

The Dangerous Power of Covenant – *Mal 2:13-16*

The Glorious Mystery that is Marriage IV

Introduction – We have already seen that marriage is God's design, doing, and for His glory. God administers this gift of marriage by means of a covenant and we need to clearly understand what that means. Covenants are powerful and powerfully binding. They are dangerous if mishandled. But when rightly understood and applied, covenants provide the kind of protections necessary to live out and enjoy the graces and gifts of marriage without fear.

What Is A Covenant – A useful definition is that “a covenant is a solemn bond, sovereignly administered with attendant blessings and curses.” This is the way in which God always deals with men.

The First Adam - All men were in Adam, who was in covenant with God (Gen 2:15-17, Hos 6:7). We are taught that in his sin, we all sinned (Rom 5:12, 17, 1 Cor 15:22).

The Second Adam – Christ is related to Adam in that He too is a representative head on behalf of His people – “*The first Adam became a living being. The last Adam became a life-giving spirit*” (1 Cor 15:45). The work of the first Adam brought condemnation upon all those who were in him. The work of the second Adam brought justification upon all those who were in Him (Rom 5:17-21). It is only through our covenantal relationship with Christ that our sins can be imputed to Him, and His righteousness imputed to us.

Is Marriage A Covenant? – What does all this have to do with marriage? Everything.

The Bride of Christ – The church, those who are in the second Adam, is the church by God's covenantal promise – “*I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.*” (2 Cor 6:16). The church is also comparable to a bride betrothed and brought to her husband, Christ (2 Cor 11:2-3, Rev 21:2-3, 9-10).

The Mystery of Marriage – Paul declares this comparison in the relationship of husband and wife (Eph 5:25). He instructs us that the paradigm of Genesis 2 is a picture to us of Christ and the church (Eph 5:31-32).

The Covenant of Marriage - There are two explicit references to the “covenant of marriage” as well – Prov 2:17 and Mal 2:14. In the section of Malachi where this covenant is cited (vv13-16), we see that God plainly considers marriage a life commitment of the most solemn sort. And this makes sense when we see that any breakage of this covenant is a declaration of a false gospel – declaring that God may tire of His bride and seek another, or that He is not jealous for the undivided commitment of His bride to Him at all costs.

“Cutting” a Covenant – In Gen 15:8-21 we learn about what making a covenant really means. When God made a covenant with Abraham, He literally “cut” a covenant; animals were cut in half and then God took upon Himself the curse of the covenant, declaring by His act, “May I be torn apart if I do not fulfill my covenant obligations to you.” This oath provides the power and the protection of covenants – and this kind of oath exists in God's establishment of the marriage covenant.

Within This Dangerous Covenant – Now, let us see what this covenant provides and how the power of the covenant protects and promotes these blessings.

Companionship – Prov 2:17 and Mal 2:14 both speak of the companionship which exists in this covenant. The two Hebrew words used point to being “in intimate relationship with” and to be “united to.” Together, they speak of commitment and intimacy. The commitment and the intimacy necessary to bring together the “one-flesh” promise of marriage.

Another way to look at it is that the commitment (covenant) brings about the intimacy (companionship). This is why when a couple takes vows, they vow to provide companionship for one another for the rest of their lives regardless of the circumstances of life. They do not take vows to receive companionship. Each vows to give all that is necessary to meet his or her spouse's need for companionship whether or not he or she will ever receive the same in return. This is what the Father did to Abraham. This is what Christ did for His bride. As an act of love, marriage vows commit one to giving, not to receiving.

Sexual Companionship and Fidelity – “*You may now kiss the bride!*” - While marriage involves a covenantal agreement to meet all of your spouse's needs for companionship, a central need and a peculiar provision exists only in the marriage relationship: sexual enjoyment and purity. Heb 13:4 tells us that in the marriage bed (bound by covenant) sexual intimacy is honorable and therefore there is no shame. 1 Cor 7:2-3 teaches us that sexual activity within the marriage is God's kind provision and practical help against sexual temptation. Husbands and wives must study one another in their spouse's particular needs as they seek to be a companion in this area. But the commitment here is the same – the vow to give, not the vow to receive or the vow to only give “if.”

Godly Children – Of course, one of the main ways God intends to glorify His name through marriage is through bringing forth a filled earth, full of generations upon generations of godly offspring. His covenant with Abraham pointed to this (Gen 17:6-7), reiterated through Moses (Deut 7:9) and passed on to all Christians (Eph 6:1-3).

Why Dangerous? – The covenant of marriage is the place where the deepest human needs and desires are met. But to enter in, one has to die to self through vows, trusting in the living God. To re-state a phrase of Jesus, “if a man seeks to find happiness for himself in marriage, he will lose it; if he seeks to give happiness in marriage to his spouse, he will find that same happiness to the glory of God.”