

Our Covenant God – Part Two

Some Vestiges of Blood Covenant in Today's Society

Although covenant is not widely practiced today, we have many customs that have lingered on in our culture that originated in this age-old tradition. When two friends "cut the covenant" by mixing blood there were a few different ways of doing this. Sometimes, as we mentioned last week, they mixed their own blood. In a case like this the two parties would cut themselves, usually on their hands, and then press their wounds together so that their blood would intermingle. That is the origin of today's handshake. Sometimes they would let their blood drip into a goblet of wine which they would both then drink. That is where we get our custom today of clinking wine glasses together before drinking.

Often they would use an animal's blood as a substitute for their own blood (especially if they were entering into a covenant with God (or a god) because no god has blood so they would need something or someone to bleed on God or their god's behalf). At other times, blood substitutes were used. The most common of these would be wine, as we see with Jesus at the Last Supper (see Luke 22:20 and 1 Corinthians 11:25) and salt. (see Leviticus 2:13, Numbers 18:19 and 2 Chronicles 13:5) Wine is considered to be the blood of the grape. (see Deuteronomy 32:14) Because these blood substitutes are still counted as blood, symbolically speaking, all covenants are blood covenants. Even marriage is a blood covenant as there is bloodshed when the woman's hymen is broken as "the two become one flesh."

Regardless of the method that the two covenant friends used, as the blood or blood substitute intermingled or was consumed, the friends believed that their lives were blending and becoming one, taking on the nature of their blood covenant partner.

Once the blood of the covenant was mixed, the next step was to make a scar over the cut as a permanent testimony to the covenant. This was normally done by rubbing salt into the wound. It would always be there as a guarantee, reminding the two parties of their covenant rights and responsibilities. This is why people greet one another by waving their hands in the air: because you recognize your blood covenant friend, not by their face, but by their blood covenant scar! This, too, is the origin of raising our hands in our worship of God. Symbolically, as we do this, we are reminding God that we know that He is our covenant partner and we are expressing our covenant devotion to Him.

When someone surrenders to someone else, like for example, a criminal surrendering to the police, we expect to see them raising their hands in the air. That is a sign of defeat. It means that they give up. They have no fight left inside of them. They will not resist any longer. But this same act used to mean something very different. If a person was attacked and it looked like they were about to be defeated, they would simply raise their hands in the air to reveal their blood covenant scar. This act would announce to their attackers: "Hey! See my scar? You are not just attacking me! I have a blood covenant friend and when you attack me you are attacking him and he is bigger than you are!" This simple act was often enough to cause the attackers to withdraw.

The different ways of cutting covenant that I described above were practiced by cultures all over the world. The Israelites, however, had two restrictions that God placed on them that related to this.

1. They were not to cut covenant with anyone who was not in covenant with God.

Exodus 34:12-16 (NKJV) Take heed to yourself, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land where you are going, lest it be a snare in your midst. But you shall destroy their altars, break their *sacred* pillars, and cut down their wooden images (for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name *is* Jealous, *is* a jealous God), lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and they play the harlot with their gods and make sacrifice to their gods, and *one of them* invites you and you eat of his sacrifice, and you take of his daughters for your sons, and his daughters play the harlot with their gods and make your sons play the harlot with their gods.

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1 - In your own words, why did God forbid His People to enter into covenant with people who were not in covenant with Him?

2. They were not to drink blood, human or animal. (see Deuteronomy 12:23)

Next we are going to look at one of the most important terms in the Old Testament:

Chesed (sometimes written as 'hesed' or "cheched"):

The New Strong's Expanded Dictionary of Bible Words and Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary tell us that this "term is one of the most important in the vocabulary of Old Testament theology and ethics" It is often translated as kindness, mercy, loving-kindness, goodness, steadfast love, faithfulness, goodness, grace, devotion, or favor. The NIV often simply translates it as love.

According to Strong's:

"Chesed is used 240 times in the Old Testament, and is especially frequent in the Psalter (the Psalms). In general, one may identify three basic meanings of the word, which always interact" "strength," "steadfastness," and "love." Any understanding of the word that fails to suggest all three inevitably loses some of its richness. "Love" by itself easily becomes sentimentalized or universalized apart from covenant. Yet "strength" or "steadfastness" suggests only the fulfillment of a legal or other obligation.

The word refers primarily to mutual and reciprocal rights and obligations between the parties of a relationship (especially Yahweh and Israel). But cheched is not only a matter of obligation; it is also of generosity. It is not only a matter of loyalty, but also of mercy. The weaker party seeks the protection and blessing of the patron and protector, but he may not lay absolute claim to it. The stronger party remains committed to his promise but retains his freedom, especially with regard to the manner in which he will implement those promises. Cheched implies personal involvement and commitment in a relationship beyond the rule of law. Marital love is often related to cheched. Marriage certainly is a legal matter, and there are legal sanctions for infractions. Yet the relationship, if sound, far transcends mere legalities... "devotion" is sometimes the single English word best capable of capturing the nuance of the original...

The association of cheched with "covenant" keeps it from being misunderstood as mere providence or love for all creatures; it applies primarily to God's particular love for His chosen and covenanted people. "Covenant" also stresses reciprocity of the relationship; but since God's cheched is ultimately beyond the covenant, it will not ultimately be abandoned, even when the human partner is unfaithful and must be disciplined (Isaiah 54:8, 10)

Interestingly enough, cheched is not used in the Bible until after God cut covenant with Abraham.

In short, cheched is not a love that includes all people. It is a love that exists only in the context of a covenant relationship. It is an eternal and committed devotion that encompasses all the different facets of expression of that love.

It is most important to realize that love is not a feeling. You can feel warm and fuzzy towards someone but that is not Biblical love. God's love for you and I is always an action. There is always evidence of His love. Jesus hanging on the Cross is God's love being demonstrated to us. There is no such thing as love without action and this applies very strongly to cheched. We see this very clearly demonstrated when King

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David searched for survivors of Saul's family to show kindness to because he had a covenant with Saul's son, Jonathan.

2 Samuel 9:3 (NKJV) Then the king said, "Is there not still someone of the house of Saul, to whom I may show the **chesed** of God?"

Here are some verses that contain the word chesed. Pretend that you are a Bible translator and rewrite each one with an appropriate English word or phrase to replace chesed. Read it in context in your own Bible and try to bring out its full meaning as best you can. I have done the first one as an example.

Q: Psalm 136:1 (NKJV) Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for *He is good!* For His **chesed** *endures* forever.

A: Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His **[loyal covenantal devotion]** endures forever!

Remember that chesed always incorporates "strength," "steadfastness," and "love."

2 - Jeremiah 31:3 (NKJV) The LORD has appeared of old to me, *saying:* "Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with **chesed** I have drawn you.

3 - Psalm 23:6 (NKJV) Surely goodness and **chesed** shall follow me all the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

4 - Hosea 6:6 (NKJV) For I desire **chesed** and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.

5 - Micah 6:8 (NKJV) "He has shown you, O man, what *is good*; And what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, to love **chesed**, and to walk humbly with your God?"

These first two lessons have served to establish a foundational understanding of the general subject of covenant. Next week we will dive into our studies of specific Biblical covenants. Before we do, however, we need to address the modern understanding of covenant.

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To the Bible student 'covenant' is a positive term because of God's chesed. But in the world of the cults and the occult, as well as in the world of gangs, covenant (or pact) is a word that often stirs up a deep fear. This is because the penalty for breaking a covenant is death. This is because, once those two bloods have mixed, they cannot be separated. The life is in the blood, so if you separate yourself from your blood covenant partner by breaking the covenant, you lose your life.

This is why the penalty for adultery was death: because it was the breaking of a marriage covenant.

However, the message of covenant in the Bible is that even when God's covenant partners were unfaithful and deserved to die, God simply postponed the death penalty, allowing them to live, until the day when Jesus – the ONE who was the FAITHFUL Friend – took the place of the unfaithful ones and died their death penalty in their place on a wooden cross. But the great news is that Jesus rose from the dead and so our death penalty has absolutely NO power over us at all. Jesus' resurrection destroyed it.

If you are not in covenant with God, then I challenge you to enter into this relationship with Him. You can do it simply by believing in Him and giving your life to Him. Just as Noah and his family entered into the Ark and were safe from the Flood, so you can enter into Jesus Christ by believing in Him. The whole message of the Bible is that God wants to have a personal relationship with you. All relationships start with communication.

You can simply pray a prayer like this:

Lord God, I believe in You. I know that Jesus is Lord and that He died for me and rose from the dead. Right now I give my entire life, all that I am, to You. I will be Your covenant friend and I thank You for being my covenant friend. Thank you that I am now brand new. In Jesus Name, Amen.

There is no blood that is more powerful than the Blood of Jesus. Thus, if you have entered into any type of ungodly agreement or covenant, once you are in blood covenant with God those other blood covenants cannot bind you. Through occult involvement, many people have entered into relationships with false gods and opened themselves to demonic influence. People are often drawn into the occult by simple curiosity or by the tragic loss of a loved one. Sometimes the occult is packaged as a child's toy, like the Ouija board. Don't be deceived. What looks like a simple toy is a trap that gives demons legal rights to harass and enslave you.

If this is you, my challenge to you is to break off those chains from your back. Know that Jesus came to set the captives free.

1. Make a list of everything in the occult, cults or other false religions that you have been involved in.
2. Renounce each thing, repenting (changing your mind about them) and confessing them as sin.
3. Do this all in the Name of Jesus.

For example: Lord God, I confess that I consulted a psychic. I know that this was sin and I will never do it again. I renounce it in the Name of Jesus.

Once you are done with your list, burn it. It is done! It is over! The Blood of Jesus has already paid for it all!

1 John 1:7 (NKJV) But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.