

Understanding the Nature of Our Relationships (The Marriage Covenant)

1. The covenant of marriage established as a lasting ordinance (Genesis 2:15-25)

- a. Marriage was instituted by God (2:21-22)
- b. The first marriage serves as the archetype and standard for the covenant of marriage. (Eph 5:31, Matt 19:4-6)
 - i. The basic parameters established by this archetype cannot be redefined. (one man, one woman, etc.)
 - ii. The first marriage ceremony provides the template for how marriage covenants are formed.
 - Two necessary components: The covenant is recognized (through a ceremony with vows/oaths), and the covenant is consummated (through the sexual union of a man and a woman). (Genesis 2:22-24, 1 Corinthians 6:16).
- c. The marriage relationship is covenantal in nature, which is made explicit in the “one flesh” union (2:24)
 - i. “A relationship of oaths and bonds that involves mutual, though not necessarily equal, commitments”
 - ii. This covenant is designed with built-in purpose, blessings, and duties/ responsibilities – all of which are defined by God in His scriptures.
 - iii. Our acknowledgement of the covenantal nature of marriage is seen in the way it is accompanied by:
 - A public ceremony including vows (oaths), attended to by witnesses
 - An initiatory sign (Wedding ring)
 - An initiatory & ongoing sign/ celebration/ renewal of covenant (the sexual relationship)
- d. The marriage relationship is not a contract
 - i. A contractual relationship instituted by people has its purpose bound up in the terms of the contract (an exchange of benefits). Whatever people think they should get from that relationship *is* the purpose of it.
 - ii. A covenant instituted by God has its purpose bound up in God’s purposes for that covenant. His design and purpose for the relationship *is* the purpose of it.

2. The covenant God instituted determines the purpose(s) of marriage.

Marriage exists primarily for the glory of God

- a. The unique image-bearing of the one-flesh union
- b. The fulfillment of the Dominion mandate (Genesis 2:15, 20)
 - i. This involves fruitfulness and multiplication
 - ii. This means that marriage (and the family) was intended to be the foundation of civilization.
- c. A testimony to the gospel of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 5:22-33).
 - i. This includes our distinct roles (Headship and submission – Eph 5:22-24)
 - ii. This includes the way we value, honor, and treat each other (Eph 4:32)

d. Reflection:

- i. How does our understanding of the purpose of marriage affect our expectations in it?
- ii. What are some worldly assumptions about the purpose of marriage, and how might they lead to trouble or difficulty in the marriage?

3. The covenant determines the permanence of marriage.

- a. Jesus grounded the prohibition on divorce in the covenant (Mark 10:1-12, Matthew 19:1-8)
- b. Divorce is something God hates because of the covenant (Malachi 2:13-16)
- c. Divorce is only permitted out of mercy when the covenant has been abandoned (Matt 19:9, 1 Cor 7:10-16)
 - i. The “exceptions” of infidelity/abandonment are not requirements for divorce
 - ii. The question should not be “when is divorce permissible?”, but rather, “when is it necessary?”.

d. Reflection:

- i. How should the permanence of the marriage covenant provide safety, security, and stability to the relationship?
- ii. What are some of the worldly reasons that people might end a marriage (that we must not entertain)?

4. The covenant determines our practice in marriage.

- a. The defined roles of headship and submission in the covenant are not decorative placeholders, but functional norms. (Eph 5)
- b. The duties and responsibilities of the covenant are part of our service to God and worship of Him. They are not primarily aimed at our spouse, nor are they done because our spouse does (or doesn't) deserve them.
- c. “Contractual” practices and mentalities must be rejected and put away.
 - i. No “give to get”
 - ii. No “I will if you will”
- d. The gospel takes functional shape in our interactions to restore and maintain fellowship
 - i. Confession/ forgiveness when fellowship is broken (Eph 4:32, Matt 18)
 - ii. Mercy and forbearance to maintain fellowship (Luke 6:27-36)
 - iii. Putting the interest of the other first and pro-actively blessing one another (Phil 2:3-4)
- e. Reflection:
 - i. How is a “contractual” approach to the way we practice marriage likely to be an ongoing source of conflict in the relationship?
 - ii. How would your marriage experience more flourishing if you functioned covenantally instead of contractually?