

Dear Friends!

My counseling work involves a large number of couples in unhealthy marriages! Alpha has had the privilege of doing pre-marital counseling for several churches over the years. We start with a 4 page work sheet that the couple fills out and then we discuss their answers in future meetings. I always start these sessions by saying that my job is to find reasons why they should NOT get married. It has worked out that way on several occasions; where issues previously hidden came to light and the wedding plans were cancelled. I have also talked with individuals who knew before the wedding they should not marry, but went through with the ceremony because the invitations were in the mail.

Marriage is hard work and there is never a time when growth isn't necessary. All too often our understanding of marriage is wrong and so we are working hard for the wrong things. Sadly today, even for Christians, marriage is a contract and not a covenant. We now have prenuptial agreements, a written contract designed for the sole purpose of making the divorce easier. If you need one why get married? In the book Whole Marriages in a Broken World the author states the prenuptial contract between Jackie Kennedy and Aristotle Onassis had 170 clauses!

All too often an unwritten contract is made by a couple. It may look like a **performance contract**: "I'll do my part; you do yours" Or a **service contract**: "I'll meet your needs and you meet mine." Then there are **appearance maintenance contracts**: "I'll make you look good if you make me look good". My favorite is the **remodeling contract**: "I'll fix you or please fix me." The worst contract is "You're the problem so you must change because I'm fine!"

These marriages all work on the principle of exchanging services,

Contract marriages produce consumers who continually ask "What's in this for me?"

In contrast, Covenant Marriage involves a commitment of persons to one another rather than a commitment of services. Marriage should involve a pledge commitment or vow not just a promise. Promises can be broken for lots of reasons but a vow is supposed to be a continuing force.

Today's new ceremony promise words, (I won't call them a vow) have changed one single word. The old vow states "*forsaking all others, and keeping myself only onto you, so long as we both shall LIVE.*" The new ceremony promise is, "*so long as we both shall LOVE!*"

God's covenants are permanent and we should strive to make our vows permanent. Without binding commitments people live a life dominated by self interest. When God enters into a covenant He commits Himself without reservation. He does not offer part of Himself or a service but rather: "I will be your God and you shall be my people." It's all or nothing with God. Mike Manson quoted by Gary Inrig says: "To keep a vow does not mean to keep from breaking it, but to devote the rest of one's life to discovering what the vow means and to be willing to change and to grow accordingly."

Please continue to pray for us as we minister to so many people living in hurting marriages!

God Bless You and Thank You!

*Richard*

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