

*The Mystery of the Faith*

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## CHAPTER ONE

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### UNDERSTANDING COVENANT BASICS

If I could name one thing missing in the modern Church, it is understanding the "ways" of God. In Psalms 103: 6-7 David writes...



*"The Lord executes righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed. He made known **His ways** to Moses, His acts to the children of Israel."*

A lot of teaching in the Church today is based on human reasoning about God and how He thinks and acts. Many wrongly think that "theology" is divine knowledge—but theology is more man's ideas about God rather than what God says about Himself. I am astounded at some preachers who take principles from the Bible and change them to fit some kind of religious reasoning or denominational thinking. The Bible says that God has "ways" by which he operates. When we cooperate with His ways, we get the same results experienced by the early believers in the Bible. We see the power of God manifested when we conform our lives to His ways. One problem with the Church today is the abundance of teachings based on philosophy and human reason. These religious ideologies are passed off as God's Word. Yet, God will not confirm the teachings of men when it has been falsely put forth as His Word. God has promised to confirm His Word, not what men say concerning His Word. (Mark 16:20, Jeremiah 1:11-12, Matthew 15:1-9)

### UNDERSTANDING COVENANT—ONE OF THE WAYS OF GOD

*"Lord God of Israel, there is no God in heaven or on earth like You, **who keep Your covenant and mercy** with Your servants who walk before You with all their hearts. You have kept what You promised Your servant David my father; You have both spoken with Your mouth and fulfilled it with Your hand, as it is this day." (II Chronicles 6:14)*

*"Now therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and awesome God, **who keeps covenant and mercy...**" (Nehemiah 9:32)*

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## ***Understanding Covenant Basics***

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Our God is a covenant-keeping God. Respecting covenant is one of God's main character traits. Since this is clearly stated in scripture, we would do well to discover its meaning and how it applies to our salvation in the New Testament. All throughout the Bible, God tells us that He relates to mankind on the basis of covenant.

Below I have provided nine scriptural references from both the Old and New Testament that plainly describe the covenant relationship we have with God.

1. *"Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen diligently to Me, and eat what is good, and let your soul delight itself in abundance. Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live; and **I will make an everlasting covenant with you—the sure mercies of David.**" (Isaiah 55:1-3)*
2. *"**I will make a covenant of peace with them**, and cause wild beasts to cease from the land; and they will dwell safely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods. I will make them and the places all around My hill a blessing; and I will cause showers to come down in their season; there shall be showers of blessing." (Ezekiel 34:25-26)*
3. *"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—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers** in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord. But this 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 31:31-33)*
4. *"But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a **better covenant**, which was established on better promises. For if that **first***

*covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second." (Hebrews 8:6-7)*

5. *"This is the covenant that I will make with them after those\_days, says the Lord: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them, then He adds, their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more." (Heb 10:16-17)*
  6. *"For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, **counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing**, and insulted the Spirit of grace?" (Hebrews 10:26-29)*
  7. *"But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to **Jesus the Mediator of the New Covenant**, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel." (Hebrews 12:22-25)*
  8. *"Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, **through the blood of the everlasting covenant**, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen." (Hebrews 13:20-21)*
  9. *"Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, **"This cup is the New Covenant in My blood, which is shed for you."** (Luke 22:20)*
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## *Understanding Covenant Basics*

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Concerning the words of Christ in this last passage, the word translated "covenant" in Luke 22:20 of the New King James Version of the Bible is translated "testament" in the original King James. The word "testament" and the word "covenant" are used interchangeably. If you look up this word in Strong's Concordance, you find that the Greek meaning is presented as both "testament" and "covenant." In modern theology, the Bible is commonly presented as a book of dispensations. This is simply understood as the dividing up of history into different time frames (or dispensations). Some preachers dogmatically declare that God starts a particular "dispensation" where He does something specific. When God accomplishes His goal, He then starts a new dispensation with an emphasis on something else. When you hear someone say that the "dispensation (or age) of healing and miracles" is over, the implication is that God doesn't heal much anymore because He's closed that dispensation and moved on to something else. The problem with this kind of flawed thinking is that you can never know when God has decided to "change the rules". It cheats us of the ability "to know" specific things about the will of God in the believer's life. You can never really "know" what God is going to do because He might not be doing what He was doing before. This kind of thinking produces a counterfeit faith in Christians. It is a faith that can make a specific request of God but can never produce the confidence of obtaining what you requested—because of the uncertainty of God's willingness to grant it. This kind of counterfeit faith is common in the modern church. The reader should take great care not to misunderstand my words—I am not against dispensationalism. I am a committed dispensationalist. Let me explain why I'm not contradicting myself.

### **GOD'S WORD IS A BOOK OF DISPENSATIONS INITIATED BY BLOOD COVENANTS.**

In the Bible, God never initiates a new dispensation without first establishing it upon a blood covenant. The Bible is generally divided into two parts: The Old Testament and the New Testament. As we discovered earlier, these two sections of the Bible are also called **The Old Covenant and the New Covenant**. The old covenant addresses the blood covenant God made with Abraham and the blood covenant of the Law that was initiated by Moses at Mount Sinai. The New Covenant was made through the blood of Jesus Christ (Luke 22:20). The old covenant of the Law is passing away (Hebrews 8:1-13), but the New Covenant is an **everlasting**

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covenant (Hebrews 13:20-21). The New Covenant is declared to be "a better covenant established on better promises" (Hebrews 8:6). The New Covenant is the same covenant in which the early Church exercised faith. The New Covenant is declared to be **everlasting**, which is why it 's still in force for the Church today. Healing has not passed away as some falsely teach—because the promise of physical healing was never based on a dispensation—it is a blood-bought benefit of an **everlasting covenant**. Can we expect God to move the same for us today as He did for the early Church? Absolutely! Why? Because we have the same **everlasting covenant** they had.

## IDENTIFYING THE PROBLEM

**"MY PEOPLE ARE DESTROYED FOR A LACK OF KNOWLEDGE."  
(HOSEA 4:6)**



Earlier we talked about God's ways. A lack of knowledge, or a wrong knowledge of God's ways, brings destruction into our lives. The Bible teaches that God never moves outside of His ways and against his own character. God never violates His Word. Never! One of the reasons He instructed Moses in His ways was so that he could successfully lead the nation of Israel. God's Word teaches us about His ways so that we can have success. Defeat in a Christian's life does not glorify God. It is interesting that God gave Joshua the admonition to meditate in the Word of God day and night (Joshua 1:8). If Joshua was obedient, God said "For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success." Prosperity and success results from conforming your life to God's ways. You get the opposite result when you step outside of God's ways and seek another path, even a good looking, religious one. By stepping outside of God's ways, you cut yourself off from His help. God gave us His Word so we could **know** His will and His ways. The tragedy is that much of the Church is cut off from God's help either through false teaching or through a lack of knowledge. This "lack of knowledge" is the ignorance of our **covenant** with God and what it guarantees the Christian. False teaching is usually aimed at either minimizing or eliminating altogether the benefits of the New Covenant of Jesus Christ toward the Christian believer, while leaving the "bare essentials" of the Christian faith for salvation intact. This kind of teaching is common and we will go into greater detail in the pages ahead.

## *Understanding Covenant Basics*

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Uncovering the lies and deception that religion has perpetrated on the Church is a large part of understanding the "mystery of the faith." If we understand where God's ways have been missed, we can make the correction and begin to enjoy the success that results from being aligned with God's Word.

### A BLOOD COVENANT GIVES US THE POWER "TO KNOW"

In Genesis chapter 15, we read how God approached Abram with incredible promises. First of all, Abram makes his case before God about his childless condition. Abram needed an heir, one of his own offspring. God responds by not only promising Abram a son but by also declaring that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the night sky. God promises Abram land—from the river of Egypt to the great river Euphrates (Genesis 15:18). Abram responds by asking God a question; "**How shall I know that I will inherit it?**" This one question sets the stage for one of the most monumental events of the Old Testament; a blood covenant between a man (Abram) and Almighty God. In response to Abram's question, God makes a covenant that becomes the **guarantee or surety** that He will do what He said. We know that the events which took place in Genesis 15 have to do with the making of a covenant because verse 18 starts out by saying, "On the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram..." Notice that God did not leave Abram in the condition of not knowing. God initiated this covenant and **bound** Himself to it by a "blood oath" that can never be broken. This covenant is known to Bible scholars as "The Abrahamic Covenant". The Abrahamic Covenant provided the groundwork for the coming of the Jewish Messiah, Jesus Christ.

### A BLOOD COVENANT—WHAT IS IT?

The blood covenant is the oldest and most ancient institution known to man. It represents the most serious and binding agreement that two people can enter into. British missionaries Stanley and Livingstone (1800 to early 1900) claimed that a blood covenant was never broken on the continent of Africa. To break a blood covenant guaranteed certain death. If a blood covenant is broken, the offender's own family will hunt him down and kill him. Blood covenant law is well known among tribal cultures. It is fully understood and practiced by Indian tribes here in America as well as most

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tribal groups in Africa. Middle-Eastern cultures, especially those where the Bible was written, are firmly grounded in blood covenant. Cultures that are not familiar with the workings of the blood covenant are the more "modern" ones. The word "covenant" has little meaning to the average American and, sadly, to most Christian believers.

In Malcolm Smith's book, "Blood Brothers In Christ," the author writes:

"We cannot avoid the blood covenant. It faces us either directly or by implication in every story and miracle of the Scriptures. **Any hope that we have of salvation can only be understood inside the framework of the covenant.** On what basis does sinful man hope to approach God and find acceptance with Him? What audacity puts into our heads the idea that we may pray and receive an answer? Without a solid foundation faith becomes nothing more than pathetic presumption, a faith in faith which is a leap into meaninglessness. **Biblical faith is a response to something God has done.** God lays the foundation, takes the initiative, and faith is but man's response to that. There is a solid foundation on which every promise and hope of salvation lies, against which every threat and warning becomes vividly real. **That foundation is the blood covenant.** In its most simple definition a covenant is an agreement between two parties. But it is more than that, for it is the **union** of two parties in which all assets, talents, debts, and liabilities are held mutually. This agreement of unity is worked out in carefully defined pledges and promises that each makes to the other."<sup>1</sup>

The key word in the above quote is **union**. A blood covenant is the union of two parties **into one new person**. In this union all assets, liabilities and resources become common. It is an **exchange** of life. The only thing similar to a blood covenant is the institution of marriage. Marriage is a covenant where a man and a woman become "one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). Unfortunately, this covenant has little meaning in America where 50 percent of all marriages end in divorce. The term "blood covenant" is derived from the Hebrew word "berith," which means to make

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<sup>1</sup> Malcolm Smith, "Blood Brothers In Christ," (Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1975) p. 13.

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## *Understanding Covenant Basics*

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a covenant by cutting where blood flows. The act of making a blood covenant is usually referred to as "cutting the covenant."

### THE STEPS IN MAKING A BLOOD COVENANT

A series of events are set into motion when two people decide they want to "cut the covenant." It is referred to as the blood covenant ceremony and is considered a most serious and solemn event.

- ◆ **An animal is sacrificed:** Usually a bull, a goat, or a lamb is killed and cut in half down the center. The two halves are separated with a pool of blood between them.
- ◆ **The exchange of coats:** Each participant removes his coat, a sign of the tribe's identity and authority, and gives it to the other participant. By doing so, each is saying, "Everything I am, everything I represent now belongs to you."
- ◆ **The exchange of weapon belts:** Each participant removes his weapon belt, which included his sword and bow. They would exchange these belts and, by so doing, declare to each other, "All my strength now belongs to you. My enemies are now your enemies." It was saying that when an enemy attacked then my blood covenant brother had a responsibility to defend me the same as he would himself.
- ◆ **The exchange of names:** Each participant takes the other's name on himself. A person's name represents his individuality. This exchange of names demonstrated a death to being an "individual." Remember that covenant is the **union** of two people. In covenant you are no longer concerned only with yourself. Your concern now includes your blood covenant brother. You care for your blood brother the same as you care for yourself because the two of you are now **one**.
- ◆ **The walk of blood:** Each participant walks a path in the shape of a figure "8" between the halves of the slain animal, then stops in the middle in the midst of the pool of blood to pronounce the blessings and the curses of the covenant. The curses would be brought to bear upon the one who broke the blood covenant. It basically said, "the one who breaks this covenant will die just like this animal has died." A pledge was also made that said, "Just as this animal gave its life so I will give my life for you if necessary."

- ◆ **The cut of the covenant:** A knife is used to make an incision in either the palms or the wrists of each participant. This was to allow blood to freely flow. The Bible teaches that life is in the blood. The two participants then engage in a handshake allowing the free flowing blood to intermingle. This symbolized the two bloods, the two lives, being joined into one blood and one life. In some cultures, the blood from each participant is mixed into a cup of wine. Each would drink from the cup demonstrating their union. The actual practice of "cutting the covenant" varies in its methods depending on the culture. When this event was finished, a substance would be rubbed into the wounds so they would never heal cleanly. This was done so that a permanent "mark" would be left. Wherever these men would go, they would be identified as a "covenant man" by the visible mark on their bodies.
- ◆ **The covenant meal:** This is usually a meal of bread and wine. Each fed the other signifying that "all that I am is coming into you." The covenant meal usually ended the blood covenant ceremony.

At this point a new relationship is born. It is a love relationship. This kind of love is called "Hesed" in Hebrew and "Agape" in the Greek. It is a love that says, "I will never leave you or forsake you."

The following illustration helps the reader to better understand the binding conditions of a blood covenant. Let's say I want to get together with a friend of mine. For the purpose of this illustration, let's say that his name is Kris. I call Kris on the telephone and say, "Why don't we get together at a restaurant for a steak next Sunday?" Kris agrees and we meet and have a good meal. As we begin to leave, I suddenly realize that I forgot to go to the bank and I have no money to pay my bill. I look over at Kris and say, "Can you believe it? I have no money on me. Can you loan me twenty dollars until tomorrow?" Kris, being a close friend, says, "Sure, no problem."

Now let's say that Kris and I conclude we have a special relationship and enter a blood covenant. Kris and I are now bound together **in the union** that the blood covenant represents. Kris and I are now **blood brothers**. We meet at the same restaurant and have a good meal together. At the end of the meal, I realize, once again, that I forgot to go to the bank and I have no money to pay my bill. I look over at Kris and say "Can you believe it? I have no money on me. Kris, give me your wallet." Kris could say, "You

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## *Understanding Covenant Basics*

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rude thing! If you ask politely I'll give you what you need." But, he doesn't say that. Why? Because he understands the covenant and knows that everything he has belongs to me and everything I have belongs to him. We are not two individuals but **one new man**. We share all assets, liabilities and resources. Now I understand that this concept seems radical, but that's only because in America we are not accustomed to the characteristics of covenant. Keep this example in mind as we continue our study.<sup>2</sup>

### THE STANLEY COVENANT

The following story is from the exploits of two famous British missionary/explorers named Stanley and Livingstone who traveled the continent of Africa from the late 1800's and early 1900. The story is actually about Stanley. It illustrates how a blood covenant can heal even a hopelessly hostile situation. Whether we realize it or not, a "hostile" situation existed between man and God. In the Garden of Eden man rebelled against God's revealed will. Where a love relationship once existed—eternal death, judgment and division took its place. God's response to this unacceptable situation was to cut a blood covenant that would end forever the enmity and would bring eternal reconciliation between Himself and the human race.

Stanley set out on his missionary journey to Africa with no idea of the circumstances he would face and the strange customs he would encounter. Upon entering Africa, he ran into trouble with different African tribes. One Chief in particular was very determined that he should leave and not return. Stanley had a guide and advisor during his travels. Being familiar with the customs, this guide suggested that Stanley make a "blood covenant" with the Chief. This involved a ceremony where incisions were made on the wrists of both men. Drops of blood from each man was mixed in some kind of drink (either wine or goats milk) and both drank from the cup. They then clasped hands as in a handshake allowing the blood from the wounds on their wrists to mix together. Drinking the wine mingled with the two bloods and the handshake symbolized the two men becoming one blood, one life, one new man. A substance was applied to the wounds that left an indelible mark where the cut was made. Wherever these men went they bore the

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<sup>2</sup> Similar illustration found in, "God Speaks To Us Through His Covenants," taught by Rick Godwin, Eagle's Nest Christian Fellowship, San Antonio, Texas.

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"mark of the covenant." At this point, these two men were considered "blood brothers." The ceremony concluded with an exchanging of gifts where each gave the other something of great value. What the Chief wanted from Stanley was the goat he owned. As he had a stomach disorder, Stanley needed the milk from this goat and didn't want to give it up. The guide persuaded Stanley that it would be wise to give up this goat. In exchange, the Chief gave Stanley his spear that had a large copper coil near the head. Stanley thought to himself, "Great! I give up my only source of food and relief and all I get is this spear!"

At that time, Stanley didn't know that this Chief was the head of the most powerful tribe in all of Africa—and this man was now his blood brother. He soon discovered that everywhere he went in Africa that spear was recognized as "the" symbol of authority. Whole tribes would literally bow their knee to it. That spear was the key that opened up the whole continent of Africa! Any tribe that chose to stand against Stanley knew they had to deal with this Chief, Stanley's blood brother.

Stanley and Livingstone stated that to their knowledge a blood covenant was never broken on the continent of Africa. To break a blood covenant made you a condemned man. A broken blood covenant caused your own family to hunt you down and kill you. The thing I find interesting in this story is reconciliation. These two men start out as being enemies. The blood covenant turned them into committed friends.<sup>3</sup>

## FACTS ABOUT THE BLOOD COVENANT

The two participants in the cutting of the covenant are called "covenant heads." The covenant remains in effect until both covenant heads die. If one covenant head dies, the other will extend the benefits and blessings of the covenant to the family of the deceased covenant head. In essence, a blood covenant not only joins the two covenant heads together but also joins the **families** as well. These facts should be kept firmly in mind as we explore the reality of our redemption in the new covenant in Christ's blood.

At the conclusion of the ceremony, the two covenant heads are called "**friends.**" The word "friend" is a covenant term that has completely lost its

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<sup>3</sup> The "Stanley Covenant" illustration was a paraphrase of chapter 3 from the book "The Blood Covenant" by E.W. Kenyon (Kenyon's Gospel Publishing Society, 1969) p. 11-13

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## *Understanding Covenant Basics*

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meaning in today's English language. We say, "I think I'll have a friend over for dinner tonight," or "I want you to meet a good friend of mine." The original meaning of "friend" carried with it the **union** of a blood covenant. It means very little in our culture. The same thing is true of the handshake. This blood covenant act has lost its true meaning. In our culture, it has become nothing more than a gesture that communicates courtesy or greeting. If we took seriously the true meaning behind the handshake, we would be very careful in using it.

With these facts in mind, we can better understand what Jesus was saying in John 15:13-15...

*"Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his **friends**. You are My **friends** if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you **friends**, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you."*

The disciples were excited about the words Jesus used here. In that part of the world and at that time, the blood covenant was a respected institution. When Jesus used the word "friend" to define his relationship with these men, it had a tremendous impact on their lives. The word "friend" as Jesus used it did not mean some kind of "Jesus is my buddy, my pal" mentality—that is found in some parts of the church today. The word "friend" as used in this verse meant "covenant friend" or "blood brother." It implied the **union** of two people in a blood covenant. Religious teaching and the erosion of the true meaning of covenant terms like "friend" by our modern culture causes us to gloss over the importance of this section of scripture. The "friendship" Jesus was talking about in this scripture was not limited to the disciples but to all those who receive salvation through their testimony—this includes us.

## REVIVAL AMONG THE AFRICAN ZULUS

Recently, I was listening to a seminar given by Malcolm Smith, author of the book, "Blood Brothers in Christ." This seminar was being offered at the fellowship I attended. At that time my wife and I were working with the youth group of the church. After the youth service, I had to go through the

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main auditorium where Malcolm was speaking. I recognized that he was speaking on the subject of the blood covenant and decided to stop and listen. Malcolm told of an experience he had while in Africa. He had traveled to Africa to do some evangelistic work. Apparently, someone ask him to speak to a tribe of Zulus, but time would not allow him to do so. Instead of speaking to the Zulus directly, Malcolm made a cassette tape on the subject of the gospel of Jesus Christ, teaching it within the framework of the blood covenant. Being an African tribe, the Zulus were very familiar with the blood covenant since it was part of their culture. When these tribes got hold of the Gospel and understood it as a blood covenant, revival began to break out. On a return trip at a later date, much to his surprise, Malcolm learned that as a result of this cassette tape, whole Zulu tribes in some areas had received the gospel and accepted Jesus Christ.

What made the difference in this situation? Other missionaries had preached the Gospel to the Zulus with little success. Conveying the Gospel in the framework of the blood covenant was the reason Malcolm had been successful when other missionaries before him had failed. It made all the difference. The Gospel of Christ cannot be fully understood apart from a blood covenant mentality. The whole message of the Gospel is firmly grounded in blood covenant terminology. In this area, the Zulus have a big advantage over the church in modern America.

## WHY THE BLOOD COVENANT HAS LOST ITS MEANING

In the modern Church, two understandings of the blood covenant are taught. The understanding we've looked at so far comes from the Middle Eastern culture and is consistent with the teachings of the Bible. In most of our seminaries, however, another mentality is taught. I refer to it as the "Western" mentality. In the western understanding, the aspect of two people becoming one (or union) and the common holdings of all assets and liabilities have been de-emphasized or removed altogether. Most modern seminaries teach that the blood covenant is nothing more than a contract or an agreement between two people. When you apply this definition to the story of the Bible, you get a totally different concept of God. This re-defining of the blood covenant is done for a specific reason. Most of our seminaries and Bible schools teach a "liberal" theology that denies or minimizes God's miracle working power today. Some go as far as to call authentic miracles "works of Satan". In an effort to provide a more

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## *Understanding Covenant Basics*

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believable explanation as to why God does not act today the way He did in Bible times, some things are re-defined to take the pressure off Church leadership to explain why God has somehow "changed." You see, if the conditions are the same for us today as they were in the early Church (and they are), then we have to take a closer look at what is being taught and eventually conclude that we are being taught wrong. Experience shows us that admitting to error is not a character trait of most religious leaders. The Pharisees of Jesus' day would not admit wrong beliefs even when confronted face to face with the evidence! The same spiritual arrogance is still with us today—little has changed except the names.

Our **faith** is the unfortunate victim of the "western" interpretation of covenant. Faith is one of the most crucial areas in the believer's life. The Bible says that without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6). The Bible states three times that "the just shall live by faith" (Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11, Hebrews 10:38). No one can be saved without faith and no one can receive anything from God unless they ask in faith (James 1:6-8). Don't let anyone tell you that the subject of personal faith is not important. It's the deciding factor of heaven or hell, life and death for the Christian. It is no small wonder that Satan has targeted this all-important subject for some of the most convincing deceptions that can be found in religious teachings.

A correct understanding of covenant is crucial because our faith is directly tied to it. Our conception of God and our faith in what He will do for us is related directly to our understanding of the blood covenant. As we saw earlier, Abram's faith was based upon a blood covenant that God initiated and bound Himself to. In the book of Romans, Abraham is called "the father of all them that believe" (Romans 4:11). If you do an in-depth study on the life of Abraham, you will find that his strong faith was firmly rooted in this blood covenant that God initiated. Our faith as Christians should also be rooted in covenant, the blood covenant of Jesus Christ (Luke 22:20). If our understanding of covenant basics is incorrect then we will possess a "counterfeit" faith when dealing with our Father on certain issues. This kind of faith looks good and tends to be socially acceptable, but it is weak and ineffective when relating with our Father in heaven.

Because of this "western" mentality of the blood covenant, we find two types of faith in the Church today. One type of faith is based on the ancient

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Middle Eastern understanding of the blood covenant, and the other type of faith is based on the "western" understanding. The western interpretation says that the blood covenant in the Bible is just an agreement or contract. It re-defines the "sovereignty of God" by declaring that God freely does whatever He wants and has not bound Himself to any kind of "covenant." Those who hold to the western viewpoint never deny the existence of God's covenant, yet they declare that God is not under any special obligation to it—which is nothing but spiritual nonsense. They say that for God to be bound to such an agreement is a violation of His sovereignty. Often you hear the term "sovereignty of God" used in the defense of the western interpretation of covenant. The word "sovereignty" means absolute in power and authority. Many Christians interpret this to mean that God does whatever He wants and is not subject to anyone or anything because He is "sovereign." God can either make you sick or heal you depending on what He wants to do. Since God is not bound to a "covenant," He can afflict you with cancer to teach you piety, holiness or some hidden purpose. This actually reflects the belief **of a majority** of professing Christians. To them, to take any other position on God's sovereignty is to call His authority into question, but does it really? Did you know that the United States is called a "sovereign nation?" This "sovereignty" also means absolute in power and authority. It means that the United States has absolute power and authority over its own borders. Does this mean that the United States government does whatever it wants to those within its borders? No it does not. America has a document called the Constitution. This document establishes certain limitations on government and guarantees certain rights and privileges to U.S. citizens. These rights are designed to protect the people from abuse that might come from their own government. The Constitution does not, however, make the United States any less a "sovereign" nation.

The Word of God tells us there is a blood covenant which God initiated and to which He bound Himself. Because it was God who initiated and established the provisions of this covenant, God's sovereignty is not affected. It was His "sovereign" choice to provide us these rights. This blood covenant guarantees certain rights and privileges to believers in Jesus Christ and is the basis for our faith toward God. Because of the existence of this covenant, we can "have faith" that God will do certain things because it is a "blood oath" forever established on the blood of Jesus Christ. The blood of God Himself sealed this covenant and it is that blood which becomes the surety of the promises (Hebrews 7:22). For this reason, our job

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## *Understanding Covenant Basics*

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is to learn what our responsibilities are and how to **receive** what is promised by the covenant. True Bible faith is always evidenced by receiving the answer when you pray and **before** you actually get what you requested. You can better understand the words of Jesus in Mark 11:24 when He said...

*"Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, **believe that you receive them**, and you will have them."*

The western understanding of covenant, however, says something different. It says that God does whatever He wants and that there is no covenant to which He is bound. This understanding produces what I call "passive faith." This type of faith is a counterfeit, which means it may look "spiritual" and pious but it isn't the real thing. Someone who prays with this type of faith might say something like..."it might not be God's will to heal me. God might want me sick so that He can make me more dependent on Him," or "It might not be in God's wisdom for Him to give me what I ask for," or "God, please heal me if it be Thy will." These kinds of prayer are caused by a lack of knowledge about our covenant with God.

Recently I heard a well known Bible teacher sharing his "concern" for Christians who believed that God would give them that for which they prayed. This man's books are very popular and can easily be found in most Christian bookstores. He went on to say that he believed if God were to give us what we ask for it would be one of the worst things that could happen to us. He said that instead of asking God to give us what we wanted or needed, we should ask God to "do the right thing." Now that kind of thinking may sound like a good, humble religious practice; but does it agree with what the Bible teaches? In Mark 11:24, did Jesus say ...whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that God will do the right thing, and you will get the right thing? No He didn't. If we read what Jesus said in John 14:13-14, we see that this teacher is saying something that directly contradicts scripture. This type of teaching causes Christians to have impotent faith.

*"And **whatever ye shall ask** in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask **anything** in My name, I will do it."*

Again in John 15:7 Jesus says...

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*"If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you."*

God wants us to be in a position of "knowing" when it comes to getting our prayers answered. You will find that a good deal of modern "Christian" teaching is specifically designed to destroy the Bible kind of faith, a faith which is based on blood covenant, and to replace it with a counterfeit (passive) faith which is based on "theology" and human reason.

In Numbers chapter 13, God instructed Moses to send out twelve men, one from each tribe of Israel, to search out the promised land (the land God promised to Abraham through a blood covenant). These men were sent out to gather information concerning the strength of the inhabitants of the land and of its abundance. When they returned, ten of the spies stirred up the entire congregation of Israel with what the Bible called "an evil report." These ten men told everyone that because of the strong, fortified cities, it was impossible for Israel to conquer this land. They proceeded to say that the inhabitants of the land were exceedingly great and appeared as "giants" compared to Israel. In the natural realm, everything they said appeared to be correct. Only two men, Joshua and Caleb, tried to convince the people that they were well able to take the land. They based their conclusion not on the outward appearance of the situation but on what God had promised. The people chose to listen to the "majority" who said it was impossible.

The conflict illustrated here is one of a blood covenant vs. human reason. Joshua and Caleb were blood covenant men. They knew that God had given Israel this land and swore it in a blood oath to Abraham. Joshua and Caleb knew it could not fail to come to pass. The other ten spies did not respect the fact that God had committed Himself to this covenant. They based their success or failure on the "circumstances" and on Israel's military ability to take the land. They did not consider God's part in the matter. The ten spies persuaded all the congregation of Israel to side with them. God said that these ten spies made an "evil" report (Numbers 13:32). My concern over the modern institutional church is that the majority is rarely right. In this case, only two men out of twelve were right, but not listened to. As a result of following the majority, God judged the entire nation of Israel. He made them wander in the wilderness until that generation died off. When God finally allowed Israel to go in and possess the land, some 40 years later, only Joshua and Caleb were still alive and had the joy of seeing

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## *Understanding Covenant Basics*

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God's covenant promise to Abraham come to pass! It is interesting to note that the difference between an evil report and a right report was Joshua and Caleb's understanding of blood covenant principles. It is also interesting that the Bible describes Joshua and Caleb as great men of faith. It is my observation that the faith of these men came from the same place where Abraham's faith came from—the blood covenant. God settled Abraham's doubts about inheriting the land by making a covenant with him—and this same covenant was the anchor and the foundation for the faith of Joshua and Caleb. They **knew** they could take the land.

From this example, I have come up with what I call the "20/80 rule." From watching the actions of the modern institutional church, I have found that more than 80 per cent of professing Christians reject the Bible position on covenant and embrace human reason and "theology" as their guiding principles. Most of what is taught today concerning faith is a "passive" counterfeit faith based on the "Western" understanding of covenant. The word "passive" describes the spiritual condition in which it puts a believer. A person with passive faith fails to take personal responsibility when making prayer petitions. This attitude subtly places all the blame for unanswered prayer on God. If their prayers aren't answered they say, "It must not have been God's will." They never stop to consider that maybe they didn't meet the Biblical conditions required to get an answer in the first place—like praying the way Jesus said to pray in Mark 11:24. The western understanding of covenant is a popular doctrine and is easily found on Christian radio and in Christian bookstores. Some of the churches' most trusted, well-known preachers teach it as truth. Some Christians are confused by what they see going on in the church today. Many secretly want to know why God seems different now than He is in the Bible. The answer is no mystery. God is still the same as He was. He hasn't changed. We are the ones who have changed. By allowing religious thinking to change the definition of covenant, we have lost the very foundation for our faith. The book of James says that without the true Bible kind of faith, "...let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord" (James 1:6-7). The problem lies with the kind of faith we have and where our faith is founded. Change the meaning of our blood covenant with God and you destroy the Biblical kind of faith.

In Matthew chapter 14, we see another example of Bible faith in action. Starting in verse 22, we see Jesus send his disciples across the sea by ship

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while he sent the multitude away after He fed the five thousand. In the fourth watch of the night, the boat was tossed about by the waves in a storm and Jesus came walking toward them on the sea. You can read the entire account yourself, but we need to focus on what Peter did in this situation. Peter saw Jesus walking on the water and said, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water." Jesus said one word to Peter, "Come." Peter got out of the boat in the middle of the storm and walked on the water. But, almost immediately something happened. Peter started out in success by **receiving** the word of Jesus to "come." As long as Peter's faith remained on what Jesus said, he could do the same thing that Jesus did—walk on water. Peter's faith, however, was pulled off what Jesus said and became focused on the "boisterous wind." Human reason took over at that point and Peter began to sink. Human reason said to Peter, "look at the wind—look at the storm—look where you are standing—this is impossible!" The Bible says that Jesus had to catch him before he went under. Jesus rebuked Peter by saying to him "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" Jesus said that Peter had "little faith." I don't know of anyone in the modern Church that could take even one step onto water yet Peter (as a mortal man) did—and this is the real miracle in the story. If Peter had "little faith," where are we at in the church today? Most of the time, preachers focus our attention on Peter's words, "Lord save me!" They turn this incident into something that illustrates our need of salvation. Although this is not necessarily bad, we also need to see that this miracle gives one of the clearest pictures about the nature of real Biblical faith. It is also important to see that Peter was the only one to get out of the boat. The other eleven disciples were afraid to try! What would you do if you were there?

There is another important lesson to be learned from this example. Notice very carefully that Jesus stated it was His will for Peter to walk on the water by saying the word "come." Jesus wanted Peter to succeed. If this is so, why did Peter sink? The majority of the Church has the wrong notion that if something is God's will then it automatically happens! Nothing could be further from the truth. Jesus said that Peter's failure was due to "little faith." How could this be since God always does whatever He wants and is limited by no one or no thing? Jesus clearly wanted Peter to walk on the water. The argument that God does whatever He wants doesn't hold up in this example and clearly doesn't remain true in other examples in the Bible, such as when the woman with an issue of blood was healed by touching the border of Jesus' garment. Jesus said, "Daughter, be of good cheer; your

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## *Understanding Covenant Basics*

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**faith** has made you well." (Luke 8:43-48) If these things are true then God demands an **active** faith from us, not a passive one. A believer with active faith recognizes that they have a responsibility in the prayer process. They understand that spiritual success or failure has a lot to do with the condition of their faith. It is not that we tell God how to answer our prayers as some have asserted. Rather, it is our being obedient to God's ways.

When you look at Peter's example of walking on the water, along with the example of the twelve spies, you see that true faith filled covenant people are few in number and are usually persecuted by the religious community as being fanatics or heretics. Since Jesus was also branded as a heretic by the religious leaders of His day, I think being a heretic in this area can be viewed as something positive. I would rather be in the same group as Jesus any day.

I cite these scriptural examples to illustrate a point. First of all, Bible faith is demonstrated by **receiving**. Faith is a right response to God's Word and this right response is one of receiving. Joshua and Caleb received the taking of the promised land **before** they had it. Their faith was based on God's promise given through a blood covenant. Peter received Jesus' word to "come." He accepted Jesus' word as true and demonstrated that he had received His word by stepping out of the boat in them middle of the sea—in the middle of a violent storm. It is this kind of Bible faith that God is looking for. As we study more about our covenant with God in the pages ahead, we need to keep in mind that **faith in the blood of God's Son is the only way it operates**. Without this kind of faith, the new covenant in Christ's blood will not benefit you. Hebrews 4:1-2 tells us...

*"Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it. For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; **but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it.**"*

## DEVELOPING A COVENANT MENTALITY

One characteristic of a "covenant" man is his boldness. When luke-warm Christians come in contact with someone who has faith founded in the blood covenant of Jesus Christ, the first reaction is to brand them as prideful and egotistical. Ego is the world's counterfeit of covenant faith. Remember that counterfeits are "look-alikes." If you place these two mind-sets side by side, they look similar. Ego is founded upon what "I" can do. Bible faith is founded upon what "God" has already done. One is "self" centered and the other is "God" centered.



The religious community often accuses people of faith of lacking humility. Webster's dictionary describes humility as a lack of **SELF-assertiveness**. A Christian who has Biblical humility has replaced self-assertiveness with **GOD-assertiveness**. This type of person may appear on the surface to be just the opposite of what the world would call "humble." His "assertiveness," however, does not come from "self." It comes from God's Holy Spirit and can be very aggressive at times. A Biblically humble person never forgets that what he is came as an undeserved gift from God. A Christian with true humility is more caught up with who he is "in Christ" than who he is "without Christ."

The best example of this mentality is observed in the example of David and Goliath. David was a faith-filled, covenant minded young man. Although you may have heard the story many times, try and catch the hidden lesson in this example from I Samuel chapter 17.

Saul was king and had reached an impasse in his struggle with the Philistines. Goliath of Gath, who had a height of six cubits and a span, stood in the way of Saul's victory. This "champion" of the Philistines possessed a bronze helmet, a coat of mail that weighed five thousand shekels of bronze, bronze armor on his legs, a bronze spear having an iron spearhead that weighed six hundred shekels and a shield-bearer that went before him. In other words, this guy was fearsome! Goliath was so intimidating that the Bible says in verse 11 that Saul and all of Israel were dismayed and greatly afraid of him. Remember that these were military men. Goliath would come out and defy the armies of Israel saying "give me

## ***Understanding Covenant Basics***

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a man, that we might fight together." The deal was that if Goliath won the fight, Israel would become the Philistine's servants. No one, even king Saul, had the courage to take on Goliath.

Something happened, however, that changes this whole situation. A young shepherd boy, approximately 16 years old, comes on the scene. There's really nothing special about this boy named David except that he knows God and understands covenant. The Bible called David "a man after God's own heart." For forty days Goliath presented himself morning and evening saying words that defied the armies of Israel. When David heard the words of Goliath, something went off inside him. David declared to those around him, "For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?" As a result, David was called before King Saul. David told Saul, "Let no man's heart fail because of him; thy servant will go and fight with this Philistine." David went on to say, "Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear: and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God." David declared, "The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, He will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine." Saul tried to persuade David not to go but finally agreed saying, "Go, and the Lord be with you."

In verse 42, Goliath sees David and the Bible says he disdained him because he was only a youth. Goliath tells David,

*"Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and the beasts of the field!"*

This threat had no effect on David at all. In response David tells Goliath,

*"You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you and take your head from you. And this day I will give the carcasses of the camp of the Philistines to the birds of the air and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know*

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*that there is a God in Israel. Then all this assembly shall know that the Lord does not save with sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord's, and He will give you into our hands."*

In verse 48 the Bible says,

*"And it was so, when the Philistine arose and came and drew near to meet David, **that David hastened and ran toward the army to meet the Philistine.**"*



We all know how it ended. David not only killed Goliath, but set the stage for Israel's complete victory over the Philistines that day.

What's going on here? We have thousands of men of war in the army of Israel and not one had this kind of confidence, including the King. Was David being presumptuous? Was he just some teenager who was mischievous and had a big ego? If you read the account in I Samuel 17, you discover that this is what his brothers thought. Where did David's boldness come from? It came from blood covenant knowledge. Examine David's words and then read Psalm 91. It gives some of the provisions of that covenant. One of the provisions is that when an enemy comes against you, "A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee." This is from where the faith and confidence of David came. It was covenant faith. David **knew** something about God that the soldiers did not know. David's faith was not founded in a god who constantly changed the rules so that you couldn't figure out what He was going to do. David's faith was in the God of the covenant. The author of Hebrews tells New Testament believers that the covenant of Jesus Christ is a **better covenant founded on better promises!** This means that we have something that is better and more sure than the Old Testament or old covenant on which to base our faith (Hebrews 8:6).

## THE TWO KINDS OF COVENANTS

To this point, we have covered what is known as an **equal** covenant. This is where the two participants who wish to cut the covenant have a balance of liabilities and assets. Where one is weak, the other is strong. Covenants are often made for this reason. One tribe who is weak in one



## *Understanding Covenant Basics*

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area will join itself to another tribe who has strength in a corresponding area. This is especially important if there is a threat from an enemy. In this way, both parties benefit from each other's strengths.

However, there is a different type of covenant called an **unequal** covenant. This is where one participant has absolutely nothing and the other participant has an abundance of resources. This kind of covenant is usually made because of a love that the one with the abundance has for the one who has nothing. The one who has the abundance actually does all the giving. The participant who has nothing does all the taking. It is an **unequal** arrangement and our natural reaction is to declare it as unfair to the one with the abundance. The Greek word for this kind of covenant is "Diatheke." I found it very interesting that when Jesus said in Luke 22:20, "This cup is the New Covenant in My blood, which is shed for you," the word "covenant" here is the Greek word "diatheke." The New Covenant of Jesus Christ is an **unequal** covenant where God provides everything—and our job is to receive what he provides. John 3:16 comes to mind as we discuss this subject, "**For God so love the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.**" Another scripture that goes along with this one is found in Romans 8:32, "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also **freely give us all things?**" This kind of thinking brings us to a place of liberty and freedom. It's good news—the good news of the Gospel. The way of religion brings bondage. It distorts and perverts the Gospel into something it was never meant to be. Maybe, we can begin to understand what Jesus was talking about in John 8:32 when He said...

*"And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."*

Many in the Church have never heard "the truth." Always remember that counterfeit truth brings bondage, but real, Biblical truth brings freedom and liberty. I believe the proclamation of the counterfeit gospel to be the main reason that many have left the Church and are disillusioned with the things of God. If this is where you are today, stay with us. We have good news for you.

