

The Book of Ephesians
Ephesians 5:22-33
Session 51 Notetaker

Notetaker Fig. 2

Five Aspects of Covenant

1. Covenants are Initiated for the **Benefit of the Other Person.**
2. In Covenant Relationships, People Make _____

3. Covenant Relationships are _____
4. Covenant Relationships _____
5. Covenant Relationships Require _____

Fig. 2: The Five Core Features of Godly Love

1. Godly _____ as taught in Romans _____
2. Godly _____ as taught in Romans _____
3. Godly _____ as taught in Romans _____
4. Godly _____ as taught in Romans _____
5. Godly _____ as taught in Romans _____

The Book of Ephesians

Ephesians 5:22-33

Session 51: The Marriage Covenant, pt. 2

In Ephesians 5:25, God tells husbands to love their wives. Most husbands love their wives, I think, but are we thinking about the kind of love that God is talking about?

We left off last time looking at five characteristics of a covenant relationship. Why? Because marriage is a covenant. If we know the guiding principles of a covenant, it will help us achieve God's purposes for marriage, and bring glory to Him. And, of course, it will meet our deepest needs and be a source of joy in our lives.

Previously, we covered the first characteristic of a covenant.

The first characteristic was:

1. Covenants are Initiated for the Benefit of the Other Person.

In our previous session, we talked about the first characteristic by pointing to the covenant between Johnathan and David. When a covenant is for the benefit of the other person, it will be evidenced by a spirit of giving.

Today, we will briefly expand upon the remaining four characteristics of a covenant relationship.

2. In Covenant Relationships, People Make Unconditional Promises

In covenant relationships, people make unconditional promises. Yes, sometimes God's covenants are conditional, but oftentimes they are unconditional.

The marriage covenant is meant to be unconditional. When we got married, we exchanged vows – promises of what we would do in our marriage. These are not the kind of promises we are talking about here.

What I am saying is: after we have entered into the marriage, we may find it necessary to make additional promises. And if you do, these promises need to be

unconditional. What does that mean? It means you will keep your promise no matter what the other person does or if new circumstances arise.

Why would we make promises after we are married? I can think of several reasons; firstly, **to stabilize the marriage**.

When unforeseen and unsettling circumstances threaten the marriage, promises may help stabilize it.

Secondly, sometimes promises are needed **to repair the marriage**. When, through the actions of one or both spouses, the marriage relationship has been significantly damaged, it may be necessary to make promises in order for the marriage to continue.

And thirdly, a spouse can make promises **to enhance an already good marriage**. We are talking about promises regarding the spiritual aspects of the marriage.

Do not misunderstand; I am not saying we should go around making all kinds of promises, willy-nilly. I am saying that under certain conditions, they might become helpful or even necessary.

Promises should be unconditional so that they are in keeping with the unconditional nature of the marriage covenant.

Here is the principle: When a covenant is unconditional, then the promises within that covenant must also be unconditional.

Just as important as the promise we make, is our motivation for making the promise. If our motivation is not for godly reasons, we are setting ourselves up to fail.

Our motivation for making these promises must be godly. In other words, the promises we make within our marriage should come from our love for God or our spouse. The best promises are spiritual in nature. In other words, they are promises which promote the covenant (of our marriage), and accomplish God's purposes for marriage.

For example, an angry husband has a habit of yelling or screaming at his wife, and it has severely damaged the spirit of their marriage. Understanding his anger is a

signal of a spiritual problem in himself, he dedicates himself to pulling down that stronghold and treating his wife differently. Instead of promising “I will never scream at you again,” it is better if he promises to always treat her with lovingkindness, to hold her in high regard with the way he speaks to her, and love her as Christ loved the church; unconditionally.

Can he keep that promise? In his flesh, not likely. But, by walking after the Spirit, engaging with God’s word and prayer, he can. This man can pull down any stronghold of anger, change the way he sees his wife, and respond to her in godly love.

A wife can make unconditional promises too. But no spouse should ask the other to make these kinds of promises; this must come from the heart of the one making the promise.

Promises of the sort we are talking about here are meant to be impactful. That means we don’t make promises about every little thing. If they are to have meaning, then they must meet a real need in our spouse or signal a significant change in us.

These promises should not be made emotionally, but after prayer and careful consideration. That means we understand that there is no magic in saying, “I promise...” If we make promises lightly, or without a commitment to changing ourselves, we may wind up worse than before.

Covenant marriages are characterized by both spouses making unconditional promises.

3. Covenant Relationships are Based on Steadfast Love

The kind of love we are talking about here is not romantic love. This is something deeper. Steadfast love is godly love rooted in the doctrine that does not change through time, or circumstances. Any emotional love we feel for our spouse should stem out of our steadfast love; godly love and charity.

The kind of love Paul is talking about does not change because it is not dependent upon the other person. It does not change because it is rooted in what the

doctrine has produced in us, and not what we feel because of outward circumstances.

Before we studied Ephesians, we studied the book of Romans. In Romans 12, we were introduced to the five core features of godly love. Do you recall what they are?

But for now let me say, when it comes to our education proper, as sons and daughters of God, the first things we learned were the five core features of godly love. These are the forms of doctrine that generate godly love and charity in us for the various relationships of life.

If you did not go through the book of Romans with us, I would encourage you to go to our Dropbox, or our YouTube Channel, or our Vimeo Showcase and watch the Romans videos. We have notes available upon request. To get the full picture of what Paul is teaching us, we need to learn Romans because the things we are learning here in Ephesians are built upon the things in Romans. This is why we say that Romans is foundational doctrine.

The kind of love we are talking about when we say that covenant marriage is based on steadfast love is the one mentioned in Romans 12:9-19. Look at that word, lovingkindness. I want you to notice three other words contained in this word: 1) loving, 2) kin, and 3) kindness.

Oxford English Dictionary (OED): loving – “of words, actions, etc.: proceeding from godly love; demonstrating or characterized by [godly] love.

I inserted the word “godly” to qualify the kind of love we are talking about. So, the first word (loving) tells us that the things we say to our spouse, and our actions toward them should emanate from, and demonstrate, the love that God Himself has for them in this dispensation of grace.

The second word is “kind.”

OED: kind – gentle with regard to action or impact; unlikely to cause harm or damage, expressing generous, caring or sympathetic thoughts or feelings.

We are called to speak and act with a steadfast lovingkindness. When we obey the doctrine to “love your wives,” it means we are gentle with them with regard to our actions toward them, that we refrain from causing them harm or damage, that we are generous and caring toward them. To what extent do we do these things? To the same extent that Christ had with the church.

Steadfast love is a choice. This is why Paul commands husbands to love their wives (Ephesians 5:25) and wives to love their husbands (Titus 2:4). If Paul commands us to do it, then it can be done. God isn’t asking us to do something over which we have no control. Steadfast love may be the single most important factor in a covenant marriage.

Steadfast love can have an emotional element to it, but primarily it is a way of thinking and behaving toward your spouse. It means choosing to focus on her good characteristics. It means expressing appreciation for those characteristics.

Steadfast love refuses to focus on the negative aspects of your spouse.

1 Corinthians 13:4 Charity suffereth long, *and* is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,⁵ Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, **thinketh no evil;**

This does not mean that we are not aware of our spouse’s shortcomings, it means we don’t think about them in connection with their failures.

Choosing to focus on our spouse’s good features will greatly affect our own attitude and the overall marriage. I am convinced that one of the best things a husband can do is spend the time getting to know his wife. I am talking about knowing what is going on inside, in her innermost thoughts. And this means husbands need to ask the right kinds of questions and develop the skill of listening.

Find out what her hopes and fears are, who her best friends are, and what things she most enjoys doing. Ask open-ended questions that will encourage her to talk. What is she most pleased with in her life? Where does she see herself going in the next couple of years? What are her greatest difficulties?

These are the kinds of questions that will let her open up so you can really see her. Be a good listener which means you don't debate with her about her answers, or condemn her for being honest. Don't be too quick to jump in with advice, just listen. If you hear something you don't agree with, keep it to yourself, and that includes the look on your face. Be the best friend she has in the world.

Tell her what you admire about her. Tell her why you love her, assuming you do. Express sincere gratitude for the things she does. Praise her for positive character traits.

We could truly go on with this for many weeks, but we can't. I hope every husband understands what we are getting at when we talk about steadfast love being critical to the relationship.

4. Covenant Relationships View Commitments as Permanent

I realize that every marriage is unique. So, when people ask about their own marriage, the answer is not always a "one size fits all." What I am saying by point #4 is that the biblical ideal is one man and one woman married for life. As Christians, we don't want to lower this ideal. But, at the same time, we recognize there are times when that is not possible.

God does not abandon us when we are contrary to Him, but He works to bring us back, so much so that He sent His Son to die for our sins on the cross. God made a great sacrifice to offer us reconciliation. God did not wait for us to make the first move, He made the first move.

And that leads us right into characteristic #5.

5. Covenant Relationships Require Confrontation and Forgiveness

Confrontation means holding the other person responsible for their actions. Forgiving means a willingness to lift the penalty and continue a loving and growing relationship. God's response to mankind has always been confrontation with a willingness to forgive.

Ignoring the failures of your spouse is not the road to marital bliss. A covenant marriage is not about "grin and bear it."

A covenant marriage means we have a willingness to forgive, but it also means that the other person is responsible for their actions.

When we read that word “confrontation,” we may immediately recoil. But I do not mean confrontation in a bad way. I am not talking about being harsh or ugly. Confrontation is communicating your sense of being wronged and the resulting pain or hurt, while giving your spouse the opportunity to clarify their actions. That means we either explain the misunderstanding or we acknowledge when we were wrong and ask for forgiveness.

Every marriage has failures. A good marriage is not destroyed by some failures, but even so, we need to deal with our failures and renew our commitment to the marriage.

I know we have raised the bar pretty high and some of you may be thinking that a covenant marriage is out of reach for your marriage. If that is the case, let me move us quickly on to the next principle.

I can recall years ago, standing with the kids in line at Disney World in Orlando, hearing the couple ahead of me having a discussion. It was not argumentative at all, but the wife was telling her husband some things she wanted him to do. (I honestly can't remember what they were, just normal stuff, I suppose.) Anyway, what I do recall is him answering in a way that would get him out of doing these chores. But, it wasn't working with her, she stayed right on point.

He turned toward me and gave me a look of resignation. Then I said to him, “You have to remember what is written in our men’s manual; that no matter what our wife says to us, we can answer her by one of two answers.” He looked at me kind of puzzled and then she said, “What men’s manual?”

I said, “The one they give every boy so he knows how to survive when he gets married.” She said, “what are those two things?” I said, “the first one is: It would be my pleasure to do that. And the second one is: “Honey, I’m workin’ on it.” Then, I looked at the man and said, “You should have used those because if you had, this would all be over by now.”

She looked at him and said, "Yes it would have." I looked at him and said, "Told you." Of course, we were all chuckling by that time. It was just a joke. There is no men's manual – at least I have to say that because rule #1 in that manual is: Do not tell any women about this manual." That is, if there is one, that would be the first rule.

Why am I telling you this story? Because I want to tell you something that sounds very similar but this time I am telling you the truth.

How would you like to change your marriage for the better by asking only three little questions? You can. Now, you might be thinking, "How is that possible, and what are those questions?"

It is possible because these questions will put the principle of servanthood into your marriage, and when that happens, things start changing. Three little questions are all it takes. Here they are: "How can I help you? How can I make your life easier? How can I be a better husband to you?"

I wish you could hear the testimonies I have heard when men began to do this. I will share this one phrase with you; "When I let her teach me how I could serve her, our marriage began to change. Not overnight – the pain had been there too long – but change did occur."

When you ask these questions, you have to be willing to listen to the answers and act on them.

You see, God's plan for marriage is two people giving their lives away to each other, with the ultimate goal of helping each other accomplish more for the glory of God than they could have accomplished alone.

I think you may now see where this is going; everything we want to happen with our marriages begins by focusing on our own relationship with God and the work He is doing in our inner man.

Ephesians 5:25 is a clear challenge to men; we are asked to love our wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself for it.

Steadfast love is available to every Christian. And that is what this study is about; distinctively Christian marriages. You see, what we need is for God's ability to love unlovable people to be in us. While I do not have anyone in particular in mind, through my years in ministry, I have encountered some difficult marriage situations, and just for a moment I want to speak to those.

I am going to pray a prayer that I think might be good for you to pray if you are in a difficult situation. So, I am printing it out in the notes because I think it encapsulates the right idea.

“Heavenly Father, you know the person I live with. You know I have great difficulty in seeing anything positive about them. But I know that you love them. And I also know that you want me to be a channel of your love to them. So, I am giving my hands, my voice, every part of me to express your love. And I am going to do it for your sake. Amen.”

I think we all see that a covenant marriage is beyond human ability, but we have divine help. A covenant marriage does not depend upon human perfection, but it is based on steadfast love being worked in our hearts by the working of God's word, and ability to forgive.

Everything we do in our marriage should be from the foundation of our relationship with God. And once we have that intimate relationship with Him, then we create the intimacy we all crave in our marriage.

Major Points from the Lesson