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A Case for Evangelical Covenant Marriage

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This brief paper attempts to set forth the biblical and legal rationale why Evangelical Christians should reject the use of the state marriage license and favor the use of a marriage *covenant*.^[1] Essentially, the marriage covenant is formalized in a marital document (or certificate) that states the vows made publicly, and both the groom and the bride sign it. In addition, the pastor(s) presiding over the ceremony, and at least two witnesses (friends) of the groom and two of the bride also sign the document. For “by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established” (Deuteronomy 19:15; Matthew 18:16; II Corinthians 13:1) and “a threefold cord is not quickly broken” (Ecclesiastes 4:12). As with government-sanctioned marriage (and weddings), the public ceremony and celebration remain intact, although the preacher’s words “by the powers vested in me by the state of...” are eliminated. As a result, there is little visible difference between the modern state-sanctioned marriage and a covenant-based marriage. The formal process of marriage is little changed by replacing the government-issued marriage license with the marriage covenant certificate. That fact should hopefully serve to set at ease the minds of many traditionalists who might balk at the notion from the start. An example of a marriage covenant document is included in the appendix below.

Having set forth the basic idea of covenant marriage, what remains is to flesh out the idea behind the institution of lawful marriage, the history of government-sanctioned marriage in the United States, the modern use of covenant marriages as a marital alternative to government-sponsored marriage, and why the issue should be important to modern Evangelicals. Let the reader be careful to note that the kind of marriage heralded here is **not** the same thing as the super-governmental "covenant" marriages legislated in some U.S. states lately (e.g., Louisiana [1997], Arizona [1998], and Arkansas [2001]).[2] A biblical marriage by covenant is nothing more than an old-fashioned marriage by *public* vows. These vows are recorded in a formal *contract* or pact and *witnessed* (signed) by qualified individuals, just as the marriage bond between Boaz and Ruth was contracted (in detail) publicly before formal and qualified witness (Ruth 4:1,10,11).

Who founded the marital institution? What is marriage^{3/4} biblically speaking?

William Smith, in his entry for "Marriage" in Smith's Bible Dictionary (1901), provides the following helpful synopsis of the origin and purpose of marriage.

The institution of marriage dates from the time of man's original creation. (Genesis 2:18-25). From Genesis 2:24 we may evolve the following principles: (1) The unity of man and wife, as implied in her being formed out of man; (2) The indissolubleness of the marriage bond, except on the strongest grounds, (comp. Matthew 19:9); (3) Monogamy, as the original law of marriage; (4) The social equality of man and wife; (5) The subordination of the wife to the husband. (1 Corinthians 11:8,9; 1 Timothy 2:13); (6) The respective duties of man and wife...Our Lord and his apostles re-established the integrity and sanctity of the marriage bond by the following measures: (a) by the confirmation of the original charter of marriage as the basis on which all regulations were to be framed (Matthew 19:4,5); (b) by the restriction of divorce to the case of fornication, and the prohibition of remarriage in all persons divorced on improper grounds (Matthew 5:32; 19:9; Romans 7:3; 1 Corinthians 7:10,11); (c) by the enforcement of moral purity generally (Hebrews 13:4) etc., and especial formal condemnation of fornication (Acts 15:20).

R. A. Torrey, outlines the theme in *The New Topical Text Book* (1897). He notes that marriage was a divinely instituted relationship between one man and one woman (Genesis 2:24). It is a *covenant relationship* (Malachi 2:4) which was designed for the happiness of man (Genesis 2:18), the increase of the human population (Genesis 1:28; 9:1), raising up godly seed (Malachi 2:15), and preventing fornication (1 Corinthians 7:2). It is lawful and honorable for all people (1 Corinthians 7:2,28; 1 Timothy 5:14; Hebrews 13:4) but Christians must marry “only in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 7:39).[3] Torrey goes on to say that marriage in the Bible is expressed by a joining together (Matthew 19:6) which can at times result in the creation of special affinities elsewhere (1 Kings 3:1). The consent of the parties to be married is also essential (Genesis 24:57,58; 1 Samuel 18:20; 25:41).[4]

In short, marriage was instituted by God in Paradise when man was in innocence^¾*before there was any civil government*. It is to be a solemn, public, contractual relationship entered into voluntarily by an eligible Christian man and an eligible Christian woman. The state had nothing to do with valid marriage at its inception and it need not have anything to do with legitimate marriage now. Furthermore, the state need not have anything to do with the oversight of the *purposes* of marriage: companionship, happiness, procreation, legitimate sexual relations, and the resulting promulgation of gospel truths to children. It is God who has established and ordained that marriage^¾and its normal result, the family^¾be the cornerstone of all social bonds and human activity. Therefore, the existence of marriage ultimately depends neither on the state's approbation nor its protection of the institution. Indeed, since marriage is honorable (Hebrews 13:4) and necessary for a healthy society, prohibition of marriage by the state or a religious authority is one of the marks of degenerate times (1 Timothy 4:3).

What is a “license” and what is a “marriage license”?

The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines *license* as “1 a : permission to act b : freedom of action 2 a : a permission granted by competent authority to engage in a business or occupation or in an activity otherwise unlawful b : a document, plate, or tag evidencing a license granted.” In general, a license is a certificate or document that grants someone permission to do something (see *Black's Law Dictionary*, 4th Edition, p. 1067), and without such permission the act is deemed to be unlawful. A *marriage license* (p. 1124) is “a license or permission

granted by public authority to persons who intend to intermarry, usually addressed to the minister or magistrate who is to perform the ceremony, or, in general terms, to anyone authorized to solemnize marriages.”

Immediately, we see two conceptual problems with marriage licensing. First, marriage is lawful because God said it is lawful, despite any view of bureaucrats to the contrary. The state has nothing to do with ordaining marriage or sustaining it as an institution, no matter how important it deems the institution to be socially. It makes little difference that the state says a marriage is unlawful apart from its sanction, any more than if the state were to say that gospel preaching is unlawful without its sanction. Second, God nowhere ordains the state to oversee or regulate marriage. The fact that the state has usurped this role does not legitimize its licensing practices or give it a place in God's economy for marriage.

Moreover, technically speaking, *law* is antecedent to the state. Thus, the marriage law has its origin in something else (i.e., God Himself). States enact *legislation* and issue *decrees*, but neither of these things can abrogate or modify the law of marriage established by God.

When did civil (state) marriage begin in the United States?

The whole idea of marriage licensing is a relatively new phenomenon. While states began registering marriages during the nineteenth century, full-scale licensing did not begin until around the time of the Great Depression. Complete New York City license records began in 1930. However, some U.S. counties claim to have begun marriage licensing earlier. For instance, Platte County, Nebraska's website notes that “the first marriage license issued in Platte County was issued in 1858 by A.B. Pattison.” Without seeing the document, it is hard to know whether this document was really a license or just a registration. Further complicating the matter is the fact that Nebraska did not become a state until March 1867^¾nearly a decade later^¾and was under federal jurisdiction at the time the “license” was issued. Similarly, the Marion County, South Carolina website notes that “The first marriage license issued in Marion went to Adeline Beal and James C. Ballard on Nov. 29, 1844. The wedding was performed by John Tucker, who signed himself ‘Regular Ordained

Minister of the Gospel'." Likewise, the Anderson County, Texas website says: "John Grigsby served as the first county clerk of Anderson County. He issued the first marriage license to James M. Martin and Martha M. Metcalfe, on August 20, 1846." (Texas had finally become a state a year earlier³/₄in 1845³/₄after years of dispute over its admission). Again, these statements are not conclusive evidence that the documents referred to were actual licenses where the state granted permission for the couple to marry, or if they were just some sort of civil registration that recognized what was sanctioned by the local preacher. By and large, before the twentieth century, most marriages³/₄if formally recorded at all³/₄were noted in the family Bible or expressed in a formal marriage covenant.

According to Pastor Matt Trewhella, in his online article 5 Reasons Why Christians Should Not Obtain a State Marriage License, there were nineteenth-century marriage licenses granted, but *only* to people of different races who wanted to marry. Couples of the same race did not have to get a marriage license. For instance, Oregon had racial ordinances regarding marriage licensing in 1862 and 1866. Other states, especially in the South, had decrees throughout the nineteenth century. It was this racial "angle" that provided the means to greater government authority over marriages. Trewhella says, "Give the State an inch and they will take a 100 miles (or as one elderly woman once said to me '10,000 miles.')

Not long after these licenses were issued, some states began requiring *all* people who marry to obtain a marriage license. In 1923, the Federal Government established the *Uniform Marriage and Marriage License Act* (they later established the *Uniform Marriage and Divorce Act*). By 1929, every state in the Union had adopted marriage license laws."

Is it possible to be lawfully married in the sight of God without a state marriage license?

One might immediately respond rhetorically to this question by asking if Abraham, King David, the Prophets Ezekiel and Hosea, the Apostle Peter, Martin Luther, and George Washington lawfully married? None of them had a government-issued marriage license. Yet God still deemed them married men rather than fornicators. A man recently wrote (December 28, 2001) to Ann Landers in the Sacramento Bee regarding his concerns over the legality of a covenant marriage.

DEAR ANN: My stepdaughter said she was married in August, but neither I nor her mother was present. Also, she never obtained a marriage license from the state. Her fiancé's father, who claims to be a preacher, performed the ceremony, although I have no idea what church he is affiliated with. When I told her she needed a state license, she said they were "married in the eyes of God."

The groom's family thinks this is just fine and dandy, but our family is hurt and bewildered. They are currently living near his family and seem happy. Should I accept them as a married couple, even though I suspect that is not the case? Do I welcome him as my new son-in-law, even though, legally, he is not related to me? Please tell me what to do.

¾Confused Stepdad in Kentucky

DEAR KENTUCKY STEPDAD: Welcome him into the family with open arms, and don't ask any questions. If the couple seems happy, everyone should be pleased. If, down the road, the legality of the marriage should be questioned, it will be their problem -- not yours. If ever there were a time when you should MYOB, this is it.[5]

An Evangelical might offer a more succinct and cogent reply than Lander's: "Of course it is possible!" In fact, it is the most appropriate means (or form) for Christian marriage. Why should the last century of human history in Western Civilization trump God's design for marriage that He instituted many millennia ago? Practical theology and Christian practice are hardly subordinate to modern state mandates. Furthermore, many if not all of the common law rights pertaining to inheritance, next of kin, and adopting the husband's surname, can be initiated (if not obtained) by carefully constructed contractual language in the marriage covenant document.

Is it sinful for Evangelicals to marry by covenant?

If God ordained the institution apart from the state as good, holy and useful, then it is not sinful to enter into it. Thus, the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith (chapter 25) declares: "Marriage was ordained for the mutual help of husband and wife, for the increase of mankind with a legitimate issue, and the preventing of uncleanness. It is lawful for all sorts of people to marry, who are able with judgment to give their consent; yet it is the duty of Christians to marry in the Lord."

Covenant marriage can provide a legitimate, objective document, and a ceremony, that indicate that a couple is married. According to Black's Law Dictionary, 4th Edition (p. 285), a *certificate* is merely "a written assurance, or official representation, that some act has or has not been done, or some event occurred, or some legal formality has been complied with." A *marriage certificate* (p. 1124) is an "instrument which certifies a marriage, and is executed by the person officiating at the marriage; it is not intended to be signed by the parties." The *marriage ceremony* is the "form, religious or civil, for the solemnization of a marriage." Certainly, a marriage ceremony can occur and a marriage certificate (covenant document) can be issued through an Evangelical service of marriage by covenant. Records of these declarations would be used to evince the lawfulness and validity of the marriage. It is certainly possible to have a marriage ceremony and to issue a certificate of marriage that affirm the marriage vows and stipulate that God's requirements for a lawful marriage have been complied with.

Is state (civil) marriage licensing in reality innocuous (or harmless) and not worth protesting?

There are several problems that arise on account of government marriage licensing. Indeed, marital public policy implies far more than a merely benign registration formality that Christians can participate in without concern. First, the Oregon Revised Statutes (section 106.210), for example, says that through a marriage license not only is the marriage "validated", but also the children that issue from the marriage are declared to be "legitimate". The state in effect grants people the privilege to reproduce! But God granted people this right (and duty) in Genesis 1:28. The state need not grant a privilege where a divine

right already exists.

Second, under a marriage license (at least theoretically), children become the produce of a privilege granted by the state. Thus, they come under the special dominion or care of the state. This aspect might provide special concern to Evangelicals when considering policies dealing with spanking and child discipline, the proper age of emancipation from minority, obedience to parental authority, requirements to attend public schools (e.g., truancy rules) or to take certain courses, and the control of child custody rights in case of biblical divorce.

Third, the marriage license might be construed as a quasi-contract that obligates the parties to obey the issuer's (i.e., the government's) rules for marriage and family. Surely, this outcome is dangerous and pernicious for the Evangelical Christian. Contrariwise, the marriage covenant document, which sets forth the agreement of the parties in the strongest terms and obligates each party to legally abide by his side of the "contract", provides greater facility to write sanctions, and wider options to enforce them, than a quasi-contract legislated by an often times wayward civil government. Indeed, the language contained in a marriage covenant can be very comprehensive and biblically-based, approved both by those who take the vows and by their elders and/or Evangelical scholars.

Fourth, God's judgment for breaking the marriage covenant is far more stringent than the state's condemnation for so doing. One might think he can get away with breaking the government license decree with virtual impunity nowadays, but God's displeasure with such deeds is unabated. The Almighty takes the marriage vows more seriously than the civil government does. "When you make a vow to God, do not delay to pay it; For He has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you have vowed. Better not to vow than to vow and not pay. Do not let your mouth cause your flesh to sin, nor say before the messenger of God that it was an error. Why should God be angry at your excuse and destroy the work of your hands?" (Ecclesiastes 5:4-6). Indeed, God says to Evangelicals "let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No'" (Matthew 5:37; James 5:12).

Fifth, preachers marry couples on the basis of their divine call to Gospel ministry rather than some government privilege. Otherwise, the state might

authorize too (and perhaps pre-approve) what preachers may say during wedding ceremonies wherein a government license is granted. Preachers serve a far higher calling than to become *de facto* government agents or bureaucrats.

Many derivative principles are worth fighting for, especially when the relative cost of doing so is not great. The state marriage license is an aberration from God's decree and as such can be expected to lead to increasing abuses. The state's usurpation of God's ordinances is wrong and perhaps immoral. Thus, Evangelicals should disabuse themselves of it whenever possible. By doing so, Evangelicals can make a "statement" by "taking a stand" and they can show God and men the seriousness of their commitment to please Jesus Christ. They may also show their obedience to Pauline doctrine: "Were you called while a slave? Do not be concerned about it; but if you can be made free, rather use it" (I Corinthians 7:21). When Christians have a means to be freer, they should avail themselves of it.

Why do Evangelicals use state marriage licenses, seldom questioning their validity?

For that matter, why do Evangelicals incorporate their churches by state franchise (instead of using private trusts) or put the American flag up in the sanctuary? Why do they ask for permission to meet (in some countries) or get building permits to enlarge the sanctuary? One simple reason, however, might be Evangelicals' ignorance of public policy issues. Another might be pragmatism. Nonetheless, these questions open up even larger public policy issues for Christians than can be addressed here. Suffice it to say that sometimes practices are done out of convenience, and other times out of a more naïve patriotism. Still other times, Evangelicals do things because they are so commanded by the civil government. However, Christians should not blindly obey whatever edict comes down from the state. Surely, they would disobey any decree prohibiting Gospel preaching or demanding that they work on Sunday or hire a certain quantity of homosexuals. Clearly, there are *many* instances in which Evangelicals *must* disobey the state.

The marriage license issue is a bit more complicated than more "obvious"

public policies because it does not appear to be such a “big deal”. Nevertheless, the fact is that Evangelicals are not bound to obey any ordinance of man that usurps an ordinance of God, including the government-mandated marriage license. Whether or not one chooses to disobey the state and marry without license is a matter of conscience. The fact that the marriage license seems so innocuous is probably in large measure why the institution has undergone such little scrutiny by Evangelicals. Yet relative inconsequentiality alone does not mean the issue is unimportant and not worth bothering with.

Should people with marriage licenses get divorced?

In the same way that missionaries who encounter polygamist tribes do not and should not require divorcing all but one wife upon conversion of a man with multiple wives, Christians need not be under obligation to get rid of their government marriage license. They are still married in spite of it, and until such time as public policies on account of it become onerous, there is really no need to spend a lot of time expunging it from their folio of legal documents. Certainly, they may do so on account of conviction and principle, but not because of obligation.

Is it sinful to marry with a state marriage license?

This matter may be best addressed by asking three preliminary general questions. (1) Is something that is *unnecessary* sinful? Probably not^{3/4}at least not in all cases. (2) Is using some otherwise harmless thing sinful if *others* use it in a way that leads them to sin? Usually not. (3) Is using something sinful if it is designed to *displace or usurp* a God-given means, such as worshipping an idol, building a tower of Babel, etc.? Always.

It seems that plausible arguments could be made by different Evangelicals of good will that place marriage licenses in any one of the three categories above. Obviously, if the marriage license falls into the third category it would

be sinful for an Evangelical to use one. However, it seems that the first category is the most likely category for the marriage license. Public policy is riddled with institutions that partly or wholly usurp divine prerogative. Many of these things are evil: social security, welfare, public schools, etc. However, many are not purely evil, but rather are inefficient or ineffective attempts by the state to attain the "common good". The marriage license does not appear to have a nefarious beginning (or overarching goal) as other public policies do. Thus, it is probably not sinful to utilize one.

That is not to say that Evangelicals should encourage its use. On the contrary, *there is no **good** reason that they should utilize marriage licenses*. There is no purpose in doing so that is God-glorifying or marriage promoting. Consequently, Evangelicals would do well to jettison the practice and free themselves from a potential tyranny of the state. The Apostle Paul sums it up well: "You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men" (I Corinthians 7:23).

Notes

agreement, convention or promise of two or more parties, *by deed* in writing, signed, sealed, and delivered, by which either of the parties pledges himself to the other that something is either done or shall be done or shall not be done, or stipulates for the truth of certain facts." Therefore, a covenant is a contract based on an agreement. An *agreement* (p. 89) is "a coming or knitting together of minds; a coming together of opinion or determination; the coming together in accord of two minds on a given proposition; in law a concord of understanding and intention between two or more parties with respect to the effect upon their relative rights and duties, of certain past or future facts or performances; the consent of two or more persons concurring respecting the transmission of some property, right or benefits, with the view of contracting an obligation, a mutual obligation."

2 There are also covenant marriage bills now pending in Alabama, California, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Maryland, Minnesota, Mississippi, Oregon, South Carolina, Texas, Virginia, and Washington.

3 Torrey also summarizes the allegorical application of marriage found in the

Bible. "The marriage relation is used to represent the union between God and his people (Isaiah 54:5; Jeremiah 3:1-14; Hosea 2:9,20). In the New Testament the same figure is employed in representing the love of Christ to his saints (Ephesians 5:25-27). The Church of the redeemed is the "Bride, the Lamb's wife" (Revelation 19:7-9)." Smith concurs: "*The allegorical and typical allusions to marriage* have exclusive reference to one object, viz., to exhibit the spiritual relationship between God and his people. In the Old Testament (Isaiah 54:5; Jeremiah 3:14; Hosea 2:19) In the New Testament the image of the bridegroom is transferred from Jehovah to Christ, (Matthew 9:15; John 3:29) and that of the bride to the Church, (2 Corinthians 11:2; Revelation 19:7; 21:2,9)."

4 In Old Testament history, it was contracted during patriarchal age with near relations (Genesis 20:12; 24:24; 28:2), and parents often contracted marriages for their children (Genesis 24:49-51; 34:6,8) or at least gave their consent (Genesis 28:8; Judges 14:2,3). The priests were not permitted to contract marriage with divorced or improper persons (Leviticus 21:7), and the high priest was also restricted from contracting marriage with a widow or a profane woman (Leviticus 21:14).

5 See Ann Landers, "Ex-husbands and wives are significant part of child's life", Sacramento Bee, December 28, 2001, Opinion section.

APPENDIX: Sample Evangelical Covenant Marriage Document

Covenant of Marriage

This document certifies a Covenant of Marriage between

Dr. John Macarewich Cobin

and

Dr. Lesle Dean Long

The above individuals were joined in the Holy Bonds of marriage on the thirteenth day of the year of our Lord two thousand and two, in Taylors, South Carolina, United States of America.

Preamble

John Macarewich Cobin and Lesle Dean Long, believing that marriage is a covenant relationship created by Almighty God between a man and a woman, knowingly and voluntarily vow to unite as husband and wife before God and these witnesses according to the Commandments of God given in His Word.

We believe that Almighty God, who sovereignly manifests His goodness and wisdom in all His works and ordinances, from the beginning created marriage when He formed Eve as a helper and companion for Adam. We believe the state of marriage is pleasing to the Lord and that He through His Word provides the divine laws and ordinances for the governance of marriage. We believe each of us is given individual and mutual duties in this covenant of marriage and we vow to earnestly fulfill the responsibilities given to us by God. We acknowledge that alone in our sinful nature we are incapable of fulfilling these duties as declared in the Word of God but that through the work of grace by the Holy Spirit in our hearts we possess the means to overcome our natural state and thus be obedient to God's commands.

Our Solemn Vows

We vow to love, comfort, honor, and keep each other in sickness and in health,

for richer or for poorer, for better or for worse; and forsaking all other, to keep each other, so long as we both shall live. Moreover, we freely and joyfully vow the following individual pledges to each other and to Almighty God:

I, **John Macarewich Cobin**, born on the tenth day of March in the year of our Lord one thousand nine hundred and sixty-three, and residing in Ventura County, California, being a believer in Jesus Christ who is biblically eligible to marry, do voluntarily, humbly and solemnly vow to take this woman, Lesle Dean Long, to be my lawful wife, promising never to forsake her; to love her faithfully, and to maintain her, as a faithful and pious husband is bound to do in following the example of the great Bridegroom Jesus Christ towards His bride the church; to live holily with her; keeping faithful and true to her in all things according to the holy gospel of God.

In accord with biblical standards for what a husband should be, I promise to lead you, Lesle, as my glory (I Corinthians 11:3,7), and to provide for your sustenance (I Timothy 5:8), working diligently, and committing my works to the Lord that He might establish my thoughts regarding our union and family (Proverbs 16:3). I promise to earnestly maintain a sacrificial love for you (Ephesians 5:25,28; Colossians 3:19) and to dwell with you with understanding (I Peter 3:7), so that I might adore and cherish you rather than arbitrarily rule over you in some harsh or dictatorial manner.

I, **Lesle Dean Long**, born the fifth day of June in the year of our Lord one thousand nine hundred sixty-two, residing in Greenville County, the state of South Carolina, being a believer in Jesus Christ who is biblically eligible to marry, do voluntarily, humbly and solemnly vow to take this man, John Macarewich Cobin to be my lawful husband, promising to love him and to be joyfully obedient to him in following the example demonstrated by the church in her love and obedience to Christ, to serve and assist him, never to forsake him; to live holily with him; keeping faithful and true to him in all things, as a loyal and pious wife is bound to do for her husband according to the holy gospel of God.

In accordance with biblical standards for what your wife should be John, I promise to be as well organized, trustworthy, and hard-working as the virtuous women described in Proverbs 31:10-31 and Ruth 3:10-11, never forsaking my faithfulness to God, to you, or to my household (Proverbs 31:11-12). I promise

to be submissive to you^{3/4}even to the point of adopting your will and desires as my own (Ephesians 5:22, Colossians 3:18, I Peter 3:1), to be domestic (Titus 2:5) and care for you and the children entrusted to me, to seek the incorruptible beauty of a quiet and gentle spirit (I Peter 3:4), and to always love and defend you (Titus 2:4) as your supportive companion.

In submission to my husband, therefore, I hereby affirm my desire and intention to take his surname. Hence, from this day forth, let it be known that I, Lesle Dean Long, voluntarily choose to call myself, and to change my legal name, that I will forever be known as Mrs. Lesle Long Cobin or, if I prefer to use my given middle name informally, as Mrs. Lesle Dean Cobin. I would that others likewise recognize my change of name. My decision is in conformity with our American cultural tradition based on the biblical principle given in Numbers 36:3 and elsewhere in the Scriptures, which indicates that a woman from one Israelite tribe who married a man from another tribe would become, along with her children, part of her husband's tribe.

Prayer and Benediction

We ask that Almighty God, who has called us into His kingdom and has united us in the bonds of marriage, may grant us the presence of the Holy Spirit, so that we, in true love of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and in firm faith of the promises of God the Father, may live holy lives according to His divine will. We ask for God's blessing as co-heirs of the covenant He established first with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and then with our Lord Jesus Christ and His Apostles for the universal church, that we may bring up children in the fear of the Lord, to the honor of His name, and to the edification of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We beseech the Lord God to replenish us with His grace and grant that we may long live together in all godliness and holiness.

Agreement Regarding Children, Property, and Common Law Matters

We affirm that all of our real and personal property shall be owned jointly, unless specifically registered and titled in our names individually or in trust. We shall affirm this contract even if we choose to live in a community property state (viz. Arizona, California, Idaho, Louisiana, Nevada, New Mexico, Texas,

Washington, or Wisconsin), that would deem all property acquired by either of us, as well as together, to be jointly owned and equally shared. The laws of the state of South Carolina shall govern the property provisions in this section, unless written consent by both of us is given to place them under another jurisdiction.

On the basis of our solemn marriage vows, we affirm that John's present six children and any children that may issue as a result of our physical union^{3/4}or by means of adoption by both of us together^{3/4}shall be our lawful and rightful heirs in the sight of God and, therefore, ought to be in the sight of men. They ought to all participate equally in such rights. Any attempt to deny them their right to inherit property, take their father's name, or make decisions for their parents as "next of kin" shall run contrary to our express intent and wishes.

We declare that upon the death of either one of us, the property owned by the deceased that does not have a beneficiary designated shall immediately become the property of the surviving spouse, if living, otherwise to the aforementioned children, equally and *per stirpes*. If both of us die simultaneously, our property that does not have a beneficiary designated for it shall immediately become the property of all of the aforementioned children, equally and *per stirpes*. If these children and us should die simultaneously, our property that does not have a beneficiary designated for it shall immediately become the property of all of our nephews and nieces, equally and *per stirpes*. Otherwise, if we have no surviving children, grandchildren, nephews, or nieces, our property shall pass to the dominion, possession and control of our current or most recent Evangelical Christian church where we were both members.

We further affirm the common law rights that we as rightfully and lawfully married have: to not have to testify against one's spouse, for the wife to be able take the surname of her husband (which she has declared to be her desire and intention), and to maintain an insurable interest in each other as beneficiaries or co-participants (or dependents) for insurance coverage purposes. Accordingly, we would entreat those courts, government agencies, and insurers to accept our solemn promises contained herein as necessary and sufficient causes for the acknowledgement of these common law rights and benefits.

Closing

In consideration of the mutual bonds of service and affection that will be rendered to one another from this point forward, it is our express desire that each of the aforementioned provisions be enforceable at law and effectual in practice. Accordingly, we hereby attest to these solemn vows and covenant obligations, with all the associated rights and duties corresponding to them, looking to the manifest grace of God to lead and care for us, as His most holy and wise purpose deems best for His glory. Signed and subscribed this thirteenth day of April, in the year of our Savior two thousand and two.

By Husband and Wife:

John Macarewich Cobin

Lesle Dean Long

Before these Witnesses:

Thomas Rush, presiding Pastor

Phillip J. Temple, Esquire

Joan Cobin, mother of the groom
the bride

Sylvia D. Long, mother of

Paul F. McClellan, groomsman
bridesmaid

Francis M. Long,

Return to the [Home](#) Page to the Main [Menu](#)