

QUESTION: What is the protocol for marriage, and according to what tradition? Is it a decision of the heart when a man and woman agree to be married to one another, and be committed in holy matrimony as husband and wife? Then this would eliminate the law of sin towards them as fornicators, would it not? Or is it a decision that must be accompanied by a traditional policy, public ritual, and documentation of the worldly kind? After all, we know from history that marriage licensure was a means of keeping tabs on couples for tax purposes and for the benefit of other financial institutions and for litigation of property disputes between couples. How much of marriage is still spiritual and a love issue?

ANSWER: The question here is not about protocol or tradition, but about OBEYING GOD! Come on! Are you really trying to say that if you love each other it's OK to just live together? Romans 13:1-5 says we, as Christians, should obey the law of the land. If the law of the land says you need a marriage license and a ceremony, no matter how small (Tom can marry you in our living room, with me as a witness, if you want to), then you need to get MARRIED to obey God. Hebrews 13:4 says, "MARRIAGE is honorable among all, and the [*marriage*] bed undefiled, but fornicators and adulterers God will judge." That was one of the verses that hit Tom and me, and helped us to remain in obedience to God before we got married. We only knew each other three months, and were engaged for two-and-a-half weeks before we got married in a small ceremony following our church's Sunday morning worship service.

You asked, "How much is a love issue?" Well, lots of marriages in the "old days" and in Bible times were arranged marriages, so those would be mostly commitment, and the love would grow between the husband and wife afterwards. Even in our case, Tom and I "loved" each other enough to want to be married to each other, but commitment is still the biggest part. Our love has grown so much more over the years than whatever emotion we felt at first, and it is the commitment that has also kept us together in spite of arguments and disagreements. Arguments will happen in any marriage or relationship, because you've got two people of opposite temperaments trying to get along, but having made a commitment to God, we work through those disagreements and rough times, and come out stronger in our relationship afterwards. "Feelings" of love are good, but if feelings were the most important thing, why would God COMMAND the husband to love his wife? EPHESIANS 5:22-33 is all about marriage, and I don't see there much about feelings. The women have three (3) commands from God, and the men have three (3) commands from God. An EQUAL **number** of commands, only they are DIFFERENT commands. Male and female are **equal in God's sight**, but the HUSBAND and the WIFE have DIFFERENT FUNCTIONS and RESPONSIBILITIES within the marriage context.

The wives are commanded:

1. To submit to their own husbands
2. To respect their husbands
3. To be subject to their husbands

The husbands are commanded:

4. To love their wives as Christ loved the church
5. To love their wives as their own bodies

6. To love their wives as themselves

You said, "After all, we know from history that marriage licensure was a means of keeping tabs on couples for tax purposes", and that may be part of the truth, but here's a fact: isn't it interesting, that we see Jesus' parents, Mary and Joseph, traveling all the way to Bethlehem when she's nine months pregnant in order to obey the law of the land when Caesar Augustus made a law in order to hold a census for tax purposes? So, there really is no "loophole" for anyone who is a Christian to say they are "married spiritually" or something like that, and not obey both God and the law of the land by getting a marriage license, and having a marriage ceremony.