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The Holy Bible consists of the Old and New Testament, or more literally the Old and New Covenant. This is because Covenant is central to God's plan for His Creation. In this section we shall look at what Covenant is and why it is central to the message we preach. It is a massive subject which we have limited time to explore. Amongst all the important things we can say about Covenant we shall here discuss five important aspects.

I Covenant is 'who God is'

Scripture tells us that God is three persons in one, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is a mystery which the Bible does not fully explain. However the Bible will often describe how these three distinct persons interact with each other so that the purposes of God are worked out. What we observe is a Covenant relationship between the three of them that is eternal, without beginning and end. There is no jockeying or vying for position within the Godhead, nor any discord, but instead pure harmony in thought, word and deed.

The New Testament uses a Greek word, *omothumadon*, when it refers to the disciples being of one heart and mind following their baptism in the Holy Spirit. Luke often describes them moving as 'one man'. The literal translation of this word is,

Rushing along together in unison. The image is almost musical - a number of notes are sounded which, while different, harmonise in pitch and tone. As the instruments of a great concert under the direction of a concertmaster - picture of the symphony.¹

What we see in the church, different voices and functions sounding out a harmonious song, is a reflection of the harmony within the Godhead itself. The difference is that, unlike as we often see in the church there are no divisions between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They do have different functions but act and speak as one. For example when God created man we witness this,

Come let us make man in our image, after our likeness

Genesis 1:26, ESV²

Charles Wesley describes this harmonious relationship as a *sweet society*³. Before we see any Covenant with man, God is in Covenant with Himself. We are not describing an external standard to which God has been complying for all eternity but Covenant is Who God Is. It describes His very nature, how He functions as three in one. This relationship has two core elements to it: -

1. **Love.** Known as *hesed* in the Old Testament and *agape* in the New Testament. It is the Covenant Love of God from which everything God does is sourced. It is this love that is later described in God's dealings with man. It is ultimately this love that reached out to fallen man and made a way back to the Covenant relationship which Adam had broken in the garden.

¹ Thayer & Smiths' Bible Dictionary

² Revealing here is that the account in Genesis used the word 'God' *singular* followed by the *plural* form of the verb 'to make'.

³ In His prayer to His Father, in John 17, Jesus refers to the glory He shared with the Father before the world was made (v.5) and the love they shared before the foundation of the world (v.24).

2. **Dependency.** The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are eternally co-dependent upon each other in every way. Everything that God does involves all three persons of the Godhead in different functions from each other: this is the basis of their unity. Their fellowship has remained unbroken and is without beginning. Although in relationship with man God is not dependent on us, we are created dependent on Him.

This fact is evident to us as we read of the beginnings of Jesus' agony in the garden of Gethsemane when He faced for the first time separation from His Father as He became sin for our sake⁴. We cannot comprehend what that must have been like for Him, who had never known that kind of separation. Although we may not fully understand what happened during these hours on the cross when Jesus bore the weight of the world's sin, we can see the effect of the separation on Jesus, which Luke can only describe as agony for Jesus⁵; it illuminates for us the complete codependency in which God exists. We shall return back to this theme later in this chapter.

What does this mean for us? It means that our understanding of Covenant begins with God, because it is integral to His nature and how He acts. Covenant describes the way God relates to Himself, as a Covenant Community to Himself. We shall also see as we progress that it is also how He relates to the creation He has made.

⁴ 2 Corinthians 5:21

⁵ Luke 22:44

2 Covenant was the catalyst of creation

If Covenant is integral to God's nature and how He functions then it is no surprise to us that this Covenant life, which God has always enjoyed, was the source for all Creation, starting with the created order of Spiritual beings in heaven. God had a Covenant with them from the moment of their creation. They were created dependent upon Him, to exist and thrive in His Covenant life.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth

Genesis 1:1, ESV

It is easy to miss the fact that Scripture begins with the creation of **both** the heavens and the earth. We often think of heaven as a place where God lived before he made earth. However the Bible clearly says that God created heaven in the beginning as well. The significance of this is that before both heaven and earth, there was God, and nothing *but* God. Jesus said, "Before ... I am". Before time and space and anything created ever existed. It is from this place of whereverness or whateverness that God created the world - perhaps we can only describe this place as the 'Covenant relationship' of the Godhead, which was God's 'launch pad' for *all* creation, the catalyst of His creative acts.

In the very act of creation, we can therefore see this Covenant relationship (within the Godhead) at work in perfect unison - the Father spoke creation into being, through the agency of the Son, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Although Adam, unlike Christ, was created and not begotten but he was made to enjoy that same Covenant relationship with God, uninterrupted fellowship of love and dependency in the garden.

The rebellion to which Isaiah alludes⁶, when Lucifer the Archangel rebelled against God, was based on his desire for *independence* and marked the beginning of his downfall; he was created dependent upon his master and independence corrupted his heart. It is that same spirit of independence which he then took into the garden God had created and introduced to Eve, subverting the natural order of harmonious headship God had made. Independence destroyed the Covenant life Adam and Eve enjoyed with God, together.

The state of dependence into which Adam was born was symbolised by the Tree of Life (a picture of Christ), whereas the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil held the choice for independence for Adam. As we know it is his choice to take the latter that broke the Covenant relationship with God and led to the death of his spirit.

⁶ Isaiah 14:12-22

It was God's mercy that led Him to banish Adam and Eve from the garden to prevent them from tasting of the Tree of Life and living forever in their state of perpetual death⁷, which is perhaps the state in which Satan has always existed since his rebellion. Allowed to die Adam and Eve at least had a chance of spiritual redemption one day (perhaps when Jesus descended into Hades to preach to the souls of the dead⁸).

So the world was created from the Covenant Life that exists in the Godhead, dependent upon that life, but was corrupted by the independent spirit of Satan. This interrupted the Covenant relationship and meant that God had to start building bridges to man to restore any form of fellowship. This Covenant making has framed the history of man, a history of the restoration of all things.

⁷ Genesis 3:24

⁸ 1 Peter 3:18-20

3 All history is framed by Covenant

The history of mankind can be framed in the Covenants between God and Man, through which God tried to restore the Covenant relationship and fellowship that had been lost when Adam and Eve broke the Covenant they had with God.

3.1 How do we define Covenant?

Before we look at those let us try to define what the Bible means by the term Covenant. Although we have already defined Covenant as the nature of the relationship within the Godhead, in the Bible the word is also used to describe God's relationship with man. It is used to define the agreements made between God and men, both before and after the fall. There are many definitions of what this means: -

- The English word 'covenant' is derived from two Latin words, *con* which means 'together' and *venire* meaning 'come'. In other words the coming together of two parties.
- The Hebrew word is *berit*, the exact etymology of which is not entirely clear. Many scholars argue the word comes from two other possible words, *barah*, meaning to eat, which we see in both the Old and New Testament when a Covenant was made; or *biritu* (an Akadaian word) meaning 'to clasp or bind' used in connection with marriage.⁹
- *berit* has also been argued to derive from a root which means "to cut," and hence a covenant is a "cutting," with reference to the cutting or dividing of animals into two parts, and the contracting parties passing between them, in making a covenant (**Gen. 15; Jer. 34:18, 19**).¹⁰ It is therefore a blood bond and in the making of a Covenant bloodshed was often required.¹¹
- A treaty between nations, or between individuals, for their mutual advantage.¹²
- A modern day definition in layman's terms - 'Abandoning your right to quit!'
- The word *berit* is used in connection with Covenants between God and man, but also man and man. Where it is the former the language construction is such that it signifies there is a superior and inferior party to the Covenant.

⁹ Covenant College Modular Training Program, © 1992, Covenant, pp.3-4

¹⁰ Easton, M. (1996). *Easton's Bible dictionary*. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

¹¹ The connection with cutting, the spilling of blood and the later necessity of this element in the making the divine Covenants may seem a strange transition to make from the Covenant life within the Godhead in eternity. The spilling of blood became necessary after the fall of man, to cover sin that separated man from God. Consider the shame that Adam and Eve felt as they confessed to God what they had done and then the shock when God took an animal and killed it in front of them. They had never witnessed such an act before in their lives; there and then God taught them that to 'cover' their shame (with the animal's skin) blood had to be shed. This set the pattern for all redemptive Covenants that followed.

¹² For example, Abraham formed an alliance with some of the Canaanitish princes (Gen. 14:13), also with Abimelech (21:22-32). Joshua and the elders of Israel entered into an alliance with the Gibeonites (Josh. 9:3-27) Easton, M. (1996). *Easton's Bible Dictionary*. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

- There is a crucial distinction to be made in respect of Covenants between man and man (lateral) and Covenants between God to man (vertical), both of which we'll explore more fully later in this chapter: -
 1. *Lateral* Covenants are negotiated between the two parties and the terms may be varied by each.
 2. *Vertical* Covenant terms are dictated by the superior party (God) to the inferior party (man) who may not change them in any way; the inferior party is only free to accept or reject the Covenant terms laid down. This describes the way in which God relates to mankind throughout history.

3.2 The Old Covenant(s)

In the Old Testament we see a series of successive covenants between God and man, each symbolising and pointing forward to an aspect of the New Covenant that was to come: -

1. ***Adamic Covenant*** - In Genesis we can observe the first Covenant in the Old Testament. Although not explicitly stated as a Covenant in the text of Genesis, it is named as such by God in the book of Hosea ¹³. In this Covenant God confirmed the terms by which Adam was set in place as God's Vice-Regent on the earth. Adam was to replicate on the earth that which had been established in the heavens.

²⁶Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

²⁷So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

⁸And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." ²⁹And God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. ³⁰And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so.

Genesis 1:26-30, ESV

There were three key elements within this Covenant: -

¹³ Hosea 6:7

- **Rule** – Adam was to have dominion over the earth, to rule as God’s representative authority on the earth.
 - **Reproduction** – Adam was to reproduce God’s image, which he had been fashioned after, throughout the earth. God’s intention was for Adam (and his descendants) to mature into the sonship of Christ, the begotten Son.
 - **Responsibility** – Adam was given responsibility for the whole of creation. It would rise or fall with him, inextricably bound together. This is why God sought an answer from Adam for the rebellion and not Eve and why their sin resulted in the earth being brought under a curse.
2. **Noahic Covenant** – After the flood, God made a Covenant with Noah which had echoes of the Adamic Covenant, for good reason. It would be easy to think that God had moved to plan B, but nothing could be further from the truth.

⁸Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, ⁹“Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your offspring after you, ¹⁰and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the livestock, and every beast of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark; it is for every beast of the earth. ¹¹ I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.” ¹²And God said, “This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: ¹³I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. ¹⁴When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, ¹⁵ I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh. And the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh.

Genesis 9:8–15, ESV

There were lots of different elements to this Covenant but the key terms were: -

- **Reconfirming** God’s Covenant with Adam – God’s mandate for mankind had not changed at all. God was still working to His plan A!
- **Reserving** Noah’s family by God’s grace. Noah found *favour*¹⁴ in God’s eyes (Genesis 6:8). Here Scriptures introduce us to the running theme of God’s remnant.
- **Rescinding** the flood waters (which represented God’s judgement on the earth) until the end of days, confirmed by the sign of the rainbow. We see this symbol later in Ezekiel’s description of the

¹⁴ Hebrew word **חֵן (Chen)**, meaning grace (and mercy)

rainbow of mercy which appears around the throne of divine glory and judgment. In Revelation 4:3 and 10:1, John has a vision similar to Ezekiel's. The rainbow is a symbol of God's Covenant, which he made with Noah and all mankind that followed him.¹⁵

3. **Abrahamic Covenant** – Over 300 years after Noah's Covenant with God, his descendant Abraham appears on the scene. During the interim period mankind has resumed its course for independence, culminating in the tower of Babel (Genesis 11). Again amongst all the wickedness on the earth, God had one man, one family through whom he could work out the Adamic Covenant mandate,

¹Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ²And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

Genesis 12:1-3

God reconfirmed this Covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15. Again there are key elements to this Covenant: -

- **Promised Land** – God called Abraham to leave the country of his birth and depart to a land that God was to show him. Abraham was being called out of the world into which he had been born, the world which constructed the defiant tower to the heavens. The writer to the Hebrews describes Abraham as the man who by faith was looking for *the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God*.¹⁶ The theme of the Promised Land was ultimately pointing toward the New Jerusalem which John described in Revelation when heaven and earth would be joined together again¹⁷. It is a promise of restoration.
- **Promised Offspring** – God's promise to Abraham was that his offspring would be both (i) numerous and (ii) a blessing to the whole world. Again, ultimately this Covenant was pointing toward the promised Seed, through whom salvation for the whole world would come; Paul makes it clear that this refers to Christ¹⁸.

¹⁵ There is no special word for rainbow in Hebrew. The ordinary word for war-bow (Heb. *qešet*) is used. The NT word is *iris*. in Gn. 9:13, 15, God's war-bow, *qešet*, is said to be put in the clouds as the sign of his covenant with Noah, and was his pledge that never again would he destroy all flesh by a flood. The meaning seems to be that what was ordinarily an instrument of war, and a symbol of vengeance, became a symbol of peace and mercy by virtue of its now being set in the clouds. [Wood, D. R. W., & Marshall, I. H. (1996). *New Bible dictionary* (3rd ed.) (1000). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press].

¹⁶ Hebrews 11:10

¹⁷ Revelation 21:1-4

¹⁸ Galatians 4:16

One of the important elements here is the rolling out of God's mandate for mankind to fill the earth with his image, starting with one family outward to all nations, the fulfilment of which was to be Jesus and his offspring by faith.¹⁹

4. **Mosaic Covenant** – The Covenant with Israel at Sinai was the introduction of the law code for God's people and again it was the calling out of a people for himself from amongst the nations.

Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people 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. ⁵Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; ⁶and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.

Exodus 19:3–6, ESV

Here are two key elements of the Covenant: -

- **Heavenly Pattern** - Like Adam, Israel was also being called to flesh out on the earth the heavenly pattern, thus reproducing the image and rule of God amongst the nations. When God gave Moses instruction to build the Tabernacle, he was to build according to the pattern God gave him on the Mountain.²⁰ The writer to the Hebrews tells that these things served as a copy and a shadow of heavenly things, a heavenly blueprint.²¹
- **Holy People** - Like Abraham and Noah, Israel as a nation had been called/delivered out of something or somewhere. They were set apart by God. The purpose of this calling was not only to be a kingdom representing God on earth, but also to be priests administering worship of the Lord. God had called Israel out of Egypt in order that they may worship Him.²² God required of the nation their faithfulness to the Covenant, that they keep themselves set apart from heathen nations around them and keep themselves from sin.

The Mosaic Covenant contained the conditions of the Covenant community, the fulness of which ultimately Israel failed to walk in.

5. **Davidic Covenant** – It was many generations later that the last of the main Old Testament Covenants was made, but this one pointed to God's final

¹⁹ Romans 8:29

²⁰ Exodus 25:9

²¹ Hebrews 8:5

²² Exodus 4:23

answer to the problem of the fall. The background to this Covenant was the state into which God's representative nation, Israel had fallen. The nation's religion had become devalued, the people had lost their way, and the ark had been removed from the sanctuary. However God still planned to honour His Covenant.

¹¹ from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel. And I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. ¹² When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³ He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. ¹⁴ I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, ¹⁵ but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. ¹⁶ And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever."

2 Samuel 7:11-16

The key elements of this Covenant were: -

- **Establishing a Great Name** – God's promise to David was to establish his name on the earth, which he did (David's dynasty lasted 400 years), but ultimately it was the *Son of David* whose name was to be made great, above all other names.²³
- **Establishing a House** – Although David himself was not to build it; the Temple was to be built by his son Solomon as a place of honour and worship for the Name of the Lord. This temple was a shadow of the *Spiritual House* that God had planned which was established on the day of Pentecost with the birth of the church. This is why Peter referred back to the Messianic promise given to David on that day.
- **Establishing a Throne** – David's reign (and throne) came to an end, but his descendant Jesus was raised from the dead to sit upon an eternal throne. Again Peter referred to God's declaration to "sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool", which was not a reference to David but to Christ Jesus.

These Covenants make up the Old Testament or Old Covenant, but as we have already seen, they pointed forward to the coming Covenant which would be cut by the promised Messiah, Jesus Christ.

²³ Philippians 2:9

3.3 The New Covenant – The Covenant of Consummation

In the New Testament we see the arrival of Jesus the Messiah and a New Covenant forged by the shedding of His blood on the Cross. Ultimately the job of the Old Covenant was to point forward to and prepare the way. It was never capable of bridging the gulf between God and Man caused by Adam's choice for independence, but as Paul says to the Galatians, it was never meant to,

¹⁵ Brothers, let me take an example from everyday life. Just as no-one can set aside or add to a human covenant that has been duly established, so it is in this case. ¹⁶ The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say and to seeds, meaning many people, but and to your seed, meaning one person, who is Christ. ¹⁷ What I mean is this: The law, introduced 430 years later, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise. ¹⁸ For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on a promise; but God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise. ¹⁹ What, then, was the purpose of the law? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come. The law was put into effect through angels by a mediator. ²⁰ A mediator, however, does not represent just one party; but God is one. ²¹ Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law. ²² But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe. ²³ Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. ²⁴ So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵ Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.

Galatians 3:15-25, NIV

There was nothing wrong on God's side of the Covenants, it was man's ability to fulfil the conditions that fell short, which is why God came in the likeness of sinful man to fulfil man's side of the Covenant, bridge the gulf and reverse the death sentence of the curse,

¹³ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"— ¹⁴so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith ... for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. ²⁹ And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

Galatians 3:13-14, 26 & 29, ESV

1. **Fulfilment of the Old** - Going back through the Covenants we see Christ fulfilled them all:

- **God's Covenant with Adam** was to bring rule and populate the earth with God's image. Paul tells us that Christ is the last Adam²⁴ through whom the Adamic mandate is fulfilled as He became the firstborn amongst many.²⁵ As we put on Christ we also put on His authority and fulfil the mandate to be rulers on the earth, bringing the kingdom rule of God.
- **God's Covenant with Noah** was an echo of the Adamic mandate but also through Christ we have been predestined to be reserved from the wrath of God. Jesus satisfied the wrath of God and caused his anger to be rescinded from the earth until the end of the age when the living and dead will be judged by the Son himself.
- **God's Covenant with Abraham** was a promise of redemption. He was called to seek a heavenly city and a heavenly man (seed) both of which we have found in Christ. We have become the heavenly city and the body and bride of the heavenly man. Jesus.
- **God's Covenant with Moses** was for Israel to be a heavenly people, holy and set apart. In Christ we are born again from above and washed in the blood of the Lamb to be as pure as He is. Now we are strangers and aliens in this (fallen) world, in it but no longer of it.
- **God's Covenant with David** was that an Eternal King was to rule and Jesus took His place next to the right hand of His Father in heaven when God raised Him from the dead, from which He will rule forever. We are now seated with Him in heavenly places and have been given dominion over the powers of darkness, to rule as kings.

2. **Superior to the Old** - Although the New Covenant fulfilled all of God's promises in the Old Testament, the writer to the Hebrews tell us something very important about the relationship between the two,

⁶But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises. ⁷ For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second.

Hebrews 8:6-7, ESV

²⁴ 1 Corinthians 15:45

²⁵ Romans 8:29

- **New Start** – The first thing we learn from this statement is that Christ has mediated a New Covenant with the Father, which subsumes the Old Covenant because it fulfils all its requirements. Jesus said that He had come to fulfil (literally “make full”) the Old Covenant not abolish it. Although falling short by way of an illustration, lawmakers have often found that years of legislation results in layers of law in a particular sphere of life. Often those layers eventually fall short or out of date and lawmakers will make a new law which *consolidates* all of the old. The New Covenant drew a line underneath the failings (the inability of man to keep the divinely imposed terms) of the Old.
- **Superior Terms** – Secondly, we learn that the New Covenant Jesus mediated on our behalf has better promises. A consolidating law is often designed not only to consolidate but improve its application and benefits for society. The New Covenant contains for us much better promises than we had under the Old Covenant. Paul wrote in Romans that the law was insufficient to produce holy conduct amongst God’s people. The Message paraphrases Paul’s words very well,

The law always ended up being used as a Band-Aid on sin instead of a deep healing of it.

Romans 8:4, MSG

- **Eternally Perfect** – The last thing that this verse tells us is that if the Old Covenant had been faultless (i.e., met the need of the situation) then there would have been no need for a newer Covenant. Although the fault lay with man, there still existed the need for a new Covenant which was faultless. This time it had to make up for human failings as well as meeting the divine demands. Again the Message puts it well,

In his Son, Jesus, he personally took on the human condition, entered the disordered mess of struggling humanity in order to set it right once and for all. The law code, weakened as it always was by fractured human nature, could never have done that.

Romans 8:3, MSG

4 Covenant love is stronger than DNA

As we have seen, the New Covenant has bridged the gap that was created by the original breaking of the Covenant by Adam. However for all those who enter in this New Covenant the impact is not just their relationship to their Creator God. The process of rebirth by the Holy Spirit creates a bond between people that is so much more than skin deep.

4.1 New (Covenant) Creations

To properly understand this we have to understand what has happened to us as those who have been born again. The Bible makes this very clear,

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

2 Corinthians 5:17

We are used to thinking of change as humans, because it is a part of life, but this is *metamorphosis*, when one thing changes by degree into something else, a transformation. However the change which Paul speaks of here is different. Here Paul uses a Greek word *καινός* (*kainos*), which means ... *of a new kind, unprecedented, novel, uncommon, unheard of*.

When we are born again a *qualitative* change takes place. The difference is as great as light from darkness. In his fallen state mankind is still the highest form of biological life on the planet, made in the image of God. However he lacks another form of life that exists within God Himself, Spiritual life. It is true that the work of salvation is a process whereby our minds are re-programmed from the way the world indoctrinated them, however this starts with a change at the core of who we are. When we are born again we partake of this Spiritual life of God *because* He joins Himself to our spirits and brings that life with Him! It cannot be emphasised enough the difference between those two forms of life. C S Lewis tries to do so,

But what man, in his natural condition, has not got, is Spiritual life—the higher and different sort of life that exists in God. We use the same word life for both: but if you thought that both must therefore be the same sort of thing, that would be like thinking that the ‘greatness’ of space and the ‘greatness’ of God were the same sort of greatness. In reality, the difference between Biological life and Spiritual life is so important that I am going to give them two distinct names. The Biological sort which comes to us through Nature, and which (like everything else in Nature) is always tending to run down and decay so that it can only be kept up by incessant subsidies from Nature in the form of air, water, food, etc., is Bios. The Spiritual life which is in God from all eternity, and which made the whole natural universe, is Zoe. Bios has, to be sure, a certain shadowy or symbolic resemblance

to Zoe: but only the sort of resemblance there is between a photo and a place, or a statue and a man. A man who changed from having Bios to having Zoe would have gone through as big a change as a statue which changed from being a carved stone to being a real man.²⁶

That life is the Covenant life that God enjoys with Himself and the crucial fact is that those of us who have been born again and now partake of that life do so together. That is, salvation is not a personal individual experience, far from it – it is partaking in the eternal, Spiritual life of God that has always been. It is like jumping together into a great, endless lake; like children jumping into a pool holding hands. It is a collective experience and this is because we now share more in common with each other than we do with those who share our DNA. The change in us, and therefore the join between us, is so much more than skin deep. The shame of course is that so often Christians don't realise it, or see it, such that it is not reflected in the way we treat one another.

4.2 The Covenant Wave

The writer to the Hebrews describes the heroes of faith that have preceded us through the ages. Many had looked forward to the New Covenant and died (a physical death) in hope of its coming. They knew a life from God that was not yet complete, but when Jesus died and descended into the place of the dead.²⁷ Nevertheless they had known the life of God moving through them in history.

We are not only joined together with those who are born again in our lifetime, but the New Covenant is like a wave that has swept through history, reaching back before the coming of Christ and forward to the present. We are on the crest of the same wave that moved the hearts of men and women through the ages. Consider the picture of the wave just for a moment. A wave is something that transmits energy from one place to another without taking the matter (e.g., the water) disturbed with it: -

“A progressive disturbance propagated from point to point in a medium or space without progress or advance by the points themselves, as in the transmission of sound or light.”²⁸

A wave can therefore be identified if: -

- Energy moves from one place to another and
- Matter doesn't move from one place to another, for the most part.

For example, ocean waves ceaselessly arrive at the shore without piling up infinite amounts of water. The wave arrives, but the water doesn't. It's the same

²⁶ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, pp.125-126 (Chapter - “Making and Begetting”), © 1953 Geoffrey Bles, London

²⁷ The Bible makes references throughout the Old Testament to *Sheol*, the place of the dead, such as David in the Psalms but most notably when the spirit of the prophet Samuel was summoned by the medium at Saul's bidding. It is clear that men who walked with God before the coming of Christ had to wait in a place of God's choosing for Jesus' rescue. Peter refers to this albeit fleetingly in his first letter (1 Peter 3:18)

²⁸ The Random House Dictionary

with us – our ancestors in the faith were carried along by the Covenant Wave of God, as it moved ceaselessly onward by the Holy Spirit. In the Old Testament men and women were carried along but they couldn't truly know the fulness of God until sin was dealt with by Jesus' death and he baptised His people in the Holy Spirit.

This divine life and energy moving through history is the Covenant Life of God Himself.

4.3 Covenant Love is the Glue

The new Spiritual life that we now enjoy as God's children in Christ Jesus, is not the only thing that now binds us together as part of God's family; God's love is now within us. The New Testament uses the word **agape**, which the Holy Spirit selected as the closest Greek word available in the world at the time to describe the love that exists within the Godhead. It is not something that God does, it is something He is. To exist is to love, for God. What we know as love in the world is not of the same sort, but again a reflection of God's love.

The miracle of our new birth is that God is able to pour His love into us. Paul wrote to the Philippians thus,

For God is my witness, how I long for you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ.

Philippians 1:8, Young's Literal Translation

We have deliberately chosen a literal rendering here, to demonstrate the significance of Paul's statement. Bowels was a euphemism of the day for the heart of a person, the seat of a person's emotions. Paul's language shows us that the love he had for the Philippians was literally coming from the heart of Christ and not from himself. Paul had learnt the secret to moving in the love of God and not by his own affections and efforts. That great Christian Commentator Bishop Lightfoot writes on this passage thus,

*"The believer has no yearnings apart from his Lord; his pulse beats with the pulse of Christ; his heart throbs with the heart of Christ"*²⁹

When writing to the Romans Paul told them that it was true not only of himself but of all born again believers,

God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

Romans 5:5, ESV

²⁹ The Epistles of St Paul, III The First Roman Captivity (I. Epistle to the Philippians): Lightfoot, J B © 1883 Macmillan and Co. London

4.4 Covenant Love Never Fails

Knowing that the baptism of the Holy Spirit would make this possible, Jesus gave His disciples showed us the second greatest commandment in the law,

³⁴ A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. ³⁵ By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another..

John 13:34-35, ESV

It is because it is God's own love, that we know it will never fail in the task Jesus has set us. In fact Jesus' prayer to His Father also guarantees,

²⁰ "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, ²¹ that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²² The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, ²³ I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me..

John 17:20-23, ESV

Agape love is unconditional; an initiative not a response. It's not an impulse or feeling. It is a choice; a decision of the will that does not depend upon the actions or reactions of the person being loved, nor upon convenience or circumstance. Agape love is not given according to whether it seems to be deserved or merited by the other. In well-known verses in 1 Corinthians Paul describes it like this:

(Agape) ⁴love is "patient...kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ It does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. ⁸ It never fails.

1 Corinthians 13:4-8

This love is the hallmark of the new covenant - marking us as His disciples and winning others into the Covenant community. The New Testament provides us with clear instruction on the many ways that love can be outworked in our lives as a testimony to the world.

<p>Live in harmony with one another (Ro 12:16)</p>	<p>We are to do all we can to live at peace with others; this means avoiding strife and dissent.</p>
<p>Be devoted to one another (Ro 12:10)</p>	<p>Devotion is the heart of covenant: “abandoning your right to quit!”</p>
<p>Honour one another (Ro 12:10)</p>	<p>Speak highly of each other; don’t slander, accuse or sow negative thoughts.</p>
<p>Accept one another (Ro 15:7)</p>	<p>We are all different; don’t be frustrated by those that do not act or think as you do!</p>
<p>Admonish or counsel one another (Col 3:16)</p>	<p>Love each other enough to speak into one another’s lives where necessary.</p>
<p>Greet one another (Ro 16:16)</p>	<p>Don’t wait to be greeted. Go first yourself!</p>
<p>Offer hospitality to one another (1Pe 4:9)</p>	<p>Let us be hospitable and welcoming towards each other. Open your home up. Give your time and space away.</p>
<p>Show care and concern for one another (1Co 12:25)</p>	<p>Care and concern has a practical outworking. Show and demonstrate care. Be genuinely concerned. Take time to consider others’ situations. Don’t become so inward-looking that you fail to notice the plight of others.</p>
<p>Serve one another (Gal 5:13)</p>	<p>Be willing to serve each other (without reward). Use your talents and abilities to bless others in practical and spiritual ways so that there might be a beautiful flow in the whole body of Christ.</p>
<p>Share one another’s burdens</p>	<p>Share your burdens with each other and be willing to ease the load for one another. You</p>

<p>(Gal 6:2)</p>	<p>have strengths that others will need to draw upon sometimes.</p>
<p>Be kind and compassionate to one another (Eph 4:32)</p>	<p>Express compassion; a genuine love and sympathy towards one another.</p>
<p>Submit to one another (Eph 5:21)</p>	<p>Submit your lives to one another. Make yourself accountable. We all depend upon you! Our testimony is bound up with yours.</p>
<p>Encourage each other (1Th 4:18; Heb 10:24)</p>	<p>We all need encouragement. Be deliberate, thoughtful and consistent in encouraging each other. Spur one another on! And rejoice when we make progress together.</p>
<p>Do not slander or complain about one another (Jas 4:11, 5:9)</p>	<p>Slander, grumbling, complaining, directing your comments at people not involved. These things are the scourge of Christianity and will quickly spread like poison in the church.</p>
<p>Confess your sins to one another (Jas 5:16)</p>	<p>Where you have fallen, make yourself accountable as part of the recovery process. If you wrong one another go to them and confess...</p>
<p>Forgive one another (Col 3:13)</p>	<p>...and be quick to forgive one another and see each other restored!</p>
<p>Act humbly towards one another (1Pe 5:5)</p>	<p>Pride has no place in the Kingdom of God; let all our boasting be of Christ only and let us be humble in all our dealings with each other.</p>

| 5 Covenant is cosmic & eternal

5.1 Cosmic Scale

As we should realise by now God's Covenant with man is not just about man, in the same way that the Covenant he made with Adam was not just about the garden. The New Covenant is about the entire created cosmos. Paul writes to the Colossians: -

¹⁵ He (Christ) is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶ For by ¹⁵ him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be pre-eminent. ¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

Colossians 1:15–20, ESV

It is not just about me and my family getting saved, or just about my friends getting saved or even the town I live in. It doesn't even stop at the world being redeemed even, but the whole of the created cosmos, all of which was created for His eternal glory.

5.2 Eternal Impact

The final thing to say about the New Covenant is, like God, it is eternal. The Covenant Wave will continue on into eternity, just as the increase of Jesus' government will know no end. This means that the cutting of the New Covenant (in Jesus' blood) has bound us together not just for this lifetime but for unending eternity.

Everything we do therefore has eternal ramifications and should be considered in that light. The restoration of all things, is only part of an eternal purpose that God is working out, which we have only glimpsed. It is only keeping us on track to a far larger plan. Often described as his most eloquent and loftiest work, Paul's letter to the Ephesians help us to see beyond redemptive history and gain the perspective of eternity, God's eternal purpose. T Austin-Sparks wrote of this eternal perspective of God's Covenant and redemptive purposes,

"Now the great effect of Paul's discovery concerning the Lord Jesus on the Damascus road was not only to reveal to him the fact of His Sonship... but to lift Christ right out of time and to place him with the Father in the 'before times

eternal'. That does not perhaps for the moment appear to be striking, but it is a very big step toward what the Lord wants to say to us. Christ has been lifted out of time. The 'time' Christ, that is, His coming into this world in time, becomes something like a parenthesis; it is not the main thing. It is the main thing if we look at the whole in light of the fall and need for recovery, but not the main thing from the Divine standpoint originally.

I want you to come to grasp this, because it is at this point we come into that greatest of all revelations that has been given to us concerning the Lord Jesus. This effect of his experience on the Damascus road, this lifting of Christ right out of time and placing Him in eternity, came in Paul's conception to be related to eternal purpose, and in eternal purpose there was no fall and no redemption. That is, so to speak, a bend down in the line of God through the ages. God's line was to have gone straight without a bend, without a break, but when it came to a certain point, because of certain contingencies which were never in the purpose, that line had to go down, and then up and on again. The two ends of that line are on the same eternal level. You may, if you like, conceive of a bridge across that bend, and of Christ thus filling the bend, so that what was from eternity is not interrupted at all in Him; it goes on in Him.

The coming to earth and all the work of the Cross is something other, the result of a necessity by reason of these contingencies; but in Christ eternity to eternity the purpose is unbroken, uninterrupted, without a bend. . There is no hiatus in Christ. This came to be related to purpose. That is a great word of Paul's '...according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.'³⁰; '...called according to his purpose.'³¹

These are eternal conceptions of Christ, and this purpose, and these Divine counsels were related to the universe, and to man in particular. Let us get across that bridge for a moment, leaving the other out; for I want you to notice the course that the Letter to the Ephesians takes. The letter begins with eternity. It says much of things that were before the world was, and it comes back to that point. Just in between it speaks of redemption, and it never speaks of redemption until it has the past eternity in view. Redemption comes in to fill the up that gap and then we go on to eternity again ...'³²

What always was, is, and will always be the divine eternal plan of God, the triune Covenant deity known most truly as "I am"?

Much of His purposes are still a mystery to us. One thing we do know is that this Covenant Life He has always enjoyed, has always been His intention for us to also partake of!

³⁰ Ephesians 3:11

³¹ Romans 8:28

³² *The Stewardship of the Mystery, Volume One - All Things in Christ: Austin-Sparks T. Reprinted, 2002 from the original, unabridged writings of T. Austin-Sparks.*