

Covenants

Editorial by Michael Kelley

The very first person I met in the Church of Christ was my future wife, sitting on the picnic bench waiting for the evening service. I thought she was attractive and I tried to strike up a conversation. We spoke a little bit but she seemed cool and distant. Over the course of two years I tried to strike up a relationship with her but couldn't seem to make any progress and almost gave up. Quite possibly part of the problem was I was over anxious and awkward yet there must have been some underlying reason. It was not until many years later that I realized that she wanted to know if I was capable of having a covenant relationship. She probably has seen several others get burned and that was just not something for her. The dictionary describes a covenant as:

Webster's Dictionary - Covenant: A mutual consent or agreement of two or more persons, to do or to forbear some act or thing; a contract; stipulation. A covenant is created by deed in writing, sealed and executed; or it may be implied in the contract. In *theology*, the *covenant of works*, is that implied in the commands, prohibitions, and promises of God; the promise of God to man, that man's perfect obedience should entitle him to happiness. *This do, and live; that do, and die.* The *covenant of redemption*, is the mutual agreement between the Father and Son, respecting the redemption of sinners by Christ. The *covenant of grace*, is that by which God engages to bestow salvation on man, upon the condition that man shall believe in Christ and yield obedience to the terms of the gospel.

In several places in the scriptures Christ is compared to being the groom and His church as being His bride. Jesus loved His church so much that He was willing to sacrifice His life for His church and die a cruel death on the cross. He also promises eternal life for those who become His people through a covenant relationship. Typically most women could not help but fall in love with a man who was willing to die to save her, and provide for her security and happiness.

2 Corinthians 11:2 *For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.*

Ephesians 5:25-27 *Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; 26 That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, 27 That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.*

If a man and woman love each other as Christ loved His church... what does the man and woman do to always be together with the one they love as a family? They enter a covenant relationship through marriage. How do they get married? By a lawful wedding ceremony. What occurs during a wedding ceremony that makes it a joining of two people? Two things... a solemn covenant is made between the man and the wife, and a person who is given authority officiates the ceremony thereby making the rite a legal contract. There are many scriptures that teach the solemnity of marriage.

So what does a person do to make a covenant with God and becoming a part of the family of Christ? Merely making a mental exercise and accepting Jesus as your Savior as some churches teach is no more making a covenant than saying "I like you" make your girlfriend a wife. It is a two way relationship and a solemn promise is required. God tells us plainly through the scriptures that this covenant is made by immersion baptism. Sometimes finding a suitable location can be inconvenient for an immersion baptism, yet there are many symbolisms associated with this method that helps explain why this method is essential.

1 Peter 3:21 *The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ:*

Acts 22:16 And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.

Romans 6:3-5 Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? 4 Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection:

Colossians 2:12 Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.

As can be seen baptism is like taking a spiritual bath, a cleansing of the soul. A mere sprinkling would not wash your entire body, and much of the symbolism is lost when some churches baptize by sprinkling water. More importantly is the symbolism of Christ's death, being buried, and arising up again. Jesus died in a corruptible human body, and arose in an incorruptible body no longer subject to death.

Vine's Dictionary – Baptism: (Greek – Baptisma) Baptism consisting of the processes of immersion, submersion, and emergence (from Bapto – to dip)

Baptism by immersion was so important that even Jesus himself was required to be baptized in order to fulfill all righteousness.

Matthew 3:13-17 Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. 14 But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? 15 And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him. 16 And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: 17 And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

Notice that the Father's proclamation that Jesus was his beloved Son came *right after* Jesus was baptized. This is clearly how we become one with God, by following His commandments, by following the examples of Christ and taking part in Christ's death and resurrection through baptism by immersion. Some churches dismiss the requirement of baptism as some sort of "works" that are as filthy rags. I cannot imagine Jesus' baptism and God's proclamation of Jesus being His beloved Son as a "filthy rag". What some of these churches do is in effect advocating a covenant-less relationship with God... much like a couple living together without ever getting married. They believe in a one way relationship where cheap grace is given freely to all while little is expected from the "believer". They often do this for monetary gain or popularity and this is possibly why some scriptures refer to these churches as the "whore" or "harlots".

Other churches make the mistake of baptizing infants, little children or even for the dead. If the baptism covenant is every bit as solemn as a marriage covenant what sort of sense would it make to marry an infant, little child or a dead person? How can any in those categories make a solemn covenant to serve God?

Moroni 8:21-25 And he that saith that little children need baptism, denieth the mercies of Christ, and setteth at naught the atonement of him and the power of his redemption. 22 Wo unto such, for they are in danger of death, hell, and an endless torment. 23 I speak it boldly, God hath commanded me. 24 Listen unto them and give heed, or they stand against you at the judgment seat of Christ. 25 For behold that all little children are alive in Christ, and also all they that are without the law. 26 For the power of redemption cometh on all them that have no law; wherefore, he that is not condemned, or he that is under no condemnation, can not repent; and unto such baptism availeth nothing. 27 But it is mockery before God, denying the mercies of Christ, and the power of his Holy Spirit, and putting trust in dead works.

These churches that sprinkle infants, or baptize children at a young age, or baptize for the dead who never knew Christ have turned a beautiful and solemn occasion into a dead work... a completely meaningless ritual that mocks the grace of God. What then is this family relationship we have with God and the church after we enter this covenant relationship through baptism? Alma details this very eloquently:

Mosiah 9: 39-42 And now, as ye are desirous to come into the fold of God, and to be called his people, and are willing to bear one another's burdens, that they may be light; 40 Yea, and are willing to mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort, and to stand as witnesses of God at all times, and in all things, and in all places that ye may be in, even until death, that ye may be redeemed of God, and be numbered with those of the first resurrection, that ye may have eternal life: 41 Now I say unto you, if this be the desire of your hearts, what have you against being baptized in the name of the Lord, as a witness before him that ye have entered into a covenant with him that ye will serve him and keep his commandments, that he may pour out his Spirit more abundantly upon you? 42 And now when the people had heard these words, they clapped their hands for joy, and exclaimed, This is the desire of our hearts.

Alma's description for the baptism covenant is very similar to a wedding vow. The woman takes upon herself her husband's name, they comfort and support each other, and they witness this before God and man and promise to be faithful until the end of their lives. After a couple makes this covenant they then enter a closer family relationship. When a person is baptized they are cleansed and made suitable for a more intimate relationship with God by the gift of the Holy Ghost through the Laying of Hands. Those who have a covenant-less relationships with God have not yet been cleansed and adopted into the family of God. While they may desire to be friends with God, they are not a part of the family of Christ and are as strangers. If a stranger desires to be a part of the family of Christ they certainly are welcome to join yet they must do so through the proper methods as God has decreed it through baptism.

May you each enjoy a beautiful covenant relationship in this life and the next,

Your Brother in Christ,

Michael Kelley