

# Love's Eternal Tie



by Desmond Ford

*White Christmas or white wedding—  
both tell of the love of God in giving us Jesus.*

**W**hat an opening for a book! "I have loved you," says the Lord.

These are the first words of the message of the last book of the Old Covenant (Testament). The rest of Malachi mourns the lovelessness of that people to whom God had married himself in covenant relationship centuries before.

## **The Bible a Book of God's Love**

The whole Bible is about the love of God. Though the Old Testament tells of an era of sin, yet it reminds us of the primeval glory.

See how creation first tells the

story of God's love. God creates beauty *and* the senses to enjoy that beauty. God creates myriads of creatures which all in one way or another speak of him. Then God made man and woman and performed the first wedding. What choruses of ecstasy there must have been that day from angels and from nature—animate and inanimate.

There was nothing without meaning in that time of glorious beginnings. Adam and Eve's union was a reflection of the union of hearts between God and man—and both the shadow and the reality were forever. The beauty of Eve, the strength of Adam, the benediction

of the sun's gentle warmth, the music of the whispering leaves, the joy of the animals, the ecstasy of physical union, and above all, fellowship with the great Father of all, each told of God's goodness.

## **The Old and New Testaments United**

In the first chapter of Genesis, humanity is made in the image of God. In the first chapter of the New Testament, God is made in the image of a man. As the books of the Old Covenant begin with the story of the first wedded union, so the first book of the New Covenant de-



scribes the union of God with humanity—the marriage of divinity and humanity in the incarnation. The angels, in wonder and delight must have sung songs pervaded with reverential awe and sweeter than those of Eden.

John's Gospel begins like Genesis, "In the beginning ...." Then, following his prologue (Jn 1:1-18), John numbers off days until on the sixth day (see the three days mentioned in John 1:29, 35, and 43; then add "the third day" of 3:1). On this sixth day there is a marriage just as there had been on the sixth day of creation in Genesis. But at the wedding at Cana, as at the Fall in Eden, the wine runs out. In Genesis, sin caused all life, joy, and love to deteriorate and fade. So, in the record of Cana, "the wine of joy ceases to flow."

The ultimate sadness of life is that nothing lasts. Neither beauty nor strength nor health nor personality itself. Because of sin, all things deteriorate and fade. The wine runs out. But the loving Christ, at Cana, teaches us that it takes three to get married. Jesus shows us that only God is sufficient to meet the needs of his fallen creatures. Christ's presence at Cana is a token or sign of the incarnation. God has not only pitched his tents by the tents of humanity but become one of us in order to transform our lives.

## The Symbolism of Marriage

The last book of the Old Testament speaks of God's love to man as typified in the marriage relation. The last book of the New Testament closes with the same message. There we read "the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready" (Rev 19:7). Lest we should misunderstand the reference to the bride making herself ready, it is made clear in the following verse. In actuality it is God who makes her ready. The "fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear" (v.8). The imputed righteousness of Christ becomes fully imparted in the last great day when all sin's taint is removed.

Paul, the chief writer of the New Testament, knew the meaning of the symbolism of marriage:

*For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two*

*will become one flesh. This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband (Eph 5:31-33, see vv. 21-33).*

Thus Paul tells us that every husband is a figure of Christ and every bride a figure of the church. For that to be possible, God had to become human. Bethlehem and its incarnation tells of the marriage of divinity with humanity—the mysterious adoption of humanity into the Trinity by the closest of all unions. So God and redeemed humanity become one for all eternity. Every wedding we attend reminds us of Bethlehem and the miracle of a new creation which there transpired.

## Divorce

In the middle chapter of Malachi, God rebukes his people for their lovelessness. He says they "have violated the covenant with Levi" (2:8). Levi means "joined" and reminds us how Leah once longed, worked, and prayed, to win the love of Jacob that he might be joined to her (see Gen 29:34). Jacob's name became Israel. His partial, imperfect love portrayed the failures of Israel through all the centuries to follow.

In Malachi 2:11 God accuses his people of being faithless and profaning the covenant by "marrying the daughter of a foreign god" (2:11). Because of their faithlessness to the covenant union with God, family units were suffering.

Divorce was becoming widespread in the days of Malachi.

*The Lord is acting as a witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant.... So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth. "I hate divorce," says the Lord God of Israel .... So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith (2:14-16).*

Sinful man, unfaithful to God, how can he be faithful to his fellow

creature? Some divorces may be preferable to a domestic chaos which is beyond repair and is killing both parties. Yet the modern rash of divorce testifies to the impiety of twentieth century humanity. The prophet goes on to predict the coming of the messenger of the covenant. The messenger will purify the sons of Levi that they may be joined to God in purity once more and become as precious as resplendent jewels (see 3:1,3,17).

## Loving Marriage Restored

The fulfillment of this climactic Old Testament prophecy is found when we turn the page and enter the New Testament. There, immediately, we are confronted by the story of Bethlehem. God marries humanity through the incarnation! Wonder of wonders! Theme for the most profound meditation! That the holy God should unite himself forever to a race of rebels. God comes down that man might one day go up. God is begrimed by the filth of a cowshed that defiled humanity might be cleansed.

Not only every Christmas, but every wedding should remind us of Bethlehem where Deity united with the fallen race forever. We repeat, "forever." John 3:16 says God gave his Son. Jesus was not lent for thirty-three years and then, flinging away manhood, resumed his former estate. Christ is still the son of man. Today, as during the days of his ministry on earth, he is still as much human as though not at all God (as well as still as much God as though not at all human). When Revelation pictures the Second Advent, it is the "son of man" who is returning (see Rev 14:14).

## Two Views of Marriage

Malachi and John (chapter 2) both tell of the unstable joy of human marriage. It's the same today. Let us consider that tragedy. Thus, we might better appreciate—by stark contrast—the reality to which marriage points.

At every wedding we attend there are romantics and cynics. Some hear the nostalgic thrilling peals of a silver bell as they witness the ceremony. Others hear the croaking of a raven as it hovers over a wilderness or ceme-





tery. To some, the word 'marriage' is deliciously sweet. To others, it is repulsively bitter. To most, it is bitter-sweet. And then there are those who hear the word as a trumpet call to battle, fierce and prolonged.

Apart from the miraculous gift of redemption, marriage is God's greatest gift to mortals. All good things are intended to develop from true marriage: companionship, family, character development, and the foundations of a wholesome society.

But the better a thing is, the worse it can become. Lilies fester worse than weeds. There are a million divorces every year in the USA.

### Love and Passion

Many marriages fail because the love which originally united the partners is not the love which endures. Too often the love prompting the union of two people is love's counterfeit. It is but a biological twitching, a chemical reaction on the rods and cones of sight, rather than the reflection of the secret that lies at the heart of the universe.

Animals, too, have sex. Is true love only that? One thing we do know: many marry not because they are in love with a person but in love with love. This is the worst form of egotism and is closely related to emotional and mental instability. Furthermore, this egotism paves the way for that death from which there is no return. Such love makes a particular man or woman unnecessary—anyone sufficiently physically attractive will do. Therefore, its nature is revealed to be lust not love.

Marriages founded on passion alone last about two years (though the

outward fabric may still stand). After getting married, it is not abnormal to feel the pull of physical attraction to others. But spiritual sanity detects the temptation as temporary madness. It is lust rather than Christian love. Only the latter endures despite life's inevitable storms of trial.

Love is not passion, love is  
not pride;  
Love is a journeying side by side.  
Not of the breezes, nor of  
the gale—  
Love is the steady set of the sail.

Deeper than ecstasy, sweeter  
than light,  
Born in the sunshine, born in the  
night,  
Flaming in victory, strongest  
in loss,  
Love is a sacrament made  
for a cross.  
—Author Unknown<sup>1</sup>

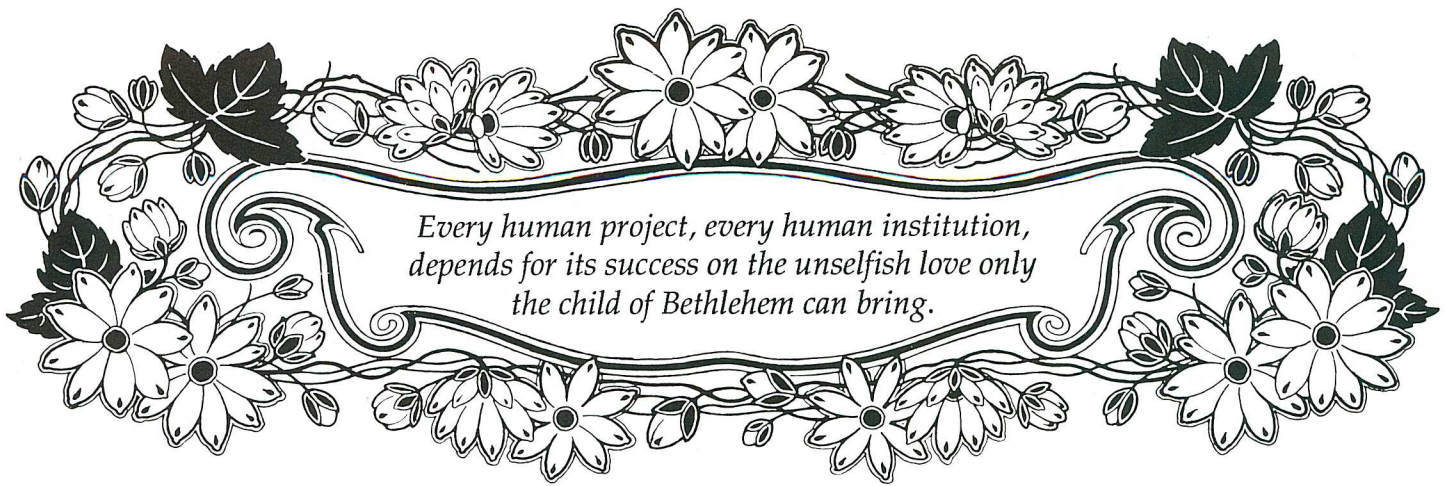
### Marriage and Sex

Christian love recognizes physical attraction as a genuine God-given ingredient, but only as the frosting on the cake—it's not the cake itself. It's not life, it's only a garnish to life. Who wants to live on just garnishes?

We have been brainwashed about love by novels and movies. Remember, these are money-spinners for the most part, and often lie. For example, nearly 90 percent of sex shown in films is not between married partners! Yet it is unbelievably rare for any story ever to mention the possible aftermath of a sexually transmitted disease. The fact is one in every four people in the United States between the ages of fifteen and fifty-four contracts an STD!







To base a marriage on sex alone is similar to entering into a lifelong business partnership on the basis of both parties liking Ping-Pong. Now the fact is, no one wants to play Ping-Pong all the time. No one is able to play all the time. Sometimes, we want to play something else. Or, worst of all, want to play with someone else!

Such a marriage would be like a masked ball where everybody seemed sweet, fair, and romantic till the ball reached a crisis and the masks were removed.

Yes, I answered you last night  
No, I say to you today  
Colors seen by candlelight  
Do not look the same by day.  
—Author Unknown<sup>2</sup>

### Marriage Problems

The sad truth is most people marry a stranger. They do so in an attempted escape from life. But when Apollo loses his looks and strength, and Venus her beauty, the mask slips. The ugly reality remains and cannot be endured. The only person ready for marriage is the one who can live without it. Marriage is a school for character. The trouble is, you must be ready to graduate before you enroll.

In most marriages contracted for the wrong reason, possession brings indifference. Whoever gets thirsty at the borders of a well? Jewelers get used to handling even the most precious gems.

Perhaps you have heard of the golfer who is supposed to have gone to hell after death. To his surprise he found himself at a well-appointed golf course. There was a beautiful clubhouse, long fairways, velvety greens,

enticing rolling hills. The set of clubs given to the visitor were perfectly well balanced. The devil and the golfer moved to the first tee. "What a course! Give me the ball," said the golfer. The devil answered, "Sorry, there is no ball."

### The Eternal Triangle

If the love that leads to marriage lacks the one essential thing, then marriage can be hell. What is that essential?

We hunger for the answer. We are tragically aware that any moron can get married, but it takes a near genius to remain married. We know that the mere signing of a contract to construct a great building is a long way from the building itself. So again we ask—what is the essential element for marriage?

The answer is: a third person. No, not the cursed triangle that precludes disaster. Rather, the third person is Christ who, as the second member of the Godhead, is already married to humanity.

The wedding story of John 2 shows this truth beautifully. As A. B. Simpson wrote long ago:

We see the failure of our natural life, joy, and love, in the exhausting of Cana's wine. Beautiful, indeed, is the bridal scene with its fair and fragrant blossoms, the freshness and beauty of youth, the vigor and nobility of young manhood, the sympathy of innumerable friends, and the bright and sunny hopes and prospects of future happiness. But oh, how soon

the vision fails! How quickly the goblet of pleasure is drained, and how often the serpent is left in the dregs, and all that remains is a memory more bitter because of the joy that has turned to sadness!<sup>3</sup>

But Christ was there. How he changed things! Soon all was not only joy, but much, much more joyous than before. Every project—and especially marriage—needs him. In him everything is renewed, strengthened, and preserved.

So here we are at the Christmas season again. It is the season of giving, and giving is the essence of love. Let every card, every tinsel, every sound of joy remind you that at Bethlehem the greatest marriage of all time was consummated. This was the only marriage entirely prompted by perfect love, when divinity united with humanity.

Not only the one Christmas Day of the year should remind us of this wonder. All the wedding unions of every day (and their anniversaries) tell the same message as Christmas. Every human project, every human institution, depends for its success on the unselfish love only the child of Bethlehem can bring.

Blessed be God. He so loved the world that he gave .... So must we. Let us give and forgive in every human relationship till the Bethlehem choirs start all over again. ❖

### Footnotes

1. and 2. Sadly I could not find the name of the authors of these poems.
3. *Power from on High*, vol. 2, pp.54-55.