

God's Covenants

Part 1 – But WHY did God make covenants?

God's given us three clear ways of proving he exists, which conveniently are given in the first three chapters of Romans. The first proof is Creation (In Romans chapter one), the second is our Conscience (in chapter 2), and the third is God's Faithfulness (in chapter 3).

The specific verses in Romans for all three proofs are these (from the New Living Translation):

1) CREATION - **Romans 1:20**, "For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, **they can clearly see his invisible qualities**—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God."

2) OUR CONSCIENCE - **Romans 2:14-15**, "Even Gentiles, who do not have God's written law, show that they know his law when they instinctively obey it, even without having heard it. They demonstrate that **God's law is written in their hearts**, for their own conscience and thoughts either accuse them or tell them they are doing right."

3) GOD'S FAITHFULNESS - **Romans 3:3-4**, "True, some of the Jews were unfaithful; but just because they were unfaithful, does that mean God will be unfaithful? Of course not! Even if everyone else is a liar, **God is true**. As the Scriptures say about him, 'You will be proved right in what you say, and you will win your case in court.'"

The first two proofs are obvious in our own experience, because the universe and the intricacies of life on this planet never cease to amaze us. God also equipped us with a conscience that's sensitive to good and evil. Like Paul said in Romans 7:18, we "have the desire to do what is good" built right into us. So God gave us two obvious proofs of his existence, but where is the obvious proof of his faithfulness?

There's a clue in those two verses in Romans 3, where Paul ties in God's faithfulness with the Jews' unfaithfulness. God had always been faithful to Israel and the Jews, but so often in their history they had been unfaithful to him. But in what way had he been faithful to them, and in what way had they been unfaithful to him? Well, this is where **God's Covenants** come in.

When God rescued the Israelites from Egypt he led them to Mount Sinai, where he tells them through Moses in **Exodus 19:4-5**, “You’ve seen what I did to Egypt and how I carried you out on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and **keep my covenant** then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession.”

God really put his reputation on the line here - and the proof of his existence too - because he made a promise to this one group of people that he either kept or he didn’t. Fortunately, we have the history of Israel recorded in great detail in the Old Testament so we can check for ourselves to see what happened. And it clearly shows that God was faithful to his covenant with Israel. He stood by them through thick and thin, because in his own words “I was a husband to them” (Jeremiah 31:32). To God his covenant with Israel was a marriage.

All we need ask, then, as proof of God’s existence is: “Did God love Israel like a husband loves his wife?” Yes, he did. He protected his beloved Israel from vicious enemies, he set her up as a fully functioning and highly respected nation, and he was intimately involved in her life, even when she was totally unfaithful to him. He was totally committed to his marriage covenant with them.

So that now gives us three clear proofs of God’s existence - and all beginning with the letter ‘C’ - **Creation, Conscience, and Covenants**. And it’s “Covenants” in the plural too, because God made several covenants, all of which in their fulfillment prove his existence.

There’s also a **fourth** proof of his existence that begins with the letter ‘C’, in Colossians 1:27, where Paul talks about the great mystery of the ages now being revealed, “which is **Christ in you**, the hope of glory,” because it’s the resurrected Christ living his life in us, or “dwelling in us richly,” Colossians 3:16, that literally transforms us into Christ’s likeness, which we get to experience personally - and what more powerful proof of God’s existence could there be than that?

So now we have four clear proofs of God’s existence, and all beginning with ‘C’: Creation, Conscience, Covenants and Christ. But even that fourth great proof of “Christ in us” ties in with God’s covenants, because it’s in the **New Covenant** that we’re promised the Holy Spirit, and it’s the Spirit who transforms us into Christ’s likeness (2 Corinthians 3:18). For us Christians, then, **God’s Covenants are central to our understanding and experience of God.**

But why did God make covenants in the first place? Was it just to prove his existence through his faithfulness, or did he have something more in mind?

Well, let's go back to the **first** covenant God made - in Genesis chapters one and two. In Chapter 1 God reforms the Earth and then chooses male and female humans to rule over what he's reformed the Earth into. So God is offering humans an amazing opportunity, of "ruling over all the Earth" (Genesis 1:26) - and **with two clear promises on his part** to help them do it: He makes them in his likeness, first of all, so that they're perfectly equipped for ruling, and he also promises to provide the food they need to sustain them (29).

And it's all put in such personal terms too. We're given this picture in Genesis of God addressing the great heavenly council and announcing to them all, "Let's make these humans like us, so they can set up our kingdom on the Earth, and we'll provide them with whatever they need along the way."

It sounds just like the covenant God made with Israel in Exodus 19, because he said to the Israelites, "out of all nations you will be my treasured possession," and here in Genesis he's saying, "out of all my creatures on this planet **humans** will be my treasured kingdom-builders." And in Genesis 2 God then rolls up his sleeves to prove he's faithful to his promise by equipping a human perfectly for the building of his kingdom on Earth, and by giving the human a small section of the Earth to rule over. And God really does put this human in charge, by giving him full responsibility for making the Garden of Eden flourish, by giving him full authority over all the creatures in the garden (pictured by naming them), and by giving him the ability to discover gold and other precious stones, minerals and metals so that the whole Earth can flourish under **human** care and creativity.

We learn in Genesis, therefore, why God makes covenants. It's for one clear and amazing reason: he loves us humans. God was totally smitten with the idea of setting up his kingdom on this one tiny speck in the universe through male and female humans, who in their love for him and for each other, and through their ability to produce children, would spread his Godly influence all over this planet to make it the most effective reflection of his love and wisdom, and the most beautiful and attractive jewel in all his creation.

In Genesis, then, God makes it clear that the Earth and us humans on it are his most treasured possession. He is, therefore, intimately involved with us every step of the way. **It's him and us in this great adventure together.**

It's the first great covenant God made, and it was made exclusively with male and female humans represented by Adam and Eve. For this covenant to work, however, it would also need us, the wife in this marriage covenant, to be as intimately involved and personally committed as God is.

And this is where we come to the second reason why God made covenants. It was through covenants that God would make a **loving relationship** between him and humans possible, based on him as the husband doing the guiding and providing, and on us the wife doing the trusting and supporting.

We see very quickly in Genesis, therefore, that **God's ultimate aim in his covenants is relationship**, the heart and core of which is pictured by the relationship between husband and wife. This explains why God got into the subject of male and female so quickly in Genesis 1, and why marriage between male and female comes up so soon in Genesis chapter 2. It's because in human males and females marrying that God has provided the perfect picture of what he's aiming at in his covenants.

And what he's aiming at is relationship - and to show us how relationship works as well. It works like marriage. A marriage works between male and female when the husband is intimately involved and totally committed to guiding and providing for his wife, and his wife is intimately involved and totally committed to trusting and supporting him. This is how God designed relationship to work, whether it's between him and us or between male and female in marriage, and he set the example himself as the husband by promising to provide all that we, his wife, would need to make his plan for this planet work. And like a good husband he would always be with us too, guiding us along the way, pictured by his very personal guidance and instruction to Adam in Genesis chapter 2.

So God did his husbandly part in helping the relationship flourish, by providing for Adam and instructing him. But tucked away among the trees in the Garden was a test for both Adam and Eve to see if **relationship was the most important thing to them too**. Would they do as God said and not eat off the tree with the fatal fruit? Would they, in other words, do their wifely part in the relationship by trusting God and supporting his plan?

But it does seem a bit odd that God would choose a tree and make it deadly when he'd made all the other trees in the garden to be good for food.

It's almost as if he's deliberately putting temptation in their way by saying all the trees were good for food - but not that one, even though its fruit was just as delicious looking as all the others. But what a picture of God this gives us, because to God this is personal. Like any committed husband he wants to know if his wife is into relationship **with** him up to her eyebrows, or can she easily be distracted by something as simple as food?

God is leaving nothing to chance here, because he's entering into a marriage covenant with humans **that can only work if love goes both ways**. He loves them, which he'd proved already by choosing them to share his great adventure with, but do they love him in return by happily joining in with his plans and instructions, and trusting him no matter what? Would they - when faced with a highly attractive and charming serpent offering them an excuse to eat what God said they shouldn't eat - go ahead and eat it, or would they respond as Jesus did when he told the devil, "man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God"? Under similar temptation - and involving food too - would Adam and Eve say the same thing to the serpent, that what GOD says is their source of life, not food? Would they, in other words, put their relationship with God first, like Jesus did?

That was the ultimate question, so God, just like any man contemplating marriage to a woman, wants to know if humans are into this marriage covenant as much as he is. He wants to know if his love for them, expressed in his great desire to have them join him in the great adventure and provide for them along the way, is enough for them to love him in return, which they would express in helping him build his kingdom HIS way. And his way was so easy to understand too, because it was based on their own relationship as husband and wife, with him as the husband and humans as the wife. No wonder Jesus was so adamant in Matthew 19 about human marriage being the way it was in the beginning, because in human marriage is the secret to how God is building his kingdom.

And it's all tucked away in that one word **covenant**. God makes covenants, because covenants get the point across that what God began and intends to complete through humans is based on a two-way relationship of love. A covenant is personal and the consequences of breaking it, therefore, are severe, as we see in the word "covenant" meaning "to cut," because a covenant between two parties involved the cutting of an animal in half and **both** parties walking between the two halves as a way of saying, "If I don't keep this covenant, I should be sliced in half too." Covenants were that serious and personal.

They were to God too, as we see in **Jeremiah 34** when King Zedekiah broke a covenant he made in verses 8 and 9 to free all the slaves in Jerusalem - according to God's command at Sinai that "Every seventh year each of you must free any fellow Hebrew who has sold himself to you" (14). When the king went back on his word and allowed people to take all their slaves back again (11), God's reaction in **verse 18** was terse: "The men who have violated my covenant (of freeing all slaves every 7th year), and have not fulfilled the terms of the covenant they made before me (of freeing their slaves in Jerusalem that year), **I will treat like the calf they cut in two** and then walked between its pieces." For breaking his covenant, and theirs, God will slice them up like the calf was sliced up.

Notice how God treats the covenant the king made just as seriously and personally as the covenant he made with Israel at Mount Sinai. So when Zedekiah made that covenant at the beginning of Jeremiah 34 to free all the slaves in Jerusalem it was as binding as the Old Covenant itself. If Zedekiah had viewed his covenant that way too, therefore, he would never have broken it, because covenants to God are that serious - and personal. Once a covenant is made there is no going back, and that applies as much to covenants we humans make as it does to the covenants God makes.

Zedekiah never understood that about covenants, however, which tells me he didn't take marriage very seriously either, because it's marriage that gets the point across about covenants. As God explained right from the beginning in Genesis 2, when male and female marry they become one flesh, meaning they are inseparable. You can't pry them apart any more than you can separate paints after mixing them together. That's how binding their relationship is, and it's made that way by God himself. As Jesus said in **Matthew 19:6** it is GOD who joins husband and wife together, so it really is a covenant that **God himself makes** between the two of them. And why does he do that? Because a covenant in which two parties are inseparable and utterly committed to each other - as husband and wife are in marriage - is the perfect picture of the marriage covenant God made with all of us in Genesis.

With that picture in mind, then - given to us by God in human marriage - we have the wonderful assurance that God will provide whatever husbands and wives need to keep their marriages firmly bound in love and commitment. And how vital that assurance becomes when we also see in Genesis 3 how God's plan for this planet fell apart when that husband/wife relationship of love going both ways between God and humans did **not** exist.

It is only when we see God as our husband and ourselves as his wife that his Kingdom on this Earth grows. But Israel, like King Zedekiah, never grasped that, the result being **Jeremiah 31:32**, that “they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them.” They never got the point that **God being a husband to them** was the relationship he had with them and the relationship they had with him. So they never got the point that as their husband God would provide whatever they needed as his wife to become wonderful instruments in his hands for spreading his Kingdom over all the Earth, just as he would have for Adam and Eve. And because Israel and the Jews never got that point they never became part of God’s big adventure and they ended up as powerless slaves in a foreign land instead.

But it was in that foreign land that one man, Daniel, did get the point. He’d been reading Jeremiah too, and when it hit him in Jeremiah that God had actually predicted their slavery and why it had happened, he prayed in **Daniel 9:4**, “O Lord, the great and awesome God, who **keeps his covenant of love** with all who love him and obey his commands.”

This is where Daniel begins in his agony of realizing why they were in such a mess. It all went back to that “**covenant of love**” God had made with them. And it was obvious that God had done HIS part as a loving husband to Israel, in providing for them, and in protecting, leading and guiding them. And the times when Israel and the Jews had “loved God and obeyed his commands” **in return** God had given them enormous influence among the surrounding nations. The Kingdom of God had grown when that covenant of love **went both ways**.

So in answering the question as to why God made covenants, it’s because in his covenants God reveals himself and his plan and how he’s going about fulfilling it. It’s in a marriage relationship with humans, a covenant of love, in which he fulfills the role of husband and we fulfill the role of wife with love flowing both ways - and that’s how his kingdom grows.

Israel, unfortunately, was unable to fulfill her wifely role, but Jesus came to fulfill it for her by following God’s instructions exactly and trusting him. And in so doing a **new covenant of love** was opened up between Christ and the Church, which again was **patterned on human marriage**, as Paul points out in Ephesians 5:25-32. So the plan is no different now than it was in Genesis, only this time God has made it possible for us to fulfill our wifely role, creating the two-way relationship with God that enables his kingdom to grow. And it’s in our experience of that happening in the **Church** that we now have a **fifth proof** of God’s existence - and Church too, very conveniently, begins with the letter ‘C’....