

ENDTIME ISSUES NEWSLETTER No. 143

“The Marriage Covenant”

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Marriage is in crisis today. Not only Hollywood movie stars, but people from all walks of life, including Seventh-day Adventists, are affected by divorce. There is hardly an Adventist family that, directly or indirectly, does not know the pain of divorce.

When I look over congregations on Sabbath morning from the vantage point of the pulpit, it saddens my heart to see in many churches single mothers outnumbering married couples. Could it be that we as an Adventist church are partly responsible for the increasing number of broken Adventist families? Could it be that in our concern to teach the sanctity and sacredness of the Sabbath we have neglected to help our members understand and accept the sanctity and sacredness of marriage?

Acceptance of Marriage as a Social Contract

Christians in general and Adventists in particular, need help today to resist what may be called the “desacralization” of marriage. The message of the media is that marriage is no longer a permanent, sacred covenant, witnessed and guaranteed by God Himself, but rather a social contract that can be easily terminated. The goal of marriage in our society is not to achieve a permanent, spiritual union but to enjoy mutual satisfaction. If one or both partners no longer feel satisfied by the performance of their spouses, they feel free to terminate their relationships and to establish new ones. Tabloids glamorize the latest break ups and the new hook ups of movie stars and millionaires.

The growing acceptance of the secular view of marriage by Christian churches is influencing Christians, including Adventists, to believe that divorce is a guiltless and at times proper procedure. This perception contributes to the rising divorce rate among Christians. The Biblical concept of a lifelong, permanent bond between a husband and a wife is quickly becoming an outdated, foreign concept. More and more couples enter the

marriage relationship believing that it is terminable. They interpret the promise “Till death do us part” as meaning “Till disagreement or other interests do us part.”

Recovery of Marriage as a Sacred Covenant

To resist this societal trend which is undermining the foundation of marriage, we must recover and reaffirm the Biblical view of marriage as a sacred and permanent covenant. Declaring our permanent commitment to each other not only on the wedding day, but periodically throughout our lives (especially on the wedding anniversary and each other’s birthday) will help us to preserve our marriage covenant.

A covenant marriage is not a relational prison locking a man and a woman into a permanent relationship. It is rather, to quote Paul Stevens, “an elastic link between two hearts. When they move apart, a tug reminds them they belong. Or, a covenant is a net beneath two trapeze artists. It is a risky business, this high-wire stunt, and they will undoubtedly fall sometime. But the safety net beneath them holds”¹

To reduce the divorce rate, Christian churches must propagate through all their resources the Biblical view of marriage as a sacred, permanent covenant. The acceptance of this view will lead to the rejection of divorce as a violation of God’s intent for marriage.

Sabbath School Quarterly (Jan, Feb, March 2006)

The concern over the increasing number of broken Adventist homes, has motivated our General Conference Sabbath School Department to devote the 2006 Sabbath School Quarterly (January, February, and March) to the study of “Families and the Family of God.” As I looked through the 12 lessons, I found valuable discussion of important aspects of marriage and family life. What I found missing is at least one lesson dealing with the biblical view of the sanctity and permanence of the marriage covenant. Apparently the authors felt that such biblical teaching could make some members feel uncomfortable, especially those who have gone or are going through divorce. Thus, they may have chosen to leave out this unpopular biblical teaching.

Yet, the foundation of a successful and lasting marriage is to be found in what the Bible describes as a “covenant.” Malachi explains to unfaithful Jews that “the Lord was a witness to the covenant between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant” (Mal 2:14).

The intent of this newsletter is to fill the gap of the current Sabbath School Quarterly, by offering a biblical view of marriage as a sacred covenant. The essay is taken from chapter 2 of my book *The Marriage Covenant*. The chapter is entitled “How to Live Out the Marriage Covenant.”

This book has helped many troubled marriages. Recently a lady who had lived separated from her husband for several months, wrote to me to express her gratitude for the way the book helped her husband to come back. After reading and underlining the book, she mailed it to her husband, hoping that he would read it. A few weeks later he called her to inform her that he had read the book and now he was ready to be reunited to her.

Sometime ago, Dr. Laura Schlessinger, a popular radio talk show host, who receives upward of 60,000 phone calls a day from listeners seeking her counsel, asked permission to post *The Marriage Covenant* in her website. She told me that she found the book to be one of the best biblical study on marriage. If you do not have a copy, we will be glad to mail you one. You will find the information on how to order the book at the end of this newsletter.

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list the email addresses of people who have no time or interest to read our analysis of current events from a Biblical perspective.

VIDEO-TAPING OF THE LECTURE ON *THE MARK AND NUMBER OF THE BEAST*

Five months of dedicated research on *The Mark and Number of the Beast*, came to a happy conclusion on Wednesday evening, February 1, 7:00 to 9:30 p. m., when a professional crew video-taped my powerpoint lecture at the Andrews University Towers Auditorium. It was a marathon lecture lasting two hours and twenty minutes, during which I used 175 slides to illustrate the historical interpretations and contemporary relevance of this intriguing Bible prophecy about the end-time battle over worship.

The reception and response of the audience surpassed my fondest expectations. The attentive looks of the people fire up my delivery with unprecedented enthusiasm. I did not see a single person leaving during the lengthy lecture. At the end of the lecture over 200 persons ordered the DVD album with the live recording they had enjoyed.

Last Sabbath, February 4, 2006, I was invited to share a condensed version of this powerpoint lecture on the mark of the beast during Sabbath School time at the La Sierra University Church. Again, the response was overwhelming. On Saturday evening hundreds of people placed an order for the new album containing both one CD-ROM disk with the powerpoint slides and DVD disk with the live lecture. The complete album with both the CD-ROM and the DVD, is scheduled to be released on Monday, February 13, 2006.

If you live in the Chicago area, you can enjoy a shorten version of this popular powerpoint study this coming Sabbath, February 11, 2006 at the Burr Ridge SDA Church. This is the church that our son, Gianluca and his wife Silvia, attend regularly with their three children. The church meets at the Lord of Life Lutheran Church, located at 725 75th Street, Darien, Illinois 60559. This will be a special Sabbath for our whole family, since, God willing, all our children and grandchildren will be present for the dedication of our latest grandson, Enzo, a supersize baby born to Silvia and Gianluca.

Significance of this Study on the Mark of the Beast

The significance of this study on the mark of the Beast of Revelation 13, stems from the need to expose the misleading identification of the number 666 with the numerical value of the letters of the pope's title *Vicarius Filii Dei*—Vicar of the Son of God. This interpretation was officially promoted for the first time in the Adventist Church by Uriah Smith in his book *The United States in Prophecy*, published in 1884.

Being editor for 50 years of *The Adventist Review*, Uriah Smith exercised an enormous influence in the formulation of our prophetic interpretations. His identification of the number 666 with *Vicarius Filii Dei*, was largely based upon the stories of two persons who claimed to have seen this pope's title inscribed on papal tiaras while visiting Rome. The stories are discredited by glaring inaccuracies discussed in the live DVD and the CD-ROM version of the lecture.

The fact is that of the 13 papal tiaras in existence, only two of them have an inscription, but none of the two inscriptions resemble the pope's title *Vicarius Filii Dei*. This fact has been known to our Adventist church for at least a century.

Already in 1905, Elder Chas Everson, an American Adventist missionary serving in Rome, Italy, was asked to conduct a most thorough investigation of the papal tiaras. He was privileged to examine at close range, not only the tiaras in St. Peter's Treasury (which I have seen on several occasions), but even those tiaras kept in the dressing room of the pope. In a fascinating article entitled "The Inscription on the Pope's Tiara," he sadly admits: "We were disappointed in not finding the object of our search; for the inscription *Vicarius Filii Dei* was nowhere to be found inscribed upon the tiaras, as the accompanying photographs show very plainly" (*Adventist Review*, July 27, 1905, p. 10).

A Stern Condemnation by *Ministry*

In spite of this information from a reliable source, some zealous Adventists designed fraudulent tiaras with the famous inscription *Vicarius Filii Dei*. The pictures are shown in the CD-ROM and DVD versions of my lecture.

LeRoy Froom, Editor of *Ministry*, strongly protested against the use of fraudulent tiaras in evangelistic meeting. He wrote: “In the name of truth and honesty this journal protests against any such use by any member of the Ministerial Association of Seventh-day Adventist denomination (our worker body), of which *The Ministry* is the official organ. Truth does not need fabrication to aid or suppress it. Its very nature precludes any manipulation or duplicity. We cannot afford to be party to any fraud. The reflex action upon our souls should be a sufficient deterrent. We must never use a quotation or a picture merely because it sounds or looks impressive. We must honor the truth and meticulously observe the principle of honesty in the handling of evidence under all circumstances” (*The Ministry*, November 1948, p. 35).

Froom’s stern warnings were soon forgotten. In recent years the popular *REVELATION SEMINARS*, conducted in many parts of the world even by lay Adventist members, have contributed significantly to popularize the numerical identification of the 666 with the pope’s title *Vicarius Filii Dei*, allegedly inscribed in the papal tiara. This explains why many Adventists have strongly condemned Dr. Angel Rodriguez, the author of the Sabbath School Lesson of June 1-7, 2002, for departing from the traditional numeric interpretation of 666, proposing instead the symbolic interpretation of that number in the Bible.

Some of the bitter email messages I have received, go as far as accusing Dr. Rodriguez of being a “Jesuit spy.” I am all-too familiar with this accusation, often attached to my name. What these accusative Adventists ignore is that Dr. Rodriguez has been serving for many years as the Director of the Biblical Research Institute, which is the doctrinal watchdog of the Seventh-day Adventist church. He is deeply committed to uphold the historic teachings of the Adventist Church. His unpleasant task is to warn anyone who departs from Adventist teachings, without a compelling, convincing reason.

Considerable pressure has been placed upon me to label the symbolic interpretation of 666, proposed by the Sabbath School Lesson and defended in recent Adventist studies, as a private view of a few scholars,

who do not represent the belief of the Adventist Church at large. As I was leaving home for the video-taping of my lecture, an influential Adventist called me, urging me to inform the audience that the symbolic interpretation of 666 presented in the Sabbath School Lesson, is the private view of Dr. Rodriguez, not the position of the Adventist church at large. The problem with such a strategy, is the failure to recognize that about 250 church leaders from all the world Divisions, examine and approve the Sabbath School Quarterly before its publication. The reason is that the Sabbath School Quarterly is an official church publication, used for teaching Bible truths to our worldwide membership.

What Makes this Study Significant?

Were you to ask me, “What makes your study different from the recent research of Adventist scholars?” My answer would be, “The difference is found not in the content but in the presentation of the material.” I have spent five months attempting to understand and summarize the research done by competent and dedicated Adventist scholars. More important still I have spent countless hours looking for pictures of documents, popes, tiaras, kings, Reformers, Adventist pioneers, books, Adventist scholars, all of whom are related to the history of the numeric and symbolic interpretations of this intriguing prophecy about the mark and number of the beast.

What I have attempted to do in the second part of the lecture, is to build upon the recent research of outstanding Adventist scholars like Jon Paulien, Ph. D., Ranko Stefanovich, Ph. D., Hans La Rondelle, Ph. D., Beatrice Neal, Ph. D., and Angel Rodriguez, Ph. D. These scholars offer valuable insights into the symbolic meanings of the cryptic number 666. I have largely adopted and expanded their insights, especially by examining the symbolic use of numbers in Revelation.

Perhaps the major contribution of this study is to help believers appreciate more fully the centrality of the prophecy of the Mark and Number of the Beast, not only in the book of Revelation, but also in the final conflict over worship. This prophecy describes with dramatic imageries the final diabolical attempt to enforce false worship through the unholy trinity represented by a dragon, sea-beast, and land-beast. The latter is referred to also as “false prophet” (Rev 19:20).

Global Scope of False Worship

John's prophecy about the mark and number of the beast, calls for believers to recognize, not external barcodes, biochips, or papal titles, but the global nature of false worship promoted by a variety of religions and ideologies, including Catholicism, secular humanism, materialism, Buddhism, Hinduism, African indigenous deities, Sikhism, Spiritism, Shintoism, etc. The common denominator of these pagan religions is salvation through human efforts, rather than through a divine provision of grace.

We are living at the very end of time when Satan is intensifying his efforts to lead mankind away from the true worship of God, into the false worship of himself. Like a monster with many tentacles Satan is using different strategies to win the battle of worship. His goal is to lead mankind away from the true worship of God into the false worship of himself.

Revelation reminds us that "The Devil has come down to you with great wrath because he knows that his time is short" (Rev 12:12). This is his last chance to place his mark, name, and number upon people, that is, to lead mankind in open rebellion against God by enforcing idolatrous worship.

May God grant to each one of us spiritual discernment ("This call for wisdom" – Rev 13:18) to recognize the deceptive ways in which Satan is trying to win our allegiance to himself. May we seek every day a larger measure of the Holy Spirit to protect us against the end time deceptions of false worship and to enable us to live in obedience to God's commandments, so that we may receive the Seal of God's protection in the challenging times in which we live.

Enjoy this Timely Study in the Comfort of Your Living Room

Now that my hard work is over, it is time for you to enjoy this timely study in the comfort of your living room. The DVD recording makes it possible for everybody to benefit from this study. Just place the DVD in your DVD player, and enjoy a two hours passionate presentation of the intriguing prophecy on the mark and number of the beast.

People unfamiliar with computers complained that the CD-ROM version of the lecture with 195 still-slides and script, was of no use to them. They urged me to make a live recording of this study. I can only thank God for granting me the wisdom and strength to produce a live recording of this study.

Your personal effort to share this recording with pastors, teachers, and evangelists, is much appreciated. These persons are often so busy, that they do not have time to benefit from the recent Adventist research. Thank you for helping them to update themselves with this valuable information.

At the end of this newsletter you will find the information on how to order this new DVD/CD-ROM Album on *The Mark and Number of the Beast*.

ANNOUNCEMENTS AT THE END OF THE NEWSLETTERS

A detailed description of the special offers on goods and services is provided at the end of this newsletter. Here is just a brief listing of the announcements placed at the end.

1. INFORMATION ON HOW TO ORDER *THE MARRIAGE COVENANT* OR THE COMPLETE SET OF THE 17 BOOKS for only \$150.00, instead of \$405.00. See the details at the end of this newsletter.

2. SPECIAL OFFER ON THE NEW ALBUM WITH BOTH THE CD-ROM AND THE DVD LIVE RECORDING of the lecture on *The Number and Mark of the Beast*. The regular price for the two disks is \$100.00, the introductory offer is only \$50.00. See the details at the end of this newsletter.

3. SPECIAL OFFER ON THE PACKAGE OF ALL MY RECORDINGS CONSISTING OF 5 ALBUMS, including the newly released DVD/CD-ROM album on *The Mark and the Number of the Beast*. The regular price for the package of the 5 albums is \$500.00, but the **SPECIAL ONE-TIME OFFER IS ONLY \$100.00**. See the details at the end of this newsletter.

4. CALENDAR OF UPCOMING WEEKEND SEMINARS.

5. SPECIAL OFFER ON PROF. JON PAULIEN'S 5 ALBUMS with 60 CD DISKS, containing 120 lectures that explain verse by verse the book of Revelation. See the details at the end of this newsletter.

6. SPECIAL OFFER ON PROF. JON PAULIEN'S NEWLY RELEASED CD-ROM WITH HIS BOOKS AND ARTICLES. Special introductory offer for \$35.00, instead of \$50.00. See the details at the end of this newsletter.

7. HITACHI PROJECTORS: Last week HITACHI offered me a special overstock discount on 25 projectors, **3200 LUMENS FOR ONLY \$1995.00.** This is the lowest price ever received for this projector. See the details at the end of this newsletter or call me at 269-471-2915

8. TOSHIBA NEW TECRA A4 LAPTOPS: Last week TOSHIBA offered me the new **TECRA A4** at 35% discount. The new model is scheduled to arrive from China next week, on February 13. See the details at the end of this newsletter.

9. REMOTE PRESENTER: The smallest and most powerful REMOTE powerpoint presenter by Honeywell. See the details at the end of this newsletter.

10. DA-LITE SCREENS for your church at 30% discount. See the details at the end of this newsletter.

“The Marriage Covenant”

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The concept of the marriage covenant is central to the Biblical view of the relationship between God and His people and between marital partners. From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible intertwines God's marriage covenant to His people with our marriage covenant to our spouses.

Human marriages are meant to be like God's marriage covenant to His people in purpose and permanence. In Jesus Christ, God says to us, "I take you." We are free to consent to become covenant partners by responding, "We take you." In a sense our salvation is nuptial. It begins when we say "I do" to Christ's marriage proposal. By accepting Christ's marriage proposal, we become engaged or betrothed to Him in this present life. "I betrothed you to Christ," Paul says, "to present you as a pure bride to her one husband" (2 Cor 11:2). At the end of history, we will experience the complete union with Christ seen in the Scripture as the consummation of marriage celebrated with the "marriage supper of the lamb" (Rev 19:9).

The marriage covenant provides us with a clue to understanding the heart of God. It helps us understand what God has done, is doing, and will do for us. It tells us that God's covenant love is a love "that will not let us go." By helping us understand the purpose and permanence of God's relationship with us, the metaphor of the marriage covenant helps us also to understand the purpose and permanence of our marital relationships. The fact that human marriages have a divine pattern provides us with a holy help in understanding how to live out our marriage covenant.

Objective of this Essay

This essay explores the practical implications of the Biblical view of marriage as a sacred and permanent covenant witnessed and guaranteed by God. In the first part we shall see how the concept of marriage as a sacred covenant is not just an abstract Biblical truth or principle but the only real and solid foundation upon which a permanent and happy marriage can be built.

In the second part, we shall examine the kind of commitment that characterizes a marriage covenant: namely, a *total, exclusive, continuing* and *growing* commitment.

In the third part we shall take a closer look at the obligations of the marriage covenant in the light of the Ten Commandments. We shall see that the principles of the Ten Commandments which express our covenant commitment to God can also serve to manifest our covenant commitment to our spouses. The overall objective of the chapter is to provide practical suggestions on how to live out the marriage covenant.

**PART ONE:
THE IMPORTANCE OF A MARRIAGE COVENANT**

The Foundation of Marriage. Marriage is like a house. If it is to last, it needs a solid foundation. The bedrock upon which the foundation of marriage must rest is an unconditional, mutual covenant that allows no external or internal circumstances to “put asunder” the marital union that God Himself has established. This covenantal commitment and conviction that God has united our lives in holy matrimony give us reasons to believe that He will enable us to stay together, even when our marriages appear to be “for worse.” It is this covenant foundation that will motivate us to seek God’s help in trying again to make successes of our marriages, even when our needs are unfulfilled and our relationships seem to be sterile or sour.

It is this covenantal foundation that is often lacking in Christian marriages today. “What is missing in most marriages today,” perceptively observes Paul Stevens, “is what the Bible identifies as the heart of marriage: a covenant. Everything is superstructure. Understanding expectations, developing good communication (especially sexual), gaining skills in conflict resolution, discovering appropriate roles or creating new ones, making our marriages fun and free, becoming spiritual friends and sharing a ministry--these are the walls, the roof, the wiring, the plumbing and the heating. They are essential to the whole. But if there is no foundation, they will collapse with the whole building.”¹

The foundation ensuring the stability and permanence of marriage is the mutual commitment of a couple to cleave to one another “for better and for worse.” The Biblical concept of a lifelong, permanent bond between a husband and a wife is quickly becoming an outdated, foreign concept. More and more couples enter the marriage relationship believing that it is terminable. They interpret the promise “Till death do us part” as meaning “Till disagreement or other interests do us part.”

To resist this societal trend which is undermining the foundation of marriage, we must recover and reaffirm the Biblical view of marriage as a sacred and permanent covenant. Declaring our permanent commitment to each other not only on the wedding day, but periodically throughout our lives (especially on the wedding anniversary and each other’s birthday) will help us to preserve our marriage covenant.

A covenant marriage is not a relational prison locking a man and a woman into a permanent relationship. It is rather, to quote Paul Stevens again, “an elastic link between two hearts. When they move apart, a tug reminds them they belong. Or, a covenant is a net beneath two trapeze artists. It is a risky business, this high-wire stunt, and they will undoubtedly fall sometime. But the safety net beneath them holds.”²

A Covenant of Faith

A marriage covenant is a covenant of faith because no Christian spouse knows for sure how their marriages are going to work out. What spouses *can* know for sure is whether or not they have solemnly committed themselves before God to a lifelong covenantal partnership in which they shall belong together as long as they both shall live. This covenant can only be made by spouses who share a common faith in God and in His ability to work out His purpose in their marriage. Sharing this common faith provides the courage to believe that God will help us to make our marriages work, even when they seems hopelessly doomed.

A Christian couple contemplating marriage needs to determine whether or not they are prepared fully and freely to enter into a lifelong marriage covenant. Discerning covenantal compatibility is more important than determining personal compatibility. When a mutual and strong covenant commitment exists, the possibility of resolving conflicts within marriage also exists. A covenantal marriage is not completely without conflicts. Total commitment to your mate does not eliminate the possibility of tensions, tears, disagreements, impatience, and conflicts. That is the bad news. But the good news is that by the grace of God, no marital conflict is beyond solution. A couple fully committed to God and to one another can rest in the assurance that God will provide the enabling power of His Spirit to resolve conflicts and restore harmony.

There are many people legally married today who have never made a covenantal commitments to their spouses. At the time of their legal marriages, some of them were not emotionally mature enough to solemnly make before God that lifelong covenant commitment. Others may have chosen to retain the idea of divorce in their minds as a last-ditch option. Instead of promising faithfulness to each other “till death do us part,” they pledge to remain together “as long as we both shall love.”

Whatever the original reason may have been for failing to enter into a marriage covenant, now is the time to make such a covenant, even if you are experiencing a good marriage. A refusal to make a marriage covenant indicates a flaw in your commitment to your spouse. That flaw is like a tiny crack that can be fatally widened by sinister forces working to destroy marriage. To avoid such a risk, we must recover and reaffirm the Biblical understanding of marriage as a lifelong sacred covenant, witnessed and guaranteed by God Himself.

A Covenant Under Attack

Four major social forces today are conspiring to undermine the Biblical view of marriage as a sacred covenant, reducing it instead to a temporary social contract governed by civil laws and terminated when it no longer meets the expectations of one or both spouses.

Secularism has caused the loss of the sense of the sacred in various realms of life, including marriage. For example, the Lord's Day is no longer viewed by many Christians as a "holy day" but rather as a "holiday," a day to seek for personal pleasure and profit, rather than for the presence and peace of God. Life is no longer sacred for many people, as over 1,500,000 induced abortions are performed every year in the United States alone, besides the countless number of persons killed everywhere by senseless crimes, drugs and violence. Similarly, marriage is no longer regarded by many as a lifelong, sacred covenant witnessed and guaranteed by God Himself, but rather as a temporary social contract, governed solely by civil laws.

Humanism teaches that marriage is a human and not a divine institution. Its function is to meet a person's needs: social, sexual, emotional, and financial. Accordingly, when such needs are no longer met, the marriage contract can be legitimately terminated.

Selfism tells us that we have the right to reach self-fulfillment, self-sufficiency, and self-development. If marriage becomes a stumbling block to self-actualization, it must be dissolved. Fritz Perls expresses it in this way: "I do my thing, and you do your thing. I am not in this world to live up to your expectations, and you are not in this world to live up to mine. And if by some chance we meet, it's beautiful."³

Relativism in moral issues facilitates the breaking up of marital relationships and the establishing of new ones. A child of humanism and relativism is the “no fault” divorce law which makes the dissolution of marriage so easy that some lawyers advertise their divorce services for less than \$100.00: “All legal fees and services included in one low price.” What a sad commentary on the cheapness of marriage today! What God has united many will put asunder for less than the price of a good suit.

To resist the various social forces which are conspiring to break apart the marriage covenant, reducing it to a temporary relationship of convenience, Christians must recover and reaffirm the Biblical understanding of marriage as a lifelong, sacred covenant, witnessed and guaranteed by God Himself. To help us understand more fully how to live out the marriage covenant, we shall examine first the nature of its commitment and then the ten commandments of the marriage covenant.

PART II: THE COMMITMENT OF A MARRIAGE COVENANT

A marriage covenant is characterized by *total, exclusive, continuing* and *growing commitment*. We shall take a brief look at each of these four basic characteristics.

Total Commitment

To accept marriage as a sacred covenant means first of all to be willing to make a *total commitment* of ourselves to our marriage partners. This is why Paul in Ephesians compares marriage to the relationship of Christ with His church (Eph 5:25-26). Christ’s commitment to us, the church, is so total that He loved us while we were yet unfaithful (Rom 5:8) and gave up His life that we may live (Eph 5:25).

Christ’s total commitment to us, to be with us in life and death, shows us the kind of total commitment upon which Christian marriage is to be founded. It is a commitment based on unrelenting love. It is a love which is “patient and kind; . . . not jealous or boastful; . . . not arrogant or rude; . . . it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. [It is a love that] bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things”

(1 Cor 13: 4-7). It is this loving commitment which makes Christian marriage a sacred and permanent covenant. A Christian married couple is called to enter intimately into the kind of total commitment existing between Christ and His church. Such a commitment makes possible the blending of two lives into an existential union of marital interrelationship where they grow together in loving unity and fidelity.

When Christian couples enter into a marriage covenant, they are committing themselves to maintaining their marital union, no matter what. This total commitment is set forth in the marriage vows: “for better and for worse, for richer and for poorer, in sickness and in health.”

By taking the marriage vows, Christian mates promise to each other what is well expressed by Elizabeth Achteimer: “I will be with you, no matter what happens to us and between us. If you should become blind tomorrow, I will be there. If you achieve no success and attain no status in our society, I will be there. When we argue and are angry, as we inevitably will, I will work to bring us together. When we seem totally at odds and neither of us is having needs fulfilled, I will persist in trying to understand and in trying to restore our relationship. When our marriage seems utterly sterile and going nowhere at all, I will believe that it can work and I will want it to work and I will do my part to make it work. And when all is wonderful and we are happy, I will rejoice over our life together, and continue to strive to keep our relationship growing and strong.”⁴

Such a total commitment is possible only by divine grace. It is God who gives us power to hold fast to our commitment. This is the unseen factor often ignored in marriage manuals. What is true for salvation is also true for a committed marriage: there is both a divine initiative and a human response. As Paul puts it, “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Phil 2:12-13). We must work to achieve total and permanent commitment in our marriages and yet recognize that it is God who is at work in and through us to make this goal possible.

A most marvellous thing about a totally committed marriage is the fact that it is solely a relationship of grace, a relationship in which I do not have to earn my wife’s love constantly because she gives it to me

as a gift. Love is seldom deserved because most of the time we are not lovable. Yet it is given to me, and this gives me acceptance, security, and freedom to act and to plumb all my creativity. This manifestation of unconditional love challenges us to respond by being more loving and lovable.

Exclusive Commitment

To accept marriage as a sacred covenant means also to be willing to make an *exclusive commitment* of ourselves to our marital partners. It means, as the marriage vows put it, “to forsake all others” and “to keep thee only unto her [or him], so long as ye both shall live.” This understanding of the marriage covenant is under severe attack in our sexually permissive society where immoral connotations of illicit sexual acts have been eliminated through the introduction of new “softer” terms. Fornication is now referred to as “premarital sex,” with the emphasis on the “pre” rather than on the “marital.” Adultery is now called “extramarital sex,” implying an additional experience, like an extra professional activity.

A landmark survey of 100,000 women conducted by *Redbook Magazine* and supervised by sociologist Robert Bell of Temple University, indicates that about one third of all married women and almost half (47%) of wage-earning wives reported “having sexual relations with men other than their husbands.”⁵ Considering that men tend to be more promiscuous than women, we can safely assume that the percentage of married men having extramarital relations is even higher.

The prevailing unfaithfulness to marriage vows has led some Christians, including some pastors, to adopt a “live and let live” attitude toward divorce and remarriage. Some Christians assume that God will accept them despite their infidelity to their wives or husbands by divorcing and marrying someone else. To such persons, the church must declare that God is not mocked. Their unfaithfulness to their marriage vows stands under the judgment of the Lord who tells us that the ultimate destiny of the faithless will be eternal destruction: “But as for the cowardly, the *faithless*, the polluted, as for murderers, *fornicators*, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their lot shall be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death” (Rev 21:8).⁶

In view of the prevailing violation of marital vows, as Christians we face today an unprecedented challenge to maintain by God's grace our exclusive commitment to our marriage partners. Exclusive commitment extends beyond the sexual sphere and includes forming relationships with friends or relatives closer than those with our spouses. By taking third parties into the confidences of our marital life, we undermine the exclusiveness of our marital commitments. Ellen White warns that "When a woman relates her family troubles or complaints of her husband to another man, she violates her marriage vows; she dishonors her husband and breaks down the wall erected to preserve the sanctity of the marriage relation; she throws wide open the door and invites Satan to enter with his insidious temptations. This is just as Satan would have it."⁷

Continuing Commitment

To accept marriage as a sacred covenant also means to be willing to make a *continuing commitment* to one's marital partner. Time changes things, including our looks and our feelings. When my fiancée accepted my marriage proposal, I was rather thin with nice wavy hair. Thirty years later I find myself considerably heavier with a shining top. I am thankful to God that the change in my looks has not caused my wife to change her commitment to me. Marital commitment must continue through the changing seasons of our lives. With each change in our lives, our marital commitments must be renewed.

To speak today of a continuing commitment may seem naive when about half of all American marriages are dissolved by divorce or annulment every year.⁸ Yet, to approach marriage with an openness to divorce is to deny the Biblical meaning of the one-flesh, permanent covenantal relationship. In His response to the question raised over divorce, Jesus was unequivocal in affirming that marriage is a continuing, lasting commitment: "What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder" (Matt 19:6; Mark 10:9).

A young couple contemplating marriage needs to consider whether or not both are prepared to make a continuing commitment to one another. But a continuing commitment to our marriage partners is not accomplished once and for all. It must be reaffirmed each day, when we are healthy or sick, wealthy or poor, happy or sad, successful or failing. In all the

changing moods of life, we must determine by God's grace to reaffirm our marriage commitments until death doth us part.

Sometime ago, a woman told me that she had filed for divorce because her feelings toward her husband had changed. She did not feel in love with him anymore. The counsel of Ellen White to such people is to change their dispositions, not their marriage partners: "If your dispositions are not congenial, would it not be for the glory of God for you to change these dispositions?"⁹ The good news of the Gospel is that our feelings and dispositions can be changed through Christ's enabling power (Phil 4:13). Divine grace makse a continuing commitment to marriage not a possibility, but a reality.

Our continuing commitment to our marital partners must rest on our covenantal commitments and not on feelings. David Phypers points out that "when Paul commanded husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church, he understood that love was a decision and not a feeling. No feeling of romantic love could have taken Jesus to the cross, yet he went because he loved us. In the same way we are to love each other whether we like it or not, and in so doing, to fulfill our consent to each other, to be husbands and wives together as long as we both shall live."¹⁰

Growing Commitment

To accept marriage as a sacred covenant means also to experience a *growing commitment* which deepens and matures through life's experiences. The Christian life is a call to grow "to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph 4:13), until we love with the fulness of His love. The same call applies to our marriage relationships. There must be a maturing and deepening of our commitment to each other. When marriage commitment stops growing, it begins to wither away.

Growth in commitment to marriage is not achieved overnight. It is a continuous daily process lasting through the whole course of our married lives. It involves, among other things, following the model of Christ's love for His church by being willing to sacrifice selfish wants for the good of the other, being willing to love even when love is not reciprocated. It involves also accepting unsuspected flaws in the character of our partners and working together to resolve misunderstandings, tensions, or hostilities.

Growth in our marital commitment often takes place through deaths and resurrections. There are times in our marital relationship when communication becomes very difficult, if not impossible. Hurt, hostility, and resentment seem to prevail. Yet, as we learn by God's grace to put to death and to bury all such ill-feeling, out of that dying, new life comes in our relationship. "If a marriage is growing," writes Thomas N. Hart, "it is growing through deaths and resurrections. If it is not growing, it might be because there is a refusal to die the deaths that have to be died and seek in them the direction in which new life is breaking. If Jesus for fear, had refused to die, he would not know the kind of life he now knows as risen Lord, nor would we have the gift of his Spirit."¹¹

The sad reality is that many marriages do not grow in maturity and love. Rather than expending energies to keep their relationships improving, some marriage partners settle down into a dull drum routine. To find a way out of such dullness, some partners seek for excitement and growth in extramarital relationships. In so doing, however, they only add misery to their lives by violating their marriage covenant and by putting asunder the marital unity formed by God.

The solution to a dull marriage is to be found not by seeking excitement outside marriage, but by working together to enrich the relationship. This involves improving our communication skills by learning to express inner feelings, by listening to the thoughts, desires and wishes of our partner, by leaving the cares and concerns of our work behind when we go home, and by watching for opportunities to manifest tenderness and affection.

Conclusion

To live out marriage as a sacred covenant means to be willing to make a *total, exclusive, continuing* and *growing* commitment to our marriage partner. Such a committed Christian marriage is not easy or trouble free. Commitment to a marriage covenant, like our commitment to the Lord, may result in some forms of crucifixion. But there is no other way to enter into the joys of Christian marriage. When we commit ourselves to honor by God's grace our marriage covenant of mutual faithfulness until death, then we will experience how God is able mysteriously to unite two lives into "one flesh."

**PART III:
THE TEN COMMANDMENTS OF
A MARRIAGE COVENANT**

Both the covenant between God and His people and the covenant between marital partners entail privileges and obligations. The privileges of the old covenant included God's choice of the Israelites as His special people, His promise to bless them, to give them the land of Canaan, to send them a Redeemer, to reveal to them His will and to make them His chosen instruments for the conversion of the world. The obligations consisted of the commitment of the people to obey the principles of conduct God gave to them in the form of commandments (Ex 24:3). God's choice of the Hebrew slaves as His own people was unconditional: "The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his own possession, out of all the people that are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love upon you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples; but it was because the Lord loves you . . ." (Deut 7:6-8)

While God's covenantal commitment to Israel was unconditional, the blessings of the covenant were conditional. If the people obeyed God's commandments, then "the Lord your God will keep with you the covenant . . . he will love you, bless you, and multiply you . . ." (Deut 7:12-13). God spelled out the obligations of the covenant in terms of commandments. These included the Ten Commandments as well as other regulations governing their social and religious life.

A Double Concept of the Law

The terms "law" and "commandments" are almost dirty words today. They are generally associated with the Old Covenant in which allegedly the Israelites had to earn their salvation through strict obedience. Many Christians believe that in the New Covenant they do not need to be concerned about obeying the law because they are "justified by faith apart from works of law" (Rom 3:28). Such a reasoning creates a false antithesis by assuming that salvation was offered on the basis of human obedience in the Old Covenant and is now offered on the basis of divine grace in the New Covenant. Why would God offer salvation in two mutually exclusive

ways? The truth of the matter is that salvation has always been a divine gift and never a human achievement.

Those who appeal to Paul to negate the role of the law in the New Covenant fail to realize that Paul does not attack the validity and value of the law as a moral guide to Christian conduct. On the contrary, Paul emphatically affirms that Christ specifically came “in order that the just requirements of the law might be fulfilled in us” (Rom 8:4). What Paul criticizes is the soteriological understanding of the law, that is, the law viewed as a method of salvation.

When Paul speaks of the law in the context of the *method of salvation* (justification—right standing before God), he clearly affirms that law-keeping is of no avail (Rom 3:20). On the other hand, when Paul speaks of the law in the context of the *standard of Christian conduct* (sanctification—right living before God), then he maintains the value and validity of God’s law (Rom 7:12; 13:8-10; 1 Cor 7:9).

Law as a Loving Response

Many Christians fail to realize that the Old Covenant made at Sinai contained not only *principles of conduct* (commandments to be obeyed—Ex. 20-23), but also *provisions of grace and forgiveness* (instructions on how to receive atonement for sin through the typological services of the tabernacle—Ex. 25:40). God’s biddings are accompanied by His enablings.

The commandments of the covenant were given not to restrict the Israelites’ delight and joy in belonging to God, but to enable them to experience the blessings of the covenant. The Psalmist declares as “blessed” or “happy” the man whose “delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night” (Ps 1:1-2). The function of the commandments was not to enable the Israelites to become God’s covenant people, but to respond to God’s unconditional choice of them as His covenant people. The law is designed to spell out the lifestyle of those who already belong to God.

The relationship between covenant and commandments appears to be a *vicious circle*: God chooses us to be His people but in order really

to belong to Him we must obey His commandments. In reality, however, as Gordon Wenham points out, what looks like a vicious circle is a *gracious circle*, because “Law both presupposes and is a means of grace.”¹² It presupposes God’s unconditional election and it provides a means for the reception of the blessings of the covenant.

Obedience to God’s commandments is our love response to God’s unconditional choosing of us. It is because God showed “his love for us . . . while we were yet sinners” (Rom 5:8) that He commands us to love Him by living according to the principle of conduct He has graciously revealed to us (John 14:15).

Our love response to God’s covenantal commitment to us is shown through worship and law. Through worship we bless God for His goodness to us. Through the law we love God by living in harmony with the principles He has revealed for our well being. Both worship and law find their parallel in the marriage covenant. As Paul Stevens rightly explains: “The first, worship, has its parallel in marriage in the different languages of love. The second, the law, is paralleled in marriage by its own ‘laws’—without which the full blessing of the covenant cannot be appropriated. These are not the conditions of the marriage relationship but conditions of blessings within the relationship. They are lifestyle statements for persons in covenant. These marriage ‘laws’ are the structure of the marriage house, which is built on a covenant foundation.”¹³

Sinai Covenant and Marriage Covenant. It is an enlightening exercise to compare the Sinai covenant with the marriage covenant by interpreting the Ten Commandments as ten principles of conduct for married people. Paul Stevens has produced a most perceptive comparison between the two covenants by means of the following table:

Covenant Between Israel and Yahweh

1. No other Gods
2. No graven image
3. Not taking the Lord’s name in vain

Covenant Between Wife and Husband

1. Exclusive loyalty to my spouse
2. Truthfulness and faithfulness
3. Honoring my spouse in public

and

private

- | | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| 4. Remembering the sabbath day | 4. Giving my spouse time and rest |
| 5. Honoring father and mother | 5. Rightly relating to parents and parents-in-law |
| 6. No murder | 6. Freedom from hatred, destructive anger and uncontrolled emotions |
| 7. No adultery | 7. Sexual faithfulness; controlled appetites |
| 8. No stealing | 8. True community of property with the gift of privacy |
| 9. No false testimony | 9. Truthful communication |
| 10. No coveting | 10. Contentment: freedom from demands ¹⁴ |

This table shows that the implications of the Ten Commandments for the marriage covenant are profound. To appreciate these more fully, we shall briefly reflect on how each of the Ten Commandments apply to the marriage covenant. These reflections are an expansion and modification of Paul Steven’s exercise called “marital meditations based on the commandments.”¹⁵

The First Commandment of the Sinai covenant summons the Israelites to worship only Yahweh who delivered them from Egyptian bondage: “You shall have no other gods before me” (Ex. 20:3). In this commandment God appeals to us to put Him first in our affections, in harmony with Christ’s injunction to seek first God’s kingdom and His righteousness (Matt 6:33). We can violate the spirit of the first commandment by putting our trust and confidence in such human resources as knowledge, wealth, position and people.

Applied to the marriage covenant, *the first commandment calls us to give exclusive loyalty to our spouse*. In practice, this means making our spouse the most important person in our life after God. It means not allowing such matters as professional pursuits, parents, children, friends,

hobbies, and possessions to become our first love and thus take the first place in our affections which is to be reserved for our spouse. It also means not amending the commandment by making our loyalty to our spouse contingent on other factors, as when people say: “I am prepared to give priority to my spouse *as long as* it does not hinder my professional pursuits.” The first commandment, then, calls us to give unconditional and exclusive loyalty to our spouse.

The Second Commandment of the Sinai covenant emphasizes God’s spiritual nature (John 4:24) by prohibiting idolatry: “You shall not make for yourself a graven image . . . you shall not bow down to them or serve them” (Ex 20:4-5). The commandment does not necessarily prohibit the use of illustrative material for religious instruction. Pictorial representations were employed in the sanctuary (Ex 25:17-22), in Solomon’s Temple (1 Kings 6:23-26) and in the “brassen serpent” (Num 21:8,9; 2 Kings 18:4). What the commandment condemns is the veneration or adoration of religious images or pictures since these are human creations and not the Divine Creator.

Applied to the marriage covenant, *the second commandment enjoins us to be truthful and faithful to our spouse*. Just as we can be unfaithful to God, we can also be unfaithful to our spouse by having false image of her/him in our mind. In practice, this may mean trying to shape our partner into our own image of an “ideal spouse” by nagging or manipulating threats or rewards. It may mean clinging to false images of love relationships with real or fantasy partners. It may also mean making an idol of social relationships outside marriage. This would include forming relationships with friends or relatives that are closer than those with one’s spouse. The second commandment, then, summons us to be truthful and faithful to our spouse by not making idols of anything that can weaken our marriage covenant.

The Third Commandment builds upon the preceding two commandments by inculcating reverence for God: “You shall not take the name of the Lord in vain” (Ex 20:7). Those who serve only the true God and serve Him not through false images or idols but in spirit and truth will show reverence to God by avoiding any careless or unnecessary use of His holy name.

Applied to the marriage covenant, *the third commandment summons us to respect and honor our spouses in public and private*. In practice, this means respecting our spouses by showing them deference and courtesy both in public and private. It means avoiding belittling our spouses, or cutting them off before the children or on social occasions. It also means not taking our spouses' presence for granted as though they were just another person. The third commandment, then, enjoins us to show respect toward our spouses by avoiding words or actions that can belittle them and thus weaken our marriage covenants.

The Fourth Commandment calls us to honor God by consecrating the Sabbath time to Him: "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work; but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God" (Ex 20:8-10). The first three commandments are designed to remove obstacles to the true worship of God: the worship of other gods, the worship of God through false images, and the lack of reverence for God. Now that the obstacles have been removed, the fourth commandment invites us to truly worship God, not through the veneration or adoration of objects, but through the consecration of the Sabbath time to God. Time is the essence of our lives. The way we use our time is indicative of our priorities. By consecrating our Sabbath time to God we show that our covenant commitment to Him is for real. We are willing to offer Him not mere lip-service, but the service of our total being.

Applied to the marriage covenant, *the fourth commandment invites us to show our love to our spouses by setting aside a regular and special time for them*. In practice, this means learning to put aside our work or personal pleasures on a regular basis, in order to listen to, to enjoy, to celebrate and to cultivate the friendship of our spouses. It means, especially, using the climate of peace and tranquillity of the Sabbath day as an opportunity to draw closer to God and to our marital partners. It means taking time, especially on the Sabbath, to walk together, to relax together, to read together, to appreciate good music together, to meditate together, to pray together, to visit together, to bless our spouses in every way their need to be blessed.

The celebration of the Sabbath, the sign of our covenant commitment to God (Ex 31:13; Ez. 20:12), can strengthen the marriage covenant in two ways: theologically and practically. *Theologically*, the Sabbath being a sign of our sacred covenantal commitment to God, serves to remind us as marital partners of the sanctity of our covenant commitment to our spouses. *Practically*, the Sabbath offers time and opportunities to Christian couples to strengthen their marriage covenants by coming closer to one another. The Fourth Commandment, then, calls us to show in a concrete way our covenantal commitment to our marriage partners by setting aside a regular and special time for them.

The Fifth Commandment enjoins us to honor and respect our parents: “Honor your father and your mother” (Ex 20:12). The first four commandments tell us how to show our covenantal commitment to God while the last six commandments teach us how to love our fellow beings. Since parents stand as the representatives of God to their children, it is logical and fitting that the second table of the law begins with our duties toward our parents. The way we respect and obey our parents is indicative of our obedience and respect for God and for those placed in authority over us.

Applied to the marriage covenant, *the fifth commandment calls us to rightly relate to our parents and to our spouses’ parents*. We do not evade our responsibility toward our parents as they grow old. As married persons, we assume responsibility *for* our parents rather than *to* them. In practice, this involves welcoming our respective parents to our home without allowing them to control our home. It involves working out with our spouse how to honor our respective parents in their old age or when ill. It involves seeking our parents’ counsel, without allowing them to dictate their ideas. It involves honoring our spouse’s parents by not making constant jokes about our in-laws. The fifth commandment, then, enjoins us to rightly relate to the parents of each spouse by respecting and supporting them without allowing them to interfere in our marital relationship and thus weaken our marriage covenant.

The Sixth Commandment orders us to respect others by not taking their lives: “You shall not kill” (Ex 20:13). Jesus magnified the meaning of this commandment to include anger and hate (Matt 5:21,22; cf. 1

John 3: 14,15). This commandment forbids not only physical violence to the body, but also moral injury to the soul. We break it when, by our example, words, or actions, we lead others to sin, thus contributing to the destruction of their souls (Matt 10:28).

Applied to the marriage covenant, *the sixth commandment calls us to renounce hatred and destructive anger*. In practice, this commandment forbids abusing our spouses verbally or physically. It forbids provoking our spouses to anger by criticising them appearance, speech, actions, or decisions. It forbids nourishing hostile feelings toward our spouses and attempting through words or actions to destroy their integrity. It forbids harping on at past offenses which have been confessed and forgiven. It challenges us to offer our spouses constructive and not destructive criticism. The sixth commandment, then, calls us to renounce any form of hatred or hostility that can hurt our spouse and thus weaken our marriage covenants.

The Seventh Commandment explicitly enjoins sexual faithfulness: “You shall not commit adultery” (Ex 10:14). Jesus magnified this commandment to include not only the physical act of adultery but also any kind of impure act, word or thought (Matt 5:27,28). *The seventh commandment summons us to be faithful to our marriage covenant by refraining from illicit sexual acts or thoughts*.

In practice, this commandment calls us to be faithful to our spouse in our body as well as in our mind (Matt 5:27-30). Such fidelity involves among other things: not seeking sexual experiences outside marriage; not allowing the attractiveness of members of the opposite sex to become deliberate fantasy of intimacy in our mind; repulsing thoughts of sexual lust or perversion and refusing to be sexually stimulated by erotic books, films or magazines; treating our spouse as the object of our love and romance rather than as the means of sexual gratification; viewing sex as a good gift of our Creator and as an expression of mutual and total self-giving to a love relationship. The seventh commandment, then, calls us to honor our marriage covenant by being sexually faithful to our spouse both mentally and physically.

The Eighth Commandment enjoins us to respect others by not stealing what rightfully belongs to them: “You shall not steal” (Ex 20:15). This commandment forbids any act by which we dishonestly obtain the goods or services of others. We may steal from others in many subtle ways: withholding or appropriating what rightfully belongs to others, taking credit for the work done by others, robbing others of their reputation through slanderous gossip, or by depriving others of the remuneration or consideration they have a right to expect.

Applied to the marriage covenant, *the eighth commandment summons us to live in true community, without taking from our partners the right of privacy and self-determination.* In practice, this means that we must not deprive our spouses of the right to make their decisions in demanding a complete community of property. It means that one spouse must not control the finances so that the other feels dispossessed. It means that we must not hold back any security from our partner as a safety measure or bargaining chip. It means that no sacrificial demands must be made of our partners in order to please our personal desires or whims. It means that we must not “steal” the individuality, dignity, and power of our spouses, by making decisions for them. It means that, like Zacchaeus, we must be willing to give back what we have taken from our spouse: freedom, money, dignity, power, goods. The eighth commandment, then, calls us to honor our marriage covenants by living in a true community, without “stealing” from our partners their freedom, dignity, money, power, or goods.

The Ninth Commandment enjoins us to respect others by speaking truthfully about them: “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor” (Ex. 20:16). This commandment is violated by speaking evil of others, misrepresenting their motives, misquoting their words, judging their motives, and criticizing their efforts. This commandment may also be broken by remaining silent when hearing an innocent person unjustly maligned. We are guilty of bearing “false witness” whenever we tamper with truth in order to benefit ourselves or a cause that we espouse.

Applied to the marriage covenant, *the ninth commandment enjoins us to be faithful communicators with our spouses.* In practice, this involves respecting our spouses’ integrity by not “hitting them below the belt,”

or by not exaggerating the truth about them, saying, for example, “You *never* take my feelings in consideration ... You *always* do what you like ...” It involves learning to understand not only the words but also the feelings behind the words of our spouse. This enables us to interpret their thoughts and feelings more accurately. We can bear false witness against our spouses by projecting on them what we think they say or mean by certain actions. We can bear false witness also by quoting our spouses out of context or by suppressing information that would give more accurate pictures of them. The ninth commandment, then, enjoins us to be faithful communicators with our spouses by learning to accurately understand, interpret and represent their words, actions and feelings.

The Tenth Commandment supplements the eighth by attacking the root from which theft grows, namely, covetousness: “You shall not covet . . .” (Ex 20:17). This commandment differs from the other nine by prohibiting not only the outward act but also the inner thought from which the action springs. It establishes the important principle that we are accountable before God not only for our actions but also for our intentions. It also reveals the profound truth that we need not be controlled by our natural desire to covet what belongs to others, because by divine grace we can control our unlawful desires and passions (Phil 2:13).

Applied to the marriage covenant, *the tenth commandment enjoins us to be content and grateful for our spouses*. In practice, this contentment is expressed in different ways: refraining from comparing our spouses’ talents or performances with those of other spouses; welcoming and rejoicing over our spouses’ achievements, gifts, and experiences without coveting them for ourselves; learning to express gratitude to God every day for giving us the spouses we have; maintaining the proper reserve toward persons of the opposite sex and reserving expressions of special affections for our spouses; avoiding making unreasonable demands on our spouses to force them to become like real or fictitious spouses we covet. The tenth commandment, then, enjoins us to be content with and for our spouses, by resisting the temptation to look for “greener grass over the other side of the fence.”

CONCLUSION

Christian marriage, to be stable and permanent, needs to be built upon the foundation of an unconditional, mutual covenant commitment that will not allow anything or anyone “to put asunder” the marital union established by God. To accept this Biblical view of marriage as a sacred covenant means to be willing to make *total, exclusive, continuing, and growing* commitments to our marriage partners. Such commitments are not easy or trouble free. Just as our covenantal commitment to God requires obedience to the principles embodied in the Ten Commandments, so our covenantal commitments to our marriage partners demand obedience to the principles of the Ten Commandments which are applicable to our marriage relationships.

There is no other way to enter into the joys of Christian marriage than by assuming its covenantal obligations. When we commit ourselves to honor our marriage covenants of mutual faithfulness “till death do us part,” then we experience how God is able mysteriously to unite two lives into “one flesh.” Honoring our marriage covenant is fundamental to the stability of our family, church and society.

Endnotes

1. R. Paul Stevens, *Married for Good* (Downers Grove, Illinois, 1986), p. 17.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
3. Quoted in E. A. Griffin, *The Mind Changers* (Wheaton, Illinois, 1983), p. 32.
4. Elizabeth Achtemeier, *The Committed Marriage* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1976), p. 41.
5. “The Redbook Report on Premarital and Extramarital Sex,” *Redbook Magazine* (October 1975): 38.
6. Emphasis supplied.

7. Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home* (Mountain View, California, 1951), p. 338.

8. According to the *National Center for Health Statistics* in 1986 there were in the United States 2,400,000 marriages and 1,159,000 divorces (*Monthly Vital Statistics*, vol. 35, n. 13 (August 1987): 3. This means that the divorce rate is slightly less than 50 percent. Considering, however, that some divorce more than once, the actual divorce rate is somewhat lower.

9. Ellen G. White (n. 7), p. 345.

10. David Phipers, *Christian Marriage in Crisis* (Bromley, Kent, England, 1986), p.59.

11. Thomas N. Hart, *Living Happily Ever After* (New York, 1979), p. 31.

12. Gordon Wenham, "Grace and Law in the Old Testament," in Bruce Kaye and Gordon Wenham, eds., *Law, Morality and the Bible* (Downers Grove, Illinois, 1978), p.17.

13. R. Paul Stevens (n.1), pp. 87-88.

14. Ibid., p. 86

15. Ibid., p. 88-94.

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1) The NEWLY RELEASED ALBUM ON *THE MARK AND THE NUMBER OF THE BEAST*, as described above.

2) The DVD SABBATH/ADVENT ALBUM containing 5 DVD disks with 10 live PowerPoint lectures of the popular SABBATH and ADVENT SEMINARS.

3) The CD-ROM BOOKS/SEMINARS ALBUM containing 2 CD disks with all my research and PowerPoint presentation.

4) The MP3 ALBUM containing 2 CD disks with 22 AUDIO lectures on vital beliefs and practices.

5) The DVD PASSION ALBUM containing 1 DVD disk with the 2 hours interview on 3ABN on my book *The Passion of Christ in Scripture and History*.

THE SPECIAL OFFER FOR THE COMPLETE PACKAGE OF THE FIVE ALBUMS is only \$100.00, instead of the regular price of \$500.00. The special price includes the airmail expenses to overseas destinations.

You can order online the complete package of the five albums, for only \$100.00, postage paid, simply by clicking here _____ If you have a problem ordering online, simply call us at (269) 471-2915. We will take your order by phone.

You can also email us your order, giving us your address, credit card number, and expiration date. For security reasons, you can email your credit card number in two separate messages. In the first message you email me the first 8 digits and in the second message the last 8 digits, plus the expiration date. Be sure to include your postal address.

SPECIAL OFFER ON PROF. JON PAULIEN'S 5 CD-ROM ALBUMS, called *The Bible Explorer Series on Revelation*.

The book of REVELATION has both delighted and frustrated readers ever since it was written. Sensational but senseless interpretations of the book abound. In this unique 60 CD-ROM series, consisting of 120 lectures professionally recorded, Prof. Jon Paulien guides you through a verse by verse study of the intriguing messages of Revelation.

Currently Jon Paulien, Ph. D., is serving as Chairman of the New Testament Department and Professor of New Testament Interpretation at Andrews University Theological Seminary.

Besides teachings and writing, Prof. Paulien travels extensively throughout the world, presenting seminars with the help of his wife, Pamela. He has authored over 100 articles and several books, *Decoding Revelation's Trumpets*, *The Book of Revelation, Too Good to be False*, *Present Truth in the Real World*, *What the Bible Says About the End Time*, and *The Deep Things of God*. These books are available in Adventist Book Centers, by calling 1-800-765-6955.

Prof. Paulien is rightly regarded inside and outside the Adventist community, as a foremost authority in Johannine literature, especially the book of *Revelation*. Students have told me that listening to his lectures, is a mind-opening experience. Personally I esteem Prof. Paulien as the leading Adventist authority on the prophetic books of the Bible.

If you wish that you could go back to school and seat in Prof. Paulien classes, I have good news for you. You do not need to worry about your age or your financial limitations. You do not even need to enroll at Andrews University and spend thousands of dollars of tuition to benefit from Prof. Paulien's instruction.

All what you need to do is simply to order his 120 lectures which have been professionally recorded and packaged in FIVE ALBUMS, EACH CONTAINING 12 CD-ROMs, for a total of 60 CD-ROMs. The set is called THE BIBLE EXPLORER SERIES ON REVELATION and takes you verse by verse through the whole book of *Revelation*. These lectures are the equivalent of four Seminary courses (about \$2000.00 of tuition), yet they are presented in a way that lay people can understand. Each lecture concludes with spiritual lessons for everyday life.

To express my appreciation for the contribution that Prof. Paulien has made to the understanding of Revelation, I am promoting and distributing his THE BIBLE EXPLORER SERIES ON REVELATION consisting of 5 albums with a total of 60 CD-ROMS, as a free service without any commission. I have offered my service to facilitate the purchase of this timely set of 120 lectures through the shopping cart at my website.

Your special offer for the complete THE BIBLE EXPLORER SERIES ON REVELATION consisting of 5 albums with a total of 60 CD-ROMS, is only \$175.00, airmailing expenses included to any domestic or oversea destination. To order your set simply click here: [If you have problems processing the order through my website, just call us at \(269\) 471 2915.](#)

SPECIAL OFFER ON PROF. JON PAULIEN NEWLY RELEASED CD-ROM WITH HIS BOOKS AND ARTICLES.

Prof. Jon Paulien is one of the most respected Adventist scholars. Besides serving as the chairman of the New Testament at Andrews University Theological Seminary, he writes and lectures extensively in many parts of the world.

Until now Prof. Paulien books and articles were available only in a printed form, often unavailable at local ABC stores. In view of my indebtedness to Prof. Paulien's scholarship, I have offered to help him to place his books and articles on a CD-ROM. This makes it possible with the ACROBAT global search, to locate immediately what he has written on biblical texts or current topics.

The CD-ROM album with Prof. Paulien's books and articles was released on February 9, 2006. For a picture and a detailed description click here. [click here.](#)

You can order online the newly released CD-ROM ALBUM with Prof. Paulien books and articles, for only \$50.00, postage paid, simply by clicking here [_____](#) If you have a problem ordering online, simply call us at (269) 471-2915. We will take your order by phone.

You can also email us your order, giving us your address, credit card number, and expiration date. For security reasons, you can email your credit card number in two separate messages. In the first message you email me the first 8 digits and in the second message the last 8 digits, plus the expiration date. Be sure to include your postal address.

UPCOMING WEEKEND SEMINARS

As a service to our subscribers, I am listing the date and the location of the upcoming seminars for the month of February and March 2006. It is always a privilege and pleasure for me to minister to our fellow believers in England. The reception and response is always very encouraging. I wish to extend my personal, warm invitation to all who are able to attend one of the followings rallies.

FEBRUARY 1: ANDREWS UNIVERSITY VIDEO-TAPING

Location: The video-taping of my lecture on *The Mark and Number of the Beast*, will take place at the *University Towers* auditorium on February 1, Wednesday evening, 7:00 to 9:00 p. m.

For information about the location of the auditorium, feel free to call me at (269) 471-2915.

FEBRUARY 3-4: LA SIERRA UNIVERSITY CHURCH

Location: 4937 Sierra Vista Avenue, Riverside, California 92506

For information call Pastor Daniel Smith at (951) 354-7095

FEBRUARY 11: CHICAGO - BURR RIDGE SDA CHURCH

Location: The church meets at the Lord of Life Lutheran Church, located at 725 75th Street, Darien, Illinois 60559. The significance of this study
For information call David Babcock at (630) 795-1095 or (630) 789-3840

FEBRUARY 17-18: LONDON - HOLLOWAY SDA CHURCH

Location: Holloway SDA Church, 381 Holloway Road, London N70RN, London, England.

For information call Pastor Emmanuel Osei at 020 8581 8311 or 0795 634 4085

FEBRUARY 24-25: LONDON - STONEBRIDGE & ACTON

Location: The rally is sponsored by Stonebridge Community SDA church and the Acton Community SDA Church. The meetings will be held at the Stonebridge Primary School Auditorium located at Wesley Road off Harrow Road, leading to Shakespeare Avenue, London NW10 8NG

For information call Pastor Clive de Silva at 0208 384 1710

MARCH 3-4: READING, ENGLAND - WHITLEY SDA CHURCH

Location: The Reading Whitley SDA Church meets at the Maiden Erlegh School, which is located at Silverdale Road, Earley, Reading, Berks RG6 7HS, England.

For information call Pastor Everett Picart at 01189 755 110

MARCH 10-11: FLORIDA: WINTER HAVEN SDA CHURCH

Location: 115 Waldemar Ct. SE, Winter Haven, FL 33884.

For information call Pastor Walter Maier at (863) 324-5161

MARCH 17-18: SAN ANTONIO SCENIC HILLS SDA CHURCH

Location: 11223 Bandera Road, San Antonio, Texas 78250.

For information call church office at (210) 684-8146 or Elder Gene Clapp at (210) 380- 0698.

MARCH 24-25: ATLANTA ROMANIAN SDA CHURCH

Location: 1207 Oakland Road, Lawrenceville, GA 30044.

For information call Pastor Adalbert Orban at (770) 995-6448

MARCH 31-APRIL 1: HAWAII: AIEA SDA CHURCH

Location: 99-Moanalua Road, Aiea, HI 96701.

For information call Pastor Lloyd Munson at (808) 455-3484

INCREDIBLE NEW OFFERS ON HITACHI PROJECTORS

Recently HITACHI offered me a volume discount on four of their projector models, in order to reduce their inventory. Last week for the first time HITACHI offered me 25 projectors 3200 lumens, high resolution for only \$1995.00 each. This is an incredible price. At the General Conference booth we sold several dozens of this projector for \$3295.00.

If your church is looking for an outstanding projector at a bargain price, this is the golden opportunity. To be brief I will only list the model, the lumens, and the special price.

CP-X250 HIGH RESOLUTION 2000 LUMENS – Only \$1195.00

Previous SDA price for the 2000 lumens was \$1900.00.

CP-X440 HIGH RESOLUTION 2500 LUMENS – Only \$1795.00

Previous SDA price for the 2500 lumens was \$2900.00.

CP-X444 HIGH RESOLUTION 3200 LUMENS – Only \$1995.00

Previous SDA price for the 3200 lumens was \$3295.00.

CP-X1250 HIGH RESOLUTION 4500 LUMENS – Only \$4195.00

Previous SDA price for the 4500 lumens was \$4900.00.

These special offers are not listed at my website, because the prices change all the time, depending on the deal that HITACHI gives us. Feel free to call us at 269-471-2915 or email us a message at <sbacchiocchi@biblicalpherspectives.com> I will email you all the details of each projector. Keep in mind that HITACHI offers us a 3 years 24/7 warranty package that is worth about \$285.00.

TOSHIBA LAPTOPS COMPUTERS FOR ADVENTISTS

Last week TOSHIBA has agreed to offer to Adventists the new TECRA A4 for only \$1195.00, instead of the regular price of \$1650.00. This is a outstanding business model with a very fast processor, extra bright screen, double memory, CD/DVD burner, wireless, etc. It is scheduled to arrive on February 13, 2006. If you are looking for an outstanding TOSHIBA laptop at a bargain price, visit my website at <http://www.biblicalpherspectives.com/Toshiba/Notebooks.html>

If you cannot surf the web, feel free to call us at 269-471-2915 or email us a message at <sbacchiocchi@biblicalpherspectives.com>. We will email you immediately all the information about the TECRA laptops. Call me for details at 269-471-2915.

DOES YOUR CHURCH OR SCHOOL NEED A SCREEN?

If your church/school is looking for a screen, the DA-LITE SCREEN COMPANY, the largest manufacture of screens in the world, has agreed to offer their line of screens to our Adventist churches and schools at a about 30% discount.

The procedure is very simple. Visit the DA-LITE SCREEN COMPANY website at <http://www.da-lite.com>. You will see hundreds of models of screens with their respective prices. Once you find the screen that you need, give us the model number by phone (269) 471-2915 or email your request <sbacchiocchi@biblicalperspectives.com> We will forward your order immediately to DA-LITE that will ship the screen directly to your address. You will receive the screen at about 30% discount.

THE SMALLEST AND MOST POWERFUL REMOTE PRESENTER

If you are looking for an outstanding REMOTE for your Power-Point presentations, you will be pleased to know HONEYWELL has just come out with the smallest and most powerful remote in the market. You can view it at <http://www.powerremote.com/>

The size of the transmitter is smaller than a credit card. You can stick it inside the palm of your hand and nobody can see it. I tested the remote in an open environment, and the radio signal can go up to 400 feet of distance. IT IS INCREDIBLE! The transmitter has three buttons: forward, backward, and laser.

I can offer you this incredible remote for only \$120.00, postage paid. To order a remote, call us at (269) 978-6878 or (269) 471-2915 or email us your order at <sbacchiocchi@biblicalperspectives.com>

Christian regards

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