

## Introduction to Covenant Theology-Part 4

Written by Calvin Fox

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**What practical difference does all this make? The first difference** is in the amount of glory God receives. In this Two-Man, Covenantal approach- salvation is all God, beginning to end. In the usual evangelical approach it is part God and part Man: God offers Salvation, Man decides whether to accept and keep what God offers. In practice, doesn't that make Man superior?

**The second major difference** is that the Two-Man, Covenantal approach is a better foundation for assurance and daily Christian living. That is because both of them are grounded and secure in God Himself. It teaches the difference between our objective standing or position in Christ and our subjective experience of being in Christ. Without the former foundation, the latter depends a lot on changing circumstances and feelings and requires the constant search for something to pump us up spiritually.

**The third very practical difference** has to do with Ecclesiology. I will try to explain next the Church as a Covenant Community.

The concept of Covenant is central in the Bible and very important in all of God's relationships with People, in fact, with all of Creation. The key Hebrew word is berith, while its Greek equivalent is diatheke Together they are used 292 times in the KJV or 319 times in the ESV. Diatheke is usually translated "Testament", as in "Last Will and Testament", a legal paper (a Will) in which the person dictates to whom his estate shall go and the conditions for its inheritance, if any, upon the testator's death

Obviously, neither the 39 "Books" known as the Old Testament nor the 27 "Books" known as the New Testament are collectively an actual Testament. Tradition has misnamed both the Hebrew Scripture and the Christian Scripture, even though it is accurate to say our Bible teaches us about an Old and a New Testament or Covenant!

How central and important the word and concept of Covenant are is indicated by the fact that the central act of our corporate Worship is based on the declaration of Jesus that we are remembering the "Blood of the Covenant" (Matt 26:28, Mark 14:24)

And central and important to remember about Covenant is that it is made primarily with a nation, not with individuals. If we want to endorse and use this concept we must accept the fact that covenant is first and foremost corporate. All Covenants include both promises and conditions. God's Covenant with His people, to be known as Israel, consists of His Promises to them (basically to be their God, providing for them) and the condition that they would serve and obey Him (basically, keeping the Ten Commandments)--as a Nation.

The Covenant Nation of Israel came into existence in history when the various tribes of the Hebrew people agreed together to accept both the Promises and Conditions God dictated to them at Mt Sinai. (They did not negotiate with God about either). Male Circumcision became the official sign of membership in the Covenant People of God. No male without circumcision could be considered a member (females were considered members by association with the males in their family unit).

Remembering their deliverance by God from slavery in Egypt was a required annual Festival, complete with a Family Meal (The Passover) to maintain their national identity. There were

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other required Festivals, as well. Israel was to rehearse and remember what God had done for them as a People and to be thankful to Him.

The Torah contained God- given norms or principles by which they, as a Nation, were to conduct all their affairs. Obedience was an essential requirement of the Covenant. The Nation was only as good as its citizens. Every member, every individual, was to do their part in keeping all these conditions for being God's Chosen People.

Now, no one could know who among all the members were actually regenerate, Israelites who had circumcised hearts and the personal faith of Abraham. That only God knew. Many were, many were not. The important point here is that every circumcised member and his family was treated the same. All were considered publicly to be among the Chosen, even though actually all were not. (Jesus would speak of tares and wheat growing together in the same field and that no attempt should be made to separate them out).

On the other hand, if citizens of Israel or Israel itself were to demonstrate gross disobedience or infidelity, publicly disavowing the Covenant, they would be considered cursed and punished. Individuals could be cast out and separated from the Nation and the Nation itself could fall under Judgment involving hard times, destruction and exile.

Again, I wrote above, "There has always been only one Covenant of Grace, although the way in which it was ministered and the responsibilities laid on its beneficiaries has changed through the years." The life, death and resurrection of Christ inaugurated that form of the Covenant known as the New Covenant. The way it is now administered and the responsibilities laid on its current members has changed from the times of Moses. But it still involves a People, a Chosen Nation and there are still Promises and Conditions.

God's intent has always been to have a corporate people, a Nation that would worship, serve and obey Him, not simply to save individuals. The latter has been the emphasis for most evangelicals. Nevertheless, God's intent remains. The Covenant remains in place and the Covenant is a corporate concept.