

4: COVENANT

Sharing Our Lives Together

The book of Acts describes a ‘joining together’ of believers, only made possible by a New Covenant in Jesus’ blood and His presence in their hearts through the Holy Spirit. Luke’s description of them ‘having all things in common’, went beyond a close association – it was a ‘Kingdom Community’, who knew what it truly meant to **‘belong’**.

ACTIVITY

How many organisations do you belong to (including social media)? Consider what level of commitment they require and the benefits gained.

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THE NEW COVENANT

Let’s look at 5 important elements of this New Covenant God has made with His people.

- 1. Covenant is a ‘binding agreement’** – A covenant is a binding agreement. Today’s world is more inter-connected than ever before in human history and yet increasing numbers of people face loneliness, because the quality of those connections has not been commensurate with the quantity of them. The New Covenant involves a binding together, for eternity. It requires a commitment beyond anything this world has to offer us.
- 2. Covenant is ‘how God loves’** – From our beginning in Eden, God has always related to mankind through ‘covenant’. As the pinnacle of creation God’s relationship with man has never been casual, but has

always been a reciprocal commitment, which can only operate in His love. The apostle John tells us that that ‘God is love’ (1 John 4:8), because it is not just something He does; it is how the Godhead relate to each other, and to us. It is anything but casual; what God desires in His relationship with us is all or nothing! God loves through a covenant relationship.

- 3. The New Covenant made through Christ** – God has related to man through history in a series of covenants (with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses and David), which culminated in the eternal New Covenant with all mankind through Jesus Christ, restoring our relationship with the Father (Mt 26:28) by a once and for all time atonement for the sin of mankind, made with Christ as mediator, sealed in His own blood.
- 4. Our relationship with God restored** – In the Old Testament the prophets looked forward to Christ’s coming knowing that God would need to change the heart of man to enable him to have an uninterrupted relationship with God once again. Jeremiah foresaw that He would ‘forgive their sins’ and ‘write His law on their hearts’ (Jer 31:31-34). The New Covenant does this by giving us a completely new heart (2 Co 5:17), making us part of a new Covenant Community.
- 5. Our relationship with each other** – As well as restoring our relationship with God, the New Covenant creates a new relationship with other believers; a bond which goes beyond mere association, and even beyond our DNA. It is a joining at the level of the soul - we become part of God’s family. Covenant is now how we relate to, and love each other. Love is the ‘glue’ that holds the covenant community together.

THE NEW COMMANDMENT

As Jesus shared the Last Supper with his disciples he not only spoke of a **new covenant** but he also gave them a “**new command**” - and in so doing established the basis of all relationships in the New Covenant:

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13:34-35)

So the love of God became the hallmark for the new covenant community and remains so today. It is in the expression of God's love, across a diverse covenant community, that the church will demonstrate God's wisdom to the world (Eph 3:10).

The covenant love that Jesus commanded is the Greek word ‘**agape**’, which the apostle Paul describes ...

(Agape) love is "patient...kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. It does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. It never fails" (1 Co 13:4-8)

THE COVENANT MEAL

Jesus also gave His disciples an expression for the New Covenant The Passover meal was shared every year to mark the deliverance of the Israelites from 400 years of Egyptian slavery. Jesus revealed to them that the shedding of a lamb's blood for the meal was really pointing forward to the spilling of His own blood for the forgiveness of their sins (Mt 26:26-28).

Jesus instructed his disciples to “do this in remembrance of me” (Lk 22:19) and Paul gives further clear instructions to the Corinthians about the meaning and significance of the Lord's Supper (1 Co 11:17-34), to

enable us to **experience the power** of this covenantal act together ...

- **Look Back** – Give thanks for Jesus' sacrifice (1 Co 11:24).
- **Look Up** – Declare the power of His resurrection over sin for us all.
- **Look Around** - Consider the covenant bond we share with each other (1 Co 11:33).
- **Look Within** – Examine ourselves honestly (1 Co 11:27-28).
- **Look Forward** – Proclaim His death until He returns (1Co 15:26).

PRACTICALITIES

Agape is not primarily a feeling but a rather a **decision; a matter of the will**; a determination - in the light of the covenant - to take practical steps to express God's love to others.

Agape inevitably expresses itself in action. Many of the Apostles' writings are taken up with how we relate to one another, in our thoughts, words and deeds. It is only possible with God's love in our hearts and when we are willing to lay ourselves down, like Christ, for each other (Phil 2:1-5) and die to self interest (Gal 2:20).



How do we live out our Covenant: (1) With God?
(2) With one another?

COVENANT – KEY POINTS

- God loves through covenant!
- We have been brought into the New Covenant, the expression of God's radical new Kingdom.
- Covenant love should define our relationship with God and with other believers.
- The covenant meal helps us remember, express and experience covenant.
- The practicalities of covenant love have to be outworked in our lives.