

1. Covenant God's way of Relationship

Today, as we focus on the three hours that Yeshua our Messiah hung on the cross we become witnesses of the restoration of a relationship between the Creator and His creation. Something so awe inspiring that it has captivated Christians for thousands of years.

The fundamental question to which all theology addresses itself is the God-Human relationship. How does God relate to us? How can we establish a relationship with God? Are we God's pawns who have absolutely no say at all in our ultimate destiny? Can there be any real stability, dependability and predictability to this one-sided relationship of the infinite, perfect God with finite, sinful humans?

The Bible answers these questions by showing us that the divine-human relationship is based on a covenant. This idea of a covenantal relationship between God and man is so basic and overwhelmingly predominant in the Scriptures that the two great sections of the Bible have appropriately been called the Old Testament (Covenant) and the New Testament (Covenant).

There are many ways to answer this question but fundamentally the relationship between God and His creation is not a lawless one. It is a relationship based on Covenant which places certain requirements and obligations for both parties.

Berith (תְּבָרִית) (pronounced *B'rith*) is most accurately translated "covenant". The Hebrew idiom for establishing a covenant is 'to cut a covenant'. This is because a covenant is made or established by sacrifice (e.g. **Gn. 15:7-21 Abraham**; **Ps. 50:5** "Those who have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice.").

Some of you will have seen the B'rith Milah notices in the newspaper. These notices announce the circumcision of a Jewish child. B'rith (covenant) Milah (word). The well-known Jewish organisation the B'nai B'rith means the "Sons of the Covenant" the Bible refers to people who "cut covenant" by the shedding of blood. We are going to see that covenant is more than a mere agreement - it involves death, a new identity and an irreversible, life-long commitment which overrides all circumstances. It is permanent nothing can undo the rights and duties contained in a covenant.

The concept of Covenant is not explained in great detail in the Bible because it was commonly understood among people in all societies. The making of covenants between people according to the Old Testament understanding of Covenant continued long after New Testament times and can still be found in many societies today. For us the closest we come to the concept of covenant is marriage but even this does not give us an accurate idea because of the "*laissez-faire*" attitude our society has to marriage.

Today as we meditate on the events of Good Friday, the suffering and death of the Lord Jesus we catch a glimpse of the nature of the Everlasting God and His everlasting covenants. We are going to see how the events we remember today are all about the values and norms of covenant. Without covenant they make no sense at all.

The Hebrew Scriptures record the establishment of a number of Covenants which form the basis of God's relationship with the world and the nation He called to be His agent of witness in that world.

The first covenant was a universal covenant which God gave to Noah. (Gen. 8). This was a Covenant for all humankind – for everyone who has ever seen a rainbow. In Gen. 17 (with Abraham); in Gen. 28:10-22 (the same covenant is re-established with Jacob/Israel); in Joshua 1 (with Jews who entered the Promised Land of Israel).

Yet here is a curious thing. When the Hebrew Scriptures speak of these covenants they do so in the singular. (**Ex. 2:24; 6:4-5; Lv. 26:42; 2 Ki. 13:23; 1 Ch. 16:16-17; Ps. 105:9-10**).

14 He is the LORD our God; His judgments are in all the earth.

15 Remember His covenant forever, The word which He commanded to a thousand generations,

16 The covenant which He made with Abraham, And His oath to Isaac.

17 He also confirmed it to Jacob for a statute, To Israel as an everlasting covenant,

18 Saying, "To you I will give the land of Canaan, As the portion of your inheritance."
1 Ch. 16:14-18

By the postmishnaic rabbinic period, circumcision and the Mosaic covenant were treated as one and the same thing.

Why is this? It is because a new covenant does not replace the one that has gone before.

Every new development is just that – a new development based on what has gone before.

The covenant with Abraham is further developed in the Mosaic expression and then

further still developed in the Davidic covenant. Each expression is based on what has

already been established and builds on the foundation of the expression that precedes it. .

The writer of the Gospel of John describes the wonder of this in the following words.

16 From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another.

17 For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.
John 1:16-17

One blessing after another – Abramic, Mosaic Davidic and now the covenant expression that Yeshua brings – one blessing after another.

You should know that the King James Version of the Bible inserted a “but” in verse 17 not because it was in the original Greek - it was not- but because the translators believed that the New Covenant had replaced the Old in such a way as to make it null and void.

In the context of the oldest religious ceremony still practiced – the Passover- Yeshua took the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood."

Here is the announcement of the central achievement of the cross – a new blood covenant. Based on the expressions of the covenants that had preceded it. Not replacing but adding to what had gone before.

To establish this covenant blood had to be shed. Jesus knew that the blood would be His. He established the covenant by His voluntary sacrifice. An important part of the covenant making ceremony included the participants cutting their the palms or the wrists of the right hand which would leave a scar for all to see. (raising hand in court, shaking hands.) Wedding ring sign on the hand. In the Abramic covenant The sign of the covenant was circumcision. This sign was a reminder to the people that they were a covenant people. EXODUS 2:24-25 Jesus' hands were pierced through so that the blood ran down His arms as a sign of Covenant. To the unbelieving Thomas He says, " Reach here your finger and see My hands...." JOHN 20:27. He showed Him the marks of the New Covenant.

2. Covenant and Promise

The covenant always comes with a promise. In the wedding ceremony the promise is made I take you to be to be my wedded wife, To have and to hold from this day forward;

For better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health. To love and to

cherish and to honour in the Lord till death us do part. According to God's holy law; and this is my solemn vow. In some respects Israel's solemn promise before Mount Sinai ("All

that the Lord has spoken we will do," **Ex. 19:8**) sounds like a bride making her wedding vow.

Speaking of the cross Jesus said,

14 "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up;

15 so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life.

John 3:14-15. /Numbers 21:5-9

Here is the promise of the cross – whoever looks with faith to the one who has been lifted up will have eternal life. This is a covenant promise made with the same solemnity and commitment as the covenant promises that preceded it.

There is no single place in the Bible where the entire process of cutting covenant is described in all its steps. Instead the passages that we have highlight one or two elements of the ceremony. By putting the various passages together we are able to reconstruct the whole ceremony.

1. Begin by exchanging prayer shawls. People during Bible times were well covered by their clothes. So many would be recognised by the outer garment they wore. In the case of observant men this would have been their prayer shawl or tallit. In covenant the exchanging of identity - the giving of myself - I now belong to you and you to me. Our identities become inseparable. What happens to you happens to me.
2. Take off belt Where your weapon (your strength) was kept.
We see this in the Covenant between David and Jonathan. 1 SAM 18:3-4
3. Cut an animal down the middle (Genesis) No other sacrifice like this. Walked through the pieces - a substitute GEN 15:10-12, 17. Another substitute is seen with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego (Daniel 3:24-26)
("Abraham saw My day and was glad" - Jesus)
4. Walk through the pieces. Walk through death symbolising the death to the past and new relationship which demands faithfulness to death. In the anrahamic covenant only the Lord (fire and smoke) moved between the pieces.
5. Cut the palm or the wrist of the right hand which would leave a scar for all to see. (raising hand in court, shaking hands.) Wedding ring sign on the hand. In the Abramic covenant the sign of the covenant was circumcision. This sign was a reminder to the people that they were a covenant people. EXODUS 2:24-25
Jesus' hands were pierced through so that the blood ran down His arms as a sign of Covenant. To the unbelieving Thomas He says, " Reach here your finger and see My hands...." JOHN 20:27. He showed Him the marks of the New Covenant.
6. Taking each other's names. This involved the incorporation of each other's names. GENESIS 17:4-5 Abraham and Sarah. God gave Abraham His name. This is why so much is made of the name of Jesus in the New Testament. If you ask anything in My name... " Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." Acts 4:12
We are followers of Yeshua who bare the name of the Covenant maker.
7. The public reciting of the terms. (the blessing) All the things that I bring into the covenant relationship and all the rights and duties. Now, in a Covenant with God I have nothing to bring. What could I possibly give God that would enrich Him. So the Covenant that God makes He makes with His Son Jesus who is our substitute - who makes the Covenant on our behalf.
8. Memorial - a meal and sometimes a pile of stones. - Mizpah the covenant between Laban and Jacob. They were such untrustworthy men that they put themselves in a place

before God where their lives would be in danger if they broke their word. Mizpah - "within the Lord's sight."

Meal of bread and wine. When Jesus ate the Last Supper with His disciples He said of the bread, "This is My Body..." and of the wine, "This is My Blood." He fed them they could not feed Him.

Sealed by this meal - Holy Spirit is the seal of the New Covenant. EPHESIANS 1:13-14

Covenant is the context for meaningful promise. The lengths that Jesus went to, to make His promise a reality are covenant requirements.

The gospel writer reflects on the context of Jesus' promise,

“¹ Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He would depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.

John 13:1

He loved them to the end is one of those loaded phrase in the scriptures. The word translated “end” is *τελος telos* in Greek. It means to the uttermost – to the fulfilment – to the end. The NIV tries to capture the import of this by translating it “*he now showed them the full extent of his love.*”

John specifies the precise time of which he speaks and the circumstances in which it was said 'that He loved them unto the end'. It was before the Passover and when He knew His 'exodus' was near. Jesus, it can be said, loved His disciples with an eternal love and He still loves His people in the same way, with a love that goes back to eternity and forward to everlasting life. This is not an idle promise this is a covenant oath. The cross is the demonstration of the extent of the promise.

No wonder the centurion at the foot of the cross, having witnessed the way Jesus suffered and died said, “Surely, this was the Son of God.”

Cecil Frances Alexander, wrote this hymn as she sat up one night with her seriously sick daughter. Many times, travelling to town, she had passed a small grassy mound, just outside the old city wall of Derry, Ireland. It always made her think of Calvary, and it came to mind as she wrote this hymn as she relied the on the Love that loves to the end.

We may not know, we cannot tell,
What pains He had to bear;
But we believe it was for us
He hung and suffered there.

3. The Covenant and Failure

We all hesitate to make promises and vows for fear that we will not be able to keep them. We know our own frailty and the trouble we have with being people of our word.

Covenants always have requirements of the participants. The fact that Jesus makes a covenant on our behalf does not mean that we are free from obligation to the stipulations of the covenant. Remembering that the covenants are built upon those that have preceded them gives us an idea of what the stipulations of the New Covenant are.

The basic stipulation of the covenants in the Hebrew Scripture is

2 'You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy...' **Leviticus 19:2.**

7 'You shall consecrate yourselves therefore and be holy, for I am the LORD your God.'"

8 'You shall keep My statutes and practice them; I am the LORD who sanctifies you.'"

Leviticus 20:7-8

26 'Thus you are to be holy to Me, for I the LORD am holy; and I have set you apart from the peoples to be Mine.

Leviticus 20:26

Jesus picks up this same theme with His disciples

48 "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Matthew 5:48

Professor David Flusser of blessed memory points out that **Luke 6:36** (*"Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful"*). is a parallel to **Matthew 5:48**: "You must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." The best way of translating this saying is, "There must be no limit in your goodness, as your heavenly Father's goodness knows no bounds". [NEB] **Matthew 5:48** is merely the conclusion to a short homily where Jesus teaches that God reaches out in love to *all* people, regardless of their attitude and behavior toward Him, "for He makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust."

The Apostle Paul or Rabbi Shaul, if you prefer, says this

16 Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, "I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM; AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE.

17 "Therefore, COME OUT FROM THEIR MIDST AND BE SEPARATE," says the Lord. "AND DO NOT TOUCH WHAT IS UNCLEAN; And I will welcome you.

18 "And I will be a father to you, And you shall be sons and daughters to Me," Says the Lord Almighty.

7:1 Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

2 Corinthians 6:16

Given these statements about being holy you would think that holiness would have a much higher profile in the average Christian's thinking. Yet there are many characteristics of the Christian community, such as the divorce statistics, which are no different to our pagan counterparts. Sexual purity is considered old fashioned and mimicking the secular world has become a way of life for many Christians. We have failed to keep the new covenant just as much as the Israelites failed to keep the first covenant. Its not just uneducated Christians either. Many Christian leaders not only give little attention to their own personal holiness but they applaud godlessness in others.

32 and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.

Romans 1:32

We have to concur with Nehemiah's prayer.

5 I said, "I beseech You, O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who preserves the covenant and lovingkindness for those who love Him and keep His commandments,

6 let Your ear now be attentive and Your eyes open to hear the prayer of Your servant which I am praying before You now, day and night, on behalf of the sons of Israel Your servants, confessing the sins of the sons of Israel which we have sinned against You; I and my father's house have sinned.

7 "We have acted very corruptly against You and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses.

8 "Remember the word which You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful I will scatter you among the peoples;

- 9 but if you return to Me and keep My commandments and do them, though those of you who have been scattered were in the most remote part of the heavens, I will gather them from there and will bring them to the place where I have chosen to cause My name to dwell.'
- Nehemiah 1:5-9**

While on the cross Yeshua bore away the curses of the broken covenant so that the believing sinner might be pardoned, He also fulfilled the stipulations of the covenant by His life. He kept the commandments so that his perfect keeping of the commandments might be imparted to those who place their trust in Him. Being justified by faith in both Christ's doing and dying, the believer becomes a recipient of all the covenant blessings.

Put more simply, Yeshua fulfilled the covenant's requirements and paid the price of our failure to do the same. Those of you who worship here regularly will have heard ,me preface the receiving of communion with Paul's words;

"He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." **2 Corinthians 5:21**

Some Christians have interpreted this spiritual truth as a licence for lawlessness. However when you look at the price that Yeshua paid for our forgiveness the only appropriate response is to seek to fulfill the requirement of all the covenants "*Be holy , for I the LORD am holy*"

The Apostle John expresses this relationship between holiness and forgiveness in the following way.

- 6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth;
- 7 but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.
- 8 If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.
- 9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.
- 10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.

4. Covenant and Identification

So far we have looked at

"Covenant God's way of Relationship"

"Covenant and Promise"

"Covenant and Failure"

We now turn to the Covenant and Identification. Of the many things the cross symbolizes for us one of the most powerful is surely Yeshua's identification with us.

"Then I will take you for My people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am the LORD your God..."

John's Gospel describes this identification with us

- 14 And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John 1:14

The statement in John is an echo of Exodus 25:8.

8 "Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them. (**Ex 25:8**)
The Hebrew of this verse is literally translated "dwell in them".

Identification is beautifully pictured in the Abrahamic covenant.

When Abram is 99 years old the covenant is renewed and his name is changed from Abram [exalted father] to Abraham [father of a multitude]. The addition to Abraham and Sarah's name is a letter from God's own name YHWH. The structure of the passage in **Genesis 17** is a chiasmic format which places the sign of covenant (circumcision) at the centre and the renaming of Abraham and Sarah on either side.

This change of names binds the parties together. Even God Himself is known as "The God of Abraham." Abraham, for his part was called friend of God. This covenant identification means real change. This is why so much is made of the name of Jesus in the New Testament.

"For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst."

Matt 18:20

"Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son." If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it.

John 14:13-14

"There is no other name given on earth or in heaven by which we may be saved." **Acts 4:12**

We are Christians who bare the name of the Covenant maker.

Jesus began His ministry by being baptised by John the Immerser. The very first act is an identification with sinful humans for whom He had come to die. Often His identification with us was misunderstood, particularly by the religious establishment. Why was this holy teacher spending time with tax collectors and sinners? What could He possibly have in common with them? What bound Him to them was identification. He came not to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom. They were His preoccu

As we consider the suffering and death of our Saviour we see the lengths to which He was prepared to take this identification with us.

The Tempter who had attempted to seduce Jesus in the desert and throughout his life was now to launch his last attack. Some members of the Sanhedrin, not content with having secured Christ's condemnation, had come out to Calvary to gloat over his sufferings; and now they began jeering: "If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross" (**Matt. 27:40**). That was not only a taunt; it was a temptation. It was a double temptation. It was a temptation to leave the last dregs of the bitter cup of suffering untasted, to escape before the final shekel of the price of sin was paid. But it was more. It was a temptation to do something dazzling and dramatic at this eleventh hour to compel men to believe in Him.

"Let him come down from the cross, *and we will believe,*" the crowd shouted. That was the real sting of it for Jesus, because at one level establishing belief was the aim and object of his life. But now in dying he resisted that last temptation and refused the allure of the spectacular for the sake of His identification with us.

When, in scornful mockery they shouted, "He saved others; himself he cannot save" (**Matt. 27:42**), they were saying something deeper and truer than they could have imagined. It was a fact, the central fact of the gospel, that in his passion to save the world He would demonstrate the final revelation of His identification with us. Jesus would not, and could not save himself. It was not the Roman nails through his hands, but by the covenant love and commitment in his own heart, that He was bound to the cross, until the work was done; and his refusal to save himself has become the saving of the world.

This is Covenant love. Not a mere sentimentality that waxes and wanes with changing circumstances. This is a love that will not let us go. Its insistent presence in our lives will not leave us to our own destruction. It is this identification with us, this abiding presence that convicts us of sin and calls us back to relationship by repentance and faith.

The writer to the Hebrews tells us that “we do not have a high priest incapable of sympathizing with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way just as we are, yet without sin”

His identification with us continues after the cross.

- 5 For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men,
the man Christ Jesus,
- 6 who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time.

1 Timothy 2:5-6

His commitment to the covenant calls us to respond with the same intensity as members of the covenant family.

- 21 For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you,
leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps. **1 Peter 2:21**

5. Covenant and Reconciliation

Some people think that the cross is about the appeasing of a celestial bad temper. Critics of Christianity often claim that the cross is a picture of an angry God who needed a blood sacrifice to calm Him down. Strangely this would be a very accurate description of the pagan view of sacrifice amongst the Canaanites and the Maya or Inca people of South America.

The Bible takes us right away from the world of pagan religion. It condemns paganism out of hand, as a monstrous distortion of truth. The Bible sets the one almighty Creator, the only real God, in Whom all goodness and truth find their source, and to Whom all moral evil is abhorrent. With Him there is no bad temper, no capriciousness, no vanity, no ill-will. One might expect, therefore, that there would be no place for the idea of propitiation in biblical religion.

The idea of propitiation—that is, of averting God's anger by an offering—runs right through the Bible. In the Hebrew Scriptures, it underlies the prescribed rituals of the sin-offering, the guilt-offering and the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) **Leviticus 4:1-6:7; 16.**

The great difference is the concept of Covenant.

In our reading King Josiah repents with all the people when they find the scroll of the law and read its contents. The king concludes; *for great is the wrath of the LORD that burns against us, because our fathers have not listened to the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us.* (**2 kings 22:13b**) It is Josiah's repentance that moves God not sacrifice. Repentance is about relationship not ritual. A change of heart is what moves God not ritualistic sacrifice for its own sake.

What difference does Covenant make?

When God established covenant with Noah, Abraham and Moses it was always by His initiation and completion. If you look at the establishment of the Abrahamic Covenant two things are very clear. First in Gen 17 in the space of 10 verses God speaks of “My covenant” and says I will eleven times. He never says “our covenant” or “we will”. He is the initiator or author and finisher of the covenant. When the ceremony of cutting covenant is performed Abraham's participation is described as; “...a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, terror and great darkness fell upon him.” **Gen 15:12** Abraham could not take part God had to do it on His behalf.

When God initiated the Mosaic covenant He first made the offer of relationship.

- 2 God spoke further to Moses and said to him, "I am the LORD;
- 3 and I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as God Almighty, but by My name, LORD, I did not make Myself known to them.
- 4 "I also established My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they sojourned.
- 5 "Furthermore I have heard the groaning of the sons of Israel, because the Egyptians are holding them in bondage, and I have remembered My covenant.
- 6 "Say, therefore, to the sons of Israel, 'I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage. I will also redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments.
- 7 "Then I will take you for My people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.

Notice the one-sided nature of the covenant that God announces to Moses. All the people did was groan!

Later the people accepted it even before they had heard the terms and conditions.

- 1 In the third month after the sons of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that very day they came into the wilderness of Sinai.
- 2 When they set out from Rephidim, they came to the wilderness of Sinai and camped in the wilderness; and there Israel camped in front of the mountain.
- 3 Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob and tell the sons of Israel:
- 4 'You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you to Myself.
- 5 'Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine;
- 6 and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel."
- 7 So Moses came and called the elders of the people, and set before them all these words which the LORD had commanded him.
- 8 All the people answered together and said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do!" And Moses brought back the words of the people to the LORD.

Exodus 19:1-8

They knew that for a covenant to be worth having it had to be made and mediated by Him. They accepted it even before hearing its terms because they knew that God was trustworthy.

The events of the cross are based on the same one-sided covenant idea. We could not assuage God's righteous anger at our rebellion and sin. Only He could. You and I could not contribute to the events of this day in any way. Our only contribution was the sin for which He died.

The Apostle John expresses it as follows:

- 8 The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.
- 9 By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him.
- 10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

1 John 4:8-10

In the faith of the New Testament the idea of propitiation is central. The love of God, the taking of humanity by the Son, the meaning of the cross, Christ's heavenly intercession for us, and the way of salvation, are all to be explained in terms of propitiation, and any explanation from which the thought of propitiation is missing will be incomplete, and indeed actually misleading, by New Testament standards.

What has happened ? The wrath of God against us, both present and to come, has been quenched. How was this effected ? Through the death of Christ. 'While we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son' (5:10). The 'blood'—that is, the sacrificial death—of Jesus Christ abolished God's anger against us, and ensured that His treatment of us for ever after would be propitious and favourable. Henceforth, instead of showing Himself to be against us, He would show Himself in our life and experience to be for us.

6. Covenants Old and New

We have already established that the New Covenant does replace the first covenant in the sense that it is completely new. On the contrary it is a covenant based on the covenants that have gone before. Does this mean the old covenant was God's mistake? Not at all. Jesus Himself stated that He did not come to destroy the law and the prophets. He came not to destroy, but to fulfill (**Matt. 5:17**).

The old covenant with its laws, priests, tabernacle/temple, animal sacrifices, etc was a picture of what Jesus the Messiah would accomplish. God was not short-sighted or ignorant about the inadequacies of the First Covenant and so, He builds a new expression of relationship which deals with sin once and for all. Jesus was not an after thought. His coming and purpose was prophesied to Adam and Eve (**Gen. 3:15**) and to Abraham the recipient of the first covenant. His coming was intentional from the time of fall of mankind and the promise of his coming brought hope to Israel through the first covenant.

When Jesus instituted the new covenant, he was in an upper room with His twelve disciples sharing the Passover meal just before His crucifixion. In the midst of the meal that focuses on the liberation from slavery in Egypt Jesus announced the new covenant.

He took the cup of wine and said, "*This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.*" (**Luke 24:20**). The new covenant was also sealed with the blood of a sacrifice. Jesus was the sacrificial lamb, and His blood was poured out for the sins of mankind. This was the end of the limited terms of the old covenant and the beginning of a new one. Jesus accomplished in the new covenant what the old covenant was not adequate to do – defeat sin.

In Yeshua the Messiah the requirements of the first covenant were fulfilled. In fact, far from abolishing the first covenant He personifies the elements of it:

1. He lived a sinless life – walk before me and be perfect
2. Became the sacrifice for our sins
3. Was raised from the dead defeating sin and death

Jesus Christ became our:

1. Our High Priest
2. Our Sacrifice

The writer to the Hebrews (**8:13**) seems to intimate that the first covenant has been made obsolete. (Greek: *palaio*) means "things worn out by time and use" (*Vine's Dictionary of Biblical Words*). **Hebrews 10:9-18** shows Christ's sacrifice made animal sacrifices pale by comparison. The first covenant ritual was not suddenly discarded or forbidden in the New Testament Church. It simply faded into disuse as people became aware of the superiority of the new covenant and that all the requirements of the first covenant were contained and fulfilled in the new. But the law of God will *never* become obsolete (**Matthew 5:18**).

As Jesus said the familiar blessing over the fourth cup – the cup of redemption – He introduced an Exodus far more radical than Sinai. No longer was the establishment of the nation of Israel to goal but the establishment of the Kingdom of God. More than Israel, more than the Church, in fact, the redemption of the whole of creation. The New Covenant is more in every way.

For this Kingdom Jesus had to do battle with the forces of darkness. The spiritual forces are invisible but the earthly foes they inspire are visible. No sooner had He announced the New Covenant, the forces of darkness struck. His own disciple Judas “lifted up his heel against Him” **John 13:18**

In John 13:18 Jesus applies **Psalm 41:9** to Judas.

7 All who hate me whisper together against me; Against me they devise my hurt, saying,

8 "A wicked thing is poured out upon him, That when he lies down, he will not rise up again."

9 Even my close friend in whom I trusted, Who ate my bread, Has lifted up his heel against me.

The psalmist speaks of a “bosom friend’s” betrayal, shamefully “lifting the heel” against him, perhaps an image of turning and walking out in a time of need or of shamefully crushing under the foot.

John adds to the sense of menace by describing Judas’ exit as, “...So after receiving the morsel he went out immediately; and it was night.” Darkness had closed in on Jesus and its intent was to crush His Kingdom.

The darkness that came from the religious establishment should unsettle us. Of course, it is easy to point a finger at the Sadducees and Pharisees but a brief examination of their motives will demonstrate that all religious institutions are in danger of the same ills.

The main attack upon the life and character of Jesus was launched by the Pharisees. The Pharisees, who were the true successors of reformers under Ezra and Nehemiah, had set themselves the task of keeping religion alive and strong and uncontaminated in dark and difficult days; and right well they had acquitted themselves as defenders of the faith.

They believed Jesus to be an impostor because he was not one of them. The possibility that the deliverer of Israel might arise, as Jesus had arisen, from the ranks of the poor, the idea of a leader who did not share their own background of culture and ecclesiastical tradition, never entered their thoughts. The prophet from Galilee had to be an impostor.

Jesus once told a story which had two characters in it, a Pharisee and a publican. "God, I thank thee," said the Pharisee, "that I am not as other men are." (**Luke 18:11.**) The sin of the Pharisee was the sin of superiority and pride.

Three things have to be kept in mind in thinking about the Sadducees. They were an aristocratic party, containing members of the old nobility. They were a political party, controlling the nation's interests at home and abroad. They were a priestly party, holding the leading places in the Sanhedrin. The Sadducean was marked by a crass materialism and worldliness. Their outlook on life was utterly secular. They did not care about God's agenda only their own.

Then there were the Romans who ruled by terror and brute force. They considered themselves to be the supreme rulers of the known world and the harbingers of peace known as the Pax Romana (**27 BC to 180 AD**). Cruelty was their modus operandi.

When you think about the events of this day at cross remember who it was that Yeshua battled on your behalf. Remember that those who sought to kill him were not unlike you and me.

7. Living the Covenant

When Yeshua died on the execution stake, crying, "It is finished," the great work of atonement was completed. Every condition of the covenant was fulfilled, and every barrier between God and sinful human beings was removed. God's work in Messiah was as complete as His work at the first creation (**Gen. 1:31; 2:1-3**).

When the first recipients of the Gospel heard the account of these events, "... they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" **Acts 2:37** Being good Jews they knew that a new teaching or spiritual truth was not worth a thing if you could not practice it.

Let me say this at this late hour, if all I have said today does not translate into the way we live then we, you and I, have just wasted the last three hours with Jesus. On the other hand, if your understanding of covenant has grown and the significance of the cross has deepened for you then your most critical question is "What must I do?"

As our reading reminded us, "*For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.* (**2:10**)

First, there is action toward God. When Jesus faced this hour He made his feelings plain to His Father, "And He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will."

Matt 26:39

The litmus test for faith is the question, "Whose will are you seeking in your life?" If you can honestly answer "God's will" then you have a transforming faith. If on the other hand you find yourself trying to manipulate God by so-called faith actions such as "abiding" or "declaring" you are exercising superstition instead of faith.

Living your faith begins with submission to God's will. That is why Jesus taught His disciples to pray "Your Kingdom come, Your will be in earth as in heaven. The sign that God's Kingdom has come in your life is the extent to which His will is done.

Like Jesus you may have difficulty facing God's will in your life – but take heart the secret is in submission.

Second, there are actions toward our fellow human beings. One of the most outstanding features of the cross is Jesus concern for others in the midst of His own suffering. "Father forgive them for they know not what they do." The New American Standard Bible tries to bring out the significance of the Greek tense in this sentence. It introduces it by "But Jesus was saying..." The Greek tense is present continuous- in other words He was praying over and over Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing."

So profound is this example of Jesus being righteous toward others that the first martyr Stephen, followed His master's example;

59 They went on stoning Stephen as he called on the Lord and said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!"

60 Then falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them!" Having said this, he fell asleep.

How we treat other people is a direct indication of our relationship with God.

The Apostle John puts it this way;

20 If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.

21 And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also.

Today of all days, as we consider the saving work of Jesus on the cross and the relationship that His sacrifice has made possible for us we should be thinking of our relationships with others.

Unfortunately there is a tendency within Christian circles to be obsessed with self-fulfillment. Spiritual experience of the ecstatic kind is seen as the hallmark of authentic Christian living. Jesus has a very different view.

"By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." John 13:35

Earlier in the chapter when He has given an example by washing His disciples feet Jesus draws to connection between knowledge and action. (15) "For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you....(17) "If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

Many Christians would be a lot happier with their lives, and their relationship with God, if they spent more time focusing on the needs of others. Doing things for God by serving others helps us to be imitators of Christ.

Micah 6:8

He has told you, O man, what is good;
And what does the LORD require of you
But to do justice, to love kindness,
And to walk humbly with your God?

Some Rabbis used this verse as the summary of the Torah in the same way Jesus used

Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18

'You shall love the lord your god with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.'

38 "this is the great and foremost commandment.

39 "the second is like it, 'you shall love your neighbor as yourself.'

40 "on these two commandments depend the whole law and the prophets."

Matt 22:37

If you have come today with unfinished business between you and God or between you and another person put into practice what you have heard. Bring your will in submission to the will of God – even if you have to grit your teeth to do it. Follow the example of Jesus who expressed His fear of what lay before Him and yet allowed the Father to decide.

Today as you come to the end of this time of meditation on the covenants and the work of Yeshua the cross you can know the same – Peace with God and Peace with others. This is the fruit of the Covenant paid for with Jesus' blood.

Final Blessing

20 Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord,

21 equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Hebrews 13:20-21