

Attic Answer #4

What is a Covenant Anyway? Does it Even Really Matter?

“And when He had taken some bread and given thanks, He broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me." And in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood.” Luke 22:19-20

Until the moment of the crucifixion which Jesus was memorializing in this account, Jesus as well as the authors of the Gospels and the apostles were living under the Covenant of the Old Testament; a covenant that would be brought to a culmination by the shed blood of Jesus Christ. The understanding of exactly what a covenant is and how God has established this kind of relationship with man is crucial to the body of Christ; the church. In fact, this type of relationship has been the *modus operandi* of God since the creation of Adam and Eve and continues to this day.

We see this type of relationship beginning with Adam and continuing with Noah, Abraham, and others. With Noah we see the “rainbow covenant” establishing an era where God would promise to never again destroy the world with water. This rainbow here in this example served as the testament of this particular agreement which will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

As is with the Hebrew and Greek languages there are many words that come replete with a distinctive meaning providing for a clear picture and definition of the word covenant. In Hebrew, *beriyth* meaning to cut a covenant, *alah* meaning the making of a solemn oath, *hesed* meaning covenant keeping, and *yada* meaning acting in a manner consistent with a covenant, pieced together provide a solid understanding. In the Greek, *diateke* meaning a contractual agreement, and *eleos* meaning the act of keeping a promise, are parallel to the Hebrew words *beriyth* and *hesed*. The actual English word covenant come from the Latin root words; *con*-together and *venio*- coming. These roots placed together render the meaning ‘coming together.’ *Beriyth* is an unusual term. It literally means “to cut a deal.” When God passed between the two halves of the animal God was, in essence, cutting a covenant with Abram.

There are 2 distinct types of covenants; bilateral where both parties are essentially equal and the terms of the covenant are negotiated, and unilateral where one party is dominant over a lesser second party and the terms of the relationship are spelled out by the dominant party. When man chooses to enter into a covenant relationship with God, man is entering into a unilateral relationship where God sets the terms of the covenant.

There are 3 major parts of a covenant. The parties are named, the terms are spelled out, and the promises to be bestowed if the terms are met. The components of ancient covenants contained these 7 items; The preamble, the historical prologue, the stipulations, the provision made for the care of the text, a list of witnesses, a blessing and curses section, and a formal oath was taken. The normal use of a covenant required mutual promises and mutual commitment.

God is a covenant keeping God. God keeps all His covenants. The essence of the word hesed, the act of keeping a covenant, is not based in 'ushy-gooshy' emotional experiences. It is based on honoring and keeping the commitment made at the onset of the covenant. God's covenants are always based on conditional agreements. Stipulations based in the if/then dynamic are replete within the Holy Scriptures. God is always faithful and just to keep His end of the covenant always bestowing His promises and blessings according to covenant relationship that He has provided for man to enter into. Man is only able to enter into this said covenant with God because propitiation of man's sin was made by the blood of Christ upon the cross of Calvary. When Christ shed His blood for all mankind that blessed day, this was the very onset of the New Covenant that remains to this day. Man has the opportunity to relate to God in a truly awesome fashion within this covenant relationship to be servants for God. Paul relates this beautiful truth in his second letter to the Corinthians, "And such confidence we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant." 2 Cor. 3:4-6