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The *Christian Wedding* in a Changing World

Validating and Illustrating the Gospel in Weddings

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The *Christian Wedding* in a Changing World

Foreword

It has been my privilege to officiate at scores of weddings during the course of more than fifty years of ministerial labor. Some of the most joyous moments in my years of pastoral experience occurred during my participation in many of those weddings. During the last few years of those labors, however, I underwent a growing measure of uneasiness concerning certain discernible trends that were evident in the weddings I was asked to conduct.

As I expressed this uneasiness to my fellow pastors with whom I labored in the oversight of Trinity Baptist Church of Montville, New Jersey, it soon became clear that I was not alone in my concerns. My fellow pastors asked me to draft a brief manual that they would eventually modify, edit, and ultimately approve. We would then present this material as an official pastoral guideline to any couple desiring to have their wedding conducted in our church building by one of the pastors of Trinity. It was our united conviction that this course of action would help both the pastors and the engaged couple conscientiously to pursue plans for a wedding ceremony that would indeed illustrate and validate the truth of God, bring a maximum measure of glory to God, and elicit unmingled joy among the gathered people of God. Furthermore, we judged that this course of action would help us in the future to avoid some of the shame and embarrassment that we had experienced in conducting some more recent weddings. This booklet contains a slightly modified version of the product of our joint labors.

Since leaving my pastoral responsibilities at Trinity in June 2008, I have become increasingly convinced that the biblical principles and counsels contained in that manual should be available to a wider audience. This conviction forced me to wrestle with the question of whether I should rework the material in the manual in order to make certain parts of it less direct and less specific. I decided that there was value in retaining the essential content and form of the original manual for two reasons. First, following this course would allow me to maintain the ethos of the direct address with which we as pastors were seeking to minister to the couples within our own assembly. Second, it is my desire that by retaining this form of addressing these issues I would perhaps provide a viable model for pastors desiring to give scriptural, loving, and specific pastoral guidance to their people concerning this and similar issues.

According to Paul's words in 1 Timothy 3:15, churches have been constituted by God as "the pillar and ground of the truth." In other words, the church is to confess and embody in the totality of its corporate life the saving truth of God in Jesus Christ as recorded in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. Within the framework of this concern, we must recognize that the wedding services conducted in our churches either validate and hold forth in clarity the truth of the gospel, or they erode and compromise the truth of the Word of God, either in its objective doctrinal content or in its inevitable practical application to life. It will become evident to the reader of this booklet that it is my conviction that many current trends in the wedding practices among evangelical Christians are not contributing to this vital function of the church as "the pillar and ground of the truth." As is true in so many areas of current church life, nothing but thorough biblical reformation will once again cause the truth of the gospel to shine with penetrating brilliance before the eyes of men. Remember the simple axiom: *We are never more effective in winning the world than when we are most unlike the world.*

This foreword and the text at the end of the manual designated as a postscript are entirely my own composition. I have submitted the material in both sections to those men with whom I previously formally labored in order to obtain their counsel concerning what I have written. The initial draft has also undergone the helpful scrutiny and critical eyes of other respected, experienced, mature, and discerning men of God. For their input, I am grateful. However, while the manual itself (in a minimally edited form) is the joint product of the entire eldership of Trinity Baptist Church, I bear complete responsibility for the material that precedes and follows the reproduction and slightly modified edition of the manual.

It will soon be evident to the reader that I have written this booklet with a particular focus upon the religious and cultural wedding practices common in the United States. However, should these pages be found in the hands of Christians in other national and cultural settings, I trust that the Biblical precepts and principles will be embraced from the heart. Then, as those Biblical precepts and principles are wisely integrated into morally neutral local cultural and religious traditions, the results will be wedding practices that are culturally sensitive but practices in which the truth of God will be patent and by which the gospel will be powerfully validated and illustrated.

Any or all of the contents of the manual may be adapted and copied for distribution to others. All I request is a simple acknowledgment that this booklet was the source of the material used, along with an explanation of how to obtain the booklet.

May God be pleased to use these few pages to challenge many couples (and their pastors) to a radical rethinking of what is involved in a truly Christian wedding.

—*Albert N. Martin*; Jenison, Michigan; 2012

A MANUAL FOR CHRISTIAN WEDDINGS

A Brief Word from Your Pastors

This manual has been placed in your hands because you have expressed a desire to be married in the building in which your church family gathers for its services of worship. Furthermore, you have requested one of the pastors of the church to officiate at your wedding. For these two decisions we are thankful, and we place ourselves before you as “your servants for Christ’s sake” to the end that “in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ” in everything pertaining to your wedding.

As an engaged couple you are urged to read and discuss this manual together. If you have questions that would keep you from signing the commitment statement at the end, please feel free to raise them with the pastor you have requested to conduct your wedding service.

Introduction

Our experience conducting weddings for many years has convinced us that the time has come to articulate very clearly some perspectives that must regulate any future weddings conducted in our church building under the leadership of one the pastors of our assembly.

Our assumption is that under most circumstances, a wedding held in our church building will be the occasion of uniting two Christians. This being so, we believe it is right for us to assume that your deepest desire as you contemplate your wedding day is that Jesus Christ will be honored and that the gospel and other related biblical truths will be powerfully validated, unashamedly confessed, and clearly illustrated in everything pertaining to your wedding ceremony (Phi 1:20).

A Wedding That Glorifies Christ

In Romans 12:1-2, the apostle Paul entreats us as the people of God to respond to the manifold mercies of God in Christ by rendering total and glad surrender of ourselves to God. He then urges us to determine not to be squeezed into the mold of this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds so that in all things we may do what is well pleasing unto God. Your pastors assume that these biblical directives have taken root in your heart as you plan your wedding service.

The world has its perspectives regarding what a wedding service is and ought to be. It has its standards of what is acceptable in the verbal content of the vows exchanged, the cut and style of the garments worn, and the whole ethos of the wedding ceremony. As a Christian man and woman, and as the willing bond slaves of Christ, you must be determined not to allow the world to dictate what you will say, how you will appear, and what you desire your wedding ceremony to convey to those gathered as witnesses to your vows and sharers in your joy.

In light of these things, it is supremely important that you think in a *thoroughly Christian way* concerning your wedding. You have just this one opportunity to glorify Christ on this very important day as you begin life together as husband and wife. We believe it is crucial for you as Christians to think and plan your wedding in terms of the following three basic issues:

1. You ought to regard your wedding ceremony as *a service of public worship*.
2. You ought to determine that your wedding ceremony and your reception will *validate and illustrate the transforming power of the gospel of Christ*.
3. You ought to desire that your wedding would *cause no stumbling or discomfort to the people of God* and would in no way *compromise the truth of God before the non-Christians* who will honor you by their presence at your wedding.

Please follow closely and think carefully concerning these three lines of vital biblical principles that follow.

1. A Wedding That Is a Service of Public Worship

The Scriptures give no indication that a marriage must be conducted in a house of worship under the leadership of a pastor in order to be legitimate. However, there are many good reasons to consider that such a service conducted in a house of worship and led by a man of God is a wise and godly expedient. It constitutes a wonderful opportunity to glorify Christ and to bear witness to the truth and power of the gospel. Such a service conducted among the gathered people of God also affords you an opportunity to allow them to obey the biblical injunction to “Rejoice with them that do rejoice” (Rom 12:15).

We are convinced that everyone involved in such a service, whether as a participant or an observer, needs to recognize that a truly Christian wedding service is, in a very real sense, a service of public worship. The name and special presence of God will be invoked by prayer; the praises of God will ordinarily be sung by the congregation; and the Word of God will be read and preached. Then, you will exchange solemn vows in the presence of God. Generally, the wedding service will conclude with earnest petitions for God's blessing to rest upon this newly established relationship. Surely, when these elements are present in a public gathering of the people of God in a building set apart for the worship of God, led by an appointed officer in the house of God, what you have is indeed a *service of public worship*.

We regard a wedding service to be essentially in the same category as a funeral service for a beloved brother or sister in Christ or a dedication service for a newly acquired building as a house of worship. Whatever may be peculiar to the unique focus in each of these services, all of the elements of worship are generally present, thereby constituting them services of public worship. As such, responsible church leaders are careful to include nothing that would be contrary to a Bible-based, God-honoring, Christ-exalting service of worship. When properly conducted, such services are planned so that they are decidedly characterized by decency of order, dignity of substance, and nobility of conduct and are suffused with biblical and distinctively gospel perspectives. Furthermore, godly and wise spiritual leaders responsible for planning such services are careful to allow nothing to intrude that would dishonor God and invalidate the gospel of the grace of God.

Until you regard your Christian wedding ceremony as a *service of public worship*, you will not have the framework of reference needed in order to judge precisely what is and is not appropriate and honoring to God. You must keep this principle in mind in planning all the details of your wedding service.

In our day, there is a common saying with respect to weddings: "It's all about the bride." If you are thinking biblically, you will not be comfortable with the perspectives that have produced that saying. Rather, as you anticipate your wedding, you will both say from your hearts, "It's all about honoring our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

2. A Wedding That Validates and Illustrates the Gospel

The Scriptures clearly teach us that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Rom 1:16). A large part of the power of God in that salvation is God's gracious work in delivering us out of this present evil world (Gal 1:4). Furthermore, according to the apostle Paul, gratitude for the mercies extended to us in that salvation should lead us to live lives characterized by a settled determination that we will not be conformed to this world, but continually transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom 12:1-2).

Your nonconformity to the world, particularly in several areas, should be patent in a truly Christian wedding service in order to both validate and illustrate what the gospel has done in your lives.

First, the mandate of nonconformity to the world should be patent *in the language of the vows to be exchanged*. A Christian couple that has embraced God's design for the respective roles and relationships of husbands and wives, as revealed in the Scriptures, will desire to exchange vows that unmistakably reflect that they have clearly understood and are wholeheartedly embracing God's directives for them in their new roles. The world has jettisoned the biblical directives concerning the husband's divinely assigned role as *loving head, provider, and leader*. The world has rejected as well the wife's assigned role as *loving, submissive helper, partner, and follower*. Surely, no Christian couple would want anyone to question whether they have rejected the world's perspectives on these matters and have joyfully embraced the biblical teaching on the respective roles of husbands and wives. Therefore, if you compose your own vows instead of using the vows suggested by your pastor, we expect you to express clearly the biblical language of loving leadership and headship on the part of the man and loving submission on the part of the wife.

Furthermore, living as we do in an age of easy no-fault divorce, a Christian couple will desire their vows to express clearly that they are entering the married state, consciously and conscientiously committed to a solemn covenant "till death should part them."

Embarrassing experience inclines us to give one further word of caution concerning the content of your vows. Some words and phrases are perfectly legitimate in the private love language between a husband and wife. However, you should not include them in vows that are publicly spoken.

The second vital area in which a Christian couple desiring a truly Christian wedding can validate and illustrate the power of the gospel is in the area of *modesty of dress*. When the apostle Paul is giving detailed directives for behavior in the house of God (1Ti 3:15), the first item he addresses to women in particular is modesty of dress that is consistent with true godliness (1Ti 2:9-10). For this reason, we believe that those who desire to marry in our house of worship by a servant of God in the context of a gathering composed primarily of the people of God must take seriously the biblical mandate of modesty.

As previously stated, the perspective of the ungodly world is that a wedding is all about the bride. Part of that assumption is that the bride's adornment, along with the adornment of her attendants, can be as flesh revealing and immodest as the bride and her attendants may choose.

In light of Romans 12:1-2, ought not Christian couples be concerned to show that the gospel has produced in them a conscious commitment to modesty of dress and demeanor as an expression of devotion to Christ? Therefore, Christians

should not tolerate a wedding marked by the excessive display of flesh and dresses that reflect the world's indifference to godly standards of modesty. The dress of the wedding party must validate and illustrate the gospel that is preached from the pulpit in your church. It is perfectly possible to negate the truth of the gospel by what we *do* as well as by what we *say* (see Galatians 2:14 for a clear example of this principle in operation).

Surely, any Christian woman desires her wedding to be an expression of what would be pleasing to her Lord and Savior. Is not the wedding a wonderful opportunity for a Christian woman to declare to all present on that occasion that God has placed in her heart a passion to be a pure and modest woman? Surely, a godly woman would not desire deliberately and knowingly to provoke lustful thoughts in the minds of men, cause shame and embarrassment to the hearts of the members of her church who are present at her wedding, grieve the hearts of her overseers, and compromise the gospel witness of the very congregation in which she is now making her marital vows.

A common objection asserts that it is very difficult to find modest wedding and bridesmaid dresses. Even if this objection were true, where does the Bible teach that being a consistent Christian in an evil world will ever be an easy thing? While there may have been some validity to this objection a few years ago, this simply is not true in the day of the Internet. An Internet search with the words "modest wedding dresses" or "modest bridesmaid dresses" reveals that there are manifold sites with pictures of gowns and dresses that are indeed beautiful, tasteful, and not at all frumpish or irresponsibly expensive. However, most of these dresses cover women's backs and shoulders, show no cleavage, and in every way would be a testimony to the bride's determination that only her husband will see flesh that is provocative to the eyes of the average man. Frankly, we find it unthinkable that a Christian woman should desire to display to the gaze of every man present at her wedding bared flesh that she anticipates will be seen with holy delight by her husband *alone* on her wedding night and thereafter. In our determination to make these things unmistakably clear in the context of a society that has lost its conscience concerning modesty, we believe we must be very explicit in identifying the kind of dress we consider entirely inappropriate.

Such explicit (and primarily negative) directives may not have been necessary to previous generations of professing Christians. However, grievous experience has convinced us that they are absolutely necessary today. They are as follows:

1. No strapless gowns or dresses.
2. No spaghetti strap gowns or dresses.
3. No bared backs below the normal bra line.
4. No visible cleavage; the breasts must be covered at least two or three inches above the beginning of any cleavage.
5. Sleeveless dresses must have snug armholes.
6. No dresses cut above the bottom of the knee (that is, while sitting).
7. No slits that bare the thighs; slits must not come above the bottom of the knee.
8. No "mermaid" dresses that snugly follow all the contours of the body.

In order to assist the bride and her attendants in their sincere attempt to respect this reasonable standard of modest dress, the elders of Trinity appointed a committee of mature women to act on their behalf in assessing whether or not the dresses chosen meet this standard. Certainly, there are other practical ways to accomplish the same goal. The officiating pastor along with the engaged couple should seek wisdom from God to establish a mechanism of accountability with respect to this area of concern.

We trust you are desirous that the man of God chosen to officiate at your wedding will have no reason to say what a leading evangelical pastor has been constrained to say when he wrote the following:

In recent years, I have become increasingly grieved by the immodest dresses of both brides and bridesmaids at the weddings that I officiate. I have observed a number of young ladies in our fellowship who have dressed modestly all their lives appearing on their wedding day in extremely provocative dresses, exposing more of themselves than on any other day of their lives.

3. A Wedding That Presents No Stumbling Blocks for Christians and Non-Christians

In Luke 17:1-2, Jesus makes it plain that in a fallen world sin is unavoidable. However, He goes on to say, "But woe *unto him*, through whom they come! It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones."¹ In Romans 14:15, Paul says, "But if thy brother be grieved with *thy* meat [*food, drink, or practices encouraged at your wedding reception*] now walkest thou not charitably." A concern to cause no stumbling or discomfort to the people of God takes us back to the issue of modesty. Many men affirm that bared backs, visible cleavage, and bared shoulders can provoke them to mental adultery and forbidden thoughts. Any woman old enough to be married should be made aware of this by her father, her mother, or her husband-to-be. Better yet that each of these individuals who have such a natural bond of intimacy and affection should speak to the young bride with one voice

¹ Or "cause one of these little ones to stumble."

concerning these matters. How can a woman professing godliness who is aware of these problems in a fallen world dress immodestly so that she provokes mental sin in others?

God commands His people to “rejoice with those who rejoice.” Brothers and sisters in Christ will come to your wedding desiring to do this very thing. However, you could hinder their ability to do so, if you are insensitive to matters related to what we would call *aspects of Christian liberty*. Love will demand that you do not plan any activities that could in any way be offensive to the people of God (yes, even to “weaker brothers and sisters”), who have come to share in your joy on your wedding day. You must carefully weigh the issues of making alcoholic beverages available, the encouragement of mixed dancing, and other such matters that may be issues of personal Christian liberty in other settings. However, the wedding reception is a public and social event, not a private event. Both “strong and weak” believers will attend this event. The Scriptures are clear in their directives that the strong brothers and sisters must in love accommodate themselves to the consciences of weaker brethren and cause neither stumbling nor grief to them (Rom 14:13, 21; 15:1-3). Once again, love that “does not seek its own” will move you as a Christian couple to be very careful that you do not encourage any activities that could erode the joy of those attending your wedding or reception.

Again, embarrassing experience forces us to say a word concerning the activities encouraged during a reception. Appropriate dignity and purity must always mark the anecdotes and memories publicly shared by friends and relatives of the bride and groom. The sharing of personal and even humorous incidents must never cause embarrassment or emotional discomfort to any who are present at the reception.

Experience also constrains us to say a word concerning the nature, number, and length of the various activities scheduled to be included in the reception. Many times, we have sat in receptions where it was quite evident that the majority of the guests were weary and even bored with what was transpiring. Once again, the simple biblical directive of Romans 13:10 should act like a sacred canopy over everything that is said and done at the reception—“Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.” If ever there is an occasion for strict obedience to the “golden rule” of Matthew 7:12, the planning of your reception is just such an occasion.

In summary, let us emphasize again that the bottom line of our desire as your pastors is that any weddings conducted in our assembly should be services of joyful but holy worship, unmistakable validations and illustrations of the power of the gospel, and an occasion for joy undisturbed by provocations to sin or causing discomfort to the people of God. Furthermore, it is our desire, and one that we trust you share with us, that those who are not Christians who attend your wedding will see and hear things that accurately convey what real Christians are and will awaken in them a desire to know your Savior.

OUR DESIRES FOR YOUR CHRISTIAN WEDDING
APPROVED AND SOLEMNLY UPHELD

Your Pastor(s),

OUR COMMITMENT TO THE PERSPECTIVES OF THIS MANUAL

We, the undersigned, affirm that we have read, discussed, and are in complete agreement with the perspectives and directives of this manual. We are therefore committed to embody these things in all the planning of our wedding service and our reception.

Groom

Bride

Postscript

Some who have read these pages may be thinking that the directives here amount to legalism and a blatant violation of their Christian liberty. They would do well to consider a proper meaning of the term *legalism*. While it is not a biblical term, the term has been put to good use to identify several attitudes and practices that are clearly condemned in the Bible. For instance, when people attempt to base their acceptance with God on the stuff of their own performance, we may rightly label their delusive effort as classic legalism. The parable spoken by our Lord concerning the two men who went up to the temple to pray (*see* Luke 18:9-14) illustrates this erroneous notion with pristine clarity. The Pharisee was the legalist in that parable. He thought that what he did *not* do in the way of moral conduct and what he *did* do the way of religious performances gave him favor with God and formed the basis of his being accepted as righteous before God. In that sense, he was indeed a pathetic but clear example of a legalist.

The counsel and the standards contained in this manual are in no way set forth as having anything to do with the basis of one's acceptance with God. It is assumed that those couples who read the manual, being true Christians, gladly confess that the only basis of their acceptance with God is to be found in the perfect life and substitutionary death of the God-man, the Lord Jesus Christ (*see* Philippians 3:7-9). Serious consideration and prayerful implementation of this manual's counsel will not in any way contribute to or detract from a person's standing before God as a justified man or woman in the righteousness of Christ, and neither will refusal to implement any of these directives necessarily bar someone from the kingdom of God. To suggest otherwise would indeed be a crass form of real legalism.

The second way in which people are legitimately dubbed as legalists is when they, like the Pharisees, add the traditions of men to the clear precepts of the Word of God as morally binding ethical norms. Our Lord sharply condemns this practice in passages such as Matthew 15:3-9.

However, the efforts of pastors who are protecting the integrity and consistency of their gospel ministry and the church's testimony by insisting that any wedding of professing Christians that they perform in the church's building accurately and patently be shaped by biblical norms should not be labeled as legalism or a restriction of Christian liberty. When a pastor stands in a church building conducting a service that is essentially a service of worship, all of the people of God who are present have a right to assume that the officiating pastor approves of the substance of the words that are spoken in the vows, the words and tunes that are sung in praise to God, and the standard of dress in which the bridal party appears.

Also, the unconverted who may be present have a right to assume that the gospel preached in that church on the Lord's Day produces what they see and hear in that wedding service. Ordinarily, less than a week before the wedding, the bride and groom standing in front of them were sitting in the very pews in which they sit, professing to believe what that church believes and preaches. Now the occasion calls that same couple to demonstrate and validate the truth they profess to believe in every facet of their wedding service. Pastors who insist that the verbal, visual, liturgical, and musical content of the wedding service must accurately validate and illustrate the truth of God's Word and the practical implications of the gospel are not legalistic. They are men seeking to exercise a vigorous, God-honoring, and commendable biblical discipleship and churchmanship. Couples planning a wedding should understand that these pastors, as sincere and noble men, are striving to be both the salt and light Jesus says to his followers are to be in a fallen world.

Would it be considered legalism or an infringement of Christian liberty if a pastor refused to conduct a wedding in which all of the groomsmen made it known beforehand that as a surprising joke directed to the groom they planned to appear in the wedding ceremony dressed in yellow T-shirts, purple cargo short pants, bright red Nike sneakers and plaid socks? The answer to that question is self-evident. The pastor's refusal to conduct the wedding under those circumstances would not be based primarily on the issue of modesty or of Christian liberty (these are biblical issues), but because of the *social impropriety* of the groomsmen's proposed dress. Should social propriety have a greater influence in conducting business in the house of God than gospel validation? Remember, the church is "the pillar and ground of the truth," constituted as such, not only responsible and privileged to make a clear verbal confession of orthodox truth but also to embody and express that truth in every facet of its corporate life, including church weddings.

There is a third way in which the term *legalist* or *legalistic* is used, albeit improperly and without valid warrant. In our day, some apply the term *legalist* to the Christian who is passionately concerned to render careful, even meticulous and universal obedience to God in every detail of his life and conduct. However, when a professing Christian takes seriously the divine mandate that whether we "eat, or drink, or whatsoever [we] do," we are to "do all to the glory of God" (1Co 10:31), he is frequently labeled "overly scrupulous," a "legalist," or a partially crippled Christian who has yet to understand and appreciate the privileges of his or her "Christian liberty." The manual that you have just read was written to help an earnest Christian couple plan and participate in a wedding ceremony that will indeed bring maximum glory to God as the entire wedding ceremony illustrates and validates the objective truth and the practical application of the gospel of the grace of God.

The gospel is declared to be "the power of God unto salvation"—a salvation that, among many other wonderful realities, delivers true disciples from desiring to be "conformed to this world" in every area of life, including the kind of wedding service that they plan and in which they anticipate participating (*see* Romans 12:1-2). When a godly engaged couple sits down

with one of their pastors to plan their wedding service and tells him that their shared passion is to have a wedding service that in every facet of its constitution will bring as much glory to Christ as is humanly possible and judicious,² dare we call this passion legalistic? When they further indicate that they desire to plan a reception that will in no way cause stumbling to fellow believers or grieve the hearts of the people of God and that will also provide opportunities for a gracious verbal witness to their faith in Christ, dare we call this tangible expression of that godly love that “seeks not its own” and “that works no ill to one’s neighbor” a manifestation of legalism? (See 1 Corinthians 13:5; Romans 13:10). Key passages in the New Testament that address the subject of Christian liberty emphasize again and again that our so-called liberties must never be exercised at the expense of that “love which works no ill to one’s neighbor” or at the expense of compromising an opportunity for a clear gospel witness (see 1 Corinthians 9).

Pastors are *commanded* to insist upon behavior in the house of God that conforms to apostolic directives (1Ti 3:14-15). Included in those directives is the injunction of 1 Timothy 2:9-10 relative to modesty. Furthermore, Paul commanded Titus to give instructions to the people of God to the end that they may “adorn the doctrine of God in all things.” We live in a culture that has greatly seared the collective conscience of the populace concerning the divine institution of marriage, specifically assigned roles within marriage, modesty of dress, and propriety of language. Therefore, pastors have a responsibility and sacred privilege to help inform and shape the consciences of their people by careful and responsible exposition of the relevant portions of the Word of God that apply to these things. Then they should seek to make specific, judicious, and warranted applications of such exposition when working with a Christian couple in the planning of their wedding service. God-breathed Scripture has not only been given to us for doctrine (teaching), but also for “reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2Ti 3:16).

We recognize that there is a rich variety of legitimate cultural and ecclesiastical traditions connected with Christian weddings. For this reason, it would be wrong to produce a liturgy for a Christian wedding and to present it as a “one-size-fits-all” document. Certainly those traditions that do not in any way violate or ignore scriptural norms can be incorporated into one’s wedding service and become the channels by which the triune God and His truth are clearly manifested in all that is said and done in a thoroughly Christian wedding.

I close the substance and the appeals of this booklet by recounting a personal experience. In the summer of 2010, I was asked to officiate at the wedding of a couple with whom I had no previous ecclesiastical relationship. When we spoke about issues relative to the planning of their wedding ceremony, I passed on to them many of the perspectives captured on these pages. They were thrilled at the prospect of having such a wedding.

Several weeks after the wedding, I received a lovely note from the young bride indicating that the Lord was giving her and her new husband manifold opportunities to witness to their unconverted friends who were present at their wedding. Many of those friends were raw, twenty-first-century pagan American young men and women. However, some of them acknowledged to the young couple that the radical difference of the entire wedding service both stunned and attracted them. Their wedding was indeed a salt-and-light-giving event. Will this be true of your wedding?

To the church leaders who may read these pages, I ask you these questions: Will you use all of your God-given influence to guide couples in planning weddings that are indeed uncompromised validations and illustrations of the gospel? Will you manifest the gracious but strong moral courage to refuse to officiate at a wedding where anything that is seen, heard, or done in any way denigrates or compromises the truth of God, the glory of Christ, and the practical implications of the gospel? You and the couple to be married have this one unique and glorious opportunity clearly to demonstrate in a counter-cultural way the following truths: the blessedness of the institution of marriage; the divine directives for a happy and fulfilling marriage; the irrevocable nature of the marriage covenant; and the blessing of the prospect of children as the fruit of their union. In so doing, you are rendering loving obedience to the command of the Lord Jesus to “let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Mat 5:16). ☞

² I use the word *judicious* to underscore the fact that some very zealous Christian couples, knowing that many unconverted people will be present at their wedding, would desire their pastors to bring a 40 or 50 minute evangelistic sermon. To comply with such a request would be a violation of our Lord’s words that we are to be “wise as serpents, and harmless as doves” (Mat 10:16). It would constitute a violation of the words of the apostle Paul “let not then your good be evil spoken of” (Rom 14:16). Furthermore, to comply with such a request would be a violation of biblical love that “does not behave itself unseemly (1Co 13:5).