

# Jehovah's Covenant With Us: The Covenant and Marriage

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Covenant young people, friends and lovers of Jehovah's covenant: I'm delighted to have the opportunity to address you at this your convention, especially in light of your theme: "Jehovah's Covenant With Us." How unspeakably beautiful is God's Covenant—that intimate bond of love and fellowship that God Himself makes with His own children. How utterly amazing it is that Jehovah God has established that relation of friendship with us—that He would account **us** to be His friends! Can you imagine that the Almighty God takes us, as it were, into His arms, clasps us to His bosom, sharing with us His own blessed life! Can you comprehend a love so great, that God would establish that covenant by the shedding of the blood of His own Son, our Lord Jesus Christ? Is it any wonder that this doctrine of God's covenant stands at the very center of Holy Scripture, and that it stands at the very heart of the truth that we love and cherish?!

And I am convinced that there is no revelation of that covenant more beautiful and more enlightening, perhaps especially for you as covenant youth, than that of the **marriage relationship**. We have in marriage a picture of God's covenant with His people in Jesus Christ. Of course one would never know that, or dream that that is possible when beholding the corruptions of marriage today. On the one hand, many live together without marrying. But there is no shock any more when unwed couples shack up together. It has become an accepted statistic of cohabitation which carries no shame; it serves as the plot for the television sitcoms.

While the herpes epidemic and the terrifying spread of AIDS dramatize just how devastating and deadly promiscuity can be, many continue to jump into intimate sexual relationships while they hold marriage in contempt. The world is in the midst of a frantic search for safer ways to commit fornication and adultery. But all the while many young men and women continue to boast of their sexual prowess.

On the other hand, many entering marriage do so as if the relationship is an experimental thing. And the rich and the famous are often in court battles to see whether their prenuptial agreements, their marriage contracts, are valid. The social stigma of divorce is almost entirely gone! Divorce is almost taken for granted! And remarriage is almost as common—it is not at all uncommon anymore for individuals to be married and divorced several times—it comes about as easily as buying and selling a car.

But the sad thing is that the evils that corrupt marriage also creep into the **church!** What is worse, increasingly much of the church itself condones these evils. Much of the church has given up any kind of a Scriptural position on marriage, divorce, and remarriage. To their shame many pastors and Christian counselors fail to warn the youth to flee fornication, and instead would educate in so-called "safe sex." They fail to guide married couples in the way of repentance and reconciliation, and instead recommend divorce for those who have troubled marriages.

And **we** may not sit back, smugly smiling as if all is well with us. No, our churches, by God's grace, do not condone the corruptions of the marriage relation. But we are nevertheless influenced by these evils in more ways than we care to admit. And in one way or another, sooner or later we are all touched by the misery and grief caused by the evils that threaten marriage.

No, it is only in the light of Scripture that we see the beauty of marriage. It is by grace that we behold Jehovah's covenant in terms of that relationship of marriage. And that is our purpose this evening—to praise and glorify our God as we contemplate how rich and how beautiful His covenant is and as we consider how highly God esteems marriage as a reflection of that covenant. Consider with me, **THE COVENANT AND MARRIAGE**. We will notice first of all: The Covenant in Light of Marriage, secondly, Marriage in Light of the Covenant, and finally, The Premarital Implications: what does it all mean for you, as young people?

### **The Covenant in Light of Marriage:**

In many places Scripture reveals that marriage is a picture of Jehovah's covenant. The passage that probably comes to mind in that connection is in the Epistle to the Ephesians, the last part of chapter 5, where the apostle compares marriage to the union between Christ and His elect Church. In this passage the Apostle Paul gives instruction regarding the holy bond of marriage. Wives are called to submit; husbands are called to love. And their perfect model for their behavior is the relationship between Christ and the Church. Wives must submit "as the Church is subject unto Christ." Husbands must love their wives "even as Christ also loved the Church."

He also directs our attention to the intimacy of the marriage relation, again as patterned by the closeness of Christ and the Church. A man must love his wife as his own body; he nourishes and cherishes his own flesh "even as the Lord the church." Why? Verse 30 tells us: "For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones." The Apostle then shows how the marriage bond takes precedence over even the relationship between parent and child. A man **leaves** his father and mother for his wife. He is joined unto his wife and they two shall be one flesh.

And then, in reference to marriage, especially from the viewpoint of the closeness, the intimacy of marriage, Paul says: "This is a great mystery." Now in Scripture, the word "mystery" has a very special meaning. A "mystery" is not just something puzzling or baffling that we can't figure out. In the Bible "mystery" always refers to God's great and gracious **salvation**, that salvation which we would never know or understand, but which God has revealed by Christ Jesus. And this is the idea here, too, for Paul goes on to say: "but I speak concerning Christ and the Church."

Oh, yes, he is giving instruction and guidance regarding marriage all right. But underlying it all is the blessed truth of the union of Christ and the Church. God wills that our marriages reflect the bond which He makes with His Church in the blood of Christ. The fundamental significance of marriage is that it pictures the marriage of Christ and His bride, the Church. Salvation is that wonderful work of God whereby we are united with Christ—yea, we become **one** with Him!

This great mystery was foreshadowed in the Old Dispensation. The Psalmist in Psalm 45 prophesies the marriage of Christ the King, who is God Himself, to a Gentile woman. The Song of Solomon is really a love song in which the covenant relation between God and His people is described in terms of the ecstatic love of marriage between Solomon and his beloved. But especially this is evident in the prophets such as Ezekiel, Hosea and Malachi. These prophets present the covenant relation between Jehovah and Israel as a marriage. Jehovah God was Israel's husband and Israel was Jehovah's wife. Her spiritual faithlessness was adultery!

In the opening chapters of Hosea, God describes His relationship to His people in these terms when He instructs the prophet to take a wife from whoredom. In this way God demonstrates to His people that He enters into a covenant of marriage with a people who are, by nature, wicked and adulterous. But Jehovah preserves and maintains that covenant of marriage as we read in Hosea 2:19: "I will betroth thee to me forever; yea I will betroth thee to me in

righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness and mercies, and in faithfulness; and thou shalt know the Lord.”

And finally, in the book of Revelation we see the glorious future perfection of that marriage of Jehovah and His people in Christ. In Rev. 19:1-10 the final salvation of the church is pictured as the marriage supper of the Lamb. That is the full realization of that blessed covenant fellowship which is the final destiny of God’s people. And in Rev. 21:2, 9 the Church is described as the Bride of Christ: “And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband...And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb’s wife.”

What a glorious revelation of God’s covenant we have then in marriage! What a fitting symbol marriage is of the covenant relation of Jehovah with His people in Christ! In this light we see that Jehovah’s covenant is a warm, living vibrant relation of friendship and fellowship of the most intimate sort. What a sovereign infinite **love** is displayed in God’s covenant! It is an indestructible love; Solomon describes this kind of love in his song chap. 8:6, 7: “Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm: for love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it: if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned.”

What an amazing **intimacy** we share in Jehovah’s covenant! Even as in marriage, the two become **one**, so in the covenantal relation Christ Jesus is the Head, and the Church, His body. The two are one. That union takes place when we are regenerated by the Spirit. The sign of this union is the covenantal sign of baptism, for we are baptized into Christ. So we are taken into God’s own covenant life to commune with Him forever.

What an **abiding** relationship! That covenant relation is a relation which can never be broken! Even as marriage is a bond which can never be broken, except by death. This is not because both parties in this heavenly and spiritual relationship are always faithful. No, we are often unfaithful, and Scripture calls us spiritual adulterers. But Christ is always faithful! He always maintains His covenant of marriage and always takes back His bride unto Himself. He guides us safely through life until He takes us into the everlasting blessedness of His covenant in the day when the tabernacle of God is with men!

And finally, we may not overlook the fact that the purpose of it all is that God may receive the glory. In the institution of marriage, the woman was not made first but second; she was made for Adam, not Adam for her. So in the Counsel of God, not the Church, but **Christ** is first. Christ does not exist for the Church, but the Church exists for the sake of Christ, to serve and praise Him forever! What a great mystery! To God be the glory!

#### **Marriage in Light of the Covenant:**

Beloved young people, how honorable the marriage state is then! We now, so to speak, turn things around, and consider marriage in the light of God’s covenant. We realize then at the outset that marriage is no human institution, that it is not of human origin. It is not so that marriage somehow evolved through the years of early human history. It is not a social contract that men worked out and found useful to society for a time.

God, the covenant Jehovah, ordained marriage to reflect His great glory in His covenant. God Himself officiated at the first marriage ceremony in the Garden of Eden. It was not good for man to be alone—and God created the woman from the rib of Adam. And God Himself then brought the woman to Adam. This was the instituting of marriage as an ordinance of God to be observed by us.

Marriage is then **good!** We read in Hebrews 13:4: “Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled.” Marriage is good in God’s eyes; He has an intense and deep love for the bond of marriage. Jehovah has a high regard for marriage; He is **jealous** for it! Why is all this true? Fundamentally because marriage is a picture of His own blessed covenant.

And thus, the Word of God even refers to marriage in terms of the covenant. In Proverbs 2:17 we are warned against the adulteress who flattereth with her words, “which forsaketh the guide of her youth and forgetteth the covenant of her God.” In leaving her husband, she is accused by God of forgetting and therefore, of breaking, His covenant.

So too the prophet Malachi refers to a man’s wife as “the wife of thy covenant.” Mal. 2:14. That’s beautiful, isn’t it? “The wife of thy covenant.” The same word is used to describe the covenant of Jehovah with His people in Christ Jesus. This emphasizes that marriage is a covenant bond and thus an unbreakable union!

And that is precisely the concern of the prophet: the men of Judah were divorcing their wives and marrying others. We read in Malachi 2:11, “Judah hath dealt treacherously, and an abomination is committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah hath profaned the holiness of the Lord which he loved and hath married the daughter of a strange God.”

How God hated that! That’s vs. 16: “For the Lord the God of Israel, saith that He hateth putting away.” Why? Because He loves His covenant! Our marriages are to be a reflection of His marriage, that covenant relation He has made with His people in Christ. In His covenant God reveals the very nature of His relation to us. It is a bond of love—and love Scripture calls the “bond of perfectness.” It is an abiding and faithful love. It never puts away—divorces, but it forgives through the blood of the cross. God does not cast us off the moment we sin and are unfaithful to Him. But He forgives in the blood of the cross and restores us through the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Don’t you see, young people, the seriousness of divorce, of remarriage, of all violation of God’s marriage ordinance? It is not first of all, that to disobey God’s Word regarding marriage is going to bring all kinds of turmoil, sorrow, heartache and misery into one’s life, sometimes consequences that remain through all our earthly life. That in itself is true. Many of us, perhaps **all** of us, have seen that in the lives of friends or relatives. Even the world recognizes that the corrupting of marriage is the cause of all kinds of traumatic problems and grievous evils with which society struggles.

No, to violate God’s marriage ordinance is to show contempt for God Himself and for His covenant! That’s why God views it as treachery! In marriage we deal with God Himself. For **God’s** sake, for the sake of His covenant, we must properly maintain the marriage bond!

Finally, of course, it is within the blessed bond of marriage that the covenant children are brought forth. That implies that sex is a good gift of God, an honorable aspect of marriage. In the sexual relationship there is a unique realization and expression of the closeness of marriage. And it symbolizes the love that Christ has for His Church and that the Church has for Christ—a relentless, unswerving, jealous, sovereign love!

And our covenant God gathers His Church in the covenant generations of His people. God’s covenant with us, as well today as in Old Testament times, includes as a precious element, that God will be the God of our children after us.

### **The Pre-Marital Implications:**

As young people you are at the age when you are probably beginning to date or at least thinking about it. Many of you have been dating for some time already. Some of you may be seriously contemplating marriage. What does this truth of the covenant and marriage mean for you?

Of course, in Biblical times there was no dating as we know it today. Especially in the Old Testament times the parents chose the mate for their children as a general rule. And even in New Testament times, when children had some voice in the matter, parents still made the final decision. Betrothal was very significant in Biblical times. It was much more serious than our modern day engagement, since it could be broken only by a legal divorce.

Let's look at this from the viewpoint of the example of Abraham in Genesis 24: I'm sure you are familiar with the history of Abraham's concern regarding a wife for his son Isaac. First of all, Abraham requires his servant to promise under oath that he will not obtain a wife for Isaac out of the land of Canaan, but would go to Haran to obtain her. Why was Abraham so concerned about this? It was a concern for God's covenant! Very simply, the girls of Canaan were wicked, unbelievers; the Canaanites were under the curse of God; and remember, God had promised the land of Canaan to Abraham and his seed. That seed would come through the line of Isaac. Marriage with one of the wicked daughters of the land would be an alliance between Abraham and the people who were to be cast out and destroyed ultimately. It would unite those who might not be united. So Abraham insists that a wife for Isaac must come from his relatives, the **covenant generations** that lived back in Haran.

What is the principle here? It is this: light and darkness may never unite! The apostle Paul writes to the Corinthians: "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers." You, children of the covenant, ought not seek to date and marry with the children of this world. And we ought not look at dating and marriage as some sort of mission endeavor to convert a marriage partner to the Lord. Godly marriage is a sacred relationship between two who are united in the faith and love of God. They have a common goal, too—to serve God in their lives, in their home, with their children.

Notice, too, that a second important principle is suggested by Abraham's actions. The servant asks Abraham what he is to do should the woman refuse to return with him to the land of Canaan. Should the servant then take Isaac to Haran and have him live there? This is a conceivable problem, isn't it? This girl would have to live in a strange land with strange people, would have to be ready to marry a strange man. But Abraham insists that the servant may never take Isaac from the land of Canaan to return to Haran. Never! The land of Canaan was the land of the covenant and promise. It was typical of the heavenly and eternal Canaan. To forsake the shadow, even for a wife, would be to forsake the reality. Isaac must inherit Canaan with all the spiritual blessings of God that went with that. Isaac **must** stay in Canaan!

Here the principle is also very important. Often young people can place marriage at the top of the list so to speak. They "fall in love" and what else can be expected but that marriage shall follow? Everything else is pushed into the background. God's covenant, the will of God, the church, spiritual considerations are all made subservient to this: I'm going to marry this person. There is a more important duty in the life of a Christian than marriage. The service and obedience to God are first and foremost. Marriage must be a means to obey God's commandments and glorify Him, honoring His covenant.

Practically speaking, the question is then: Will this relationship, ultimately this marriage, lead away from the land of Canaan? Or put it this way—will this conceivably lead me away from the Church? Will I sacrifice God's Word for the sake of marriage? Will I heap contempt on God's covenant? Abraham recognized and we must recognize that we may not forsake the truths of God's Word—even for a wife or a husband!

And finally I want to call your attention to the fact that God is faithful to His covenant. Abraham reminds his servant of God's faithfulness, in bringing him to Canaan, in blessing him there. Surely God would not forsake Abraham and Isaac now in this time of need. By faith

Abraham believed that God would see to it that Isaac would receive the proper wife through whom the promise would be realized. And how marvelous it was that God provided Rebekah as the wife Isaac must have!

What does this mean? God still brings two people together. The marriage form puts it this way: “Witnessing thereof that God doth yet as with His hand bring unto every man his wife.” Very simply, God will provide! You, as young Christians, must believe that—God is faithful! Don’t worry and fret—even when in a few years many of your friends may be getting married. Don’t allow yourself to be pressured into an unhappy marriage out of desperation. The point is that God has already determined who your husband or wife shall be, if it’s His will that you marry. It remains for **you** to **learn** His will in this respect. And that must be the goal and purpose of dating.

At this time in your life, especially during high school years, dating should not be taken too seriously. It should be fun, casual, with the purpose of getting to know each other. But even now, you should approach dating from a **spiritual** viewpoint, seeking to honor God’s covenant! You shouldn’t be playing the field, making dating a game, trying to see how many broken hearts you can leave behind! Even now, be looking for a fellow Christian, a fellow believer to love and be loved in the love of God!

And, young people, don’t be deceived by the distorted and perverted idea of **love** presented by the world in which we live! You know as well as I do that the ungodly present love as lust—sex—feeling. Young people, flee fornication! For the sake of God’s covenant, show modesty and respect for each other, also here at the convention. The love portrayed on television, in the movies, on much of the music of the radio, in so many magazines and novels is a perversion of true romantic love.

Love is presented as a matter of feeling, emotion, intense emotion, emotional fireworks accompanied by lightning and thunder—that’s “falling in love.” It’s presented as magic and mysterious and sudden! The popular music of the world has put it that way for years already. Love just **happens**, “some enchanted evening...across a crowded room.” Think of some of the songs you listen to—very often you can substitute the word “lust” for “love” in those songs and have perfect sense and bring out the real intent.

Following that influence, you girls will look for the tall, dark, handsome stranger to walk out of the darkness. You fellas will look for the sweet, sexy stranger to sway in out of the mist. You won’t be inclined to even think about the covenant—about those you may even go to church with or your classmate in your Christian High School. Love is not something you **fall** into, it’s something you **grow** into by the love and grace of God as His children. Open your spiritual eyes! Look for **spiritual** beauty and strength, for **spiritual** compatibility!

Date and enter marriage prayerfully! Dating can be very difficult and trying. Marriage is never easy. But place your faith and trust in our Covenant-keeping God. Seek His grace that, whether single or married, you may honor and esteem His Blessed Covenant, even by a life of obedience to His ordinance of marriage.

Originally Published in:  
Vol. 47 No. 9 November 1988