



Covenant Marriage

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By Rev. David Koch

Introduction:

As I begin this morning, I want to share with you an experience that I had this week. On Wednesday morning, I awoke quite early, and got up to pray. Seeing the news on Tuesday evening, I was somewhat troubled by the talk of possible terrorist activity in our nation. Some fear and anxious thoughts came into my mind. As I went to the kitchen to get a hot cup of cappuccino, I looked out the window and as it was still dark, there high up in a clear sky, I saw the brightest star. God spoke to my heart and mind and reminded me to not be afraid. He reminded me that He had made that star, and was in control of this world. He reassured me that I did not have to be afraid, but just needed to trust Him. When I sat down to pray and look to God's word, the devotional thought from OUR DAILY BREAD, so spoke to me, because it was about being realistic, and dealing with our fears.

Can I share with you that no matter what happens in our nation, no matter what happens in our world, no matter what happens in our family, no matter what happens in the economy, God is still in control and He is trustworthy. We are able to cast our fear on Him and know that He will fill us with His peace in place of the fear. That is my first message to you this morning.

Now my second message this morning is about our covenant relationship. Marriages are in trouble today. There are many stresses with jobs, raising a family, involvement in school, church, business, community events and affairs. God has a plan for your home. If your marriage is in trouble, then let me encourage you to not think in terms as the world thinks.

Don't tune me out if you are single. If you are unmarried, you are still an important person to strengthen marriages. How can that happen you ask? Well you can pray for marriages that they would stay strong. Pray that temptations would be minimal, that God would strengthen the bonds and vows of marriage, and that Christian homes would demonstrate in a visible way, the covenant relationship there is between Christ and the church.

The goal of a covenant relationship when it comes to a marriage is not simply to endure to the end, or to enjoy each other's company. A covenant marriage relationship includes those things but also has the goal to glorify God in the relationship and exemplify Christ to the world.

Too many people today view marriage as a legal arrangement that has a contract with it. Contracts are based on rights and responsibilities and are motivated by self-centeredness, rather than on unconditional love. A legal contract is necessary to begin and likewise end a marriage, but a covenant is more than a contract. The value of a covenant marriage relationship as opposed to a contracted marriage agreement, lies in a person's understanding and acceptance of God's intent for marriage and the importance of God's presence in that relationship.

TEXT: **Malachi 2:14-16** - You ask, “Why?” It is because the LORD is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant. Has not the LORD made them one? In flesh and spirit they are His. And why has He made them one? Because He was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth. “I hate divorce,” says the LORD God of Israel, “and I hate a man's covering himself with violence as well as with his garment,” says the LORD Almighty. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith.

I. The Biblical Plan for a Covenant Relationship

We are instructed in our text to “guard yourself in your spirit and do not break faith with the wife of your youth.”

The warning here is that we are to be alert, that we are to be watchful, that we are to protect with everything we can the spirit of our marriage, and not allow the trust and relationship we have in our marriage to be broken. Be faithful in your mind, in your thoughts, in your actions toward your spouse.

In Malachi, God used the term covenant in reference to marriage. The nation of Israel had dishonored God in their lives and in their worship, they seemed to be clueless as to how or why they were offending God. What was the reason for God's disfavor? **Malachi 2:14-15**. “...because the Lord has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth.” She is your companion and wife by covenant. In this passage, God clearly acknowledges that marriage is as a covenant and holds it in high regard throughout all scripture.

The idea of breaking faith here has to do with transgress or being unfaithful to your spouse. When we take a vow we enter into a covenant, not only with the person we have made our vow to, but also into a covenant with God who witnesses such vows.

Under the old covenant, the law gave several reasons for divorce, including if someone had been caught in adultery, if someone became pregnant before marriage, etc. When the Pharisees were trying to catch Jesus in a trap, they asked him about divorce. We find his response in **Matthew 19:7-8** - “Why then,” they asked, “did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?”

Jesus replied, “**Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning.**”

It was not God's plan from the beginning. When Jesus speaks of hearts that were hard, He was not only meaning in the aspect of emotions and love, but also in the aspect that they had no spiritual perception of their covenant relationship to their spouse.

For those who have suffered through a divorce, let me assure you, God's grace is sufficient to heal you and His forgiveness is available to start over. He is the God of the second chance. Divorce is not the unpardonable sin.

II. The Foundation of a Covenant Relationship

At the core and foundation of any covenant relationship is unconditional love. In other words, I love you for who you are, not for what you can do for me. There is nothing you can do that will cause me to not love you. This is the manner of love that God extends to us. He loves us without condition.

The word covenant is used 280 times in the Old Testament and the Greek term is used 33 times in the New Testament. Whenever it is used, it is evident that God is the initiator of the covenant. There were covenants that God entered into with men and women of faith - Moses, Abraham, and David.

God entered into a covenant with the people of Israel. There were definite times in the history of Israel when God was frustrated, and when He was disappointed in the way His people acted toward Him. The people of God didn't always respond to His love in a positive way. At times God's people would turn their back and pursue the gods of the heathen people around them.

Other times they would break God's laws and bring pain to God's heart. Yet somehow God would get their attention, and they would confess and repent and God would bless them. God never divorced His people from His unconditional love toward them. He has established an everlasting covenant based on Jesus blood with all who enter into relationship. We enter that relationship through the trust of our heart, and the declaration of our mouth. Thus we become united with Christ.

God has always been the giver of the covenant, and we have been the receivers. As God's people, we

choose to accept and remain obedient to the covenant God has established. A covenant relationship with our spouse can only be made possible through God's gift of unconditional love.

Too often in situations where there has been a violation of trust in marriage, unconditional love is not offered. Instead, because of lack of spiritual depth and understanding, the sin or violation is such that one or both individuals harden their heart toward the other and the ending of that is death to the relationship. Forgiveness in relationships can be a challenging issue. Yet if we choose to not forgive others, we also choose to not be forgiven.

III. The Goal of a Covenant Relationship

The goal of a covenant relationship is to bring God glory. God's intent for your covenant relationship in marriage is to show in a tangible way, the relationship He has with the church, his bride. There has to be submission, respect, love, singleness, giving, selflessness, purity, caring, and provision in a covenant relationship. You will find all these qualities in the following verses:

Ephesians 5:21-33 Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, His body, of which He is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church - for we are members of his body. "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." This is a profound mystery - but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

Here are practical ways to help you fulfill your marriage covenant

1. Participate in marriage enrichment classes and couples home and family group.
2. Publicly or privately affirm the covenant of marriage and pray that God will enable you to remain true to the covenant.
3. Request help in times of stress in your marriage.
4. Secure resources from church that will help you in keeping your covenant.
5. Seek professional help if intervention is necessary.

Men how do you perceive your wife? Do you believe God brought your wife to you? Do you consider her a gift from God? Have you considered that when God brought your spouse to you, He was demonstrating His love to you? God was saying, I know it is not good for this person to be alone, so I will bring a husband or wife into their life. I have made a helper for you and your relationship should be one that demonstrates that to her and others around you.

Peter Lombard observed that Eve was not taken from Adam's head, because she was not intended to be his ruler, nor from his feet either, because she was not intended to be his slave, but from his side, precisely, because she was intended to be his companion.

Eileen Power, Medieval People

IV. Four Helps for Marriages That Are In Trouble.

1. **Don't kill your marriage.** A patient once told a doctor, I am in so much pain. The doctor replied, you will get better if you follow my instructions. Number one: DON'T KILL YOURSELF.

Many people who are in great pain would never think of taking their life, but when it comes to experiencing pain in their marital relationship, they often think of killing their marriages. Before you do anything else if your marriage is in trouble, don't even think of ending it. Counselors tell us the 95 % of all troubled marriages can be healed, but that can only happen if you stick with it and if you get help. Think only about what you can do to save and heal your marriage instead of the option the world offers.

2. **Maintain a vital spiritual life.** Day by day draw closer to Christ by praying and reading His Word by yourself and with your spouse. God's word is a wonderful tool to help us if we obey it.

3. **Develop communication.** Tell your spouse what you like about them and it will revolutionize your marriage. All too often we pick at the things we think we can change in a person.

Peter Jenkins in his book “Walk Across America” wrote his experiences traveling on foot across this continent. In his book, Jenkins explained that he never felt overwhelmed or defeated by the big things, Instead he said, what almost defeated me over and over again was the sand in my shoes.

Many marriages suffer from the same problem. Seldom-discussed sand in the shoes of relationship underlies many of the marital failures that scar this land. It’s not the big but the little things. What do I mean by sand in the shoes? - The abrasive sand of criticism.

Conclusion:

There may be some of you here today that understand more clearly what a covenant marriage relationship is. You would like to make a commitment to God, your spouse, this fellowship, and community that your relationship will be such. Find in your bulletin the covenant card. I want to read it to you this morning, and give you opportunity to sign and date that card.

Believing that marriage is a covenant intended by God to be a lifelong fruitful relationship between a man and a woman, we vow to God, each other, our families, and our community to remain steadfast in unconditional love, reconciliation, and sexual purity, while purposefully growing in our covenant marriage relationship.

Hebrews 13:20-21

Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom *be* glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Often what happens in a marriage is that we become quick to point out the faults or shortcomings of our spouse, and we don’t emphasize the good points. We would find out that nothing will take care of the bad points like praising and emphasizing the good points. Use your marriage license as a hunting license for good, to find virtue and not fault.

4. **Turn up the thermostat in your marriage.** Show warmth, affection, and intimacy. Hold hands the way you did when you dated your spouse. Walk with your arms around each other. Touch can work magic in your relationship.

As you seek to obey God’s will for your marriage, He will bless it, making it healthy and vital. Remember, don’t ever give up!