

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 27

THE FATHER AND JESUS

Part 3. The True Gospel of the Covenant:

- *Our Father's Stipulations For Ratifying And Consummating The Covenant*
 1. Your Salvation Pilgrimage both Begins *and* Continues with Your Repentance
 2. Your Salvation Pilgrimage both Begins *and* Continues with Your *agape (ahav)* Love
 3. Your Salvation Pilgrimage both Begins *and* Continues with Your Obedient Trust
 4. Your Salvation Pilgrimage both Begins *and* Continues with Your Forceful Conviction and Steadfast Determination
 5. Your Salvation Pilgrimage both Begins *and* Continues with You Forgiving Others
- *Summary Of The Covenant Issues*



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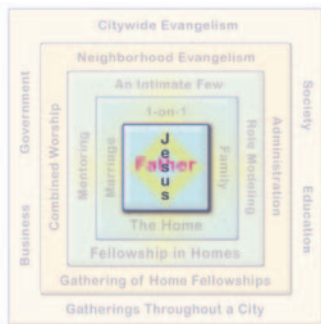
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• *Summary Of The Covenant Issues*



Introduction

How important for your life in the Spirit that you understand the stipulations for embracing our Father's Covenant that's made possible in Jesus!

As we mentioned in Lesson 25: Your pure motive is crucial in order for this Covenant to be ratified and consummated. It's this *heart condition* which differentiates covenants from contracts. Most *contracts* are entered into with *self-interest* in mind. The motive is to get the best deal for yourself!

In contrast, the very nature of a *covenant* takes into account the benefit the *other* person will derive from the relationship as well. In the *intimate union* of His Covenant with us, our Father is seeking children who lovingly want a relationship with Him and purpose to live a life that pleases Him (see Ephesians 5:10).

Keep in mind that embracing the Covenant our Father offers you calls for a life journey in which you *die to your own self-interests and desires*. Only through

self-death can your spirit respond to His Spirit so that you may diligently grow in the character and servant nature of Jesus. Remember this key point when we discuss the *relational responsibilities* of the marriage covenant in Lesson 30.

We noted in the previous Lesson that the sanctification process is a *life of dying* by placing the idols of your heart on God's altar. Remember that for over two hundred years before the coming of Jesus, a number of the "*Hebraic stream*" rabbis taught that a person must experience a spiritual rebirth. These rabbis understood the trust-filled *altar experiences* that Abraham underwent with his God.

Conversion meant rebirth. If there is a rebirth, then there must also be a death. Death to what? Our discussion of Abraham in the last Lesson emphasized a key point: His trusting obedience required a life of dying to the things of this world—*altar experiences*. Being born again is not only the demise of relying on religious practice and ritual, but entering into a life of dying to your *self*.

Death and resurrection are embodied in your need for the immersion of water baptism. You are identifying in your spirit with the Son of God to die so that your sins will be covered over. Through this death to the power of your sin nature you can rise in union with Him victorious, never having to die again in the "second

death" (see Revelation 2:11).

Through immersion into his death we were buried with him; so that just as, through the glory of the Father, the Messiah was raised from the dead, likewise we too might live a new life (Romans 6:4).

Don't lose sight of this! Your purity of motive and willingness to die are essential if you accept the Covenant our Father is offering you.

THE FATHER AND JESUS

Part 3. The True Gospel of the Covenant:

Our Father's Stipulations For Ratifying And Consummating The Covenant

- *Repentance*
- *Love*
- *Obedient Trust*
- *Forceful Conviction and Determination*
- *Forgiving Others*

Let's review the stipulations of the Hebrew Bible to which Jesus referred: "Whoever puts his trust in Me **as the Scripture says, rivers of living water will flow from his inmost being!**" (John 7:38,39).

1. Your Salvation Pilgrimage both Begins *and* Continues with Your Repentance

"For this is what the high and lofty One says—He who lives forever, whose name is holy: 'I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite'" (Isaiah 57:15).



John the Baptist, Jesus, and Peter at Pentecost all affirmed repentance as the first step toward salvation. Biblical repentance always demands a *turning from sin* and a *turning to God*. Do you see these two distinctives?

- Turning from sin
- **and** turning to God.

That's the vital message in this verse: "*declaring with utmost seriousness the same message to Jews and Greeks alike: **turn from sin to God; and put your trust in our Lord, Jesus the Messiah***" (Acts 20:21,CJB).

A life that has been changed from sinning to living God's way is the sign that your repentance is in fact genuine. If all you've done is feel bad that you sinned or that your sin cost you something when it was found out, that's nothing more than regret or remorse. Turning from sin to God and *living His way* is the only biblically acceptable response to the Spirit's call to you.

Keep this distinction in mind:

After his denial
Peter showed repentance.

After his betrayal
Judas showed remorse.

Repentance does grieve you that you have grieved God. You hunger for the forgiveness, cleansing and restoration that only He can give. *That grief* is the

“godly sorrow [that] brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret” (2 Corinthians 7:10). Godly sorrow leads to you to repent, and your repentant heart leads to salvation in the changed life it produces.

Intimately connected with repentance is *confession*. When you confess a sin, whether attitude or action, you’re acknowledging from your heart that you have violated God’s righteous commands. Your confession agrees with God’s perspective that you know you’ve sinned.

Repentance and confession flow throughout the Bible as a continuing stream of reconciling truth. David, the man after God’s own heart, certainly was far from perfect in his life choices. Yet he responded to God’s call to repent, realizing the painful consequences when he resisted.

Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit. When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Selah. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord’—and you forgave the guilt of my sin. Selah (Psalm 32:1-5).

Perhaps that’s why we’re warned not to become hardened by *sin’s deceit* (see Hebrews 3:13), but to have a contrite heart when convicted of sin. Notice too that trying to ignore the sin that is sepa-

rating us from loving fellowship with our Father becomes a spiritual cancer gnawing away at body, soul and spirit.

Each person who would enter our Father’s Covenant must come to the same realization that David did: Only by the grace of our merciful Lord can we find the sure cleansing that follows humble repentance.

God, in your grace, have mercy on me; in your great compassion, blot out my crimes. Wash me completely from my guilt, and cleanse me from my sin. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil from your perspective, so that you are right in accusing me and justified in passing sentence (Psalm 51:1-4, JNT).

Then David adds, *“My sacrifice to God is a broken spirit; God, you won’t spurn a broken, chastened heart”* (Psalm 51:17).

“I confess my iniquity; I am troubled by my sin” (Psalm 38:18). Our Father uses your guilt’s badgering and your troubled spirit to humble you to turn away from the iniquity that’s brought you such distress! Through confession and repentance you begin the process of embracing the Father’s Covenant and receiving His cleansing and forgiveness.

What if you don’t repent?

[God speaking] “When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood; wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong” (Isaiah 1:15,16).

Unless each praying heart has humbly washed in the river of repentance and

forsaken sin, the eyes and ears of our Father will not respond.

Many who embrace false gospels believe that God hears and responds to every prayer uttered by every person. But what does His Word say about those who choose to abide in sin? *“The LORD is far from the wicked [unrepentant] but he hears the prayer of the righteous”* (Proverbs 15:29; apperceived in 1 Peter 3:12).

The “gospels” that *don’t* require repentance have revealed themselves as spawn of the Evil One. Satan knows that when you don’t repent, the Father won’t hear your prayers. He has made that clear in His Word as a warning.

Stop to consider the tragic foolishness of all those prayers going unheard by our Father because people refuse to humbly repent and confess their sin. It’s like trying to have a conversation on a phone that’s disconnected. No sane person would do that! If you found no one on the other end, you’d hang up.

Yet our Father uses His refusal to answer the prayers of the unrepentant to warn them. He waits until we come to the point of seeing sin from His perspective—as utterly sinful! Then He faithfully shows us how to restore our line of prayer communication with Him through repentance and confession:

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:8,9).

See the power of answered prayer when you *have* been cleansed of all unrighteousness:

The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. Elijah was a

man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops (James 5:16,18).

Our Father’s parameters for those who want to be counted among His own are precise. His holy nature cannot abide tolerated sin based on the presumption that He’ll excuse or ignore it.

Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: ‘The Lord knows those who are his,’ and, ‘Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness’ (2 Timothy 2:19, apperceived from Numbers 16:5,26).

The apostle John here sums up his pivotal passage on forsaking a sinful lifestyle in order to remain united with Jesus: *“Here is how one can distinguish clearly between God’s children and those of the Adversary: everyone who does not continue doing what is right is not from God”* (1 John 3:10,CJB; see 3:1-9 also).

Our Father hasn’t changed between the two Testaments! He won’t set aside His holiness for anyone. The penalty for the sins of all mankind has been paid by the shed blood of Jesus. But His atonement is useless to us until we turn from our sins to Him in repentance so that we can receive that forgiveness.

To help you understand the sweeping importance of repentance, let’s again use an analogy from marriage. On the morning of his wedding a groom approaches his betrothed and says, “Honey, I

love you deeply, but I also have two lovers I'm having difficulty giving up. Let me keep them for a while and maybe I can get rid of them later."

How would she respond? Would she marry him? So many people who embrace counterfeit gospels continue to pursue the *same besetting sins* they had before some person ratified them as "saved". In fact, many have *no intention* of giving up their sins. By their intent they are committing **spiritual adultery** against our Father.

Scripture very graphically depicts Israel as "adulterous", "unfaithful", even as a donkey in heat chasing after many lovers. Anyone wanting to live in Covenant union with our Father must consider this warning and examine themselves and confess their sins.

Lack of repentance says to our Father, "I want what you have to offer, *but I don't intend to change or to give up anything.*" Will He enter into or remain in a Covenant with a person who refuses to give up other spiritual lovers? No!

During the past few decades the Gospel has become "watered-down." Many have agreed to "come to Christ" with the intent of "getting saved" because that was all that was asked of them by the person making the gospel offer!

But, salvation is the culmination of a life in which "*Jesus is Lord.*" Paul assured the followers of Jesus in Rome:

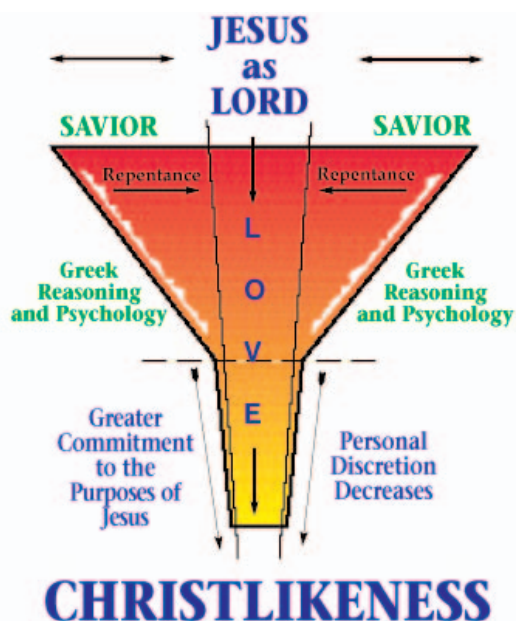
That if you acknowledge publicly with your mouth that Yeshua is Lord and trust in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be delivered
(Romans 10:9, JNT).

Early one Sunday morning, hours before Mike was to speak at a morning worship service, the Lord woke him up. There in his mind's eye was a vision of a funnel. As Mike stared at the funnel he could hear in his spirit an explanation of its meaning. Sketching the funnel on his computer, he then made an overhead transparency of it.

When he finished his message that morning, he put the funnel transparency on the overhead projector and explained it to the congregation. To his surprise, people left their seats and came forward to repent of their sins, convicted of having believed a gospel that did not include the *Lordship* of Christ in their lives.

The following week Mike was asked to address a different congregation. The Holy Spirit prompted him, "Just tell them about the funnel." He again put the funnel transparency on the overhead projector. After he had finished explaining its meaning, people again left their seats and came forward to repent. When the funnel image was presented on retreats, the explanation elicited the same response: conviction and repentance. :

This illustration represents the funnel:



The *Lordship* of Christ is your entry point into the funnel. Lordship implies a rejection or yielding of all that you are in your sin nature—all of your will, your rights, your possessions, your plans. You become His “disciple”. It’s a conversion that demands that you weigh the cost.

Jesus makes very clear the extent of the relationship He calls for and the cost of that commitment. He starkly precludes lightweight verbal agreement through a few isolated verses or religious concepts:

*If anyone comes to me and **does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his own cross and follow me cannot be my disciple*** (Luke 14:26,27).

Whatever relationship you have with your own family must pale in comparison to your devotion to Jesus as your Lord. Your own ambitions and goals must be set aside as dross. Discipleship entails *total loving trust and obedience* to your Master.

Let’s return to the funnel. Like the pull of gravity, your humility to submit to the Lordship of Jesus draws you downward into the funnel as an invisible but constant force. The tug of His faithfulness doesn’t let go of you. When you sin, His Spirit seeks you out and brings you to repentance through His loving kindness (see Romans 2:4). God pursues you to the point of your yielding so that your broken heart and spirit can once again enjoy the fullness of His presence as Lord.

In your pilgrimage to salvation, you’re drawn into the stem of the funnel. The love of Jesus is so compelling that you don’t even want to think about yourself but *only to do His will*. Your personal discretion to choose what *you* want

to do withers as you continue to yield yourself as a bondservant to His will. Our Father’s goal for you as His child is to be changed by His Spirit into Christ-likeness in such a way that there truly is evidence of a “*new creation*.”

Those who understood the funnel explanation recognized that the “being saved” gospel they’d received in the past had consigned them to the sides of the funnel to wallow in their sin nature or excuse it.

Through the influx of analytical reasoning and psychological excuse making into Christendom during the past few decades, *sins* that require repentance are now considered “problems.” No longer are Christians held accountable to take personal responsibility for their own sins.

Much of pastoral counseling now convinces people that they must *understand* their problems and find out *who is at fault* for their current condition. Through the process of psychological “problem exploration”, individuals may expand their *awareness* about their difficulties. However, also they develop an increasing unhappiness with God.

Though they might not put it into words, in their hearts they neither trust Him to do what He promises in the Bible nor do they entrust themselves to Him as Lord of their lives. Thus many Christians live as if they’ve been “victimized” by both God and by others. They’ve refused a loving trust in a sovereign Lord. In effect this enables them to just keep circling around the side of the funnel.

Through *repentance*, however, personal accountability rather than blaming others would detach them from the sides of the funnel and slide them into the center. Only repentance can bring them to the center where they can journey downward through

the Spirit into greater Christ-likeness.

In the gospel you received, were you told that you needed to repent? If not, what consequences have occurred in your life as a result of a powerless counterfeit gospel?

Is the concept of *spiritual adultery* new to you? What sinful “lovers” might be competing with an intimate and powerful relationship with Jesus in your life?

As you review the passages that call for turning away from sin in order to walk in forgiveness and purity, are any of your theological premises being challenged? Is the Holy Spirit pinpointing specific areas of tolerated sin in your own life?

2. Your Salvation Pilgrimage both Begins and Continues with Your *agape* (*ahav*) Love

If you want to enter into Covenant with our Father and continue on your pilgrimage with Him, He establishes the same relational requirement in both the Older and Newer Testaments: that is, to *love Him*.

The Older Testament repeatedly

describes a Father Who longs for a love relationship with His people. The foundation of this love requirement is found in Deuteronomy 6:4,5:

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

The Hebrew word for love, *ahav* (ah-hahv'), means that you are filled with desire and delight and passion for the One you love. You long to be with our Father and to live in ways that please His heart.

The meaning of the Hebrew letters of *ahav* is “[a window into the Father's heart](#).” The second of the ten commandments declares that our Father promises to show *His love* to a thousand generations of those who *love* Him and *keep* His commandments. These are the same interconnected requirements that permeate the Apostle John's writings!

Apperceiving that same Deuteronomy passage cited earlier, Jesus delivers the most vital commandment, expanding *sacrificial expression* and *loving motivation* to encompass both His Father and those whom He puts in our life path:

‘Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second [which is from Leviticus] is like it, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments (Matthew 22:37-40).

The Greek word for love here is *agape* (ah-gah'-pay), and its meaning is similar to the Hebrew *ahav*. To summarize the priority of loving God:

Everything about living in union with your Father—everything about knowing and experiencing Him, everything about knowing and doing His will—depends on the quality of your love relationship with our Father and His Son, Jesus. If your love relationship is not right, nothing in your life will be right. And, His love compels you to keep His commands.

You may be wondering how anyone can love God at the *beginning* when they're just entering into Covenant with the Father—especially since none of the false gospels call for this important stipulation.

Wholehearted love is manifested by those who esteem the wonderful value of the Older Testament in understanding their *own sinful depravity*. If you fully understand just how utterly sinful you are, you'll readily perceive God's grace in the atonement and lovingly appreciate the sacrifice of Jesus on your behalf: "The Holy God loves a sinner like *me?!!*"

Trevor McIlwain of New Tribes Missions has gotten phenomenal response by teaching native peoples the Bible in *chronological order*, from Genesis to Revelation. When they complete the Older Testament, they fully grasp the depth of their own sin and their inability to pay the penalty for those sins.

Then, when they hear about the atonement of Jesus on their behalf, they are overwhelmed and grateful to respond in love for His sacrifice on the cross. Out of *love for God* they'll cling to Jesus through any trials they might face.

Those who recognize without doubt their own innate sin nature from the Older Testament won't need to be propped up in their faith as so many who embrace false gospels do. People who are

forever leaning on others for assurance that they're "Christians" have never come to grips with their own depravity, nor have they fully grasped with loving hearts what Jesus did for them.

Without a loving gratefulness for the forgiveness and reconciliation our Lord offers according to His Word, they follow a gospel of their own making, a god who is no god. After a while they return once more to the vomit of their old sinful lifestyle.

On your own pilgrimage to salvation, if you try to keep God's commands without loving Him and depending on the direction of His Spirit, you'll grow proud. You'll get caught up in what you *do* for Him to define your expression of Who He is to you.

Paul admonishes in 1 Corinthians, chapter 13 that "*without (agape) love, we are nothing.*" Living out God's commands because of your *love* for Him keeps you humbly dependent on Him, and contrite when you fail. You're eager to repent because you hunger for restoration of fellowship with Him. The source of this *agape* love which weaves your spirit with your Lord's is the indwelling Holy Spirit, Whom those who embrace the true Gospel receive.

The early Church expressed an *intensity* of love for God that's not seen in the false gospel messages perpetrated today. Persecution from outsiders who despised followers of Jesus dispelled any easy-believism or intellectual assent to the Gospel! Yet today, well-meaning yet misguided "Christians" who rush to get people "saved" often fail to help them understand the depth of loving intimacy our Father desires.

Nor do they help people come to grips with the reality of *their own sinful*

Father's love for you. At the same time, your willing dependence on Him ultimately puts to death your own ambitions and plans as you yield to His.

As your ongoing trust deepens and you recognize His unfailing faithfulness, an element of *childlikeness* takes root in you. You live in Covenant union as the Father's child, agreeing in spirit that He is our intimate "Abba" Who is leading us as His lambs on our pilgrim way to eternity.

You received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children (Romans 8:15,16).

You enter into Covenant with our Father by trusting in the shed blood of Jesus for the forgiveness you so desperately need. Nothing you can do can ever pay the penalty for your sins. All our Lord requires is that you confess these before Him and repent.

You continue on in your faith pilgrimage to salvation by trusting in the loving care of our Father. Where trust exists, peace does as well. Any worry, anxiety, or concern about the future indicates you *lack* trust. That's why Peter exhorts us to cast all our cares on our Lord because *He cares for us!* (1 Peter 5:7)

Many who embrace false gospels *call* themselves "believers" but they have no idea how far they are from the trust our Father requires to enter into and live in Covenant union. Belief, or cognitive agreement with a reality, puts you on par with the demons—definitely not a trust that leads to salvation: "*You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder*" (James 2:19).

Habitual failure to trust in our Father can lure you to break your part of the

covenant. Distrust is a direct attack on His divine character. If you fail to trust the ALMIGHTY, your Creator and Redeemer, you're placing yourself *above* Him as He has revealed Himself to be.

Like Lucifer, a *habitually mistrusting* person desires to usurp the position of our Father by wanting Him to do *his or her will*. They choose not to trust that His plans and purposes are the only suitable ones for His beloved child. The Covenant is ruptured because our Father will remain true to His Word, "*You shall have no other gods before me*" (Exodus 20:3)—yourself included.

The unwavering trust that God requires of His children is the fabric woven throughout the Hebrew Bible and the Newer Testament because HE is the Source of all trust! As you choose to cooperate with the indwelling Holy Spirit, He empowers you to walk in reliance on our Father, not fearing your troubling circumstances or trials.

Rejoice in some of God's promises to those who trust Him to orchestrate their pathway:

"Many are the woes of the wicked [unrepentant], but the LORD's unfailing love surrounds the man who trusts in him" (Psalm 32:10). Notice that this doesn't say you won't face trials! But with your Lord as a shield, you can stand and keep standing in the midst of them.

"Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight" (Proverbs 3:5,6). It's much easier to walk along a path our Father has leveled than to stumble about in confusion and unbelief! A person who trusts our Father first seeks

His will and then does it without concern about the cost of obedience. The child who trusts forgoes looking to circumstances as confirmation of His will; rather, he presses on despite them.

*“Here is what the Sovereign LORD says: ‘Look, I am laying in Zion a tested stone, a costly cornerstone, a firm foundation stone; he who trusts will **not rush here and there**’ (Isaiah 28:16, CJB).* If you are certain of His Sovereignty, your heart can rest in peace. Or would you rather rush here and there, soliciting human rationalization and worldly opinion of what course to take next?

Never lose sight of the fact that your salvation is based on an *ongoing loving trust* in God, a relationship of trust in His faithfulness: *“Abraham trusted God, and it was credited to him as **righteousness**”* (Genesis 15:6). Our trust produces the same results.

Respected teacher Dwight Pryor concurs: “Faith is more than belief in something. It is *faithfulness to Someone.*” Because of Abraham’s trust, a promise was given to him that through his seed blessing would flow to the Gentiles. And that Seed’s blessing *has!!!*

Under which circumstances have you found it hardest to really trust your Father in heaven? What were the consequences of your doubt?

How would you differentiate between a *season of worry* and a *habitual distrust of God*? How might you find yourself trying to

get around His plans and will for you? *Have you? When?*

4. Your Salvation Pilgrimage both Begins *and* Continues with Your Forceful Conviction and Steadfast Determination

Do you recall the *intensity* with which David and Jonathan entered into covenant with each other? And, how Jonathan even risked his life to go to David so they could renew their covenant?

When you embrace the stipulations of our Father’s Covenant, you’re entering into the most important relationship of your life! If you were the Father, what *determination of heart* would you be looking for in your potential Covenant child of the Spirit?

Answering the call of our Father to repent, to love and to trust calls for a vigorous response from which no earthly power can hold you back! As Jesus proclaimed, following Him is an intense heart issue that in no way nullifies the love and obedience requirements of the Hebrew Scriptures:

*Up to the time of John there were the **Torah and the Prophets**. Since then the Good News of the Kingdom of God has been proclaimed, and everyone is **forcing his way into it** (Luke 16:16).*

This passage can best be understood by considering the walls that surround Jerusalem:

Around a military fortification such as the walls of Jerusalem, “killing zones” are established to concentrate weapon fire for maximum killing effectiveness. Those who attack the fort must first courageously battle their way through the killing zone. Because of the strong likelihood that they’ll be killed in the attack, these soldiers have to “be dead” to everything *beforehand* so they can fully focus on their objective.

That kind of forceful determination was the standard in the earliest Church for those who embraced our Father’s Covenant. This essence of pursuit that can’t be stopped is captured in Matthew 13:44-46:

*The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then **in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.** Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, **he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.***

It takes tremendous certainty to give up everything about yourself and your way of life in order to lay hold of that which our Father is offering you. *Genuine repentance, agape love and your complete trust* produce the type of conviction and determination our Lord requires to be in Covenant union with you.

Do you believe forceful conviction and steadfast determination are required to enter the Covenant our Father offers? Why or why not?

If you consider yourself to be a Christian already, how strong is your conviction and determination to follow our Father and His Son, Jesus?

weak half-hearted intense
 0—10—20—30—40—50—60—70—80—90—100
[Put an X on the number that best describes you.]

Explain why you answered as you did.

5. Your Salvation Pilgrimage Both Begins and Continues with You Forgiving Others

The Hebraic stream of Judaism had inherited a vital example about the importance of forgiving others—their ancestor, Joseph. His brothers despised him, sold him into slavery, and lied to his beloved father that he was dead. He was falsely accused by Potiphar’s wife and thrown into prison.

But, Joseph was able through all of this to live with a *forgiving heart* because he saw the sovereign hand of his God, even in His sufferings. You can recognize that he was willing to not demand a pound of flesh from either God or his adversaries through the names he gave his two sons. This was a forgiving man!

Joseph named his firstborn Manasseh and said, ‘It is because God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father’s household.’ The second son he named Ephraim and said, ‘It is because

God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering' (Genesis 41:51,52).

When Joseph revealed himself to his brothers he affirmed again his unshakable trust in the sovereignty of his Lord

And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you (Genesis 45:5).

Because of his *forgiving heart* he lived in certainty of God's larger purpose.

After their father Jacob died, the brothers of Joseph feared he might finally take revenge for their mistreatment of him. Realizing what was going through their minds, Jacob prepared a message asking forgiveness for his errant sons.

*This is what you are to say to Joseph: 'I ask you to **forgive your brothers** the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.'* Now please **forgive the sins** of the servants of the God of your father (Genesis 50:17).

What a contrast to the arrogance with which these men had treated him so many years earlier! Notice as well the emotional impact this message had on Joseph. He had already *forgiven them in his heart* before they even approached him!

*When their message came to him, Joseph wept. His brothers then came and **threw themselves down** before him. 'We are your slaves,' they said. But Joseph said to them, '**Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God?**'* (Genesis 50:17-19).

- **To hold unforgiveness is to place yourself on par with God.**

- **Refusal to forgive refutes God's sovereignty over the events in your life and the people who hurt you.**
- **Unforgiveness creates spiritual blindness that evidences distrust in Him as Lord.**
- **Holding on to unforgiveness keeps you from receiving our Father's Covenant of forgiveness in His Son's blood.**

Jesus warned soundly against the evil of unforgiveness and the barrier it raises against being forgiven by our Father. Many who spread false gospels are startled by the stark words of Jesus.

*If you **do not forgive** men their sins, your Father **will not forgive** your sins* (Matthew 6:15).

The key question for you is, Can you be forgiven of anything by our heavenly Father if you *do not forgive* those who have violated you? According to Jesus, NO!

The Apostle John warns us about unforgiveness, an expression of *refusal to love* as our Lord has commanded those who say they love God:

*We love because He first loved us. If anyone says, 'I love God,' yet **hates his brother**, he is a **liar**. For anyone who **does not love his brother**, whom he has seen, **cannot love God**, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: **Whoever loves God must also love his brother** (1 John 4:19-21).*

The early Church understood that our Father will not enter into Covenant with an unforgiving person. Why? Because in light of the supreme sacrifice of His own Son, our Father refuses to

walk through that precious blood with someone who refuses to forgive. If our God is willing to forgive at the cost of His Son, who among mankind can justify unforgiveness toward *anyone*?

To the earliest followers of Jesus, bitterness and pride were nearly synonymous. Both lack the humility needed to approach our Holy God. And bitterness is the arrogant manifestation of the pride which our Father resists.

We discovered during the years of holding seminars on the Hebraic foundations that 97 out of every 100 attendees *knew* they didn't have a consummated relationship with our Father. *Unforgiveness*, that is, unresolved bitterness, was the most common factor that hindered them.

A bitter person is like a bride on the day of her wedding who tells her groom, "Honey, I'm a prostitute and I'm going to continue my profession. I refuse to give it up. Will you still marry me?" The spiritual adultery that is manifested by clinging to bitterness is just as vile!

A bitter, unforgiving person shows no evidence of the Holy Spirit operating as a "stream of living water." And, our Father doesn't need "streams of bitter water" representing Him in this world.

How can a bitter person ever live in loving union with the Father? A person who clings to unforgiveness has failed to appreciate how much he or she *needed to be forgiven* through the blood of Jesus shed to pay the penalty their sins deserved.

That's a relational fact, something obvious to the early followers of Jesus but not so obvious to those who have garmented themselves with false, man-centered gospels that allow people to

stay "just as they are."

Your decision to forgive opens the way for the Holy Spirit to take up His residence in you. It is *He* Who heals your heart and emotions; you can *never* heal yourself.

Richard Wurmbrand teaches a profound and accurate interpretation of the Lord's Prayer. He states that "*forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors*" should be translated, "*forgive us our debts as we **have already forgiven** others their debts.*"

Only by fully understanding forgiveness could martyrs throughout history have responded with grace toward their persecutors. Those suffering for their trust in Jesus *have already forgiven* their tormentors. It all begins with the loving words of Jesus, repeated by Stephen, "*Father, forgive them...*"

Don't be deceived by popular teaching that you don't have to forgive a person *unless they ask you to*. We are to walk in the steps of our Master, and neither the religious authorities nor the Roman soldiers asked Him for forgiveness! You are to forgive *from your heart*, regardless of whether that relationship changes, extending that which the heart of our Father has extended to you.

"Forgive us our sins, for we too have forgiven everyone who has wronged us" (Luke 11:4).

Our Lord is well aware that we'll be hurt and betrayed, even by those within the Body. A wise friend, Bert Schlossberg, told us years ago:

"You can never walk in the fullness of Jesus until you can wash the feet of Judas."

Rarely can human effort or strength ever wipe away the hurt you feel from what others have done to you in the

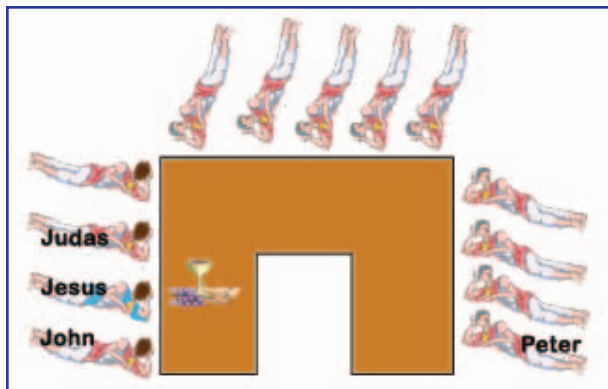
past. Only through loving trust in Jesus and the power of His grace can you forgive the 'Judases' in your life.

To the ancient Hebrews God was *Yahweh-Rapha*, the Lord our Healer. Your trust and reliance in Jesus releases His power to *remove the sting* of those painful memories. Then you can come alongside those who are suffering pain similar to that of your healed past so they can find hope for healing.

Bert's words impacted our hearts. On February 21, 1994, we celebrated our twenty-fourth wedding anniversary with him and his wife Exie during our stay with them in Israel. We gathered for dinner at the Biblical Resources Center south of Jerusalem to participate in a reenactment of the Last Supper.

We were seated around a triclinium (three-sided) table eating what would have been a traditional Passover meal at the time of Christ. Jesus and His disciples would have reclined on their left side around the three outside edges of the foot-high table, facing it.

This diagram depicts the likeliest seating arrangement of Jesus and His disciples at the Last Supper:



The second position on the left was traditionally *the host* of the meal. That would have been Jesus. The first position on the left was the "go for" person who

assisted the host. John 13:23,25, "*One of them, the **disciple whom Jesus loved**, was reclining next to Him...Leaning back against Jesus, he asked Him, 'Lord, who is it?'*" indicates this to be John.

The first position on the right represented the lowest place at the table. In John 13:24, Peter motions to John. Speculating that he was embarrassed as a result of the argument over "*which of them was to be considered greatest*" (see Luke 22:24-32), Peter possibly took this position across from John and Jesus.

Remember that Jesus had responded to His betrayer, Judas, by washing his feet. The third position on the left was reserved for the person whom the host wanted to honor or for special guests outside the family. When Jesus was asked who would betray Him, He responded, "*It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish.' Then, dipping the piece of bread, He gave it to Judas Iscariot, son of Simon*" (John 13:26).

We know that it wasn't John in front of him, so could Judas have been seated in the *seat of honor*? We were deeply affected by the possibility that Jesus would have honored His betrayer. In our hearts we knew that it was within the character of Jesus to do such a thing.

Certainly all of us at that meal left with a deeper conviction of how far we who follow in the steps of Jesus must go to *forgive those who hurt us*.

One of the most common reasons we found for our Father not consummating His Covenant is bitterness. Does anyone come to mind who raises up negative feelings in your heart? What did that person do to you?

Do you purpose to *forgive from your heart* those who have hurt you? Do you purpose to ask *their* forgiveness when you're next in contact for even holding onto unforgiveness against another human made in God's image and for whom Jesus died?

THE FATHER AND JESUS
Part 3. The True Gospel of the
Covenant:
Summary Of The Covenant Issues

*“Show me your trust without deeds,
and I will show you my trust
by what I do... You see that
[Abraham's] trust and his actions
were working together,
and his trust was made complete
by what he did...
As the body without the spirit is dead,
so trust without deeds is dead”*
(James 2:18,22,26).

Fulfilling our Father's purposes in obedience to the impulse of the Spirit is the only way we can understand the intent of the apostle James as he teaches the connection between *trust and deeds* in chapter 2:14-26. The deeds James speaks of refer to walking in the *will of our Father* to His glory. This is no more or no less than Jesus did.

Let's review once more the biblical stipulations for you to enter into our Father's Covenant. Your Salvation Pilgrimage begins and continues with your:

1. *Repentance.*
2. *Agape (ahav) Love.*
3. *Obedient Trust.*
4. *Forceful Conviction and Steadfast Determination.*
5. *Forgiving Others.*

We had reservations about listing these criteria out of concern that people might take a “by-the-numbers” approach to this. But these need to be displayed in one place so that you can understand the biblical stipulations for our Father to ratify and consummate the Covenant with you.

Our Father designed marriage to be the *physical representation* of the spiritual Covenant we have with Him. In other words, if you want to know the depth of a man's relationship with our Father, then watch it in the love he has for his wife. The *agape* of a man for his wife is the same kind of *agape* that he must have for his Lord, “*For in Christ Jesus...the only thing that counts is trust expressing itself through [agape] love*” (Galatians 5:6).

This is vital! Just as in a marriage, your *heart determination* to want to live in Covenant with our Father is that which brings about your union in Jesus through His Spirit.

As you weigh these criteria for embracing the Covenant our Father is offering you, can you see how the five apply to your own marriage covenant (or to the marriage analogy if you're single)?

1. Can it exist without *Repentance*?
2. Can it bloom without your *agape Love*?
3. Can there be peace without your mutual *Trust*?
4. Can it flourish without *Forceful Conviction and Steadfast Determination* to make it succeed?
5. Can love grow without *Forgiveness*?

As with God's design for the marriage covenant to produce godly offspring, keepers of the Covenant with our Father are also expected to bear fruit:

Every branch which is part of me but fails to bear fruit, he cuts off; and every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes, so that it may bear more fruit... I am the vine and you are the branches. Those who stay united with me, and I with them, are the ones who bear much fruit; because apart from me you can't do a thing... This is how my Father is glorified—in your bearing much fruit; this is how you will prove to be my disciples (John 15: 2,5,8, JNT).

In deference to His Father's will, Jesus fulfilled His purposes. As our Father's children, we, too, have *specific, God-given purposes* to carry out as His beloved children. Yet, without the indwelling Spirit, we would neither be able nor expected to fulfill these on our own.

He *enjoys* our dependence on Him. To be "born again" is to become His child. There's no better relationship you could have!

In our next lesson we'll discuss the consummation of the Covenant and the role of the indwelling Holy Spirit. But now we want to end this lesson by asking you to prayerfully reflect on the questions below.

Review your spiritual journey to this point.

- **Have you repented of known sin according to His Word? Yes or No?**
- **Do you love Jesus with gratefulness that your despicable sin nature no longer has rule over you, and you can commune intimately with our Father as His child? Yes or No?**

- **Do you fully trust in the shed blood of Jesus as payment for the punishment your sins deserve? Are you walking with hope in obedient trust in your Father, alert for opportunities to fulfill His purposes? Yes or No?**

- **Are you forceful in your heart to keep pressing on toward your salvation despite circumstances that try to deter your walk of trust? Yes or No?**

- **Have you forgiven in your heart all who have violated you in any way? Yes or No?**

If your heart's answers to the above questions are "yes", then your Father is prepared to enter into Covenant union with you. Kneel down and speak to Him affirming your heart's agreement with His stipulations.

Also, we encourage you to be baptized — pledging to your Father that you will keep a clear conscience on your pilgrimage to salvation (1 Peter 3:21).

[The *Gospel of the Covenant* is available as video and audio segments in our [Jesus In Your Home](#) series on our website.]