

# Reformation of the marriage culture

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## Introduction

- The call to blamelessness is new for every one of us. This call is firstly, and most importantly, apprehended in the marriage relationship. The word of the Lord in this season is not providing us with 'better tips' for how to have a happy marriage. Rather, the call to blamelessness is the gospel of our salvation. Eph 1:13. How we respond to the Lord's call in this season will impact upon our salvation and upon the salvation of our families and households. 1Co 7:14.
- It is helpful to acknowledge that we do not yet understand blamelessness. We recall from the Scriptures that understanding is a way of life. Pro 9:6. This means that we understand the word only when it has translated to become our culture. Blamelessness is a culture that we learn from Christ. We embody this culture through our ongoing fellowship with the Lord and with one another, particularly with our spouse.

## Mercy, grace and blessing

- In order to understand the culture of blamelessness, we must first apply ourselves to obtain mercy, grace and blessing. Let us consider each of these in turn.

### Mercy

- The *mercies* of the Lord are new toward us every morning. Lam 3:22-23. As we shall see, walking blamelessly before the Lord is not possible without the Lord's mercies. In His mercy, the Lord awakens our ear, morning by morning, enabling us to hear, learn and speak as a disciple of Christ. Isa 50:4-5.
- Furthermore, it is by the *mercies* of the Lord that we are enabled to participate in the finished offering of Christ. Rom 12:1. As we journey with Christ in the fellowship of His offering, we are being progressively perfected. Heb 10:14. This is the culture of blamelessness. 2Pe 3:14. It is for this reason that we are to come boldly to the throne of grace so that we may obtain mercy and may find grace for each day. Heb 4:16.

### Grace

- The Lord makes available a unique portion of His Spirit to each Christian married couple. The prophet Malachi described this unique portion as 'a remnant of the Spirit', enabling husband and wife to be 'one Spirit' and to raise godly children. Mal 2:15. This portion is uniquely added to the covenant of marriage. However, this aspect of *grace* is not automatically inherited simply because two Christians got married.
- A husband and wife must respond individually to the word of the Lord which is calling them to be blameless before Him. Gen 17:1. This word calls them to forsake the fallen and unclean ways of relating together. 2Co 6:17. In this way, faith received from the preached word gives access to this unique portion of *grace*, in which a Christian husband and wife can stand. Rom 5:2. The apostle Peter described a

married couple who are appropriating this unique portion of the Lord's Spirit as 'being heirs together of the *grace* of life'. 1Pe 3:7.

### Blessing

- Through a husband and wife's diligent application to the word of faith, the blessing promised to Abraham is appropriated by, and extended to, their family. Pro 12:27. Gen 12:3. In the Beatitudes, Jesus described the blessing promised to Abraham in eight statements, beginning with 'blessed are the poor in spirit'. Mat 5:3-10.
- Jesus also identified the prerequisite for obtaining the *blessing* promised to Abraham as, 'blessed is he who is not offended because of Me'. Mat 11:6. As we shall see, holding on to offence as a 'victim' will eventually disqualify a person from obtaining this blessing. The Scriptures describe this as 'a root of bitterness'. Deu 29:18. Heb 12:15.

### The call to Abram

- When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him and said, 'I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless.' Gen 17:1. Evidently, the way in which Abram was living and relating with his wife was not blameless. The fruit of their marriage culture was the birth of Ishmael according to the flesh. Gal 4:23. In order to respond to the Lord's call, Abram needed to honour and submit to Christ as his Head. 1Co 11:3. Submission to the order of headship is an aspect of the fear of the Lord.
- In calling Abram to walk before Him and be blameless, the Lord was directing Abram to shift the culture of his marriage. Many years earlier, Abram had learned that it was through fellowship in Christ's offering that he would inherit the promised blessing. Gen 15:8-9. However, fellowship in the offering of Christ had not become a daily reality in Abram's life, his marriage or his household. In obedience to the Lord's call, Abraham shifted the culture of his marriage and household to an ongoing participation in Christ's offering. Gen 18:19. Circumcision symbolised this new culture. Gen 17:23.

### Recovering from the Fall

- The current relational dynamics of a husband and wife, which can be described as the 'chemistry' of their marriage relationship, are the result of a combination of factors. These factors include temperamental or ethnic differences, familiar cultures, impacts of shame, impacts of aging and declining health, genetic predispositions, identity frailties, the fear of death; and the list goes on. At a more fundamental level, every marriage relationship since Adam and Eve has been enslaved to the other law that resides within the heart of every man and woman. Rom 7:23.
- The Lord summarised the impact of the fall of mankind upon every marriage relationship when He said to Eve, 'Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.' Gen 3:16. No marriage is exempt from these dynamics. We can begin to wonder if these relational dynamics will ever be different. Ecc 1:9. So, how does a married couple find deliverance? Deliverance from these dynamics is not through cognitive assessment of each contributing factor. Rather, recovery to the order of headship brings deliverance.

### *Fellowship with our spouse*

- Following the fall of mankind, Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God, among the trees of the garden. Gen 3:8. The Lord called to Adam, saying, 'Where are you?' Gen 3:9. The Lord was calling Adam, with his wife, to be restored to fellowship with Him and with each other. In this, the Lord was calling them to be restored to the order of headship.
- Indeed, Christ comes looking for every one of us. He is calling us to converse with Him and with our spouse. The Lord is intently interested in how husband and wife meet and relate with one another on the ground of headship. Their conversation is marked by the same spirit of faith they receive in the word that is preached. 2Co 4:13. Rom 10:8.
- As our great High Priest, Christ is speaking to us from the finished position of His offering. Heb 10:14. In that sense, He has already perfected the dynamics of every marriage relationship, and has finished our works within God's Everlasting Covenant. When a husband and wife engage in the conversation of faith, they are believing in the progressive restoration of their marriage relationship and in their ongoing participation in God's Everlasting Covenant. This is a daily reality.

### **Reformation of the marriage culture**

- The reformation of the marriage culture is progressive and continual. It involves an ongoing discussion of faith as both husband and wife apply themselves to walk blamelessly before the Lord. We do not presume that our marriage culture is 'fine' because of the absence of conflict. Nor do we keep the status quo until a 'crisis-based' renegotiation is needed. Rather, the culture of the marriage relationship is being continually renewed as an outcome of our daily connection to Christ's offering and sufferings.
- Through illumination, we see that all of our fleshly initiatives within the marriage and the family, through which we have endeavoured to obtain blessing, have only brought forth the fruit of the flesh. We realise that the marriage and family have become a sacramental project. By 'sacramental', we mean that our preoccupation has been our perception of what constitutes the blessing, and our perception of how that blessing is achieved. In many cases, a 'conflict-free' marriage and household has been our perception of blessing. However, such a pursuit is only a resignation to the flesh.
- The commitment to cultural reformation in our marriage requires the individual response of a husband and of a wife. The word of the Lord calling us to the culture of blamelessness gives each person grace to mourn alone. Zec 12:10. We acknowledge that all our fleshly relational practices are actually our rejection of Christ's headship. The Holy Spirit turns our mourning into blessing by joining us to the fellowship of Christ's prayer and travail. Rom 8:26.
- The imperative of the Spirit in this season is for every man and every woman to respond to the call of the Lord. Amazingly, the Lord honours the faith obedience of each one, such that, even if their spouse is unrepentant, they are able to minister the grace of life within the household. 1Co 7:14. This ministry within the marriage and household is according to the full assurance of hope. Heb 6:11.

## Family fortress

- Our ability to walk blamelessly before the Lord depends upon being delivered from 'the mindset of a victim'. Each of us has a victim mindset. It is simply the assessments of the other law within us. The other law compels us to judge our sufferings as being unjust. A victim will be completely self-justified in their abuse of others. This dynamic is a great deception. They will be completely ignorant of the relational offence and destruction they are causing to others.
- Let us consider how this 'victim attitude' impacts upon the chemistry of the marriage relationship and, in turn, leads to the establishment of 'a family fortress'. This is where husband and wife are *together* in their mindset toward relational difficulties. Luk 23:12. In an endeavour to mitigate or to minimise the possibility of further relational hurts in the future, they establish ways or mechanisms to protect the nuclear family against such a threat.
- Even where there are relational hurts from a long time ago, the established defence mechanisms, and even 'social norms' of how nuclear family relate to the extended family and within the church, may remain. All of our fleshly initiatives, under the guise of protecting ourselves from potential suffering, are an abuse upon extended family and church. Our fleshly endeavours will never result in fellowship.

### *The example of Abram and Sarai*

- Consider the account of Abram and Sarai in relation to how deceived a husband and wife can become. They were completely *together* in their fleshly initiative to bring forth Ishmael. He was the full manifestation of the flesh within their marriage. As the Scripture notes, 'He who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption.' Gal 6:8.
- After Abraham and Sarah received a remnant of the Spirit, their relationship was characterised by spiritual conflict. In obedience to the Lord, Abraham shifted their relationship to a culture of blamelessness. In response, Sarah asked for the fruit of their fleshly initiatives to be cast out of the household. Gen 21:10. This was a point of distress for Abraham. Gen 21:11. Abraham met his Lord and confirmed that, in order for a marriage and household to remain spiritual, it required the removal of the flesh.

## A renewed mind

- As we shall see, a family fortress is the complete antithesis to the mind that Christ demonstrated. Php 2:5. Christ did not consider Himself to be a victim of our abuse, even though He was the target of our scathing attack. The Lord desires to renew our minds as we repent of our 'victim mindset'. Rom 12:2. As a victim, we confess, in fearful reaction, 'I am suffering alone.' Psa 116:10.
- As a fellow-slave of Christ, our testimony becomes, 'I am co-crucified with Christ. Each day I am filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ. The treasure of my name as a son of God is obtained through my participation in Christ's reproaches. I would have lost heart, unless I believed His word, which calls me to walk blamelessly before Him.' Gal 2:20. Col 1:24. Heb 11:26. Psa 27:13.
- As we repent of our 'victim attitude', the light of the knowledge of our name as a son of God shines upon us. 2Co 4:6. By faith, we offer ourselves relationally as a husband, wife, son, daughter, grandfather, grandmother, grandson, granddaughter.

### Psychological healing

- Our fleshly initiatives are an abuse, directed towards God the Father. We are unhappy that He didn't protect us from suffering. The result of our abusive actions, which the Father has laid upon Christ, is the degradation of our physical, mental and emotional health. Psa 69:9. This is a result of not rightly discerning the body of Christ. 1Co 11:29-30.
- A large degree of psychological sickness and instability can be quickly healed as we participate in the *agape* meal, with a renewed mindset. 1Co 11:27-28. For this reason, the Lord said through the prophet Isaiah, 'Then your light shall break forth like the morning, your *healing shall spring forth speedily.*' Isa 58:8.

### Spiritual warfare

- The evidence of the remnant of the Spirit within the marriage relationship is a spiritual conflict, where the Spirit sets its desire *against* the flesh. Gal 5:16-17. All of us still have fleshly ways in us. That is the other law, fathered by Satan. Satan came into the middle of the marriage relationship and fathered in us the right to question, to judge and to have an opinion. How are these fleshly practices removed from the marriage relationship?
- In his second letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul described the mode of our spiritual warfare. He wrote, 'The weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the *destruction of fortresses*'. 2Co 10:4. The pulling down of a family fortress, or stronghold, can be achieved only by a Christian husband and/or a Christian wife. The apostle Paul explained earlier that the foremost spiritual weapon is 'the meekness and gentleness of Christ'. 2Co 10:1.
- Paul then wrote, 'We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking *every thought captive to the obedience of Christ*, and we are ready to punish all disobedience, whenever your *obedience is complete*'. 2Co 10:5-6. In our flesh, we have no capacity to be obedient. It is the Spirit who enables our endpoint to be in the obedience of Christ, as He pours the love of God into our heart. Rom 5:5. The obedience of Christ is made complete in our lives, each day, as we walk by the Spirit. Paul then explained that God will bruise Satan under our feet whenever the obedience of Christ is made complete in our lives. Rom 16:19-20.