

# CHRIST OUR COVENANT

## RIGHTEOUSNESS

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It's worse than the plague of AIDS. It's what causes despairing souls to jump off the Golden Gate Bridge. It plagues teenagers. It's what causes the breakup of couples ending in divorce. It's what divides nations and causes wars. What is the basic human condition? We are all *alienated* from God.

This feeling of disconnect from God which plagues all human beings is buried in the deep within the human psyche. If it was not buried subconsciously we would all implode and commit suicide. So the human mind tries to hide it and not be honest with itself. But our alienation from God manifests itself in anxiety which drives us throughout life having no hope and anticipating death. The basic motivation of life, the reason why we do everything is fear.

God proclaims to us sinners the reason to live. There is a text that introduces us to the subject of God's covenant and the solution to our problem of alienation from Him. "The secret of the LORD is with them that fear Him; and He will show them His covenant" (Psalm 25:14). It is not difficult to figure out what the Lord's secret is for He does not want to hide it from us. His "secret" is loving God with a heart that has been emptied of all self. The ultimate meaning of the cross is God's everlasting covenant. God is revealing to all a deeper appreciation of Jesus' cross with the purpose of reconciling our alienated hearts to Himself.

How did God win Abraham's heart when a heathen out in Ur of the Chaldees? God gave him a revelation of the cross. We read: "And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed" (Galatians 2:8). God took the initiative and showed him the gospel of the cross. Seeing this love of God crucified his selfish heathenism and Abraham was born again becoming a new creation.

God's everlasting covenant to the human race through Abraham is supernaturally unveiled in seven wonderful promises found in Genesis 12:2-3: "And I will make of thee a great nation [the church], and I will bless thee [you will prosper], and make thy name great ["the friend of God," James 2:23]; and thou shalt be a blessing [proclaiming good news]: and I will bless them that bless thee [with more abounding grace], and curse him that curseth thee [sin's natural course is self-destruction]: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed [temporal life now in Christ, with the prospect of immortality]."

God did not ask from Abraham any promises in return. Salvation is not faith and works. God's plan of salvation is faith alone. The faith that appreciates the gift of Calvary's is constrained by Jesus' self-denying love. Such genuine faith is rare today, but it does work by love ("faith which worketh by love" Galatians 5:6).

Abraham simply believed God's promise. "And he believed in the LORD; and He counted it to him for righteousness" (Genesis 15:6). Abraham was

justified by faith. “For the *promise*, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed [Christ], through the law, but through the righteousness of faith” (Romans 4:13).

When something is justified or made right, it means that it is straightened out. A wheel out of alignment on a car is annoying in the least and dangerous at the limit on the freeway. To get rid of the vibration an auto mechanic must rectify the problem. He makes it “right” again.

When God justifies a man, he doesn’t do a half job. Justification by faith is squaring up the legal accounts that the sinner has with the bookkeeping of the universal law, but it is much more. God straightens up the man from the inside out. When one experiences the forgiveness of his sins, truly, it changes the alienated heart from a rebel to a friend of God and there is peace.

We can never truly experience the forgiveness of sins until we see what it cost Jesus to remove them. So long as there’s a confessional approach to our prayers, the mechanics may be all there as to asking for all my sins to be remitted, but I will get up off my knees an unchanged man and pursue my own worldly life until next week’s confession. Justification by faith is a personal understanding of a change in legal status having sins remitted, and a heart change resulting in a new motivation of Jesus’ love in overcoming sin.

God’s promise to Abraham was dependent upon his future offspring of which he had none. So God

promised him a son.<sup>1</sup> But when decades went by and Sarah had no child, in her unbelief she persuaded Abraham to deny God’s promise in taking her personal assistant, Hagar, for a surrogate. This resulted in the birth of Ishmael.

This sordid affair is an example of the old covenant. “He who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh” (Galatians 4:23). “The flesh” is the taproot of sin. It is the ego of self-centeredness which manifests itself in unbelief of God’s promise. The old covenant of unbelief produces bondage in sin. Abraham went afoul of God’s plan. It became a paradigm alongside God’s covenant. Paul wrote, “an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar” (Galatians 4:24).

Abraham’s experience of old covenant unbelief became an example of what it means to be “under the law” (Galatians 4:21). To be “under the law” means to revert back to our natural-born love of self. This is out of harmony with God’s law of self-giving love. The love of self is driven by fears which seek a heavenly reward as opposed to the terror of hell. Self can only produce sin which is an abolition of the law.

The two experiences of the old covenant and the new covenant are not exclusive to before the cross and after the cross in terms of time as is so often

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<sup>1</sup> “And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir. And, behold, the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir” (Genesis 14:3, 4).

misunderstood. The two experiences of unbelief and faith are the old covenant and the new covenant respectively. These two experiences run on two separate, but parallel tracks both before the cross as well as after the cross. The two covenant experiences are not dispensational in respect of the cross being the great divide between the two. Abraham believed God, but then he did not continue in faith by a normal Christian life of repentance and thus he reverted back to the human default position of unbelief which is the old covenant.

When in her 90's Sarah believed God's promise, she bore him Isaac.<sup>2</sup> Isaac was a joy and delight to his parents. He was such an obedient child. Whenever Abraham had a problem Isaac was on hand to fix it. Now all of Abraham's hopes were dependent upon a future Messiah through Isaac.

So the Lord tried Abraham's faith in His covenant by asking him to sacrifice His unique, darling son of promise. Would Abraham's heart be wholly reconciled to God's will? Or would he disappoint God by embarrassing Him before the universe by exposing Him to the accusations of the devil that there was no one on earth who manifested a complete at-one-ment with God as a result of appreciating the gospel?

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<sup>2</sup> "Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised" (Hebrew 11:11).

All heaven watched with amazement as Abraham and Isaac made the ultimate sacrifice.<sup>3</sup> They both

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<sup>3</sup> "Faith is a sympathetic appreciation of the character of God, an un-worldly and entirely un-natural understanding of the motives which led Him to Calvary. "By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son." It can readily be seen that Abraham's faith included much more than confidence in Isaac's possible resurrection, and a prophetic prescience that in the end all would turn out right. As far as it was possible for a weak and sinful man to do so, Abraham experienced the surrendering love of the Father, who offered up His only begotten Son. Heaven must have looked on the tender and moving scene with unutterable interest. Were Satan's accusations true that no human being could understand and appreciate a purely unselfish and disinterested motive to the extent of willingly sacrificing something dearer than life? Would Abraham, the Father of the faithful, be at-one-ment with God in the final analysis of his character? Was his heart beating in tune with the fathomless throbbings of Infinite Love?

"Tremblingly, with tears, and yet by faith, Abraham ascends the mystic ladder that links earth with heaven. His faith lays hold upon the very gates of heaven. Weeping, he climbs still higher in his faith, ascending above the heights of the clouds, until his faith having reached its apex, he sits beside the throne of God, one with the Father. The final embrace is given, he bids Isaac farewell for the last time, and raises the knife to slay him. His darling, something far far dearer to old Abraham than his weary life, he withholds not. Nothing more could he sacrifice. A child of humanity, by faith in Christ, has become like the Most High! The place to which Satan aspired has been taken by one of his former subjects. The plan of redemption is a success. Faith triumphs. Humanity's adoption into the family of God is assured. All who will share with faithful father Abraham the faith which he exemplified, will share alike the reward—

committed themselves to the separation. And now the divine redemption price could be more fully appreciated by heaven and earthlings. Isaac was in full agreement with his father's sacrifice. By faith Isaac offered himself up as a sacrifice.

It is upon this event in the Old Testament that Jesus spoke the most memorized words in all the Bible. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). "His only begotten Son" is His only, unique, darling One. God paid the price for your redemption as well as the Son. The Son did not pay the price to an offended Father who needed a Divine appeasement. That is the pagan view of the atonement. God took the initiative in His covenant and gave the atonement in His Son. The Son bridged the gulf of darkness between Himself and the Father on the Cross by His faith in the promise of His Father. Thus Jesus' faith was the atonement.

The price paid by both Father and Son was given for you. When you go to the store and pay the cashier the money for an item, you agree that the item is worth the equivalent of \$10. When the Father and the Son paid for you the price of His sinless, endless life, there is no dollar estimate that can be placed on that sacrifice. Its purpose was to reach your soul that you might realize you are worth the equivalent of that price.<sup>4</sup>

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atonement with God." Robert J. Wieland, "In Search of Faith," p. 27.

<sup>4</sup> "For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body" (1 Corinthians 6:20).

Abraham had some hope when he sacrificed Isaac. He believed in the resurrection from the dead.<sup>5</sup> God told Abraham that he would die not having received the promise.<sup>6</sup> But "the land of promise" was "a strange country" (Hebrews 11:9); it was not the land promised him in God's everlasting covenant. "For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Hebrews 11:10).

Abraham's children allowed themselves to become slaves in the land of Egypt because they did not sojourn in tents during the famine of Joseph's time and then leave afterward, but rather built permanent dwellings. When God gave His covenant to Israel they were to be a free nation, with God as their King and provider. Through a rapid sequence of miraculous events the Lord delivered them from Pharaoh out of Egypt and led them to Sinai.

It was at Mount Horeb that Moses struck the rock and the Lord provided them water to drink. "And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ" (1 Corinthians 10:4). The smitten Rock is the Cross of Christ from which His life flows by the channels of the Holy Spirit to the soul. This is

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<sup>5</sup> "By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son. Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure" (Hebrews 11:17-19).

<sup>6</sup> "And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age" (Genesis 15:15).

how ancient Israel understood the miracle of the Rock. Calvary came before the law was spoken from Sinai.

Then God showed them His covenant the same as their father Abraham who believed. God spoke to them. “Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles’ wings, and brought you unto myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine” (Exodus 19:4, 5). If you will “hear” my voice and “cherish” my covenant, then you will be my “cherished” people; which is a play on words in the original Hebrew. There was no legalistic obedience required as God spoke these words of love to His ancient people. He sought to draw them to Himself through the revelation of the principle of the Cross, His own self-denying love.

Their own self-reliant response to God’s promise was: “And all the people answered together, and said, All that the LORD hath spoken we will do” (Exodus 19:8). They repeated this sentiment and according to Ellen White “the people did not realize the sinfulness of their own hearts, and that without Christ it was impossible for them to keep God’s law; and they readily entered into covenant with God. Feeling that they were able to establish their own righteousness, they declared, ‘All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient’ (Exodus 24:7).”<sup>7</sup> She says it was “their covenant with God” “the ‘old covenant’” of “Obey and live”.<sup>8</sup> Paul says it was “the

<sup>7</sup> Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 371, 372.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 372.

one [covenant] from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage” (Galatians 4:24).

“Trust and Obey” is the old covenant. Trust in self, trust in making our promises to obey is futile and destructive of true faith in Christ. Teaching children and teens to make promises to God is a common teaching method.

Not only is making promises to God not required, it is actually detrimental because it is the essence of self-righteousness. Whoever makes the promise is automatically the source of the righteousness. The fundamental principle of the old covenant is making promises to God, and to add the proviso “with God’s help” is little better for it is then the faith-plus-works idea which is still mired in legalism.

So the “Pledge” goes “By the grace of God I will be pure, . . . kind. . . true. . . keep the Pathfinder law. . . be a servant to God. . . a friend to man,” etc. In a *Tots* book old covenant promises are encouraged: “I will whisper in your ears how I love you, children dear. Promise Me you will be true in every little thing you do.”

The fault of the old covenant is set forth in *Steps to Christ*: “Your promises and resolutions are like ropes of sand. . . . The knowledge of your broken promises and forfeited pledges weakens your confidence in your own sincerity, and causes you to feel that God cannot accept you. . . . What you need to understand is the true force of the will. . . . The power of choice God has given to me; it is theirs to exercise” (p. 47).

The most clear Bible definition of God’s plan of salvation in His everlasting covenant is this. “Now to

Abraham and His seed [Christ] were the promises made [the Father promised His Son]. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ. And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect [The law does not nullify the promise. The law is in the promise of Christ]. For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise” (Galatians 3:16-17). The covenant is God’s promise not our promises to Him.

Unfortunately ancient Israel no more heard God’s promise with the hearing of faith than has modern Israel. “For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it” (Hebrews 4:2). God proclaimed the message of the cross of Jesus to them, but they did not believe.

The problem with their old covenant was with them. There could be no forgiveness of sins and power to overcome sin in their promises to obey. That was revealed only in God’s everlasting or new covenant. “For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. For *finding fault with them*, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of

the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord” (Hebrews 8:7-9).

So the Lord was obliged to enter into their covenant, but there was no cross, no salvation in it. He gave them many, many object lessons to lead them to His everlasting covenant of the cross. These object lessons were attached to their old covenant. The ten commandments were written on stone when they should have been written in their hearts by faith which works by love. God wishes to dwell in their hearts but they sent Him to live in a motel room. So He instructed them to make me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them. He gave them the morning and evening sacrifice to show them the cross. But when Jesus came the meaning of this whole system had been rendered meaningless. Even the priests had no idea what it all meant when Jesus at the age of twelve came to inquire at the Temple. The whole dispensation of shadows and types were swept away when He died upon the cross for now the reality had come.

There were many true Israelites during the Old Testament dispensation of shadows and types. Hebrews 11 records the faith in Christ of Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthae, David, Samuel, and many others. But all were saved by looking to the Christ of the everlasting covenant.

The denouement of the everlasting covenant has yet to be fulfilled in the latter rain of “the third angel’s message in verity.” In other words, the third

angel's message is the everlasting covenant promise of God. "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more" (Hebrews 10:16, 17). When the alienated hearts of God's people have been healed by seeing the ultimate meaning of the cross, then our Day of Atonement will be realized and the sanctuary cleansed.

This is a true story, dates back to the British rule in India. The Pamban Bridge is situated in Tamil Nadu, India. At the entrance of the bridge you can see a picture of a weeping man holding some human body parts close to his chest.

This bridge was built during the British rule in India and it was constructed in such a way that the center portion of the bridge could be lifted with the help of huge wheels, so that ships could easily pass under the bridge. On the bridge, roads and rail tracks are laid for trains and other vehicles to pass. A middle aged man was appointed to roll the wheels up and down when ships arrive. Once he saw a train slowly approaching, while he was pulling back the bridge after a ship quietly passed beneath. He had to pull back quickly or else there would be a fatal accident and thousands would have died.

At that time his nine year old son came with lunch. When he saw his father struggling with the wheels, he kept the lunch box down and started helping him to roll the wheels to put the bridge back. Suddenly his son's finger got caught inside the wheel and he started crying out. At this time if the father tries to

save his son, the bridge could not be put back on time. He had no other option but to ignore his son's cry. With all his strength he kept on rolling the wheels to down the bridge. As the wheels rolled on, his son slowly started slipping away into the huge machine.

Tears rolled down his father's cheeks, but he ignored his son's cry. If he tried to save him, the train will surely fall into the sea with the people in it. Slowly the boy's whole body fell into the machine and his father could hear his bones breaking one by one, until with a loud sound, his head cracked.

The train with thousands of passengers slowly rolled on the rails, without knowing what had happened there.

Though this man performed his duty honestly he lost his only loving son. With extreme lamentation, he pulled out his son's body parts from the machine and held it close to his chest and cried bitterly.

British Government honored him greatly and in memory of this incident they placed the picture at the entrance of the bridge.