

The Delight of Pure Love (Between a Man and a Woman)

10-2-11

God is a pattern maker. He likes to make and replicate patterns. We see this in nature, where endless variations of beautiful patterns abound, and we see it in the Bible, where God again and again establishes patterns to be reproduced. In His Sovereignty He includes us in the replication process, as when Jesus commanded us to go into all the world and make disciples—little Christs—duplicating in others our personal experience of His Great Love.

Marriage is one of the greatest patterns established by Abba. Genesis defines marriage as a man leaving his father and mother to be joined to his wife as one flesh, and says there is no shame in this pure union (*Gen. 2:24-25*). Jesus affirmed this definition and added: “Therefore what God has joined together let not man separate” (*Matt. 19:6*). Paul explained that the marriage between a man and a woman is a pattern for the church, and vice versa. Just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself sacrificially for her to sanctify and cleanse her, so too a husband shall be to his wife. “This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church,” said Paul (*Eph. 4:25-32*).

The Book of Revelations culminates by elevating Paul’s spiritual mystery to yet another level: “Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.... Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!” (*Rev. 19:6-9*) We are the bride. The Lamb of God is Jesus, and there is a perfect spiritual union with Him in store for those who have made themselves ready.

This higher purpose for marriage is anticipated, and patterned, in the Old Testament when *Deuteronomy 6* instructs parents to teach God’s commandments diligently to their children, to “talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way....” If parents do this, it will go well for them and they will possess the good land and cast out all the enemies of God’s ways (*Deut. 6:1-19*). I.e., the home established by a loving husband and wife is the place designated by God to create the best culture for a successful, blessed life both on earth and hereafter!

Remarkably, ancient Jewish wedding traditions teach us much about God’s pattern for marriage. Each step from betrothal to the consummation of a traditional Jewish wedding echoes God’s love affair for His people—ourselves—expressed in Scripture.

To briefly summarize traditional Jewish wedding customs, the father selects a bride for his son, a large bridal price is paid, the marriage covenant is signed under a canopy symbolizing God’s covering, and the groom leaves the bride with a pledge of his return. There follows a separation period of a year or more, while the groom prepares a place for his bride, but the father, alone, decides when the place is ready. Then the son is released to return for his bride, who has spent that same time readying her wedding garments and herself to become her betrothed’s wife. A banquet is held, and the wedding feast is open to all who desire to attend. This perfectly describes how God, Himself, chose Israel, and us, and made a Covenant to become united with His Messiah. Jesus, our Betrothed, paid a steep price for us and we are His. He left behind the Holy Spirit and a pledge to return for us at a time the Father will decide. Now, the great marriage supper of the Lamb awaits us!

What does this mean for us today? For one, it clarifies an important aspect of courtship. In Biblical courtship, commitment precedes intimacy, whereas in modern dating, intimacy precedes commitment. Courtship involves our intelligence and practical preparations for the success of a relationship, whereas modern dating is driven by emotions and dangerous, premature flirtation with the fires of physical desire. No wonder a recent survey of unmarried evangelical young adults 18 to 29, found 80% said they had had sex. We as Christians rail against abortion yet we have failed totally to create a safe and supportive culture for young men and women to discover chaste love, which requires a decision and commitment before releasing deeper longings for physical intimacy. Our teens are expected to “say no” when there are few or no safeguards in place to protect them from their own natural desires. “Safe sex” is advocated in place of pure love as God intended it.

The *Message Bible* instructs us: “Learn to love appropriately. You need to use your head and test your feelings so that your love is sincere and intelligent, not sentimental gush” (*Phil. 1:9-10*).

Abba, let us lean not on our own understanding, but in all our ways acknowledge You and Your perfect pattern for becoming one with Your purposes for bringing together a man and a woman, in Jesus’ Name. Amen.