

Our Covenant God – Part One

Covenant is to friends what marriage is to a married couple.

Introduction to Covenant: A Summary

Covenant is the union of two lives traditionally symbolized by the mixing of their blood. Just as that blended blood can never be separated, the blood covenant bond between friends can never be broken. The two have become one soul and one life until "*death us do part*".

Throughout the Bible we see that God entered into blood covenants with people, committing Himself to both faithful and unfaithful men. To understand why He did so, we need to think the way that the Biblical writers thought about friendship and covenant. Today we use the term 'friend' very loosely. However, in Middle Eastern (and Biblical) thought a friend was someone that you were so close to that you had entered into a blood covenant with them. It was only after Abraham entered into covenant with God, that God called him His friend. Jesus said that this friendship love was the greatest love of all when He said "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends." (John 15:13) This is the same agape love which is described in 1 Corinthians 13.

Covenant is different to a contract. It is not a legal document. A contract is based on mistrust, where the parties try to protect their personal interests. With a contract one must always be careful to read the "fine print". In contrast, a covenant is a complete giving of yourself to the other person with absolutely no concern for yourself at all. In a covenant relationship your concern and focus is on the other person, not on yourself.

Covenant is friendship and it incorporates intimacy, selflessness, agreement, love, and relationship. In our study we trace and examine the covenant relationships between God and Mankind throughout history as recorded in the Holy Bible.

So many people question whether or not God could really love them. But that is the wrong question to ask. God loves you and IS your friend. The real question to ask is "Will you be God's friend?".

God is indeed our Covenant God!

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What is a Covenant?

Because covenant is not a ceremony that is widely practiced in society today, we are in danger of missing its meaning. A covenant is not just a binding agreement between two parties. It is so much more than that. It is not a contract. Covenant is the union of two friends as their two separate lives become a single life.

Before we can understand covenant, we must define 'friend'. Friend is one of those words that are so commonly used that they are rarely, if ever, defined. The understanding of the meaning of the word friend differs from person to person. A relationship that I might consider an acquaintance someone else might consider a friendship. Because of the familiarity of this word, its meaning has become vague and indistinct. In the West we use the term 'friend' casually. Friendships are here today and gone tomorrow. Slight disagreements can end a friendship at the drop of a hat. Yet, it was not so in the Eastern thought and way of life where a person would be considered a friend only after he or she had entered into a blood covenant with you.

The root meaning of the word friend means lover. A friend is one who loves. The love of a friend, according to Biblical and middle-eastern thought is "unselfish love" and "a love without desire". In Greek the word used for this type of love is agape. It is described in the great love chapter of the Bible: 1 Corinthians 13. It is "a love that selects and rests on the one selected without asking any return". Jesus called this love the highest form of love when He said "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends." (John 15:13)

A friend is someone who stays true to you even when you reject and hurt them. This was a hard thing for me to truly grasp because I always had the attitude that 'friendship is a two-way street'. The way that I saw it was that if someone hurt me that meant that they had broken the friendship and so I was free then to close the doors and walk away. It wasn't because I was a hard person that I reacted that way. It is quite the opposite, actually, for I have a very soft heart. It was just a survival tactic to save me from the hurt and pain of betrayal. But what God showed me was that 'friend' is your identity no matter what the other person does to you. 'Friend' is who you are.

An old Persian poem by the poet Jamee translated here by Alger addresses this quite eloquently:

"Sheik Schubli, taken sick, was borne one day
Unto the hospital. A host the way
Behind him thronged. 'Who are you?' Schubli cried.
'We are your friends,' the multitude replied.
Sheik Schubli threw a stone at them: they fled.
'Come back, ye false pretenders!' then he said;
'A friend is one who, ranked among his foes
By him he loves, and stoned and beat with blows,
Will still remain as friendly as before,
And to his friendship only add the more.'"

Homework Question # 1: Paraphrase this poem about Sheik Schubli, explaining what he was saying about the characteristics of a friend.

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Homework Question # 2: Today you often hear dogs being referred to as “man’s best friend”. We know that Jesus is really man’s best friend, but considering the relationships between dogs and their owners and the poem about Sheik Schubli, which characteristics of a friend would be grounds for this saying?

Homework Question # 3: Consider the following verses. So often we question God’s love for us. I know that I did that. For years I battled to believe that God truly loved me. But what do these three verses tell us about the love that Jesus has for you and I? Was Jesus guilty of being ‘a friend of tax collectors and sinners’ as the Pharisees said?

Luke 7:34 (NKJV) The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’

John 15:13 (NKJV) Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.

Romans 5:8 (NKJV) But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

When one person’s friendship is reciprocated then the two friends would enter into a blood covenant. Blood-covenanting is, as described by H. Clay Trumbull in *The Blood Covenant*, “a form of mutual covenanting, by which two persons enter into the closest, the most enduring, and the most sacred of compacts, as friends and brothers, or as more than brothers, by means of its mutual tasting, or of its inter-transfusion.”

Aristotle expressed the blood covenant union by saying: "Friendship is a single soul dwelling in two bodies."

In the East, this tie of blood covenanting is considered even a closer tie than that of natural heritage. We see this same thought in the mind of the writer of Proverbs 18.

Proverbs 18:24 (NKJV) A man who has friends must himself be friendly, But there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

The thought behind the blood covenant ritual is that the life of any created being, whether animal or human, is in its blood. Today, when we see or think of blood, we think of death. But in the mind of the people who lived in the days of the Bible, blood is life and life is blood.

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Blood = Life, Life = Blood.

Genesis 9:4 (NKJV) “But you shall not eat flesh with its life, *that is*, its blood.”

Deuteronomy 12:23 (NKJV) “...be sure that you do not eat the blood, for the blood *is* the life; you may not eat the life with the meat.”

When you read in the Bible that a covenant was ‘made’ between two or more people, the actual verb should not be translated as ‘made’. The Hebrew word is karath (Hebrew Strongs Number 3772). Even the root of the word translated as ‘covenant’, which is Berith (Hebrew Strongs Number 1285), means ‘to cut’. This is because there is always blood involved in cutting a covenant. You cut a covenant by the shedding of blood.

David and Jonathan

One famous example of two people who were blood covenant friends is David and Jonathan. We will examine their story in greater detail another day but for now I want us to just look at their hearts and see the love that they had for each other.

1 Samuel 18:1-3 Now when he had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan **loved him as his own soul**. Saul took him that day, and would not let him go home to his father's house anymore. Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he **loved him as his own soul**.

An interesting thing I discovered in my studies is that even in the remotest tribes scattered over the earth, a form of covenant and a form of worship is practiced. Deep within man, is a desire for intimacy with God and an understanding of covenant that is not taught, but known to him.

Homework Question # 4: Time and again, we find that God initiates covenants with Mankind throughout the Bible. It is always God that initiates these covenants. It is always God who reaches out to the people. What does that tell you about God's heart towards you and what does it tell you about the relationship that God wants to have with you?

Proverbs 17:17 A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.

Sources: Trumbull, H. Clay (1893). The Blood Covenant.
Trumbull, H. Clay (1891). Friendship: The Master Passion.