

## **Covenanting Together**

This study booklet is designed for believers in Jesus Christ who are considering becoming a covenant member of a church and desire to know what it means to enter into a covenant with other believers. By and large Americans have little understanding about what it means to become a partaker together with other believers in God's New Covenant and then entering into covenant with other believers to carry out God's will. We are an independent people and try to redefine Christianity in such a way as to make allowance for this independence. This study is an attempt to explain covenanting from a Biblical perspective so that we may let the Word of God, rather than our cultural perspective, shape our thinking.

There are four studies in the booklet. The first gives us an understanding of what it means to enter into a covenant from an Old Testament perspective. The second study focuses on the New covenant. The third study focuses on the consequences of us entering into the New Covenant together with other believers. The last study is really not a study but rather a guide for introspection as you consider entering into the covenant of the church. You will need to obtain a copy of the church covenant from one of the leaders.

L. Berkhof in his book Systematic Theology has written "...the response of those who share the covenant blessings will be one of true, faithful, trustful, consecrated, and devoted love. To the general promise "I will be thy God, " man responds by saying "I will belong to thy people, " and by casting his lot with the people of God."(1) We hope that these studies will bring understanding in the vital area of what it means to participate together in the covenantal life of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 3:18, 19). Systematic Theology, L. Berkhof, page 277.

### **Study #1: Old Testament**

The purpose of this first study is to understand the meaning and purpose of covenants in the Old Testament. As we get a Biblical perspective of covenants we will understand what makes up a covenant, how binding they were (even when unwise), the consequences of breaking one. As we understand the Biblical view of covenants as presented in the Old Testament we can gain a better understanding of what it means to participate in the New Covenant and why we covenant together with the church of God.

I. Our God is a covenantal God. "A covenant is like a treaty. It established the terms of relationship between two parties. It said how the two intended to relate to each other...The essence of the covenant was the (formal) relationship it established"(1).

1. There were two types of covenants in Old Testament times:

A. Between God and man. We could refer to this as a vertical covenant since it is made between a superior being (the creator) and an inferior being (his creatures). An example of this would be the covenant God made with Noah after the flood (Genesis 9:8-17). This type of covenant is also called a testament (Hence the Old and New Testaments).

B. Between a man and his fellow man. We could call this a horizontal covenant since it is between two (or more) of God's creature. An example of this would be the covenant between Jacob and Laban (Genesis 31:43-55). A modern example would be such as a marriage covenant.

C. In many cases a vertical covenant between God and man requires a horizontal response, as we will see below.

2. Read Genesis 15:1-21. This is sometimes called the Abrahamic Covenant.

A. Is this covenant vertical or horizontal? Why do you say this?

B. With whom was the relationship established? (vs. 1, 18).

C. What is the relationship established by this covenant? (vs. 1, 7). (See also Exodus 2:23ff; 6:2-8, Leviticus 26:11f).

D. Are there any escape clauses (whereby contract is made void)? Will God ever forget His covenant? (Ps 89:34, Daniel 9:4).

E. What attribute(s) of God is displayed by his being a covenant keeping God?

II. Read Joshua 24:14-28

1. Is this a covenant vertical or horizontal?

2. What is included in this covenant? (Promises, obligations).

3. Is this an appropriate response to God's covenant? How does it allow His people to reflect His invisible attributes?

III. Read Joshua 9:15-20

1. Who are the participants in this covenant?

2. How wise was it? (v.14)

3. How binding was it? Why? (see II, #3 above). Was this horizontal covenant at all binding in the vertical sense? (v.19).

IV. Read Jeremiah 34:8-22

1. Who were the participants?

2. How binding was it? What were the consequences of breaking the covenant?

3. If our God is a covenant keeping God, what should be our response to Him toward our covenantal obligations?

V. FOR FURTHER THOUGHT: A marriage covenant is an example of a covenant we enter into today. How serious is such a covenant? Are there any escape clauses? What are some other covenants we enter into (any agreement)? How serious do you take your covenantal obligations? Have a time of prayer that you will be a covenant keeper and thus reflect the attributes of your God.

(1) Lois Barrett, Building the House Church, Herald Press, Scottsdale, Pa. c. 1986 pg. 30

## **Study #2: The New Covenant**

Last week we studied various types of covenants in the Old Testament. We learned what covenants were, how binding they were even when unwise, and what the consequences were of breaking covenants. We need to keep these concepts in mind as we study this week on the New Covenant. Remember the ultimate objective of these studies is to understand what it means to enter into covenant with the church.

I. Read Hebrews 2:1-3. The book of Hebrews contains many such warnings (Cf.4:1, 2; 6:4-9; 10:26-31).

1. Why were these warnings so appropriate especially when addresses to Hebrews?

2. What would these warnings say to us?

II. Read Hebrews 8:6-13

1. What was the first covenant? (see study #1).

2. What is the New Covenant? What relationship is established? (v.10).

3. How is the relationship different from that established in the Old Testament (covenant)? How is this effected? (See John 14:15-26)

4. Both covenants are based on forgiveness (v. 13) and require a sacrifice. How is the New Covenant superior (9:28-10:4)?

5. How should we view being a partaker of this covenant? (See warning verses in I above).

III. Turn to the book of Galatians:

1. How does one become a partaker of this covenant? (see Galatians 3:7, 13f, 22, 24).

2. What is the impact of this New Covenant on the life of a believer? (Cf. 5:13, 16, 22-24)

3. Have you partaken of the covenant? How do you know? What are the implications for your life?

### **Study #3: Impact on Relationships**

In our first study we learned about covenants and especially how grave it was to be included in God's covenant as well as to enter into covenant before God with others. Last week we learned that God's New Testament (covenant) is to be viewed with equal sobriety. This week we will study what the impact of the New Testament should be on our relationships with others who have entered with us into this New Testament of love and grace.

I. Read Ephesians 2:11-3:21

1. What has God accomplished in Christ between those who have been saved (included in the covenant of grace)? See 2:13, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19, 21, 22; 3:6

2. Should our invisible vertical covenant with God be reflected in our visible horizontal relationships with others? (Eph. 2:19, 3:6). How? Cf. John 13:34, 35; 17:20-23.

3. Where should this visible relationship be manifested? (Eph. 3:10).

II. Read I John 4:7-5:3 (see also 3:10-18).

1. How does this portion of scripture connect the vertical relationship we have with God with the horizontal relationship we have with other believers? (Cf. vs. 10, 11).

2. What are some specific elements of God's invisible relationship with us, which ought to be reflected in our visible relationships with one another? (In addition you might look at Hebrews 10:19-25). What are some of the advantages of establishing a formal relationship with other believers by covenant? (see also Hebrews 13:17).

3. Is it appropriate to formalize this relationship with the people of God (i.e. through a formal covenant before God)? (Cf. Study #1; also II Chronicles 34:29-32; Nehemiah 9:1-3, 38) This is what we do with a church covenant.

One writer has said of the church covenant "We acknowledge that God, not we, set the terms of this covenant. Our (church) covenant, then is our response to God's covenant and our attempt to express our understanding of that covenant and its implications (for us as partakers together of His covenant)"(1).

4. How is a church covenant similar to a marriage covenant? How serious is such a covenant? Are there any escape clauses? How binding is our relationship with God's people?

5. Go through the covenant (at the end of the booklet or ask for one from your leader). Examine the specific elements, which attempt to summarize our responsibilities to others. Is there anything you think is unbiblical in this covenant? (List any questions you may have).

(1) Ibid., pg. 37.

## TIME OF PRAYER FOR COVENANTING

I. Plan to set aside at least one hour of concentrated time to focus your attention on the Lord in prayer and the study of His Word. How is God leading you? As you pray try to determine if God would have you covenant with this body or another. From your study of the Word you now understand that when you were saved God entered into covenant with you. But He has also entered into covenant with others as well. Thus you have become a partaker together of Christ with all those who call upon His name. This corporate salvation is appropriately reflected as we covenant with other believers endeavoring to reflect His relationship with us in our relationship with His people. The question to discern, then, is if The Lord is leading me to covenant with this group of saints or another.

II. If the Spirit of God is going to speak to you it is necessary that you be under His complete control.

1. Therefore begin your time with prayer asking God to expose anything in you that might prevent the Spirit of God from acting freely and especially anything the previous 3 studies may have exposed (wrong attitudes, selfishness, lack of obedience in any area, fear, rebellion, mistrust etc). Have a thorough time of confession and cleansing so that the Holy Spirit has full reign in your life. (See I John 1:9).

A. Where might my flesh tend to get in the way of my discerning the will of the Spirit? (See Galatians 5:17)

B. Have a time of prayer for protection against your flesh controlling this time of prayer and study.

2. After this, review your studies on Covenanting. The Holy Spirit uses the Word in guiding us. Pray as you review. You might ask the following questions:

A. Do I really understand what it means to covenant together? If not, what questions do I need to have answered (list these specifically and then seek counsel from older believers.

B. If I am hesitant is it because of rebellion? Mistrust? Fear? Be open with the Lord as you take these to Him. (You might also share this with the church so they can help you.)

C. Is there any known, continued pattern of willful sin in my life, which I need to take care of as I enter into covenant? (see Hebrews 10:26-31).

D. Is there anything that might indicate that He might be leading me not to covenant with this group?

E. If I don't covenant with this group where should I covenant?

3. What would God have me to do? Where would my flesh tend to hold me back? Have a time of committing yourself to the Lord (See Romans 12:1).

A. If you have additional questions which need answering before you can enter into covenant be sure to see an elder or other mature believer as soon as possible.

B. If you determine that the Lord is not leading you to covenant with us be certain to answer #5 above and begin immediately taking steps to covenant with them.