



# A Covenant... Not a Contract!

by Greg Albrecht

**T**here is probably no other human endeavor quite like marriage—sadly, many of these partnerships that begin with such hope and expectation regularly fail. One of the reasons marriages fail is because many see marriage and the entire relationship through the eyes of a contract rather than through the perspective of a covenant.

Marriage, an example of a human covenant, can help us to understand the divine relationship God offers to each of us. He offers us the *new covenant in Christ*, not the *new contract in Christ*. **It's a covenant, NOT a contract!**

- A contract is a legally binding agreement between two parties, a business agreement which stipulates that work be performed or services rendered in exchange for a price.

- A contract stipulates that if one party scratches the back of the other, then the other party will return the favor.

- A contract is the way human beings interact. Contracts are the way we do business—contracts are at the heart of human economies.

- Contracts are based on the principle of *quid pro quo*—you do something for me and I'll do something for you. And of course, according to our performance-based contract

economy, if you fail to do something for me then I am not obligated to do something for you. Should you fail to perform your duties then I am released from my requirements to do mine.

But, a **Christ-centered marriage is a covenant**—and, of course, **our relationship with God, in and through Christ, is a new covenant**.

If a couple perceives their marriage as a contract, then they will each be keeping score to determine whether their partner owes them—whether they have done more for their partner than their partner has done for them.

When a marriage is nothing more than a business relationship (and by the way, in some very real ways a marriage is a business relationship), then it becomes a matter of keeping score.

But when a marriage is based on a Christ-centered relationship, then spouses lay aside their human desire to keep score, and instead serve their mate, without ever expecting a return in kind.

Christ-centered marriages are based on promises, trust, love and grace—so that when one partner stumbles, the other is not quick to condemn and find fault (as is the case with a contract), but quick to forgive and reconcile.

For many people, their relationship with God, as Christ-less religion explains it to them, is basically an assurance, assuming

they obey and perform enough good works, that they will not be tortured forever in an eternal hell.

That's "contract Christianity." You do something for God and God will respond and do something for you. **But contract Christianity is oxymoronic**—that is, the two words are contradictory. Authentic Christianity, as given to us in and through Jesus Christ, by God's grace, is not a contract—it's a covenant.

- A covenant is not an exchange of goods and services—it's an exchange of lives, a sacred promise based on trust. A covenant is not a legal deal, it's a pledge of faith.

- To live in the new covenant with God means that you have exchanged lives—Jesus has given you his life, on the cross, and you surrender yours to him, and Jesus then lives his risen life in you, so that, as Paul says in Galatians 2:20, *We are crucified with Christ and we no longer live, but Christ lives in us.*

- Salvation therefore, is not a contract—it's not an exchange of your good deeds and good works for God's blessings and favors.

Salvation is a covenant, a promise—it's free, because it's given by God's generosity which does not depend on human accomplishments. According to the new covenant in Christ, we do not earn or merit God's love—he gives it to us because of his promises, because of his goodness and because he loves us unconditionally. □