

Week 2 __ God's original Design for Marriage...

Last week we talked about God's original design for man and woman and began to try to understand this design and contrast it with what we see and experience and "expect" in the midst of a fallen world. We acknowledged that the things we have expected from our spouse – to fulfill us as a person and "meet our needs" are not only unrealistic but they were never what God intended. So we have returned to the beginning to see what God has designed marriage to be.

Foundational to understanding God's design is the idea of covenant. That role of covenant in God's design is what we are going to discuss tonight. The reason we are going to do that is that we need to understand the level of commitment-born out of His love- that God has for His people of all ages.

A covenant is really a promise...but an upgrade on a promise. It is the most serious form of a promise and is really, in God's economy, higher than a contract. We live in a nation of laws and contracts are at the high end of the food chain. When you have a contract, however, you have a *transactional relationship*. The contract defines what to do but also what happens if someone breached the contract and if you agree to the contract then you are agreeing that everyone is treated fairly, even in a breach, because that is defined.

The point is that most marriages in our country and culture have been made in the form of a covenant but it then exists and continues in a contractual society. We are a nation based on laws. And it is a society which believes that man is basically good rather than sinful by nature. And that self-fulfillment and happiness is the ultimate aim of life, and therefore our marriages should have this goal as well. We must begin to see these things as they are because everything about this Christian life, including our marriages, is counter-cultural. Our marriages, and how we handle things, is to be handled God's way and we will be going up-stream against our culture to do that.

NOW, in the OT a covenant can be between equal parties Or between a king and his subjects. There were several major covenants throughout the OT and they could be conditional – "if you do this, I will do this" – or unconditional – God says He is going to do something and He covenants or promises to do exactly that. Let's look at a couple of them.

Let's [read Gen 15:9-21](#) describing the Abrahamic covenant; God has just reiterated to Abram for a 2nd time that He is going to bless him. AND that he is going to give him a son and multiply his descendants beyond the ability to count them and also give him the land God is going to show him!

Abram has already believed in faith and God has counted it to him as righteousness. We call this **justification**. Abram asks for “something” from God as assurance that these promises are going to happen. And God gives him this covenant. (We know all of this about justification by faith from Romans 4:3, which quotes this exact verse.)

But Abraham asks “O Lord God, **how may I know** that I will possess it.” Now there are times in the Bible when asking a question in unbelief results in God giving a sign that is a rebuke for unbelief...ie. Zacharias questioning the angel who told him that his wife Elizabeth is going to bear a son – John the Baptist. The angel makes him mute. But this is not one of those times because we see that Abram has believed God because it says he has. God has already given His word but He goes a step further. He goes through a ritual never before seen – the covenant.

Literally, covenant means “to cut or to sacrifice”

- In the OT the idea was to say “may it be for us like these animals if we were to break our covenant”
- The idea of **sacrifice** was always implicit in the OT covenant and animal sacrifice was to illustrate that principle.

The point here is that God binds Himself to His promises through a covenant. It is a picture of what He is going to fulfill but it also serves to reassure Abram that NOTHING will deter God from what He has promised. Abram can bank on it because God’s character is unchanging.

Now let’s look at Jeremiah 31:31-33. ([READ IT](#))

God references that this new covenant He was going to bring about – by the way, is it conditional or unconditional? – it is NOT dependent on their obedience as a pre-condition. He is single handedly going to accomplish His purposes.

Now look at the end of verse 32...”although I was a **husband** to them”. **In the OT, God revealed Himself as the faithful husband to Israel.** We see that in various places but one great example is in the book of Hosea which is all about God’s faithful love to His unfaithful people. He commands Hosea to marry a prostitute, named Gomer, who is a picture of Israel...an unfaithful, adulterous woman. Despite being faithfully loved and mercifully forgiven many times, Israel is portrayed as an unrepentant harlot. God condemns unfaithful Israel but also shows His absolute commitment to her. He even has Hosea forgive and remarry Gomer despite her unfaithfulness.

Look at Hosea 2:14-16. V 16 says that one day Israel will call God, “Ishi” (my husband). ([READ Hosea 2:16-20](#)) . Betroth, betroth, betroth...in righteousness, justice, lovingkindness, compassion, faithfulness. That is how God sees the future for Israel even

though she sees the harsh present conditions because of her sin. He is a husband, not a harsh task master like those false gods Israel has wanted and served.

Well, that's fine for Israel but how does that affect us in NT times?

In the NT, a similar picture, **Jesus Christ is pictured as the husband and the church is the Bride.**

Let's go to [Ephesians 5: 1-2 \(READ them\)](#). "an offering and a sacrifice to God". Has the first condition of a covenant been met? A sacrifice? YES, Christ is the sacrifice! This isn't just animals that are being sacrificed ... this is the SON OF GOD!

The book of Hebrews deals especially well with explaining this sacrifice because it is written to Jews, who have this sacrificial system in clear view. Let's [read Hebrews 9:13-16](#).

Now that we understand that Christ has fulfilled the original intent in the mind of God by offering Himself as an atoning sacrifice for the sins of man – that He has met the original DESIGN of God – let's look at the famous passage from Ephesians 5:22-33 in a new light.

This time, instead of reading this and looking at it for what the husband should do or what the wife should do...let's look at it primarily from what it says about Christ and the church. In fact, verse 32 says this...this section and especially the preceding quote is about **Christ and the church.**

(Class Exercise:pass out a written copy of Eph 5:22-33, break the class into smaller groups and ask for feedback on what we learn about Christ and the church)

Do we See what God is saying to us from this view of him as husband and Christ as husband? What does that look like and what is His heart toward us?

Q: How do we get from where we are in our marriage to a better place?

Some of us are really struggling in our marriage. Every one of us that is married can have a better marriage. Even if you have a great marriage, it can be better.

Paul David Tripp says that it is his experience that more marriages are fixed **vertically** than they are **horizontally**. That ***"the difficulties in our marriages do not first come because we don't love one another enough. They happen because we don't love God enough; and because we don't love God enough we don't treat one another with the kind of love that makes marriages work...Sturdy horizontal love always begins vertically."***

In the next few weeks we are going to see how we can **become**, not **do**. It's about Worship in our vertical relationship; not Willpower and not Working harder in our horizontal relationship with our spouse.

Look at the new covenant one more time (Jeremiah 31:33 “I will put my law within them and **on their heart I will write it and I will be their God and they will be my people**”). God is FOR US and He is working in our lives to weigh in on and empower our relationships.

In a group this big I know that some of you are not close to the Lord right now. For some your heart is stone cold right now – you don’t feel anything toward your spouse or really anything else in life. Some are angry at God, bitter over what life has dealt you. Some are depressed, barely enough energy to get out of bed in the morning, so certainly not enough to work on becoming a better spouse. Maybe you are just overwhelmed with life. Wherever you are – God is calling you back. And it is more important that you respond to that call than that you make a list of things to “do better”. If you proceed trying to do this in your own strength, you will not only fail but you will feel like a hypocrite. Fake it til you make it is Not a biblical expression!

This is the Christian life; our hearts are prone to wander and marriage is not exempt from this battle. In fact, it is a major battleground. We will talk more about repentance in marriage in the coming weeks but first I want to call your attention to the call to “return to the Lord”...because it is the starting point for how we actually become godly people and not just people checking the boxes and relying on our works to make us better spouses.

Let’s look at **Hosea 6:1-3** . This is a call from God calling us back to our relationship with Him.

“Come” – God is speaking(through Hosea) to get our attention. He is calling out...

“let us” – you are not alone; this is a corporate call and your brothers and sisters are with you, we all need help, we can all help each other

“return to the Lord” – you don’t have to be where you are today; you can return to the Lord!

“He has torn, He will heal” – make no mistake, God is behind this difficult time but God disciplines us for our good, as a father disciplines his child.

“He will revive us...” – after a specified time God will lift His discipline in our lives if we return to Him. God’s hand is on the thermostat and He will turn the temperature down when He has our attention.

“That we may live before Him” – this is His goal for us, that we might walk with Him and live in His presence

“so let us know, let us press on to know the Lord” – let’s give it everything we’ve got!! let’s “press on” to know the Lord. We are not going to give up because things got tough. Nothing is more important to us than getting right with the Lord.

“His going forth is as certain as the dawn” – just as the sun rises everyday so God goes out to work in the world and accomplish His purposes. Every day, He’s working in your life and my life!

“He will come to us like the rain” – like the heavy, steady, saturating early spring and late fall rains in Israel that soak the ground and nourish the crops before the arid months ahead, God promises to

meet us as we come back into His presence. It is a deep and satisfying time with the Lord which overwhelms everything else in our lives.

In conclusion, God is not reluctant to welcome us back. His heart toward us is always to welcome us back from wherever we've been. We have this record (the Bible) of His faithfulness and promises. But most of all **we have the cross of Christ...** God has made the ultimate sacrifice to show us how far He will go for us. Resist the temptation to try to improve in your own strength..."come, let us return to the Lord". Let's get to the foot of the cross as quickly as we can...