

# *The Standard Bearer*

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*Special Issue:*

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*“Till Death Do Us Part”*

# Two Become One

For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh.

This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

Ephesians 5:31-32

Paul has just instructed husbands and wives how they are to behave toward each other in marriage. Wives are to submit to their husbands in all things, even as the church submits to Christ. Husbands are to love their wives, even as Christ loves His church.

In that connection, Paul explains the great love that Christ has for His church. He gave Himself to the cruel cross that He might sanctify her and present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, holy and without blemish. And what explains Christ's great love for His church? We are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones.

In the passage we consider for this meditation, Paul quotes Genesis 2:28. This brings us back to the original marriage ordinance of creation and teaches us that in marriage two become one flesh. This is a great mystery. *Two become one!* But Paul has in mind more than marriage between a man and a woman. Ultimately, the mystery of

marriage is the relation between Christ and the church. Do we not become one with Christ, even as a man and a woman become one in marriage? This is a great mystery!



In marriage two become one flesh.

Before marriage, a man and a woman are two. Each is brought up in different homes, living separate lives. But in marriage they become one. They are no longer two but one flesh.

To become one flesh is to be joined into the closest possible relationship of life. There are other close relationships in life. There is the parent/child relationship in which children are the flesh and blood of their parents. There is the sibling relationship in which brother and sister are of the same flesh and blood. But marriage is a closer relationship yet. In marriage two become one flesh. So close is this relationship that husband and wife live one life together. When marriage works as ordained by God, husband and wife more and more think alike, pursue the same goals, and work together as one. The joys and sorrows of the one are that of the other. Husband and wife in a sense lose their separate identity and are identified together. They find no real meaning and significance in life apart from each other. They are incomplete without the other. When one of the marriage partners dies, the other loses a part of self.

*Rev. Slopsema is a minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches and has been married to Joan for 46 years.*

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#### Editorial Office

Prof. Barrett Gritters  
4949 Ivanrest Ave. SW  
Wyoming, MI 49418  
gritters@prca.org

#### Business Office

*Standard Bearer*  
Mr. Timothy Pipe  
1894 Georgetown Center Dr.  
Jenison, MI 49428-7137  
PH: 616-457-5970  
tim@rfpa.org

#### Church News Editor

Mr. Perry Van Egdom  
2324 Fir Ave.  
Doon, IA 51235  
vanegdoms@gmail.com

#### United Kingdom Office

c/o Mrs. Alison Graham  
27 Woodside Road  
Ballymena, BT42 4HX  
Northern Ireland  
alisongraham2006@hotmail.co.uk

#### Rep. of Ireland Office

c/o Rev. Martyn McGeown  
38 Abbeyvale  
Corbally  
Co Limerick, Ireland

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Two become one in marriage because God joins them together in marriage. Speaking of marriage in this passage, Paul cites Genesis 2:24, “For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined to his wife.” The word “joined” means to be glued together. In marriage God glues two together. God does not glue together into the intimacy of marriage two of the same sex—man with man or woman with woman. The recent U.S. Supreme Court decision to legitimize homosexual marriage is a mockery of marriage. According to Genesis 2:24, God glues together in marriage only a man and a woman. This arises out of the fact that God made the woman out of the man to be a help meet for him. Because the woman is taken out of man, she is similar to him. Yet, she is also profoundly different. Being glued together in marriage, husband and wife complement each other in a most wonderful way so that together they can serve the Lord in a way that neither could achieve alone.

The bond that God makes in marriage by gluing a man and woman together makes the marriage bond a *permanent* relationship. Were marriage a human invention and the bond of marriage only of man’s making, any marriage could be terminated at will. However, when God glues two together, He does so *for life*. The only thing that dissolves the marriage relationship is death.

For the woman which hath an husband is bound [tied, fastened] by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man (Rom. 7:2-3).

Consequently, when asked about divorce, Jesus proclaimed, “What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder” (Matt. 19:6).

Let every married couple or those contemplating marriage understand this. Take this perspective in marriage. Marriage is permanent. Should problems arise in your marriage, divorce is not an option except in the case of adultery. But even then, the marriage bond is not broken. Only death breaks the marriage bond. Let husbands and wives be committed to their marriages and in Christ work out any problems that may arise. And let those dealing with what may seem insurmountable problems in their

marriage remember, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Phil. 4:13).



“This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.”

The mystery Paul speaks of here is not a crime story that you need to solve. Nor is it a deep, dark truth set forth in riddles and apparent contradictions, so that only a few can understand or of which no one can make complete sense. When the Bible speaks of a mystery, it is speaking of the works of salvation that God performs in Jesus Christ. These are called mysteries because they originate in the mind of God and can be known by us only when God chooses to reveal them. And God has revealed the mysteries of salvation in the Scriptures.

Marriage is a great mystery!

That God joins a man and a woman together in marriage so that they become one flesh is a great mystery. It is great in that it is a wonder that brings great joy.

But the great mystery of marriage is not limited to the union of a man and a woman. That in itself is not the mystery of salvation.

And so Paul adds, “but I speak concerning Christ and the church.”

Between Christ and the church there is a most intimate and wonderful relationship. Paul speaks of that relationship in verse 30, “For we are members of his body, of his flesh and blood.” Often the Bible calls the church the body of Christ. This compares the church to a human body with many members. Of that body Christ is the Head and we are its members. As members of Christ’s body, we are “of [out of] his flesh, and of [out of] his bones.” Just as Eve was made out of the flesh and bone of Adam and then glued to him in marriage, so the members of the body of Christ find their spiritual origin in Christ and are glued to Him in marriage. This spiritual marriage becomes a reality first in God’s eternal election. In election God chose Christ and chose us in Christ (Eph. 1:3). Eternally, God gave us to Christ (John 17:9). This makes us one with Christ eternally. This eternal election in Christ becomes a spiritual reality in our lives through the gift of faith that joins us to Christ and makes us spiritually one with Him. In this way God marries us to Jesus Christ.

And what a blessed marriage that is! In that marriage we enjoy all the blessing of the cross that Christ earned

for us and received at His exaltation into heaven. In that marriage we are regenerated to a new life of loving service to God and the enjoyment of intimate friendship and fellowship with Him through Jesus Christ. The beginnings of that life we enjoy now. And because this is eternal life, we will enjoy it perfectly in heavenly places world without end.

What a great mystery is this marriage of Christ and the church!

But there is more.

The marriage that God has ordained from the beginning obviously serves as an earthly picture of this eternal marriage between Christ and the church. As members of Christ's body, we are "of [out of] his flesh, and of [out of] his bones." Quite obviously, God had this in mind when in the beginning He made the woman from the flesh and bone of the man and joined them in marriage. God ordained marriage among us to be a picture of that higher, spiritual marriage between Christ and the church. Already before the Fall God established the institution of marriage to reflect the saving relationship between Christ and the church!

But there is still more to the mystery of marriage.

Through the institution of marriage, husband and wife also enjoy the blessings of the greater, spiritual marriage of the church to Christ. Most men and women are incomplete in the single state. This is true from many points of view, but especially from a spiritual point of view. In the single state, men and women experience significant weaknesses when it comes to serving their God and enjoying a blessed life with Him in Christ. That lack is graciously addressed by God when He gives them a marriage partner. In marriage those who are incomplete

find a partner that complements them, making them complete. In marriage the Christian husband and wife enjoy the blessings of their spiritual marriage to Christ in a way that they could not find in the single state.

This is a great mystery!

Although it is not the focus of this passage, it is also a great mystery that those whom the Lord has called to be eunuchs for the kingdom's sake find fullness in the single state. These indeed are special gifts to the church.




Our calling is to honor marriage by living in marriage as God intended.

Marriage is not being honored today. Many live together in sexual union without marriage. Others enter into marriage with the thought that they will divorce if the marriage does not work well. There is even talk of trial marriages, so that the young can learn the ropes of marriage.

We must honor marriage. We must do so by viewing marriage as a reflection of the great mystery of the marriage between Christ and His church. We must also honor marriage by reflecting in our marriages that higher marriage of Christ and the church. Wives do this by submitting to their husbands, even as the church that Christ sanctifies submits herself to Christ her Head. And husbands reflect in marriage the higher marriage between Christ and His church by loving their wives, even as Christ loves the church. And marriage is honored by committing ourselves to the permanency of marriage.

Honoring marriage, we will also enjoy the blessings of the blessed marriage between Christ and the church.

This is a great mystery! 

## EDITOR'S NOTE

We have been planning a special issue on a Reformed Marriage for a long time now, and are very pleased to mail this issue to you this Spring. We think you will be edified by it.

You will notice immediately that most of the articles are co-authored, that is, written by husband and wife teams. It was evident to us that when it comes to marriages and weddings, the women often have a great deal to say, and rightly so. We take opportunity here to thank the women who participated, as well as the long-time elder and his wife

for their contributions.

The articles range from pre-marriage preparation by parents to the question that should be answered by couples before marriage: what do they hope for with regard to having children?

May our covenant God bless our marriages to His glory, and preserve them for the sake also of the "godly seed." We hope the marriage ceremonies and the celebrations that follow also bring Him due honor.

—BLG, Ed. 



# Marriage for Life: A Blessing

And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.

Genesis 2:22-24

**T**he godly marriage is an inestimable blessing. This is not only the personal experience of God's people through the ages, it is the testimony of Scripture. Proverbs 18:22 declares, "Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the LORD." The Lord understood the need of the man, for in day six of the creation week the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him" (Gen. 2:18). The psalmist sings of the blessedness of the man that fears the Lord: "In thy wife thou shalt have gladness, she shall fill thy home with good" (PRC Psalter, #360). Solomon, with the wisdom given him by the Spirit of Christ, exhorts husbands, "Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the

days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun" (Eccl. 9:9).

## God's Institution

Genesis 2:22-24 demonstrates that God instituted marriage in the creation week, making it to be a creation ordinance. As a creation ordinance, it is law for all peoples, races, and cultures as long as this creation endures. God's institution of marriage rules out marriage being man's invention. Marriage is not the product of society or of the church. God ordained the form this relationship must have, namely, one man and one woman for life.

God instituted marriage with a view to His covenant. Marriage is not established merely for good order in society, though it has that function, for God is the God not of confusion but of good order (I Cor. 14:33, 40). The marriage institution serves the good of the covenant by establishing families. The blessing of covenant families with father, mother, and children points to the covenant relationship God forms with His people. He is our Father, Christ is our Lord as older brother, and all God's chosen people are His children. In a godly covenant family, the members learn to live the covenant life together, and in this way experience something of the life of God's covenant of grace.

But there is more. The marriage itself is a God-given picture of the eternal marriage of Christ and His bride, the church. The relationship of husband and wife is the most intimate life and love that is found in this world. Even the closeness of parents and children does not reach the level of intimacy in marriage. Accordingly, "shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Gen. 2:24).

## One Flesh for Life

In His instituting of marriage, God teaches that two become one flesh. At least four New Testament passages quote this instruction of Genesis 2:24 (Matt. 19:5; Mark 10:7, 8; I Cor. 6:16; Eph. 5:31), and many more passages are founded on this truth. In a marriage, God forms this bond uniting husband and wife (Matt. 19:5, 6). God alone can dissolve the bond, and He does so by death (Rom. 7:2). That is why Jesus indicates that our earthly marriages do not continue in heaven (Matt. 22:28; Mark 12:25; Luke 20:35).

However, in this life the marriage bond that God forms abides unbroken unto death. Those who reject this will experience the consequences of breaking God's ordinance. Societies that violate this creation ordinance will suffer the destructive effects. Churches that ignore God's

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*Prof. Dykstra and his wife Carol have been married for 43 years.*

ordinance will reap bitter fruits in its members and families. These fruits are not merely “natural” consequences. They are rather the results of God’s terrible judgment, the God who “hates putting away” and who “visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children.” And, speaking of children, they suffer the most from the breakup of marriages.

Those who argue that Scripture permits divorce (for any reason other than adultery) and remarriage (while the spouse is yet alive) argue primarily on the basis of Matthew 19:3-9 that Jesus gives this right. A quick reading of the passages will reveal why it is often cited. It is a difficult passage, capable of more than one interpretation. Specifically, the issue involves the phrase “except it be for fornication.” The question is: Is Jesus with this phrase giving His church the one ground for divorce? Or, is Jesus giving His church the one ground for remarriage after divorce? What is the correct interpretation?

Reformed interpretation of any difficult passage, that is, a passage that could ostensibly yield more than one interpretation, follows several “rules.” Proper interpretation always includes the rule of *context* (What does the context indicate?). And another significant “rule” is that *more difficult* texts are to be interpreted in light of *easier* (that is, unambiguous) texts.

As to context, it is clear that the entire discourse is about one thing—“Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?” Tempting Jesus, the Pharisees inquired about the *grounds for di-*

*vorce*. The essence of their request was: Are there any grounds for divorcing a wife, and if so, what are they? If the phrase “except it be for fornication” be a ground for *remarriage*, then Jesus never answered their question. The context, therefore, points to this “except” being a ground for *divorce* rather than a ground for remarriage.

But if the passage remains somewhat obscure, and universal agreement elusive, that itself becomes a reason *not* to make it the foundation for justifying divorce and remarriage—a ground for breaking a bond established by God; for tearing apart two who had become one; for leaving children without a family, a stable home, and foundation for life. Will any Reformed church dare to do that on the basis of one or two passages that are difficult to understand, open to two possible interpretations?

Then, besides, will a church approve divorce and remarriage on the basis of obscure passages, while the rest of Scripture is clear and unambiguous in forbidding it? God Himself testifies that He hates divorce, and that “the LORD hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously” (Mal. 2:14, 16). Jesus teaches that “whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery” (Luke 16:18). And Romans 7: 3 states plainly that “if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her

husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man” (Rom. 7:3). To which may be added the plain statement of I Corinthians 7:30—“The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord.”

Notice that all these texts give straightforward instruction without exceptions or qualifications. They are not open to two interpretations. They state that divorce is *allowed* for fornication, but fornication does not dissolve the marriage bond formed by God. This plain instruction must guide the church in its interpretation of the more difficult passages. It must also determine the church’s teaching and practice.

If there is a judgment of God on the violation of marriage—the sinful, unbiblical divorce and remarriage while the spouse is alive—know too that the gracious blessing of God rests on marriage for life. Where should we begin? Let us start with the blessedness of mutual trust and confidence. Trust is an essential part of a good marriage. It is the confidence that the spouse is committed, fully committed, to marriage for life. It is the assurance that nothing short of the deadly wound of adultery could ever make him or her walk out on the marriage, and even then reconciliation is possible, in Christ. This trust is expressed the night they say “I do” to the vow “till death do us part.” And this mutual trust continues to grow, develop, and unite as the years go by. In such a marriage, never does a woman say:

"If I do this, my husband might leave me." That is not in her thinking. She is motivated by love, not fear of being forsaken.

Second, the children, when the Lord grants that additional blessing, have a secure environment in which to grow, learn, and develop. Their foundation is secure and unshaken. To learn the devastating, shattering effects of divorce on children, pick up any one of a score of books by these children, now adults. Their testimony is that divorce's devastating effects on children last their entire life. I do not exaggerate. Read their stories; you will weep. For the story of a Christian child, read *Child of Divorce, Child of God* by Kristine Steakley. However, when the marriage is as it ought to be—stable and biblical—children benefit. They receive the love, instruction, encouragement, and guidance so important for their life in the church and in society. With such a foundation and model they can go forth, and by God's grace, establish a home that mirrors their godly parents. This is a blessing of marriage for life.

Third, such a marriage bestows the blessing of a lifetime of growing together. The reality is, becoming one flesh is a process. Legally, the husband and wife become one on their wedding day. Formally, they live together from that day on. But two lives must truly become one, and that takes time. After two years, a married couple looks back and realizes they are much closer now than they were when they got married. Now we are united, they may say. But that unity grows, and ten years later they realize how much

closer they are, and twenty years later, they are still becoming more and more one flesh. That too is a blessing of marriage for life. A long, unbroken, enduring friendship is enjoyed, not without conflict to be sure. But a good friendship is a joy. Husband and wife grow together in such a marriage.

Fourth, they can assist each other. That is one of the purposes of marriage—that they faithfully assist each other in things belonging to this life and the heavenly. But do they know how to assist each other in life? Marriage for life means that husband and wife become adept at assisting each other. They learn

*Marriage for life  
—a good  
biblical marriage—  
reflects God's  
covenant life  
with His people.*


the needs, the weaknesses, and the strengths of one another. They learn where they can assist much, and where not as much. A lifetime of learning, and getting better at assisting each other—a blessing of marriage for life.

We could expound on many more blessings. Marriage for life enables a lifetime of worship together. It enables two to stand strong together in the spiritual battles of life—the

two together are much more than twice as strong as they are apart. They can fulfill their calling in life—whatever God gives them to do. No doubt godly, married couples could keep on adding to the list from their own experience.

But one thing more must be included. Marriage for life—a good biblical marriage—reflects God's covenant life with His people. It reflects the love, mercy, forgiveness, joy, and blessedness that the believer experiences from God and with God. God is absolutely faithful and never, ever breaks (dissolves) His covenant bond with His people, though they oft sin against Him, deserving to be divorced on the ground of their spiritual adultery. A solid, loving marriage for life exhibits to the children in a family this picture of God's blessed covenant. The husband and wife experience it in their giving and receiving in love.

Surely, when we are in heaven and experience the joys of the real marriage in perfection, the marriage of the Lamb and His bride, we will look back at this life and wonder—why did we not see all these aspects of our marriage that pointed to the reality? And we will see our failures as husbands and our failures as wives with a clarity that we now rarely grasp.

For all that, these marriages are a blessing, as they point us to the reality. And in our sin-plagued and folly-filled marriages, by God's grace alone, we are preserved as husbands and wives in marriage. To God be the glory for His marvelous gift of marriage... for life. 

# Timeless Truth for Dating

While parents may dread the day their children begin dating, often young people cannot wait to jump in with both feet. Parents may dread it because they know the temptations, stress, and heartaches that may come for their children when they date. We want our children to marry one day, if God wills, but to arrive at this destination unwounded by sin and heartache is not easy.

Young people, on the other hand, are often ready to forge ahead. Emotional and physical closeness appeals to them, but they soon find real temptations and sorrows. Breakups happen. In fact, many times it happens that the first person our son or daughter dates will not be the one he/she marries.

How do parents and young people navigate the rocky road of dating? What will help with the fears, temptations, pressures, and breakups? The Scriptures, which are “a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path,” faithfully lead. When we follow Scripture, we do things God’s way. This alleviates fears and protects us from being driven simply by excitement and feelings. Dating God’s way will always lead to blessing and joy.

## Servants, camels, and bracelets

Probably the closest the Bible comes to mentioning dating is the history of Isaac and Rebekah. Remember, Abraham sent his servant, Eliezer, back to his hometown to find a wife for his son. Rebekah first met Eliezer when she offered him and his camels a drink from the well. He then gave her bracelets, the family approved, she traveled back behind a veil to meet Isaac, and they married. It would do us good as parents and young people to read this history in Genesis 24 before and while dating.

We are not advocating arranged marriages, camels, and bracelets as the new courtship. Although there

is nothing wrong with giving your wife-to-be jewelry! (Guess who wrote that?) However, in this history and throughout Scripture we do find principles to guide dating. From the history of Isaac and Rebekah we want to observe the biblical principles that lead us to date in a way that is pleasing to God.

## Dating for marriage

Christian dating is the intentional, selfless, God-glorifying, prayerful process of finding a godly spouse. The Christian dates to find a God-fearing spouse in dependence on God. Although Isaac never “dated” Rebekah, notice that Abraham was intentional when it was time for Isaac to marry. Applied to dating today, this means dating is for the purpose of finding a spouse.

Dating is not for intimacy, romance, or good times. Abraham did not tell Eliezer, “Find a wife to make Isaac happy and feel good about himself.” Intimacy and romance feel good. A young woman enjoys it when a young man buys dinner, listens to her, and holds the door open. A young man is pleased to take a young lady out, have her laugh at his jokes, and be impressed with his car. A young person looking for these things is not ready to date. Christian dating is intentional with a view to marriage. This does not mean a woman and a man must be committed to marrying each other before they date. But they should be committed to seeking a spouse according to God’s will.

## Dating for more than marriage

Isn’t there something more? Dating is for worship! If you are single and want to be married, please remember marriage is not your long-awaited promised land. The goal of Christian dating is God-glorifying worship. Notice how Abraham’s servant worshiped when he found Rebekah (Gen. 24:26-27, 48). The goal of this life is not marriage. God has created us first for the purpose of worship. In dating, we must always focus on worshiping Him.

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*Rev. Eriks and his wife Jen learned about dating through their own struggles and mistakes, and are still learning as they guide their own children. They have been married for 20 years.*



## The one rule

Abraham's instruction to Eliezer is clear: do not dare find a woman from the Canaanites for my son Isaac. Go to my hometown where you will find God-fearing women and find a wife for my son there. In this history we find the clear principle found in God's Word: date and marry *only* in the Lord. Notice that we said *date* and *marry*.... If we are to marry only in the Lord, then we also date only in the Lord. Throughout the Old Testament, God warned His people not to marry the heathen. Time after time, God's people disobeyed this command to the destruction of their spiritual health. The New Testament gives us the same principle in I Corinthians 7:39: "she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord."

What does this mean? Is it enough that the young man or young woman says he/she is a Christian and goes to a church? No. Marrying in the Lord means that the person one dates is committed to loving and honoring Jesus Christ and shows this in his/her life. This love for Christ is manifest especially in a humility of confessing sin and clinging to the cross of Jesus Christ. One of the questions my wife and I ask a young man before he may date one of our daughters is: what is your relationship with Jesus Christ? If a young person goes to church but frequently lies to parents, expresses how much they despise catechism, or mocks and bullies others, he/she is not showing a commitment to Christ and His Word. This is not a person to be dating. Date only one who is consistently godly in words and actions, in any circumstance.

Marrying in the Lord emphasizes the importance of spiritual oneness. We should date those who are committed to Jesus Christ by being committed to His truth. The other should believe the same truth, God's truth, that I believe. Marriage is difficult enough because of sin. It becomes even more difficult when husband and wife are not united in their faith. Remember Amos 3:3, "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" Although this passage is not about dating per se, the principle is certainly vital for dating and marriage.

Abraham followed this one rule in finding Isaac's wife. Here are some ways we can apply this timeless truth to contemporary dating.

## Pray, pray, and pray

Before Abraham's servant saw even one woman, he

stopped and prayed, "O Lord God of my master Abraham, I pray thee, send me good speed this day, and show kindness unto my master Abraham." We should pray for the determination of God's will in the same way Eliezer did. His prayer encourages us to pray...and pray some more. If it is your desire to be married, pray for God to bring a spouse to you. Pray before you start dating. Parents, pray for God's blessing on your parenting and that God would bring a godly spouse to your children. Begin praying when you hold your child in your arms. Before they walk, pray for their future spouse. Do not stop praying.

## Parental involvement

When it was time, Abraham oversaw the process of finding Isaac's wife. So also parents ought to be intimately involved in and faithfully overseeing the dating process. We should be talking to our children about marrying in the Lord from the time they are young. Although not mandated by Scripture, but a good idea nonetheless, fathers could set the rule that any young man that wants to date his daughter must first speak with him. This possibly awkward yet important and frank conversation would include expectations, boundaries, and purpose in dating, among other things. Fathers should be talking to their sons before they ask a girl out about why he likes this young lady and how to treat her as child of God. As parents, we may not simply pray and hope for the best. Be an instrument in God's hand to help your children date and marry in the Lord. Our children may struggle with the heartaches and uncertainties of dating as they learn about relationships. Parents, be there to guide and help with the comforting words of Scripture.

## Seek confirmation

For those who are dating, let those who love you help you. Abraham's servant explains to Rebekah's father, Bethuel, and brother, Laban, all that has happened and why he believes Rebekah is the wife for Isaac. Laban and Bethel respond, "The thing proceedeth from the LORD: we cannot speak unto thee bad or good..." (Gen. 24:50). If God has brought two people together in Him, He will make it clear to other believers in their lives. If people who love Jesus Christ and you have serious reservations about your relationship, you should have serious reser-

ventions about it. Do not wait for opinions. Ask godly friends at church and school who are committed to godly marriage. This is especially true of parents, who know you best. Even those who no longer live with their parents should consider them an important resource here.


Do not rely on your feelings or the feelings of the one you are dating to give evidence that this is the one. Listen to the multitude of counselors around you, because dating can easily blind us to reality. One of the ways God reveals His will is through those around us. If you are unwilling to ask those around you what they think, consider that a warning that something is not right.

### Clarity before intimacy

One of the greatest dangers of dating is that couples form premature emotional and physical closeness. Dating couples tend to build emotional and physical closeness, which is really cheap and easy intimacy. It is danger-

ous to give our hearts and lives to someone while dating because temporary intimacy is not the goal of dating. True Christ-centered intimacy is reserved for marriage. We want to know with clarity whom we should marry. Dating is a time to seek and pray for clarity regarding a relationship.

### Timeless truth

God's timeless truth does not remove all the pitfalls on the path to finding a spouse. But when we do this God's way, we can be assured of His guidance. Parents can direct their dating children with God's timeless truth. Those dating can be assured God will not abandon them in this exciting, yet difficult search. God may not answer our prayers about dating as directly as He did Eliezer's. We do not find our spouses at wells or with thirsty camels. But He guides with His Word today as surely as He did with camels and bracelets. 

HOWARD and EILEEN PASTOOR

## Preparing our Sons and Daughters to Build the House

God-fearing parents love their children and rejoice when they walk in the truth, marry in the Lord, and bring their children up in His fear. They rejoice when the marriages of their children are built upon the Rock, Jesus Christ; when they live together in love, unity, and peace and reflect the beautiful and mysterious marriage of Christ and His bride, the church. They rejoice, because they know in their hearts and souls that this is God's gracious work and confess "Except the LORD build the house, they labor in vain that build it" (Ps. 127:1).

God builds this house through the institution of mar-

riage and through covenant parents who strive to keep their baptism vow to bring up their children in the fear of the Lord "to the utmost of their power."

Marriage is so significant and vital for the family and church that those who enter into this covenant must be thoroughly prepared and trained. This awesome responsibility and calling rests first of all on the parents. Preparation for the marriage covenant begins when believing parents earnestly pray for godly seed before they are conceived and born, knowing that such children are gracious gifts and are an heritage of the Lord. These children, who are sanctified in Christ, must learn the fear of the Lord, which must be thoroughly ingrained into the very fiber of their being.

"Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work

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*Mr. and Mrs. Pastoor are members of the Faith Protestant Reformed Church in Jenison, Michigan, where Howard also serves as elder. They have been married for 37 years.*

into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil" (Eccl. 12:13-14). The world and reprobate mind considers this truth archaic, judgmental, narrow, and repulsive, but the Reformed parent and believer embrace it. By walking this narrow way with our children, faithfully teaching and preparing our children for life, especially married life, we please God. Thus, when our children learn the fear of the Lord, they know He is the Almighty and Awesome One who in His mercy and grace has plucked them out of the bondage of sin, judgment, and hell, and has brought them into His covenant relationship of friendship and love through the work of Jesus Christ. Therefore, they praise and thank Him, and willingly and joyfully serve Him.

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and the knowledge of the holy is understanding" (Prov. 9:10). Surely our sons and daughters who have the beginning of wisdom will be faithful husbands and wives, and will love, hate, serve, forgive, trust and obey—biblically—in their lives and marriages. These activities of faith must be taught and demonstrated to our children by us, the parents, even as the carpenter's apprentice must be taught how to build a house. The blueprint for the house is the Scriptures.

### **To love is to build the house**

God, the Builder of the city which has foundations, is love (Heb. 11:10; I John 4:8). Let us, therefore, teach our sons and daughters to "put on charity which is the bond of perfectness" (Col. 3:14). The fruit of this love is mercy, kindness, humility, meekness, and longsuffering (Col. 3:12).

Children who are taught the essence of love, rooted in their relationship with God in Christ, know also that the marriage bond is unbreakable in this life. To know and understand this is absolutely vital; "until death do us part." Love is not mere emotions, feelings, and passions that blow like the wind; rather love is like super-glue and hardened steel bolts that bind for life. This understanding and knowledge brings real commitment and gravity to those ready to marry.

The faithful husband nourishes and cherishes his wife as the Lord loves His church and sacrificially gives Himself to love and provide for her (Eph. 5:25-30). The faithful wife and mother loves, and out of that love, gives

herself and her all to her husband and children. "Every wise woman buildeth her house" (Prov. 14:1).

The house without love is an inhospitable and uninhabitable abode, a stone-cold, barren house without a furnace. Let us, therefore, teach our sons and daughters to build their house warmed by the fervent love of God.

### **To hate evil is to build the house**

"The fear of the Lord is to hate evil" (Prov. 8:13). Sin and evil destroy and tear down the house. They try to break the bond of love, ruining and scarring many marriages. May we, as parents, live antithetically, hating and eschewing all evil as the very venom of the old serpent, that vile and foul demon from the abyss. May we also teach our children to hate evil through the rod of correction. They must learn at an early age that pain and suffering are a consequence of sin and, therefore, they must run from it.

Through chastening and discipline our children learn to rule over their own spirit and discipline their mind. This is vital in all relationships, especially marriage. They must be taught to bite their tongue, not lash out in a fury of anger, and to do all things in moderation. "He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down without a wall" (Prov. 25:28). May our sons and daughters learn to build their homes by hating evil and fighting against the temptations of Satan, the world, and their old man of sin.

### **To serve God is to build the house**

Jesus Christ was the Servant of all servants and perfectly fulfilled the will of His Father. Let us teach our children to put on the mind of Christ and follow the example of Paul and Timothy, the servants of Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:1). Servants, or slaves, are not their own but belong to their master; we and our children belong to our faithful Savior, Jesus Christ (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 1).

As parents, through word and deed, we are called to teach our sons and daughters to "wash each other's feet" in marriage, family, and church. Our lives must be a living sacrifice to God our King. The sin of selfishness must be dealt with, for it will bring much contention and misery in the marriage and house. Together, with common goal and purpose, husband and wife must walk together. "Can

two walk together except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3). May our sons and daughters learn to build the house by serving Christ and His kingdom *together*.

### **To repent and to forgive is to build the house**

"For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). Sin is in the homes and marriages of all believers—all of them. This humbles us deeply. The remedy is repentance and forgiveness through the cross of Calvary, which brings forth the blessed fruit of healing, restoration, and joy.

"Confess your faults one to another and pray for one another that ye may be healed" (James 5:16). Covenant parents must demonstrate repentance and forgiveness in their own lives and marriages so their sons and daughters learn by word and deed, and then also emulate this activity of faith. In this way the confession of David in Psalm 51 becomes their confession. Thus they are equipped to put away all bitterness, wrath, and malice, and be tenderhearted and longsuffering in their lives and marriages, because God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven them (Eph. 4:31-32). May our sons and daughters be taught to build and maintain their homes through repentance and forgiveness so that the joy that sin takes away may be restored.

### **To trust and know God is to build the house**

"They that know thy name will put their trust in thee..." (Ps. 9:10). We know God by His Word, which is faithful and true. Our sons and daughters must be thoroughly instructed in the Word so they may know God's beauty, character, and attributes. They will know Him to be their awesome God for He is worthy of their trust and faith. Faith and trust are brothers. Faith gives strength and resolve to press on. Trust brings peace and contentment. Both are sorely needed in the home and marriage.

On family visitation, I have asked young children if they trust their dad to give them food and shelter for tomorrow. Incredulously, they respond, "Of course!" This answer opens the door to ask the next question, "Why do you believe that he will do that?" They always answer, "Because I know my dad..." For of such is the kingdom of heaven!

Our sons and daughters who have been taught that God is worthy of their trust, because they know Him personally, are prepared for the responsibilities and trials of life, especially married life, and will experience peace and contentment in their home.


### **To obey God is to build a house that is blessed, rich, strong, and thankful**

God's people desire and long for His favor and blessing, especially upon their children and grandchildren. They have experienced God's blessings in the way of obedience; therefore, they teach their children to walk in this way, to keep His commandments and to love His Word. "Blessed are they that keep my ways" (Prov. 8:32). This blessed house is also a fabulously rich house where dwells a treasure far greater than silver and gold. "The blessing of the LORD, it maketh rich" (Prov. 10:22).

The way of the Lord, keeping the commandments of the Lord, makes the house strong; it is like wood and steel beams that give our physical dwellings structural integrity. "The way of the Lord gives strength to the upright" (Prov. 10:29). The spiritual strength given, then, empowers our sons and daughters to be unspotted, chaste, and pure, sparing them from the spiritual wounds caused by sexual sins.

There may be times when our children do fall into sin, even great sin; then they must be held accountable. God in His sovereign mercy and grace will use their sin as the rod of correction to chasten them with a fiery trial. Even as old scaffolding is discarded after the building is complete, so too the sin, once used by God to correct and save, is thrown into the sea of forgetfulness.

In the blessed way of obedience, believing parents express their thankfulness and present themselves as a living sacrifice to their heavenly Father. Therefore, through word and deed, may our children be taught to obey as unto the Lord so they may be equipped to build a blessed, rich, strong, and thankful house.

Let us humbly pray that God continues to use weakest means to fulfill His will and give wisdom and grace to covenant parents to prepare covenant children for a blessed and God-honoring married life. "Establish thou the work of our hands upon us: yea, the work of our hands establish thou it" (Ps. 90:17b). 



# The Reformed Wedding Ceremony

## Introduction

It was the most unforgettable day of our lives, up to that point. The reason was not that it was the hottest day of July in decades—although it was sweltering! No air conditioning back in that day either. It was not a very nice day to be sitting in church for a wedding. But that did not matter to us because we were getting married! After more than three years, innumerable dates, hours and hours of planning—mostly by her, of course—in the company of all our friends and family, we were at long last getting married! And ever since that July day, we have annually celebrated its memory. More than once we have listened to the cassette tape recording of the wedding ceremony. That's right, the *cassette tape* recording—no video capabilities back then.

It was the ceremony that we remember most vividly. At the heart of that ceremony was the Reformed “Form for the Confirmation of Marriage Before the Church.” It was a ceremony that included a fitting message based on an appropriate passage of Holy Scripture, in this case I Peter 2:7. In the midst of the ceremony were the vows that we spoke to each other—and before God, as the minister reminded us. It was a ceremony near the conclusion of which the minister said something like, “According to the laws of the state of Michigan and by the authority invested in me by the church of Jesus Christ, I now pronounce you husband and wife, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.” Truly, I get goose bumps just remembering that moment. It was a ceremony that ended, after a concluding prayer, with the minister introducing us to the congregants by saying, “It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you Mr. and Mrs. Ronald Cammenga.” Indeed, what a day that was!

That is the kind of memorable day that every Christian wedding should be. That is the kind of joyful celebration that ought to characterize the wedding ceremony of all those who marry in the Lord. And that is the kind of

memorable day that the wedding day ought to be for all who save themselves for each other and for that day, in obedience to the command of Christ. And thus our earthly wedding days can prefigure the glorious day of Christ's second coming, when, according to Scripture, He will come for His bride in order to take her as His wife and consummate their marriage. What a day, glorious day, that will be!

## A “Church Wedding”?

In the history of the Reformed church there have been those who advocated official church weddings. Strictly speaking, a church wedding is not merely a wedding that takes place in a church building at which a minister officiates, and attended by the members of the church. Rather, a church wedding is a wedding that takes place during an official church worship service. Strictly speaking, a church wedding takes place on Sunday, during the regular public worship service and under the supervision of the consistory. There may be no candles, no flowers, no special music, no soloists, and none of the trappings that have become so much a part of weddings today. Much of this would be for the good. During the course of the church service, very likely after the sermon, the wedding takes place, with the reading of the form and the speaking of the vows, much like the administration of the sacraments. This is a church wedding, in the true sense of the word.

We confess that we are not strongly in favor of “church weddings.” Allow us to give our reasons.

First, we believe that a wedding is, strictly speaking, a family affair and not an ecclesiastical matter—much like a funeral. But neither a wedding nor a funeral belong to the official work of the church. For this reason, we are in favor of the prevailing practice among the members of our churches today, that weddings are not conducted as official church weddings.

Second, we believe that a wedding is a bit of an intrusion into the order and content of a “normal” Sunday worship service. Especially is that the case with weddings in our day. This, we think, is one of the reasons why those who do have church weddings often have them on a

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*Prof. Cammenga is professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament Studies in the Protestant Reformed Seminary. He and Rhonda have been married for 41 years.*

weekday, rather than on Sunday. There is the sense that a church wedding on Sunday is a distraction from the normal routine of public worship as ordained by God.

Our public worship services consist of the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. There is no biblical example that we are aware of that incorporates a marriage ceremony into the public, corporate worship of the church. For these reasons we favor the wedding practice that is prevalent in our churches today, rather than an official church wedding.

### Use of the Form

If a wedding ceremony is not an official church wedding, the use of the “Form for the Confirmation of Marriage Before the Church” is not required. Nevertheless, because of the beauty of this form and its solid doctrinal content, the use of the form ought to be encouraged among our young people. The form has so much to commend itself. And it is also the case that the form is an outstanding witness to non-Protestant Reformed folk who attend our weddings.

But then, the ministers ought to let the form speak for itself. We ought not make all kinds of changes, introduce our own wording, our own edited version of the form. Let the form stand and let it shine in all its own natural beauty.

And that includes its beginning. In our humble opinion—I have colleagues who disagree, and that is fine—we very much appreciate the way in which the form begins. It is realistic. It is honest. It is true to life at a time when couples tend to look at marriage through the proverbial rose-tinted glasses: “Whereas married persons are generally, by reason of sin, subject to many troubles and afflictions....” We are convinced that our fathers knew what they were doing when they began the form this way.

And that is another good reason for using the form, and using it *as it is written*. The form ensures that the wedding ceremony is a *solemn* ceremony. A wedding is a joyful occasion, to be sure, and God’s people ought to rejoice and celebrate on such an occasion. But for all that, this joyful occasion is also a very solemn occasion. Two people, a man and a woman, are being united in the most intimate earthly relationship—and for the rest of their lives. Use of the form serves to call attention to the solemnity of this ceremony. Because it is a solemn occasion, ministers ought not to introduce undue levity into

the wedding ceremony. Read the form, and let it speak to the two who are getting married, as well as to those who are witnessing their union.

### Various Details of the Ceremony

As far as the ceremony itself is concerned, we counsel the young people and their parents not to make the wedding ceremony unnecessarily extravagant. We must not be motivated by the desire to impress others. Good stewardship enters in. Also in our wedding ceremonies we ought to be concerned for a wise use of the resources that God has entrusted to us. For parents or young couples to go into debt because of a costly wedding ceremony is not pleasing to the Lord. Besides, there is beauty in simplicity. Some of the most beautiful ceremonies in which we have participated were very simply done.

Weddings vary in the number of attendants standing up for bride and groom. That often depends on the number of family members in their respective families. Often the desire is to get as many of the immediate family involved as possible. One thing that we discourage is small children standing up for the duration of the ceremony. Have them walk down the aisle; have them part of the wedding party until the wedding party mounts the platform. But then consider having them sit down. It too often happens that they become fidgety and thus detract from the ceremony. That should not happen and should be discouraged.

A word about dress is in order, especially the dresses of the bridesmaids. We express a concern over less-than-modest dresses worn by the bridesmaids at some of the weddings we have attended in recent years. To be blunt, there has been way too much skin showing on the bride’s attendants. Couples ought to be concerned about this and the witness that it leaves with those who attend. A reminder of this from the minister when he meets with the couple for pre-marital counseling is in order. In a good sense, the beauty of the bride and her attendants may properly be on display at the wedding. Christ’s bride is a beautiful bride and will appear in all her beauty when He comes for her at the end of the ages. But beauty is never at the expense of modesty.

The minister should see to it that the couple submits their wedding ceremony to him so that he can be sure that there is nothing objectionable in the ceremony. He


should pay special attention to the music, both what is played for the various processions, and what is sung by any vocalists or audiences.

At the very beginning of the ceremony, it is customary for the minister to put the question to the parents of the bride, “Who gives this woman to this man in marriage?” Her father then responds on their behalf, “Her mother and I.” That is altogether fitting, in our judgment. Parental approval and blessing on the marriage is an important part of a Reformed wedding. The Reformed wedding is covenantal. For that reason we would recommend that couples consider having the minister put the similar question to the parents of the groom, “Who permits this young man to take this woman in marriage?” anticipating the same response, “His mother and I.” Parental approval and blessing in the case of the groom is just as important as in the case of the bride.

Of great importance are the vows that are spoken—occasionally memorized—by bride and groom. Most ministers will have a number of sets of vows from which the couple can choose. Sometimes they combine parts of different vows, and sometimes they write out their own vows. What is essential in the vows is the promise before God and to each other to remain faithful *until death*, or *as long as they both shall live*. The Reformed minister ought to insist that this is included in the vows, or refuse to allow the use of the desired vows. We have heard vows that included the promise to remain faithful to each other “so long as our love shall last.” So long as their love lasts—that is a recipe for certain disaster! It often happens on account of the fact that “married persons are generally, by reason of sin, subject to many troubles and afflictions,” that love cools. Sadly, it may even come to it that husband and wife “fall out of love.” No mat-

ter; by virtue of their marriage and God’s will that marriage is for life, they are called to remain faithful to each other. They may not divorce! The vows spoken at the time of the wedding must commit husband and wife to each other “so long as they both shall live.”

Usually the couple chooses the text on which the officiating minister gives a brief meditation—twenty minutes or so. Most ministers have a list of texts from which couples can choose. If nothing else, the list can give them some ideas. Frankly, we enjoy hearing a message on a new and different text, out of the ordinary and the expected. It is almost always possible to make an application of a text to the specific situation of marriage. Couples should be encouraged to come up with something unique for their wedding text.

There is always room for a personal touch in a wedding ceremony—something that sets your wedding apart and makes it memorable for those who attend. In our wedding, my wife recited Ruth 1:16 and 17 to me immediately after we lit the unity candle. When it came to the end of the concluding prayer in the form, we took over from the minister and recited the Lord’s Prayer together. And there are all kinds of other possibilities. I collected wedding programs and always gave the engaged couple a packet that included a handful of these programs. Comparing them often gave the couple ideas for their own wedding ceremony. There are also a number of worthwhile books designed to assist in wedding planning. One that I regularly lend to couples is *The Christian Wedding Planner*, by Ruth Muzzy and R. Kent Hughes. But in the essentials, our wedding ceremonies must be fundamentally the same. We must strive to be distinctively Reformed. We must be Reformed not only in our doctrine of marriage, but also in our marriage ceremonies. 

PROF. BARRETT GRITTERS

## Still Using the Reformed Marriage Form?

*Prof. Gritters is professor of Practical Theology in the Protestant Reformed Seminary. He and his wife Lori have been married for 37 years.*

**T**he Protestant Reformed Churches’ “Form for the Confirmation of Marriage Before the Church” was originally drafted and adopted by official decision to be used in all weddings. Today it is not always used in PRC weddings. When Protestant Reformed young men and women marry, some ministers modify

and re-word the form; some use other forms. These ministers are not disobeying any church regulations, and this introductory paragraph is not criticism of them. But the story behind the form, and our use or non-use of it, is worth knowing if you wonder about current practices.

At the PRC's Synod of 2000, when the Church Order was revised, the article regulating weddings (Art. 70) was changed. The old Church Order read, "Since it is proper that the matrimonial state be confirmed in the presence of Christ's church, according to the form for that purpose, the consistories shall attend to it." But consistories did not always "attend to" this. Weddings rarely took place in the presence of Christ's church, and though the form was usually used, consistories were overseeing neither the weddings nor the use of the form. The new wording of the Church Order is significantly different, and reflects what the churches judged to be a better understanding of weddings and marriages outside the Netherlands:

The consistories shall see to it that those who marry, marry in the Lord, whether it be in a private ceremony or in an official worship service. When the solemnization of marriage takes place in an official worship service, the adopted form for that purpose shall be used.

The churches decided that weddings are not necessarily ecclesiastical, that is, do not need to be performed under the oversight of a consistory and in a service of worship. That is, some weddings may be "private ceremonies." In those weddings the adopted form is not required. Thus, the form is sometimes modified, paraphrased, or substituted with another.

Although I was a part of that synod and voted in favor of the change, it would have been better if the churches had looked more carefully at 1) the reasoning behind the Church Order's old requirement, 2) the history of the form, and 3) what place the *church should* have in the weddings of her sons and daughters.

### **The history of the Form for the Confirmation of Marriage**

The roots of the form go all the way back to the Roman Catholic liturgy that Calvin and others with him used but modified to reflect a Reformed understanding of marriage. According to Rome, marriage was a sacrament. As a sacrament, it conferred grace and thus must

be performed by the priest in worship. The Reformers rejected the idea of marriage as a sacrament and re-wrote their "Marriage Services" accordingly. Calvin wrote his form using Farel's. Farel borrowed from the Germans, and the Dutchmen Marten Micron and Peter Dathenus borrowed heavily from all of them. Especially Dathenus (ca. 1531-1588—Dathenus knew Calvin and other first-generation Reformers) the Lord used to give to the Reformed churches in the Netherlands the liturgical forms, in much the same form that we have them today in our Psalter. Dathenus was a leader in the early Dutch Reformed churches, even presiding at the some of the earliest Dutch synods and at the earlier "convent" of Wesel in 1568. For the churches, Dathenus translated into Dutch the Heidelberg Catechism, the Genevan Psalter, and the all the liturgical forms, including the "Form for the Confirmation of Marriage."

In 1619, about thirty years after Dathenus died, the great Synod of Dordt officially adopted these liturgical forms. Significantly, Dordt first decreed that the liturgical forms had the same authority in the churches as the Church Order and the creeds. Then Dordt mandated their use in the churches. The marriage form as well.

This is the tradition the PRC inherited when they came out of the Christian Reformed Church.

The tradition included that weddings take place *in the church*, in an official service overseen by the elders. You see, although the Reformers rejected the Roman Catholic view of marriage as a *sacrament*, they did not reject the idea that marriage was an ecclesiastical institution.<sup>1</sup> So most Reformed churches (even Presbyterians for a time) mandated that marriages take place in the presence of the church.

The fathers believed that a marriage involved both the civil magistrate, which declared the marriage legal, and the church, which confirmed the marriage in the presence of God and His people. The Dutch fathers agreed with the reasons given by their German brothers for the church being involved: First, marriage is not man's invention, for God gave Eve to Adam in marriage. Second, as Christians, the new couple ought to be exhorted out of God's Word. Third, the church ought to assemble to pray for God's blessing on the union. These are reasons worth remember-

<sup>1</sup> The Reformers called marriage an *ordinance*, although they did not define ordinance as carefully as they defined sacrament.



ing today. It is difficult to argue, on the basis of Reformed liturgical principles in the second commandment, for *official* church weddings. In my judgment, the Reformed practice has properly moved away from *church* weddings. However, it is a mistake to leave the church out of her children's marriages. How best to do that is a good question.

And so in years gone by, when a young couple of our Dutch ancestors left the magistrate's office where the state had declared their marriage legal, they made a beeline to the sanctuary to have the newly-made marriage *confirmed* before God's church.

### Possible improvements in the form

And therein lies one of the weaknesses of the form, used as is, for weddings in the PRC. It was written to *confirm* marriages that had already taken place legally before the magistrate. The Dutch called it *huwelijks-bevestiging* ("marriage-confirmation"). They still do. So the form's opening paragraph has: "...to the end that you...who desire to have your marriage bond publicly *confirmed* here in the name of God before this church...." Then, before the vows are recited, the minister asks, Do you desire "to be *confirmed* in the same?" Now it becomes clear that this language was not intended for the situation among us today, where no legal declaration has been made prior to the wedding ceremony.

In the United States and Canada, the Reformed minister serves in two capacities. He serves in a civil capacity, authorized by the government to declare a union of two to be legal according to the laws of the land. He follows the law, carefully fills out the proper paper-work, giving one copy of it to the newly-weds and returning the rest to the state in the prescribed time. But the minister also serves in the weighty capacity of servant of God and His Word. In that capacity he brings the gospel, leads the assembly in prayers for the couple, and calls them to live in harmony with God's Word in marriage to the glory of the God who instituted marriage in the beginning.

Thus, the language of "confirming marriage" is inappropriate.

Because of the form's origins, it also includes no *declaration* of marriage. I have witnessed weddings where the minister, probably naïve, never made the declaration. The officiant ought to declare, as many do, "According to the laws of the state of \_\_\_\_\_, and the ordinances of

the Church of Christ, I now pronounce you, N. and N., husband and wife."

The form could also be reconsidered in its opening statement, so somber and dark. "Whereas married persons are generally, by reason of sin, subject to many troubles and afflictions...."<sup>2</sup> Certainly that is true. But it was uniquely so when Marten Micron wrote this introduction with a view particularly to the persecution of Reformed Christians that was raging. So Micron was referring not only to troubles caused "generally, by reason of sin," as the form is presently worded, but to the *kruis* (the "cross") Reformed couples would bear in that day, as he originally put it. Circumstances differ today. I trust, too, that faithful pastors, in their preparation of couples for marriage, will remind them of troubles they will face for many reasons. The form could better begin, as most other Reformed forms did, with the simple and solemn preamble: "Beloved in the Lord, we are assembled here in the presence of God for the purpose of joining in marriage N. and N."

### The form's great strengths

But those few suggested changes should not make any conclude that the form is a bad form. The form is good. It is rich. It is biblical.

In the first section, the form instructs us that because God instituted marriage, He is pleased with the married state. For that reason God's Son honors marriage. Then the form teaches three reasons that God instituted marriage. It should not be overlooked that the first is: *mutual service*. The form is wise.

The second section instructs both groom and bride of their duties in marriage.

Then come the vows, preceded by a question whether the couple understands the biblical instruction just given, and a declaration that there has been no "lawful impediment." This latter should resurrect the question and practice of announcing the banns for three weeks preceding the wedding, to give opportunity to any to show why the marriage ought not to take place. In connection with the vows, I would also suggest that no vow should be spoken without some expression of lifelong commitment of each to the other: "till death do us part," or "as long as we both shall live." The form's vows do not include these important promises.

<sup>2</sup> In 1903, P. Beisterveld, an old Dutch Church Order authority, said, *De aanhef is somber*, that is, "The introduction is bleak."

In the “closing,” the form pronounces a blessing from the “Father of all mercies,” reminds the couple “how firm the bond of marriage is” from Matthew 19, and ends with prayer and a blessing from Psalm 128.

One of the form’s great strengths is its plain-spokenness about the place of the woman in marriage. Recently I spoke to a pastor of another Reformed denomination that uses the form we have. He spoke about visitors to marriage ceremonies who sometimes rudely laugh when the form reminds the bride “how you are to carry yourself towards your husband according to the word of God.” I also have noticed more than a few times in weddings where I officiated that people, whom I thought were not listening, suddenly poked each other and either rolled their eyes or grimaced at the exhortation, “Your will shall be subject to your husband.” The form is good.

### The form’s catechetical value

When the early Reformed synods adopted liturgical forms, some of these synods reminded the churches that the forms were not only to be read in public worship, but also to be memorized by the members as tools of instruction. Dordt’s Synod, remember, said that the liturgical forms had the same authority as the creeds and the Church Order. This is why we sometimes call these forms “minor confessions.” They are “minor” not because they are less weighty, but because they treat a narrow portion of biblical teaching. The forms are instructive. This form teaches the Reformed doctrine of marriage. The form can serve well, then, to catechize those who desire to be married.


Most pastors probably have a set of outlines they use to lead engaged couples in the essential doctrines of marriage and family life. Those who do not would do well to look hard at the Form for Marriage before they start. Those who already have materials would do well to supplement their outlines and assignments to include the reading and study of the whole Reformed form.

What better way to start than to remind couples of the certain assistance of God in whatever troubles they face; that the Word of God is the standard for conduct in marriage; that God instituted marriage and His Son honored it; that He will aid and protect married persons even when they are undeserving? The form includes instruction about being servants of the other, bringing

up children in the fear of God, and living with a good conscience by avoiding uncleanness—how timely!

Men are taught from the form about their calling to be head of the home, to lead their wife with discretion, protect her, pray with her, even teach her. What other reminder would ministers have to exhort the aspiring husband to read, study, grow in knowledge? The men also learn from the form to work hard in their occupation and support the poor. Here is occasion for the minister (or deacons) to instruct about stewardship, budgets, and systematic giving to the church. And the young brides-to-be are taught not only to obey their husbands in all lawful things, but (if it is the Lord’s will to give them children) to “look to their family” rather than an occupation outside the home.

Not to be forgotten is the form’s reminder of how firm is the bond. “Hear now from the gospel how firm the bond of marriage is!” ought to reverberate within the walls of every Reformed wedding ceremony, especially in these evil days when marriages are so easily broken and new marriages are made while one’s spouse yet lives. Then, without embarrassment, “Whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery!” God’s own powerful warnings can be brought to the young couple as they prepare for marriage—they must express full agreement with them or the minister may not perform the ceremony. And the assembly of friends and family hear it. Where else will many of them hear it?

The old Reformed Form for Marriage. Let us not lose it. 

### For further study of the Form for Confirmation of Marriage:

1. Biesterveld, P. *Het Gereformeerde Kerkboek*, 1903.
2. Biesterveld, P. and H.H. Kuyper, *Ecclesiastical Manual, Including the Decisions of the Netherlands Synods and Other Significant Matters Relating to the Government of the Churches*. Translated by R. DeRidder. Grand Rapids: Calvin Theological Seminary, 1982.
3. Maxwell, William. *John Knox’s Genevan Service Book 1556: The Liturgical Portions of the Genevan Service Book used by John Knox While a Minister of the English Congregation of Marian Exiles at Geneva, 1556-1559*. Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1931.
4. Meeter, Daniel. *The North American Liturgy: A Critical Edition of the Liturgy of the Reformed Dutch Church in North America, 1793*. Madison, NJ: Drew University Dissertation, 1989.

# Wedding Receptions: Sanctified Celebrations

A wedding reception is a joyful celebration of the union of a man and a woman as husband and wife. It is a celebration in which family, friends, and acquaintances are given opportunity to rejoice with them that rejoice (Rom. 12:15).

That such marriage celebrations have a place in the life of the Christian is evident from the references in the Bible to various wedding feasts, including the one in Cana of Galilee attended by our Lord Himself and at which He performed the “beginning of miracles” that marked His earthly ministry.

The “Form for the Confirmation of Marriage Before the Church,” which itself or a variation thereof is generally used in the weddings conducted by Protestant Reformed ministers, refers to Christ’s attendance, gifts, and miracles at the wedding in Cana (John 2:1-13) as evidence that the Lord Himself highly honored marriage. That would also include the celebration of that union according to the custom in the church of His day.

J.C. Ryle has some excellent commentary concerning the wedding in Cana, commentary worth our consideration and which we make no attempt to improve upon.

After making some noteworthy observations about our Lord’s attendance at that wedding feast in Cana and pointing out the biblical significance of marriage, and that the joy of marriage is dependent upon Christ’s blessing and presence, Ryle goes on to write the following:

We learn, secondly, from these verses, that *there are times when it is lawful to be merry and rejoice*. Our Lord Himself sanctioned a wedding-feast by His own presence. He did not refuse to be a guest at “a marriage in Cana of Galilee.” “A feast,” it is written, “is made for laughter, and wine maketh merry” (Eccl. 10:19). Our Lord, in the passage before us, countenances both the feast and the use of wine.

True religion was never meant to make men melancholy. On the contrary, it was intended to increase real joy and happiness among men. The servant of Christ unquestionably ought to have nothing to do with races, balls,

theatres, and such-like amusements, which tend to frivolity and dissipation, if not to sin. But he has no right to hand over innocent recreations and family gatherings to the devil and the world. The Christian who withdraws entirely from the society of his fellow-men, and walks the earth with a face as melancholy as if he was always attending a funeral, does injury to the cause of the Gospel. A cheerful, kindly spirit is a great recommendation to a believer. It is a positive misfortune to Christianity when a Christian cannot smile. A merry heart, and a readiness to take part in all innocent mirth, are gifts of inestimable value. They go far to soften prejudices, to take up stumbling-blocks out of the way, and to make way for Christ and the Gospel.<sup>1</sup>

Wedding receptions, therefore, are lawful celebrations for Christians.

Those celebration may take many different forms.

Even as wedding customs themselves vary considerably in different cultures and at different times, so it is with what we refer to as wedding receptions.

When we consider the parable of Matthew 25:1-13, for example, it is important to our interpretation of that parable that we understand the wedding customs of that day. After all, they differ tremendously from our own wedding customs in North American in the twenty-first century. We also must remember that wedding celebrations or wedding receptions are and have been conducted very differently in different places and at different times.

Early weddings in America were generally private affairs, held at the home of the parents of the bride or groom. The wedding celebrations, therefore, were intimate family gatherings.

In the early nineteenth century, weddings especially among the upper class had begun to evolve a bit more into the recognizably modern American wedding (complete with a lavish cake, dinner reception, and toast to the bride and groom), but they remained quite small and private.

In time, however, and with the increased prosperity of American culture, weddings and their celebrations became more and more elaborate.

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*Rev. Key is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Loveland, Colorado. He and his wife will be married 40 years in November, D.V.*

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<sup>1</sup> J.C. Ryle. *Expository Thoughts on John* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1879)1:88-91.



In the past century weddings that would have been held in private homes were now being moved to churches, where more square footage allowed for a larger number of guests and seemingly required a greater show. A bride who may have sewn her own wedding dress or simply used a dress she already owned was now likely to hire a dressmaker or even order a ready-to-wear wedding gown. Cakes and flower arrangements that would have been prepared at home were now being contracted out to bakers and florists, and the “wedding industry” began to grow.

Various factors, therefore, come into consideration when we plan not just weddings, but wedding receptions.

For one thing, we have to remember that wedding receptions are family celebrations. The church does not supervise these events any more closely than any other family event or social function of church members. Details of wedding receptions are the responsibility of the family involved.

But no matter the differences in customs, we must remember as Christians that wedding receptions are to be *sanctified* celebrations.

We stand reminded, therefore, that the call to holiness applies also to our Christian celebrations.

In this connection, those of us who have been any number of years in the ministry have seen some receptions that are not what they ought to be. There is no place in a Christian celebration of marriage for off-color jokes with sexual innuendo, a making fun of the calling of a husband or wife, or comments that would ridicule the relationships of the newly married couple to each other or to their new fathers-in-law or mothers-in-law.

There also is no place in a Christian wedding celebration for a dance, as has become very common today even within the communities of so-called Reformed Christians. The kind of public dancing common in our modern culture expresses the pervasive influence of an improper view of sexuality that violates the seventh commandment. We who hold to the Heidelberg Catechism’s exposition of the seventh commandment have to live our confession. In the seventh commandment God forbids “all unchaste actions, gestures, words, thoughts, desires, and whatever can entice men thereto.” (And when you read the Heidelberg Catechism, do not overlook the Scripture references that are the basis for that instruction.)

The relationship of marriage as ordained by God and

given to some within His church is so beautiful, and carries such glorious significance as the reflection of Christ and His bride, that it is to be held in highest esteem always. We may not succumb to nor contribute to the world’s profaning of that relationship. Celebrate marriage properly.

Appropriate wedding receptions are to focus on the celebration of the gift of marriage, the celebration of family life, as well as the celebration of God’s providence as He leads us from conception into the relationships of life that He has ordained for our blessedness.

While that celebration of family life does not exclude the possibility of humorous expressions of our love and life’s experiences, we have to remember that remarks made that reflect upon marriage are to be an affirmation of the high calling that God gives us in marriage, even as was set forth in the marriage ceremony itself.

Another matter that we have to consider in our wedding receptions is the matter of stewardship. Many weddings have become elaborate and very costly events. That those who have the financial means host such celebrations is not wrong. But for us who do not have such means, it is wrong if we think that we have to host wedding receptions that rival the costly events put on by others. We have to remember our calling to live within our means. We have the utmost respect for those who have hosted wedding receptions that were limited in the number of guests and that provided a very simple luncheon, often prepared by the family, because they recognized the importance of not spending what they did not have. We are called to be faithful stewards in every aspect of life. The same applies when it comes to wedding receptions.

Finally, let us also remember that we participate in the weddings and receptions that we attend. Our attendance is a testimony that we know the union to be lawful, that is, lawful according to the divine ordinance of marriage—one man to one woman until death parts them. If we are to be faithful to God, then, we do not testify of our approval to a couple entering an adulterous relationship by the remarriage of a divorced party whose spouse is still living.

By our attendance at a wedding, we testify that we give that union our blessing, and are ready to help that couple, as much as we are able, to see that their union is pleasing in the sight of God.

But that testimony given by our attendance at a wed-



ding carries over as well to the wedding reception. While we have no direct say in what goes on at most weddings or receptions that we attend, we must not forget our calling as brothers and sisters in Christ to encourage one another in godliness. There is a corporate responsibility involved, if wedding receptions are not sanctified celebrations.

We let J.C. Ryle's commentary conclude the matter (*John*, 1:88-91):

The subject no doubt is a difficult and delicate one. On no point of Christian practice is it so hard to hit the mean between that which is lawful and that which is unlawful, between that which is right and that which is wrong. It is very hard indeed to be both merry and wise. High spirits soon degenerate into levity. Acceptance of many invitations to feasts soon leads to waste of time, and begets leanness of soul. Frequent eating and drinking at other men's tables, soon lowers a Christian's tone of religion. Going often into company is a heavy strain on spirituality of heart. Here, if anywhere, God's children have need to be on their guard. Each must know his own strength and natural temperament, and act accordingly.

One believer can go without risk where another cannot. Happy is he who can use his Christian liberty without abusing it! It is possible to be sorely wounded in soul at marriage feasts and the tables of friends.

One golden rule on the subject may be laid down, the use of which will save us much trouble. Let us take care that we always go to feasts in the spirit of our divine Master, and that we never go where He would not have gone. Like Him, let us endeavour to be always "about our Father's business" (Luke 2:49). Like Him, let us willingly promote joy and gladness, but let us strive that it may be sinless joy, if not joy in the Lord. Let us endeavour to bring the salt of grace into every company, and to drop the word in season in every ear we address. Much good may be done in society by giving a healthy tone to conversation. Let us never be ashamed to show our colours, and to make men see whose we are and whom we serve. We may well say, "Who is sufficient for these things?" But if Christ went to a marriage feast in Cana there is surely something that Christians can do on similar occasions. Let them only remember that if they go where their Master went, they must go in their Master's spirit. ☞

REV. CORY and LAEL GRIESS

## Children: Calling and Blessing

God calls the Reformed husband and wife to bear children. Just as marriage is a creation ordinance, so God's calling to bear children is a creation ordinance. Strikingly, the first thing God says after He creates the woman for the man is that together in their marriage they must bear children: "Be fruitful, and multiply" (Gen. 1:28). This command necessitates a link between marital intimacy and the begetting of children if God in His providence grants that possibility.<sup>1</sup>

For the Reformed couple, this calling intensifies as they

<sup>1</sup> This is not the *only* purpose of marital intimacy as the Roman Catholic Church wrongly teaches (among other passages, see I Corinthians 7:5 and The Song of Solomon). Otherwise a couple who could not bear children would be required to abstain from marital intimacy. Neither does this imply that every act of marital intimacy must have the possibility of conception. However, it does mean a couple must seek to bear children in their marriage.

*Rev. Griess is pastor of the Calvary Protestant Reformed Church in Hull, Iowa. He and Lael have been married for 9 years and have 5 children.*

see from Scripture that God is pleased to carry on His covenant of structured fellowship also with the children of believers (Gen. 7:7; Acts 2:39). Due to this promise, the Scriptures lay further weight upon God's people to bear children: "And did not he make one?...And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed" (Mal. 2:15; see also I Tim. 5:14).

Not only is bearing children a calling, but the Reformed couple also gleans from Scripture that children (many!) are a blessing from God (Ps. 127:3, 5; 128:3-4). When the Lord grants little ones to His church, their presence stands as a reminder of His love and favor and covenant promises.

This does not mean that the bearing of children is easy. God's curse for sin affects all things, and this aspect of life in particular (Gen. 3:16-19). While God has not made bearing and raising children itself a curse, His curse *affects* the bearing and raising of children. God has, due to sin, greatly increased a woman's sorrow in bearing children, and at the

same time increased her ability to bear them. The curse has also affected the husband's calling to support those children. The creation from which he must derive their support works against him instead of with him.

### Regarding the Use of Birth Control Generally

The first two truths (that bearing children is both a calling and a blessing) almost put the issue of birth control to rest for God's people. Indeed, some couples will conclude it is best never to prevent or plan the conception of children. If these couples faithfully raise all the children they bear unto the Lord, then the whole church is thankful for their godly example and prays for more of their kind.

However, as much we want to caution against its use, we would argue that the reality of the curse of God for sin may allow for the careful use of some forms of birth control in some cases.<sup>2</sup> But because selfishness can quickly exploit even that statement, we begin discussing this matter by addressing the heart.

Birth control broadly defined is anything that can prevent the birth of children.<sup>3</sup> There are ethically legitimate and ethically illegitimate methods of birth control. However, even if one allows for the use of ethically legitimate methods of birth control in some cases, he must recognize they can be and often are used wickedly. The issue begins in the motives of the heart. The great question everyone has to ask—including newly married couples who are expected by so many to wait at least a year or two to have children—is: “Why? Why would I prevent the birth of children into my covenant home?” And the Reformed couple must answer this question *honestly*, for we easily deceive ourselves (Jer. 17:9).

As the Reformed couple engages in this heart-probing, consider that the very origin of chemical birth control was the constant push for sex without responsibility in society. It is not just *necessity* but the *desire for pleasure* that is the mother of invention. Google a chart of birth rates in United States history, and you will see that the line plummets after 1960 when chemical birth control went on the market, and that the line continues to

drop steadily until it arrives at its lowest point in 2015.<sup>4</sup>

The ever-increasing desire for pleasure combined with the ever-decreasing desire for responsibility in the world can affect us as Reformed Christians too. So as you answer “why would we prevent the birth of children?” consider the following kinds of questions: Do we seek a standard of living that far exceeds even that of our parents and grandparents in their child-bearing years, not to mention that of the vast majority of the rest of the world? Have materialism, worldly comforts, and extravagant vacations clouded our thinking? God does not desire that His children be at ease, but that they joyfully and self-sacrificially serve Him by raising children, all the while detaching themselves from the things of this world. Are we selfishly guarding a worldly notion of marriage? Are we stingy with respect to our time? Children require a tremendous sacrifice of time and energy—often around the clock. This sacrifice means less time fishing, hanging out with the guys, or sitting in front of the television or computer. For a woman the sacrifice involves not only her time and personal desires, but also her very body. After several children, she may look in the mirror and feel embarrassed about the dramatic changes she sees. Wives, is your view of physical beauty defined by the world? Husbands, do you assure your wife that she has not been “ruined” as the world would say, but that she is beautiful with a beauty that the world cannot see?

That said, there is no biblical rule as to when each couple's quiver is full. Due to the reality of the curse upon life in this world, there are factors that a couple may legitimately consider in thinking about family planning. A mother may face health issues, even ones that can endanger her life and lives of future children. Just a few examples include multiple c-sections, extreme diabetes, and cancer. The mental and emotional health of especially the mother may have to be considered (taking care not to cover up selfishness). Postpartum depression is a real issue. In addition, some women are simply physically and emotionally frailer than others. Maybe there is a child (or children) with special needs requiring a great deal of time and energy. Maybe the house is full and teetering on the edge of mom and dad's ability to rear the children faithfully. In these cases and perhaps others, we believe

<sup>2</sup> The argument to the contrary from the case of Onan in Genesis 38 does not take into consideration the issues of levirate marriage involved in that passage.

<sup>3</sup> This includes everything from the prevention of conception to the murder of children conceived but not yet born.

<sup>4</sup> 1.8 children per woman, and it is only that high because of the Hispanic population.

God's people have to make judgments with much prayer and soul-searching.

This matter is intensely difficult, especially because the old man of sin can be so deceptive. Even sincere Reformed believers may disagree. We must all use sanctified wisdom and live *coram Deo* (before the face of God). The rule we believe to be biblical is that we ought to have as many children as we are *able* to have, understanding "able" to mean not merely as many as we can have without cramping our lifestyle, nor meaning necessarily as many as we are able to produce physically. Rather, "able" means, able to raise faithfully in the fear of the Lord.<sup>5</sup> Each couple must stand before God. If a couple's honest answer to that is three, so be it. If it is fifteen, or as many as we are physically able to bear, so be it. The key principle is that we are honest with ourselves before God and are vigilant for selfish motives hiding under the pretense of spiritual ones. And we ought to pray that the preaching ever warn us of that possibility.

### What Forms of Birth Control Are Ethically Permissible/Impermissible

If a couple before the face of God honestly believes they ought to use birth control at a certain time in their life, what forms are ethically acceptable? All Reformed couples ought to personally research the matter in order to make God-honoring decisions. Here is what we have discovered in our own research.<sup>6</sup>

First of all, we must begin with the conviction that life begins at conception.<sup>7</sup> So many doctors (some Christian ones too), speak of life beginning at various other points

<sup>5</sup> We understand even the question of what it means to raise children faithfully in the fear of the Lord will garner disagreement. This aspect too bears serious consideration and discussion as each couple stands before God.

<sup>6</sup> It would be worthwhile to read a portion of the book *God, Marriage, and Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation*. 2nd ed., by Andreas J. Kostenberger and David W. Jones (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010. Pages 123-129 are germane). Another worthwhile resource is the book *Does the Birth Control Pill Cause Abortions?* by Randy Alcorn. In addition to those sources, we have conferred with believing doctors we know personally.

<sup>7</sup> This subject is another article, but the main reason for this position is conclusive. At the moment of fertilization there is a complete genome (determining gender, eye color, height, body type, etc) in the new being. Therefore, the new being is another individual life separate from that of the father and mother. If an individual being with a complete genome, separate from the life of the mother and father is not a separate life, then what is it?

in the growth process of the fertilized egg. What one says about when life begins will determine what one says about what forms of birth control are ethically permissible.<sup>8</sup>

All forms of chemical birth control that are taken after intercourse, such as the "morning after pill," RU-486, and others, are abortifacients (drugs which induce abortion). Using these drugs after intercourse, and if you have conceived (which one does not know), is no different from going into an abortion clinic to kill your child a few months later. It is murder.

Regarding chemical birth control one takes regularly, such as the birth control pill (whether combined or progestin only), shots, and IUDs, the Reformed couple must be aware of the facts. According to the recently published *God, Marriage, and Family*<sup>9</sup> these common forms of chemical birth control work to prevent the birth of a child in three ways. The first is by preventing an egg from being released. The second is by thickening the cervical mucus so that the sperm cannot reach the egg, if an egg is released anyway, which some experts estimate happens as often as 50 percent of the time. The third is by making the lining of the uterus *incapable of supporting the life of a newly conceived child*, given the possibility that the first two methods fail.

There is no ethical issue in itself with the first two actions of the pill. But the third causes an abortion. So the question becomes, do the first two methods of the pill ever fail? We quote from the book mentioned above:

Statistically speaking, when taken as directed, these various types of hormone based birth control methods are effective [in their first two lines of defense—that is preventing conception, CG] 99.5 percent of the time.... From this fact one can know for certain that while "the pill" is effective in preventing ovulation and preventing fertilization, it does not prevent all fertilization. While there is no statistical data to indicate how many births are terminated by the third mechanism, one can be assured that it does occur."<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> If you ask a doctor (even some Christian ones) if a particular form of birth control causes an abortion, he may say no; but that may be because he believes life does not begin at conception. He may also further confuse the issue by stating that this particular drug cannot terminate a pregnancy. This is because he may define *pregnancy* as beginning later than the moment of conception.

<sup>9</sup> The authors cite their credible medical sources.

<sup>10</sup> Kostenberger and Jones, *God*, 337 (footnote 29).

Though admittedly, the possibility of breaking the sixth commandment here is small, it *is* still a possibility, and therefore chemical birth control ought not be used by the child of God.<sup>11</sup>

This leaves only three ethically legitimate methods: natural family planning, barrier methods, and surgical sterilization.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> There are some Christian women who take birth control pills as medicine for other physical maladies. If that is your situation, then you ought also to use barrier methods of birth control to prevent the possibility of breaking the sixth commandment.

<sup>12</sup> We are not now saying anything about whether or not these should be used in any individual case; we are merely stating that these are the only ethical forms to use.

## Conclusion

As with every matter in the Christian life, obedience begins in the heart. A heart that responds to the gospel of redeeming grace is filled with gratitude. Gratitude needs a riverbed in which to flow. That riverbed is the law of God. We hope we have given some help in determining what God's law is and is not in these matters, and in setting forth the principles by which we may live in godliness. May God bless us as we live before His face as husband and wife, and as we bring up the godly seed He so graciously gives us. ☞

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### Wedding Anniversary

■ With thankfulness to our covenant God and Father, we celebrated the 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary of

#### **JIM and MARGE HOOGENDOORN**

on April 5, 2016. We praise God for His faithfulness in using them to instruct us and guide us, not only as children, but well into our adult years. We pray that He continues to bless them and keep them in His sovereign love and care.

Jeremiah 29:11-13: "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart."

Your loving children and grandchildren

### Teacher Needed

■ The Board of Reformed Heritage Christian School is accepting resumes for a full-time high school and junior high math/science teacher and a full-time middle school multi-grade teacher for the 2016-17 school year. Reformed Heritage is committed to teaching covenant students from a distinctively Reformed perspective. Our goal is to train our young people to grow academically, think biblically, and be servants of Christ in all endeavors of life. If you would like more information about our school visit the website: [www.refhcs.org](http://www.refhcs.org)

A cover letter and resume can be mailed to: Reformed Heritage Christian School, 700 N. Fletcher Ave., Kalamazoo, MI. 49006. Attn: Mr. Dave Vander Meer or e-mail: [dnjvm5@att.net](mailto:dnjvm5@att.net)

### Classis East

■ Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, May 11, 2016 at the Providence Protestant Reformed Church.  
Jon J. Huisken, Stated Clerk

#### Topic

### *The Necessity of Membership in a True Church of Jesus Christ*

#### Speaker

Prof. David Engelsma

#### Date/Time

Friday April 22, 2016 at 7:30 P.M.

#### Place

First Jenison CRC  
8360 Cottonwood Dr., Jenison MI

#### Sponsor

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