

THE GLORY OF THE COVENANT OF MARRIAGE

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The Bible speaks of marriage as a covenant. A covenant is a bond, a treaty, a commitment between parties. Proverbs 2:17 speaks of marriage as a covenant. Malachi 2:14 speaks of a woman as a man's wife by covenant. The Bible describes marriage far more than a mere relationship or a happy friendship. The institution of marriage, as designed by God, is in fact a covenant between both parties to each other and before God.

1. Marriage is a LIFELONG covenant. The marriage relationship was created by God for one man and one woman to leave their parents and to join themselves to each other in an unbreakable bond. Marriage is not to be severed. It should not be broken. It must never be conditional. The covenant of marriage is to endure as long as both persons live. It must be lifelong.

2. Marriage is a DIVINE covenant. Far more than being something that a governing authority or the state created or instituted, marriage is God's plan. God thought of, defined, provided the parameters of, and wills marriage. This means that the defining of marriage does not rest in the powers and ingenuities of men because God and God alone designed marriage and defined precisely what marriage is. God decreed that one man must leave parents and he must join himself to his wife (who also leaves her parents) and the man and the woman become one flesh. In fact, even Jesus said that it is ultimately God who joins the husband and wife together.

3. Marriage is a WILLED covenant. To live as a married couple, both the husband and the wife must resolve to stay together, to grow together, to communicate together, and they must will -- that is, they must commit -- to remain together as long as life endures. Marriage is a choice and it's also a commitment. When times get hard and disagreements arise, the covenant should not be broken. Rather, the commitment of both the husband and the wife to one another should strengthen the bond of marriage all the more. Thus, marriage is a willed, deliberate, enduring, and committed covenant one with another.

4. Marriage is a SACRIFICIAL covenant. Just as in the ancient world, the parties who would engage in a covenant would take an animal and sacrifice it as a symbol of faithfulness to the covenant treaty. The meaning was this, if anyone were to break his part of the deal, his end would be that of the sacrificial animal. To live in the covenant of marriage is to sacrifice for the other person, for their good, for their enjoyment. It is a blessed sacrifice and a delightful service. Marriage exists *not* for me to be served and for me to be happy by what I can get out of it for my pleasure and comfort. Rather, marriage is designed for me to sacrifice me and myself and my aspirations so that I may attain the higher joy and greater blessedness of serving another, sacrificing for their well-being, and seeking to bring them joy and pleasure.

5. Marriage is a PERSEVERING covenant. Covenants in the truest sense of the word do not fail. They endure, they continue, they do not fail. When God brings a man and a woman together in the covenant bond of marriage, it is a persevering covenant because the husband and the wife persevere with each other through all seasons of life, through all ages of life, through all the storms of life, through all the joys of life, and through all the uncertainties of life. True marriage does not fail; it endures. Both parties within marriage resolve at the ceremony before God and witnesses to remain together throughout life and they must persevere in keeping those promises throughout the remainder of their marriage together till they die. True, self-giving, faithful love does not fail.

6. Marriage is a GOSPEL-DEMONSTRATING covenant. The most remarkable reality regarding the marriage covenant is that it points to something bigger. It has always pointed to something greater. The grand design of marriage, by God, was for the covenant of marriage to be a demonstration of a greater covenant. It was to be a picture, if you will, of the reality. It was to be an illustration of a far greater, spiritual relationship. The Bible speaks of this as a mystery. The mystery spoken of was something that existed before but it was unknown, it was veiled, until the proper time when the true and full revelation would come to light. The New Testament clarifies that marriage is a mystery -- it is something that was physical relationship pointing to a spiritual relationship. Both are real. Both are delightful. But the physical marriage relationship on earth always is meant to point to the spiritual relationship between Christ and His Church. Christ, as the Bridegroom, gave Himself for His bride, the Church. The Church, the Bride, submits to her Christ as He is a blessed Bridegroom, a loving provider, a passionate sanctifier, and a promise-keeping lover. This spiritual relationship between Christ and His Bride is pictured through the earthly, visible marriage relationship between a husband and a wife. The husband is called to emulate Christ in loving his wife and sacrificing for her well-being. He is to love her, and lead her, and cherish her, and nurture her. The wife, on the other hand, must submit to her husband in the same way that the church submits to her Savior in all things. This submission is a worshipful, internal, willing, delightful, and glad placing oneself under her husband's authority that God has lovingly placed over her. That is to say, the covenant bond of marriage is ultimately and always meant to be a *pointer* to the ultimate marriage and to the eternal union of Christ and His bride. Human marriages will terminate. When a spouse dies, the marriage relationship is over. No one will be married in heaven. But there is a marriage that does not terminate. A covenant marriage does exist that cannot fade away, it does not pass away, and it is eternal. In fact, the fullness of that marriage will really, everlastingly, and passionately be experienced in its fullness after believers die and meet the perfect Bridegroom face to face. Every marriage portrays the gospel. Is your marriage a healthy demonstration of the gospel in this world? In a day in which marriage is mocked, rejected, 'redefined', and blasphemed, true marriages that accurately and beautifully present the gospel through a husband's self-giving and sacrificial love and through a wife's humble, quiet, and respectful submission are desperately needed. May your marriage be a gospel-demonstrating marriage. May you strive with all your might and by the Spirit's enabling grace to live and think and serve and conduct yourself in your marriage relationship in such a way that the gospel of Jesus Christ is accurately, beautifully, and clearly presented. If you do this, you *will* be different. But stick to it. It's worth it. The ultimate marriage is soon-coming. Soon you'll meet your eternal, ravishing Bridegroom face to face!