

# Joined Covenant

*Bryn Jones*

*To be covenanted with God is to be covenanted with God's people.*

When we were born again, we became new creations, bonded together in the new covenant. This covenant is an agreement between God and the redeemed community, His people. It is a covenant sealed by the blood of Jesus Christ and continually confessed by sharing the Lord's supper.

The new covenant is a family covenant, a covenant of brotherhood. God expects us to live in the blessings *and* the responsibilities of it. We do this by keeping the covenant law:

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

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Notice that it is not our love for God that makes us stand out to the world, but our love for one another. Living in harmony with God isn't near as difficult as living in harmony with our brother. But that is where God's blessing abounds.

It is sad to hear about Christians who have been hurt, stabbed in the back and betrayed by other Christians. Such terms should never have to be used in reference to believers. It is the world that should be characterized by covenant-

breaking - not the Church. We should instead model loyalty and commitment to one another through the love of God.

A church is only as strong as the bond of covenant among the members. Churches rarely collapse because of doctrinal differences. Most often they die because someone breaks the covenant of brotherhood.

People never say, "I left that church because I am arrogant and self-centered." Instead they say, "I felt lead by the Lord." This sounds much more spiritual but often it is a cover for some selfish desire. They broke the covenant of brotherhood.



We must understand that we are in covenant with one another through faith in Christ.

The real issue is not, "Do I want to be in covenant with that person?" but, "Will I honor the covenant that already exists by virtue of our common life in Christ?"

In practice I can only walk in covenant with people who are themselves already walking in covenant. Our ability to enjoy covenant fellowship then is conditioned on covenant living. "Can two walk together, unless they be agreed?" We are not talking about harsh judgmental attitudes but love's responsibility.

Now let's identify some of the marks of covenant love:

## 1. Covenant Love Accepts People As God Accepts Them.

**"Accept one another...just as Christ accepted you." (Romans 15:7)**

Covenant accepts a person simply because God accepts him. If you relate to people on the basis of their performance you put them under pressure to please you. They feel they have to attain something to gain your approval. That is not right. If you are walking in covenant, other people should feel secure because you love them for who they are.

Many people find it difficult to even accept themselves. What a joy for them to find a covenant community where they are accepted unconditionally!

## 2. Covenant Love Relates to People As People.

In some churches people are reduced to membership statistics. As soon as new people attend a meeting they are pulled in as potential members. "We need more members," is the thought.

"But those new people may be hurting."

"Never mind that. Get them in - we need more members."

Such attitudes quickly spiral down to the basest of considerations. More members means more potential donors to the building program. So, let's see: What part of town do they live in? What kind of car do they drive? How big is their home?

Well, I have good news for you: Jesus never treated people like that! He loved people, and they loved Him because they felt His love.

## 3. Covenant Love Treats Others The Way God Treats Us.

When addressing the Corinthian Church, Paul *first* confirmed his faith in the them. He observed that despite their shortcomings, they would all make it through beautifully:

**"I always thank God for you because of His grace given you in Christ Jesus...He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ." (I Corinthians 1:4,6,8)**

That is the strength of covenant: knowing your brothers in both success and failure and still treating them as Christ treated you.

## 4. Covenant Never Marks People By Their History.

What counts is not where people have come from but where they are going. Don't mark people by their history.

If God were to mark us by our history, we would all be total failures.

**"If You, O Lord, kept a record of sins, who could stand?" (Psalm 130:3)**

Jesus would never have given Peter another chance. Barnabas would never have made John Mark profitable again. Paul would have written off most of his colleagues.

## 5. Covenant Love Covers Without Covering Up.

One moving illustration of covenant is the story of Noah's nakedness. When Ham saw his father drunk and naked in his tent he went and told his brothers. Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it across their shoulders, and:

**"...walked in backwards to cover their father's nakedness, their faces turned the other way." (Genesis 9:20)**

Ham took a perverse pleasure in relating his father's downfall. Shem and Japheth, however, covered their father's sin out of love and respect. That is true covenant love.

But remember, covering is not the same as covering up.

**"He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy." (Proverbs 28:13)**

Shem and Japheth did not pretend their father was not naked and drunk. But they cov-  
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