

Covenant & Commitment

A four-week series
on Covenant Membership



Covenant & Commitment:

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1. Covenant: A Living, Breathing Thing
2. Covenanting with Christ & the Church
3. New Covenant, Renewed Vision
4. Covenant as Radical Discipleship



What is a Biblical Covenant?

Covenant (בְּרִית or *berith*)—literally means “to cut”; to make a sacred pact, vow, alliance, agreement, etc.

In the ANE, treaties or covenants were made between kings and their subjects, or between deities and worshippers (e.g. “If... then” reflects this)—Costs, benefits, and consequences.

A biblical covenant had elements of a contract, but went deeper in establishing a spiritual/soul connection. It involves persons entering into a relationship of trust then made public. In other words, you’re putting faith in a person(s).

- ANE: “Let’s cut a covenant...” or “Let’s make a pact.”
- Today: “Let’s get married.”

“The marriage analogy of biblical faith is particularly appropriate because marriage is a covenant, and is true of a host of other concepts in Scripture, faith in the Bible is a *covenantal* concept... The only official covenant that remains in our culture is marriage, and even this is increasingly being treated like a contract instead of a covenant... The most basic difference is that a contract is a legal arrangement made *between* people, while a covenant is a pledge of *trust* that *involves the people themselves.*”

Greg Boyd, *Benefit of the Doubt* (pg.114)

Genesis 17:1-5 NIV

¹ When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, “I am God Almighty; walk before me faithfully and be blameless. ² Then I will make my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers.”

³ Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, ⁴ “As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. ⁵ No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations.

Genesis 17:6-8 NIV

⁶ I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. ⁷ I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. ⁸ The whole land of Canaan, where you now reside as a foreigner, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.”

Genesis 17:9-11 NIV

⁹ Then God said to Abraham, “As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come. ¹⁰ This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. ¹¹ You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you.

Paul, Romans 4:9-11, 13 NIV

⁹ We have been saying that Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness [covenantal faithfulness].

¹⁰ Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before!

¹¹ And he received circumcision as a sign, a seal of the righteousness [covenantal faithfulness/membership] that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised.

¹³ It was not through the law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith.

Exodus 24:1-4 NIV

¹ Then the LORD said to Moses, “Come up to the LORD, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel. You are to worship at a distance, ² but Moses alone is to approach the LORD; the others must not come near. And the people may not come up with him.”

³ When Moses went and told the people all the LORD’s words and laws, they responded with one voice, “Everything the LORD has said we will do.” ⁴ Moses then wrote down everything the LORD had said.

Exodus 24:4-8 NIV

He got up early the next morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain and set up twelve stone pillars representing the twelve tribes of Israel. ⁵ Then he sent young Israelite men, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as fellowship offerings to the LORD. ⁶ Moses took half of the blood and put it in bowls, and the other half he splashed against the altar. ⁷ Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, “We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey.”

⁸ Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, “This is the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.”

Jeremiah 31:31-32 NIV

³¹ “The days are coming,” declares the LORD,
“when I will make a new covenant
with the people of Israel
and with the people of Judah.

³² It will not be like the covenant
I made with their ancestors
when I took them by the hand
to lead them out of Egypt,
because they broke my covenant,
though I was a husband to them,”
declares the LORD.

Jeremiah 31:33-34 NIV

³³ “This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,” declares the LORD.

“I will put my law in their minds
and write it on their hearts.

I will be their God,
and they will be my people.

³⁴ No longer will they teach their neighbor,
or say to one another, ‘Know the LORD,’
because they will all know me,
from the least of them to the greatest,”
declares the LORD.

“For I will forgive their wickedness
and will remember their sins no more.”

So What's Involved in a Covenant?

1. Counting the cost before entering into a faith-relationship and belonging to one another (e.g. ability to trust, sacrifices, benefits, long-term effects, etc.)
2. Entering into the covenant and being forever changed by the relationship (e.g. new identity, new family, a new shared destiny/future, etc.)
3. Continually investing (time, energy, money, etc.) to maintain a healthy relationship, and intentionally renewing vows through a living & active display of love

Signs of the Covenant

- Old Testament – circumcision, obedience to the Law
- New Testament – baptism, obedience to Christ/Spirit

In the New Testament (Covenant)...

Believer's baptism is the initial outward sign of an inward transformative reality. First step of obedience.

Communion or Lord's Supper is an outward sign and renewal ceremony of the entry sign/vows of baptism

These **NT practices**, which include faithful presence and ongoing ministry in the church, keep our covenant alive

Covenant: A Living, Breathing Thing

A Summary & Review

- Covenants are personal and deeply spiritual
- Covenants are public (announced & given a sign/symbol)
- Covenants, while messy at times, are living and active—requiring constant attention and care
- Deliberate renewal is required to keep a covenant alive, healthy, and productive (a blessing to others)
- Covenanting with God and others begins with a commitment to **belong, believe, and behave** in a way that honors the mutual trust that's been made

A wooden chalice stands on the left, and two pieces of bread are on the right. The background is a warm, textured orange-brown.

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Sermon audio & slides in PDF can be downloaded at:
www.christiansburgmennonite.org