

Establishing a Christian Home

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Introduction

Our subject is establishing a Christian home. This topic is rather broad; therefore, we will focus our attention on establishing a Christian family by choosing a godly husband or wife. The importance of this topic cannot be underestimated. To a large degree the future of both the church and society depend on establishing godly, dedicated families. This study will involve an examination of a number of teachings in Scripture that are directly related to establishing a covenant-keeping household. We will examine the spiritual consequences of intermarriage with the heathen both before and after the Mosaic covenant, the teaching of God's law on intermarriage, the reasons why intermarriage is wrong and dangerous, the means of finding a godly mate, biblical courtship and other applicatory principles. All the biblical materials as well as their application apply not only to believers who are seeking a husband or wife, but also to all covenant parents who have a responsibility to prepare their children for marriage and oversee the courtship process.

Intermarriage in the Predeluvian Era

In the era before the worldwide flood, intermarriage between the godly and ungodly is viewed as a major contributing factor to the wickedness of mankind and the judgment of the flood. Genesis 6:1-8 reads: "Now it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born to them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves of all whom they chose. And the LORD said, 'My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, for he is indeed flesh; yet his days shall be one hundred and twenty years.' There were giants on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men and they bore children to them. Those were the mighty men who were of old, men of renown. Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. So the LORD said, 'I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.' But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD."

In this narrative the sons of God refers to the godly line of the Seth, while the daughters of men refers to women from the line of the ungodly Cain. There are a number of things to note in this section of Scripture. First, note that the young men from believing families were motivated not by spiritual matters but were influenced by the beauty of the heathen women. They were directed by lust and not by the revelation of God. Second, note the similarity between the apostasy of the "sons of God" and the temptation narrative. They saw beautiful women and they chose autonomously apart from God's word. When Eve saw that the tree was good and pleasant to the eyes, she took and ate the fruit. Third, note that these unbiblical marriages resulted in

widespread apostasy. The antithesis between the followers of God and the wicked Cainites was lost. Immediately after mentioning the conjugal relations between the Sethite and Cainite lines and the resulting children we are told that they produced mighty men and men of renown (i.e., men of reputation; famous men). Within the broad context of Genesis 1-11 the designation “men of reputation” is very likely negative. These were mighty men (Hebrew *haggibborim*; *gibborim* is often used to describe soldiers (see 2 Sam. 10:7; 16:6; 20:7; 23:8, 9, 16, 17, 22; 1 Ki. 1:10, etc.), that is, men of violence who sought fame by their mercenary pursuits. After describing these famous mighty men the narrative immediately turns to the widespread wickedness of men on the earth. Hamilton writes, “By virtue of its placement, the incident in 6:1-4 is obviously intended as an introduction to the Flood story. Until this point the Scripture has discussed the sins of individuals: Adam, Eve, Cain, Lamech. Now for the first time the emphasis shifts to the sins of a group, ‘the sons of God,’ with the result that God’s punishment is directed not against a man, but against mankind. This emphasis of the sins of a group is perpetuated in the Flood event.”¹

Fourth, intermarriage and the resulting apostasy led to the destruction of the human race with the exception of Noah and his family. Even before the giving of the law syncretism led to integration into death and judgment. Indeed, as we shall see in this study a common and highly successfully tactic of Satan has been to tempt and corrupt covenant men and woman through the opposite sex. The devil used Eve to get to Adam. The Midianites used beautiful women to seduce the men of Israel to fornicate and worship idols (Num. 25:1-18).

The Patriarchal Period

A study of the God-fearing patriarchs reveals a very negative attitude toward intermarriage with unbelievers. The fathers and mothers not only explicitly command their children not to marry pagans, they also show great displeasure when a son marries a heathen. Note the following examples.

When Abraham sought a bride for Isaac he made his chief servant swear by God not to take a wife for Isaac from the daughters of the Canaanites (Gen. 24:2-3). Instead the servant was to travel all the way back to Abraham’s original country (Padam-Aram) to find a suitable mate for Isaac (Gen.24:4ff.). Abraham is very aware of the importance of covenant continuity and dominion. His son must not intermarry with a heathen not only because such a union would have disastrous spiritual consequences for Isaac’s family but also because the Canaanites are destined to disinherit the land. This is no future prosperity and dominion for those who reject Jehovah. The fact that Abraham was willing to send his servant on a long journey to find a godly wife should serve as an example to all Christian fathers. Abraham gave top priority to finding a good wife for his son.

Interestingly, Esau (who we are told was *not* of God’s elect even though a child of Isaac) did not walk in the ways of his father Isaac but married a heathen local. “When Esau was forty years old, he took as wives Judith the daughter of Beerli the Hittite, and Basemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite. And they were a grief of mind to Isaac and Rebekah” (Gen. 26:34-35). This brief section is placed in the narrative to emphasize that Esau was unworthy to be a successor to Isaac. It is strong evidence that he (at best) was indifferent to the religious convictions of his parents. He obviously had no scruples about taking heathen wives from the Canaanite people

¹ Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 271.

who occupied the land. Esau's rebellion against God is manifested in this passage in two ways. First, he married without the oversight, permission and blessing of his believing parents. Second, he intermarried with the local heathen women—the enemies of God. Esau's actions were a sign of his unbelief and were instrumental in insuring that his posterity had no commitment to Jehovah. Subsequent revelation indicates that Esau's descendants were the enemies of God and His covenant people.

When a son or daughter marries an unbeliever it causes great grief to believing parents. In Genesis 27:46 Rebekah reminded Isaac of the pain and stress that had been caused by Esau's Hittite wives. She then painted a picture of total misery which would make her life unbearable if Jacob would follow Esau's example and marry a heathen. This reminder caused Isaac to give a special charge to Jacob saying, "You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan. Arise, go to Padan Aram, to the house of Bethuel your mother's father; and take yourself a wife from there of the daughters of Laban your mother's brother" (Gen. 28:1-2).

Immediately after this change Isaac blessed Jacob and confirmed the Abrahamic covenant unto him. Isaac understood the relationship between marrying a believer, establishing a godly household and the continuity of covenant blessing through history. The narrative of Genesis 27 and 28 not only reveals the lack of faith of Esau who despised his birthright. It also shows how the lack of faith works itself out in family life. Jacob was faithful, obeyed his parents and married a believer. Esau was unfaithful and disregarded God by marrying heathen Hittite women. Esau was a very tragic figure. Even after he understood the great displeasure of his parents with his heathen wives he only made matters worse by marrying into the rejected line of Ishmael (Gen. 28:9). He believed that marrying a descendant of Abraham would please his father (Gen. 28:8). The issue, however, was not simply a matter of race or genealogy but of faith. It is not enough to marry a child or grandchild of a believer. The children of believers must also believe themselves. If they do not they are cut off from the covenant.

The Teaching of God's Law on Intermarriage

God's law-word explicitly condemns intermarriage with the heathen or unbelievers. The issue of intermarriage is so important for avoiding syncretism, idolatry and apostasy that Jehovah makes His will known on this issue in the original giving of the law as well as at the covenant renewal in Deuteronomy and at Joshua's farewell message where the covenant is renewed once again.

In Exodus 34:1-17 we read: "Observe what I command you this day. Behold, I am driving out from before you the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite. Take heed to yourself, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land where you are going, lest it be a snare in your midst. But you shall destroy their altars, break their sacred pillars, and cut down their wooden images (for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God), lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and they play the harlot with their gods and make sacrifice to their gods, and one of them invites you and you eat of his sacrifice, and you take of his daughters for your sons, and his daughters play the harlot with their gods and make your sons play the harlot with their gods. You shall make no molded gods for yourselves."

In Deuteronomy the grown children of those who left Egypt are given the same warning before they enter the promised land. In his covenant renewal sermon Moses says: "When the LORD your God brings you into the land which you go to possess, and has cast out many nations

before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than you, and when the LORD your God delivers them over to you, you shall conquer them and utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them nor show mercy to them. Nor shall you make marriages with them. You shall not give your daughter to their son, nor take their daughter for your son. For they will turn your sons away from following Me, to serve other gods; so the anger of the LORD will be aroused against you and destroy you suddenly. But thus you shall deal with them: you shall destroy their altars, and break down their sacred pillars, and cut down their wooden images, and burn their carved images with fire. For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth.”

After the land of Palestine was largely subdued by God and at the end of his great ministry, Joshua made a covenant with Israel (see Josh. 24:25). This covenant is a renewal of the previous Mosaic covenant and thus has much in common with Deuteronomy 7 (cf. especially chapters 31-33). Joshua’s challenge to Israel says: “Therefore be very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, lest you turn aside from it to the right hand or to the left, and lest you go among these nations, these who remain among you. You shall not make mention of the name of their gods, nor cause anyone to swear by them; you shall not serve them nor bow down to them, but you shall hold fast to the LORD your God, as you have done to this day. For the LORD has driven out from before you great and strong nations; but as for you, no one has been able to stand against you to this day. One man of you shall chase a thousand, for the LORD your God is He who fights for you, as He promised you. Therefore take careful heed to yourselves, that you love the LORD your God. Or else, if indeed you do go back, and cling to the remnant of these nations--these that remain among you--and make marriages with them, and go in to them and they to you, know for certain that the LORD your God will no longer drive out these nations from before you. But they shall be snares and traps to you, and scourges on your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from this good land which the LORD your God has given you” (Josh. 23:6-13).

The exhortations related to the covenant between Jehovah and Israel all relate to or center around faithfulness to the Lord of the covenant. How are God’s people who are surrounded by heathen nations, peoples, societies and cultures going to remain faithful to Jehovah? What must the covenant people do to avoid the sins of syncretism and idolatry? Before taking into account the specific commands to the covenant people not to intermarry with the heathen a consideration of the exhortations that surround God’s warning (i.e., the immediate context) is in order. The imperatives and warnings that are given in the context of the command not to intermarry are tangentially related in that they are all given to serve the same purpose. This purpose or goal is faithfulness to God and the covenant through history or multi-generationally. Children are part of the covenant and must continue covenant faithfulness from generation to generation. Note the following warnings and imperatives that serve the central purpose.

(1) There is an exhortation to love and cleave to the Lord (Josh. 23:8, 11; cf. Dt. 4:4; 10:20; 11:22; 13:4; Josh. 22:5, etc.). The word cleave in Hebrews (*dabaq*) is used in Scripture to describe the husband and wife relationship (e.g., Gen 2:24). The language of marriage is deliberate. In Exodus 34:14 the people are even reminded that Jehovah is a jealous God. The covenantal language is a reminder that Jehovah saved Israel and established a personal, loving relationship between Himself and His people. The people are to delight in Him, depend on Him, and continually devote themselves to His glory. They are to serve Him with every fiber of their

being. Motivations in Scripture to obey God, to be faithful unto Him are both positive and negative. Our faithfulness to God must be founded in our love toward Him. The threats of punishment should be our secondary concern. The church expresses its love and trust in God by obedience to His commands (see Ex. 34:11; Josh. 23:6, 8, 11; 1 Jn. 2:3-5; cf. Dt. 31-32).

(2) The covenant people are commanded to utterly destroy the heathen nations (Ex. 34:13; Dt. 7:1-2; Josh. 23:9-10). The best defense against apostasy and idolatry is a solid offense. Stagnation, compromise and lukewarmness are enemies of both personal and corporate sanctification. Obviously if the covenant people are busy exterminating the enemies of God they will not be making friends with them or compromising with their pagan world view. For example, a Christian who in the presence of unbelievers discusses the things of God (e.g., the law; the gospel; the Christian worldview) will either see conversions to Christ or will be brushed aside.

The command to destroy the seven Canaanite nations by physical force typifies the Great Commission in the New Covenant. The church is to aggressively work for the extirpation of all false religions and idolatry throughout the whole earth by discipling the nations through the preaching of the gospel (Mt. 16:15ff.), teaching the nations Jesus' law-word (Mt. 28:20) and by baptizing them. The Bible emphasizes that the extension of God's kingdom in the land of Canaan and throughout the whole earth is brought about through Jehovah's power (Ex. 34:11; Dt. 7:1-2; Josh. 23:9; Mt. 28:20; Jn. 16:13ff.; Ac. 2).

When God's law describes the responsibility to destroy the seven heathen nations there is an emphasis on destroying their gods, altars, pillars, Asherim, and sacred sites. All the monuments to idolatry and all the paraphernalia of false worship are to be completely obliterated in order to remove all the temptations toward syncretism and idolatry. The warnings against religious paraphernalia and intermarriage serve the purpose of maintaining loyalty to Jehovah, faithfulness to the covenant and the holiness of the covenant people *generationally*. Obedience to God's commands ensures covenant blessings and the expansion of God's kingdom. The wisdom and truth of God's law in this matter is demonstrated by the historical fact that the syncretism and apostasy of Christians has done far more harm to the church and society than have persecutions, famines, pestilences and so forth.

(3) There is a warning not to make a covenant with the heathen nations (Ex. 34:12, 15; Dt. 7:2). Any treaty or covenant with a pagan nation is an act of unfaithfulness to God who had commanded the total annihilation of the inhabitants of Canaan. This command applied to any kind of agreement whether political, religious or marital. Jehovah does not acknowledge the idea of spheres of neutrality between believers and the heathen. The Bible condemns the viewpoint which says that God's people can co-operate under some type of secular, humanistic or ecumenical umbrella. In the ancient world politics, religion and marriage were explicitly related or interwoven. Thus, treaties between different nations or tribes with competing gods or religions were often secured by intermarriage of the royal classes. These syncretistic marriages would be followed by the inclusion of the new foreign gods within the land. The common people of the land follow the example of the leaders and participate in the new worship practices. The two religious systems are eventually merged into a new syncretistic religion that is not really faithful to either previous worldview. This political pragmatism in the area of treaties and intermarriage is the result of political leaders playing god in the area of ethics and doctrine.

(4) The reason for the commandment forbidding treaties and intermarriage with the heathen and commanding their total destruction and the destruction of their gods is to ensure the holiness of the covenant people (Dt. 7:6). In Exodus Israel is designated "a kingdom of priests and a holy people" (Ex. 19:5-6). Salvation brings responsibility. The covenant people have been

separated, sanctified or set apart from other peoples to serve the Lord. God's people are not to behave like or imitate the heathen but rather to obey God's covenant law as an example to other nations (Dt. 4:6 ff.). Believers are to walk in a manner worthy of their calling. "The Israelites were a *holy people* because of their relationship to God, which *separated* them, or cut them *off* (apparently the original sense of the root *qds*, 'holy'), from other peoples and practices. Their holy character does not indicate inherent merit, but rather divine choice."²

The idea of salvation and the responsibility to be holy; of covenantal union and communion with God and the necessity of separation from that which is evil or unclean runs through both the Old and New Testaments. In between a classic passage on justification by faith alone and a reminder that God saved and separated the Ephesians from rank heathenism, Paul writes, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). After discussing the blessed union between God and His people (2 Cor. 6:16; cf. Lev. 26:11, 12; Ezek. 27:27) Paul argues that this union logically leads to separation or sanctification. "Therefore 'Come out from among them and be separate', says the Lord. 'Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you'" (2 Cor. 6:17). Some Corinthians were maintaining close ties with the unbelievers around them and as a result were participating in heathen practices (pagan idolatrous banquets, temple prostitution, fornication, etc.). To counter this sinful behavior Paul argues that Christ and Satan—good and evil—have nothing in common. He also appeals to the law and the prophets' call to separation. Christians must direct culture. They must submit everything to God's ethical standard and never, ever follow heathen culture or practices.

Why Intermarriage is Wrong and Dangerous

The commands not to intermarry with the heathen (Ex. 34:16; Dt. 7:3; Josh. 23:12) are followed by arguments why the covenant people must avoid such behavior. The primary reason is that intermarriage places a believer into the position of being drawn into idolatry (Ex. 34:16-17; Dt. 7:4).

Intermarriage with a heathen results in incredible temptation to compromise the faith in some manner in order to please one's spouse. Solomon is a prime example of a person who sinned to please his wives. "But King Solomon loved many foreign women, as well as the daughter of Pharaoh: women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and Hittites—from the nations of whom the LORD had said to the children of Israel, 'You shall not intermarry with them, nor they with you. Surely they will turn away your hearts after their gods.' Solomon clung to these in love. And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart. For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the LORD his God, as was the heart of his father David. For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD, and did not fully follow the LORD, as did his father David. Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, on the hill that is east of Jerusalem, and for Molech the abomination of the people of Ammon. And he did likewise for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and sacrificed to their gods" (1 Ki. 11:1-8). Solomon loved his wives and wanted to please them and keep them happy by building them temples for their gods. The foreign women

² P. C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 179.

even turned his heart after other gods. The great period of declension for Israel that led to the destruction of the nation did not begin with Jeroboam the son of Nebat but with Solomon. Solomon's compromised syncretistic family life led to the downfall of a whole nation.

When Nehemiah rebuked the Jews who had married women of Ashdod, Ammon and Moab he reminded them of the wickedness of Solomon. He wrote: "So I contended with them and cursed them, struck some of them and pulled out their hair, and made them swear by God, saying, 'You shall not give your daughters as wives to their sons, nor take their daughters for your sons or yourselves. Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? Yet among many nations there was no king like him, who was beloved of his God; and God made him king over all Israel. Nevertheless pagan women caused even him to sin. Should we then hear of your doing all this great evil, transgressing against our God by marrying pagan women?'" (Neh. 13:25-27). After cursing the Israelites (i.e., in a religious, covenantal sense) Nehemiah tells the wayward men that if even Solomon (the wisest most blessed of kings in his day) could be made to sin by his pagan wives, how will you be able to stand against this temptation?

All of this information regarding intermarrying in Scripture raises the question: Why is intermarriage so dangerous to the spiritual life of a family? There are a number of reasons why intermarriage is a snare of the devil.

(1) A Christian who marries an unbeliever is making a covenantal union with a person who has a contrary world and life view. Such a union raises some important questions: Can a solid spiritual foundation of a household be built with clay mixed with iron? Can unity of purpose be maintained when there is no unity of belief? Can a household serve two masters? Paul deals with this issue in 2 Corinthians 6:14-16. He writes, "Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people." The apostle supports his exhortation by asking a series of questions that reveal the inharmonious, inconsistent, absurd nature of such a relationship. Hodge writes, "Parties are said to be in communion when they are so united that what belongs to the one belongs to the other, or when what is true of the one is true of the other. Believers are in communion, or have fellowship one with another, when they recognize each other as having a joint interest in the benefits of redemption, and are conscious that the inward experience of one is that of the other. Incongruous elements cannot be thus united, and any attempt to combine them must destroy the character of one or the other."³

Since good and evil, righteousness and lawlessness, light and darkness, Christ and Belial cannot coexist or live in harmony, what is the common result of such unions? Such unions invariably end up producing some form of syncretism. Syncretism is "the attempted reconciliation or union of different opposing principles, practices, or parties, as in philosophy or religion."⁴ When two opposing world views exist under the same roof, unbiblical compromises are made to keep the peace or at least the outward appearance of peace. Professing Christians who are married to heathen husbands or wives often compromise on crucial spiritual matters such as: family devotions, faithful church attendance, what is acceptable to watch on TV and in movies, on how to spend money, on monuments to idolatry (e.g., Halloween, Xmas, Easter), on

³ Charles Hodge, *1 and 2 Corinthians* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1974 [1857, 59]), 543.

⁴ Jesse Stein, ed. in chief, *The Random House Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: Random House, 1966), 1442.

how to raise children (e.g., discipline, ethics, schooling, etc.), Sabbath observance and fellowship with other believers (heathen spouses have ungodly heathen friends and obviously do not enjoy discussing theology, home schooling and the Bible). Indeed, every area of life becomes a struggle against unbelieving husbands' or wives' worldview because in the philosophical areas of ultimate concern (epistemology, ethics, salvation, ontology) there is not one fundamental area of agreement.

In such households the important issues in life are pushed into the background and are replaced with mundane, unimportant, trivial conversations and pursuits. In other words since the husband and wife cannot agree on what God to worship, they will agree to root for the Yankees or enjoy golf together. But what happens in a household when the most important things in life are ignored or deemphasized? The result is that Christ is not glorified and the true covenant religion is not effectively passed on to one's children. The attempt to live in peace with a pagan results in an explicit or at least implicit form of *functional* neutrality. This attempt is a failure to recognize and live in terms of the radical antithesis between God's people and the heathen. When people who profess Christ fail to place Him first in all things and live in terms of their God-given calling in life, they destroy their own future because they cannot effectively pass the faith onto their children. Intermarriage, syncretism, idolatry and covenantal death go hand in hand.

Given this sober reality, one is not surprised to find warnings against intermarriage throughout Scripture. God has made it very clear that He hates intermarriage and all syncretistic behavior. God identifies Himself as the only true God, as a jealous God (Ex. 20:5) who hates compromise with idols. Household religion can never compromise with idols by making peace with idolaters without dreadful consequences.

(2) A believer who marries a pagan places himself and his children in the fellowship and continual presence of a corrupting example. Paul warned the Corinthians that "bad company corrupts good morals" (1 Cor. 15:33 NASB). Can there be anymore of a corrupting force on a believing spouse and covenant children than a godless Christ-denying husband/wife or parent living under the same roof? Thomas Manton writes, "Many times, by carnal choice, all the good that is gotten into a family is eaten out, and within a little while religion is cast out of doors: Ps. cvi. 35, 'They were mingled among the heathen, and learned their works;' Neh. xiii. 25, 26, 'I contended with them, and made them swear by God, Ye shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor take their daughters to your sons;' 2 Kings viii, 18, 'He walked in the ways of the kings of Israel; for the daughter of Ahab was his wife.' Valens, the emperor, married with an Arian lady, and so was ensnared so far as to become a persecutor of the orthodox. The wife of the bosom hath great advantages, either to the perverting or converting a man's heart to God; or else, if they should not prevail so far, what dissonancy and jarrings are there in a family when people are unequally yoked, the wife and husband drawing several ways!"⁵ Everyone knows that husbands and wives often learn each other's patterns of living whether for good or ill. Also, children have a natural tendency to imitate their parents' behavior. A covenant child who must continually watch a heathen parent curse, lie, worship entertainment, profane the Sabbath, read perverted literature, etc. will at best have much more difficult time with sanctification and at worst will follow the unbelieving parent into heathenism and idolatry.

Further, Christian parents have a responsibility to not only set an example for their children of what a godly marriage ought to be; they also ought to show their children how Christian marriage (although imperfectly at best) mirrors the relationship between Christ and the church. If covenant children have a godless, irresponsible father or a worldly, rebellious mother,

⁵ Thomas Manton, "A Wedding Sermon" in *Works* (Worthington, Pa: Marantha, n. d.), 2:164.

they are denied the benefit of a truly Christian godly household. This lack of a proper example can have negative consequences for a whole life time.

Note also that even when an unbelieving husband or wife is willing to cooperate to a certain extent with a Christian spouse by attending church and going through various religious exercises, such behavior in essence sets forth an example of gross hypocrisy for the children. The children, who study their parents better than anyone else, know that a heathen father or mother really doesn't care about the things of God. Thus the children don't really have a good example, but rather have the model of a Pharisee. These children are implicitly taught that going through the motions is enough, that outward rituals are the essence of religion. This is one reason why the children of these syncretistic, ungodly unions so often reject Jehovah and the covenant for the lusts of the flesh and the pride of life.

(3) A Christian who marries an unbeliever makes it virtually impossible to be faithful to the central childrearing mandate in Scripture which is to make God and His law-word central to everything in the child's life and education. Can a child be diligently and continuously (i.e., from the morning till the evening; cf. Dt. 6:19) taught to love God and obey His word when one parent doesn't care about God or the Bible at all? Obviously biblical instruction cannot be integrated into all of life when one parent ignores God and worships self and pleasures.

Further, there is the inevitable conflict over how the children will be educated and how the children will be disciplined. This is another area where compromise and hypocrisy is unacceptable. Does a believing husband or wife expect their pagan spouse to just give in and permit an explicitly Christian form of education and discipline when an unbelieving spouse has a natural aversion and hatred for the things of God? Such a situation is especially bad for Christian women who are married to heathen men. Such women are not in any position to assert a God-given authority over the man. A Christian man can at least order his heathen wife to submit in this area. If she doesn't like it, she can leave. A Christian woman can respectfully disagree with her husband and even lawfully disobey him when he asks her to sin or contradict Scripture. But, if he is determined to place the children in a satanic state school, what can the wife do to stop such a moral atrocity?

Finding a Godly Mate

Having considered the biblical imperatives and various historical examples relating to intermarriage and the main reasons why intermarriage has such negative spiritual consequences, let us turn our attention to the means of finding a godly Christian husband or wife. How does a believer find a godly mate? There are many things to consider when pursuing marriage.

A good starting point for seeking a mate is to first understand how the Bible defines a good Christian. One should never consider marrying a lukewarm, half-hearted, semi-committed, backslidden professor of Christ. How can one tell if a person is a committed Christian? While no mere mortal has the ability to examine or know the human heart, nevertheless, there are external indicators that point one in the right direction. As Jesus said: "You shall know them by their fruits" (Mt. 7:16ff.). There are two main areas to examine in order to determine the spiritual quality of a potential spouse. These are doctrinal and personal sanctification.

Doctrine

While no one is perfect doctrinally or has exhaustive theological knowledge, a number of things in this area are important to consider. (1) Obviously, no person who holds to the true Reformed religion should ever consider marrying a person who holds to heresy or any blatantly false doctrines. While it is certainly possible for a Roman Catholic or Arminian to be inconsistent with their church's teaching and be saved, it is not a Reformed believer's job to attempt to read hearts and minds. God will sort out such matters on the day of judgment. People who confessionally adhere to damnable heresies must be rejected as infidels. Further, people who are orthodox on the doctrine of salvation, yet who are deficient in other areas not damnable (e.g., Baptists, charismatics, paedocommunionists, uninspired hymn singers) should be avoided. The goal of a Reformed Christian marriage should be to glorify Christ with further growth in doctrinal integrity and sanctification, not less. It has been the experience of this author that very often wives and husbands adopt the doctrinal deficiencies of their spouses.

Someone may object to the need to be so strict by arguing that finding a suitable Christian mate is very difficult, especially in small towns and isolated farming communities. Such a situation, however, is not a good excuse for compromise. Reformed believers must be willing to network and move long distances if necessary to find a suitable husband or wife. Covenant continuity is far more important than the location where one lives. While preaching in Reformed churches in small farming communities, this author noticed that these little churches consisted almost entirely of older people (i.e., 60 years old and older). When questioning the people in these churches about their sons and daughters, it was revealed that in many cases their children still lived in the community but that they had married a Methodist or Baptist Arminian and were attending a heretical church. Such ungodly behavior is totally unacceptable. Covenant continuity takes precedence over location and even over living near relatives.

(2) One should marry a person with a certain level of doctrinal maturity. This maturity involves a grasp of the fundamental doctrines of the faith as well as a strong commitment to them. A person who is not doctrinally settled on important issues is a person in flux. Such a person cannot lead children in an effective manner theologically, and may even stray into dangerous heresy. Almost everyone who has been a Christian for a long period of time has met people who change doctrines very frequently (e.g., one year a Calvinistic Presbyterian, then an Arminian Lutheran, then an apostate Greek Orthodox). People who float about with every kind of doctrine are dangerous because no one really knows where they will end up. Also, Reformed believers should avoid people who are very ecumenical in their views of heretical and dangerous doctrines. For example, a man who says that full preterism, or Arminianism, or the Charismatic movement are not a big deal, that we should extend the right hand of fellowship to such groups, is lacking in biblical discernment. Remember, a love of the truth involves a hatred of that which is false.

Everyone who wants to get married should first learn their English Bible and then become acquainted with Reformed theology. This can be done by studying the Reformed creeds and confessions (especially the pinnacle of Reformed thought—the Westminster Standards) as well as classic texts in theology (e.g., John Calvin, Charles Hodge, Louis Berkhof, etc.). Christian parents need to make sure that the spiritual training of children as a preparation for marriage is emphasized. If catechizing and daily theological instruction have been the habitual practice in a home, then when the children are married they will not depart from the right path of God's commands (read Prov. 22:6; cf. Dt. 6; 9:12; Prov. 13:14).

Personal Sanctification

Obviously, it is not enough that a person profess the true Reformed religion, he or she must walk in God's statutes. One must look for empirical evidence of a mature state of sanctification. Some of the visible fruits to look for are as follows. a.) Does a prospective mate have a history of church membership in a faithful Reformed church? If a person does not bother to join him or herself to a good church or regularly misses public worship for flimsy reasons then such a person is not ready for marriage. b.) Is a person guilty of scandalous sin in recent history? Is a person refusing to repent of any known sins? c.) Does a person have consistency in their walk with Christ? Do they have a strong desire to glorify the Lord in their family life? d.) Does a person love the brethren? Is there a heartfelt desire to fellowship with the people of God? e.) Does a person love the Bible and theology? Do they want to excel in the knowledge of Christ and His law? Do they enjoy discussing the things of God?

Avoiding Common Mistakes

When pursuing a Christian husband or wife it is very important to understand and avoid common stumbling blocks. People who get themselves into lousy marriages often are guilty of making poor unbiblical decisions. Some of the most common mistakes are as follows.

(1) Some people (usually men) place an undue emphasis on physical beauty. While physical beauty is a blessing in believers and is a desirable element in a mate, it should never take precedence over other factors such as godliness, theological fidelity, intelligence, leadership qualities and so forth. As believers in a heathen culture where the majority of professing Christians are corrupt theologically and ethically, we need to be realistic in our expectations of physical beauty. When people are unrealistic in their expectations they can fall into two negative snares. One is an undue delay in marriage which can rob a person of years of happy marital bliss and fertility. Another snare is a willingness to compromise theological principles and ethics in order to expand potential marriage partners. Scripture repeatedly warns believers to beware of the lust of the eyes or beauty as seduction. The Holy Spirit has made it very clear in the biblical record that the physical beauty of heathen women can be a great temptation to covenant men. This point is noted in the pre-deluvian intermarriage crises (Gen. 6:2, "the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were beautiful"). Believers must not let themselves be swayed by carnal motives.

A common expression of an undue influence on physical beauty in our day (especially evangelicals) is the practice of "evangelistic dating." Professing Christians, who for various reasons are not content with courting godly believers, instead date pagans or doctrinally corrupt professing Christians (e.g., Arminians) with the excuse that marriage will only occur if the person converts to Christ. Aside from the fact that dating itself is an unbiblical snare of the devil (see below), the concept of evangelistic dating is unscriptural and unwise for the following reasons. First, no one knows if the person one is dating will ever convert to Christ. Such conversions are rare and often the professing Christian is converted to sin and worldliness by the pagan. Second, such an unholy process tempts the potential mate to fake a conversion in order to get married. This author is familiar with a number of women who pretended to "get saved" in order to get married. Then once the marriage was completed it became very clear that the conversion was totally phony. Third, a person who spends time dating heathen women is wasting

precious time that ought to be used courting godly Christian women. Fourth, spending time with an attractive heathen of the opposite sex deliberately places oneself in a situation of incredible temptation. Instead of following the example of the Israelites at Baal-Peor (see Num. 25:1-18) or Samson (Jdg. 14:2; 16:4ff.) we ought to follow the example of Isaac (Gen, 24) or Jacob (Gen. 28-29).

(2) Some people (usually women) place an undue emphasis on money and success. While money and success are good things when used lawfully, they become idols when they become an end in themselves, when they are not used to glorify Christ. If a woman has to choose between a godly man of modest means or a lukewarm, worldly professor of Christ who is rich and powerful, she must choose the more godly of the two. Money, material goods and success in business is of little worth if it is used for pleasure and leisure instead of for the kingdom of God. Thus the apostle John warned us of “the pride of life” (1 Jn. 2:16). Once again we need to be reminded that there is nothing wrong with being rich. The patriarchs were rich and powerful (Gen. 13:2; 14:14; 30:43; 32:13ff.). Further, it is important that the man be able to provide financially for his family. But, we must be on guard against the common American idolatry of money for money’s sake, of keeping up with the Jones, of rank consumerism. A modest house and income with the love of Christ and a godly atmosphere is infinitely better than a mansion and fancy cars without a strong commitment to Christ.

(3) Christians must also avoid being influenced by our pagan culture when choosing a mate. Heathen concepts of love, happiness, fulfillment and so forth must not be allowed to intrude upon the biblical definition of these crucial terms. The reason that evangelicals have such a high divorce rate and so much misery is not because of their obedience to Scripture but because they have substituted the world’s concepts of love and happiness for what God teaches. Pop psychology and Hollywood hype are poor substitutes for God’s law and a full Christian world and life view. John warns us to love not the world or the things of the world (1 Jn. 2:15). Paul tells us what we cheat ourselves when we substitute the philosophy of men for the philosophy of Christ (Col. 2:8ff.).

Practical Steps for Pursuing a Mate

When pursuing a godly spouse there are some important overarching considerations to keep in mind.

(1) One cannot overemphasize the necessity of prayer in finding a godly mate. By praying to God we not only acknowledge that we are dependent upon His assistance in secondary causes when choosing a mate (e.g., wisdom, guidance, direction, etc.); we also acknowledge that as the sovereign Lord, God Himself is our matchmaker. Indeed, the Bible teaches that there is a special loving providence regarding the marriage of His people. “Houses and riches are an inheritance from fathers, but a prudent wife is from the LORD” (Prov. 19:14). Manton writes, “The land of Canaan was divided by lot; but marriage is by the special destination of his providence, either for a punishment to men, or for a comfort and a blessing. *Here providence is more immediate*, by its influence upon the hearts of men; here providence is more strange and remarkable, in casting all circumstances and passages that did concern it. Estates fall to us by more easy and obvious means, and, therefore, nothing be exempted from dominion of providence, yet a good wife is especially said to be of the Lord. So also Prov. xvii. 22, ‘Whoso findeth a wife, findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the Lord.’ A wife that is a wife indeed—one that deserveth that name—he that findeth her, it is not a chance to him, but

an ordered thing by God. He hath not only experience of God's care, but his goodness and free grace to him in that particular. Well then God must be owned, sought, glorified, in this particular. The husband, in the catalogue and inventory of his mercies, must not forget to bless God for this, and the wife for the husband. The Lord was gracious in providing for me a good companion; I obtained favour from the Lord."⁶

Out of a loving concern for Adam God fashioned Eve and brought her to him. We must pray for God to bring us a husband or wife of His special choosing; a husband or wife found by God's providence to our particular physical and spiritual needs; a husband or wife who will help us in our chief end which is to seek first Christ's kingdom and His righteousness (Mt. 6:33).

(2) Closely connected to the previous point is the necessity of patience. Prayers must be accompanied by a trust in God's loving providence. One must wait for a godly Christian and thus one must not compromise biblical principles when making decisions. Many professing Christians have made horrible unbiblical decisions regarding marriage because of impatience; because they were unwilling to wait for God to bring the proper mate. When men and especially women get to a certain age there can be fear and anxiety over the future. In such circumstances a person must cast all of their anxiety upon the Lord, pray and make sure that all proper secondary means are being used to find the appropriate husband or wife. "Those whom God bringeth into it are likely to fare best, and they that resign themselves up into his hands, to be disposed of by him, surely take the readiest way to obtain the happiness they expect."⁷

(3) There must be an active seeking for the appropriate husband or wife. In other words, one must use all the lawful means to find a Christian husband or wife. Jesus instructed the disciple to pray for our daily bread (Mt. 6:11; Lk. 11:3). Scripture also teaches us that we must go out and work so that we can obtain the food, shelter and clothing we need. A person who wants to catch fish does not go to a desert but to a lake. Likewise, if a person is seeking a godly Christian husband or wife, they must place themselves in a position to meet such people. When we pray for God to bring us the proper person, we do not expect the person to drop out of the sky. We are asking God to providentially (through secondary means) bring the person into our path. There are a number of things that Christian can do to meet potential husbands or wives.

(a) If a person has Christian parents that understand their responsibility in biblical courtship, he or she can ask a father and mother to use their family and Christian connections to help find a suitable mate. Christian parents should use every resource available to them to widen the pool of potential godly, Reformed believers. If a family attends a tiny Reformed church in the middle of nowhere with no suitable candidates for a son or daughter, then the parents must come up with ways for their children to meet people. When Abraham faced a situation where no godly women were available in his immediate area for his son, he placed Isaac under the authority of his chief servant and sent him far away where a suitable mate could be obtained (see Gen. 24). Similarly, when Isaac could not find a godly mate for Jacob in Canaan, he sent him away to a relative's household in Padan Aram (see Gen. 28). In our day parents will sometimes send a son or daughter off to a Christian college or Bible school to find a husband or wife. This tactic can be very successful if done properly. Some things that need to be considered are: First, the vast majority of Christian colleges are Christian in name only. The faculties are full of heretics, apostates, feminists and secular humanistic lap dogs. Further, most students in such colleges are not Christians but heathens and infidels (e.g., Romanists and Arminians) from the geographical area around the college. Therefore the idea that most modern Christian colleges are full of

⁶ *Ibid.*, 2:165-166.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 2:163.

wonderful Christians is a myth. They are places full of temptation and iniquity. Second, children sent off to college should not stay in dorms which are fornication centers but should take a room with a godly Christian family. Remember the rates of fornication, drug abuse and drunkenness in “Christian” colleges are only a little better than secular universities.

(b) A Christian who finds himself/herself in a tiny Reformed church with no opportunities should visit other Reformed churches. Some people live near cities that have Reformed churches with many unmarried young adults. Such an opportunity should not be overlooked. Some precautions to be observed are: first, keep in mind that the preaching, teaching and worship in large Reformed churches is often mediocre and compromised. Be careful to court only committed Reformed believers. Second, in churches that are very large, there usually are some people that are there because of the church’s largeness not because of the gospel. Once again, be very diligent in seeking out only committed Reformed persons.

(c) An excellent way to meet other Christians is to go to Reformed conferences. Most of the small conservative Reformed denominations have family conferences on an annual or semi-annual basis. These conferences offer an excellent opportunity for families to make connections with other serious Christian families from all over the United States. Such contacts can lead to further communications by e-mail, telephone and then supervised visits. A wise father and mother can and should even be making connections with other families before a child is of eligible age for marriage. Christians act very unwisely when they imitate our heathen culture and allow courtship to be a haphazard arbitrary affair run by immature young adults.

(d) Christians can also use the services of a Reformed matchmaking service. At the moment there is at least one Reformed matchmaking business that is inexpensive and has an excellent screening process. If a person does not have Christian parents who can help make connections with other families or is very shy, such a service could be of help. Remember one must pray for a godly husband or wife and the one must be active in searching for a mate. In our day when most churches are seriously compromised on doctrine and ethics, one must use every resource available to find a person strongly committed to the true Reformed religion.

Oversight by Fathers

Believers need to recognize and act upon the biblical teaching that fathers have a responsibility to exercise oversight regarding finding a suitable mate for a son or daughter. Choosing a spouse is not an autonomous decision on the part of a son or daughter. In the very first marriage, God, the Father of Adam brought Eve to Adam (Gen. 2:22). Christian fathers are to give their daughters in marriage (Ps. 78:63; 1 Cor. 7:36-38; Dt. 22:13-21). Believers who are seeking a godly mate must do so under the authority of Christian parents. This point means that they must continually consult their parents during the process of courtship. They must rely on their parents’ experience, wisdom and maturity when making decisions. This consultation gives believers with godly parents a great advantage in finding a godly spouse.

There are a number of reasons why Christian parents are a tremendous help in finding a suitable mate. (1) They are usually more objective when analyzing prospective partners. While a young man may place too much emphasis on physical beauty, parents are more impressed by traits that make for a long term productive relationship. Also, it is much harder for a young man to pull the wool over the eyes of a mature Christian man than it is to impress a young woman. Parents are not influenced by infatuation, sexual attraction, romantic feelings or strong emotions. (2) They have a long history from which to draw important lessons. They have much more

wisdom when it comes to relationships and decision making. They are much less willing to be fooled or to make knee-jerk, spur of the moment decisions. (3) They have a better understanding of what it takes to be a good husband or a good wife. (4) They can ask difficult or uncomfortable questions of prospective spouses without fear of offending the person being considered. It is their job to ask the difficult questions. The prospective mate needs to understand this. (5) They can fence a son or daughter from sexual temptations by arranging meeting times and places. Christian sons or daughters are thus never placed in a situation where they are tempted to commit fornication. Believers, who reject the biblical teaching on courtship in favor of modern dating, not only place themselves in a situation of incredible temptation but also waste precious time that could be used getting to know each other and furthering each other's sanctification.

Conclusion

The Christian family is the nursery of the church and state and is essential for covenant continuity, a godly civilization and the fulfillment of the cultural mandate. Given the central role that God has given to covenant families, believers need to recognize the importance of establishing Christian households. Believers have a responsibility not only to believe in and live according to the truth but to pass the faith onto their children. This crucial task can only be effectively accomplished by marrying a serious, committed, thoroughly Reformed Christian spouse. That is, a person who is committed to maintaining the corporate attainments of Christendom (e.g., the Westminster Standards) and passing them along to future generations by preserving godly descendants who will fight for the truth. May God enable us to apply the biblical principles of His infallible word to this important endeavor. Amen.

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