

Discussing How To Restore The Early Church

Returning Intimacy and Power to the Father's Children

*"I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for,
it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.
For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."
(Matthew 18:19,20)*



SECTION 4 - LESSON 24

THE FATHER AND JESUS

Part 1. The Covenant Basis To The True Gospel:

- *Introduction: The Gospel Of the Covenant Is The Pilgrimage To Salvation*
 - *Never Assume That Someone (Even You!) Is A Christian!*
 - *Our Father — A Covenant-Giver*
 - *Our Father — A Covenant-Keeper*



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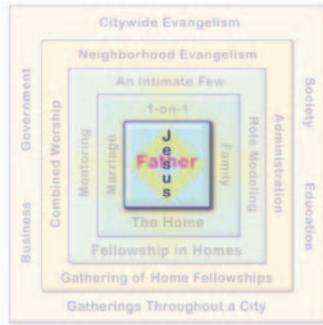
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THE FATHER AND JESUS

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Don't take these lessons lightly. Jesus was surrounded by "religious" people in His day. He made sure His warning was clear: *"For many are called, but few are chosen"* (Matthew 22:14). We are addressing in these Lessons the *chosen*, the ones who through the encouragement and support of others in the family of Jesus still need to be *found faithful* when they reach the Judgment Throne. May each of us find a joyous welcome by our Lord!

THE FATHER AND JESUS
Part 1. The Covenant Basis to the True Gospel:
Introduction To The Gospel Of The Covenant Is The Pilgrimage To Salvation

"It is because of this death that [Messiah] is mediator of a new covenant [or will]. Because a death has occurred which sets people free from the transgressions committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promised eternal inheritance" (Hebrews 9:15,CJB).

You may be in for quite a spiritual surprise as you go through this Lesson and the next four! We'll be introducing you to the Gospel of the Covenant that the earliest followers of Jesus embraced, a life-changing Gospel of power and praise.

You'll come to understand that salvation is a *pilgrimage*, a relational journey much like a marriage. Those who'll be welcomed at the Judgment Throne by Lord Jesus are His *"called, chosen and faithful followers"* (Revelation 17:14).

When you hear the word "gospel", what does it mean to you? In other words, if you consider yourself a *Christian*, write down the gospel you embraced.

Include the biblical basis that substantiates why you believe you are saved.

Let's discern now if the gospel you wrote down matches the true Gospel our Father established in Jesus. The reason we're putting you on the spot right away is that there are so many false gospels being peddled in Christendom today. Did you embrace the true Gospel, or one of the many "gospel" counterfeits?

One of the difficulties surrounding the issue of "faith" is resistance to consider that you might be wrong or may have believed a lie. Nobody wants to find out that any of their faith practices are in error. But centuries of Hellenist and Roman pagan influence have brought forth a vast number of commonly accepted man-made religious practices. Sadly, few of these are God-ordained.

Recent studies have been conducted that indicate the bitter fruit of the false gospels so pervasive in the world today.

- **Ray Comfort, an international evangelist, reports that he's found less than 10% of those who go forward at evangelistic crusades remain "Christian" afterward.**
- **A readily recognized evangelistic association in the U.S. found that less than 4% of the people who go forward at their crusades are walking as "Christians" just a few years later.**
- **A well-known and widely respected campus ministry found less than 5% of the students who'd been active in their ministry to be "Christian" 5 years later.**

- **The divorce rate in the "Bible Belt" is 50% higher than among non-Christians in the U.S. This sad statistic may seem unrelated to the Gospel, but, as we'll show later, the true Gospel and God's purpose for marriage are intricately connected. We contend that the "gospel message" of much of the Bible Belt is both incomplete and deceptive. This spiritual counterfeit contributes to the epidemic divorce rate among people who call themselves "Christian".**

Before we begin looking at the Covenant foundations of the true Gospel, ponder two key points:

1. Embracing the *true* Gospel that is offered by our Father starts you on a pilgrimage that will *transform you* into increasing Christ-likeness, and ultimately find you welcomed at the Judgment Throne.
2. Embracing a *false* gospel sets you on a counterfeit path that *completely misses* the salvation our Father offers, with hell as your destiny.

The consequences of embracing a counterfeit gospel are eternally severe. We encourage you to take your time as you go through these lessons. You owe it to yourself to verify that you've in fact embraced the true biblical Gospel. The Gospel which the earliest Church embraced requires far more than mental agreement with the "gospel idea". As you'll see, to embrace the Gospel our Father offers demands *everything* you are and have.

THE FATHER AND JESUS
Part 1. The Covenant Basis to the
True Gospel:

Never Assume That Someone (Even You!) Is A Christian!

“Don’t be deceived, my dear brothers”
(James 1:16).

When people who call themselves “Christian” first encounter each other, they often assume that the other person is a “Christian” because he or she *claims* to be. Of all the areas in which you need discernment, this is THE area in which you should assume nothing!

We know that *“Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light”* (2 Corinthians 11:14). He often uses individuals whom he has taken *“captive to do his will”* (2 Timothy 2:26). He sends forth these agents like Trojan horses to infiltrate and hinder the walk of Christians.

You need to be discerning before you give the right hand of fellowship: Every person is either the Father’s child or Satan’s. There’s no middle ground about this in the Bible. As the apostle John clarifies, apart from true followers of Jesus, *“the whole world lies in the power of the Evil One”* (1 John 5:19).

The Bible warns that *“wolves in sheep’s clothing”* would attempt to infiltrate and destroy our families and faith communities. Satan, the deceiver, enjoys creating false gospels and penetrating faith communities with individuals he has under his controlling influence. Therefore we must choose to appropriate the weaponry with which Jesus has armed His own: *“We know that the Son of God has come and has given us discernment, so that we may know who is genuine”* (1 John 5:20a).

We wrote in Lesson 23 about satanists in Connecticut who had infiltrated cer-

tain congregations. In one of the largest Baptist churches in the state, a woman satanist became superintendent of the Sunday school. She’d been sent clandestinely to “water down” the curriculum. If it hadn’t been for the spirit of discernment in the pastor’s wife, this woman would have gotten away with her insidious assignment.

How many other faith communities are now being infiltrated by Satan’s servants disguised as Christians? ***Never assume anyone is a follower of Jesus!***

Tragically, so many “Christians” have been duped into embracing a satanically-inspired false gospel, totally missing the Father’s Good News and the promises it brings. ***Never assume all gospels are the genuine article, either!***

How about you? When someone tells you that he or she is a Christian, do you accept them as such just because they say so? Why?

What discerning questions could you ask to determine if a person truly is a follower of Jesus? Why is it important to ask?

Before going further, define the biblical definition of “covenant”.

THE FATHER AND JESUS

Part 1. The Covenant Basis to the

True Gospel:

Our Father—A Covenant-Giver

“I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you”
(Genesis 17:7).

God initiated a covenant with Abraham with a very special quality: it’s *everlasting*. We can assure you from personal experience: Few Christians fully grasp the significance of the **Abrahamic covenant** and what it means to their own salvation.

The early Hebraic followers of Jesus clearly understood the significance of biblical *covenants*. Today these are understood dimly at best. God had established covenants with His chosen people through Noah, Abraham, Moses and David. Jeremiah had prophesied that the Jews could expect yet another covenant, one in which *Torah*, the teachings of God’s way of life, would be written *in their hearts*.

In terms of biblical covenants, **God is the initiator** between Himself and His people. Each covenant comprises distinct parameters:

- Our Father’s **stipulations** in order for man to accept the covenant.
- His promises of **blessing** for obedience.
- His **judgment** for breaking the covenant.

*** Read Deuteronomy, chapter 28, to deepen your understanding of covenant *consequences*. Alongside God’s promise of blessing stands His judgment for refusing to abide by the stipulations of His covenant.

Paul reminded the Gentiles (the non-Jews) about covenants as part of the heritage they’d received from the Hebraic stream: *“Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises”* (Romans 9:4). The writer to the Hebrews builds the foundation of the Messiahship of Jesus on the institution of a *new covenant*: *“To Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel”* (Hebrews 12:24).

This phraseology may sound strange in Hellenized Christendom. But what a thundering impact Jesus’ words must have had on the Hebraic ears which first heard them: *“This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins”* (Matthew 26:28). Suddenly in that upper room that evening, it was a new ball game on earth—the prophesied New Covenant was transcending the old!

What we’ll be sharing here is in your Bible, but few ever pay attention to the *ramifications* of covenants. The Gospel had been proclaimed to the Hebrew, Abraham, foretelling that *Gentiles* were part of God’s plan for redemption:

[Abraham] trusted in God and was faithful to him, and that was credited to his account as righteousness. Be assured, then, that it is those who live by trusting and being faithful who are really children of Abraham. Also the Hebrew Scriptures, foreseeing that God would consider the Gentiles righteous when they live by trusting

and being faithful, told the Good News to Abraham in advance by saying, "In connection with you, all the Gentiles will be blessed." So then, those who rely on trusting and being faithful are blessed along with Abraham, who trusted and was faithful (Galatians 3:6-9, JNT).

Abraham was told millennia earlier what God was going to do for *you*. Remember, we're describing a Hebraic Restoration which goes back to the faith-based life of the first Hebrew, Abraham. Even the true Gospel was told to him *first*.

We today won't adequately appreciate the New Covenant that's offered to us through Jesus unless we have a heart-knowledge of the Older Testament as the early Hebraic followers did.

The sacrifice of Jesus inaugurated a New Covenant, but the Gospel—the full meaning of that covenant Good News—is found in the Hebrew Bible, the Older Testament.

When you decided to respond to the Spirit's prompting and follow Jesus, did you have any concept of the covenant relationship into which you were entering? Yes or no? If no, what did you believe you were doing?

What did the "blood of Jesus" mean to you at that time? How has your understanding of the significance of His blood changed since then?

THE FATHER AND JESUS

Part 1. The Covenant Basis to the True Gospel:

Our Father—A Covenant-Keeper

"Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed," says the LORD, who has compassion on you" (Isaiah 54:10).

God doesn't willingly break the covenants He establishes with mankind. In fact, some, such as His covenant with Abraham, are called *everlasting*.

Man, however, violates and breaks covenants whenever we lose our awe-some fear of God and unrepentantly look elsewhere for gratification. Time and again the Israelites broke the stipulations of the Sinai covenant which God had established to single out this people as His own for very specific purposes.

Out of His great mercy our longsuffering Lord repeatedly sent prophets to warn them. We need to take these warnings seriously today! The Israelites, however, responded by shutting the ears of their hearts.

They did not keep the covenant of God and refused to live by His Torah...for their hearts were not right with Him, and they were unfaithful to His covenant (Psalms 78:10,37,CJB).

You may have noticed in your reading of the Older Testament that God refers to His relationship with Israel in a “matrimonial” context. Our Father describes Himself as the “Husband” of Israel:

“For your Maker is your husband—the Lord Almighty is His name—the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; He is called the God of all the earth” (Isaiah 54:5; see also Jeremiah 31:31).

When God sent prophets to warn them of the consequences of their **spiritual adultery** with pagan gods, He used the relational commitment of *marriage* to frame His rebuke: *“But like a woman unfaithful to her husband, so you have been unfaithful to Me, O house of Israel,” declares the LORD*” (Jeremiah 3:20; see also 31:32; Ezekiel 16:32; Hosea 2:2,16).

Like a loving Husband, our Father faithfully does *His* part to keep the covenants He makes. But when the rebukes of His prophets go unheard and man’s sin is so rampant that His holiness is continually trampled, the Covenant is severed (see, for example, Deuteronomy 31:16,20; Isaiah 24:5).

Consider how painful it must have been for our loving God to speak these words to His beloved. Ponder as well the defiant and rebellious hearts that took their relationship with God for granted. They were deceived that because of their status as His “chosen ones”, they could defile that relationship with immunity.

You have returned to the sins of your forefathers, who refused to listen to my words. You have followed other gods to serve them. Both the house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken the covenant I made with you forefathers (Jeremiah 11:10).

Ongoing unconfessed sin and unrepentance break a covenant with God.

Remember this when we discuss the New Covenant.

Even the heathen Babylonian commander knew why God had allowed Jerusalem to fall: *“Now the LORD has brought it about; he has done just as he said he would. All this happened because you people sinned against the LORD and did not obey him”* (Jeremiah 40:3).

The grieving prophet sums up God’s appraisal of the people He chose, an evaluation that bears striking resemblance to the lawless within Christendom today:

To this day they remain unhumiliated; they have not been afraid, and they have not lived according to my Torah or my regulations that I presented to you and your ancestors’ (Jeremiah 44:10).

So many who call themselves “Christian” have no holy fear of God. They refuse to abide by the stipulations of the New Covenant or the commands Christ made clear from the Hebrew Scriptures.

Why is the nature of God’s covenants with man so important?

- His covenants are more than just an *agreement* between Himself and mankind.
- By looking at His covenants you get a true picture of His *emotional commitment* to the people with whom He enters into covenant.
- You become aware of His grief and pain as His people sin against Him. His *husband-like longsuffering* for His unfaithful wife is a stop sign for you to make your own self-examination.

- You realize that there indeed comes a point at which His *wrath is aroused* when people break the covenant He's so graciously offered them.

Because the Hebrew Scriptures offer an example and warning of how *not* to respond, we need to take seriously the gross presumption pictured in the following passage. *Intentional sin* against our Bridegroom is repugnant to Him. If you assume that you're a "Christian" yet continually violate His covenant, you'll reap the same response as Jesus gave to those who went through religious motions but disobeyed God's will: "*Get away from Me, you workers of lawlessness. I never knew you!*" (Matthew 18:23).

Here's what God thinks of covenant-breakers who have pushed Him too far:

*Put the shofar to your lips! Like a vulture [he swoops down] on the **house of the LORD**, because they have **violated my covenant** and **sinned intentionally** against my Torah. Will they cry out to me, 'We are Isra'el, God, **we know you**'? Isra'el has **thrown away what is good**; the enemy will pursue him* (Hosea 8:1-3).

Anchor for yourself that embracing the Gospel of the Covenant is similar to entering into marriage and *staying* married.

Our Father intends for those who embrace the New Covenant He offers us through Jesus to be understood as a spiritual marriage covenant.

Conversely, the *earthly marriage covenant* physically represents the spiritual Covenant we have with Him. If you're married, the quality of love relationship you claim to have with God is

seen in the quality of love you share with your spouse. The marriages of followers of Jesus are on display for all mankind to see what the New Covenant looks like.

The "spiritual marriage" metaphor permeates the Newer Testament. The followers of Jesus are His bride, and He awaits her at the wedding banquet: "*Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the **wedding** of the Lamb has come, and **his bride** has made herself ready*" (Revelation 19:7).

As you read on, continue to remind yourself that the union of marriage and the New Covenant that leads to your salvation are intricately linked in understanding.

Like the *life pilgrimage* of a marriage in which the character and love of a couple deepens over time as they keep the covenant, our Covenant-keeping God transforms us on the pilgrimage to our salvation. This transformation process is often referred to as *sanctification*.

Similar to marriage, our relationship with our Lord is foremost *a heart issue*. The greatest commandment describes intense relational determination: "*Love the LORD your God with **all your heart** and with **all your soul** and with **all your strength***" (Deuteronomy 6:5). The Hebrew word for "love" used here is *ahav*. This word signifies zealous passion for God as you walk in His ways with Him.

The sign of the covenant between God and the sons of Abraham was circumcision of the foreskin, a painful physical act that drew blood to seal the relationship. Other than having this procedure for health reasons, few outside of Judaism have any idea of the *spiritual* ramifications of this act.

The term *heart circumcision* also appears frequently in the Hebrew Scripture text—and this “spiritual surgery” is needed by all followers of Jesus! Our Covenant-keeping God, Who is deeply committed to *His* part of the covenant, knows that your *heart* must yield to Him in loving submission in order for you to keep *your* part of the covenant. That’s why Paul clarifies for the Roman believers, both Jew and Gentile, that “*true circumcision is of the heart, spiritual not literal; so that [a person’s] praise comes not from other people but from God*” (Romans 2:29).

Our Father is well aware that no one who enters into a covenant with Him (or even into a marriage covenant with a spouse) is fully prepared to keep that covenant, no matter how good their intentions. Each person needs to be transformed during the covenant pilgrimage.

Heart circumcision is the means by which the Master Covenant-keeper accomplishes your transformation. And, just as physical circumcision is painful, so is the cutting away from your heart all that is unlike our Lord’s character!

The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live (Deuteronomy 30:6).

The goal of our wonderful God as He circumcises our hearts is so that we may love Him more and more, and in the process of growing in love, find the *full meaning of living*.

God repeatedly commanded the Israelites to *love Him* in the Hebrew Scriptures (see, for example, Deuteronomy 6:5, 11:1,13,22; Joshua 22:5). And, the outflow of that whole-hearted devotion would be *obedient trust*.

Our Lord made known the commands and instructions of a way of life that would bring blessing on His covenant people. Their love was to be translated into *action*. The same pattern flows into the Newer Testament: *love* and *obedience* are interwoven! This covenant principle can be summed up briefly: “*If you love Me, you will keep My commands*” (John 14:15).

Don’t think that *heart circumcision* is “Older Testament” stuff, foreign for those who embrace the Newer Covenant! **Jesus** is our *heart Circumciser*. In fact, as we’ll see in Lesson 26, *heart circumcision and sanctification are synonymous!*

As our sin nature is stripped away, we may love Him and those He brings our way with a sacrificial love that’s independent of whether it’s reciprocated. The old nature can’t control a heart that’s in union with Jesus.

Also it was in union with Him that you were circumcised with a circumcision not done by human hands, but accomplished by stripping away the old nature’s control over the body. In this circumcision done by the Messiah (Colossians 2:11,CJB).

Our Bridegroom is helping His bride to remove everything in her sin nature that hinders their shared love from being poured out onto others. It’s so important for you if you’re a follower of Jesus to understand the significance and process of heart circumcision. If you don’t, you’ll *resist* rather than cooperate with the circumstances and situations our Lord uses to circumcise your heart.

Sadly, for so many today the Gospel is merely the means to “getting saved”. And too many are satisfied with just

that, being *told* by a third party that “You’re saved.” Those who swallow counterfeit, shallow gospels see covenants as some form of contract. But this is nowhere near the truth. We’ll come back to the vital differences later on.

As we’ll discuss, the Gospel of the Covenant Is The Pilgrimage To Salvation calls for a life journey of increasing loving trust in our Father. For instance, when Jesus stresses, “*This is the blood of the covenant,*” He’s not focusing on the cup of wine. Rather, He’s directing our attention to the *goal of our Covenant-keeping Father*: that all who put their trust in the atoning blood of Jesus may live in intimate relationship with Him.

The emphasis is on the *relationship with Him*. For instance, when a couple marries, which is more important: the ceremony, or the loving relationship which the ceremony makes possible? The ongoing relationship!

Keep reminding yourself that a “covenant” brings about a union. **The covenant our Father offers invites you to live in union with Him.** Union implies a oneness, and an *ongoing pilgrimage with Him* on earth until the time when your name is read aloud before the host of heaven.

What is your goal as you keep this Covenant of union? **To live in a way that brings glory to our Father.** In fact, any goal or purpose that *doesn’t* incorporate **love-based desire to glorify our Father** will ultimately prove idolatrous. Your heart’s desire for *anything but* His glory will lead you down the wrong path of self-focus and self-gratification. You’ll keep asking yourself, “What blesses *me* in this relationship?”

That our Father is a *Covenant-keeper* is a powerful truth. That is, *He* doesn’t break the covenants He makes with mankind. But to their sorrow, men do. As we’ll discuss, even in the New Covenant of Jesus’ precious blood, people can break that Covenant with dire consequences.

If you’re married, before you got married did you expect that marriage would change you? Yes or No? If yes, in what ways did you expect to change? What problems in changing have you encountered?

If you’re married, how could a deeper understanding of God’s covenant with you help your relationship with your spouse?

If you’re married, how is the word “union” played out in your marriage? Ask those who know you both well: Do they see increasing Christ-likeness in your marriage covenant? Ask them to be specific.

If you're single, how does your understanding of your "marriage relationship" with Jesus affect your walk with Him? Describe how you've been changed by the Heart Circumciser.
