

Courtship & Marriage article 12

Dear young people,

In the last letter I talked about engagements; the time has now come to talk about marriage. Rev. Hanko, in his book, *Leaving Father and Mother*, devotes an entire chapter to "Wedding Plans." I am in agreement with what he writes in this chapter and do not intend to repeat what he has said.

But I find myself in something of an awkward position, for, while I am acquainted with the ways in which wedding ceremonies are conducted in this country, I am not familiar with wedding practices in Singapore, nor have I ever attended a wedding in Singapore. If I would discuss, therefore, wedding practices in this country, it would be on no advantage to you. Taking these things into account, it is better to make a few remarks in general about marriage ceremonies.

Although the tendency is to write one's own Form or use other previously prepared Forms, which are not in our Psalter, I have found the Form which appears in the back of the Psalter to be, far and away, the very best Form to use in a godly marriage ceremony. I find it to be especially appropriate because it is so thoroughly Biblical.

It is Biblical in its very first words as it reminds a young couple that they are sinful people and that they will experience many sorrows and troubles in their life together as a result of sin.

It is Biblical because it includes the Biblical meaning of marriage.

It is Biblical because it defines what Scripture says about the responsibility of wives in marriage and the responsibility of husbands within the marriage bond.

It is Biblical because, especially in the prayer, it reminds young couples of the fact that the chief purpose in marriage is to bring forth the children of God's covenant..

It is good, therefore, that an engaged couple read and study the Marriage Form before they actually marry and study its beautiful teachings. I do not think that in the many marriages over which I presided I ever used any other Form.

Another point which is worth making is to pause for a moment to consider the great advantages of a marriage conducted in the worship services of the church on the Lord's Day.

My father writes about this at some length and I will not repeat what he has said. He discusses the problems that are involved, but also suggests ways these problems can be solved. My wife and I had one daughter who married during a worship service, and it is the one wedding in our family that stands out in my mind. (We did not have anything to say about the ceremonies of our sons, for their prospective wives make the wedding plans.)

A third point that ought to be made is that our wedding ceremonies ought, as much as possible, reflect the everlasting relationship of Christ and His church, of which our earthly marriages are but a picture. Not only ought the Form itself do this, but the

entire ceremony ought to remind the couple and those present at the ceremony that the wedding taking place points us to a greater, more wonderful, wedding where Christ is the bridegroom and the church is the bride. This can best be done by a wedding message brought by the presiding minister, who holds these things before the minds of the young couple being married.

Fourthly, the simpler in its outward form the ceremony is the better. As I said, I do not know how things are done in Singapore. (Some of you ought to invite my wife and me to your wedding sometime so that we can learn the manner of Singaporeans in weddings. We do recall that during our last visit to Singapore we celebrated our 56th anniversary, and many dear friends from CERC led my wife and me through parts of a Chinese wedding, but we didn't learn very much from that of how things are actually done among you.)

I know parents that have gone deeply into debt and spent thousands of dollars on all the trappings of an elaborate wedding ceremony for their daughter. But this is wrong. It can never be good stewardship of the Lord's money to spend so much on a ceremony. Nor does it add to the solemnity and godliness of a ceremony to have costly trappings. In fact, the costly decorations and the various rituals seem to me to detract from the spiritual atmosphere and emphasis that ought to be present at such a solemn occasion. It seems to be that the rule of thumb is: The simpler, the better.

Fifthly, a couple about to be married must take the vows they are to make seriously. These vows are oaths which they two swear before God and before His church. They make oaths concerning their determination, by God's grace, to fulfill their responsibilities in marriage and to remain faithful to each other. It is a serious matter to make an oath and then break it. This is, after all, why a young man and a young woman need to prepare so carefully for marriage. The oath they are about to swear is before God's face, and He punishes those who break that oath.

One final word about receptions. I would imagine that receptions are also held in Singapore as surely as they are here. Receptions are not out of place, for they are a symbol of what the Bible calls "the wedding **feast** of the Lamb" (Revelation 19:7). Eating and drinking together is itself a symbol of the blessedness, joy, communion and fellowship that saints shall have with Christ in heaven. Our wedding receptions must be, therefore, times of happiness, laughter, fellowship and eating and drinking together. But they must not be riotous and filled with raucous hilarity. They also must reflect the joy that comes from the establishment of a new covenant home among the people of God. I do not like what sometimes happens here in the States that all the solemnity of the wedding ceremony is forgotten and gone at the reception: that during the reception, noise and jokes, unbiblical practices and worldly frivolity prevail. This is wrong and unworthy of the great wonder that takes place when two are united to become one flesh as Christ and His church become one flesh.

And so, if our marriages are to begin in the fear of the Lord, a man and his prospective bride ought to make careful plans for their wedding.

With Christian love in the Lord,

Prof Hanko