

God's Covenants

Part 2 – Restoring what was lost in Genesis 3

Part 1 in this series took a stab at answering the question, “WHY did God make covenants?” To ask that question in the first place one has to believe that God, in some extraordinary way, involves himself directly with us humans by making covenants with us. And that surely has to stir something inside us, that the great God of the universe actually made personal promises to us humans that we can literally experience being fulfilled. Here’s a way, then, to really prove God exists by asking the simple question: “What promises did God make in his covenants, and did they happen?” And we can include the New Covenant in that too, because according to Scripture the New Covenant and all its promises are in operation right now, so are those promises happening, and are they happening in our OWN experience as well?

And that’s a challenge if ever there was one, because we’re opening ourselves up to whether God’s purpose for creating us is actually happening in our own lives - and we’re faced with a real and tangible way of finding out too. All we need do is look at God’s covenants, because it’s in those covenants that God shows us exactly what is supposed to be happening in our human lives and why. The “why” part is simple, that God wants his “glory and goodness,” as Peter phrases in **2 Peter 1:3**, to spread throughout this Earth. But it’s the **means by which** he’s fulfilling that purpose that makes it real for us, because he’s doing it through a **marriage relationship** with us humans.

And how do we know that? Well, it’s mentioned several times in the **covenant** God made with Israel. God said he was “a husband to them” (Jeremiah 31:32), “I am married to you” (Jeremiah 3:14), “your Maker is your husband” (Isaiah 54:5), and Daniel called God’s relationship with Israel a “covenant of love” (Daniel 9:4). And in the New Covenant it’s still a marriage relationship, between Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5:25-32, 2 Corinthians 11:2).

The idea of a marriage relationship with God is not so hard to understand either, because God made us male and female for the purpose of a marriage relationship with each other. And it’s been that way right from the beginning of our human history, as Jesus made clear in Matthew 19:4-6.

Marriage, therefore, becomes a supremely important part of God's plan for us humans, because it helps us grasp the relationship God has with us and the relationship we have with him. It is exactly like that of husband and wife, where God plays the role of husband and we play the role of wife. If we're unsure, therefore, of what the roles of husband and wife in human marriage are supposed to be, all we need do is look at the role God plays as husband to Israel in the Old Testament, and the role he wishes his wife Israel would play in return.

And to God it's all about total commitment, with love flowing both ways, because this is what he set up from the very beginning in Genesis as the PRIMARY means of fulfilling his plan on this Earth. It was **love** that made him want to share his plan with humans, and love that made him create us in his image to equip us to play a part in his plan. And clearly this was something God was totally **committed** to as well, because when Adam and Eve did not play their part in the covenant God did not give up on them. But that's what God means by "covenant." It's all about love and commitment, to get the point across that there is **no other way for his plan to succeed other than covenant love and commitment flowing both ways between him and us** - just as there's no other way for a human marriage to succeed other than love and commitment flowing both ways between husband and wife.

The great goal God has for us humans, then - that he's covenanted with us to fulfill - is to create that love and commitment in us. Or as Peter phrases it in **2 Peter 1:3**, "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness," and **verse 4**, "he has given us his very great and precious promises, SO THAT through them **you may participate in his divine nature.**" And that's crucial because by participating in his divine nature we are then able to covenant a life of love and commitment to God in return. And that's crucial too, because it is only by us sharing GOD'S divine nature of love and commitment that the Earth under the care of God and humans can flourish.

So this is exactly what God offered Adam and Eve in the Tree of Life. It would have given them "everything" **they** needed "for life and godliness" too, so they too could "participate in God's divine nature." The Tree of Life, therefore, would have given them the same covenant love and commitment to God that God had for them, and that way God's plan could have happily kicked into action with humans playing their part perfectly as the loving, committed wife.

Instead, however, humans wanted to play the role of husband.

We see that in Adam and Eve wanting to eat the fruit off the OTHER tree, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. And what did that tree represent? Well, the serpent gave us a clue when he told the pair of them in **Genesis 3:5**, that if they ate off that tree “you will **be like God**, knowing good and evil.” And God did not deny that either, because in **verse 22** “God said, ‘The man has now **become like one of us**, knowing good and evil.’”

So, instead of humans taking on God’s divine nature, they chose instead the tree that represented God’s **role**. They wanted to be “like God” and take on HIS role. They wanted to be the husband in the relationship, not the wife. At which point God cut off access to the Tree of Life, which is interesting, because it meant that humans from that point on could not share in his divine nature.

And that was tragic, because it was only by Adam and Eve sharing in God’s divine nature that would enable his plan to go ahead. Without the divine love and commitment they needed to fulfill their role as the wife in God’s plan, the whole plan of God and humans working together to make the Earth flourish came to a grinding halt.

So the two trees made it clear that God is more than willing to share his divine nature, which the Tree of Life represented, but not his role, which the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil represented. The choice, therefore, was clear. Was it God’s divine nature they wanted, or his role? And since Adam and Eve represent all of us, that’s the choice we’re all faced with.

And this is where an understanding of God’s covenants comes in, because God’s covenants are as much about **playing our roles correctly** as they are about sharing the divine nature of love and commitment. And that’s not difficult for us to understand, because God created marriage for male and female humans where the same principle applies. A happy, successful marriage depends on mutual love and commitment - but it also depends on both husband and wife playing their respective roles. And in God’s design of male and female each plays an obvious role. The design of a woman’s body, for instance, clearly identifies her role as child-bearer. And a man is obviously built to be the provider.

It’s interesting, then, that when Adam and Eve decided they wanted to be like God and take on his role, the first thing that entered their minds was to hide their bodies, blurring the difference between male and female, so that even their **roles** as husband and wife would lose their importance too.

What we have in Genesis, therefore, is what God had in mind originally for the successful execution of his plan. It was a marriage covenant with Adam and Eve involving the acting out of specific roles and a relationship of love and commitment - on both God's part and theirs.

We then get to see what happens when Adam and Eve do not like the idea of God being the husband in this great plan of his. One has to ask why they didn't like it, when God, like a good husband, had promised in Genesis to provide everything they needed, and the whole creation was theirs to discover and enjoy - and with God always being on hand for consultation and guidance too. But independence from God, and even independence from each other - as we see in Eve not consulting God OR her husband when tempted by the serpent - is what they preferred instead. So God confronts all three of them - Adam, Eve, and the serpent - and he explains what will now happen to them as a result of their deliberate or deluded rejection of the covenant he'd made with humans that would have spread his glory and goodness all through creation.

To the SERPENT, first, he said, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers," **Genesis 3:15**. What the serpent and all those it spawns will now face is a constant battle with humans that they think they can win. BUT, **verse 15**, the woman's offspring "will crush your head" while the serpent's offspring "will (only) strike his heel." It's an amazing prediction, made at the very beginning of human history, that evil will do great damage to humans in an attempt to wreck God's purpose, but a human will arise that will strike a death blow to evil so that humans win in the end. It illustrates yet again the power of what God means by the word "covenant," because it's **what God covenanted with humans here in Genesis that decides the outcome of human history**, not evil. So evil may look like it's winning, but God assured us right from the beginning that his covenant purpose for humans will not be thwarted.

To the WOMAN, next, God predicted she would have pain bearing children, **verse 16**, and "Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you."

This is enlightening, because when it's put in the context of God's covenant in Genesis involving **both roles and relationships**, we see here that God strikes at both. The woman's role, for instance, was to bear children, which should have been a huge pleasure for her, because it was through her children that God's glory and goodness would spread throughout creation. That was God's intention in Genesis 1:28, that every child born would play a part in furthering his plan.

But that would not be happening from now on, because Eve's desire to be like God and take on **his** role (rather than hers) had cut her children off from the Tree of Life. And that was awful, because the only way her children could play a part in furthering God's plan was by sharing in God's divine nature, which the Tree of Life would have given them. It would have given her children the love and commitment to God they needed for his covenant promises to continue in full force through them - but now they'd have no meaningful part in God's plan. God had warned them, though, that they'd die if they ate off the wrong tree, and here we see it in **the death of purpose**, because humans from this point on would have no purpose in life, other than living out a physical existence and dying.

You wonder why Eve bothered having children at all, then, when she knew that evil could easily do to them what it had done to her, and now her children's lives would be meaningless and empty too.

But that's the sorrow all mothers have suffered ever since, having to watch their children get sucked into a system that has no purpose to it, other than getting what one can out of life and then dying. And how many kids - with huge potential - waste their lives chasing empty dreams, resulting in frustration, loss of hope, broken relationships, mental illness, and even suicide? But with the breaking of God's covenant came death, and here we see it in the **death of the woman's role as mother** as God intended it to be, because no matter how much a mother nurtures or loves her children it will never be enough to recover the role God gave women originally, of giving birth to children who would partake in God's divine nature to expand God's glory and goodness throughout creation.

And God hasn't finished with Eve yet either, because his covenant included roles AND relationships, so it's no surprise that God then added the **death of a woman's relationship with her husband** next. God's original plan for Eve was to equip her perfectly as Adam's co-ruler of the world, by giving her everything that Adam lacked so she could be the perfect, complementary help to him. And then as married male and female in happy relationship together - and as total equals too - they would spread the glory and goodness of God's divine nature to the world through their children.

That was the plan, but now the life of women would pathetically diminish to desperately wanting a husband, and feeling incomplete as a woman without a man - the total **opposite** to what God originally intended, because in Genesis 2:18 God said it was the man who was incomplete without the woman.

But a woman's "desire will be for her husband," **Genesis 3:16**, so from this point on a woman's focus would be on marrying a man to guarantee her security and to feel valued, as if men were now God or had God-like qualities. But women have learnt through centuries of hard and often bitter experience that men without God's divine nature don't make good gods at all. And God made sure of it too, because he also predicted in verse 16 that men would "rule over" their wives. So instead of treating their wives as essential equals, men would view women as either slaves or competition, and in their frustration at not understanding women, men, as we so often hear today, resort to humiliating their wives and domestic violence. How different life turns out to be for many wives, therefore, compared to all those rosy dreams and high expectations they had as brides on their wedding day.

God then turned his attention to the MAN with a terrible curse that would be the death of his role as father, and the death of his relationship with his wife too, because from now on a man's life would be pathetically diminished to the "painful toil" (verse 17) of working most of his waking hours just to put food on the family table. His constant worry would be looking after his family and always having a job, but his job would wear him down and burn him out, and leave him with little energy and time for his wife and kids, and at the end of that constant struggle only death to look forward to as well (verse 19).

Compare that to what God had in mind for the man in Genesis 2. God had given him a guaranteed job as his top man in making the Garden of Eden flourish, and from what the man learnt there under God's guidance about botany, biology, geology, animal husbandry, agriculture and the working of metals and minerals, he would then take that knowledge and expertise outside the Garden of Eden to begin the process of making the entire creation flourish. And right alongside the man would be his equally capable and equally interested wife, and together they would share their knowledge and new joys and discoveries with their children, with never a fear of where the next meal was coming from, and never spending hours away from each other. And from that happy, functioning family life of theirs a society of culture and creativity would develop that would bring joy, delight and a wonderful feeling of accomplishment, and most of all a thoroughly enjoyable and loving relationship with God.

But God took all that away in Genesis 3, and made sure that we humans could never recapture what we lost too, because he struck right at the heart of what makes a society successful: THE FAMILY.

Try as hard as we might, then - and I'm sure many families really do try - we cannot fulfill God's purpose for life, marriage and family, because we chose the wrong tree and did not receive God's divine nature. And without that nature God's purpose through us humans, of spreading his glory and goodness to the whole Earth, cannot happen. We are stuck instead with nearly half of all marriages failing, confusion about gender roles and gender identity, a growing epidemic of depressed young people, and no interest in God's reasons for why we're alive, why we get married, or why we have children.

Wouldn't it be great, then, to have a second chance at the two trees, now that we understand what they picture, and get it right this time? Well, this is where Jesus, the gospel, and the New Covenant become so practical because they're all about giving us just that, a second chance. When God made that original covenant in Genesis he was severe in his penalties on us for breaking it, yes, but **he didn't cancel the covenant**. His purpose for humanity, marriage and family still stands, because when God makes a covenant he sticks to it.

So he sent Jesus as a human to do what we had clearly proved from the beginning of our history we couldn't do. Jesus lived the role in God's covenant that Adam and Eve did not live, and he lived the relationship of love and commitment flowing back to God too. So in both role and relationship Jesus played our part in the covenant, so that the covenant in Genesis could continue in full force again.

But the REASON Jesus was able to live our role and our relationship with God was because he **did** have God's divine nature, which gave him "everything **he** needed for life and godliness." So having fulfilled our human part in God's original covenant, he was now able to do what Adam and Eve weren't able to do, which was start the process of **spreading God's glory and goodness** throughout the Earth. And that's where the CHURCH comes in, because it's in those who believe Jesus got us back on track to fulfilling God's Genesis covenant - and who want to be part of it - that God's divine nature now resides, just as it did in Jesus. And that means, of course, that we can now spread God's glory and goodness wherever we go, just as Adam and Eve could have done through their children.

And that's the great promise of the New Covenant that we can literally experience happening, not only in our ability to fulfill our role and relationship with God, but also in the roles and relationship of love and commitment we have with each other in marriage, which is just what God intended because human marriage is still the best picture we have of our marriage covenant with God.