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3. Foundation Three: Commitment In Marriage

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Many marriages were destined for trouble from the utterance of the words “I do.” When the couple publicly declared, “I do”, they really didn’t understand what they were committing to. They had no comprehension of what true commitment was. They entered marriage thinking that divorce was a viable option in their pursuit of self-fulfillment and happiness, or they naively thought that it could never happen to them. For many there isn’t much difference between their commitment in dating and their commitment in marriage. Marriage is just another way to express how much they love someone.

In many cultures, including the biblical culture, they practice arranged marriages, which typically has a very low divorce rate. In those cultures, “love” is more than just feelings; it means commitment. Love as a feeling will have seasons of strength and seasons where it seems to diminish totally. Marriages based primarily on one’s feelings will have the consistency of the ocean during a lunar eclipse. This is why you often hear people say, “We just fell out of love,” when divorcing, which means they lost the early feelings they had in the marriage.



feelings for you, I will still love you. If you get sick and can't respond in love towards me, I will still love you. If you treat me unlovingly, I will still respond in love towards you." This type of love is divine, and it is this love God originally meant to be experienced in marriages.

God's Covenant Faithfulness with Abraham

In considering love as a commitment, let's look at God as an example of one in a committed loving relationship. We will see this in God's covenant with Abraham in [Genesis 15](#). [Genesis 15:7-21](#) says:

He also said to him, 'I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it.' But Abram said, 'O Sovereign LORD, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?' So the LORD said to him, 'Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon.' Abram brought all these to him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other; the birds, however, he did not cut in half. Then birds of prey came down on the carcasses, but Abram drove them away. As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him. Then the LORD said to him, 'Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions. You, however, will go to your fathers in peace and be buried at a good old age. In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure.' When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces. On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram and said, 'To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates.'

Do you know anything about a blood covenant? A covenant is simply a binding agreement between two or more people. But, often in ancient times, they would seal the covenant in blood. In fact, the word "covenant" really means "to cut". They would take a few animals, most likely cattle and birds, and cut them in half. One person would walk through the sliced pieces essentially saying, "Let this happen to me if I break this covenant." Then the others would do the same.

In this story, God promised to give Abraham and his descendants the land of Canaan. Abraham replied to God in verse 8, "How can I know that I will gain possession of it?" God responded by initiating a blood covenant with Abraham. However, what makes this covenant interesting is that in verse 17 God walks through the pieces by himself without Abraham. He virtually said, "Let this happen to me if I don't fulfill this covenant." He put the ownership of completing the plan exclusively on himself, apart from Abraham's compliance



independently, but even more so together, as one flesh ([Gen 2:24](#)). Therefore, in marriage we are meant to reflect his love, his commitment. Scripture actually teaches that God is love (cf. [1 John 4:8](#)), and though, we are not sovereign like God or holy like him, we are still called to imitate him in all relationships and especially in the marriage relationship (cf. [Eph 5:22-33](#)). [Ephesians 5:1-2](#) says, “Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”

There is a sense in which we must have the same type of commitment with our mate that God had with Abraham. Abraham previously had committed to following God and fulfilling his will. In [Genesis 12:1-3](#), Abraham left everything to follow God; he committed to God. But God’s commitment to Abraham was unilateral, meaning God would fulfill his covenant even if Abraham failed. Similarly, in marriage we are saying, “I will do all that is in my power to love you when you fail me and to love you even if you don’t love me. I will seek to love you as God has loved me. I am committed to you.” No doubt, this is difficult. But this is how God loves us, and it is how we should love our spouses.

God’s Covenant Faithfulness with Israel, Abraham’s Seed

Another example of God’s commitment to his people and what our commitment in marriage should look like is seen in the book of Hosea. God told the prophet Hosea to marry a woman who would eventually become a prostitute and cheat on him. God was going to use Hosea’s marriage to display his commitment and love for Israel, who had been unfaithful to him by worshipping false gods. Look at

[Hosea 3:1-5](#):

The LORD said to me, “Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another and is an adulteress. Love her as the LORD loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes.’ So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and about a homer and a lethek of barley. Then I told her, ‘You are to live with me many days; you must not be a prostitute or be intimate with any man, and I will live with you.’ For the Israelites will live many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred stones, without ephod or idol. Afterward the Israelites will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king. They will come trembling to the LORD and to his blessings in the last days.”

After Hosea’s wife had left him and cheated on him, he sought to restore their relationship in obedience



priest, prophet, or sacrifice as they have rejected God. But when Christ returns, then they will be restored to God—their faithful covenant partner (v. 4-5).

Again, here we see God's covenant faithfulness. He will one day take his wife, Israel, back, even though she committed spiritual adultery. God covenanted with Abraham and his descendants, and he will be faithful to fulfill that covenant.

As Christians called to reflect God's image, we must seek to model his commitment to his people, his bride. It was this type of commitment that Hosea modeled in his marriage. He took his wife back, even though she cheated on him. By doing this, he modeled God's love and commitment to Israel. Marriage was always meant to symbolize God and his love for his people (cf. [Eph. 5:22-27](#)).

It is difficult to imagine a marriage partner being unfaithful or failing us in any way, but it is wise to consider your response to unfaithfulness even before entering the marriage covenant. If one of the purposes of marriage is to be a reflection of God's relationship to his people, then we cannot but consider this. As believers, marriage is not primarily for our self-fulfillment and happiness; it is to bring God glory as it reflects him.

In addition, we must consider this type of commitment because we are marrying people who are infected by sin and are prone to fail. If we are going to model God's love and commitment in marriage, we must ask ourselves, "Are we truly willing to be committed to our mates through the good and the bad, success and failure?"

In most marriages, couples are only committed when one person keeps his or her side of the covenant. However, that looks nothing like God's love. Marriage is different from dating. It is supposed to be a committed love, a persevering love, a hopeful love, especially when the relationship is tough. Again, one must ask himself even before getting married if he is really willing to display this type of commitment.

God Hates Divorce

As mentioned previously, arranged marriages have a very low divorce rate, and this may be true, in part, because of the great amount of shame that comes with divorce in those cultures. This is interesting to consider since there is very little to no shame for divorce in many other cultures, especially in the west. It has almost become popular. I read a bumper sticker the other day that said, "I am always right! Ask my two ex-wives." Divorce has become almost expected, which is why so many people are choosing not to marry and to instead just live together. And if they do marry, they realize that they have a "get out of jail" card, which they keep close to the chest.



‘I hate divorce,’ says the LORD God of Israel, ‘and I hate a man’s covering himself with violence as well as with his garment,’ says the LORD Almighty. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith.

Here in this passage, God rebukes the Israelites because of how common divorce was in their culture. God said he hated the violence divorce created in the family, and he taught the Israelites to guard themselves and to not break faith with their wives.

Moreover, let’s look at how Christ dealt with divorce in the New Testament. In [Matthew 19:9](#), Christ says, “I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery.”

In [Matthew 19](#), Jesus gave one of two exceptions that can break the marriage covenant. The first is *adultery*. In a marriage where there is unfaithfulness, if the innocent spouse leaves the union, he or she is free to remarry. However, Christ said that if anyone married a divorced person, not under the exception of adultery, they would be living in a continual state of adultery. Why would they be in a continual state of adultery? This is because God still sees the divorced person as married to his or her first spouse. The first exception that can break the marriage covenant is adultery.

With that said, we must still remember God’s ideal. Even though adultery breaks the marital covenant and allows the innocent spouse to seek divorce and remarriage, that still is not God’s ideal. As seen in the book of Hosea, Israel was adulterous in their relationship to God many times, but he still continually took them back. As the prophet Hosea imitated God’s committed love, he took his own adulterous wife back. Even under the exception, God’s ideal is for the couple to restore the relationship, and by doing this, they demonstrate his committed love. Look at what Paul said about divorce in [1 Corinthians 7:10-11](#). He said:

To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife.

Those who get divorced, for any reason other than adultery, must remain unmarried or reconcile with their mate. This includes situations where there is abuse, irreconcilable differences, etc. *Marriage is supposed to be a life-long relationship, and when a person divorces, Scripture says he or she should remain single.*



forgiveness does not always remove the consequences. If reconciliation is impossible, the cheating spouse must accept God's forgiveness and give himself to a life of serving the Lord as a single person. God will give him grace to fulfill that call and will make him fruitful, if he is faithful. As for the innocent spouse, God's ideal is for her to seek to restore the marriage. If that is not possible, she is free to marry another.

Why are we considering divorce and remarriage in a pre-marital/marital counseling study? It is because those who want to follow God's design must understand how important the marriage covenant is to God. For God, marriage is to be a committed relationship that is essentially unbreakable. Those who break it, except under adultery, are to stay single and continue to pursue the Lord.

These regulations for marriage are strict and were given by God to discourage divorce. In a society with no regulations and no shame with regards to divorce, it has become rampant and a viable option in a difficult marriage. Scripture teaches marriage is a covenant which should reflect God's covenant with us. Even when we fail him and turn our backs on him, he remains faithful because of his covenant which he sealed with the blood of his Son.

What is the second exception that would break the marriage covenant?

In [Romans 7:1-3](#), Paul said this:

Do you not know, brothers—for I am speaking to men who know the law—that the law has authority over a man only as long as he lives? For example, by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage. So then, if she marries another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress, even though she marries another man.

Here, Paul taught that the second exception, which would allow for remarriage, is *death*. Death breaks the marriage covenant. Marriage is a physical covenant that makes a couple one flesh ([Gen 2:24](#)). They become one in body, soul, and spirit. Only a physical thing can break this covenant and that would be adultery or death. In fact, in the Old Testament a cheating spouse was put to death, and then, the faithful spouse was allowed to remarry ([Lev. 20:10](#)). In the New Testament, this is no longer true, but the cheating spouse is called to remain single.

Again, it should be heard that divorce is not an unforgivable sin. God's love and grace are experienced in



With the advent of sin, marriage has been severely damaged, and sadly, most, in some way or another, will be affected by divorce. But where there is sin and brokenness, we, as God's church, must seek to be conduits of God's abundant grace so there can be healing and restoration for all who suffered.

Doesn't the amount of commitment required for marriage, especially a bad marriage, sound scary? It almost sounds impossible. The marriage union is supposed to be a lifetime commitment, without a "get out of jail" card. It is meant to be something that can only be done through God's power. In fact, when the disciples heard of these rigid stipulations, they responded with a similar awe. They said, "If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry" ([Matt 19:10](#)). That's how strict the stipulations seemed to the disciples, and it should also challenge us as we consider this lifetime covenant.

Again, why do you think God made the marriage covenant so stringent?

Simply put, our God hates divorce, and he intended for people to marry and stay together forever. Our legal system provides strenuous consequences to discourage people from stealing, killing, raping, etc. Heinous crimes can incur a potential lifetime sentence in prison or the death penalty. Extreme consequences deter sin in society. This is the same thing God has done with marriage.

He wants people to know that marriage is a life-long calling. It is a covenant commitment and the only way out is to, essentially, remain single. Because people in the church have not been taught this or truly considered it, they have adopted the culture of the world, which looks at divorce as a viable option or as a necessary consequence of seeking self-fulfillment and happiness. If divorce is necessary to find happiness they say, then so be it. And, therefore it has become increasingly common even among Christians. Statistics reflect no difference in the number of divorces occurring in the church compared to those outside the church. However, since marriage is meant to reflect God and his love for his people, it is meant to be a union based on commitment. It is a union in which both say, "I will love you even when you are unlovable, and even when I don't feel like loving you. I will love you like God loves me for his glory and his fame which is my purpose in life."

Conclusion

Have you ever looked at marriage in light of this kind of commitment?

Just as God covenants with his people through the good, the bad, and the ugly, so must we consider marriage as a lifelong covenant. It is a covenant based on commitment and not feelings, for feelings come and go. We approach this covenant realizing the potential consequences of not fulfilling it, just as



How do you think understanding the realities of this sacred covenant should affect premarital couples or those already married?

Certainly, at the minimum, it should make couples re-evaluate their commitment. They should ask themselves, “Am I truly willing to love like God loves and commit like he commits for his glory and joy?”

Commitment in Marriage Homework

Answer the questions, then discuss together.

1. What was new or stood out to you in this session? In what ways were you challenged or encouraged? Were there any points/thoughts that you did not agree with?
2. What disciplines will you continually practice in order to help maintain your faithfulness and commitment in marriage? What steps would you take if you were having serious difficulties in marriage? How would you help restore your union? (Include who you will seek help from.)
3. Write down all the strengths of your mate which may aid having a committed and successful marriage.
4. Write down all the weaknesses of your mate which may hurt having a committed and successful marriage.
5. Write down all your strengths which may help having a committed and successful marriage.
6. Write down all your weaknesses which may hurt having a committed and successful marriage.
7. Discuss these with your mate. What *action steps* should you take as a couple to work on any weaknesses?
8. (If your mate is not willing to work on weaknesses, then you should discern how dangerous these weaknesses are, if they are something you can live with, or if his or her unwillingness to work on them may be a foreboding sign of not being willing to compromise in the future. This might be something worth talking more about together and/or bringing up with your pastor or mentor in order to further discuss and evaluate.)
9. After completing this session, in what ways do you feel God is calling you to pray for your future marriage? Spend some time praying.



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