

Covenant People

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It's something I've been thinking quite a bit about. Covenants are very important to God and hence they need to be important to us. They've always been important to God in dealing with mankind, so it's something to take very seriously. First of all we could ask "What is a covenant and why are they so important?"

I have a big unabridged Webster's Dictionary that my mother passed down and it has everything in it. It has quite a few definitions of "covenants". When it comes to the Bible, it says, "the promises of God as revealed in the scriptures; conditioned on certain terms on the part of man such as obedience, penitence, faith, etc.". So that's Webster's definition. So why is a covenant so important to God and hence to us

The title of my sermon today is:

Covenant People

I'd like to begin in Deuteronomy 28:1.

Deuteronomy 28:1 *"Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that the LORD your God will set you high above all nations of the earth.*

2) And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the LORD your God:

3) Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the country.

4) "Blessed shall be the fruit of your body, the produce of your ground and the increase of your herds, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flocks.

5) Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl.

6) "Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out. (NKJV)

It goes on and on with the many blessings. I'm going to go ahead to verse 14. Here's the other side—you might say the flip side.

Continuing in verse 14) ...

14) So you shall not turn aside from any of the words which I command you this day, to the right or the left, to go after other gods to serve them.

15) "But it shall come to pass, if you do not obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes which I command you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you:

16) Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the country.

17) Cursed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl.

18) *“Cursed shall be the fruit of your body and the produce of your land, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flocks.*

19) *Cursed shall you be when you come in, and cursed shall you be when you go out. (NKJV)*

It continues on with all these curses. All the material in between here and verse 63 is what is going to happen if you don't obey God and keep His covenant.

Continuing in verse 63) ...

63) *And it shall be, that just as the LORD rejoiced over you to do you good and multiply you, so the LORD will rejoice over you to destroy you and bring you to nothing; and you shall be plucked from off the land which you go to possess.*

64) *Then the LORD will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other, and there you shall serve other gods, which neither you nor your fathers have known—wood and stone. (NKJV)*

We saw this happen to Israel. God gave them blessings and cursings for obedience and disobedience and they eventually reaped the blessings and then the cursings. So, God blesses nations and peoples for keeping His commandments and covenants and He destroys all nations for breaking His covenants. Covenants provide a way that God tests people—nations. He tests you and me. We are under a covenant with God. Covenants provide a way for God to see what's in our hearts.

Next month we'll be taking the Passover service—the bread and the wine—which Christ said is a sign of the New Covenant, the covenant that we are under. The Passover should really remind us of something that is extremely important—that year by year we are a covenant people. Each of us when we were baptized entered into a covenant with God. The covenant sealed by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, His sacrifice and death for us.

God has made a number of covenants with people over the years, starting with the Garden of Eden. Allen went over quite a bit of material about marriage and the family. The first covenant in the Bible really is the marriage covenant so I would like to read a couple of scriptures along that line. Beginning in Genesis 2:21-24.

Genesis 2:21 *And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place.*

22) *Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man.*

23) *And Adam said:*

*“This is now bone of my bones
And flesh of my flesh;
She shall be called Woman,
Because she was taken out of Man.”*

24) *Therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. (NKJV)*

The word *covenant* is not mentioned here but marriage is described as a covenant in Malachi 2:13.

Malachi 2:13 *And this is the second thing you do: You cover the altar of the LORD with tears, With weeping and crying; So He does not regard the offering anymore, Nor receive it with goodwill from your hands.*

14) *Yet you say, "For what reason?" Because the LORD has been witness Between you and the wife of your youth, With whom you have dealt treacherously; Yet she is your companion And your wife by covenant.*

15) *But did He not make them one, Having a remnant of the Spirit? And why one? He seeks godly offspring. Therefore take heed to your spirit, And let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth. (NKJV)*

Marriage is a covenant which started with the creation of man and woman in the Garden of Eden. They were bound as husband and wife. The marriage covenant used in United church—and I think it's pretty common to the churches of God that came out of the Worldwide church, uses these words.

Marriage is the natural union but a divine institution ordained of God. It was established not by man but by the eternal God at creation and derives from His authority not from civil codes of man but from the divine laws of God. Immutable, unchangeable from creation.

We exchange rings as part of the marriage ceremony which is a token of the covenant. So, covenants have tokens. Tokens are signs or whatever you want to call them.

After the flood God entered into a covenant with Noah and actually with the earth. A covenant that said there would not be another flood across the earth and the rainbow covenant was a sign of that covenant. Let's look at Genesis 6:18.

Genesis 6:18 *But I will establish My covenant with you; and you shall go into the ark—you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you. (NKJV)*

Continuing in Genesis 9:9)

Genesis 9:9 *And as for Me, behold, I establish My covenant with you and with your descendants after you,*

10) *and with every living creature that is with you: the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you, of all that go out of the ark, every beast of the earth.*

11) *Thus I establish My covenant with you: Never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood; never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth."*

12) *And God said: "This is the sign of the covenant which I make between Me and you, and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations:*

13) *I set My rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be for the sign of the covenant between Me and the earth.*

- 14) *It shall be, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the rainbow shall be seen in the cloud;*
- 15) *and I will remember My covenant which is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh.*
- 16) *The rainbow shall be in the cloud, and I will look on it to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.”*
- 17) *And God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant which I have established between Me and all flesh that is on the earth.” (NKJV)*

When our children were young and we would see a rainbow, we would always mention that the rainbow is a sign from God, a covenant sign, that there won't be another flood like that one.

Abraham entered into a covenant with God. I'd like to turn to Genesis 17:1.

- Genesis 17:1** *When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless.*
- 2) *And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly.”*
- 3) *Then Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying:*
- 4) *As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations.*
- 5) *No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations.*
- 6) *I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you.*
- 7) *And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you.*
- 8) *Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.”*
- 9) *And God said to Abraham: “As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations.*
- 10) *This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised;*
- 11) *and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you. (NKJV)*

So, another covenant sign.

- 12) *He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised, every male child in your generations, he who is born in your house or bought with money from any foreigner who is not your descendant.*
- 13) *He who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money must be circumcised, and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant.*

14) And the uncircumcised male child, who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant.” (NKJV)

Circumcision is a sign of the covenant that God made with Abraham. After bringing Israel out of Egypt, God made another covenant. He made this covenant with the Israeli people and all the commandments that were given there are laid out in Exodus 20 -23, so you can read through that. I'd like to go to Exodus 24:1, where a covenant is confirmed.

Exodus 24:1 *Now He said to Moses, “Come up to the LORD, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and worship from afar. 2) And Moses alone shall come near the LORD, but they shall not come near; nor shall the people go up with him.” 3) So Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the judgments. And all the people answered with one voice and said, “All the words which the LORD has said we will do.” 4) And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD. And he rose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars according to the twelve tribes of Israel. 5) Then he sent young men of the children of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the LORD. 6) And Moses took half the blood and put it in basins, and half the blood he sprinkled on the altar. 7) Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read in the hearing of the people. And they said, “All that the LORD has said we will do, and be obedient.” (NKJV)*

Here's a book of the covenant with all the commands that God had given to the Israeli people and they agreed to that covenant.

8) And Moses took the blood, sprinkled it on the people, and said, “This is the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you according to all these words.” (NKJV)

God uses blood as a token of a covenant. We call this the Sinai covenant or the Old Covenant but here we see a progression. The Sinai covenant being built upon the covenant of Abraham. The Jews have remained under these covenants and still are. They are still practicing circumcision; they are still mandating the keeping of the laws given at Sinai. They are no longer keeping animal sacrifices because there is no temple. There are many Jews who feel it is necessary and really want to rebuild the temple. We'll have to see—there have been prophecies that point towards that and we'll have to see what happens. Still, there are those covenants between Israel and God.

Now God has made a New Covenant in Jeremiah 31:31.

Jeremiah 31:31 *Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—*

32) *not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD.*

33) *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. (NKJV)*

This is expounded in Hebrews 8.

Hebrews 8:7 *For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second.*

8) *Because finding fault with them, He says: "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—*

9) *not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they did not continue in My covenant, and I disregarded them, says the LORD.*

10) *For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.*

11) *None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, "Know the LORD, for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them.*

12) *For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more."*

13) *In that He says, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away. (NKJV)*

So, the people of Israel were a covenant people and they still are, even though they broke the covenant. We see God, as He prophesied, scattered them all over the world. But still there is that covenant. There is a new group of covenant people now. The Old Covenant led to the New Covenant and many of the things of the Old Covenant are incorporated into the New but there are some things that have been changed. Jeremiah 31 and quoted in Hebrews 8, the law now will be written in our hearts. So, there is still God's law. You can't argue that God's law is done away. God's laws have now become a part of our very being and minds. The whole sacrificial system has been changed since Christ's sacrifice replaced the blood of the lambs and goats and animals. Back to Hebrews 9—just about where I was.

Hebrews 9:11 *But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation.*

12) *Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.*

13) *For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh,*

14) *how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?*

15) And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.
(NKJV)

When Christ died, the veil of the temple was torn in half which signified that we now have access to God the Father, which was not part of the Old Covenant. The sign of the New Covenant is baptism which pictures death—putting away the old person and paralleled to Christ's death in doing with our sins. I'd like to turn to Acts briefly—Acts 2:38 which I think we've read many times.

Acts 2:38 *Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*

39) For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call." (NKJV)

So again, the sign of the New Covenant is being baptized and agreeing to Christ's sacrifice for us. The coming of the Holy Spirit does teach us and converts our minds. One verse in John 14 to see this.

John 14:26 *But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.* (NKJV)

The Holy Spirit reminds or clarifies things that we may have known and brings to our mind things that are hidden. If we look around the world, we see tremendous blackness. So many things that have been withheld from the world for a purpose, so the world would go its own way. It would experience all the evils that God says we have to learn from. We have to learn the evil to overcome it and be His children.

There is a new sign of the New Covenant, which is baptism and it represents a New Covenant which it says here, contains better promises—indefinitely better—in eternal life as members of God's very family. There is a Passover service that has been modified by Christ to signify His sacrificial death instead of the animal sacrifices. It's explained in 1 Corinthians which we read normally during the Passover service.

1 Corinthians 11:23 *For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread;*

24) and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me."

25) In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." (NKJV)

We have a New Covenant and the tokens are the bread and the wine, symbolizing Christ's sacrificing of His body and His blood.

26) *For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.*

27) *Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.*

28) *But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup.*

29) *For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. (NKJV)*

In Israel, those that were under the covenant, those that were circumcised, took part in the Passover. Likewise, now, those that are under the New Covenant and have been baptized should take part in the Passover. The question of circumcision rose amongst Christ's disciples and this led to what we call the ministerial conference of Acts 15. It was decreed that the Gentiles, especially all those under the New Covenant and not the Old were not required to be circumcised because they entered the New Covenant with the baptism and a new token or new symbol. So circumcision is not a part of the New Covenant. Circumcision is now of the heart. God says our circumcision is of the heart. He writes His law in our minds and hearts. Baptism has replaced circumcision as a New Covenant symbol. If you were under the Old Covenant, you were give physical promises to the land of Israel. Under the New Covenant we are given an infinitely better promise of eternal life in God's family.

I remember Mark Mickelson describing the difference between the Old and New Covenant. He said that under the Old Covenant God promised, *I will be your God and you can be My people.* Under the New Covenant, He said *I will be your Father and you will be My children.* So, it's completely different and is a family type relationship under the New Covenant.

We in the churches of God feel there is some evidence that United States and some of the Western nations have descended from Ancient Israel—the scattered 10 tribes. In that regard, we could still come under that covenant that God made with Abraham which He said would exist long into the future and that from Abraham would come many, many nations. It does appear that God's covenant promise has been applied to this country—to the United States. We started out as a God-fearing nation to the best of our knowledge. We had Christianity which has been corrupted but we still tried to follow God. I think we saw the blessings of Deuteronomy 28 applies to the country. We became the most powerful nation on earth. We adopted the motto "In God We Trust" which I think is a token of that covenant. Now we've departed from God and I think we're seeing the curses of Deuteronomy 28 and multiplying now upon the country.

The vast majority of the world's population really are under no covenant and essentially have no future yet. I think we must really have stamped in our minds that we are under this New Covenant. We must never forget the awesome promise that the covenant that God made with us at baptism contains. It contains a promise of eternal life and what could be more awesome than that? The flip side is eternal death so it's up to us to maintain that covenant with God that we entered into at baptism.