

FOR WEDNESDAY (THE MARRIAGE COVENANT)

Traditional Wedding Vows - Old Book of Common Prayer

Wilt thou have this Woman to thy wedded wife, to live together after God's ordinance in the holy estate of Matrimony? Wilt thou love her, comfort her, honour, and keep her in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all others, keep thee only unto her, so long as ye both shall live?

I,....., take thee.....to my wedded Wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part, according to God's holy ordinance; and thereto I plight thee my troth.

Selection from LOVE AND CONFLICT, New Patterns of Family Life by Gibson Winter.

"In biblical language, marriage is a covenant between a man and a woman. We seldom speak of covenants these days, but this term expresses a unique relationship. We can understand the term most clearly in the light of God's covenant with His people. The Old Covenant is the alliance initiated by God with the Israelite people. The act of God in delivering the people forms the basis of the Covenant. However, the Covenant is sealed by the Commandments and the pledge of fidelity in terms of them from both sides. God promises to be with His people, to empower their obedience to His laws and to protect them. Israel pledges itself to faithfulness to God. Israel will serve no other gods. The history of Israel is the record of God's faithfulness to the Covenant and Israel's struggle with its own mistrust. We need not pursue this further, since we are primarily concerned with the nature of a covenant relationship. Faithfulness, trust, and support are the fabric of a covenant.

"The covenant of marriage is only a human analogy to the real Covenant of God. The distinction is important, since God initiates the Covenant with His people whereas man and woman jointly initiate the covenant of marriage. The fabric of the relationship is similar, nevertheless, since husband and wife join in a covenant which excludes other relationships of such intimacy. They pledge faithfulness and mutual trust. They pledge mutual support. They enter into an intimate relationship in which they share their personal and physical lives. They become one flesh.

"The marital covenant of biblical times joined many family ties. Political, economic, and religious bonds were cemented through marriage. Families became linked in a complicated network. Family names were continued through significant lines of descent. The marital covenant was a crucial bond in the society. This is rarely true in our day. The marital covenant is now a bond between a man and woman through which a single, intimate family group is founded. The covenant of one flesh is a covenant of intimacy for the husband, wife, and children. They may continue their relationships with parents and relatives, but the pledge of faithfulness and mutual support is limited to the intimate group. This is a covenant of intimacy.

