

Covenant Relationship  
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Deuteronomy 28:1-6; 15-19

Opening: Our text today is not about marriage, but what we know from our own personal experience in marriage can help us understand this how this text speaks to our relationship with God.

*We hear a lot of jokes about how to have a harmonious marriage relationship. "A happy wife equals \_\_\_\_\_" or, "The way to a man's heart is through \_\_\_\_\_." Why are those old lines insulting? What do they imply about marriage? Why is a successful marriage much more than just quid pro quo ("If I do this for you, you do that for me?")*

Deuteronomy 28 is a pivotal chapter where Moses reiterated and reinforced the covenant between God and His people given at Mount Sinai (the Mosaic Covenant). In this speech God (through Moses) defined the terms and consequences of Israel's covenant with Him before they entered the Promised Land. Obedience to God would bring great blessings for Israel and disobedience would bring horrible curses.

The point for us: If we obey God, we will be blessed. However, a covenant relationship with God should not be transactional. God is not a vending machine and His covenant with us is not a formula to get what we desire. Jesus said, *"If you love me, you will keep my commandments."*(Jn. 4:15)<sup>i</sup> He did not say we earn His love through good behavior.

**(NLT) — 1** "If you fully obey the Lord your God and carefully keep all his commands that I am giving you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the world. **2** You will experience all these blessings if you obey the Lord your God: **3** Your towns and your fields will be blessed. **4** Your children and your crops will be blessed. The offspring of your herds and flocks will be blessed. **5** Your fruit baskets and breadboards will be blessed. **6** Wherever you go and whatever you do, you will be blessed.

- In verses 7-14 God gave specifics of these blessings: victory over their enemies, prosperity, abundant offspring and livestock, protection, and national leadership. If they would faithfully follow God's commandments He would establish them as His honored and prosperous people. Then there were curses for disobedience:

**15** "But if you refuse to listen to the Lord your God and do not obey all the commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come and overwhelm you: **16** Your towns and your fields will be cursed. **17** Your fruit baskets and breadboards will be cursed. **18** Your children and your crops will be cursed. The offspring of your herds and flocks will be cursed. **19** Wherever you go and whatever you do, you will be cursed.

- The rest of the chapter (v. 20-68) described these severe curses in horrific detail. Things like defeat by their enemies, destruction of crops and livestock, disease, famine, exile, and social collapse. Children taken captive, devastating plagues, consuming famine, and even cannibalism during siege conditions. Finally, they would be scattered among foreign nations and endure hardship without peace.
- Why do you think God was so specific about the blessings and cursings?
- Let's talk about covenants. The dictionary says a covenant is *"a formal, solemn, and binding agreement [it can be] a written agreement or promise usually under seal between two or more parties especially for the performance of some action"*<sup>ii</sup>
- In the marriage covenant the husband and wife recite vows (promises) to each other in a solemn ceremony in front of witnesses. They come as equals.
- In everyday life we often hear about covenants when we decide to buy a home in a neighborhood. How does that work? Who has the "power" in the relationship?
- This covenant in this passage is structured like a king making a covenant with his subjects or a weaker nation (suzerain-vassal treaties). Think of it this way:
  - In those treaties between a powerful nation (the suzerain) and a weaker, less powerful nation (the vassal), the powerful one offers protection in exchange for loyalty and submission.
  - The powerful party (king or large empire), sets all the terms of the agreement. They have the authority and the power to protect the weaker party from enemies.
  - The weaker party must agree to the terms. They retain some local self-rule but cannot conduct their own independent foreign policy or form alliances with other powers.
- Here is a simple explanation of the structure of this kind of covenant:
  - The powerful king reminds the smaller king of all the good things he has done to help him before.
  - Then, the powerful king gives the smaller king a list of rules to follow.
  - If the smaller king follows the rules, he gets blessings—like protection, peace, and success.
  - If he doesn't obey, there will be curses or bad consequences.
  - Both kings agree to this deal and share a special meal to show they are serious about it.
  - So, a covenant in the ancient world was not just a one-time trade (transaction) but an ongoing promise where the smaller king remained loyal to the powerful king, and both had responsibilities to each other.
  - God is not only our creator, He is also the sole source of blessings.
  - **James 1:17 (NIV) — 17** Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.
- In God's covenant with Israel given on Mt. Sinai, in Exod. 19–24 we see "similar elements: Description of God's saving acts for Israel (Exod. 19:4–6; 20:2); the stipulations (conditions) (Exod. 20:3-23:33); the treaty recital (Exod. 24:7); and the ceremonial meal (Exod. 24:9–11)"<sup>iii</sup>
- There are a series of biblical treaties in scripture:

- **Covenant with Noah:** God promises to never again destroy the world with a global flood, preserving all living creatures. (Unconditional)
- **Covenant with Abraham:** God promises Abraham descendants, land, and that through his lineage, all nations would be blessed. (Unconditional)
- **Mosaic Covenant (Old Covenant):** God gives the Law through Moses to the people of Israel, outlining how they are to live as His people. (Conditional)
- **Covenant with David:** God promises David that his descendant will rule on the throne forever. (Unconditional)
- **New Covenant:** Established through Jesus, this covenant provides for the forgiveness of sins through Christ's sacrifice, accessible to all who believe.
- The New Covenant is **both conditional AND unconditional**. It's a bit complicated but in essence, "God guarantees the outcome of the covenant through Christ's work and the Spirit's power, yet individuals must exercise faith to enter into that promised reality."<sup>iv</sup>

**Hebrews 8:6 (NLT) — 6** But now Jesus, our High Priest, has been given a ministry that is far superior to the old priesthood, for he is the one who mediates for us a far better covenant with God, based on better promises.

**Hebrews 9:15 (NLT) — 15** That is why he is the one who mediates a new covenant between God and people, so that all who are called can receive the eternal inheritance God has promised them. For Christ died to set them free from the penalty of the sins they had committed under that first covenant.

- Trusting Christ as Savior and Lord makes us a party to that new covenant.
- That new covenant is a relationship with God. It is not transactional where I earn blessings by good behavior. Back to our example of a marriage covenant.
- How can spouses keep their marriage relationship from becoming transactional?
- We know the sad end of the story for the nation of Israel. Because they repeatedly broke the covenant, God's judgment led to destruction of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, exile, and wandering as "wanderers among the nations," hated and suffering hardships.

So, What's the Takeaway?

- What is the lesson for us? First, to be a party to the new covenant we must trust Christ as Savior and Lord. Instead of obeying rules to earn God's approval, we simply must have faith in Jesus acknowledging that He took the punishment for our sins and now God makes us new from the inside out. We can have a real relationship with God. For all eternity we are accepted, loved, and never alone.
- As we said: If we are Christ-followers and we obey God, we will be blessed. However, a covenant relationship with God should not be transactional.
- God is not a vending machine; obedience is not a formula to get what we desire.
- Jesus said in **John 14:21 (NIV)**, "*Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.*" [A loving covenant relationship]
- He also said if we "...seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things [provision and blessing] will be given to [us] as well." **Matthew 6:33 (NIV)**

- On the other hand, **Galatians 6:7** tells us, “*Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.*” [There is a penalty for disobedience.]
- The great news for Christ-followers: Though disobedience costs us blessings and harms our relationship with God, we do NOT lose the salvation Jesus paid for.
- When we disobey, a simple confession to God asking for forgiveness restores the relationship of love on which His new covenant rests. (His mercy and grace.)
- Thank God He made a way (through Christ) for us to enjoy this amazing covenant relationship with Him!

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<sup>i</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Jn 14:15). (2016). Crossway Bibles.

<sup>ii</sup> Merriam-Webster, I. (2003). In *Merriam-Webster’s collegiate dictionary*. (Eleventh ed.). Merriam-Webster, Inc.

<sup>iii</sup> Achtemeier, P. J., Harper & Row and Society of Biblical Literature. (1985). In *Harper’s Bible dictionary* (1st ed., pp. 190–191). Harper & Row.

<sup>iv</sup> <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/are-gods-covenants-conditional-or-unconditional/#:~:text=For%20example%2C%20God%20makes%20a,of%20final%20salvation%20through%20Christ.>