

“Covenant Throughout the Bible” or “The Christian Way is Best”

I have good news today. God has given us a structure, a pattern, a way to live that provides us with a way to discern the good we should do and courage to do the good. It shows up in the Bible many times and places. We even take our name from it. It is God’s Covenant for us established before time.

A good understanding of covenant principles provides us a solid framework to be in God’s plan. For example, a covenant can describe the consequences of doing wrong and the blessings of doing right. God’s covenant helps us see how to convert wrong-doing into equitable justice and restoration. We learn to channel anger in a Godly way lest the sun go down while we are yet angry. It helps us put the powerful feelings that come with love into the beautiful matrix called marriage. That is, through examination of the marriage covenant, you can discern God’s sequence and understand that commitment comes before privilege. That, feelings notwithstanding, you will have a high degree of assurance that this marriage will uphold the both parties in their many roles, duties, joys and pleasures till death do them part.

I hope to encourage you all to live the covenant way and to teach it to others. If our children, grand-children, and inquiring souls understand God’s Covenant foundation, we will have empowered them to live fully the best sort of life and to propagate the good news to future generations.

Covenant is a word rich in meaning. Let’s take some words to see how. The inhabitants above the arctic-circle have over 10 words for what we call ice. It is important to their survival that they distinguish just what they will be traveling over as they hunt and move about.

We use the word “love” in many ways. For example: brotherly love, love of country, husband & wife love, and as in “I love lasagna”. The word covenant is like that.

A general definition is: a covenant is a chosen relationship in which two parties make binding promises to each other. It includes voluntary consent, careful consideration of the benefits and risks, public affirmation and consent, mutual responsibilities, rules for conflict resolution, and affirmation that this can only succeed by being in harmony with the highest power, God.

Covenants are all around us. – “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. — That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed...”

I covenant with my neighbors not to fence my front yard and to plant only certain trees to maintain the neighborhood’s appeal.

“Dear friends, we have gathered here in the presence of God to join this man and this woman in holy marriage, which is instituted by God, regulated by his commandments, blessed by our Lord Jesus Christ, and to be held in honor among all people.”

“We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.”

“We the members of this Congregation now welcome you with joy into our church family. We pledge to you our love and support, our friendship and our prayers, so that together we may continue to grow in the knowledge and love of God.”

Here’s a personal covenant I entered on Oct. 4, 1969: “I, Andrew Eads, do solemnly swear that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true

faith and allegiance to the same; and that I will obey the orders of the President of the United States and the orders of the officers appointed over me, according to regulations and the Uniform Code of Military Justice. So help me God.”

The covenantal view asserts that all areas of human life are subject to theological discernment including family, community, economy, ecology, wellbeing, and justice.

In a covenant, something is at stake in the material sharing that is sacred, life giving, enduring and transcendent. (Stackhouse)

Jeremiah’s inspired prophecy show us there are two big covenants God has made with man.

*Jeremiah 31:31–33 (ESV)*

“Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

There is a third covenant made before time between the Son of God and God the Father.

*John 3:16-20*

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light

because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed.

When we place our obligations to each other in something other than the covenant established for us by God, bad things happen. There are injuries and damage and degradation of peace and order, loss of life on a mass scale, and huge injustices.

For example, in our own country we still battle the stupidity of racism and the profound damage it has done, even 160 years out from slavery's official end. We misplace the role of family by handing over ever larger functions to the state. Individuals lose their dignity and power to grow when we consign them to being a case number, an entitlement recipient, a failed human.

Looking back, we see the debacle of Communism which subordinated human needs and fostered hate between the proletariat and bourgeoisie, whatever they are. Your life was to revolve around the revolution and your needs were subservient to a false god called history. The price was the decade long purges by the likes of Stalin, Mao, Pol Pot to the tune of 60 million people dead. Under this corrupt system, the catch phrase was and is, "All things are permissible." We can see this in action today in countries around the globe.

Covenants have consequences. Israel was governed by judges up to Samuel's time, he being the last judge.

*1 Samuel 8:6-9*

But when they said, "Give us a king to lead us," this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the Lord. And the Lord told him: "Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king. As they have done from the day I brought them up out of Egypt until this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are doing to you. Now listen to them; but warn them solemnly and let them know what the king who will reign over them will claim as his rights."

Israel celebrated this as a big deal. Samuel knew better. It was a violation of God's covenant with His people.

What God-established-Covenants are we violating? ... as a church, as individuals, as a nation?

Here are some Biblical covenants that had beautiful, productive outcomes, for example Ruth's covenant with Naomi.

*Ruth 1:16-18*

But Ruth replied, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me." When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her.

Christians are not members by birth or clan but by the New Covenant:

*Eph. 2:11-22*

Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (which is done in the body by human hands) **remember** that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

And *1 Peter 2:9-11*

You, however, are a "chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people he claims for his own to proclaim the glorious works" of the One who called you from darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were no people, but now you are God's people; once there was no mercy for you, but now you have found mercy.

So, getting back to the alternate sermon title: "The Christian Way is Best", I'm borrowing from a Christian ethics professor, Max Stackhouse who wrote:

*Christianity has viewed the divine-human relationship as the center of meaning, morality, and society and considers that the basic design of familial, economic, political, and cultural life flows from that central relationship. Religion is what establishes the possibility of a bonded association that lies under a higher law and a greater purpose than any natural solidarity or contractual agreement.*

Holidays are coming. Will there be hot conversations about a certain president? What if your response was like an Old Testament Judge inquiring after the facts and seeing how they fit the covenant between God and us? What if you frame the questions in covenant terms, "Has God's will for us been violated? Have we done all we can to uphold the covenant? If so, how do we restore the broken trust?"

Holidays are coming. Will couples fall in love? Just look at the people binging on the Hallmark channel! The critical question is "will couples seek and understanding of God's covenant for marriage first?" Could you counsel them about the blessings to be had in a bonded relationship formed in obedience to God's covenant for marriage?

Imagine living your life by honoring the covenant Jesus paid for with his life. We are bound by covenant love with every person we meet. Imagine looking on everyone as through covenant eyes, to hold them up, defend them against wrongdoing, caution them when they do wrong, and seeking just restoration. Imagine living out the timeless covenant – Salvation from our sins through the shed blood. In other words, sharing the Good News like it really is Good News!