



Covenant: The Heart of the Marriage Mystery

Covenant is the fundamental tool that God has designed to order His relationship with mankind.

by Dr. David Kyle Foster

Part of the understanding of the "Why?" of this mystery can be found in the understanding of covenant, which is the vehicle by which a man and a woman are to establish the lifelong, faithful relationship in which physical sexual interaction is meant to operate.

Covenant is also the fundamental tool that God has designed to construct and order His relationship with man.

Dr. Scott Hahn (whose research I will be sharing with you in this article) notes that a covenant is an exchange of persons, as opposed to a contract, which is an exchange of promises.

Covenants are established by making an oath—an oath that creates kinship between the two who are making the covenant.

Christ strikes a covenant with us at our baptism—one that is stronger than blood, one that establishes a divine, everlasting kinship bond. In making covenant with Him, God adopts us into His family and treats us as heirs to the family fortune.

The Hebrew word for "oath" is "shevah," meaning "to seven oneself" (In Gen 21:27-31, Abraham makes a treaty with Abimelech using seven ewe lambs, and they called the place "Beersheva," which means, "the place of the oath" or "the well of the sevens.")

If you don't have an oath, you don't have a covenant.

Another Hebrew word for oath is "I raise my hand" (See Deut 32:40ff). When we raise our hands in worship, for example, we are swearing an oath. We lift up God's name when we invoke God's name in an oath.

Making an oath is to call upon the power of God to bind Satan and evil. It is a mystery of drawing down the presence of God, of engaging God for help and power so that we can do whatever it is we are pledging to do.

Hahn quotes Old Testament Prof. Barker, who noted:

The cosmic order is restored by means of the oath and the name of the Son of Man. The oath is the means of creating order. It is the means of binding the fallen spirits who operate through nature in order to make them serve a higher purpose. To be initiated into the oath, according to the Jewish outlook, gives great power. It enables the initiate to summon and bind the spirits in his service by means of the even greater name whose authority he uses. When the great oath was broken [referring to Adam's sin and the Fall] the system began to collapse. The name of the Son of Man is the most powerful means of restoring order to a broken world.

Scott Hahn concludes Prof. Barker's thought by saying: "Whenever you invoke the name of Jesus, you tap the power of God's oath." That is why God gave saints the power to bind evil and release or loose righteousness in this world.

Another Hebrew term is "to put oneself under a curse" in order to receive God's blessing. We are therefore placing ourselves under a curse, to be damned if we don't keep our part of the oath.

Only in Christianity does God bind Himself to man by swearing an oath. God put Himself under a curse if He didn't keep the terms of the covenant to Abraham and his seed. Since we did not keep our part of the covenant, God became man and became a curse for us in order to make us His covenant family.

Hahn concludes:

We are sitting on a stockpile of spiritual power that we have barely begun to tap. Do not be stingy with your blessings. Do not withhold from your [loved ones] the invocation of God's name. Whenever you give the benediction; every time you make the sign of the Cross; every time you invoke the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit; every time

you do anything in the name of God, you are tapping the power of creation and the great oaths that God swore when He fashioned the world; but even more, you are tapping the greater power of Jesus Christ, the Son of Man, who has brought about a new creation, having sworn a new covenant oath, having taken upon Himself the curse for our sin.

Let's bring the concept of swearing an oath into our New Testament understanding. Guess what the Greek word for oath is? The Greek word for "oath" is "mysterion"—mystery—a concept which is found throughout the New Testament—a concept used in Eph 5:32 that describes the marital relationship between a man and woman as a type of the marriage between Christ and the Church.

When we ask for God's blessing and submit ourselves to His curse by oath, God comes down and empowers us to do what we would otherwise not be capable of doing.

Another Greek word for "oath" is "horkia" or "horkos"—the English term "exorcism," or "to oath out" When you exorcise demonic spirits in ministry to someone, you literally "oath out" evil. Dr. Hahn notes that "Cross my heart and hope to die" is a medieval oath formula. The martyrs in heaven before the throne with raised hands are bearing witness under oath to Christ's faithfulness. As a result, the accuser of the brethren is cast out.

When we assemble at the Lord's Table or Eucharist, we are engaging in spiritual warfare.

The word "sacrament" comes from the Latin word for "oath"—"sacramentum." And so, the sacraments of the church are oaths set in symbolic form which Christ has left us to conquer powers that exceed our meager strength. Our faith, our testimony, binds evil and conquers Satan.

It is a real war on a real battlefield, a real trial in a real courtroom. It's also a clan struggle, a family united against forces that are determined to deface and destroy all that is good and pure and holy.

In having made our eternal covenant with God through Christ, we have united ourselves with Him and become one flesh. And because His name is now attached to our lives, to our ministries, to our words, He can use us to bind evil. We are now extensions of His very body through which He can continue to physically touch the world with His healing power.

Just as your offspring will carry on your name and legacy, so we carry on His name and legacy.

The power of Almighty God is not being released in many of our lives because we have never embraced this high calling. We have married Christ in word but have never consummated the marriage by giving ourselves to Him with the trust and abandon that we were designed to give. Rather than giving our all to Him, rather than submitting to the source of our life with joyful obedience, we have grumbled and complained and questioned Him at every turn in the road.

We have rejected the call to love, which is a call to sacrificially give ourselves to Him just as He has sacrificially given Himself to us. We have defiled the marriage bed with other gods, with other idols. We have remained fixed on ourselves, offering only periodic, emotion laden gestures of love that only tease but never deliver.

The Lord might well think some of the same thoughts as Romeo as he waited outside Juliet's bedroom balcony for the slightest glimmer of hope that she shared in his love for her. God may see us at a worship service, erupting with a sudden burst of romantic sentiment as we sing our love songs to Him.

"But soft, what light through yonder window breaks," He might exclaim. "It is my lady. Oh, it is my love. Oh, that she knew she were."

But so often, His hope is dashed as we leave the service and return to our self involved lives without putting any of those sentiments into practice—without any change in our lives, without any deepening of our pursuit of Him, without any reality beyond the sentimental notions of those love songs that we mouthed.

Christ has made promises and sworn and faithfully executed oaths to bind Himself to us and to bind evil and cast it off, if we will simply be true to Him in ways that are real.

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