

WHAT'S A CREATIVE COVENANT MARRIAGE?

Cre-a-tive [kree áytiv] Imaginative, artistic, aesthetic, gifted, talented, inventive; having the power or quality of creating.

Cov-e-nant [kúvvənənt] Unconditional, eternal, life and death promises between God and His people.

Mar-riage [mérrij] A recognized relationship, established by religious ceremony, between a man and a woman who intend to live together as lifelong partners.

A Creative Covenant Marriage (C² Marriage) is a life-long, eternal, public commitment between two believers. The marriage reflects the eternal covenant relationship God has offered to us: A “lay my life down for you,” sacrificial, life-long commitment to be loved unconditionally. The *C² Marriage Agreement* is designed to memorialize the unique marriage covenant between two believers. It helps you make a *game plan – an intentional strategy* for building, maintaining and protecting a healthy, joy-filled marriage.

WHY “CREATIVE?”

Scripture says we were created in the image of God, and God is the Creator! We are called to be like him, and being *creative* is a key character trait of God. So *we* are called to be creative – and that readily applies to our marriages.

Marriage was intended by God to be a living, maturing life relationship. But after the excitement of the wedding is gone and the day-to-day realities of life set in, couples often grow complacent in their marriages. But remember, we are called to be creative! In marriage, we need to be creative in the way we deal with conflict. Creative in our intimate time and date nights. Creative in the way we work at our marriages and mature through the relationship. Creativity is in God's character, and is meant to be in ours.

ABOUT THE C² MARRIAGE AGREEMENTS

This *C² Marriage* contains the *C² Marriage Agreement for Engaged Couples* and the *C² Marriage Agreement for Married Couples*.

More than contracts, the C² Marriage Agreements are *evidence on paper* of your “all or nothing” commitment to doing marriage God's way. They are also *intentional, master plans* for a successful marriage. For the engaged couple, the C² Marriage Agreement commits the parties to preparing for marriage and making important disclosures *before* they walk down the aisle. For the already married couple, the Agreement helps you refresh and infuse your marriage with creativity and direction. For all couples, the Agreement helps you define, *ahead of time*, how you will handle difficult moments.

WHY SO MUCH EMPHASIS ON “CONTINUING EDUCATION?”

Want to know what a person truly values? Look at where they spend not only their money, but their *time*. The wanna-be doctor spends *years* in medical school and internships. The wanna-be athlete spends loads of time on the practice field. We all spend time in school learning reading, writing, and arithmetic, and beyond that, studying government, history, the arts, the sciences, and the list goes on. Strangely enough, most of us spent little or no time qualifying ourselves for marriage. Pastors, teachers, real estate agents and contractors can't get licensed without studying and passing tests. So why don't we work as hard to educate ourselves on the most important adult relationship we'll ever have?

That's why the C² Agreement gets “creative” about the way we do marriage.

WHY CHURCHES, THERAPISTS & LAWYERS?

You'll notice in the C² Marriage Agreements that churches, Christian therapists/counselors, and Christian attorneys play a big role. Why is that? Because marriages don't thrive under the “lone-ranger” theory.

Fools are headstrong and do what they like; wise people take advice. (Proverbs 12:15, The Message)

Refuse good advice and watch your plans fail; take good counsel, and watch them succeed. (Proverbs 15:22, The Message)

Many start their marriages in church, which is a great thing, but that should only be the beginning. It is equally important that we live out our marriages in the church, from start to finish, doing marriage God's way: Praying together, worshipping and serving together. In so doing, we take a huge leap towards living out our marriages in God's House, not ending them in a courthouse.

We heavily encourage a whole-community approach to doing marriage. That means partnering with those positioned to provide wise counsel. You need pastors, therapists and lawyers to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with you to make your marriage a success. Church participation and pastoral support are vital to the spiritual health of your marriage. Christian counseling and therapy is an immensely helpful source for working through life issues that should not be overlooked. Christian attorneys help you understand your rights and obligations under the Agreement and help you avoid legal land mines.

WHAT'S CONFLICT RESOLUTION?¹

As Christians, God has a different plan for us when it comes to conflict in marriage. The Bible is clear that we should make every effort to stay out of court, resolve matters “inhouse,” and seek reconciliation wherever possible. That's why the C² Marriage Agreement gets specific about handling marital conflict.

RESOLVE MATTERS “IN-HOUSE”

The Apostle Paul tells us that disputes among believers have no place in the secular courts. This is particularly true within Christian marriage. He pointed out that there are skilled members of the Christian community who are well-equipped to assist in the resolution of disputes. Here's what Paul said:

Is it possible that there isn't one levelheaded person among you who can make fair decisions when disagreements and disputes come up? I don't believe it. And here you are taking each other to court before people who don't even believe in God! How can they render justice if they don't believe in the God of justice? These court cases are an ugly blot on your community. Wouldn't it be far better to just take it, to let yourselves be wronged and forget it? All you're doing is providing fuel for more wrong, more injustice, bringing more hurt to the people of your own spiritual family. (1 Corinthians 6:5-7, The Message)

CLEAR DIRECTION: SEEK TO WORK IT OUT

The problem isn't that Christians have conflict in marriage, it's how we treat each other when in conflict that counts. We are called to be living examples of *God's love in action*, even through conflict. God calls us to be shining stars before a watching world:

For it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for His good pleasure. Do all things without murmuring and arguing, so that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, in which you shine like stars in the world. (Philippians 2:13-15 NRSV)

¹ This section on Conflict Resolution is copyrighted material of Mediation Law Group, Inc.™, and is reprinted here with permission. For more information on biblical dispute resolution, visit www.mediationlawgroup.com.



Jesus gave clear direction on how we are to treat each other when troubles arise – it's laid out in Matthew 18:15-17 (from *The Message*):

1. If a fellow believer hurts you, go and tell him – work it out between the two of you. If he listens, you've made a friend.
2. If he won't listen, take one or two others along so the presence of witnesses will keep things honest, and try again. (*Informal or formal mediation.*)
3. If he still won't listen, tell the church. (*Arbitration.*)
4. If he won't listen to the church, you'll have to start over from scratch, confront him with the need for repentance, and offer again God's forgiving love.

ADMIT YOUR OWN CONTRIBUTION TO THE DISPUTE

When we find ourselves in conflict with our spouse, the Bible tells us to first examine our own actions and motives, and admit the part we have played in the dispute. Lamentations 3:40 says, "*Let's take a good look at the way we're living and reorder our lives under God.*"

On the issue of motives, Jesus directs Christians to first consider their own shortcomings, instead of focusing only on the shortcomings of others. It is very easy to point the finger at your spouse when conflict arises, but Jesus said, "*Don't condemn others, and God won't condemn you. God will be as hard on you as you are on others! He will treat you exactly as you treat them. You can see the speck in your friend's eye, but you don't notice the log in your own eye*" (Matthew 7:1-3 CEV).

James, the brother of Jesus warned, "*Where do you think all these appalling wars and quarrels come from? Do you think they just happen? Think again. They come about because you want your own way and fight for it deep inside*" (James 4:1 The Message). In marriage, like in all other disputes between Christians, it is essential that we are honest with ourselves and admit our own part in the conflict.

SEEK A SOLUTION AND CONSIDER THE INTERESTS OF OTHERS

The Bible urges us to take a radical approach to conflict – considering the needs of the other party, not just our own needs. This is especially true in marriage! There is much wisdom to this approach, because in order to have lasting agreements both spouses in conflict must be satisfied that their interests are heard and that honest attempts have been made to meet those needs.

Consider this advice: "*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should not look only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others*" (Philippians 2:3, 4 NIV). And, "*Finally, all of you should agree and have concern for each other. You should also be kind and humble*" (1 Peter 3:8).

RECONCILIATION AND UNITY

Reconciliation and unity are constant themes throughout the Bible. The importance placed on reconciliation is not to show the world that we seldom have conflict, but instead to show the world our unity and love in our *management* of conflict. Having a planned process in place for the inevitable reality of conflict helps us to manage conflict quickly and with the intention of coming to reconciliation. Above all, Christians must forgive one another. This is never more true than in marriage. It is the ultimate goal in all family dispute resolution to reconcile the spouses to one another and to restore the family to relational health.

An important objective in conflict is forgiveness that leads to resolution and reconciliation (unity). A tremendous amount of personal growth occurs when conflict is managed productively. In order for forgiveness to occur, everyone must be very clear on the issue(s) causing

disagreements. "*Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace*" (Colossians 3:12-15 NIV).

Finally, the most important objective in working through conflict biblically is to demonstrate *unity* in the body of believers. Why is unity among Christians so important? Because how we treat each other and handle our differences is our *witness to the world of the love of God*. Consider Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane:

"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in Me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as You are in Me and I am in You. May they also be in Us so that the world may believe that You have sent Me. I have given them the glory that You gave Me, that they may be one as We are one: I in them and You in Me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved me" (John 17:20-23 NIV).

It is clear that Christians demonstrate the love and power of the cross, through their actions. Jesus said: "*I give you a new commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another*" (John 13:34, 35 NRSV).

RESOURCES

Go to www.thecreativemarriage.com to find the resources you need to live out your Creative Covenant Marriage. There you can find valuable resources to fulfill your continuing education requirements. At www.thecreativemarriage.com you can also listen to podcasts, get referrals to marriage-related experts, great date-night tips and travel ideas. There are also recommended materials designed to take your marriage to the next level.

Know other couples who want to have a creative covenant marriage? Order additional C² Marriage Agreements online at www.thecreativemarriage.com.

GET CERTIFIED!

After you've signed your C² Marriage Agreement, be sure to **register the Agreement** online at www.thecreativemarriage.com. Registration entitles you to discounts on books, materials and events. But more importantly, once registered you can complete the continuing education audit and get certified for completing your continuing education units. But most importantly, you'll serve as a shining example to your family, friends and community of how to do marriage "God's way."

