couple are not just joined on the wedding day. They might become 'one flesh', but they do not necessarily become one spirit. We should note the harsh implication of what Paul asserted in this verse. 'Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is *one body* with her? For "the two" He says, "shall become *one flesh*". But he who is joined to the Lord is *one spirit* with Him.'⁵⁶ Even an immoral relationship is 'one flesh'. It is clear therefore that to be 'one spirit' in the image of God requires something more than sexual relationship. It requires a process of bonding and yoking that allows God to join the couple supernaturally in one spirit. Accordingly, the Christian model must make time for proper bonding in a culture of unity (comparability).

This is why we recommend a process that moves from friendship to courtship to bonding, followed by engagement and marriage.

Traditionally, of course, courtship has often worked quite differently. Many have proceeded through a romantic courtship to the 'will we, won't we' phase, and once certainty leads to a 'proposal', the couple plans, and proceeds to be married. The customary program is: romance-proposal-marriage. Clearly, this approach lacks the element of proper joining, and leads to marriage that is based in romantic optimism with some added religious overtones.

True romance is the mystery and delight of 'worth-ship'. It develops as two people freely meet, appreciate one another, and develop a real perspective on the 'comparability' of the other. The true and godly

56. 1Co 6:16-17 AV

romance is not just the *eros* or the pursuit of finding oneself in the ideal context. True romance will always protect *eros* from its downward tendency toward 'erotic', sensual, self-indulgence. When a relationship is driven by the way ones feel affected, validated and empowered, or by the measure of 'compatibility', then it is in bondage to self-centredness.

First phase of bonding – practical explanation

As it was with the first steps of the courtship question, the first phase of the bonding question requires some clear, up-front leadership and communication between the man and the woman's father. This is an important interaction, and not just in the sense of permission. It is important because if the relationship does proceed towards marriage, the man will be asking the father to progressively release his daughter to his emerging headship. The man and the father of the woman are now fixed in a 'head to head' relationship, one which ultimately sees the woman redefined from under the headship of her father, to that of the man.

Normally, fathers will take this whole matter quite seriously, not least because they are vitally interested in what kind of headship and home this man will provide. If in fact the father has not been proactive in the relationship already, he should be urged to be so now. Most daughters would expect and respect this, as a mark of love, even if they may struggle with the sense of scrutiny that is involved.

As we know, parents' modes of involvement vary considerably from one circumstance to another. There are situations where romantic excitement takes over, and parents are tempted to kick-start or promote courtships that meet their approval. In the Christian culture, however, because Christ seeks to be head to every man and thus to every new home, the initiative in promoting relationship belongs to the man and the right of response to the woman. Parents must regard these lines of sanctification, while nevertheless fulfilling their God-given role as parents.

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What we are saying here is that at the point of bonding, the man must begin to express genuine Christian headship. For her part, the woman must be set free to examine, test, and then choose the headship of this man. Parents must understand these dynamics, so that all proper relational lines are honoured. Parents do have an active role in releasing their children to accountable choices, just as the adult children have a need to properly accept the accountability that now rests with them. There must be no vacating of headship and motherhood roles. And equally, there need be no clash of headship agendas. Soon, the woman must leave her father's headship and choose the headship of her partner. The fiancée must also demonstrate that he is standing up to provide that headship, and that he is intending to promote a bond that is in sanctification and honour. He must accomplish this with full respect for and in communication with, the woman's father. In the 'ideal' scenario, the woman's father will aid this whole matter in a number of ways.

1. First of all, he will not quickly forfeit his headship but maintain it diligently, and call his daughter to continue to relate to him as head, right until the point that she covenants to the fiancée. He does not do this to conflict with the young man, or to put his daughter in a double-bind, but to communicate with her thoroughly so that she understands and comes to peace with what is transpiring. If she is at peace with her father, she will be at peace with her new head.

2. The woman's father should lay a clear expectation upon the young man to show that he is able to set a headship context for the future. His daughter will become disoriented if the young man does not begin to define the culture and practice of the new relationship. The 'father and mother' context has previously defined her completely, in terms of the corporate nature of being. She has had a purpose and setting for all that she has done, from her acquired skills to her context for communication and process. The fiancée must now provide this. Of course, he is only

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learning, and a wise father will promote his endeavours, and then direct his daughter to this newly defined culture.

3. As we have just said, the woman's father is the one most able to support the young man in understanding the need for a headship context. Then he is able to make sure that she makes a shift to him as head, without resorting back to her father, and without falling in the gap. In the truest sense, the young man will have little chance of identifying precisely how and where to call her to respect and obedience without the support of the father. The father is able to firm him up in his emerging headship, and is best able to oversee and challenge his daughter in her emerging submission.

4. Equally, a father is able to judge, and must judge, the submission of the man to the lordship of Christ amidst his brethren as he approaches marriage. This is a most crucial matter for the father. Does the young man love the brethren more than his own life, and more than his fiancée? Will the daughter be free to love the brethren of Christ, more than her own life, and more than her husband – should he ever place her in that divide? Is he genuinely establishing a new house under Christ, or is he naively subjecting her to a familiar culture which will ultimately be destructive? He is no more free to subvert her to the familiar oppressions of his culture than she is in relation to him. The young man, with his brethren, will have to test her on this point. But equally, the woman's father must test this point with the young man. She is choosing a new head believing that he is 'uncovered' toward Christ. If this is not so, the father has no liberty at all to give her away in marriage.

5. A wise father is able to observe the changing relationship between mother and daughter. If she discounts her mother or modifies the relationship prematurely, she will negate a most important aspect of her pre-marriage preparation. If she 'conquers' her mother, she will carry this kind of relationship forward into the way she relates to other women in married life. If she holds on to her mother, she is in danger of carrying a

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feminine sub-culture into marriage – as if she can always lean on her mother’s affirmation over against her emerging head.

6. The father’s exercise of headship toward his own daughter must reach its peak in this next phase. He will always be her father, and it is in these final months as her head, that he has the opportunity to minister that word of discipleship that will equip her to proceed into marriage as a life-giver, as a disciple of Christ, and not as a ‘second-class’ underling full of romantic expectations. He does not give her away on the condition that the young man fulfils everyone’s expectations. He commits his daughter to her new head as a disciple who is ready to lay her life down, one who is accepting her call as helper, as the weaker vessel. She is to be the vessel and expression of God’s weakness within the image. Her new head is to show understanding and honour for this calling. Neither the father nor the new head can renegotiate this ‘weakness’, protect her from it, or compensate for it. And, with understanding, they will not want to anyway. Rather, the father who is committed to his daughter’s discipleship should be able to be an example of how to understand and honour this unique aspect of a woman’s call within the image. Hopefully, he has not treated her as a princess who will now expect this from her husband. Hopefully, she will move to marriage to be as much the heir and well-spring of the grace of *zoe* as her new husband, neither expecting him to be her superior, nor attempting to be his.

7. In all these matters, an overriding consideration is that the relationship of the new couple to their former parents will still remain, and will be valid and vital in the future.

Now we can begin to see why the head-to-head relationship between father and young man is so crucial.

Bonding in spirit and truth

Those who bond are in effect taking a step to ‘worship in spirit and truth’, of which Jesus speaks in John chapter four. We say this because if

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they are to give proper worth to one another, they must be of 'one spirit' – and this is achieved by being joined to the Lord.⁵⁷ Equally, to give true worth to another, they must do so in the truth, or reality, of who they are. These two elements are essential. To fail to be of one spirit is described in Malachi as treachery against the marriage covenant. '*Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously.*'⁵⁸ To deal treacherously within the marriage covenant means that one is not truly meeting, or worshipping, the other. Only the relationship that is in spirit and truth can be blessed of God.

The will of God

Concerning the 'will of God', note again the key verse from Thessalonians. 'For this is the *will of God*, your *sanctification*: that you should abstain ... that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in *sanctification and honour*.'⁵⁹ This is a helpful place to begin on the subject of God's will in marriage. What is God's will regarding marriage? First of all, His will is our sanctification, namely that we take a partner in sanctification and honour. This is the will of God. Accordingly, a relationship can be said to be in the *general will* of God provided it proceeds along the lines of sanctification and honour.

But what about the specific will of God? We said earlier that a relationship becomes the *specific will* of God at the point where we choose and where we make a covenant. Our emphasis here is that it is in this *bonding phase* that we must come to the point of faith for the specific will of God to be done in our lives. A relationship becomes the specific will of God, because within this bonding process, which then leads to being joined by the Lord, He makes us one spirit. This is supported by Jesus words, 'What *God has joined* together, let not man separate'.⁶⁰ The only

57. 1Co 6:17 58. Mal 2:15 59. 1Th 4:3-4 60. Mat 19:6

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question to be answered is, ‘How does God join together?’ Is it by a priest, or a particular marriage service? Is it the vows that join people together, or the intimate relationship of marriage? The point becomes clear. God must join two together by a process in which He actually does so, and not by a nominal, religious pronouncement. This is where the phases that we have called the ‘bonding question’ and the ‘marriage question’ are so crucial.

It is as he comes to regard this relationship as the specific will of God, and as he becomes assured of God’s provision for his house, that the man establishes the holy ground of his marriage relationship. While these things don’t become an absolute reality until the wedding day, nevertheless, they are achieved and formed during this bonding phase, and in the subsequent period called ‘the marriage question’.

The emergence and exertion of feminine *eros*

We should comment further on what takes place on the part of the woman at the point where courtship moves to bonding. We should bear in mind that the Christian woman, from the beginning of the exclusive relationship, has been the respondent and not the initiator – the follower not the leader. Even an apparently strong and outspoken woman is still in the position of *replying* to the man’s initiative as to the progress of the relationship. While the woman has acted accountably as an *individual*, nevertheless to some degree, she has not had to be completely accountable for the relationship, for its context, development and future. Once she agrees to the man’s proposal – which marks the end of courtship and the beginning of bonding – she will now own the matter entirely. She will emerge, or should emerge (and in some cases must be pressed to this) and begin to show a strong exertion of feminine *eros*.

What do we mean by ‘the exertion of *eros*’? The exertion of *eros* in a courting relationship is the emergence and total expression of the ‘authentic being’ of an individual toward the other. For the woman, *eros*

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describes the woman's full commitment to the future, which will now show itself as a vibrant idealism and strong desire to facilitate the future 'romance', in the true sense. She will 'throw herself' whole-heartedly into it, in other words, even to the point that the focus is not so much 'us together' as 'me for him'.

It has been observed that in the bonding phase, it is the woman who first 'stands up' to express herself in relation to the man. True bonding depends on this response from the woman. She must be urged and freed to this, and show preparedness to jeopardise the earlier ethos of the relationship. By this action, she chooses to give herself to him as a woman. She is secure in the relationship and begins to test him against herself.

What do we mean by testing? First, she is now beginning to facilitate what he has already started. She now begins to facilitate a courting relationship as a mirror of the initiative that he has formerly taken towards her. Second, the 'testing' is not a 'trial and error' sort of initiative, but a response towards the relationship which puts it to the 'test'. What is being tested is the ability of the relationship to bond. Her desire to be 'drawn' is being fulfilled, and she is now beginning to 'run after' him. While she is 'running after', she is no longer following behind. She is now committed to a *full* participation in this relationship according to the man's stated initiative. It is this response that now 'tests' him as to the nature and integrity of his initiative.

The newness and capacity of her response catches the man by surprise. Note what has happened. Earlier, the two were so much of one mind that they seemed to have become merged together. Now she has begun to express her own identity and role towards him and for him. She exerts full, accountable, identity expression toward the man. As we said, she is not putting him on trial from a self-centred perspective. However, she is *testing* and developing her own capacity to apply and express her sonship capacities in the direction that the man sets – not now as an

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independent individual. ‘Neither is man independent of woman, nor woman independent of man, in the Lord.’⁶¹

At this point, the man can become insecure in the relationship. In fact, because of a lack of understanding, some may even be tempted to break up the relationship, assuming that because the togetherness is threatened, the relationship is over. Of course, this is not the end of their relationship, but the beginning of the next step. The moment of ‘standing up’ and of owning the courtship by the woman is the beginning of the re-ordering of the relationship towards a new culture.

From the heights to the valley of the ‘shadow’

Let us comment further on the transition from courtship to bonding. Although the images are slightly simplistic, the fact is that the relationship must travel from the mountain heights of harmony and compatibility to the ‘shadows’ of challenge and uncertainty, until it is formed in the cross in every aspect. We spoke earlier of the elements involved in ‘finalising the question’, i.e. the courtship question. As these assignment questions are answered, the courtship proposition comes to an end and marriage comes into view. It is not hard to see that for a brief period, the relationship dwells in the heights of harmony, confidence and compatibility. The two are so much in concord that they are almost lost in the other. They can discuss everything and agree on anything. They may even wonder if anyone before has ever been as compatible as they! The optimism is exciting and legitimate, but things are about to change. Normal growth and commitment will themselves compel the relationship toward a much more enduring reality. And of course, the reality of two people really meeting, choosing and reforming toward the future is bound to carry the relationship through a testing time – through the ‘the

61. 1Co 11:11

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valley of the shadow'. It is in this 'valley' experience of true bonding that the unique expressions of male and female, and the unique roles of head and helper will emerge. By the understanding of the cross, the two will become bound together in a Christian culture for marriage.

Middle bonding

During this time, the relationship finds a new settledness, acceptance and commitment. The woman has accepted the relationship, and is presenting herself as a 'helper' in the Christian image. Now the man must be clear what it means to offer headship to the bonding relationship. This will bring some crisis, because both must now function as Christian helper and head, and not as two equal, mutual, romantic idealists as in the past.

This will bring the subject of conflict recovery back into view. In turn, there will be a new pressure upon the need for the sanctification of male and female, each to his/her unique identity and role. Our earlier comments about relating in the cross are applicable here. What needs to happen here is that with each relational interchange, through the highs and lows of cultural exchange, the two must negotiate, define, refine, test and establish their operating dynamic and cultural mode for the future. This operating dynamic must be the cross of Christ in all that it means. It is only by the cross that these two, who come from completely separate parents, can now be redefined toward one new image as head and helper.

A couple of illustrations will help here. Let us imagine that when conflict arises, the man adopts a strong position of being 'right', claiming that this is 'headship'. On the other hand, let us imagine that the woman 'wins' the round by adopting an upset, offended and even pathetic stance – eventually forcing the man to capitulate for the sake of romantic peace. Without dissecting these examples at great length, the point is that if either of these dynamics becomes the basic operating mode, this mode will remain at the centre of the future culture. Obviously, in the above

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cases, the man who lives in the cross will first address his own reactivity, legalism and self-centredness, and sanctify himself to stand in the place to which the Lord calls him. This will be a position from which he cannot shift, and one to which he can humbly call his partner – at the same time leaving her free to work through a Christian response. On the woman's side of the above illustration, she must find the power of the cross to sanctify herself from her fallen dynamics. Through the cross, the Christian man will find a sanctified indifference to the emotive pressure of the woman. The Christian woman, as helper, will be able to make right responses toward the man's headship initiatives.

Naming the relationship and its mode

This brief and very general illustration serves to highlight the central issue of bonding. What will be the mode of resolving male-female, head-helper differences, and diversities in the future? Will respectful and insightful communication be empowered by the cross, or will there always be a mixture of motives, modes and mechanisms? Will patterns form in this bonding phase that cannot be easily renegotiated and broken?

Remember, Adam's role in naming animals progressed to the 'naming' of his relationship with Eve. 'This is now bone of my bones ... she shall be called [named] Woman ... taken out of Man.'⁶² In fact, he later 'named' Eve as the mother of all living.⁶³ In the bonding phase, the process of identifying, defining and adopting specific cultural practices for the future is in fact the 'naming' of the relationship – linked with Adam's naming of *his* relationship.

The following list of questions helps to focus the commitment of a couple who are entering the bonding phase. These can be responded to as

62. Gen 2:23 63. Gen 3:20

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a written testimony from one toward the other, and then also reviewed by the marriage counsellors.

1. Am I as an individual participating in this relationship as one born of God, finding *zoe*-life so as to live for the other?

2. Am I prepared to be redefined in relation to the other – i.e. as a ‘helper’ for this specific man, or as a ‘head’ to this specific woman?

3. Am I committed to giving trust and respect to the man as head, just as Christ is head, and to the woman as the helper provided by the Lord?

4. Have I dealt with all corrupt expectation of the relationship (ie romantic expectation, lifestyle, identity abdication)? Can I give a written report of the major problems we have encountered and of how we have processed them?

5. Have I dealt with all vain traditions and come to a new cultural expression within this relationship?

6. Do we own our part in the relationship, fully expressive as male and female?

This is the crucial mode for proceeding to marriage. Is the woman beginning to own the relationship in her own identity and personality, being uniquely herself in relation to this man, with the most fundamental questions now being resolved? Likewise, is the man beginning to stand in his unique identity, being himself in relation to her, able to begin to establish the ground of the relationship upon which the marriage can be built and become functional? Now, we should note that the man’s initiative to establish the ground is not just an exercise of merging two different perspectives. It is not an exercise of mutual consensus, but it is the establishing of the ground and function of a marriage relationship.

The establishment of the ground in godly headship order will enable full identity freedom as man and woman and full relational expression. Any constriction of identity or expression shows that the ground for the relationship is not yet established. If the ground is established and the couple start to process their culture to a unified expression, we begin to

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see the possibility of a ‘one flesh’ reality come into view. The relationship has now moved from the courtship proposition phase into the bonding phase. Consider the bonding question: is he/she for me, for life? How have you arrived at the answer to this question as the will of God? Note that it is the principle of worship (true appreciation) in spirit⁶⁴ and truth (reality⁶⁵) that now moves the couple into the bonding phase.

Late bonding

Mature *agape* choice and the resolution of a genuine Christian culture are the hallmarks of late bonding. The man is comfortable in the authority of identity and role that is his. He has fully chosen the relationship, with all its parameters and challenges. In the upcoming ‘marriage question’ phase, he will present the relationship to the Lord to find a final conviction of the Lord’s enabling and provision for his future relationship. He has now dispensed with all temporal reasons and self-centred motives for choice. This sanctification of his motives now allows him to choose this woman in *agape*, through offering.

The woman likewise, has fully chosen the relationship, despite the nervous pathway she has travelled to fully invest her trust in the relationship. She has now chosen the relationship, not because it is successful and trouble-free, but because she sees it as a God-given context for giving. She is resolved that through faith, she will commit herself to the headship of the man. She has fully accepted the culture that has been named, and is relaxed about the death-life redefinition that will be needed as she continues to be a comparable helper.

Together, the two should blossom and relax with the culture and future that they have chosen. Previously they may have lived on the horns of a dilemma, to some degree. Now they have emerged from ‘the shadow

64. Mal 2:15 65. Joh 4:23

of death', knowing the Lord as their Shepherd, into the sunlit pastures of trust and confidence. All that lies ahead is the defining exercise that we have called 'the marriage question'.

Pastoral care in the bonding phase

In the early bonding phase, the carers are involved in the discussion of the courtship content blocks and questions, helping to identify male/female roles and perspectives, and simply explaining the phase of development that the couple are in. We have observed in practice that the element of the woman 'standing up' fully, as discussed in the section on 'the emergence and exertion of feminine *eros*', needs attention here. On the man's part, because he is responsible to sanctify the relationship to become a marriage union, he will benefit from some individual discussion on what this means.

In middle bonding, the two will benefit from reflection and instruction on the development of the unique Christian dynamic by which they resolve their culture in the cross.

In late bonding, the couple will need a reality check to see that they have negotiated the necessary content and questions. This is also the time to be urged to consider upcoming financial and practical planning toward the future. With the 'marriage question' now in view, pastoral carers must note an important issue. Before the man can approach the Lord about His provision for their 'house' to be established, all impediments to this approach must be removed. A house cannot be established if there is any gap between the two and Christ. A mandate from Christ to be the head of a house can only be given to him through offering. The man has *not* yet received this mandate. Hence, the removal of impediments and the closing of gaps in terms of faith, conviction and maturity, must be considered. For example, discussion is needed with pastoral carers about any moral failures and breaches of relationship that may need further submission to the lordship of Christ. Where necessary,

confession and remission can remove any impediments to successful union. In some cases, this may take more time and process than the couple have realised. In this case, the timing of marriage plans should not impose itself. Then with every impediment out of the way, the relationship can move towards the resolution of the marriage question.

Bonding difficulties and challenges

A number of observations can now be made about the challenges that a couple may encounter during this bonding period. In many cases, these obstacles are only exposed through this testing time, and need to be resolved if a single culture is to be successfully established. The couple may need some help and discussion from carers in order to define and process issues that become a hindrance. Some of these are outlined below:

1. *Running ahead*: there is a danger that the couple may want to run ahead to get married before bonding properly, simply because courtship brings them to a joyful phase of complete compatibility. Because the focus of the man has been upon wooing and ‘winning’ the woman, her consent makes it appear that the chase is over. As we have reiterated, many in the past have become engaged at this point where the courtship reaches its climax. However, if the two commit to the bonding proposition, as we have outlined it, they will soon discover that the culture of who they are and how they relate together, and how they will serve together is only just beginning to develop.

2. *Self-centred motives*: let us now analyse the commencement of the bonding phase. One of the primary signals is that the woman begins to exert herself in her feminine role towards the man. Note that this should be an action of true identity. On the other hand, self-centred motivations may also emerge, in the sense that she hopes to conform the relationship to her pre-conceptions. In truth, both the man and the woman have a collection of familiar pre-conceptions of marriage, and as the prospect of

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marriage becomes imminent, the pressure for these to be realised grows. Of course, as we have said both must begin to leave father and mother, which means to leave these familiar cultures. They must choose a unified culture that is 'in the image' under Christ's headship, not one that is in the 'image' of previous expectations. It is the mechanisms by which each will endeavour to control the outcome for their own security and happiness that provoke the need for deep relational process within the bonding phase. Each must address his/her own motives and sanctification so that each is now for 'the other'. Self-centred mechanisms of control must be put off and real change must take place by the application of repentance and faith.

3. *Immature choice-making*: this is a searching time, for the most basic reasons for one's choices are now under the spot-light. Why has each chosen the other? Does it spring from an examination of pros and cons – compatibilities and incompatibilities? Is there a hidden bargain developing, i.e. a form of trading that is obligating the other to be different or else? Is the commitment unstable, one which may ultimately fail? Will certainty rise and fall when blonde hair turns grey and an hourglass figure turns to pear-shaped? Will some of these flimsy, immature and impressionable reasons for one's choices disappear and leave the relationship with no reason to continue? Of course, the answer to these matters is that in the end, choice must be without any reasons. The strength of a choice without reason is that it does not depend on reasons to continue to exist. One must simply choose the other as an action of absolute identity. Part of the celebrant's duty prior to marriage, is to challenge partners to *simply choose, with no reason at all*. Many reasons could be cited, such as 'we love one another', 'we have a great friendship', 'we can't live apart a minute longer', 'it's the will of God' etc – these must be put aside in favour of a simple, single-minded choice. Knowing that this is the goal helps set the direction for all the earlier choice-making that marks the progress of the relationship.

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4. *Chauvinistic responses*: while the woman's response will tend toward manipulation, the man's will lean toward threatened insecurity that shows itself in chauvinism. The reality of what the two have chosen is now impacting much more than ever before. The pressure that each exerts and the associated responses to one another can be frightening. They both soon recognise that they are now living out what they have aspired to. They must now *be* all that they have *said*. Individual integrity, as well as the integrity and substance of the relationship, are now being tested, and need to be tested to the limit. As the woman emerges with full conviction, her strength can actually intimidate the man, which is why he may resort to chauvinism, even calling it headship. Chauvinism will then tend to shut down and restrict her expression, when in fact he should *promote* this expression. The key is for him to be faithful, sanctified and patient, and to show secure leadership. He must not withdraw, albeit at times he will need time to consider how to regroup and act in the way that is 'for her'. As he continues to meet and choose, the relationship will reorder to head and helper and it will bond in the Christian image. This process requires the full extent of the bonding phase, as described above.

5. *Male/female perspectives*: note that the innocent exertion of female/male *eros* can appear to be an imposition of one perspective upon the other. Clashes can occur simply because each is threatened by the other, and each wonders what the future will be like if the present is so dramatic. This is where genuine love, with its fruit of kindness and patience etc, becomes the well-spring of good communication. Thus conflict resolution skills can be developed. Reflection and instruction at this point will help identify the dynamics. Then the two can be directed to the development of their own mechanisms for conflict recovery. Resolution should restore both man and woman to full, free identity expression. There is a lot to learn here, since a woman does not respond to life and situations in the same way as a man. Neither is 'under' or 'over'

the other. Rather, it is time to forsake the ground of 'rightness' and to begin to dwell with understanding. Naturally, there are individual aspects that do need to change. Nevertheless, couples must now develop an understanding of that male-female uniqueness which is authentic and which does not necessarily need to change.

5. The marriage question – proposal and engagement

It is during the late bonding phase, just before engagement, as the relationship blooms and all other 'questions' have been put aside, that the answer to the 'marriage question' seals the relationship as the specific will of God. At this time, through the process of offering, the man seeks God for the provision and capacity for a 'house'. Understanding authority, headship, love, respect, obedience, culture, naming and resurrection life now become essential in the establishment of the foundation upon which this house will be built.

The two must now go before the Lord, rather in the manner of Abraham's Moriah offering, and place the relationship before the Lord for Him to receive it, and at the same time, assure them of His miracle provision of an all-sufficient 'Lamb' for the house. Many thoughts are run together here, so we shall explain.

Before announcing their engagement, a couple is well-advised to take time in prayer and fasting to find an explicit assurance that this is 'the will of God'. Naturally, this question has been present all the way along. In this late phase, however, the question is one in which each partner needs to meet the Lord and to resolve, absolutely, that he/she has a faith for this relationship to be the specific will of God. Having tested it in relation *to* the will of God, the time has come that this marriage will *be* the will of God. Vows will soon be taken which certainly fixes their choice *as* the will of God, simply because both believe that this is so, and

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both commit to it as being the specific will of God. How is this important question answered?

What we suggest is that the man must take the initiative in the manner of Abraham. He should ‘go up the mountain’ so to speak. He should hold his future in his hand and seek to meet Christ as his Head and future provision for the house. His desire is to know the holy ground given to him by God, so that his future house can be blessed. We remember here that at the time of passover, described in Exodus, each family took a ‘lamb for a house’.⁶⁶ This is how each house was preserved and established as belonging to God’s Everlasting Covenant. The man must find an assurance that right there in the place of his fervent offering, God will provide a lamb, meaning a total provision, adequate for each step of the road that they must travel in the future. He is now confident that the Lord will build and provide for the house. He can now also present this to his partner so that she can exercise her own choice on the matter.

We have summarised many steps in the process above rather quickly. Now we shall discuss some of these elements in more detail.

The ‘house’

Initially, those who court do so with marriage in view as their ultimate goal. As the couple grow together, the perspective of marriage broadens beyond themselves as individuals coming together, to a future ‘house’, the inclusion of children and the fulfilment of the work that God has prepared for them. The key to this perspective becoming a successful reality is the founding of the house. This house is the blessing and context in which the marriage can be established, and, through the blessing of God (multiplication), produce a godly seed. This perspective

66. Exo 12:3

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is particularly important for the man who will be 'head' of this house, and accountable to God for its administration. The house could also be called the 'holy ground' of the marriage, which is established through the offering made by headship.

We should note that the house is *not* the same as the marriage. A house is a provision for a family to be established in the will of God, but it is not *the* family. Were the marriage to cease, the man's house would continue in the will of God. Why is this the case? It is because the house is the covenant ground of the man. The establishment of the house is a unique headship encounter – an event between the Lord and himself alone. It is to the 'ground' of this house that he will be calling the woman. Until then, the woman takes up an initiative of prayerful support as she continues in her role toward him while this event takes place.

The man receives provision for the house through the process of the cross in relation to his head Christ. We remember the call of God in Isaiah 66:1, 'Where is the house that you will build Me?' By this we know that the blessing of God is to come into the family. With this in view, the man must covenant that he will live according to the will of God and the culture of the household of faith. Through the complete offering of himself and his ambition for other ways, he is able to stand up again as from the dead in resurrection life. He also receives the power or capacity to participate in the 'naming' of the house and the marriage covenant. In this action, his headship is named (he has received authority) and his house is named for his headship under Christ.

The actual proposal?

This leads us to consider the issue of the man's final 'proposal' of marriage. Well before this time, marriage has been considered, discussed, 'proposed' and tested. The notion has travelled from the valleys of uncertainty to the heights of optimism. But at the conclusion of the matter, what is the man proposing? Our point here is that a Christian

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man should propose a house, not just a marriage. To illustrate the difference, it could well be argued that only minimal process and development is necessary for a viable marriage. Many long-lasting marriages are a testimony to this. In fact, these successes are often touted as proof that a lengthy program is not necessary. Our proposition concerning ‘building a house’ removes the whole argument away from the long-short, success-failure, considerations. It might be possible to propose marriage with limited preparation. But if a man desires to propose a Christian ‘house’, it is quite a different matter.

Hopefully, all Christian men approaching marriage will desire to offer and propose a house, not just a marriage. Our point about the ‘marriage question’ is that if a man understands his mandate properly, he will finally compose a complete marriage-house proposal that is culturally specific for the future. He will propose a house and a marriage that is built upon the rock, and ask for the woman’s response. This will be the final marriage proposal. As he testifies to His mandate from the Lord, and sets out the cultural mode of his future, he then invites her to marriage within this Christian context already stated. The clarity of this proposal will enable the woman to make a final confession of submission, and to participate in the blessing with her response to headship, *‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord’*.⁶⁷

Now we need to pursue some of these elements a little further.

How do we know love?

From the outset, let us say that the ‘house’ is a microcosm of the ‘kingdom’. That is, it functions according to the same life and principles as the kingdom. This is especially evident when we begin to raise such themes as love, authority, respect, righteousness etc. Let us now take a

67. Luk 13:35

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moment to understand how these themes integrate to make up the package that establishes a house within the will of God.

The Scripture tells us that ‘God is love’. ‘Love’ is both His essence (fundamental nature) and attitude (mode of operation). We remember that ‘God so loved that He gave’. From this we begin to understand that God’s fundamental nature is expressed through the attitude that is ‘givenness’.

Now, how does the creation, mankind, come to know and understand love? 1 John 5:2-3 tells us that we know love and that we express love when we ‘keep His commandments’. Clearly, love is demonstrated by a relational obedience to the word of the Father. If this is so, then love will only be seen and understood in a relational context. It involves me, and it involves someone else with a word to me! In this relational context, obedience to authority, i.e. obedience to the words spoken as part of that authority is the expression of love. To love is to obey. John 14:23-24 is clear on this also. If anyone loves Christ, he will keep or obey His words.

Now this raises another point! There is a ‘word’ or command (law) that addresses every individual and calls for obedience. It is through obedience to this word that we can know and express love in the kingdom and in the family. This word has an authority that is not from men but from the Father. The Father gave authority to His servant Jesus Christ. Jesus also gave authority to His servants, as described through the parables.⁶⁸ This authority is also given to the head of every house who is sanctified through offering to the will of the Father.⁶⁹

Build on the rock

Here stands our foremost point. A marriage-house will not be built on the rock unless it is solidly based on complete commitment to the

68. Mat 21:33-44 69. 1Co 11:3, Eph 5:22-24

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lordship of Christ. Christ is the Head of the church. If we love Him, we obey Him. Christ is the head of every man, and man is the head of the woman. As men obey Christ, they show that they love Christ. If wives love their husbands, they obey them. It is as simple and straightforward as that. If wives do not obey their husbands, they do not love their husbands, no matter how strong their feelings of affection may be. A great portion of the mutual love that couples have is really a measure of their accumulated experience, their interdependence one upon the other, and their mutual empowerment one of the other. This is a strong challenge, but must be spoken, since love cannot be defined apart from God, who is love. All other ‘loves’, all other facets of affection and romance, must take their place in relation to the source of love. Yes, there is a genuine, godly romance. However, to distinguish what is true from among the false and pretending forms of love and romance is a difficult task. As men and women, we must admit that our self-centredness compels us to define everything on the shifting sand of convenience, idealism and pleasure. How often we hear the words, ‘He, or she, doesn’t love me’, when we really mean, ‘He, or she, doesn’t please me!’

To love is to obey

Only when there is complete respect for who God is, and accountable regard for who we are in relation to God, can we say that we love Him. The proof of love is not how we feel at a moment of religious awakening. The proof is how we keep His commandments. The real challenge is this. These same values and attitudes must flow from the source of headship right through to every family. Our responses to one another in the home are not a pale copy of those we make to God. They are the one and same dimension. We may not merely copy some god-like qualities. We must draw our life from the Father, through Christ our head, as men who obey

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Christ, and as women who obey their husbands.⁷⁰ Husbands are to love their wives *as Christ loved* the church, not as a copy of Christ's love. This means that men must love their wives enough to forsake their own comfort and to express the imperative authority of Christ in their firm demeanour and unmixed culture. To capitulate to anything less is to show that they love themselves more than Christ. Wives are to obey their husbands, as they do the Lord. This is the measure of their love. Children are to show reverence for their parents, as a mark of their love for God.

Marriages without love

A marriage without obedience is a love-less marriage. This is clear. We must wrestle with these absolutes until we discover the foundation that is uniquely Christian. What will we establish, preserve and defend as we go forward into marriage? Will it be the idols of romantic love, or the imperatives of God's word and will? If couples serve the idols of romance, they will build a house on the premise that everything must be 'nice'. The atmosphere must be nicely spoken, nicely encouraging, and always nicely concluded. Firmness is only permitted if it is couched in niceness, and if there are adequate rewards provided as a compensation.

Most often, this is the cultural mode we have grown up with. Years of self-serving friendships have moulded us to the idea that anything which threatens the peace, even if it is true, must be avoided. If parents *have* loved us and disciplined us, then we do have at least some image of true love. However, often these aspects are not sufficiently developed to withstand the power of self-seeking romance. We find that we are only prepared to jeopardise romance if it produces more romance.

Christian courtship and bonding processes should permit God Himself to shake all flimsy constructions and decorative trappings, so

70. Eph 5:24-25

that false footings can be replaced – so that sand can be replaced with rock.

Respect for authority

Jesus admonishes the devil in Luke 4:5-8 concerning his lack of respect or ‘reverence’ for the ‘LORD your God’. Satan should have ‘bowed low’ in respect of the Father’s authority. His disrespect meant that he was in a presumptuous position, taking authority over another where he had no authority to do so. Jesus’ answer to this presumption was to instruct the devil that he should rather ‘worship’.⁷¹ John 7:18 tells us clearly that the one who speaks from himself, (ie not under authority) seeks his own glory and not the glory of God. *There is no respect or reverence for the one who personifies the authority* – in this case, God.

We know that all authority has been given to Christ and that every knee shall bow to the authority vested in Christ by the Father (let us not forget that ‘Lord’ means ‘supreme in authority’).⁷² When we have spoken about the ‘lordship crisis’, we mean the crisis of the achievement of the love of God, which bows the knee in obedient respect to the authority of the Lord. When the ‘knee’ does not bow, respect is not being offered as a right response to authority.

Where do we see this lack of respect? Returning to the point above, the devil has presumed an authority that was not his. He even thought that he could give authority to Christ! In effect, if he could have delivered that authority to Jesus, he would also have been an authority over Jesus. Now, in the relational sphere, disrespect operates in this same way. If you do not respect the authority of another towards you, then you must be your own authority. This is a deceived position, as all authority is given

71. See section, ‘Bonding in spirit and truth’, p 87 72. Isa 45:23. Php 2:10

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to Christ, and He has given it to His servants who ‘occupy until He comes’.⁷³

The accusation that the authority has failed to love in asking for obedience, particularly in a matter that is ‘not nice’, is also deceived by its own judgement into thinking that love can be known outside of authority.

Love is obedience to the command given by a messenger. The messenger speaks with the authority given to him by his Lord, Christ. Love is motivated to fulfil the command (law). Righteousness is the law fulfilled.⁷⁴ If the command has been fulfilled then the messenger and his message have been respected, and righteousness in flesh has been its result.⁷⁵

When this authority is placed within the man to be ‘head’ of his house, God actually asks him to personify ‘love’ to his wife and household. The woman, having made covenant by marriage to submit to headship does so in an attitude of reverence and respect.⁷⁶ Now the house becomes seen for what it is, a context for the love of God to be known and received through a participation in the culture of obedient respect. This culture honours the being of the other, who personifies authority. This becomes important as sin is always expressed against a real person and not just a set of principles.

The authority given by God is personified. That means that *it* is the person and not a position that they hold. The authority of the Father is because He is the Father, and not holding a fatherhood position with principles that can be offended. The ten commandments were not just ten good suggestions to be taken on board or not – they were the commandments of the Lord. This is important to understand. Authority is always personified. Those who were disobedient did not just disobey

73. Luk 19:13 74. Mat 5:17-20 75. Joh 14:15 76. Eph 5:33. 1Pe 3:3-6

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the commands; they disobeyed the Lord. The Lord was sinned against, the rules or commands served to define the nature of the sin committed against the Lord. Sin can therefore be defined as rebellion against the command and disrespect of the messenger.⁷⁷

Jesus explained that there is no authority available from any source other than the Father. As He was taken up into heaven He said that ‘all authority’ had been given to Him and like the parable of the man going to a far country, He gave authority to His servants and commanded them to watch.⁷⁸

Summary – love and authority

Let us now briefly list some of the fundamental qualities of Christian life and family culture in the light of the discussion above.

1. Love is only perfected in us as we live in right relationship to authority.⁷⁹

2. The expression of love is only known within the framework of authority and relational obedience.

3. Love is summed up as the fulfilment of all the righteous requirements of the law. When love is manifest, it is manifest as righteousness.⁸⁰

4. Righteousness is the combination of the authority of the law stated as specific commandments, with the qualities and motivations of love. These two elements together (i.e. authority and love) are manifest as righteousness. Righteousness is the living expression and actions of those who are in relationship with God. Righteousness is the culture of their lives.

77. Mat 28:18. Rom 13:1-7. 1Co 15:24-28 78. Joh 5:26; 6:15; 20:21 79. 1Jn 2:1-6 80. Gal 5:14

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5. To say that we love another person, but to show no acceptance or respect for their authority, is a lie.⁸¹

The understanding and application of these relational fundamentals is what makes for a happy home.

Headship and the will of God

Consider the account of Abraham and Isaac ascending the mount in obedience to the command of God.⁸² Abraham was to offer his son to God as a sacrifice on the altar. Broader than the death of his son, was the laying down (death) of his future. Abraham's 'house' would cease from the face of the earth. Isaac himself would lose his life and never have a 'house'. Nevertheless, both men ascended the mount believing that God's covenant promise would be fulfilled and provision would be found in the midst of the fire of offering.

God's covenant promise was between Abraham and his descendants, and the principle of the house was to be circumcision. In the new covenant, we understand that this 'cutting off of the flesh' (circumcision) is now achieved through the obedience of Christ.⁸³ The covenant was made with both Abraham's and Isaac's houses. Both of their houses were established through this obedient offering. Isaac did not resist and was therefore obedient, proof that he had been instructed in the ways of obedience, as God Himself had trusted he would be.⁸⁴

Isaac's obedient offering was the mode and means by which his house was established a) in the flow of headship life from the Father, b) out of death and c) sustained by the resurrection power of Christ in the world where death had previously reigned. 'If the Spirit of Him.'⁸⁵

81. Joh 14:15; 15:21-23 82. Gen 22 83. 2Co 10:5. Rom 2:26. 1Co 7:19

84. Gen 18:18-19 85. Rom 8:11

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How does a man fully enter into the provision of the Lord to establish his house? When a man seeks the specific will of the Lord concerning his initiative to establish his own house, he must enter into the covenant casting aside all other ‘reasonable’ ideas and give himself to love (obey) his Lord. The mode of the man’s offering is now shown to be the love of God – *agape*.

Agape is this ‘one way’ love of God that exists without reasons. It is also the authority of God expressed toward man. When a man takes up this *agape* initiative to establish his house, he does so in obedience to the authority and headship of the Lord in relation to this woman and the children to come. The authority of the Lord is then given to the man in relation to this specific woman. The authority of this house is now established and is named in the fellowship of the Father, the Son and this man. Now, we need to note that this authority is ‘named’ in the man. This is more than delegation. It is a new capacity born in him.

A number of elements have come together in order to establish this house within the specific will of God. First, the man has come to the place where he realises that this marriage proposition is actually viable, but it needs the seal of the will of God in order to see the covenant life come to the union.

Second, the man has exercised his mandate to find a wife honourably in the fear (respect) of God and has no issue between himself and his Lord. Issues of faithlessness, moral failures, other covenants, are examples of issues that would interfere in the activity of establishing his house in relation to the Lord. These issues need to be confessed and processed before the face of the messenger before this covenant action can take place. It is important that the couple do not confess to each other without a pastoral overseer being involved. Why is this? The confession itself does not serve any purpose unless it is before Christ and His messenger, in a context where a pathway forward can be prescribed.

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Thirdly, he presents himself to the Lord to make covenant with Him regarding the ground of the house that he is asking the Lord to establish and the blessing of the life of God to his marriage and family.⁸⁶

These three elements come together when the whole initiative that the man wants to take is laid down before the Father. It is offered as a sacrifice in the same faith as Abraham and Isaac, that the Lord will make provision for the covenant to be fulfilled. The lamb which Abraham and Isaac received symbolises this provision for the house to be blessed with life and multiplication. It also reminds us of the sanctification of the children of Israel through the blood of the lamb applied to the doorposts and lintels of every house, when the LORD made a difference between Egypt (the world) and Israel (meaning prince *with God*⁸⁷). Through this process of offering, sanctification and blessing, the man is able to take up his initiative again in relation to Christ. He has passed through the fire of offering, and begins through the power of resurrection life to build his house in covenant with the Lord.

Harmonising the authority named

At this point, we need to note the effect that this relational offering has had on the varying authorities that have an interest in the establishment of this specific house. These authorities include the Father, the Lord Jesus Christ the Head of the body, the Holy Spirit and the man who is seeking covenant in relation to his house. Through this action of offering, all the named and delegated authorities with interest in the enterprise have harmonised.

The initiative to make offering has allowed the man to place himself *under* authority, by offering his entire life and future house into the hands of His Lord and his Father. He has aligned himself with the 'blessing' of

86. Psa 127:1 87. Gen 32:28

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life from the life-source (the Father) from whom every family (house) receives its name.⁸⁸

The culture of this house is now declared to be established after the order of godliness. ‘As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.’⁸⁹ In the future, as the family grows, through times of joy and crisis, this house will serve the Lord. This covenant makes it clear that respectful, obedient submission to the authority of God is the mode of this house on holy ground and there is no deviation because of this commitment.

Named authority

How is the authority of a house named? Previously, we mentioned the notion that there are ‘named’ and ‘delegated’ authorities. When it comes to the investment of God’s own life into an individual, He does not *delegate* the authority; rather He *names* it. Named authority is passed on from God to man through offering. It is also connected to the source (the Father) in the flow of headship life through offering. ‘For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named.’⁹⁰

When the named authority is received, it is received as an individual possession. The authority is received into the person. It is not a position. The individual, having offered themselves (laid down their life), is able to ‘stand up’ in resurrection life, and move forward as a viable part of God’s administration. The man now participates in the ‘naming’ of his house and culture. ‘This is now’ as per Adam’s declaration in Genesis 2:23-24.

Misappropriation works by taking the authority that is given outside the flow of headship life, and using the law to regulate and delegate it. Its power and strength is not sustained in resurrection life (headship flow).

88. Eph 3:14-15 89. Jos 24:15 90. Eph 3:14-15

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It can only exist for the length of biological life (70 years) because of the sentence of death creation received as the penalty for sin.

How does resurrection life work?

With the advent of sin in the garden, God passed judgement on creation, putting it under the curse of death by edict. Thus, the effect or result of sin and rebellion is death ('the wages of sin is death').⁹¹ Sin and rebellion result in death because life is only sustainable if it is in the flow of headship life from the Father. This life is able to bring redemption to the loss of life (death) that is the reality when one is alienated from the life of God.⁹²

Now we can see that the life of God is completely compatible with the world of death, because it is able to break in on us by resurrection life out of death. It is compatible because it works out of death, and is therefore redemptive, even as He declared, 'I will redeem them from death'.⁹³ This is how redemption (bought back from death) comes to the family. The individuals of the family can be redeemed from sin, lawlessness and death. In fact, the whole culture of the family then is able to live in the cultural way of God that is life out of death.

Offering has now worked to establish this 'house', as an order of life in this creation. Marriage in this life is not an eternal institution, but is superseded by that of which it is prophetic, i.e. the marriage of Christ and His bride. In this life, resurrection life is the redeeming life by which the house, marriage and family become established.

The final crisis of submission

When a man presents and defines the ground and culture of his house to his partner, the woman must herself finally choose him and the ground

91. Rom 6:23 92. Eph 4:17-20 93. Hos 13:14

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that he is offering.⁹⁴ The spirit of her choosing should be after the manner of the testimony, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!’⁹⁵ This indicates that she has chosen his headship, his defined culture and the order of godliness he has expressed. Until this confession is made, she will remain ‘lonely’.⁹⁶ Each must now finally choose the other, and not for any reason such as ‘love’, ‘need’, ‘potential success’, ‘serving God’, or even because ‘this is the will of God’. The choice of the other is made in full accountability. Each individual must find faith that this relational initiative is within the specific will of God – and not just the general will of God.

This phase of process should take somewhere between one and four weeks, and heralds the end of the bonding phase process. A final proposal will now lead to engagement and marriage. The processive questions asked in this phase are:

1. *The Lord* Himself asks, ‘Where is the house you will build for Me?’
2. *The man’s* headship crisis: is the marriage we are about to choose the specific will of God, now that we have interacted responsibly and understand what God requires for Christian marriage? Is there a provision in the Lord for my house to be established?
3. *The woman’s* crisis of submission: is this the one to whom I can say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord?’

Engagement and marriage

A sound courtship, in which mature questions, answers and choices have been involved, does not require any further process. Engagement should be as short as convenient to avoid the prolonging of the artificial nature of engagement. Its chief purpose, at the bottom line, is merely to

94. Jos 24:15 95. Luk 13:35. Isa 62:4

96. From Luke 13:35, the word ‘desolate’ can be translated as ‘lonely’.

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set an appropriate context for making wedding plans. Three to five months is usually sufficient. Some preparations may perhaps have been made earlier than this, such as booking venues, holidays etc.

Section Two

Supervising the Courtship Process

Introduction

It is obvious to all of us that there are a number of interested ‘players’ who have some role, large or small, in relation to a courting couple. These include parents, the civic authorities, the community, the celebrant, various advisors and friends. Broadly speaking, these could be grouped under family, community and church. A prospective marriage will have a bearing on all three of these and vice versa. Accordingly, a wedding service will usually reflect the involvement of these three elements. A wedding is not the exclusive property of any one of these three. Hence, we must understand how these separate elements bear upon and influence the marriage. We must examine the way in which each is to be involved and accountable.

Interested parties

Let us begin by listing those who have some ‘vested interest’ and therefore some role in the progress of a courtship, and also in the outcome.

Parents

The first line of interest, beyond the man and woman, is with the parents of each partner. Even if the degree of ‘interest’ varies, the living parent/parents have a role, as well as some degree of Christian duty as reflected in the Scriptures. Parents have a God-given duty to prepare their children for married lives that conform to God’s will and also social obligations. From the other end, the adult children, while needing to be accountable for their own decisions, have a Christian duty to honour their fathers and mothers. Individual identity is only understood as each one honours the family in which the ‘Father of spirits’ gave them birth

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and formation. Self-knowledge and self-acceptance are essential to the whole courting process. If adult children are in reaction or lack of resolve in relation to parents, they are impeded in their ability to form sound relationships. Clearly, the harmony of the new marriage bond, and the security of the grandchildren to come, both hinge upon careful responses to the family order that God has granted us.

Civic authorities

We list the legal arena next, since it cannot be ignored and because it sets the backdrop against which Christian celebrants and counsellors can identify their role. We won't deal with all the international variables here. We shall just come to the point. The constitutional government, of whatever kind, legislates and polices its laws with the aim of preserving the continuity and safety of the society. It is therefore a legal requirement and a social duty, bound upon celebrants, to prepare citizens properly for marriage and its moral obligations. Christians are submitted to these same obligations and even more so because they seek to be a witness of the power of Christ to redeem mankind from relational breakdown.

Marriage celebrants, whether Christian or civil, who are licensed by the government, have moral and legal responsibilities to fulfil. For example, they are required by law to give adequate marriage counsel. Where partners have been married before, they are required to clarify the legal freedom for, and the moral implications of, remarriage. Non-licensed counsellors who may assist in Christian courtship must remember that these obligations exist. They must not glibly ignore them as if there are exceptions to the law. They must remember that celebrating marriage is a weighty social duty, quite apart from the questions of Christian duty. Of course, the harmony of these matters is that a responsible Christian couple should be the more able to respect their social duty, since they have the grace of Christ to assist them toward successful outcomes.

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Why are these issues important? A few illustrations will help the point. Christian celebrants and counsellors will face a cross-section of the same issues as in the community – young marriages, hastily conceived marriages, marriages that are being urged because of immorality or pregnancy, marriages of convenience to gain citizenship, ‘arranged’ marriages, marriages involving divorcees, marriages with questionable foundations, with obvious disparities of age, suitability, viability etc, and marriages where the mental and emotional capacity for marriage itself is questionable. This list should serve to highlight the need for a definition as to *who* is accountable, and to *what* degree.

Obviously, men and women marry themselves, in reality. No-one ‘marries’ them, even though a celebrant may perform a service or provide a legal contract. Finally, those who marry one another are the ones who will bear the consequences. The role of all interested parties is to advise, guide and even warn. But finally, people with a legal right may do as they will and the community is forced to bear the consequences. The church cannot prevent this, any more than it can prevent violent crime.

Our task as Christian couples and as Christian celebrants and advisors, must begin by dividing clearly between the accountability that belongs to parents, to the community, to the law. God can and will only bring blessing where the lines of authority and accountability are honoured.

Celebrant – messenger?

In part, we have already begun to define the role of a celebrant as one of the interested parties. Whether Christian or not, a celebrant has a range of moral and legal duties. These must be understood by every courting couple. If a celebrant is a Christian, then he is more than a legal officer. He has another role as well, namely that of the ‘messenger’ before whom vows are made. A wise Christian leader will not deal with marriage simply as a social duty. Rather, he aspires, and calls the couple

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to aspire, to the highest will of God for marriage ‘in the image’. The Scriptures show that God is jealous concerning the covenant of marriage. Marriage and the procreation that results from marriage, are an intimate part of the Everlasting Covenant – meaning that mankind has been given the solemn duty of participating in the generation of the ‘many sons’ that are brought to glory as the Father’s eternal reward.⁹⁷ God desires ‘godly offspring’.⁹⁸ There is only one way for *godly* offspring to be produced – by godly marriages. This is the goal that the Christian advisor has in view for every couple.

God has offered mankind the ‘blessing of Abraham’, which can be summed up briefly as ‘the blessing of the life of God in each family’. The celebrant-messenger is the messenger of this blessing. He does not arbitrate upon the will of God, nor can he ‘bless’ a marriage as if to confer God’s stamp of approval.

With all this in view, the best way to describe the role of the celebrant is this. Out of respect for Christ and for the accountability of every individual, he would naturally seek the involvement, in the courting process, of all interested parties. Because of the varying orders of authority that all come from God (i.e. family, government, church, individual accountability), the major part of his duty is to integrate these, given all the variables, toward the best possible outcome for all concerned. He cannot guarantee ‘happiness’ for all, but he should exercise due care that those who are accountable before God are involved to the degree that is real in the circumstances.

Other advisors

The leader who will ultimately marry the couple is usually not the only advisor. Friends, family members, Christian elders and leaders all

97. Heb 2:10 98. Mal 2:15

have some valid part in the development of the relationship. It would be ideal if all these had the same understandings and aims in mind. However, of course, this is often not the case. Hence, the couple can find themselves the subjects of much well-meaning but confusing advice. So, two things have to be noted. First of all, there is much to learn from others and the exercise of sharing and listening to others is ultimately beneficial for the young couple who are processing their own relationship and developing their own culture. The second point is a proviso. Those sharing with young people will often have a bias toward a particular approach and may even introduce reactions and fears based on their own experience. For example, 'Make sure you don't marry this or that kind of person'. 'If you love each other, then get married as soon as possible before you get too old.'

It is hoped, and can be encouraged in the church community, that all advisors will act in the same spirit, capacity and accountability as the celebrant-messenger. With this in mind, churches should exercise strenuous care to train their leaders and workers and also to remain in such dialogue as will ensure the best possible unity of mind.

Supervising the courtship process

We need, then, to describe how the courting process should operate and how a courtship should be supervised. We need to define the role of parents and advisors.

In relation to parents, wise courtship counsel will always recommend a respectful, communicative and resolved approach to parents. Comments on vital input from parents will be made later in the study.

From the church perspective, we suggest that wherever possible two or three leadership couples (including the celebrant) should be asked to help with the courtship process. This means that the range of sight and experience is greater than if there is only one celebrant-counsellor. In this

way, the couple can access help that is both specific to their needs and systematic.

What to expect from counsel

There are two chief admonitions that could be given to a couple when seeking helpful counsel concerning the path way of their courtship. First, they should be aware that a counselling situation is *not* a social event. While this may sound obvious, some couples can become so caught up in the enjoyment of their relationship that they simply expect others, including counsellors, to be likewise focused. While the counsellors are happy for the couple, the purpose of the counselling time is to address the nature of their courting relationship, and provide some helpful instruction or guidance if needed. This needs a professional approach to ensure that the essential relational content is addressed to the couple.

Second, it is important to emphasise on the one hand, that the counselling session is *not* the process, but it is a discussion *about* the process. Obviously, the couple needs to process their own relationship. It is they who need to know, process, choose, and proceed or discontinue according to their own faith before God. The counselling situation simply provides helpful content and reflective discussion or instruction where needed. On the other hand, the couple should not use the counselling exercise as though it supplied the criteria for a successful courtship which, if fulfilled, will commend them for marriage. This style of ‘box-ticking’ interaction does not implement faith accountability. It also treats the celebrant in a manner that is dishonoring – as though his criteria are the veto as to whether or not a couple can marry. Jesus taught clearly that we are not to ‘forbid to marry’. It is because of this admonition that our counselling approach does *not* emphasise the appropriateness of the match or choice of a couple. It does however seek to ensure that a choice is made, and a culture formed in sanctification and honor. For this reason, a ‘powerful’ counselling approach that seeks to ‘process’ or to adjust the

couple is unhelpful. In these cases, the appeasement of the counsellor can become his priority in the process, and therefore the justification for the relationship proceeding (i.e. it forces the couple to tick the boxes). Very often, this style of interaction simply indicates the unresolvedness of the counsellor on an issue. This unresolvedness could be explained as a cultural 'bias'.

Being aware of bias in giving counsel

Wise counsellors and pastoral carers will admit that no one has a marriage culture that is completely resolved. Because this is so, every couple will have a bias of some sort; e.g. idealistic, romantic, legalistic, mechanistic, patriarchal. These dispositions are discussed in Section Three. Note that any bias in a marriage shows unresolved marriage culture. Many couples share from their own experience as if it is the 'ideal', while others may share from reaction and fear because they 'went about it the wrong way'. Across the board, then, we must emphasise that the Scriptural model for marriage culture should be the model from which instruction is drawn.

The next point is that if carers can remain aware of their own propensities and biases, they will be able to protect the new couple from undue influence in certain directions. For example, where a counselling couple's culture is overly romantic, or overly mechanistic, they should protect others from developing along similar lines.

This shows why it's important for each courting couple to relate to two or three different counsellors. This will minimise the effect of any particular bias and broaden instruction beyond the bounds of any one marriage experience.⁹⁹ This team counselling approach will also enable discussion between counsellors about these biases. In this way, those

99. Pro 11:14; 15:22; 24:6

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coming for guidance can benefit from a mature and open dialogue and can be careful to apply the Scriptural model to the formation of their own specific culture.

The role of motherhood in giving counsel

In this whole matter, the wives of counselling couples need to note the following foundational issues. Each new courtship develops by virtue of headship actions being taken by the *man, in relation to Christ* and alongside the elders of the church. Because of this, care is needed in the way that older women advise younger unmarried women. Where leaders' wives take a particularly high profile of instruction in a courtship-counselling situation, this can be confusing to the men who are seeking to emerge in headship. Rather, she should be an example of the way in which the Christian woman *facilitates* the culture of a home, rather than defining or giving direction to it. If she avoids directive or forceful communication, she will be well able to give helpful reflection and encouragement.

Adding to this point, we recall that Paul is quite specific about a woman usurping headship over a man. One implication of this is that a woman cannot call a man to headship, or instruct him in the matters of headship. She is, however, able to 'crown' him in his headship by careful reflection from a motherhood perspective. The 'Seven Blessings' marriage service contains elements which describe this 'crowning' role of motherhood.¹⁰⁰ What is needed, then, is to apply this principle back into the courting-counselling interaction.

Let us consider an illustration. It is possible that where matters of male/female conflict are being considered, the counsellor's wife may impose a view that derives from her own lack of resolution. She may impose this view on the young man. If the husband-counsellor cannot

100. See p 130

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publicly disagree or amend her advice, then the young man is forced to accept the advice as a word of truth and headship. The woman's word, endorsed by the authority of the male counsellor, undoes the headship of the young man. He is now constrained to adopt a response toward his partner that is not the culture he would have chosen.

Another situation that can occur is that the wife will use the counselling interaction as the chance to make a point to her husband. Obviously, this is completely unhelpful to the new couple. In such extreme examples, counselling couples are not only confusing others, they are 'saying and not doing' and are therefore in danger of precipitating the discipline of God upon them.

The 'average' program for courtship development

Let us now step through the way in which a courtship may develop, in terms of the counsellor-couple interaction. We are not including here all the spontaneous fellowship and sharing that will take place.

Until a courtship is well under way, most 'pastoral' interaction will be low-key and one to one, i.e. with the man and woman separately. In these stages, the exercise falls squarely on the parents' and the individuals' shoulders, provided they are mature enough to understand what is going on.

The only advice that is needed or that can be given in these early stages is to be careful to pass responsibly through the 'friendship' and 'romance' questions, as per the earlier outline. There are variables here, in terms of maturity, haste, pressure, patience, upset, understanding, parent involvement, or lack thereof, which give rise to varying needs for advisory assistance. Some seem to proceed effortlessly at first, while perhaps requiring more input at a later stage. Others find the early increments quite uncertain, as self-knowledge and reliable perceptions develop. In this case, strategic input is often needed at an early stage, whereupon the relationship runs more smoothly later on.

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In every case, once the courtship is properly under way, along the lines defined earlier, then the content of the ‘courtship proposition’ stage needs to be urged upon the couple. The primary need is for them to consider the content themselves over time. Instruction and process as a couple together with counsellors is not yet necessary, since the two need to meet one another and take time to develop their relationship. The summary of the key foundations for a relationship as outlined in Section Five is the body of content that is needed. The couple should be asked to keep a brief journal of the experiences they pass through, so that these can be shared with the counsellors at a later date.

Normally six to nine months of courtship marks the point where the relationship is ‘serious’ and where couples will find it helpful to receive some reflection upon their development. The counselling team should now begin to help the couple test their relationship. To effect this, the couple needs to share their progress by way of the written summaries as suggested in Section Five.

From this point forward in the relationship, this kind of dialogue will be needed, with one advising couple or other, every month or six weeks. This need can intensify at some times, and relax at others. Obviously, too much talk tends to replace the time needed to actually court. Alternatively, if the couple is too much alone, they will not have the input that will help them move forward. Time may pass without much development actually taking place.

Involvement of parents

Most parents of courting couples will not have had the benefit of this kind of training when they were married themselves. It is likely that a courtship process, of any kind at all, will be a new experience for the parents. Hopefully, wise parents will see this as a learning time for themselves, as much as for the courting couple. A prayerful, wise and

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supportive approach will be needed. On the one hand, parents will need to avoid projecting their own experiences on to their children. On the other hand, parents must stay vitally involved as the ones who are most accountable apart from the couple themselves. Other Christian counsellors cannot be responsible in those aspects that belong to parents.

Even though the time has come to release children, this is nevertheless a time for resolving and for deepening relationships between parents and their children. If children leave father and mother in the right manner, they will come home in the right way. Why is this? Because the cross, as it is activated in all relationships, removes all enmity. The oft-quoted notion of perpetual tension with 'in-laws' does not need to be the case for Christians. If children take up their own accountability (cross), they will not lean on their parents in an inordinate way. If children break out and reject the opportunity to be resolved in their relationships, as if this is showing 'accountability', they will carry reaction and tension into their new families.

Courtship is a time for both sides of this equation to be examined and worked through. If adult children are well resolved, the relevant matters will be few and the new challenges will be faced with relative ease. If there are issues that have been ignored or lightly healed in the past, it is time for these to be disclosed. Courting adults should remember that they are not just pursuing an exciting, short-term liaison. Rather, they are forming a 'whole-of-life' culture that will greatly involve parents and grandparents etc. Soon there will be engagements, celebrations, weddings, family meals, babies, child-minding, grandparent treats and finally, funerals as well. The marvel of the gospel is that through the power of the cross, a capacity for mature love, for sincere respect and for mutual understanding should develop in these vital years of friendship and courtship.

Practical involvement

As the courtship progresses, parents may wish to understand how their involvement can be initiated in a manner that will be appropriate, knowing that it is not *their* courtship and may not necessarily proceed as they would like it to. Parents must also note that as the courtship progresses, their involvement will also need to grow and change. Let us discuss this changing involvement.

Friendship question

In many cases, the emerging friendship develops in the family home on both sides, not out on the town somewhere. However, the family cannot be the 'base' for the relationship. By this, we mean that the parents are not running the courtship, but are involved as interested parties. The parents should not run ahead of their children to see something established before its time, but watch over the relationship to observe that sanctification and honour are actually guarding its activity. Courtship is not a time for free rein in terms of independent and detached activity. However, in the matters of choice within the relationship, all others must remember that the progress must be made by the courting individuals alone. They must be given room to so choose and adjust to the accountability of these choices.

Romance question

As the phase for the romance question approaches, once again, this is a time of heart-searching and choice for the couple. However, an important interaction takes place at the end of this phase, when the man declares his intention to the father of the woman. Apart from this, there may be the need for some minimal discussion in helping the man or woman understand the romance question, and in working through his or her expectations in this regard.

Courtship question

When the relationship becomes exclusive and there is a headship initiative from the young man, the interaction changes from friendship to courtship. Parents need to be aware of the changing dynamics at work. The young man should ask the father's permission to court his daughter. Note that he is not asking permission to marry his daughter. Nevertheless, courtship cannot be initiated without an *intention* to process the relationship toward marriage. The father does not then process the courtship, but honours the initiative by helping his son or daughter to process their individual choice. He ensures that his daughter is not caught up in romantic fantasy and at the same time, he is assessing the potential head as a mature match for his daughter. This is not so much to do with compatibility as with the integrity of his headship and his readiness for marriage. The father encourages the couple to meet and know one another. Gradually, they will meet and merge to such a degree that they believe they are completely compatible and ready for marriage. The wise father will realise that this is only the start of the bonding phase.

In the 'Seven Blessings' marriage service, speakers such as parents and friends are included, precisely because of their role in supporting the process and in bearing witness to its integrity. The mother of the bride for example, recites set lines which bear witness to the 'crown' of headship that rests on the man. She is given these words of testimony on the basis that she has a God-given role in the courting process. The point here is that parents must apply themselves to an understanding of these roles. Fathers and elders must instruct younger men in the ways of headship. Mothers have an equally important role toward daughters.

Early bonding question

In this phase, the man is eager to view the woman in her home context and culture. We say that he courts in her 'father's house', and becomes acquainted with her culture. This is appropriate, for as yet the man does not have a house to which he may call her. However, his own house cannot begin to become a reality until she begins to leave her father's house. When it is time for this to happen, a careful and honourable negotiation needs to occur. As this phase unfolds, the woman will still desire to be in her own family home, expressing her own identity and culture and being herself in relation to the man. The man will want to meet and know her in this setting, because this is where she most knows herself and is most secure to be herself.

Clearly, parents have a significant role in this regard. They are particularly able to observe and interact with their children to help them understand male/female perspectives. Of course, if tensions surface they should not take sides or intervene. They should allow the couple to work their own relationship through, while also giving the kind of reflection that may aid maturity.

As we have implied earlier, the bonding phase will bring new elements of process and uncertainty, as the mature roles of head and helper emerge and find resolution in a new couple and culture. Parents should always encourage communication, while avoiding manipulation or partiality. Mothers may need to avoid being caught in the emotion of certain situations, leaving the couple to 'walk out' their relationship. This is extremely important as the couple are beginning to define and develop their own culture, one which is quite separate from that of their families. Unwise communication at this time may tie the relationship to the parents in an unhelpful manner.

Middle bonding question

At this time, the couple seem to come to peace in their relationship, and the parents also relax and believe that this relationship may work out after all! They encourage the couple to now meet in their own culture. The father may need to urge his daughter to this, since she is now more secure than ever in her home setting. The father must consciously *begin* to let go of his headship and commend her to the young man. He is only beginning this release, for he will not let go of his headship completely until the wedding day. Indeed, he is still primarily accountable to watch over the sanctification of his daughter until she is given away.

The woman should now begin to spend more time in the man's home and with his parents. She does so because she is now looking at his culture and beginning to facilitate the dynamics that the man is naming as the ground for marriage.

A helpful reminder here is that while headship is released to the young man, and the couple both leave father and mother to cleave as a new unit, there is no suggestion in this that the parents cease to be the father and mother, or that they somehow deny or forfeit these important relational dimensions. Again, we stress that with all enmity removed by the cross of Christ, these relationships are sanctified to take on new meaning and increased blessing for the future.

Late bonding question

At this final bonding stage, love is established and the relationship is relaxed and blossoming. The emerging roles of head and helper are now evident in a new and unique culture. Parents will now support the couple in forming their own culture. They encourage them to relax and bloom. There is no pressure to proceed too quickly from this point.

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Prior to this, the friendship community will have accepted them as a couple. Now that they are definitely a couple and marriage is a certain prospect, it is important that parents and others allow the man to exercise his own headship initiative. Wedding dates and plans are the prerogative of the couple. Others must wait to know what their supportive roles will be.

While the father doesn't officially transfer his headship until the wedding day, we must nevertheless make this point. If he is acting in the daughter's best interests, he will commit to a 'head to head' relationship with the younger man long before this – in fact right from the advent of courtship. By doing so, he will gradually rest the weight of acting in Christian headship upon the younger man so that he must take his role seriously, prepare himself for it, and exercise himself in it. If the man has the support and respect of the future father-in-law, the daughter will then relate genuinely to her new head, not relying on her father to 'fix things'. The man will not feel pressed by expectations to prove himself. The daughter will then know, respect, choose and submit to him for the man that he is.

These elements are crucial to an effective bonding phase. The father must know how to relate to the younger man in a way that supports, steadies, trains and even tests him. He must also know how to release the couple to their own accountable processes. The daughter must know how to make a progressive distinction between her father's headship and the emerging headship of her partner. The younger man must know how to respect the contribution of the woman's father, making a distinction between his fatherhood and the aspect of headship which he must now learn. The mother needs to be active in facilitating all these godly agendas, contributing a motherhood that crowns the young man, and which fully supports the daughter through this transition.

Engagement

The whole dynamic of the relationship changes once the engagement is announced. Everything now becomes focused toward marriage. Often, the parents of the bride become consumed with the preparation for the marriage day. This is appropriate as they relate closely with the couple to hear their wishes and fit these into the context of a budget. Parents will have a role in the specific sexual instruction that needs to be offered.

The engagement time is a good opportunity for the parents of the bride and groom to relate more closely, both in practical details as well as in forging sound relationships for the future.

In the matter of traditions, wedding protocol and costs, it is important to note that families have a great variety of cultural and traditional approaches, some of which will clash with the desires of the couple. There is a need for care, sensitivity, respect, flexibility and wisdom if all are to consider one another, while giving proper honour to the new couple.

Section Three

The Question of 'Culture'

Introduction

In this next section, we shall clarify what we mean by culture. Usually, we associate 'culture' with an ethnic group or with being 'cultured' or refined in our tastes toward dress, art or music etc. When we use the word culture in our present context, we mean the entire way of life that we cultivate as the family of God. God's people have a specific culture that distinguishes them from the world. This culture is the *same* from one family to the next and from one nation to the next. Comparing Christian families in Australia with those in Papua New Guinea for example, styles of living (lifestyles) in regard to work, dress, food, transport and social routines will be very diverse. However, the basic culture of godliness, relationship, values, family order and holiness will be the same. Christian families therefore, will have different styles, traditions and colours in the way they steward their gifts, abilities and provisions. However, they will have, or should have, the same fundamental 'culture' of godliness. The beauty and poetry of life is that we can all delight in one another, in terms of our ethnic and experiential backgrounds, while sharing the same Christian culture of love, respect and hospitality.

Many family cultures are quite sound and will find their way into the new culture that is chosen by the couple, under Christ's headship. However, wise parents realise that as teenagers emerge into young adults of marrying age, it is essential to identify and distinguish between godly features and fallen-worldly features of culture. Salvation and holiness depend on honest examination of familiar ways and family traditions that are not consistent with Christian culture. Wise parenting will enable courting adults to be released from the power of these obligations. Hopefully, this will have been in progress for some years already. Whether so or not, the time has now come for there to be sanctification from all familiar ways.

Cultural biases

Some helpful discussion could be sought by the parents from leaders and elders in the church concerning any cultural bias in their marriage that may impact as a familiar culture on the couple. Whether they were previously aware of an issue or not, with the help of some discussion, the parents will be able to speak to the couple and release either individual from any loyalty to the ‘vain traditions’ they may have inherited. What are some of these biases and how would they manifest in marriage if they are not addressed?

We will now turn to a discussion of different marriage cultures and examples of the biases that they exhibit that are in opposition to the culture of godliness.

The culture of seduction

Normally we think of seduction as pertaining to immoral, sensual or sexual conquering of another individual, against his or her will. More broadly, however, we should note that this basic mode can influence the entire way in which a friendship and courtship develop and proceed. For example, the man who is lazy in developing wholesome friendships is often waiting to be overcome with a strong feeling of some sort for a particular woman before he takes initiative to know her. In effect, he is waiting to be motivated by a seducing snare, even where the woman may intend no such thing.

From the female side, it becomes prominent in the fallen nature of women to ‘send out vibes’ of attention, to arouse interest and affection, even where they have no intention of being committed to an honourable relationship. This is seduction.

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Solomon said that 'I find more bitter than death the woman whose heart is snares and nets, whose hands are fetters. He who pleases God shall escape from her, but the sinner shall be trapped by her'.¹⁰¹ While this verse speaks of the female snare, we should remember that the opposite can be true. The point is that waiting to be snared, or seeking to be snared, as an alternative to responsible and sanctified relationship is of a seductive nature.

Such relationships have two elements: One person is seeking self-validation through control of the other. They therefore actively seduce their partner as a reward for subservience. The partner, seeking to be seduced, wants to escape from the pressure and accountability of standing in identity. The pressure of functioning in a responsible relational interaction, and the pain that responsible relating may bring, is actively avoided. For them, seduction and romance have been confused. The lie that they have believed is that seduction promises personal gratification and security by vacating accountability to the other.

This kind of relating does not work, for the two elements that operate in control are seduction as a reward and emasculation as a punishment. One is not possible without the other within the relationship. Those accepting seduction as the ultimate romance can never make peace within the relationship. They are locked-up in the deceived position of 'keeping the peace'.

Pastorally, we have found that control and accountability as fundamental concepts are mutually exclusive. It is often assumed that a controlling person is an accountable person. However, those who exercise control rarely ever accept accountability for their attitudes and actions.

101. Ecc 7:26

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If seduction is the basis for a marriage, and the compensation for being controlled is the motive for seduction, this kind of marriage can never be joined by God and is a delusion. This culture has been described as ‘control by heat that becomes control by coldness (frigidity)’. The only answer for this culture is to face the lordship crisis and put off all mechanisms of seduction and control.

The culture of disobedience

The demand for equality, for equal ‘say’ and equal right of opinion within marriage, in the man or the woman, shows a culture of disobedience. This culture denies that there is a distinctive identity and role which the zoe-life of God defines for male and female in the image. In the case of women, there are some who demand equality in matters that belong to headship, and who will even seize the role of setting the direction for the family. Some women appear compliant, while in fact they are merely agreeing with those things that accord with their own ideas. There is therefore no actual point where obedience is offered.

The Scriptures are clear that this attitude will produce ‘sons of disobedience’, i.e. offspring who also have this fundamental approach, who are in fact subject to the wrath of God.¹⁰² Sadly, there are many who see obedience as being crushed, suppressed and demeaned. They desire to be the source of their own actions. The fruit of this culture is relational alienation and dystrophy.

The culture of romantic fantasy

A relationship that is based in the ideals of romantic fantasy does not allow personal relational accountability to operate. More simply, if we are bound to keep things nice and sweet, then we will have to restrict our

102. Eph 2:2-3; 5:5-7. Col 3:5-10

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diverse and accountable roles as male and female. In the highly romantic marriage culture, one partner or other can be constantly ruled by the pressure and expectation that he or she must sustain the romantic culture. Romance is the dictating factor. Partners inadvertently find that they are governed by the idol of romance, since they must avoid any process that might threaten the romantic culture. When reality is avoided, this preoccupation with romance can even open the door for immoral fantasy.

The children of these marriages will also exhibit a moral weakness and relational dystrophy. Their unwitting belief and hope is that romance will always make relationships turn out well in the end. It is not hard to see that within courtship, it is likely that a romantic couple will yield to immorality with the justification that they will marry anyway, and that it will all work out. However, as the Scripture notes, God is the 'avenger' of such immoral behaviour.¹⁰³

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103. 1Th 4:6

Section Three – The Question of ‘Culture’

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The culture of ‘two romantic agendas’

Often, courting relationships that begin during the mid to late teenage years occur in a context lacking in effective parental communication and supervision. The parents may themselves be unresolved and unbalanced with regard to their own identity and relationships and, as a result, their children may feel some sense of alienation and rejection. The children may lack any sense of feedback and direction regarding who they are and what they should be doing.

As they begin to mature, the children are watchful of their parents’ mode, and often become critical of their relationship and relational ability. In response to their own sense of rejection and hurt, they develop an expectation that their own life should not be this way. Through the assessment of their parents as ‘dysfunctional’, the children now conclude that they are and will be more relationally mature than their own parents. This new ‘maturity’ is thought to be the means by which they will find comfort for the hurt they feel from the family’s dysfunction – alienation and rejection.

Having assessed their parents’ immaturity, and assuming themselves to be more mature, they now begin their own romantic liaisons with a false idea of what mature relationship involves. Because they have wished

104. 1Th 4:6

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for a romantic ideal that is different from the dysfunction of their family, they now use that wishful thinking to define what they are assuming to be maturity. Relational maturity is now assumed to be the capacity to share hopes and dreams concerning who they are and who they want to be.

This desire for a romantic ideal and ‘special’ maturity for each individual leads the couple to covenant this often unwitting romantic expectation into their relationship. Each of them makes covenant with the other to assist in the realisation of the substance and mystique of the identity projected. They move to support each other in both the image projected and in the lifestyle that goes with it. For example, the man may have projections to become a minister. The woman may adorn herself with what she imagines to be the particular mystique of the minister’s wife, with the aim of helping him achieve his goal. For example, she might project herself as a counsellor, excellent organiser, or as one of the ‘beautiful’ people, apt in music, art and hospitality etc.

In this way, the two conspire to support one another in achieving the identity mould of their own making, and in achieving these expectations. They set out into the future, *excusing* the *present* failures and unreality in pursuit of the ideal outcome. Of course, the relationship cannot maintain itself, because while ever they think resolution will be found in a ‘better future’, they cannot meet, and they do not address the actual state of their relationship. The couple then increasingly move to a parallel mode, still seeking to maintain the image of a successful relationship. They will however continue to be affirming of each other’s idolatrous projection, and support each other’s insecurities in order to achieve the self-image and goals projected.

Furthermore, they will develop a ‘fortress mentality’ to protect the relationship from accusations of unreality, and to preserve and maintain the image projected. Most often, this kind of commitment strays at the point of physical affection – mostly because the two are ‘in love with

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love’. They are mutually empowered. The two romances *should* be moving forward to become one. The couple appears to be more ‘together’ and committed than ever, and this is the delusion and snare. It becomes difficult for parents or carers to break in and speak to this kind of relationship, because they present themselves as the ideal couple on the ground of their projection, their belief in each other, and their conviction about their flawless romance. However, the goals projected are not within the realistic capacities of the two young people. The basis of the relationship must be renegotiated – and this will be difficult without it breaking apart.

This whole scenario, if it is not addressed, will have serious implications in their marriage covenant. Unfortunately, if the woman’s goal is romance, quite often she will look for fulfilment outside of the marriage – in work or hobbies. The husband may suffer this in order to keep the image alive. He praises and excuses her, but underneath feels quite angry and humiliated. He remains committed to the relationship, but is frustrated because he cannot change the fundamental basis, and because he cannot bring forth the image that he has projected.

Where there are children of such marriages, the double bind and delusion in the parents has a significant impact. The children can see the fantasy in their parents. This fantasy is their coping mechanism and escape regarding the unreality of the first family, who are now grandparents. These grandchildren often show a better understanding of reality than their parents.

How is a total revision of this courtship or marriage covenant to be successful? Integrity and honesty must prevail, and the man and woman must recover a real view of themselves and of life. If there have been breaches of trust due to unreality, escapism, or infidelity, these must be properly addressed, without blaming or excusing the other. There must be a fresh commitment to accept the other as he truly is. The submission of the marriage to Christ’s lordship must be evident. Then the children

can also proceed to understand themselves, without struggling with inner reaction, anger and antagonism.

The culture of feminisation

First of all, let's examine what it means to be 'feminised'. Simply, when a young man is dominated and controlled by a strong mother, he learns and takes on sophisticated or guilt-driven relational responses that are compatible with the expectation of his mother. As this corruption continues, his male responses are undermined because he is forced to bow to the powerful woman. Instead of learning the ways of headship and thus being crowned in identity, he takes on a mode of operation and interaction that we have called 'feminised'. (Note that this does not necessarily mean he is 'effeminate', although in extreme cases of abuse this could occur.)

In the case of the son of a feminised man, a young man would exhibit at least some, if not all, of the following symptoms. His nature may appear relationally compliant, but not necessarily obedient. Coupled with his compliance is a cynical attitude that is often hidden. He becomes cynical because he quietly objects to being treated in this dishonourable way. He may also develop an anxious and reactive demeanour. Anxiety develops because having earlier conceded to control, he now becomes reactive. Why? It is because he is possibly still trading with control and expecting a nice outcome in return. Therefore, when a relationship becomes too demanding, he becomes reactive. He fears control. He cannot stand up in the right way, and cannot submit in the right way. Now he becomes a commentator upon circumstances and events. He is full of assessments, but is unable to come to a conclusion. He does not know what to do, or how to make a decision. While his mother was dominating him, he did not need to make a decision. Now that he is older he cannot do more than commentate on decision-making,

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because the confidence and accountability for decisions frightens him. He ‘waffles’ around, and cannot come to a conclusion.

He may develop a demeanour that is sophisticated and all embracing, facilitating and ingratiating. The desire for nice relationships means that he will trade in acceptance. He may use sophisticated reasoning to justify relationships and events that are outside of godly order, hoping to ingratiate himself with others who give him acceptance in return.

He will often have a romantic expectation of life (e.g. wanting ‘nice’ relationships) and be unwilling to take account for his life and relational impact when relationship breaks down. He acts as the victim. This young man will probably pursue a wife who is going to mother him, since this is the style of relationship that his parents modelled to him. His image of a marriage relationship is that one offers loyalty in exchange for comfortable relationship. This kind of relationship is a fleshly covenant basis in trading for control and reward. It is a ‘fortress’. Clearly, this ‘feminised’ mode, where it exists, will need help somewhere or during the courtship process.

‘Pathetic’ bargaining culture

The mode of bargaining for a ‘better deal’ by showing pathetic, ‘poor me’ and whinging responses, is a culture that is present from childhood. If it has not been adequately addressed, it will still be prevalent in the courting relationship. Even in marriage, there are many partners who expect to be carried through life with no accountability. This may not be obvious, but shows itself subtly, for example, in the expressed desire to be fathered, mothered or comforted. Alternatively, it may show itself in a perpetual and vociferous commentary on failed goals, grave injustices and expectations that have not been realised. The lack of attention given to these noises will produce anger and petulance.

Pecking order culture

One of the most common cultural mindsets is that which sees others as higher or lower in the pecking order. In this case, those who are 'higher' should be served and appeased. Those who are lower should respect and obey. The subtle and sinister spin-off is that all who are seen as peers are viewed as equals, who therefore have no authority towards them. Of course, if we simply put everyone on a peer level, we can be totally lawless, while quietly treating most others as lower. The real truth is this. Whenever our responses are set within a pecking order perception, these responses are corrupt. There is never any genuine humility. There is only humiliation because we are not as good as we thought we were. On the side of positive responses, these may not be genuine either, as we are often asserting ourselves over the top of others whom we deem less successful.

The worst result of these corrupt responses is that we can never respond to a peer. We can never hear the simple word that is so essential to salvation. We are also completely disabled in the capacity to be a son or daughter and in fact a father or mother. Where we live in first love, there should be an ability to receive from another, no matter what age or stage they may be. The truly sanctified individual will demonstrate that he/she is completely free of all pecking order style relating.

The culture of control

Genesis 3:16 describes the 'desire' and 'ruling' which establish the fight for control wherever the curse of the fall is still unbroken. As a result of the Fall, it was implied that Eve would seek to control her husband by the same deceptive manipulation as she used on Adam in the first place. For his part, he would rise up to rule over her and dominate her as his means for regaining control. Manipulation and domination for control are an entire culture from which Christians must be sanctified.

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Regardless of personality and temperament, all elements of this culture are self-centred and self-preserving. Both partners need to be regenerated in identity and transformed according to the mind of Christ.

The *laissez faire* culture

Those with a *laissez faire* culture respond to life only when they must, i.e. when pressures motivates them. Devotees of this culture tend to live only for the present, with no goals for the future and no faith for process. By the time they are forced into action, the problem is already out of hand. The air of apparent freedom and spontaneity that some demonstrate, is misleading. It is a fact that those who are *laissez faire* actually become driven by anxiety, because they have no positive process in view. They are anxious because the future is largely unknown and out of control. There is no program in place to address the future. The past is merely a vague memory of things that happened, from which nothing has been learned, since life is never approached with accountability and initiative. Those courting and marrying with this culture are understandably blind to relational implications. They fluctuate and react. They move from indifferent freedom, with no goals, to bursts of control and optimism that are actually driven by anxiety, since this is the only way to deal with the many variables of relationship.

Culture of escapism

The capacity to develop a sound relationship only comes from faith. Those with faith live in the present-continuous reality of giving and relating. Many have learned an escapist approach to life, where religion and religious ‘highs’ are believed to be the signs of reality and progress. In fact, escapists are always claiming these ‘break-throughs’ which validate their person and position. This culture must be put off once courtship is in view. Otherwise, partners are seeking mystical experiences as a mark of their bonding to one another. What they claim

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to be the miracle of bonding may in fact be a capitulation or a reversion to familiar, cultural ways in which ones are finding a sense of peace.

Those rejecting escapism will not be claiming these pivotal re-born experiences. Rather, they will be finding the peace that comes from sound identity and true relational order. The danger for the escapist is that their reality cannot be challenged and their relationship cannot be addressed. They will begin to defend their perceptions as if no one outside of their 'miracle' match, made in heaven, can possibly understand. Of course, this is a culpable blindness and the relationship will become a fortress that cannot be addressed by a messenger.

The true miracle of Christian bonding will show itself in secure identity, steady faith and clear sanctification. Such individuals will not be seeing their relationship as an examination to be passed, as if they must defend themselves and escape from anything or anyone that brings reality to bear.

Mechanistic culture

Put simply, the mechanistic culture becomes focused on the right presentation and the right way to do or address things, but lacks relational sight or perception beyond its own method or approach. Relationships become projects and presentations and individual diversities are restricted, as if everyone must perform in the same way.

Those with this culture operate well within a system, but will tend to struggle with self-knowledge and confidence outside of this structure of mechanisms. When they relate and instruct others, there is a danger that they will be protocol and task related, and that they will neglect to minister to the essential being of the other.

If this culture follows through as a strong component in marriage, the children of the marriage will not know themselves apart from performance and will struggle to give themselves apart from their works.

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When the relational sphere is mechanistic and dry, the sense of meeting will be limited.

Wanton culture

We are using the term ‘wanton’ not in the sexual sense, but to describe a culture of relationship with an inordinate emphasis on social freedom, with the associated dynamics of attention seeking, demand and conquering.

The hallmark of the wanton agenda is that it is always controlling and dominating relational interactions. It is always promising relationship (or better relationship) but there is no dynamic of meeting. This can be a corrupt relational approach whether a person is single or married.

The wanton culture projects itself as one of sociability and friendship, but in the pursuit of social acceptance and the joys of social hedonism, the lines of sanctification are replaced by the mystique of projection and superiority over others. An individual with this culture is not content to be on his/her own and is not happy in a group interaction unless he/she is seen to be leading the group, or in the case of a couple, they must be seen to be *the* couple in the group.

As we said above, this person is ‘always promising but never met’. This has a confusing effect on the peer group. For example, the instigator seeks to maintain his or her grip upon the agenda. To do so, activities must be promoted that are always out beyond the group – something other than what the group is currently involved in. A new thought or plan must be put forward so that one can remain one step ahead. Instead of participating as one within the group, this operator is always doing something else – changing the subject, behaving in an eccentric manner, etc. The unspoken assertion is, ‘I am the law, the leader. My mystique will dictate the parameters’.

The symptom of this culture is that where it has become habitual, individuals are nothing unless they are behaving in a wanton manner.

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They do not know who to be. Any kind of genuine 'meeting' becomes a threat. Those who meet are the enemies. True meeting is viewed as being conquered or demeaned. Such ones are always wanting (wanton) what they do not have and are even afraid to become resolved, because their wantonness is now a habit.

Where elements of this culture are present in courtship, or even in marriage, there is always the suggestion that one must dominate relationships to find self-worth. Conquering is the only way to validation. So this culture has its own rules for acceptance, always using others for some degree of self-gratification.

Let us go further with this profile. A curious feature of this mindset is that the mystique and projection can be strong enough to draw high romantic attraction. However, once the other is drawn in, the first cannot proceed. The whole dynamic is therefore an abuse of the other. This could exist in a strongly male society, where projection of self-worth becomes a game. It could also exist in a strongly feminine grouping, where the women flirt in what they see to be a socially acceptable manner. They have a habit of obligating men to their attentions, with no intention or capacity to proceed in any way. Groups like this can become a clique that feeds on 'deep and meaningful' communication. The group with this profile may even declare themselves to be serving the Lord in their activity. There is a form of loyalty that is not true relationship. At best, relationship is superficial.

In courtship, those with any hint of this culture will not be able to relate properly. They want to be fulfilled but are never able to commit. Therefore, they guard their own prince/princess ground. At the same time, these are vulnerable to immorality due to the 'free-love' kind of mindset. The only pathway for deliverance is through sanctification and by laying down the mechanisms of control and projection that bind themselves and others.

Courtship within the church culture

In church life, there are many cultural and relational variables that impact on every aspect of life and fellowship. This is particularly so when it comes to the relational exchanges between young men and women who are of courting age and who are beginning to investigate relationships and courtship possibilities with all good intent. It is in this sphere that we will define particular interactions and attitudes that may be detrimental to the successful negotiation of these encounters. We note that in every generation, recovery of ‘the image’ is necessary for all who have been born in sin and that in general terms many of the same issues are negotiated as each generation passes and the next appears. Let us now consider some of these dynamics by attempting to profile the negative variables against the backdrop of an understanding of godly culture and order.

Let us consider the development of a romantic interest between a young man and woman. Whose initiative is actually at work – his, hers, family or friends? All relationships play a part in the fellowship life of the church. However, the distinctions of sanctification also prohibit certain initiatives, behaviours, attitudes and expressions of opinion. We all desire to negotiate these encounters in a godly manner. We should therefore welcome instruction and reflection concerning our mode of conduct in these matters. In this way, the relationships of the young couple and their family and friends can be sanctified and blessed.

Concerning the initiation of a courtship, we would all agree that it is the honour of a young man to take initiative in sanctification and honour towards a young woman. He demonstrates dignity, integrity and the capacity for headship when he declares his honourable intention to her father in their first real head to head encounter. This becomes the mode in which their relationship man to man will now begin to develop.

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What problems can occur at this time? We have already indicated that often it is the impact of family and friends that can be detrimental to the relationship of the young man or woman. We will now look at some of these issues and suggest the pathway forward for the relationship to progress.

Consider this scenario: two fathers and two children. Each father perceives that the child of the other father may be a good match for his own child in matrimony. Both fathers are motivated by the desire to see a godly resolution to the question of marriage for all of their children and are in favour of the relationship proceeding, while as yet there has been no visible initiative from the couple themselves. With a word of fatherhood, the father of the young man sends him for counsel to a potential courtship counsellor. The intention is that the young man might declare his intention to court to the counsellor and discuss the steps needed in order to get the relationship started. Meanwhile, the household of the young lady appear to be happy with the look of the young man for their daughter and the father of the girl communicates this opinion to the counsellor. Already we have to ask the question: Whose relationship is this? We do not believe in arranged marriages, but who is arranging this one? If the young man does come to the counsellor, the counsellor is obligated to say, 'Yes, she is nice, you are nice – proceed', but in reality, he has no authority to either give or deny permission for the relationship to proceed.

What has happened? First, the young man's headship and accountability has been impugned by the over zealous opinions of the family and friends. A friend, elder, father or mother may not make suggestions regarding the potential suitability of a person for marriage to the one they are caring for, whether their own child or someone else's child. The nature of their comment should be limited to the discussion of

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the nature of the ‘name’ of the person, i.e. ‘Your name is ointment poured forth’.¹⁰⁵ A friend can speak of this content much more easily than a counsellor can. The course of wisdom in this matter for the counsellor is to adopt the attitude ‘too wonderful for me’.¹⁰⁶

Second, a fundamental mistake has been made when the young man approached the inauguration of the relationship through the door of the counsellor (even if he is obediently pursuing this pathway because of the suggestion of fatherhood). If, and it’s true, the counsellor has no opinion regarding the personnel involved, the best he can do is agree that such and such are nice and commend them to their pathway. In so doing, the counsellor now enters into a patriarchal relationship to the couple, rather than one free from obligation to all parties concerned. Why? It is because the implied point is that this young man will or will not enter a courtship with this young woman depending on the counsellor’s opinion. In reality, the only suggestion that should be made to a young man is to meet with a few members of the opposite sex and make his own choice.

It is also a mistake for him to only seek relationship from those who appear to have approval in the friends’ pecking order group and who appear to be approved by the parents, leaders, elders etc. This appearance of approval is actually a sham, dictated not by eldership but by the peer group dynamic and any liaison is not a true meeting or worthing at all.

Third, the counsellor is in danger of endorsing a small-group assessment of who should be able to court with whom. Now think on this carefully! The opinion of the parents is reflecting this bias. So also, the children will loyally reflect the same approach to relationship as the parents are communicating (whether that communication is overt or implied). Based on the endorsement of approach (not necessarily opinion) the children now develop a social pecking order. This pecking

105. Son 1:3 106. Pro 30:18-19

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order also declares either overtly or through implication who may be with whom, who is 'in' and who is 'out' regarding courtship, ministry and social participation.

Making this attitude even harder to pin down is the ability of this same clique to include others 'less fortunate' as a sophisticated and religious demonstration of acceptance, therefore negating any thought of either group assessment or evidence of the existence of a clique. The 'in group' clique, often controlled by the girls, begins to dictate which people are socially acceptable. A set of fleshly power games begins to operate by law, and couples are then matched via the sophisticated wisdom of these girls.

Fourthly, the parents are blinded by idealism. Part of the parental blindness is that the children present well (ideal) and are nice. The parents believe in the innate goodness of their children and their children's motives and the innate goodness of their own culture. This causes them to excuse the sin of their children as foibles and not sin, while falling into the assessment of the children from other families (sometimes because of the report of their own children). The desire for special friends and relationships, which belongs to the teenage experience, should have been put off by this time but will become an inordinate mode of operation in future years if not checked.

A particular dynamic occurs when a young woman takes up this role. The endorsement by the father or mother of the positive development and maturity of the daughter helps to cement this approach to relationship. This approach now becomes empowered to become a group dynamic among her peers as she becomes evangelistic, finding converts to her world and social view, who are also empowered to facilitate this initiative. Whose initiative is it? This is why it is even harder to pin down, because the girls, by nature, are not accountable and draw their empowerment from other sources, e.g. Dad said, Mum said, a counsellor said. The girls do not function in headship and, because of this, must find

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a replacement authority for their assessments. This authority is idealism with assessment by law that becomes the replacement for the authority of headship and becomes the power-base and model or example for other youth. The group dynamic is wanton and romantic and/or a ministry fantasy empowered from idealism, based in assessment and not founded in the authority of headship. We re-visit this facet of relational growth with every new generation.

Section Four

The Celebrant and the Marriage Service

Introduction

Traditionally, couples do not think very much about the wedding service until quite late in the process. All they really know has been learned from watching other wedding services. They know that vows are recited and the legal register is signed. Against this background, our proposal is that the program of courtship should be reflected in the wedding service and vice versa. In developing a clearer view of courtship that is uniquely Christian, we have felt challenged to consider what kind of *service* is uniquely Christian.

Until the last few years, most Christian weddings used the same service format, built around the bridal entry, the vows, the rings, the signing of the register and the grand exit of the newly-weds. The inadequacy of this format was that the service and vows were to some extent seen as a 'sacrament' by which God's blessing was assured, *whether the relational realities were worked through or not*. Couples did not work through what they were actually vowing, and the service, though Christian in style, was similar to all others. Traditionally, services have not been a reflection or statement of the unique cultural model to which Christian couples are committing.

Ideally then, we are suggesting that a couple should see the service as a declaration and profession, where the *content* of the service becomes the *basis* of earnest preparation. The *Service of Blessing* written in 1998 is one such service that was designed to be a more complete cultural statement. What we are suggesting is that for our present purposes, the 'Seven Blessing' service best sums up the cultural model that we are recommending. Recalling the discussion on the 'messenger' role of the Christian celebrant, this particular service *is* the Christian message. It summarises the total *message* in a Scriptural manner. If one were to ask, 'What is the message, in terms of a suitable wedding service?' we could say that the 'Seven Blessing' service is the message.

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Is this therefore the ideal service? No, it is not. We hasten to add that the ‘Seven Blessing’ service content will serve as an excellent study for all Christian couples, as it represents the goals to which all couples would aspire. However, its format does not suit all situations, hence it is not to be seen as the ‘ideal’ service. It is one particular service that represents our Christian ideals. Because the service sets out spoken lines for mothers, fathers, friends and grandparents etc, it is not suitable to all family situations. What we suggest is that the culture represented in the service be adopted as the goal. As for the service, it should be composed by the celebrant in consultation with the couple, in such a way that it aims for the same cultural statement, while doing so in a way that best fits the situation.

Factors governing the service composition

We said earlier that a wedding service is really a combined expression by *all* the interested parties. The couple, the family, the church, the celebrant and the ‘state’ all have a voice in the service. From a quiet ‘garden’ wedding with parents and a civil celebrant, through to a grand-scale service, these same elements are represented and involved in either affirming or blessing the new couple. Our subject here is to examine the way in which the marriage service *needs to reflect the reality* of what is taking place in each unique family/church situation. This will free us to tailor the service to the situation.

The complexity of the matter is this. Family, church and ‘legal’ implications fall across a very wide spectrum. If every marriage was between young people with committed, Christian families and all had the highest Christian aspirations, the matter would be simple. One service would suffice for all, as it used to. However, just as the circumstances vary, so the marriage services must vary to reflect these unique circumstances.

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The governing authorities of our nation have set a minimum criteria for a valid marriage. All celebrants have been required to submit a service outline which conforms with legal requirements. Naturally, it is only specific legal issues that are in view, e.g. that the service must address just one man and one woman and that both must be legally free to marry. The government is also making sure that the marriage rites of various religions do not conflict with community standards etc. The point here is that a Christian service, one that reflects the foundations we have discussed, needs to do much more than this.

To illustrate the thought that a service should reflect relational reality, consider the role of the woman's father. His participation in 'giving her away' to the man is not something that we take lightly. However, traditional marriage preparation and the services themselves, have regarded this matter fairly lightly – even light-heartedly. The honouring of this important reality needs two revisions. First of all, his role toward the new head of his daughter, and the associated respect of the young man, need to be properly considered throughout the courtship process. Second, the wedding service needs to reflect, honour and enact the transfer in an appropriate manner. This is one illustration of the need for the service to be integrated with all the existing and future relationships that are part of God's order.

The celebrant – the messenger

Let us now discuss the celebrant's role in the Christian context.

Marriage is not a sacrament administered by a priest, as if the service must be a 'Nuptial Mass' in which God's blessing is invoked upon the union. Is a wedding then only a legal contract, or something more? Let us note first of all, that only a 'celebrant' licensed by the government can 'celebrate' a marriage. His counsel, his conduct and the documents associated with the marriage, all have legal significance. So what role does a *Christian* celebrant have? He has a legal role, as does any other

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celebrant. Is there any added significance in his being a church minister? In one sense, no, for he is not the successor to some kind of patriarchal blessing that he confers upon the couple. He is, however, in Scriptural terms, a ‘messenger’ within the realm of the Christian church. In this arena, his authority is not in a ‘position’ but in his being called to convey the ‘message’. What is his message? In broad terms, he is a messenger of the gospel. More specifically in relation to a marrying couple, he is ‘the messenger of the covenant’ that God seeks with man, of which each marriage is a vital part. He acts under Christ’s headship. He is the messenger of the order of life to which each new couple can be connected through headship order.

It is prescribed in God’s covenant bond with man, that the connection between God and man is made through headship: God is the head of Christ, who is the head of the man, who is the head of the woman. This is an order of authority, not in the legal sense, but in the sense that the ‘I AM’ God states the *reality* of ‘what is’ in relation to Himself.¹⁰⁷ God has defined for male and female a perfect law of liberty in which each may have the grace of life. The life *is* the authority and vice versa. We cannot resist or deny authority and find life. Each and every messenger carries this as his message.

Vows made before a messenger

‘When you make a *vow* to God, do not delay to pay it ... do not let your mouth cause your flesh to sin, nor *say before the messenger* of God that it was an error. Why should God be angry at your excuse and destroy the work of your hands?’¹⁰⁸ This passage highlights a broad and vital principle in the way we live our lives. Our confession should always reflect reality. ‘With the mouth confession is made unto salvation.’¹⁰⁹ Confession is the

107. Exo 3:14 108. Ecc 5:4-6 109. Rom 10:10

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key to salvation. Why is this? This is because the word we receive has power once we confess it with our own mouth, and once we follow through to *become* what we have said. Our confessions are not just private, as we might think. What we confess as the truth about our sin, or our righteousness, is considered to have been proclaimed 'before the messenger of God' as we read above.

This is the principle that we must apply to the confession of marriage vows, perhaps the most important of all vows. Just like the daily confessions of the truth by which we are saved, the marriage vow is a confession that is made before a messenger. Marriage is an individual vow, not just a mutual agreement. The vow to be a husband or a wife is a binding one, as binding as the vow or covenant to which God has committed Himself. God is jealous over this vow because it is the vow that most reflects man's acknowledgement of God and of His covenantal purpose.

From the viewpoint of the legal *celebrant*, a marriage ceremony is only a *statement* of some kind in front of the public officer and a couple of witnesses. From the viewpoint of the *messenger*, the vows are designed to be a confession of the Christian *message*. They are a response of faith upon having heard the message, and a vow to establish the new home upon the foundation declared by the messenger. At the same time, those who understand the message and the blessing are at liberty to 'bless' the couple, as is contained in the 'Seven Blessing' service. Those who participate in this service are not expressing seven religious 'sanctions'. Neither is the celebrant. They are expressing a blessing in the same terms as they are spoken in the Scriptures: 'Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD'.¹¹⁰ If the message of blessing has been declared and the couple are responding with a vow of faith, then it is legitimate that blessings should

110. Jer 17:7

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be expressed toward them, on the basis of their vow and not with any sense of sanction apart from the faith of the couple.

Order of creation and order of redemption

We know that the first breath in creation was later exceeded by the breath of the new creation, the Holy Spirit.¹¹¹ As there is an order of creation, there is an order of redemption. Our point here is that those who do *not* find Christ's redemption *still marry*, and do so because God originated marriage as part of the order of creation.

The question is sometimes asked, 'Is a marriage legitimate if the two are not God-fearers?' The answer is, 'yes'. Couples marry and also become parents of children who belong to God, whether they are God-fearers or not. Marriage was ordained by God and inaugurated in creation. Men and women marry as part of this order of creation. Whether or not they acknowledge God, men and women have been given a mandate to which they are accountable, and for which they shall be judged.

Questions a celebrant must resolve

A celebrant who is purely a 'civil' officer doesn't take any of these issues into account, as he/she merely adopts a community-legal role. Christian celebrants on the other hand, face a variety of considerations, since they may be approached by couples across the whole range – from those with no faith, to those who are seeking the optimum Christian outcome; from those on questionable legal ground, to those with straightforward circumstances. Experienced Christian celebrants have usually worked through their own approach to these issues.

Most Christian celebrants are confronted, at some time, by situations where they have insufficient grounds upon which to be free to marry the

111. Joh 20:22

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couple. They may also be approached with situations in which they *can* participate with a good conscience. Because all marriage is before God, whether acknowledged or not, Christian celebrants will see some situations as an opportunity for evangelism. Every 'house' formed on the basis of creation's order, has a chance to proceed to redemption's order in Christ. A celebrant is well placed to highlight that the gospel offers the true power of love and the genuine ability to fulfil God's will. If the hearers only want a religious sanction upon their marriage, the celebrant might decline in good conscience. Alternatively, he might marry the two, while making clear that he cannot give a sanction to those decisions for which the couple must be accountable themselves. He may feel to be involved with the marriage, simply so that he has an opportunity, now and in the future, to direct them to the gospel of Christ.

A celebrant cannot forbid marriage and nor can he instruct some to *be* married. He cannot, on either hand, lift the accountability from the individuals. At the same time, he is free to proclaim the 'message', and marry couples in the hope that they will embrace the Christian faith. He is also free to abstain from marrying a couple, even though someone *else* may agree to do so. There *are* circumstances where Christian celebrants believe it will be more real if the couple applies to a civil celebrant. In this way, they avoid the appearance of 'blessing' something with which they have insufficient relationship.

The sum of this deliberation is that a celebrant might apply himself to a wide range of situations, in the interests of furthering the Christian message. He does not assume that all couples are the same, but he applies himself to *each unique situation* in an attempt to call forth and draw together the responsible participation of all parties.

The social duties of a celebrant cannot be ignored or set aside, even in the early stages of a courtship. Considerations of a 'community' nature can emerge at any time. For example, a Christian celebrant may be confronted with an emerging relationship between adults who are

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incapable of marriage. He may also need to give careful thought to social and ethnic morés – for example where ethnic groupings may have strong protocols as to how men and women should mix and behave. The question of a courting partner moving from one city to another in pursuit of marriage has implications that church leaders must consider carefully before they sanction actions that parents and the community would treat with suspicion. These few examples are sufficient to raise awareness that there are very definite lines of accountability that must be honoured. To avoid confusion, the role of the church is best described in terms of the ‘messenger’ role, while of course, the social aspect of the celebrant must be harmonised with this.

The ‘right’ wedding service?

Each wedding service must be tailored to reflect these expressions of responsible participation. The father’s role in ‘giving away’ his daughter is an example of this responsible participation, to which we have already referred. The appointment of speakers on the couple’s behalf is another. The focus on the couple’s sincere vows is another example. The celebrant’s participation, which is our main focus here, is to testify that the legal and moral duties are being observed. In this sense only, he ‘sanctions’ the wedding. He does not however, sanction the wedding as a divine representative, and he does not confer the blessing of the church as a patriarchal institution. He does not absolutely know, and cannot presume to know, the entire reality that is presented to him. In his role as a messenger of the blessing, he does proclaim the *fact of the blessing* which God has ordained for mankind. He testifies of the blessing, he celebrates the blessing, he evangelises toward the blessing, and he solemnises the couple’s vows as their solemn response *to* the blessing. Finally, he prays for the blessing. In this sense, the ‘laying on of hands’ has validity – not as a sanction, but as a prayer for grace to inherit the blessing.

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In the final analysis, the actual 'blessing' as such is quantified as the sum of the integrity and faith of the whole; the sum of all those elements of accountability which *will* appropriate blessing in varying degrees. There is therefore an optimum 'level' that can be sought. If parents are agreed, if friends have integrity and can attest to the integrity of the couple, if the couple have kept integrity with parents, friends, counsellors and themselves and if the 'messenger' has been able to fully declare the message with integrity, then we are sure of one thing: the elements of headship are all in place, i.e. the headship of Christ, of the parents, of the messenger and of the man toward his wife. This is a foundation for blessing that God would wish for every household. This 'blessing' of which the Scriptures speak is not conferred upon the couple, but is achieved through the *application of the couple to making right responses* to Christ and the gospel. It is the varying grades that exist in these aspects that make the matter of marrying and giving in marriage such a challenge.

A 'Service of blessing'?

In recent years, we have written the *Service of Blessing* to draw together and reflect these elements discussed above. In this particular 'Seven Blessing' format, the focus is on the testimony and 'blessing' offered by friends, mothers, fathers, elders and the congregation. The aim of this service is to optimise the declaration of the blessing, the confirmatory testimony of friends and family, as well as optimising the significance of the vows that are expressed. However, this particular service is only suitable where these optimum elements can be represented. If mothers, fathers, or friends are not integral to the testimony being expressed, or if for any reason it is not appropriate to express the various blessings, then adaptations should be made, or a different service should be constructed. Any and every service can be a 'service of blessing', and simply needs to be composed and styled to reflect the elements that are real. Our proposal is that the same content that is conveyed in the 'Seven Blessing' service,

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can be incorporated in other services, perhaps including a number of commendations: a ‘commendation of headship’ and a ‘commendation of motherhood’. Various speakers, such as parents, grandparents, leaders, or friends, could both commend the bride and groom, as well as commending to them the Christian culture to which they are committing themselves.

In all this we should remember that the overall blessing is for the couple to be admitted as a new family into the membership of the body of Christ. This participation is declared when the new couple, in due time, shares in the ‘one bread’ and the ‘cup of blessing’.

Testing – blessing

We may sum up this meditation in this way. A couple *tests* their relationship so that they can anticipate the *blessing* that God promised to each new house that is established on holy ground. This blessing is contingent upon the maximum relational integrity being *shown by the couple and toward the couple* from all the interested parties. Blessing is not conferred in some liturgical ceremony apart from this. Simply then, the best result for any relationship will be achieved when all interested parties express full accountability toward one another. The marrying couple themselves must resolve their relationships with their own families, since their future lives as new parents with new children will continue to be lived in relational integrity with their own parents. Various advisors, including parents, friends and church leaders, must also express the optimum care and interest in the couple’s future. Then blessing is assured.

The *test* of a relationship is the way in which all these ones pass the *test of behaving accountably* one toward another. Fathers and mothers, whether God-fearers or not, must not fail to extend due accountability toward the care of future couples. The same applies to celebrants and counsellors. The blend of these expressions will determine the

foundation upon which the couple builds their future. Hopefully, the relationship will be tested properly, by all interested parties. If so, all can testify, as part of the wedding day, and attest to the test that has been undertaken.

It is understandable that courting couples sometimes feel that they are being tested on a 'pass-fail' basis. Since they hope to succeed, they are prone to consider the advice given, and measure themselves as to their performance. This is somewhat unavoidable, however counsellors can guard against this by urging the couple to see that it is their own foundation, not a polished performance, that they are working on.

Counselling?

We have used the words, 'counsel' and 'counselling' intentionally. First of all, we well know that these words now have an increasing legal connotation. Where ones give counsel, and others place confidence in their 'advice', the grounds exist for a legal challenge to be made as to the credentials and credibility of the counsellor. For this reason, churches are wisely avoiding the notion of counselling, and being careful to simply share Christian precepts, leaving others free to accept or not.

From the legal viewpoint, it is now imperative that we take care in giving advice in areas where one is not 'licensed' to do so. For example, legal charges can be laid against a well-meaning Christian who strays into giving psychological, medical or marriage advice. Laws related to discrimination, defamation and privacy now have wide-spread implications for Christian practices which used to be quite straightforward. For example, if a third party is witness to a 'pastoral' interview in which an offended party later claims 'defamation', that third party witness may be called to testify against the 'pastor'. However, the application of the law means that the well-meaning care of others can become a legal issue where the other party feels that they have suffered loss or injury as a consequence. For example, conditions that cause

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concern may no longer be mentioned in public without the permission of the one who has the private need or concern

In one sense, these legal pitfalls are a help, in that they remind Christians never to give *directive* ‘counsel’ to others. Christian help is a matter of sharing as friends, and of commending certain responses to the Christian gospel. Strictly speaking, ‘counsel’ in the ‘social’ and ‘professional’ sense, is not part of the Christian ethic. On the other hand, those who are employed by the church, or who act for the church, are regarded in the community as holding positions of trust. This makes them potential targets of legal litigation, even where they are innocently fulfilling the terms of the Christian gospel. For this reason, extreme care must be exercised.

In the area of marriage, this issue of legality makes it essential that Christian celebrants act professionally, and act in the best interests of the community at large, not just within the narrow confines of the Christian church. In other words, they are acting for the good of the community, hence marriage preparation should be thorough. Note also that the warning sounded above is applicable to marriage, because this area of marriage is one of the areas where Christians *are* licensed to give counsel.

In the program we are advising, then, there is a distinction between the licensed celebrant who *does* have certain duties and liberties, and those friends and helpers in the church community who will share casual support. In this way, we do not need to do as some churches are doing in employing counsellors with legal credentials. And nor do we need to practise ‘counselling’ at all, except in the case where the legal celebrant acts within the bounds of the license that he has. This frees us to share all the content that we would hope to share for others’ good, without any risk of crossing the lines of legal concern. As we said earlier, it would seem ideal if three couples are involved with each courting couple in the process – the celebrant-counsellor and his wife, another pastoral couple who are most in contact for instruction and reflection, and a third couple

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who will take a purely supportive role. In this way, the substantial content and essential process can be covered, with the weight falling to different couples in each case. Such a program should also ensure that all the 'bases' are covered, given the time constraints that can limit effective process.

Section Five
Courtship Assignments

Introduction

Let us now summarise and formalise the process by which a couple are helped to address their own relationship. As stated in the previous section, where possible, three carers will be asked to help with the courtship process. If there are two or three supporters, then the broader range of sight and experience will benefit the couple's development. In broad terms, one supporter needs to take a primary *supervision* role (normally the celebrant), one a *systematic* approach, and one a *supportive* approach.

The role of the celebrant-counsellor will be to help the couple assess the reality of their own relational development. He will also communicate with other carers regarding the couple's courtship program. These other carers will be asked to address specific blocks of content with the couple to aid their relational growth and understanding. The second couple will be asked to give systematic instruction so that the content is covered. The third will be asked to help with relational support and instruction concerning specific content blocks to do with preparation for marriage.

Imagine for example that in one particular courtship, one of the full-time leaders takes the supervision role and later accepts the celebrant duties. A young couple who are well versed in the courtship-marriage program could take the systematic instruction role, while an older house group leader couple, well known to the young people, could accept the supportive role. All are supervising, all are sharing instruction, and all are supporting, but some more specific designation of tasks will help the overall clarity. The way in which these three elements – supervision, systematic instruction and support – are distributed can vary in each situation.

Assignment points

We should emphasise from the outset that it is the task of the *couple* to understand the content of sound courtship, and to test their own reality. They do this by applying themselves to godly process, and by seeking reflection and guidance in this regard. If a relationship is simply driven by romantic impulse, without any application to process, it is quite possible that time will pass without any real formation taking place. In such cases, it isn't long before the couple become keen to get married. Then Christian counsel becomes a kind of 'yes, yes' exercise, as the two are impatient to be married, and their optimism makes it seem that all the points of process are well covered. In these cases, counsellors find themselves pressed to go along with the momentum of the couple. One of the most important things is to make counsellors and supporters aware of the degrees of progress, and to step the phases through with patience and application.

To make the program real, we advise each couple to make their development much more conscious and content based. For this purpose, a program of assignments is set out here.

Keeping track?

First assignment. Our first suggestion is that each couple should keep a journal of their relational development firstly as individuals and then as a couple, from the advent of the 'courtship question'. This will give the couple and the counsellors something concrete upon which to base their discussion. This journal can simply record the key points of decision and development.

Early-courtship. In our experience, it is normally five or six months before any input is needed toward the courtship. The couple must simply meet one another and continue to build their Christian friendship. In this early stage, they are not yet ready to 'test' their relationship, since it is

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only forming. In the courtship phase, the priority with regard to process is between the two individuals. It is only in the late courtship and in the bonding phases, that the celebrant and counsellors are substantially involved.

Mid-courtship. By the time the courtship is settled and steady, it is time for the points listed under the 'courtship question' to become the basis of discussion (Christian foundations, sanctification and honour, romance etc). We propose that between mid-courtship and the 'finalising of the courtship question' (somewhere between six and nine months from the commencement of courtship), the couple begin to prepare a synopsis of these key process points. Of course, they might write up any other observations and issues in order to make these known to their counsellors. On each of the points of content listed, they should comment on how they first saw and understood that particular point, and also how they confronted the issue and negotiated it to a mature understanding. Naturally, a couple have a general 'feel' for the content listed, and may see writing it down for discussion as an unnecessary exercise. However, it is good to be pressed to genuine, cognitive assessment of the points.

Late courtship toward bonding. As the couple shifts from courtship-testing toward 'finalising the courtship question', the written assignments on the eight points shown below should be concluded and presented to the counsellors.

Bonding. The bonding tasks, in terms of elements for discussion and written summary, are referred to later in this section. Note also that, in Section Three, we have illustrated some of the problematic cultural biases that result from the failure to address significant issues of relationship. These profiles are an illustration of how problems and failures continue into marriage unless checked and processed during the bonding phase.

Assignments for the ‘courtship question’

Let us now turn to a discussion of some of the specific content and questions that are addressed in the courtship phase. The assignment headings were summarised earlier in Section Two, but further expansion is provided here.

1. Christian foundations for relationship

a) Is the essential relational mode of this couple one of givenness? How is this givenness displayed? Is the relationship based in the pursuit of personal romantic goals? Does either party seek to serve or be served? Is the essential mode of relating *really* one of respect, giving and revealing the other? Do both parties exhibit the maturity and capacity to give in sanctification and honour, or is one or other dominant or subservient? Give examples that demonstrate the answers you have given.

b) Is there a foundation of Christian communication, free from self-centred manipulation, control etc? Are the individuals free to give and receive as individuals of worth? Describe, with examples, how this works in your relationship.

c) What is the unique nature of male/female friendship? Is there a genuine friendship continuing as part of the foundation of this relationship? What are the hallmarks of this friendship? Is genuine affection growing; a quiet appreciation that is not constantly stumbled?

d) Can you see in one another the features of godly comparability?

e) Integrity testing. When we speak of integrity, we mean that one is integrated with oneself, i.e. that one’s actions are consistent with identity, and vice versa. We could say it this way. Do I really know the person? Are all his/her actions consistent with this person, or is there a gap between being and action (function) that makes me confused? Are there regular inconsistencies which leave me wondering what’s going on? Note that the commitment to test, protect and develop a context in

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which romantic love can prosper, is a responsible action of *identity*. The romantic relationship must never 'run away with itself'. A relationship that is out of control is one in which there is no sound identity expression, hence we say it has no integrity. This testing of integrity is not a discrediting of the sincerity of romantic love, rather true testing will add substance to the commitment to love. How?

Integrity belongs firstly to being and secondly to function. Integrity of being is real identity 'standing up'; integrity of function must only be assessed through the eyes of sanctification and honour.¹¹² Are your own being and function consistent with one another, i.e. do you have integrity? Are you able to identify this integrity in your partner? Can you clearly see what sort of person your partner is? Is he/she being that real person in relation to you?

f) Unreality, seduction and control are indicators of a lack of integrity. They also indicate the need for regeneration and transformation to the 'image' that God intended for marriage. What understanding of this 'image' do you have?

Are you both relating without pretence? Are you relating without withdrawing? Are you relating without control or manipulation? Explain how friendship is not the enemy of authority, and how friendship fits into the order of relationship. Does friendship mean having an equal say in all decision-making? If not, why not?

g) Do you perceive any areas that you would seek to change in your partner as the relationship develops? Are the traits you would like to change fundamental to the person's personality, or are they immaturities or foibles that you are hoping will change? If so, be willing to honestly face and discuss these traits. The demonstration of a true understanding

112. On this point, see the appendix on 'sanctification and honour'.

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of this question in relation to your partner will show your ability to worth-ship the other.

2. Sanctification and honour

Sanctification and honour require knowledge of yourself and the other, and yourself in relation to the other and vice versa.¹¹³ This knowledge must govern the mode and appropriateness of everything you do, from friendship right through to courting, bonding, engagement and marriage. Sanctification is how one responds as an individual before God. Honour is how one responds to the other on the same matters. In this way, sanctification and honour determine all the lines or boundaries of identity and relationship.

a) Have you established your relationship according to the Biblical definitions of sanctification as the context to grow, know and be known?¹¹⁴ What evidence is there that you are not following the model of the world in courtship ('the passion of lust'¹¹⁵)? What initiatives are you now taking toward the relationship in sanctification and honour?

b) Against the backdrop of sanctification and honour, we could say that communication is set free and regulated by these same lines. To receive the communication of the essential identity of another person is an honour and a privilege. That communication is freely given and freely received. It does not bind or confine the identity expression of another, but is secure in itself and unthreatened by the other.

The desire to meet or know the other means that communication is without other agendas, expectations, control, or manipulation. While the lines of sanctification will guard the communication of the physical or sexual being, the principle objective of verbal identity expression or communication is to know and be known as a sanctified being.

113. See Appendix 1 114. 1Th 4:2-8. Eph 5:25-28. Gal 6:6-7 115. 1Th 4:5

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When a relationship displays the reality that each person is free to be himself/herself and free to receive from the other, the foundation for good communication is in place. The dynamics of the courtship process will also test the capacity for mature communication as the relationship passes through times of joy, pressure and stress, conflict and resolution. As the relationship continues, and the couple give attention to themselves, it becomes possible for a good pattern of communication to be established.

‘Coming to sanctification’ is that process by which a couple grow together and come to a settled-ness of identity and relationship. The content of sanctification begins with the knowing of oneself and knowing oneself in relationship i.e. knowing who you are and living accordingly.

This is the basis of understanding one’s redefinition toward ‘head’ or ‘helper’. These shifts do not transpire as a kind of mystical transformation, a religious self-definition, by which one achieves a new role. Nor can one simply put on a set of ideals. Rather, as one grows in the capacity to give freely and to receive in faith, as a unique male or female identity, one becomes sanctified as ‘head’ or ‘helper’ to this specific relational image, i.e. with this particular man or woman. For more on this see ‘Culture of escapism’.¹¹⁶

In the bonding phase, this question takes on a very specific application. Are the two of you being sanctified to the unique identity and role of head and helper in this relationship? We could say: are both coming to sanctification? Where do you see evidence of this happening?

116. See p147

3. Romance, *eros* and *libido*

In Section One, we explained clearly that true romance is the elation that derives from the ‘worth-ship’ of the other. It is an appreciation of the mystery and mystique of the other. The desire of true romance is to meet the other, not to conquer him/her. The individual holy ground of the other as a person is always accepted and appreciated and must never be violated. Unsanctified romance is entirely based in how I am made to feel by the appealing aspects of the other – i.e. to what degree am I overcome? This is the ‘passion of lust’. Worldly romance is actually a form of mutual empowerment, as though ‘I am made to feel I am really somebody by the attentions of the other’.

Briefly outline in your own words how you see this ‘worth-ship’ operating in your relationship. Define true and false romance. Show how the statement ‘always met but never conquered’ could be misused to justify a parallel and consensus style of relating, in which eventually one would service the agenda of the other.

a) Explain your understanding of the development of true romance, and describe how it involves the elements of friendship, affection, *eros* and *agape*. There are various Greek words used to describe different types of love. Specifically, C S Lewis in his book *The Four Loves* uses the terms *storge* for affection, *philia* for friendship, *eros* for the state of ‘being in love’ (not sexual activity which Lewis called ‘Venus’, and we will call *libido*), and *agape* for the love with which God loves.¹¹⁷ For our discussion, we will need to further understand *eros* and *libido*.

Eros and *libido* are words that describe very different motivations in men and women at the relational interface. When a person expresses *eros*, what is identified is his motivation to meet, and know (appreciate) the other.

117. See Appendix 2

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When *eros* is governed by a godly spirit in sanctification *it can proceed towards romance*, since it promotes a particular kind of meeting. This meeting can be described as being in ‘sanctification and honour’, where the aim is to ‘meet’ the other and not to conquer them. It aims to find fellowship and spiritual appreciation through giving worth to the other. *Eros* or ‘being in love’ is a clear and ecstatic desire to know the mystery of the other.

Libido is the drive toward sexual consummation. *Libido* is not evil or sinful in itself, but it must be guarded from corruption by Christian sanctification. When it is unguarded and becomes corrupt, it will motivate one to conquer the other, and to use the other for selfish gratification. The Christian ideal is that as *libido* emerges with puberty, young men and women learn right from that time how to guard and preserve themselves from corruption. Clear guidelines on these sexual understandings are contained in other writings.

With these understandings in place, *libido* can be properly placed as a function of *bios* (from which we get our English word biology), which at the appropriate time will serve *eros* in the final marriage bond.

Let us state clearly that *eros* is not primarily an expression of the sexual being. *Eros* is an expression of the whole person. Hence, *libido* (or sexual desire) must *serve eros*, or corruption will result. Sexual desire seeks fulfilment in sexual activity. This is a God-given impulse. But outside of the covenanted relationship of marriage, sexual activity is sin and brings a curse because it is sin against oneself, as well as incurring the wrath of God.

Eros begins with an appreciation of beauty and is expressed as the motivation to know and appreciate the other. Lewis noted that *eros*, as a motivation, seeks the ‘beloved’.¹¹⁸ It seeks the beloved herself, not the

118. op cit p 87

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pleasure she can give. Why? *Eros* focuses on the ‘person’ or *authentic being* of the other. It is not focused on the satisfaction of sexual desire. Indeed, if *libido* is to serve *eros*, it will be expressed as the giving of one’s own being to the other. Giving to *the other*, then, is the focus, not the satisfaction of *libido*. ‘*Eros now transforms what could be a need-pleasure into the most appreciative of all pleasures.*’¹¹⁹

Human *eros* is a part, but not the whole, of godly romance. It promotes fellowship with the other. Romance is a spiritual appreciation that serves and gives worth to the beloved. It preserves *libido* for its right expression within the marriage context.

b) Explain how you perceive the motivation of *eros* operating in your relationship? How do sanctification and honour impact on this operation? What is the difference between human *eros* and godly romance?

c) What standards have you applied regarding *libido*? Noting that the awareness of *libido* is part of the courtship and marriage reality, how much preoccupation with the expression of *libido* is in your relationship at this stage (i.e. physical affection that is sexually stimulating). We must highlight of course that a genuine relationship will be accompanied by physical attraction. However, the preoccupation must be with friendship, affection, true *eros* and the development of genuine romance.

As we have said, *libido* is the drive toward sexual consummation. To pursue consummation outside of the marriage covenant is an abuse of the persons involved. We say ‘abuse’ because the other is not known, but rather used. Sexual actions are a self-gratifying exercise driven entirely by the desire to find and know oneself.

d) Do we understand the basis of seductive behaviour? The motivation to find and know oneself though the expression of *libido* is the

119. op cit p 88

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basis of seduction. Self-knowledge is not attained by this means. Such improper motivation actually shows a *lack* of self-knowledge, and this kind of immaturity places the integrity of the relationship in doubt. There is also serious doubt on the capacity of this couple to truly meet and proceed into proper courtship. It is necessary to control *libido* so that the genuine communication of *eros* is developed, i.e. maleness/femaleness in their specific roles of givenness.

e) How would you expect to see this communication operating, since it will not be through the satisfaction of *libido*? Note carefully that when a couple become preoccupied with *libido*, it indicates that their relationship has stalled in its process. The relationship will now be incapable of proceeding without specific relational resolution and some recovery made with help from eldership. The relationship has stalled around some specific relational matter, or else the fundamental issues of selfishness and self-centredness have not been resolved via application of Christian relational commitment and response. The result of this corruption is the dishonouring of another person by using them for self-gratification.

The true *giving* expression of *libido* is not possible outside of the context of marriage in which the commitment, provision and protection of one's partner is the fundamental prerequisite for its expression.

f) Is there any propensity whatsoever to use strong physical affection as a kind of cure-all or a soothing balm to reassure one another that everything is okay? Wherever this dynamic is carried over into marriage, we observe that the resolution of all conflict is always sought through intense sexual activity. Naturally, this does not produce proper resolution, and only increases the incapacity of the couple to meet, communicate and become resolved as one in the image. Courting couples should be warned that there is a mindset abroad that advocates this kind of 'kiss and make up' philosophy. Sadly, all that has happened is that

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one's partner is being used for gratification, as a substitute for accountable giving.

4. Maturity

a) What understanding do you have of your own personality, and that of your partner?

b) Are you understanding temperament differences with a view to developing conflict recovery?

c) What understandings are in place concerning male/female perspective? What understandings need further development in the area of perspective? Give examples of areas of compatibility and incompatibility and points being resolved and yet to be resolved regarding differences of perspective. Is male/female perspective finding expression, balance and integration?

d) List any 'thorny' areas which you are not comfortable to discuss, or which you do not yet feel free to raise and discuss. Are they unspoken because you hope that romance or time will bring a solution?

e) What makes your courtship viable? What is the basis upon which we are proceeding with this relationship? (Remember, sanctification and honour exclude the notion of a casual romantic friendship in which there is no specific faith toward marriage.) By what measures is it clear that a maturity exists which could proceed, within a suitable time-frame to bonding and further to engagement? Note that if clear immaturities are evident, manifesting in overall discomfort, inadequate self-knowledge and unsuitable time-frame considerations, then the courtship should be slowed down.

5. Fundamental identity and worship

a) Define in your own words what the words *respect*, *honour* and *trust* mean as they operate in your relationship. What do you mean when you say, 'I trust her/him?' Having defined the words, do you give respect,

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honour and trust to your partner? Do you feel that the same is given to you? Is your trust something that you fundamentally give, or is it something that is *earned* or bought by the other? Does trust tend to be always under review?

b) Is there a need to unmask any areas of unreality, possessiveness and control in this relationship? If so, describe how; if not, describe why.

c) Are you both comfortable with each other publicly? Are you sometimes embarrassed by the way the other functions? Do you understand why discomfort occurs? If so, how will you resolve this issue?

d) Have you resolved questions of social status and pecking order attitudes? What cultural/background differences have you perceived? Have these been understood and appreciated in order to synthesise the two cultures into one new culture? What vain traditions have you observed that need to be put off?

6. Escapism

There are several forms of escapism which begin to show themselves within a relationship.

a) The first is romantic hedonism, defined as an over-emphasis and over-indulgence in the enjoyment of pleasurable and romantic activity. In some instances, romantic hedonism promises the blissful future of a lifetime together of similar activity. 'Compatibility' is often defined as the mutual pursuit of pleasurable activities, e.g. sport, gardening, travel, craft. Hedonism can often play a large part in the early stages of a relationship. This needs arresting before it becomes the fundamental motivation – in which case, relational immaturities and incapacities will not be addressed. Hedonism must not substitute for relationship. The romantic attraction which first propels a relationship to some degree, must begin to serve the relationship and not drive it toward pleasure seeking as a form of escapism.

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If true self-knowledge and knowledge of the other do not immediately begin to grow, the lust for pleasure will take over and retard the pathway of becoming one spirit.¹²⁰

b) How have you addressed this matter in your relationship? Is there any escape of relational process through hedonism, romance, other ambitions, fantasy? Is there any tendency to detract from maturing in life and body relationship because we become engrossed with each other, and escape into the pleasure of the relationship? How will you understand and ensure that romance serves the relationship rather than driving it? Do you still maintain your serving commitments to the family and church?

c) Are you relationally diligent? How do you know this? In what relational areas have you been tardy, or lazy? How have you addressed these? As discussed above, romantic fantasy may not be used to escape from relational reality. It is a mistake to decide to marry from the basis of romantic fantasy, or to use the maintenance of the fantasy as an excuse for avoiding the process of bonding.

d) Do you avoid process and the genuine testing of your relationship because it may not be nice, because it may spoil the romance? Note that the preparedness *to address* and process the relationship is the indicator of relational diligence, of maturity and of the capacity to move forward in the relationship.

7. Understanding relational order

a) What is your understanding of authority and love? Can love be known apart from authority? Is authority just a principled position, or is it personified? Is sin therefore against a person or a principle?

120. 1Ti 5:6

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The nature of the authority and order of Christ is a necessary understanding in every relationship, especially as it impacts on the understanding of sin and accountability. First, the nature of authority must be understood as personified and not as a principle or position. Second, sin (lawlessness) and accountability are perceived and understood in relation to the one who has been pierced by the disobedience. Obedience is not just compliance to a principled position, and sin is more than just lack of this compliance.

b) Are you coming to relational rest? What does this mean to you?

Relational rest results from a diligence to enter the rest that is the 'Promised Land' or holy ground of identity and relationship. It is a rest found by diligent obedience to the word of identity, in place of striving by works to define oneself and others. This obedience is made possible by the enunciation of the word of identity which, when mixed with the faith of relationship, brings about lines in 'pleasant places' or 'green pastures' for rest.¹²¹

8. Understanding 'Us'

a) Have you truly met one another in all aspects? Do you truly know one another? Have you put off the evasive and compensating mechanisms which work against true knowledge?

b) Does this relationship have the foundations for a viable marriage?

c) Do you propose to marry one another? Is there a like-minded willingness to embark upon Christian bonding, as defined in earlier sections?

These final questions are important, because a couple can only proceed to the bonding phase if the 'will we, won't we' question is reasonably settled.

121. Heb 4: 1-11. Psa 16:6-7. Psa 23

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Summary

The completion of these assignment questions should see the relationship cross over into the bonding phase of courtship. Whereas we expect the courtship phase assignments to rest primarily with the couple, the bonding processes bring a greater accent on discussion with the celebrant and other counsellors.

Again, the content for the bonding phase is highlighted in Section One. In the bonding phase, it is also appropriate for the couple to begin to process a common approach to various cultural expressions and responsibilities. These would include finances, hospitality, attitudes to family, children, housing, and so on.

Appendices

Appendix One

Sanctification and Honour

Explanation of the chart

The chart shown at the end of this appendix is intended to show that aspects of our identity, life and function will either become sanctified ‘*upwards*’ through the cross or they will ‘*drop down*’ and become corrupted by the fallen nature. The reader should observe the upward flow to the right and the descending corruption in the centre as indicating these points.

In this way, we indicate that upon the pathway toward marriage, the aspects of identity and relationship can be raised up to the *highest* level. Alternatively, these aspects may *degenerate* to destruction because of the fallen nature. Even then, if relationships do corrupt or fail, they can be redeemed and recovered by returning to the process of the cross. Hence the arrow showing a return to the pathway of the cross.

Elements of the chart

At the left hand side of the chart, we begin with the definition of man. The right hand side shows the goal of Christian marriage. Falling from the point marked as ‘choice’ is the pathway to destruction. If a person does not proceed through the cross, their being, desires and physical and emotional functions will all degenerate. Naturally, the desires for love, romance, relationship and marriage will also degenerate unless they are sanctified through the cross.

The three shaded bands have the designations: ‘Person’, ‘*Eros*’ and ‘*Bios*’. Our development in these three areas is then shown beneath the series of headings moving from left to right: choice, sanctification,

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joining, honour, romance, holy ground and marriage. Notes on person, *eros* and *bios* are included below.

The fallen nature

First, without the cross, man's person, or his identity, will become corrupted (see chart). Second, without the cross, the *eros* of man, his love and longing for completeness, for what he does not have, will degenerate to seeking 'erotic' pleasure. Instead of seeking true outlets for his worship and appreciation, he will be seduced to vain idols of worldly romance and pleasure. He will search for romance and true community but will only find further alienation. Third, in the area of his *bios* or physical, biological functions, he will seek harmony and union, but will become dehumanised. Instead of sexuality being tied to the whole person, it becomes disconnected and degenerates to an 'animal' function.

Part of the usefulness of this chart is to show that the process of courtship must move through 'sanctification and honour' in order to establish the relationship on 'holy ground'. Christian marriage is a 'holy land' dimension, not just a social institution. This volume recommends that all courting relationships aim for these goals, and also ventures that all marriages and families can recover themselves to these ideals, if they have not been formerly realised.

Person and bios

The simplest starting point is to say that man (male and female) consists of 'person' and *bios* (think of inner and outer man if you like). Person (being or identity) refers to the basic 'self'¹²² and *bios* to the

122. What Thielielcke calls 'authentic being': H Thielielcke, 1964, *The Ethics of Sex*, Clark & Co, London, p 28.

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physiological functions of mankind, some of which he has in common with animals (at least in the purely physical sense).¹²³

In God's address to humankind in the Scriptures, man is seen as an indivisible whole, and the idea of dividing and identifying various aspects of man's nature is somewhat academic and artificial. It is useful, however, to identify the features of man so far as they show motivation, desire and accountable action.

It is in this sense that we identify *eros* (one of the Greek words for love) as a specific motivation in man, and also as one rendering of the whole of man in his pursuit of identity and ultimate relational destiny. Thielicke called *eros* the meeting point of *person* and *bios*. By this he meant that the essential 'person' (in a static sense) and *bios* or living functions, run together into the dimension of *eros*. *Eros*, then, is something of a complete statement of human motivation; a desire for what we do not have; a longing for completeness. C S Lewis defined *eros* as the love that lovers are in, but expanded upon this to discuss the longing of the soul upwards toward the beautiful and the ideal.¹²⁴ It is this desire or longing that transports one into a sense of fulfilment. The feeling of elation that is induced by another person or by experiences of life can elevate the human soul into a realm of pleasure or ecstasy.

In modern language, *eros* is linked immediately with the word 'erotic'. This places an entirely negative construction upon *eros*, which is not our approach here. However, this word association between *eros* and erotic does help to highlight that indeed *eros will* degenerate to the erotic if there is no sanctifying process to lift up man's desire from carnal degeneration.

123. Bear in mind that the division of body, soul and spirit employed in Greek thought, (quoted once in the New Testament), has a different and a limited application, since in the Hebrew mindset the person is perceived as a whole unit – a view that is strengthened once we understand incarnation and accept that godliness is revealed in our flesh as we participate in the adoption. 124. *op cit* p 85

Appendix One – Sanctification and Honour

When we speak of *eros*, we mean the desire to know and meet and experience the significance, fulfilment and elation that can only come from knowing and being known in one's true place of relationship. Of course, it requires sanctification and the addition of God's love (*agape* – self-giving love) to lift *eros* upwards and guard against its descent to fleshly dictates. The chart focuses on this point. If all the elements are not progressively sanctified upwards, they will stall and then quickly descend and degenerate.

Through the cross (sanctification) and by the addition of God's power to love (*agape*), the human longing to know and meet is lifted up toward honour, appreciation and worship. Then one enters the true romance of life which can be sustained by establishing the altar and its attendant culture of giving.

Choice

We have shown the pathway downward to destruction as intersecting at this point (on the chart) since choice and desire must lead us to the cross if the goals are to be realised. The cross brings us to the reality of our identity. Identity must stand up and meet Christ so that the first man can be regenerated and the new creation can birth 'headship' in the man and 'glory' in the woman. Glory is the full expression of identity.

Sanctification and joining

In the first band ('person'), we show that sanctification will cut us free from the fallen nature to be joined to the Lord in one spirit. As we stand in true identity, we are able to be joined to a partner by the Lord ('what God has joined together, let not man separate').

In the *Eros* band, we show that the addition of God's ability to love (the result of our new birth) will sanctify us toward the ability to give.

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In the *Bios* band, we show that sanctification will free us from the power of the flesh and enable the discipline of all our faculties and capacities toward holiness and honour.

Honour

Whereas ‘sanctification’ describes the impact of the cross upon us personally, ‘honour’ is a good word to describe the impact of the cross upon our relationships with others. The outcomes of honour in the three bands of the chart are self-explanatory.

The holy ground of marriage

We are all in a process, whether in courtship toward marriage, in reforming our married culture, or in renewing our sanctification in life itself. This process sanctifies us to the holy ground where our culture is that of the ‘altar’. If this altar is established approaching marriage, or re-established in our married relationships, it will produce the dimensions of mystery, fellowship and godly consummation that are shown on the chart.

Chart Two

The second chart makes a useful comparison between the Christian and Secular view of romance. The anecdotal comparisons help to show the sharp contrasts which are alluded to throughout this volume.

Chart One

SANCTIFICATION & HONOUR

The unique elements of Christian courtship, marriage and life in general

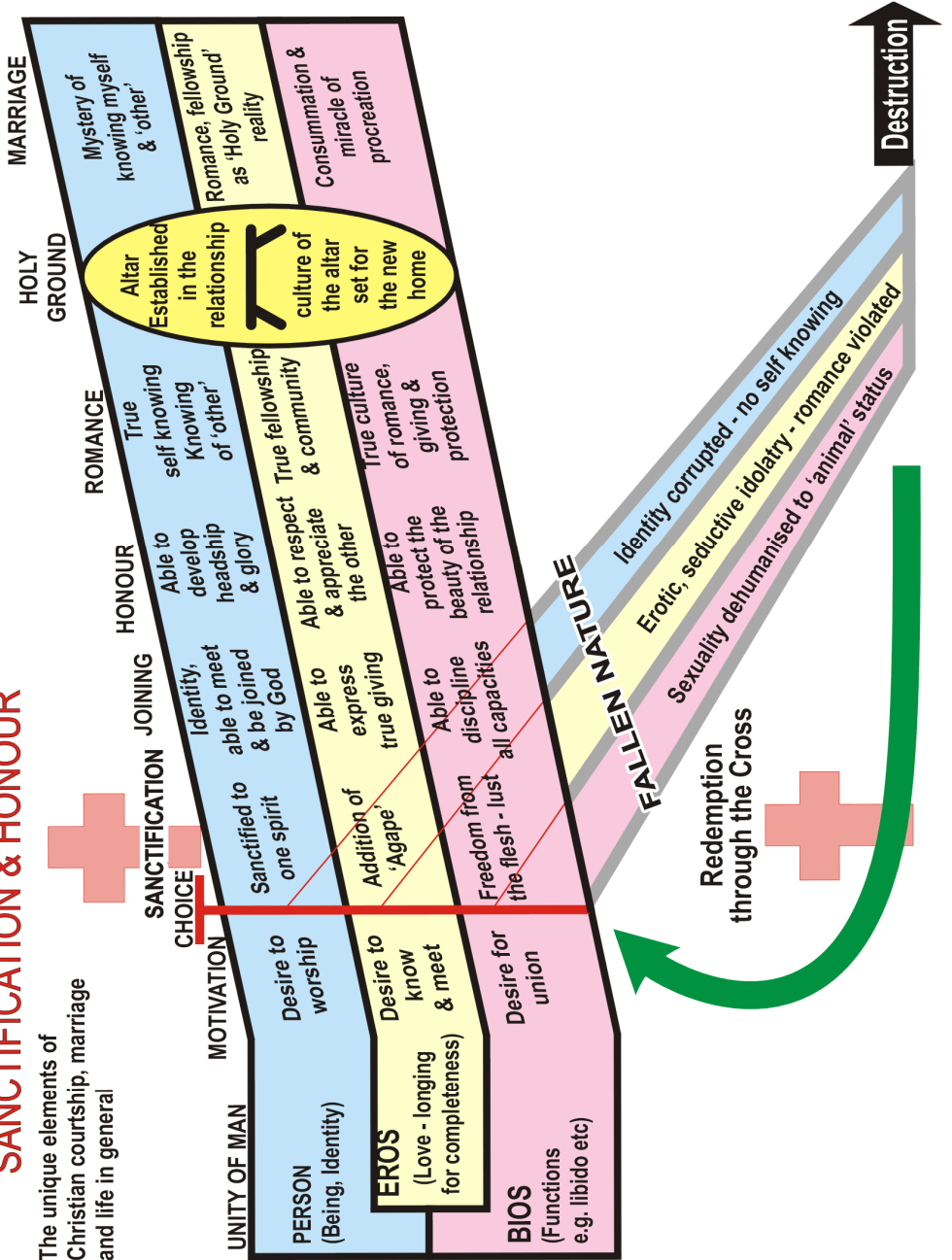


Chart Two

	CHRISTIAN VIEW OF ROMANCE	SECULAR VIEW OF ROMANCE
Model	Sanctification and honour.	Passion of lust.
Basis	Meeting and appreciation of the other.	Compatibility – common interest.
Mode of Living	One spirit.	Parallel; cohabitation; equal rights.
Empowerment	The power and ability of first love through the Holy Spirit.	Emotive power of rights by which one eventually holds control.
Approach to Compatibility	Right for each other is tested by exertion of true identity, true meeting, both seeking the will of God.	Tested in relation to personality, social status, education, lifestyle, recreational interests, sexual compatibility.
Approach to Maturity	The ability to give oneself.	The ability to sustain oneself personally and socially while living parallel in isolation; sophistication.
Unity	Two become one flesh and one spirit.	The two never meet and never become one spirit.
Definition of Male/Female	Both in the image; essentially and distinctively male or female; no confusion or overlap.	Elements of person and sexuality disconnected; even gender is disconnected from sexuality.
Motherhood and Fatherhood	These roles are seen as goals – as the epitome of identity development.	Roles are rejected, confused, or denied.

Appendix Two

Notes from *The Four Loves*

by C S Lewis

C S Lewis in his book, *The Four Loves*, gives an insightful treatise on the nature of love.¹²⁵ Lewis divided his discussion into four different facets (or types of love) that he perceived to make up the whole package that is 'love'. Because of its usefulness to this discussion, we have referenced some of his work below and interspersed our own comments.

Brief summary and comments

Lewis's overall treatise is this. Before discussing *agape*, he amplifies 'affection', 'friendship' and *eros*, showing the strengths and weaknesses of these 'human' loves.

'Every human love at its height has the tendency to claim for itself a divine authority. Its voice tends to sound as if it were the will of God Himself ... each attempts to override all other claims and insinuates that every action done "for love's sake" is thereby lawful and even meritorious' [implying in this action that 'love is God']; 'that erotic love and even love of one's country may thus attempt to "become gods" is generally recognised. But family affection may do the same.' (Lewis p 12).

'We may say, quite truly and in an intelligible sense, that those who love greatly are "near" to God. But of course it is "nearness by likeness". It will not of itself produce "nearness of approach" ... that is why we may mistake "like" for "same". We may give our human loves the unconditional allegiance which we owe only to God. *Then they become gods*;

125. *Ibid.*

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then they become demons. Then they will destroy us; then they will destroy themselves.
(Lewis p 13).

‘It follows from what we have said that we must join neither the idolaters nor the debunkers of human love.¹²⁶ Idolatry both of erotic love and of “the domestic affections” was the great error ...’ (Lewis p 15).

Appreciation

‘Appreciation’, according to Lewis, is a critical meeting point between ‘need-love’ and ‘gift-love’. Appreciation therefore establishes the pathway toward mature love. As he said, ‘we do not merely like the [objects], we pronounce them, in a momentarily God-like sense, “very good”. This attention offers [to the object] a kind of debt [cf offering] ... this wish that it should be, and continue being what it is, even if we were never to enjoy it, can go out not only to things but to persons ... need-love cries to God from our poverty; gift-love longs to serve, or even to suffer for God; appreciative love says: we give thanks to Thee for Thy great glory.’ (Lewis p 20).

Comment on affection

As appreciation is the best measure of identity and meeting, so affection best measures appreciation.

‘It’s a need-love, but what it needs is to love; it’s a gift-love, but it needs to be needed. This warm comfortableness, this satisfaction in being together, takes in all sorts of objects. It is indeed the least discriminating of loves.’ (Lewis p 34). ‘Affection is the humblest love.’ (Lewis p 36). ‘So affection, besides being a love itself, can enter in to the other loves and *colour them all through* and become the very medium in which from day to

126. Debunkers are likely to replace reality with the religious overtones of the ‘will of God’, or with loveless pragmatism.

Appendix Two - Notes from 'The Four Loves' by C.S. Lewis

day they operate.' (Lewis p 36). 'As for erotic love, I can imagine nothing more disagreeable than to experience it for more than a very short time without this *homespun clothing of affection* ... there is indeed a peculiar charm, both in friendship and in *Eros*, about these moments when appreciative love lies, as it were, curled up asleep and the mere ease and ordinariness of the relationship, wraps us around. No need to talk. No need to make love. No needs at all except perhaps to stir the fire.' (Lewis p 37). 'I have said that it is not primarily an appreciative love, yet oddly enough, this very fact means that it [*affection*] can in the end make appreciation possible which, but for it, might never have existed.' (Lewis p 35).

'Affection broadens us; of all our natural loves it is the most catholic, the least finical, the broadest.' 'Affection resembles love, but is not [on its own, the full statement of] love.' (Lewis p 38). 'Affection can cause unhappiness because it is ambivalent.' (Lewis p 39).

We draw from Lewis the sentiment that humanly speaking, affection is the most broad and encompassing 'love'. While friendship is chosen and worked upon, *eros* is pursued and then heightened by the mystery of the other and the pursuit of beauty and *agape* is 'shed abroad' by laying life down. Affection more simply indicates and measures our genuine 'affectedness' by the other and is therefore the 'least God-like' and potentially idolatrous dimension, and is the best indicator of our genuine 'meeting', to which we add the commitment dimensions of love.

When *eros* fails, for lack of the God-like quality it boasted, and friendship limps away to a tussle to find companion interests, it is then that '*affection*' on its own, measured in appreciation, kindness and carefulness, shows itself strong enough to last a lifetime.

Friendship

Of friendship, we are aware that its weakness is its basis in companionship, fellow-interest, common goals – 'Oh, you too?' On the

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positive side, it will outlast *eros*, as it would be chosen above *eros* if only one or the other were permitted to continue.

Friendship, however, clearly needs the addition of life laid down (for one's friends) if it is to be elevated to the status where one can even be a 'friend of God', by showing the ultimate ground of friendship, viz. faith. Thus friendship is, by God, elevated to the image of highest love, and can be so, although it may also not be the case. Marriage of course, is not for the purpose of friendship alone, even as it is not for the sole purpose of affection or *eros*.

We speak of the need of affection even before and above friendship because it speaks purely of human affectation – not as the sole basis for marriage but as the property without which marriage will have no meaning, since it is not for friendship or *agape* that we marry.

'Friendship in Christ, who has chosen us for each other (and we have not, as is normally the case, chosen each other in common interest) is not therefore the customary reward for discrimination and good taste in finding one another. Rather, it is the instrument (context and vehicle) by which God reveals to each the beauties of the others.' (Lewis p 68).

Eros will say, 'Love you? I am you!' (Lewis p 89). *Eros* seeks the beloved. In this way, it is true that *eros* seeks identity and community, to know oneself in the knowing of the mystery of another, as if to possess the mystery of another finally explains who I am? However, it is really only in the image (where *agape* prevails) that these goals are realised.

'[It is] ... useless to separate lovers, even if persuaded their *Eros* will bring unhappiness ... mark of *Eros* [is that the exponents] had rather share unhappiness with the beloved, than be happy on other terms.' (Lewis p 98). So *eros* is pursuing an unattainable, and even overlooks the true nature and condition of the other in the pursuit of what one believes is the desirable goal.

'*Eros* may unite ... unsuitable yoke-fellows ... [and form] "love matches".' (Lewis p 100).

Appendix Two - Notes from 'The Four Loves' by C.S. Lewis

'... Within which [marriage] Eros will never be enough'. 'Eros, however, without reservation and obeyed unconditionally becomes a demon ... divinely indifferent to our selfishness; he (Eros) is also demonically rebellious to every claim of God on man that would oppose him. People in love cannot be dissuaded by kindness; and opposition makes them feel like martyrs.' (Lewis p 100).

On *eros*

'Of all loves, he [*eros*] is, at his height, the most God-like – therefore most prone to demand our worship; of himself he always tends to turn "being in love" into a sort of religion.' (Lewis p 102).

That marriage promotes idolatry, Lewis is unsure, arguing that the 'plain prose and business-like intimacy of marriage renders this proposition absurd', as does the 'affection in which Eros is invariably clothed' ... 'the real danger ... is not that the lovers will idolise each other, but that they will idolise Eros himself'.

He further argues that *eros* is seen as possessing its own law – 'love's law' (Lewis p 103), and that 'the spirit of Eros supersedes all laws' as if it describes a 'new creation'. (Lewis p 104).

'The grim joke is that this Eros, whose voice seems to speak from the eternal realm, is not himself necessarily even permanent. He is notoriously the most moral of our loves. Yet, the world rings with complaints of his fickleness. In one high bound, it has overleaped the massive wall of our selfhood, it has made appetite itself altruistic, *tossed personal happiness aside as a triviality* and planted the interests of another in the centre of our being. Spontaneously and without effort, we have fulfilled the law (towards one person) by loving our neighbour as ourselves. *It is an image, a foretaste*, of what we must become to all if Love Himself rules in us without a rival. It is even (if well used) a preparation for that. *Eros is driven to promise what Eros of himself cannot perform.*' (Lewis p 104).

Charity

‘Something else, first vaguely described as “decency and common-sense” but later revealed as goodness [he refers here to the nature of God] and finally as the whole Christian life in one particular [aspect], must come to the rescue ... of the mere feeling [inferring that affection, friendship and *eros* are based in human feeling] if the feeling is to be kept sweet.’ (Lewis p 107). He means that *agape* must protect the other human dimensions of affection and love.

‘The claim to divinity which our loves so easily make, can be refuted without going so far as that. The loves prove that they are unworthy to take the place of God by the fact *that they cannot even remain themselves and do what they promise to do without God’s help.*’ (Lewis p 109). We would say that they are all distorted and undermined by the power of sin, or self-centredness. *Whereas they could, ideally, elevate us as if to the highest achievements, they will, unless they are redeemed, draw us downward to the most serious of contrary behaviours.*

So we begin to conclude that we do not marry from or for affectation; but neither do we marry for the will of God, supposing that only *agape* will ever be necessary. To do so is to deny our very creation, and to deny the exercise that God has given us to ‘love one another’ in the *most total and complete sense*. We are those who have been called to be ‘of God’, to whom *love is not God*, even though God is love; and to whom the exercise of loving, in all the dimensions discussed, is part of this image (what Lewis calls resemblance to God) without of course necessarily bringing us ‘nearness’ to God.

Each love is necessarily God-like, but can equally become a demon if abused, misused or not otherwise addressed and sanctified by the life and love of God to become part of an organised and integrated divine-human fellowship in the image, where marriage ‘in the image’ can be, and is, recovered by the work of redemption.