



(Mal 2:10-16)

According to the Bible, Christian Marriage...

1. Is a covenant¹ that is binding (i.e. establishing certain obligations) and bi-lateral (i.e. both parties must maintain faithfulness to the covenant obligations to continue receiving the blessings gained when the covenant was ratified).

(2:10-16) = Jewish men were being unfaithful (**11, 14, 16** - “**faithless**”) to the wives they acquired through covenant marriage (**14** - “**Wife by covenant**”; see also Pro 2:17; Jer 31:31-32) by not fulfilling their obligations to love/care for them but instead seek to be released from them (“**For the man who does not love/hates his wife but divorces her**”). As a result, they were no longer receiving the blessings associated w/their marriages (**13** – “**He/God no longer regards the offering or it accepts it with favor from your hand**”). IOW: The blessings of the marriage were dependent upon faithful fulfillment of their covenant obligations!²

2. Affords us w/more than simply the blessings experienced through our special union w/one another (e.g. sexual intimacy, synergy, etc). Our marriages become a vital conduit to receiving God’s favor and granting our requests.

(13) = the burnt offering made for the purpose of atonement and entreating God’s favor. Again, God would not accept b/c of their mistreatment of their wives (**14**) (Zec 7:1-14; Mat 26:26-28 w/Exo 24:3-8 w/1Co 11:17-32 w/1Pe 3:7).

3. Requires that both the man and woman be Christians - especially if expecting to produce children w/the best chance of following God.

(10) “**Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us?** = Are we not all children of the same covenant family? IOW: Our parents understood their duty to only marry other Jews/Christians (Deu 7:1-3; 2Co 6:14-18). “**Why then are we faithless to one another, profaning the covenant of our fathers**” = This duty was not being followed by this generation of Jews. Rather the covenantal purity preserved by their ancestors was being destroyed. **(11-12)** = Malachi’s generation were marrying pagans (“**Judah...has married the daughter of a foreign god.**”). As a result, these Jewish men were not only defiling their bodies (“**Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the Lord which He loves**” – 1Co 6:15-20) but also bringing a curse on their children (“**May the Lord cut off from the tents of Jacob any descendant of the man who does this**”). Marrying w/in the covenant community (i.e. other Christians), therefore is also important to producing children who will remain Christians throughout their life. **(15)** = Marriages consisting of two faithful covenant members brings the added blessing of children w/good spiritual genetics (i.e. “**Godly offspring**”, i.e. Exo 20:5-6). The best chance then we have of producing children who will persevere in following God is when both parents are Christians. Though the children in spiritually split homes receive God’s special provision to enter the covenant (1Co 7:14), they also run a greater risk of being led astray due to the contribution (inwardly and outwardly) of the unbelieving parent. Another reason God prohibits such marriages (Deu 7:4).

4. Possesses two very important phase: betrothal and consummation:

4.1. Betrothal = The place where Christian marriage officially begins. It means that the man and the woman have each agreed to the terms of the covenant and (where applicable), received approval from their parents/covenant community (e.g. Gen 24:49-52, 57; also contra Exo 22:16). This is also the time when the man gives - and the woman receives, the betrothal present or “**bride-price**” (e.g. payment to the parents, and some form of wealth/jewelry to the daughter) as the visible sign of both covenant ratification and their official status as husband and wife (Gen 24:53, 34:12; Eze 16:8-12). **(14)** “**wife by covenant**” = This phrase refers to a wife in the betrothal stage only. IOW: she is a wife only by marriage covenant and not yet thru consummation. For obvious reasons, the same can be said about her husband (i.e. he is a husband only by covenant – not consummation). The terms (husband and wife) are (nonetheless) valid and appropriate since all the rights/benefits associated w/those titles are afforded to them. Such as:

4.1.1. Identification by others as husband and wife (2Sa 3:14; Hos 2:16-19; Mat 1:18-19; 2Co 11:2).

4.1.2. Protection from easy dissolution of the relationship (i.e. betrothals cannot be broken w/o possessing grounds for legitimate divorce – adultery; Mat 1:18-19, 5:31-32, 19:1-9).

4.1.3. Enjoyment of non-intercourse related sexual activity w/one another (Remember – betrothal is marriage! Also, porneia/sexual immorality pertains only to extra-marital sexual activity; 1Co 7:1-2).

¹ According to Gordon Hugenberger, “A covenant, in its normal sense, is an elected relationship of obligation under oath.” (*Marriage Is A Covenant*, p.11). Meredith Kline defines a covenant as, “a sanction-sealed commitment to maintain a particular relationship of follow a stipulated course of action.” (*By Oath Consigned*, p.16).

² Unfortunately, Evangelical Christianity has rejected both the binding and bi-lateral nature of covenants. They attempt to see a substantial difference between the concept of contract and covenant where no real difference exists. Examples of such folly include Matt Chandler’s most recent book (and articles) on Marriage, “Our lives are driven by the contractual and what I mean by that is most of our cell phones, our mortgages, our leases, our car notes, all of those are forms of contracts; we are saying that I am going to give these things, but if I give these things, you must give these things. So, I will give you this amount of money, but if I give you this amount of money, you will give me in return this much data or this car or this house or whatever it actually is. Covenant is the opposite of that. If you think about that moment in a wedding ceremony where the vows are exchanged—that’s covenant. Covenant language is ‘for better or for worse.’ We are acknowledging that this might go south. Think about how crazy that is! On our wedding day we are acknowledging a relationship that could go bad, but my vow before you, the covenant I am making before you, before our friends and family, and before God, is that I’m not going anywhere. (*The Mingling Of Souls*; “*Covenant Vs. Contract*”: <http://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2014/december-online-only/covenant-vs-contract.html>). In reality, covenants are arguably more serious than most modern contracts as demonstrated through God’s promised action when His people fail to be faithful to their (marriage) covenant w/Him (Deu 28:15-68). This is also picked up in the rituals of animal bi-section associated w/covenant and the severe consequences communicated through its symbolism (e.g. Gen 15:10 w/17).

4.1.4. Promise of sexual intercourse in the near future. (1Co 7:3-5) = These verses are speaking about the promise of sexual intercourse that will come after the “limited” amount of time agreed upon by the couple to abstain, since the moment such sexual intercourse takes place, the marriage immediately moves from betrothal to consummation (ibid). The maximum amount of time allowed for the betrothal has differed throughout redemptive history. In the days of the Patriarchs, it could be several days (e.g. Gen 24:54-59) or several years (Gen 29:18-21). During the time of the Reformation (16th century), it seemed to differ based on where you lived. For example, In Germany, Martin Luther established two days as the maximum time for betrothal. In Geneva (Switzerland) Calvin established six weeks to be the maximum. Though diverse, the common thread remains the same: no more time should be given than absolutely needed. IOW: the shorter the gap between betrothal and consummation the better – especially in societies where pre-marital sex is common and encouraged. In such societies, it behooves the church to place an emphasis on the term “limited” given Satanic temptation (i.e. temptation to extramarital activity – see v2), and most people’s “lack of self-control”. What is the purpose of betrothal? The purpose of betrothal is to provide enough time for the transfer of the father’s property (i.e. his daughter) to her new master (i.e. her husband; 1Pe 3:6). Throughout the majority of history, and as continues to be true in many cultures today, this means also the transfer of the dowry (i.e. real estate, money or other items of wealth intended to help the daughter in the creation of a new family). This time is also given to the groom for the purpose of securing both means of support and place to live for him and his new bride (Gen 2:24; Pro 24:27 = start your family only after you have worked out how to provide for them; 2Sa 17:3). In modern America, the betrothal period is used to prepare for the consummation ceremony (i.e. the wedding – to wed = to consummate).

4.2. Consummation = Sexual intercourse. The Bible (along w/secular society) has always recognized this act as the point at which the marriage process is complete (Gen 29:18-28 – “give me my wife that I may go into her” = IOW: that I may consummate the marriage thru sexual intercourse. Notice: though Leah was not the betrothed, intercourse nonetheless makes her Jacob’s wife as well; Deu 21:10-14, 25:5)³. Equally so, the Bible recognizes the importance of a consummation ceremony/feast: an event signaling that the betrothal period has ended and the agreed upon time to transfer all dowries and obligatory wedding gifts has come (e.g. Mat 22:4-10 = former guests refuse to come to avoid obligatory gifts; Num 36:1-4 w/Eph 1:11; Col 1:11-13). As such, it celebrates the fact that the couple’s wait is over: a new family (or new age) has come into existence and is supported by the covenant community (Rev 21:1-5 = marriage consummation means new family/new age). This then is what is symbolized through the act of sexual intercourse – and the contradictory/perverted message therefore communicated through pre-marital sex (Gen 2:24 w/1Co 6:15-20 = sexual intercourse makes us “one flesh” or “members” of one another. IOW: we become family. Paul’s words here are similar to those in 2Co 6:14-18. We can’t be family/members w/Christ and w/prostitutes or those of the world; Consider also Joh 3:28 -29 - 36 = The role of the “friend of the bride-groom” was to announce that sexual intercourse has taken place and a new age/creation has come)⁴. In respect to those men who cannot wait until the wedding, it is permissible to consummate the marriage beforehand – i.e. the ceremony is optional⁵. However, in cases where the betrothal period was reasonable, this has meant forfeiture of the consummation ceremony/obligatory gifts since the betrothal period was violated/ignored (1Co 7:36-38 – “better” w/Exo 22:16; Deu 22:28-29 = Betrothal contract violated/ignored meant paying the bride-price and forfeiture of wedding ceremony. That this is indeed in mind can be adduced by considering those cases where the betrothal was honored – e.g. Mat 25:10; Gen 29:22. As w/ expected, this was also how the levirate marriage worked since it was not the creation of a new family unit – Deu 25:5 – e.g. Gen 38:8). That being said, an early departure from the betrothal period (and its consequences) is not serious sin (though some repentance w/ required for violations of former oaths). God’s concern (and condemnation) is instead reserved for those on the opposite end of the spectrum; those who fail to keep/refuse to keep the consummation promise (of their betrothal) as was the situation in Malachi’s day. **(15-16)** = Among all the other things discussed, these verses also reveal the way in which the Jewish men were failing to “love” their betrothed wives (“by covenant” – v14). It was the “faithless” or unfaithful act of refusing to consummate the marriage and produce children to God (“**did he** [the husband] **not** [or, he *did not*] **make them one** [as in one flesh] **w/ a portion of the Spirit in their union** [pass on the holy spirit to a new generation of children in procreative sexual union]; Consider also Deu 20:7)⁶. Instead (as already discussed) their betrothal wives were being put away (in divorce) for pagan wives.

5. Concluding take-aways:

5.1. Betrothal *is* marriage; not engagement.

5.2. Pre-marital sex is sin; pre-ceremonial sex is not.

5.3. DRC should produce betrothal contracts w/periods of no more than 6mos.; forfeiture of ceremony if early consummation; couples publicly agreeing to the terms and subsequently being proclaimed husband and wife before the congregation.

³ “Sexual union was understood as a marriage-[consummating] act. Clearly, sexual union is the indispensable means of consummation of marriage in the Old Testament. It seems probable that sexual union functioned in this manner precisely because it was viewed as a covenant-ratifying oath-sign” – Gordon Hugenberger (ibid, p.248, 279)

⁴ “‘One flesh’ refers to the establishment of a new family unit – in other words, the bondedness expressed by flesh is more precisely a familial bondedness. The principal support for this view is Gen 29:14, 37:27; Lev 18:6, 25:49; 2Sa 5:1 and Isa 58:7 where the term (“flesh”) refers to the members of one’s family-or kin.” – Gordon Hugenberger (ibid, p.162)

⁵ Joanne Ferraro states in her article discussing marital views during the 16th century that. “Both Protestant and Catholic courts regarded mutual consent as the essential requirement for a valid marriage. Church services celebrated the union, making it public and secure under law, but it was the couple’s mutual agreement that made it binding in the eyes of God. Strasbourg law explicitly stated in 1534 that a church ceremony was not obligatory to make a marriage valid or legal.” (“Courtship, Marriage and Divorce”, Encyclopedia Of European Social History).

⁶ “Cuneiform law [before Mosaic law] makes plain a legal obligation on the part of the groom to consummate the marriage once their has been inchoate marriage.” – Gordon Hugenberger (ibid, p.261)