

“Make the Cut”

Genesis 12:1-3 Mark 14:22-24

We live in a contract crazy culture. Everywhere you look you run into affidavits, stipulations, fine print, and escape clauses. The list is limitless. You can't buy a cell phone without signing a contract. You can't get cable television without signing a contract. You can't lease a car without signing a contract. You can't even work out at a gym without signing a contract, can you? Marriage—you have to sign a contract. Because, after all, marriage is a contract, right?

A contract is an agreement between two parties. “If you keep your end of the deal, I'll keep my end of the deal and everything is cool. As long as my needs are met, as long as I'm happy, everything is fine. But the moment you mess me around, I'm out of here.”

Here are some definitions of a contract. Number 1 — an agreement between two or more parties; especially one that is written and enforceable by law. Number 2 — a writing or document containing such agreement. Number 3 — marriage as a formal agreement.

The question, then, that is hanging in the balance today goes like this, “How good is this marital contract?”

Divorce is so prevalent in our society today. I have seen lots of statistics, and they disagree on the exact percentage of divorces, but it is pretty clear that at least half of all marriages will end in divorce. We have more marital information at our fingertips than ever before. It's great to know that men are from Mars and women are from Venus. It's awesome to know that

we have these five love languages. I think it's wonderful to think about his needs and her needs and the fact that they are mysterious.

But, even though Dr. Phil and Oprah talk about relationships, the world's ways don't really work. I mean, think about all the information, all the books, all the periodicals, all the psychobabble, and all the talk shows about marriage. A lot of the information is okay, but rarely does the stuff talk about the most important aspect of marriage. Rarely does it talk about the foundation of what it means to be a husband and a wife.

Here is the foundation. God says that marriage is not a contract. God says throughout his Word that marriage is a covenant.

A covenant is a blood bond of life and death. It is an "all and everything" commitment. God has this great plan for every marriage here. Regardless of the state of your marriage, if you grasp this concept called "covenant marriage," God can transform your marriage, by his power, from being an unhappy, same-old, same-old, in-a-rut marriage into something that is truly awesome to behold. It is all about covenant.

Covenant is mentioned over and over again throughout the Bible. Go back, if you would, in your Bible to the book of Genesis 12:1-3. Think about the two most intimate relationships known to humankind—our relationship with God and our relationship with our spouse. Both are founded on covenants. *"The Lord said to Abram, 'Leave your county, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I'll bless you, I will make your name great and you*

*will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.’”*

Now, skip over to Genesis 15:18. *“On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram.”* What’s a covenant? It is a blood bond of life and death, an “all and everything” commitment. There are many, many covenants throughout the Old and New Testaments. Now, let’s move to I Samuel 18. How many of you have a best friend? I’m talking about the friendship between Jonathan and David. David was the guy that killed that big behemoth, Goliath. Jonathan was King Saul’s son. They had this bond, this friendship that was amazing.

These two young men entered into a covenant relationship with each other. 1 Samuel 18:1-4, *“After David had finished talking with Saul, Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself. From that day Saul kept David with him and did not let him return to his father’s house. And Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as himself. Jonathan took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, along with his tunic, and even his sword, his bow and his belt.”*

When these two guys got into covenant relationship with each other, they exchanged robes. That was an illustration of the fact that they were giving 100 percent of themselves to each other. They also traded belts, and this showed that they were going to fight each other’s enemies, that their problems were not their problems alone anymore, they were the other person’s problems, too. It showed that they were committed to each other, no matter

what happened. They were saying to each other, “I’ve got your back.” That’s covenant relationship.

As we read more and more on covenants in the Old Testament, we discover that the covenant was all about the “blood bond.” In fact, if you look at the word covenant, you’ll see that it comes from a root word that means, “to cut.” The people making a covenant would take animals, split them down the middle, and arrange the halves opposite of each other. They would walk in a figure eight through the bloody path, signifying the eternal aspect of the covenant—signifying the fact that they were dying to themselves, dying to their ego, dying to their autonomy, and they were becoming one flesh. As they walked through the bloody halves, it also symbolized that if they turned their back on the covenant, if they dissed each other in any way, they were saying, “God do to me what we have done to these animals. Just go ahead and take us out on the spot.” Making a covenant was and is a serious deal.

A covenant is nothing about feelings; it’s not about emotion; and it is nothing about, if you do this, I’ll do that. A covenant is about unbridled commitment—a blood bond for life. Covenant is a powerful, powerful thing. We serve a covenant God. Covenant is in the very heart and nature of the Lord God himself.

The tradition of a modern wedding reflects and illustrates God’s covenant relationship throughout the Bible. God takes marriage very seriously, because marriage is not just a contract, it’s a covenant, it’s a blood bond, and it’s a commitment for life.

Let's go through the wedding ceremony to see what happens and to see the elements of covenant in a marriage. As the officiating minister I stand here in the middle of the sanctuary or chapel. The groom comes in with me and stands to my left waiting for his bride to come in and walk down the aisle. Why does he do that? The groom waits for the bride because he is the initiator of the relationship. He has wooed her, he has dated her, he has "popped the question" to his fiancé. This is a picture of what Jesus Christ has done for you and for you and for me. What did Jesus do? Jesus took the initiative in my life. I didn't deserve it, but he initiated the covenant. He voluntarily gave his life and spilled his blood on a rugged cross. He went into covenant, that's the new covenant, just so you and I will respond to his love and say, "I do," to him. That's what Jesus did.

So, the groom is reflecting that, because the Bible says, "Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church." Well, here's how Jesus loved me—unconditionally. I thank God I'm not in a contract with Jesus. If I were in contract with him, I'd be in serious trouble. I mean, man, I've broken that contract tens of thousands of times. I'm in a covenant relationship with him—in covenant. That's why the groom does this, that's why he waits. It's because he's the initiator of the relationship. It's a reflection of what God has done for all of us.

Next, we have the bride walking down the aisle. As she walks down the aisle she's saying, "I am dying to myself, I am dying to my past relationships, I am dying to autonomy, and I'm dying to ego." The groom is saying the same thing.

The bride's father will give her away. If you read Genesis 2, you'll see that it says our heavenly Father gave Eve, the first bride, to Adam. Then I will put the bride's and groom's hands together. As they bring their hands together, as they hold hands, it signifies two persons becoming one flesh.

The vows are very, very important. The vows are part of the covenant, and as a part of the covenant, they need to be straight from the word of God. They should reflect this covenant, this unconditional love, this picture that I've been talking about. Because remember, when people went into covenant relationship with one another it was a public thing. Marriage should not be some private, little thing. It should be a public event because you are entering into covenant with God and with one another, with your parents, your family, and your friends as witnesses. If you break the covenant, you break this covenant with God, with each other, with your family, and with your friends. That's why God hates divorce.

Maybe you're saying, "Well, I've been divorced. I mean I said these words, I took these vows, but I didn't realize it was a covenant." If you have, I have good news. Here's the great thing about Jesus. He is in covenant with you. You can start today, fresh and anew. You can make this vow before God and say, "From this day forward I'm going to do it God's way." Divorce is not the unpardonable sin.

The bride and groom recite the vows to one another. I tell them to look at each other while saying the vows. As they say the vows people listen and watch. They're saying the vows before God, family, and friends.

From there, I'll take the rings and I'll talk about the rings. I know rings are beautiful pieces of jewelry, maybe a nice diamond, but here is what they represent. They represent the covenant commitment, this blood bond that is made. The circle is eternal, just like your unconditional love is eternal for each other. I mean, there are no terms or conditions here. You're in covenant, and you are to love each other, even when it is tough to love. Don't complain, "Well she's not meeting my needs," or, "I'm not happy." Well, do you know what? Happiness and all that stuff is not mentioned in the vows. "For better, for worse; for richer, for poorer; in sickness and in health," that's in the vows. We're talking commitment; we're talking covenant. Too many people see marriage as just a contract. That's precisely why so many marriages are messing up today. We have been too prone to think, "Now if you do your part, if you meet my needs, and if you help me out, then everything will be cool. But the moment you don't do that, I'm going to change to someone else." That is a weak and shallow and worldly view of marriage. Marriage is about covenant and commitment and the ring represents that. It's an outward symbol of the inward covenant we have before God. So, when you wear your wedding ring you're saying, "I'm out of the game. I'm spoken for. I'm a one-woman man. I'm a one-man woman." That's what the ring represents. It's a powerful, powerful, thing.

Marriage takes bending, it takes strength, it takes flexibility. Marriage is hard, but it is worth it. It is worth it. Marriage is not the easiest thing, but, when it is done God's way, in covenant, it will be the most blessed

relationship, next to your relationship with God, that you will ever, ever be a part of.

After the couple joins hands, speaks vows, and exchanges rings, I'll pronounce them husband and wife. Then I'll have them walk back down the aisle signifying the fact that this covenant has been made, that they have a blood bond of life, a commitment until death. Don't you see the genius of God now in marriage? Don't you see how important marriage is to Him? It should reflect His relationship to His people, you and me. If you think about it, Jesus Christ, the groom, has been pursuing you and me. He's been wooing you and me. He's been seeking you and me. He's been a pursuing lover. He loves us unconditionally and many here have responded to this question. Jesus asked, in faith, "Will you become mine? Will you receive what I did for you on the cross? Will you?" Many of us here have said, "Yes, I will" or "I do." But, some of you right now have never, ever, made that decision.

Christ's death, burial, and resurrection is the ultimate covenant. Here's what our Lord said about this new covenant. In Mark 14:24 Jesus said, "*This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.*" In 1 Corinthians 11:25 he said, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood." Jesus has popped the question. He has. What is going to be your response? The moment you say, "Yes Jesus, I'll be in covenant with you by faith," the moment you make that decision, you will have the power; you will have the strength, to make the cut. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.