

Fisher's Foundations THE COVENANTS OF GOD

Lesson 7

THE OBJECTIVE OF THIS CLASS:

Is to accompany you, the student, into first and foremost, a vital covenantal relationship with God (into a closer one, if one such union has already been established). From there, we'll encourage you into strong, meaningful and fulfilling relationships with other members of the Body of Christ.

"But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people" (Jeremiah 31:33).

"But this is the new contract I will make with them: I will inscribe my laws upon their hearts, so that they shall want to honor me; then they shall truly be my people and I will be their God" (Jeremiah 31:33 TLB).

INTRO:

The Bible is divided into two sections described as the Old Testament (or Old Covenant) and the New Testament (or New Covenant). A covenant is basically a promise of faithfulness. Several times throughout the Bible, God entered into a special covenant relationship with people. For instance, God entered into personal covenants with specific promises to Abraham, Noah, Moses and others. Please know that Jehovah God has not changed nor has He forgotten about these covenants. He is a covenant-keeping God. He always keeps his promises and commitments and that is how we are to be as well. Relationships matter! God's plan for Israel will be ultimately fulfilled. His covenant with Israel does not become His covenant with His Church. He means what He says and says what He means. God made these commitments because He really loved Israel and had a wonderful purpose for them as a nation. He still does and God has a special plan for your life, as well. He prizes and values you greatly! He longs to live in a marvelously beautiful relationship with you everyday as His Spirit leads you in Kingdom-building-participation with a healthy local church. It's important for you to remember that your involvement with God's Church will aid you as you grow and mature spiritually. The extent of sin is so great in our world though, that its effects continue to this very day in the form of cruelty, suffering and death. Sometimes church goes also suffer, but God wants to help us forgive and move on. Sound covenant teaching addresses this. It's vital for establishing right relationships – first upwards and then outwards. All around us, relationships have been shattered and been destroyed, but God can fix them if we let Him. Many people are even at odds with our sinless God and subsequently they are constantly at odds with other people but as we pray, Jesus Christ can remove the war in man's heart.

I. GOD WILL WRITE HIS WILL ON YOUR HEART

God promised that under the New Covenant He would write His will, not on tablets of stone, but on our hearts. He begins doing this at the point when we accept Christ. When we are truly born again we enter into a covenant with God. He promises to be ever faithful to us, and we commit to being ever faithful to Him as He helps us. We give Him our lives, He gives us His. This is the greatest exchange in the universe! We give Him our sin and receive His righteousness. We give Him our sorrow and receive His joy. All that we need from God, He gives to us because, by blood covenant, we have become heirs to the resources He wants us to utilize in fishing for souls.

This wonderful New Covenant was described by the writer of the Book of Hebrews as a "better" covenant (see Hebrews 7:22), because now Jesus Christ actually lives inside of us, giving us both the desire and the power to do God's will. We can walk in covenant relationship with Him forever. The Bible says, **"For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure"** (Philippians 2:13). The agency of this New Covenant is the blood of Jesus Christ (See Luke 22:20).

Because we have entered into a covenant with a faithful God, we can be faithful in the other relationships of life: Our covenant of faithfulness to our husband or wife, and our covenant of faithfulness to Christ's Church. The Holy Spirit empowers us to be loyal.

Q&A 1. Please explain in your own words what you think the English word "covenant" means.

A Biblical covenant is a strong agreement made between two persons based on love and fidelity. God has committed Himself to providing for His children. He meets all our needs. Covenant is a very old concept, and among these persons it is the mutual care and concern shared by these parties to ensure protection. Of course God doesn't need us to protect Him – He protects us. Some Christians take the doctrine of covenant too far and manipulate others for selfish ends, but proper love will prevent us from exploiting people who are God's property.

"The secret (sweet, satisfying companionship) of the Lord have they who fear – revere and worship— Him, and He will show them His covenant, and reveal to them its (deep, inner) meaning" (Psalm 25:14 Amplified).

The Bible reveals that God is a covenant-making, covenant-keeping and covenant-revealing God. The Bible itself is actually a covenantal book.

ENGLISH, HEBREW AND GREEK DEFINITIONS

In modern society the word covenant has lost some of the fullness of meaning that it had in Bible times. In order to rediscover its meaning, we will now consider some definitions of the word "covenant."

ENGLISH

In English the word covenant means a clear mutual understanding between two or more parties, each binding himself to fulfill specified obligations. Definitions of the word "covenant" range from a legal contract to a binding contract.

HEBREW

The Old Testament Hebrew definition comes from the word "beriyth." The word "beriyth" is defined "a compact," because it was made by splitting sacrificial animals in half and passing between the two pieces of animal flesh. A covenant was and still is a serious agreement. During the Abrahamic covenant, as the parties walked between the bloody pieces of flesh they said, "May God do to me as we have done to this lamb if I don't keep this covenant."

GREEK

In the Greek New Testament, the word "covenant" is defined "diatheke," which means a disposition, arrangement, a testament or will. The definition according to the Moulton & Milligan Lexicon states "an arrangement made by one party with plenary power which the other party may accept or reject, but cannot alter.

II. THE CUTTING OF COVENANT

The Eastern mindset, when it comes to cutting covenant is far different from our own. Westerners, in our day and age think, "how gory! Who would want to be involved in a weird cultic thing like that?" And many cults have done some very destructive things, incorporating the shedding of blood unrighteously. With false worship, that's often the nature of the beast, you could say. But the covenants of God are conversely constructive by nature and spiritually positive for anyone who will commit to Him!

With not too much fan-fair, covenants are made in the western world in everyday life. They are mainly relating to the materialistic side of things (i.e., in buying cars, homes, cell phones, computers etc.), in contractual and shallow relationships, so there is little comprehension as to the depth of meaning that God intended for them to encompass. Originally, there was to be more significance involved in cutting or making a covenant. But God loves us and still takes relationships and their agreements very seriously. It would be good for us to re-think and go back to His way, becoming more like the Lord (loyal and obedient) in all our dealings. W. L. Payne, Jr., interestingly enough stated:

"Our western minds have a difficult time comprehending what cutting a covenant means because we have never been involved in the physical act. Most of us have never seen a covenant cut, even through the blood covenant of friendship, as it is called. This is still practiced in parts of the Middle East as well as in other parts of the world.

People entered into blood covenant unions for different reasons. Sometimes it was due to a deep love for one another, sometimes for mutual protection. For whatever reason the blood covenant was entered into, it was the most binding agreement possible.

*Traditionally, covenant was cut in this manner. Two men would come together and write on paper or some other material all the terms of their agreement. These would be read before witnesses, (most of the time friends and relatives). The bodies or palms of the hands of each participant would then be slightly cut and clasped together so the blood could commingle. Some of the blood was drained into a cup of wine mixed up and drunk by each participant." **(Double yuck! Please don't do this. What a mess you might say. Yes. Don't worry though, Christians and churches don't practice covenant this way. God doesn't want or expect us to, but He does want us to love one another).***

"Some of the blood was then placed on the copies of the agreement which were put in amulets (small carrying cases), to be worn somewhere on the bodies of the covenant parties. The scars on their wrists or palms, along with the bloodstained agreements, would be constant reminders of the blood union, a strong blood covenant friendship.

There was a second vital part of cutting the covenant. During the ceremony, one or more animals were slain and divided in halves, which were placed opposite of each other. The covenanting parties would then pass between (walk through) the slain carcasses. By doing so they pledged themselves to 'life and death' ... by violating the covenant, the person was asking that his own body be slain and torn in pieces just like those of the animals he had passed between.

By completing the 'blood covenant friendship,' the parties have entered into the most enduring and scared compact as friends and blood brothers. It was more binding than their relationships with their natural brothers and sisters, and for that matter more important. All possessions one owned now belonged to the other, and visa versa. In case of enemy attack, there would be two to fight instead of one.

After the ceremony, families and friends would join the covenant partners and gather around for the feast. But even though they ate the covenant meal with the covenant brothers they were not part of the covenant. They were excluded from all its privileges."

CHECK OUT THE STEPS THEY USED IN ESTABLISHING THIS EASTERN TYPE OF COVENANT

- 1. The exchanging of coats (signifying covering).**
- 2. The exchanging of belts (signifying protection).**
- 3. The sacrificing of an animal (signifying redemption).**
- 4. The slight cutting of the body/for mixing blood (signifying the seal of agreement).**
- 5. The forming of a scar (the mark of a seal).**
- 6. The setting of the terms (signifying purpose).**
- 7. The exchanging of names (signifying identification).**
- 8. The eating of the covenant meal (signifying fellowship).**
- 9. The planting of the tree of remembrance (signifying memorial).**

Kind of interesting how they did that huh?

What's the point? Around the world, relationships used to be taken more seriously? People typically didn't just ditch mates or friends due to "irreconcilable differences." If you think about it, every relationship has irreconcilable differences, but if any two mates were exactly the same, wouldn't one of them be unnecessary. We have irreconcilable differences. My wife and I after 25 years of marriage still do not agree on everything, but that's ok. That's part of what make her so intriguing and I love her just the same.

Today, in the context of the local church, there is to be liberty, holiness and grace. Christians are not to be told that they are "in sin" when they leave one church just to attend another one where they are being fed the Word (if there is no proof of real sin). Jesus leads Christians to go find healthy churches where they can grow ...in His own timing and way. He alone is their Lord. Christians are not to purposely hurt or shed blood for each other, but they are to deny themselves and meekly defer to others. Jesus' blood was shed for us willingly so we would be drawn closer to God and His Body. Churches are not to contrive weird "covenant rituals" to gain control over their adherents. There is no place for coveting or gospel-greed! Each Christian is to respect the personal property of others, be willing to share if the Lord leads and diligently protect each other. The giving of time, talent and treasure is to be voluntary—without constraint, guilt-trips or pressure. We are to love each other with Christ's selfless love!

III. THE SEVEN MAIN BIBLE COVENANTS ARE:

THE EDENIC COVENANT - (GENESIS 1,2) - The Edenic Covenant was made before the entrance of sin, involving the original plan and the original man and woman - Adam and Eve. This covenant reveals God's original purpose for the whole of Adam's race (Gen. 1-2). Although the word "covenant" is not found in the Bible until Genesis 6:18, by reading Genesis chapters 1 and 2, we can clearly see that there was a love covenant between God and man from the beginning of creation.

When we understand the Edenic Covenant, we can have a better perspective of the original state of pre-fallen man with his maker. This covenant included relationship, character, dominion, fruitfulness, and eternal life based on trust and obedience. Adam's fall necessitated the other covenants, the subsequent redemptive covenants to be fulfilled, all of which pointed by faith ahead in time to the cross. You remember how Jesus said, "It is finished" as the new covenant was nailed down on a bloody cross for you.

THE ADAMIC COVENANT - (GENESIS 2:15-17) - This covenant was the first made after the entrance of sin in the world. This covenant involved God's judgement for Adam and Eve's sin and the coming of Messianic redemption (Gen. 3). The shedding of blood necessary in making the Adamic covenant involved God initiating the first sacrifice, when God took the knife of sacrifice and made the left over skins into a covering for Adam and Eve as clothing. This was a picture for us as well, as to how we are to put on the Lord Jesus Christ, appropriate the benefits of His bloodshed and clothe ourselves with His compassion.

The Adamic Covenant was a seed covenant. It was not fulfilled in Adam. This covenant was a long process that went through Noah, Abraham, the prophets, David, and then finally culminated with Jesus.

THE NOAHIC COVENANT - (GENESIS 6:18) - The Noahic Covenant was made with Noah, after the flood involving all creation, all creatures and all future generations of the human race. Centuries had passed and corruption was great in the earth. God was even grieved that he had made man. God wiped out all creation, except Noah, his family and the pairs of animals.

After the flood God made this covenant with Noah and promised him He would never flood the earth again with water. God gave us the rainbow as a sign of His promise (Gen. 9:11-17). According to verse 16, this sign was actually a reminder to God of His covenant that He made with man.

THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT - (GENESIS 15:18) - The Abrahamic Covenant was of course the covenant God made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This covenant was made after the Tower of Babel, the scattering of the descendants of Noah, and it involves the nation of Israel, the seed "Messiah" and all the believers that would follow Him. Yes, it involves you and me! This is the most comprehensive of all Old Testament covenants.

Man was again sinful and the earth was filled with corruption at this point in history. So, God raised up a righteous man to fulfill his plan on earth. Through Abraham, God would express His soul-saving, missionary passion, blessing all the nations of the earth. This covenant had individual, national and spiritual promises of blessings, including God making them a great nation; the multiplicity of seed; the blessing of the land; etc. (Gen. 12:2-3; 27-29; Num. 24-9; Zech. 12:3; Joel 3:1-3).

Abraham pleased God by responding with faith and obedience. Romans 4:3 states that Abraham believed God and it was counted unto him as righteousness (Gen. 15:6; Ps. 106; Gal. 3; Heb. 11).

THE MOSAIC COVENANT - (EXODUS 24:8) - The Mosaic Covenant was made strictly and solely with the chosen nation of Israel, after the Exodus from Egypt at the foot of Mt. Sinai, This covenant acted as a "schoolmaster" to bring Israel to the Christ who would be the Savior of the world (Gal. 3:24; Exo. 19-40).

Throughout the study of covenants it is important to note that God does not abolish a former covenant in order to institute a new one. He merely builds upon the others. An example of this is when Moses interceded before God on behalf of the children of Israel when they worshipped the golden calf. Moses interceded on the basis of the Abrahamic Covenant, not the Mosaic Covenant. Further, God continued to fulfill His promise of the Abrahamic Covenant in that he brought the children of Israel to the land of Canaan and gave this land to them as an everlasting possession even after the Mosaic Covenant was established.

The Mosaic is the most difficult and complex to interpret because it involves the sacrifice system, the tabernacle, and ceremonial rights. Several purposes of the Mosaic Covenant were to illustrate two major ways of dealing with man – law and grace; to provide in ceremonial law a temporary atonement or covering for sin by which Israel could approach God in worship and upon the basis of which He could

dwell among them; to show that none can be justified by law, but by grace and faith; and to show that the law of covenant could not give life, but that only the new covenant in Christ could.

THE DAVIDIC COVENANT - (PSALMS 89:3) - The Davidic Covenant was made with David after the death of King Saul and at the establishment of the Kingdom of Israel under a Davidic King. It involved King David, both his natural and spiritual seed and pointed ultimately to the Lord Jesus Christ and the everlasting throne and kingdom of the King of kings and the Lord of lords (2 Sam. 7; Ps. 89 and 132).

To fulfill the promise of the coming Messiah, God was establishing a covenant between Himself and King David. God desired to dwell among His people (Exo. 25:8) and in order to do so would need to establish a kingdom and throne. Jerusalem was the location; David was the king. The house of David was to be God's government, in type, until Jesus Christ, born of David's lineage, came to set up His reign upon earth and establish an eternal throne and kingdom. This was the reason for the Davidic Covenant. Therefore, this covenant also carried hope of the "promised seed," Jesus Christ.

THE NEW COVENANT - (LUKE 22:20, JOHN 1:29) - The New Covenant was made with the two houses of Israel and Judah after the judicial rejection of the Messiah by Jewry and just prior to His Crucifixion. It replaced the Old Mosaic Covenant. It made salvation through the blood of Jesus on the cross available for the whole world (Jer. 31:31-34; Heb. 8; Matt. 26).

The New Covenant was made by the Lord Jesus Christ immediately prior to His death at Jerusalem with the 12 apostles, His foundational personnel for the Church. This covenant became the fulfillment of all previous covenants.

Jesus Christ had come to earth to fulfill all the other covenants in His blood. He presented principles of blood covenanting through the sacrifice of dying on the cross. Even the scars in His hands and side remain signs of His everlasting covenant with man. Jesus Christ paid a high price to enjoy covenant with us.

Like pointing out the similarities and distinctions between a photograph of a person and the actual person, here is the connection between the old Mosaic covenant and the new Messianic covenant. This shows you that the old covenant was just a dim snapshot, a mere shadow of the real Christ. Are you currently in covenant relationship with Jesus Christ as Lord? You can be.

Q&A 2. Which two houses was the New Covenant made with after the judicial rejection of the Messiah by Jewry?

IV. THE OLD AND NEW COVENANTS

THE OLD COVENANT UNDER MOSES	THE NEW COVENANT IN CHRIST	APPLICATION
Gifts and sacrifices by those guilty of sin.	Self-sacrifice by the guiltless Christ.	Christ died for you!
Focused on "the physical" (such as the building where one goes to worship).	Focused on the reign of Christ in the hearts of believers.	God is directly involved in your life.
A mere shadow.	A reality.	Not temporal, eternal.
Limited promises.	Limitless promises.	We can personally trust. Christ's promises.
Failed agreement by Christ.	Faithful agreement by Christ.	Christ always keeps His people. Word.
External standards and rules.	Internal standards – a new heart.	God sees actions and motives – we are now accountable to a loving Person, not to mere rules.
Limited access to God.	Unlimited access to God.	God is always available!
Based on negative fear.	Based on love and forgiveness	Forgiveness keeps our failures from destroying the agreement.
Legal cleansing.	Personal cleansing.	The cleansing is now complete.
Continual sacrifice.	Conclusive sacrifice.	Christ's sacrifice was perfect and final.
Obey the rules!	Serve the living God.	We have relationship not regulations.
Forgiveness earned.	Forgiveness freely given.	We have true and complete forgiveness.
Repeated yearly.	Completed for all time, by Christ's death.	We can appropriate this payment for our sin.
Human effort and strain.	Simply, God's grace for you.	Initiated by God's love.
Available to some.	Available to all.	Available to you, now.

Again, a covenant is a legally binding obligation. And if our hearts are not changed, following God's rules will be very unpleasant and difficult for us. It will be impossible to keep our end of the vertical agreement in and of ourselves. Unregenerate people typically rebel against being told how to live. The Holy Spirit, however can give us new desires, helping us want to obey God (Phil. 2:12, 13). With new hearts we experience our greatest joy in serving God. Under God's new covenant, God's law of selfless love is inside us, rather than an external set of boring rules. The Holy Spirit will remind us of Christ's words, activate our consciences, influence our motives and desires, and make us earnestly want to obey authority. Now, we desire to do His will with our whole heart and mind.

V. HERE ARE TWO MORE SIGNIFICANT COVENANTS

At Mount Sinai God made a covenant with Israel collectively, His special people, a holy nation. The exodus was God's sign to them of its validity (Exodus 19:5, 6). Because God loves all peoples, He chose to use this nation Israel to be His witness to the other nations. Keeping their part of the covenant in accomplishing this task would take obedience, but Israel, (like so many of us today with a missions mandate), simply dropped the ball. Now it's time to pickup the ball and run with it, spreading the Gospel in love. **God will help us become good fishers of people as we follow and depend upon Jesus.**

God also made a covenant with the priests, the Aaronic priesthood (Numbers 25:10-13). Aaron's descendants would be priests forever even though many of them also blew it in properly representing God's authority.

Now we are His priests and kings for reconciliation ministry (prayerful, tactful witnessing) across all cultural, religious and racial lines. Since our horizontal relationships (inside the Kingdom and out) are taken seriously by God, shouldn't we also take them just as serious? That is our divine imperative. God calls us to love Christians and sinners.

Q&A 3. Please explain how God made covenant with the children of Israel.

Q&A 4. Please explain how God desires for you to daily relate to Him... to other Christians and to sinners around you.