

The Covenant of Marriage

Introduction – ‘Look, some people call it “marriage”, others call it “living together”, but what difference does it make?’ The farther and farther we get from a biblical understanding of marriage, the weirder and weirder it gets. While the evangelical church is trying to hold back the floodgates with some faithful instruction, it has lost its bearings as to what makes marriage truly unique. The subsequent consequences and compromises in the teaching of American evangelicalism have only begun. Without an understanding of the ‘covenant of marriage’, all of our books and seminars will simply become pursuits at better communication, sorting out roles, and learning to live better with your roommate, whoever he, she, or they, might be.

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). There are two explicit references to the ‘covenant of marriage’ as well – Prov 2:17 and Mal 2:14.

Application: Authority and Individualism – If we do not understand our marriages covenantally, we begin treating the roles of authority and submission with regard to two individuals rather than as an organic union. Without a covenant, we are left with a man in charge of a woman, rather than a man having representative authority and responsibility. The picture is not one of lord and serf, but of head and body.

Understanding Headship Within a Covenant –

Private Persons/Public Person – Each one of us, individually, is responsible before God for our own sins. But the husband must take 100% responsibility for the sins of the union as well. If she sins, he sins – “*just as through one man, sin entered the world*”. How else are we to understand Christ taking responsibility for our sins? He is our Head.

Submission to Headship – A wife is a helper to her husband in his task to exercise dominion over the earth. It is their task (Gen 1:28). It is his task with primary regard to the earth. It is her task with primary regard to him. This is why husbands and wives share the same names. They are one before God with one overarching vocation from Him.

Love From the Head – Christ didn’t just love the church a lot. He loved her as her Head. And we are to learn to love our wives in the same way – covenantally.

A Love that makes lovely – this is efficacious love which transforms.

A Love that is sacrificial – this is incarnational love, not sentimental.

A Love that takes responsibility – this is masculine love which never blames her.

A Love that nourishes – this is jealous, faithful love that feeds, washes, instructs.

And why does the Head do this – “*For no one ever hated his own flesh*”. That is, because of the covenant.

Conclusion – It is only this love, understood covenantally, that declares the true gospel. Today, the tragedy is two-fold. The modern evangelical church boasts no radical difference in its divorce rates and horror stories. The man-centered marriages reflect the man-centered, non-efficacious atonement. That is not to say you have to be reformed in order to have a great marriage. It is to say that among the reformed particularly, we have no excuse.

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