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Sermon

Covenant Ligaments



Part 1
By Derek Prince

With the message that I brought two nights ago—where are we now, Saturday—that must have been Thursday night, on "The Coming Together of the Bones," I pointed out that the theme of God and the purpose of God today is restoration, and this is a double or parallel restoration of His natural people, Israel, and His spiritual people, the Church. Those are rather, you know, loose terms that I'm using. Don't press me theologically on them; they're just used as a way of conveying a meaning, that's all. And I pointed out that in many instances the prophecies and the pictures of the restoration of natural Israel are types and patterns that show us what God is doing in restoring the church to its inheritance in Jesus Christ. I particularly spoke about the vision of the valley of dry bones and what happened when Ezekiel prophesied and how the bones started to come together and were formed into bodies, and then how the second time when Ezekiel prophesied again the spirit of life from God came into those bodies and they stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army.

Now I want to go back to that picture and deal with another aspect of it in a practical way tonight. This is the message that Ezekiel was given to prophesy and this is the result that followed. Just taking the middle part of that vision tonight, Ezekiel 37 beginning at verse 4:

> "Again he [that is, the Lord] said unto me, Prophesy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus saith the Lord GOD unto these bones; 'Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live: and I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live; and ye shall know that I am the LORD.' So I prophesied as I was commanded: and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone."

That is the passage that I particularly emphasized about the bones losing their individual liberty and being brought together supernaturally by the Holy Spirit and uniting into

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functioning members through the joints. So we read again here,

> "...and the bones came together, bone to his bone. And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above: but there was no breath in them."

That's the process that I'm interested in, in detail tonight. The bones came together, were fitted together in joints, then three more things came—the sinews bound them together at the joints so that the joints after that were firm. If we just had three bones together at the elbow in our arm but no sinews to bind them together, we'd have a useless arm. What I'm emphasizing tonight is the importance of the sinews. After the sinews had bound the joints together, then flesh came up over the bones and the sinews and skin came up over the flesh. And once the skin and the flesh had covered the joints, the sinews were no longer visible, nevertheless, they were essential. And without the sinews the results that God desired could not have been brought about.

So we're talking now about believers being brought together in God-appointed unity or union with one another in joints which are personal relationships between believers, and then being bound together at those joints by something that corresponds to sinews, to make those joints permanent, so that they're strong and reliable and the body functions as a body, and it's not limp, and it can do it's task, and the arm can hold a weight, and apply pressure, and exercise tension, and it has strength. So the sinews are an essential part of the stability and the strength of those joints and of the members that are brought about by them.

Now what I want to speak about tonight is the nature of the sinews. What is it that binds the bones together at the joints so that they become stable and strong? I want to tell you in advance that I believe God has given me this message. I believe in a sense that it's come to be by the revelation of the Holy Spirit, and it is in advance of where we are. So I'm not talking about something we're already fully practicing, but I believe I'm outlining something that lies ahead in the near future in God's agenda for us. So if you come up to me afterwards and say, "Well, Brother Prince, explain in detail exactly how it works," I will answer you, "I can't do that." I see the outlines of the vision, but the practical outworking of it we'll have to go into stage by stage. We'll have to walk it out.

Now I want to turn to the New Testament to Ephesians chapter 4 and I want to take there a picture of the completed body of Christ, and apply the picture from Ezekiel to this picture, relate the two, and work out the practical details. I'm going to read in Ephesians chapter 4 beginning at verse 11 about the means whereby the completed body of Christ will be brought into being. This is now New Testament teaching. It's not shadow, it's not type, it's not prophecy—it's plain explicit statements, but part of it is still couched in the figure of a body. Beginning at verse 11 we read this:

"...he" and He is the risen, exalted Christ. It says a little earlier "He led captivity captive and ascended up on high." It is the ascended Christ that we are here referring to. The ascended Christ "gave some" and it speaks about five specific ministries. Some people say four. Let's not argue about that one tonight. "...He gave some, apostles; some, prophets; some, evangelists; some, [shepherds] and teachers;"

I want to emphasize without dwelling on it, that it's the ascended Christ that gave these ministries. If you'd care to look in the text you'll see that that is so. This is important because the first ministries on the list are apostles, and it is not referring to the apostles whom Jesus appointed while He was on earth. These are apostles appointed by the ascended Christ.

Now verse 13 tells us why Christ gave these ministries to His body. Verse 13, verse 12 says:

> "For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, ['Leave out the first comma as all modern translations do, and you get the Prince version':] ...for the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry. [In other words, these ministries are not to do the job, they're to equip the believers to do the job. All right.] ...for the edifying [or the building up] of the body of Christ: ..."

There are two purposes for these ministries—one, to equip the believers to do their jobs; two, to build up the body of Christ.

Verse 13 states the destination or the terminus toward which these ministries are taking us, and it beings with the word till. I think we all agree till indicates always something that lies ahead in the future.

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This is something that has not yet been achieved, it lies ahead. And it says, "Till we all come." Now the King James Version says "in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God," but without going into a lot of details I'm going to give you "the Prince version" which says, "Till we all come into the unity of the faith and of the acknowledging of the Son of God." It's very clear we are not in the unity of the faith today. That doesn't need to be stressed. It's obvious, but our destination is to come into the unity of the faith, and these ministries are placed in the body to bring us into the unity of the faith and they are needed in the body till we come into the unity of the faith. If you will agree with me that we have not yet come into the unity of the faith, then you will have to agree logically that these ministries must still be functioning in the body because they're to function in the body until we all come into the unity of the faith.

And the next phrase, I believe, indicates the basic way in which we come into the unity of the faith which is by the "acknowledging of the Son of God." It is not by sitting down and arguing doctrine or theology. Experience shows that the more we argue doctrine the more disunited we become. And significantly those groups in Christianity which have based their unity on doctrine are the ones that are divided most frequently—the Baptists, the Pentecostals, the fundamentalists genre. The most doctrine-conscious people are the most prone to split. Doctrine is not the basis of New Testament unity. The basis of New Testament unity is the acknowledging of the Lord Jesus Christ. When each of us individually gives Christ His rightful place in our lives, and when our churches collectively give Christ His rightful place in His church, around the acknowledged, uplifted Christ we will be brought into unity with one another. The way to unity is not through theological or doctrinal discussion, it's through the acknowledging of the Son of God. It's through giving the Son of God His rightful place in our lives individually and in our assemblies or churches collectively. You will find that where people meet together and uplift and exalt and extol and set forth the Lord Jesus Christ, unity results.

There are two other objectives stated in verse 13 which we need to look at:

> "...unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: ..."

The word perfect I prefer to translate here "mature" or "full grown." The destination of the church is a full-grown man. It's important to understand that the church is growing up. It is not in a static condition. We are growing to maturity. Our destination is maturity, not merely as individuals but collectively as the church of Jesus Christ—one mature full-grown man.

For many years I pictured the growth of the church as purely numerical. More and more people would go on getting saved and added to the church, and when X number of people had been saved, which was the specific number foreordained by God, the church would be complete. But I have come to see that the church is also growing from infancy into maturity. The New Testament church was a very healthy infant. The church at the close of the age will be a full-grown man. And then it says:

> "... the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: ..."

To Christ in His total fullness, which means that the full grown body of Christ, the church, will fully represent Jesus Christ to the world in all His graces, attributes, ministries and gifts—the full-grown church in the earth will be just like having Jesus here when He was in the flesh. That's the ultimate of God's purpose. Let's look at those four objectives and then move on.

Number one—the unity of the faith.

Number two—the acknowledging of the Son of God. And these are related because the acknowledging of the Son of God is the way into the unity of the faith. In other words, we have to give Jesus His rightful place in the church. What is His rightful place? He is the head over all things—not some things—to the church which is His body.

The third objective is a full-grown mature man.

The fourth objective is the stature of the fullness of Christ whereby the complete church completely represents a complete Christ to the earth. Those are the objectives to which God has committed Himself to bringing His people, and I personally am convinced that He will do what He set out to do. My faith is not in us, it's in God, but that places a responsibility upon us.

Then verse 14 warns us of the alternative and I believe there is only one alternative. It says:

> "That we henceforth be no more children [little retarded babies running around in our Charismatic diapers], tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by

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> the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; ..."

The Bible warns you clearly that there are those who are lying in wait to deceive you. You do not need to speculate about it. They are there, and most of you who leave this conference will run into them within the next twelve months. You will meet people who are placed there in your path by Satan to deceive you. You'd better be ready. Let me also add that you're never so open to spiritual deceptions as when you receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit, because that opens you to a completely new realm. And until you learn how to function in that realm you are exposed to all sorts of spiritual forces that for the most part you were not exposed to before. If ever a person needs discipline teaching, it's when they receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit, and we in the last few years have seen scores and scores—in fact, thousands and thousands of people who receive the baptism and go off into error, fanaticism, and foolishness within the next few months. Why?—because they would not come under discipline. They wanted to do their own thing, run around, play their little spiritual games and they remained spiritual babies, prattling in tongues, talking about gifts and accomplishing nothing useful for the kingdom of God.

I'm personally convinced that Paul here sets before us two alternatives—you either come under the discipline and the authority that Christ has placed in His church or, rejecting discipline and authority, you remain a spiritual baby, always open to deception, and when you get out of one error you'll get into the next. Paul says, "A man who is a heretic after the second and third admonition reject; knowing that he is subverted. . . ." A person who's been into three errors is practically hopeless. There's something in them, inside that is pushing them into error, and I'll tell you what it is—it's rebellion.

All right, now we're going on. The alternative again, the good alternative, the right alternative—verse 15:

> "Speaking the truth in love, [we] may grow up in him in all things, [to Him] which is the head, even Christ: ..."

You're either going to be spiritually retarded or you're going to grow up into maturity. It you're to grow up into maturity it will require authority and discipline in your life.

Now we have the picture of the completed body. In verse 16:

> "From whom the whole body [that is Jesus Christ the Head] fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love."

There's the whole body, every part in its right place, every part fulfilling its right function, every member properly joined to the other members and strengthened by those joints—and notice the phrase "that which every joint supplieth." The supply of God to the body is in a large measure dependent upon the joints being in good order. The joints are our interpersonal relationships. If our relationships are not in proper order, the supply of God is available theoretically, but practically we do not receive it. It's through the joints that we receive our supplies. I believe God has provided healing for the whole body of Jesus Christ, but I believe there are many that do not enter into healing because the joints are not functioning. I believe God has provided for the material needs of the whole body, but there are many who are not living in material provision because the joints are not functioning. It's the joints that supply the need. Until we get our personal relationships established, settled and functioning we are not going to live in the fullness of God's supply. The supply in a large measure is dependent upon the joints.

Now I'd like to compare with that Colossians, which is a parallel passage. Colossians chapter 2 verse 18 and 19. Now in these verses Paul is again warning people against going into error, and he also provides the remedy, or the antidote or the safeguard, against error. Verse 18 speaks about the error, verse 19 tells us how we may avoid error. I do not believe it is necessary to go into error. I believe God has provided a way to keep out of error. All right.

> "Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility [a humility of the will which is not a humility of the spirit, an outward kind of humility] and [the] worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen [but the best texts say "intruding into those things which he hath seen"], vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, ..."

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I think the people Paul is describing there are the super-spirituals, the ones who've always got a higher light and a deeper truth and a new revelation. They're intruding into things what they've always seen. You know what I pray? I pray, "Lord, keep me from the higher light and the deeper truths. Keep my feet on the Rock. Help me to be sober and practical." And I'm scared of people who are always getting new revelations, especially when it makes them think they're more spiritual than others. All right.

Now what's the problem with these people? It's stated at the beginning of verse 19, "Not holding the Head, . . ." They went into error because they didn't do the things stated in verse 19, so the safeguard against error is to do the things stated in verse 19. So to find out what we should do, we leave out the not. Do you see my reasoning? And we get: "Holding on to the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, . . ."

And notice the nourishment comes through the joints. So you can be an unnourished Christian, not because God hasn't made nourishment available, but because you're not jointed in such a way as to receive the nourishment that God has made available.

> "... from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together [strengthened, united], increaseth with the increase of God."

You'll see that that's very parallel to the passage in Ephesians 4. The two pictures are very similar, and Paul states the two reasons why we go into error. One is that we're not rightly related to the Head— we aren't holding onto or connected to the Head—the other is we're not rightly related to other members in the body—we're not rightly jointed together. I believe those who are rightly related to the Head and rightly related to their fellow believers will not go into error. I believe this is what God is directing us into.

Now in Colossians 2:19 it says:

> "... all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, ..."

Now the word that's translated bands in the King James is translated "ligaments" or "sinews" in the modern versions, so we're back to the sinews, which is where I've been headed, you see.

Now what are the sinews? What is it that takes those three bones that meet at my elbow and so binds them together that they don't fall apart, that they stay together, that they function in union as an arm—that one bone doesn't go running off and saying, "Well, I don't like you other two bones and I think from now on I'm going to find another church." I mean, this is a very serious practical question, and I believe God has given me a scriptural answer. I was about the say 'the' answer, but modesty forbade.

Now I'm going to make a statement which I'm going to endeavor to support. I believe that when we look for the ligament or the sinew that makes the interpersonal relationship joints permanent, stable and efficient, we have to uncover a truth which was known to God's people both in the Old Covenant and in the New, but which we have largely failed to see or to understand. In other words, I am not teaching something new, I'm going back to something basic which we have overlooked. The key to what I'm teaching is the very word that I used, the 'Old Covenant' and the 'New Covenant'. Bear in mind the word that translated 'testament' in both Hebrew and Greek is the standard word in those languages for 'covenant'. And what I want to suggest to you tonight—the ligament that should bind the joints together so that they will not slip, they will not separate, is 'covenant'. I believe this, in a sense, is the forgotten secret which the Holy Spirit is now uncovering for us.

The word 'covenant' undoubtedly is one of the most significant and distinctive words in the Bible, and I think God's people in the old days understood covenant in a way that made many things immediately clear to them that are not clear to us because we've lost the meaning of covenant. It's very interesting for American people to know the Hebrew title for the United States. I don't know how many of you know this, but in Hebrew the United States is not called the United States. It could be, because there's perfectly good Hebrew words to say that. But I believe the Jewish people, in a sense, are a prophetic people, and when they chose the Hebrew word for the United States they gave if a prophetic title.

Now please understand I am not suggesting that America is the lost ten tribes. Please get me clear there. Just don't get me hung on that peg because it isn't where I belong. But what the Hebrew language calls the United States is "*artsot haberiyt*", which means "the Land of the Covenant." The word for 'covenant' is 'b'rith'. You'll find in Ashkenazi Hebrew they talk about B'nai B'rith. 'B'rith' is the word for 'covenant'. If you're familiar with any kind of Orthodox Jewish organization, you've heard about B'nai B'rith. I don't like the word 'B'rith' because I don't like that way of

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pronouncing Hebrew. Hebrew in Israel, the word is pronounced 'b'reit'. But I believe there's a tremendous insight in the title given the United States.

This is not the theme of my message, but I just mention this for a moment. You see I believe that the Jewish people have discerned that the United States came into being in a different way from almost any other nation. They came into being on the basis of a covenant, and if I'm right a covenant is the strongest, most stable, most secure relationship between human beings. I believe, myself, the entire strength of this nation rests upon a covenant, and when the American people forget that the product of a covenant and don't understand what a covenant is, this nation will lose its strength. In fact, that is our present problem.

Now, in order to illustrate a covenant I'm going to choose the one which is familiar in some measure to all of us. There is one relationship that's run really through the history of the human race which is a type of a covenant, and that is marriage. According to the law of South Carolina, I mean the state law, marriage is a covenant between a man, a woman and God. Now I believe that's the scriptural view of marriage, and I believe that if we're going to have a scriptural view of marriage we cannot leave out God. That's why I do not believe a marriage can be legitimately dissolved without taking God into account. And I think that once we fail to see the covenant nature of marriage it loses its strength and its stability and there is a social breakdown. How many see that happening in the United States today? I believe the essence of the problem is the failure to understand covenants.

All right, I'm going to give you a very simple picture of what's involved in entering into and staying in a marriage covenant. I'm going to take the contemporary American way of getting married, but I cannot forebear to point out that it isn't the Bible way of getting married, because in the Bible a man did not choose his wife. The parents made the choice. Wasn't that archaic, out of date? But I'll just make one observation: it worked far better than the present system in America. In fact, history has never found a system that works so badly as the present American system of marriage. We need to view that objectively.

How do we enter into marriage today? I'll suggest to you five successive phases. This is nothing elaborate, believe me, or profound. I would suggest courtship, commitment, covenant, physical union and continuing fellowship. Courtship is going together steady, getting to know one another. Commitment is what we call getting engaged and at some point after the engagement, the engagement is finally ratified and solemnized by a covenant. And a covenant for Christians is usually conducted by a minister and in a place that in some way acknowledges the supremacy of God. And after the covenant, the marriage is consummated by physical union, and in actual fact if it isn't consummated by physical union legally it is usually not recognized as a valid marriage. And after physical union there comes an unfolding, developing relationship between two persons which goes on year after year after year, and having been married almost thirty years myself, I will tell those of you that have not been married that long there's always surprises in store in a marriage. It's a—you don't know your wife after five or ten years, you're just getting to know her. In a real God-blessed marriage there is a continuing, unfolding fellowship which should go on and on and on, and grow richer and stronger year by year.

All right, now I want to point out certain rather blunt facts which I trust will shock nobody because important,— What's the significance of the covenant? Is it important? Does it matter? Why have a church service? Why not just get engaged and go to bed? A lot of people do. But you know what the Bible calls that—fornication. So in the sight of God that ceremony which we call a marriage ceremony, that covenant makes such a difference that without it sexual union is fornication, and with it, it's marriage which the Bible says is honorable in all. So see the difference that's made by the covenant. See?

Now what I want to suggest to you is that true Christian fellowship should be arrived at by a parallel route. There should be courtship, there should be commitment, there should be a definite covenant, and after that a union, and after that continuing fellowship. Now what I want to suggest to you is the basic problem in the body of Christ is that we've missed out the covenant. What have we got—fornication. Now this may sound crude or shocking to some of you, but basically I think the church of Jesus Christ is full of spiritual fornication where people come together without any permanent commitment to one another. Join a church, get offended with the minister, or get huffed with one of the ladies, and run off and join another church. Now if my analogy is right that is either fornication or adultery. If there's been a covenant and you break it, it's adultery. If there's been no covenant, it's fornication.

Now I really believe that's why we see so little valid, continuing, enduring fellowship in the body of Christ, because we're like a lot of people— Well, let's take the man. He says to the young woman, "I love you. Let's get together. Come to bed with me." If she's foolish enough to do it, the odds are that in a year or two he'll tire of her, or maybe a month or two. Having no permanent commitment he runs

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off and finds another woman. I don't know whether you'll agree with me, but in my opinion without the solemnity of a covenant commitment, most men would commit adultery, and those that don't really honor their covenant commitment usually end up by committing adultery.

I think the only thing that can keep us from fornication or adultery is covenant, and I believe that this is what God is speaking to us about in binding the bones together. The ligaments that makes the union permanent is covenant. When they're bound with a covenant then it takes a major injury to the body to sever that ligament. I don't say it cannot be severed, but it's quite different from bones that are just held together by flesh and skin. You see, I think that's basically the kind of body we have today. It's a body which has got bones, flesh, skin, but no ligaments. It's got no strength, it's flabby, goes any way, you rest on it, it collapses. What's missing? Covenant, the invisible ligaments that nevertheless is essential to the functioning of the body.

So now I want to take a little while to study covenant. That's too elaborate a word—study. I just want to give you a few Scriptures on covenant. I'm opening this subject up. I am not saying it's the last word on it. One reason why I'm not saying it's the last word on it is I don't know the last word on it. But I look back to the time when I started to teach myself Hebrew. As a soldier in the British Army in 1943 I decided I would teach myself Hebrew. It was a pretty agonizing process, but in the end I achieved it. When I started to read my Hebrew Bible, which I still have today, I was one of those nuts that use a lot of different colored pencils. I had three different colors—blue, green and red—and quite without any process of reasoning I chose a different theme for each color. And you know what the three themes I chose?—I mean, God must have inspired me. I chose blue for covenant, green for sacrifice and red for the shedding of blood. You know what I've discovered? Wherever I have the blue I have the green, and wherever I have the green I have the red, and God indelibly imprinted on my mind there is no covenant without a sacrifice, and there's no sacrifice without the shedding of blood. If you don't see where the blood is shed, look for it, and that applies particularly to the covenant in Genesis 17 where apparently there is no sacrifice, but the mark of the covenant was circumcision. The blood was shed from Abraham's own body which was a preview of Calvary. We won't go into that. It's a fascinating study.

Let me mention this briefly. God made two covenants with Abraham. The first is in Genesis 15. It's called "a covenant." The second is in Genesis 17, God calls it "My covenant."

There's a great difference. The first covenant is never called an eternal covenant. It promised Abraham nothing. It only promised the land to his descendants. The second covenant, which is "My covenant," is called an everlasting covenant, and it makes the promise first to Abraham for an eternal possession and then to his seed after him.

I vividly remember being in an electrical store in Jerusalem in 1948, just before the State of Israel came into being, and the city was in a state of chaos, panic, people were shooting one another, people were being shot in the streets, blowing houses up, fighting surreptitiously. We had just run out of our home in the middle of the night and left a complete building behind, vacating it at nine o'clock at night because it was going to be attacked at midnight—and I was in this Jewish electrical store in Ben Yehuda Street buying some little electrical gadget and everybody was gloomy. You know, when Jews are gloomy, there's nobody gloomier than Jews. They were all complaining about what was happening, fearful about what was going to happen next, and I thought, I'll witness. So I said, "Well, when you have the promise of eternal life these things are different."

So the man behind the counter said to me, and I was talking English to him, "In our Bible," he said, "there isn't anything about eternal life or resurrection." "Oh," I said, "I don't understand that," and I switched to Hebrew and I quoted Genesis 17 to him in Hebrew where God says to Abraham, "To thee and to thy seed after thee will I give this land wherein thou art a stranger for an everlasting possession." And when I quoted Hebrew everybody in the store stopped talking. They listened. And I said, "How come that God promised it first to Abraham and then to his seed after him?" I said, "Up till now Abraham has only had enough area in this land to be buried in. If there's no resurrection that promise can never be fulfilled. It's worth thinking about that."

Genesis 15—God says "a covenant"—your descendants will inherit the land. It doesn't say forever. That was fulfilled under Joshua and lost when the Romans destroyed the nations. If there weren't another covenant—but there is—it's "My covenant," it's an everlasting covenant. It's to Abraham first and to his seed after him for an everlasting possession. That covenant is still in being and it's going to be fulfilled.

All right. Now let's look at some of the statements in the Scripture about covenants. Really what I want to do this evening, the climax of my ambition is to stir you up to see that in covenant we have a long neglected secret. I'd like to turn to Psalm 25 and read from verse 10 to verse 14; Psalm 25 verse 10 through verse 14. I want you to notice this passage begins and ends with a covenant.

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> "All the paths of the LORD are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies. For thy name's sake, O LORD, pardon mine iniquity; for it is great. What man is he that feareth the LORD? him shall he teach in the way that he shall choose. His soul shall dwell at ease; and his seed shall inherit the earth. The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant."

Now I want to point out certain facts there about covenant. First of all, "the paths of the LORD are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant." Bob talked about the easy and the hard way. This is the easy way. "All the paths of the LORD are mercy and truth unto such as [do what?] keep his covenant." Notice, it's "His covenant." This is the one that's called by the Lord, "My covenant."

"And his testimonies." What are testimonies in relationship to covenant? I believe testimonies are those outward indications of the covenant relationship. Whatever we do that's outwardly visible that declares our covenant relationship with the Lord are the testimonies of the covenant. With Israel, one mark under the old covenant was the keeping of the Sabbath. That was an indication that they were in covenant relationship with the Lord. It was something everybody could see, but the secret source of it was the covenant.

All right—so if you want all God's paths to be mercy and truth to you, you have to learn to keep His covenants and His testimonies.

Now the next verse seems a little disconnected. It says, "For thy name's sake, O LORD, pardon mine iniquity; for it is great." The word 'iniquity' ('avon' in Hebrew) means basically "rebellion." It's the same word that's used in Isaiah 53:6:

> "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all."

What's iniquity? Going our own way. So the psalmist, when he views the Lord's covenant, says next, "LORD, pardon mine iniquity," pardon my stubbornness, pardon my self-will—why? Because stubbornness and self-will in the covenant are mutually incompatible. You want to come into a covenant, you have to renounce stubbornness and self-will. And actually the remedy for stubbornness is a covenant. When you enter into a covenant it will deal with your stubbornness. That's why some of you don't want to enter into a covenant. Something inside you knows what lies ahead. Your mind may not know but somewhere inside you there's a rebellious ego that says, "If you get involved in that, I'm going to suffer." And that's the truth. Now, verse 12:

> "What man is he that feareth the LORD? him shall he teach in the way that he shall choose."

All right, God chooses His students by character. You remember I said that earlier. God doesn't choose everybody that comes up and enrolls in a Bible school or a seminary. Lots of people graduate from both and they've never been taught by the Lord, because the Lord teaches those that fear Him—the reverent respect for God.

Verse 13, "His soul shall dwell at ease." And I would say this as I view this, the way to dwell at ease is to be secure in covenant relationship. There's very little security for people outside of covenant. "...and his seed shall inherit the earth."

> "The secret of the LORD [and the Hebrew word means 'the secret council of the Lord'] is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant."

Notice the emphasis on fearing the Lord. If you fear the Lord, He'll teach you. If you fear the Lord, He'll show you His covenant. I believe the knowledge of God's covenant comes only by revelation from God to those who fear Him. The proud, the stubborn, the self-willed are excluded.

Let's look now in Psalm 50. Help me because I've got a long way to go. Psalm 50, I want to read verses 1 through 5:

> "The mighty God, even the LORD, hath spoken, and called the earth from the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof. [This is a message for the whole earth.] Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined. Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence: a fire shall devour before him,

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> and it shall be very tempestuous round about him. [This is the coming of the Lord in glory and power.] He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that he may judge his people."

Let me offer you this observation. The first judgment when the Lord comes will be of His own people—the judgment seat of Christ, for judgment always begins at the house of God. It will not be a judgment of condemnation, but a judgment of reward. Verse 5:

> "Gather my saints together unto me [this is God speaking, "gather My saints together," then He specifies who His saints are]; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice."

The Hebrew says literally "Those who cut My covenant on the basis of a sacrifice." The standard Hebrew word for "to enter into a covenant" is "to cut a covenant." And God says, "The only people I'll acknowledge as belonging to Me, My committed ones, My saints, are those who cut My covenant on the basis of a sacrifice." So in order to be in permanent relationship with God you must enter into a covenant that's based on a sacrifice. Okay?

Let's go on to Ezekiel chapter 20—Ezekiel chapter 20. Now this is a picture of the re-gathering of Israel. It is one which has been fulfilled in my generation. I'm old enough to remember Adolf Hitler and the Nazis. Some of you aren't. It's hard for me to believe that people alive today don't remember who Adolf Hitler was. If you'd lived then you'd never forget. This pictures the re-gathering of the Jewish people back into their land in the period under Hitler, and it's the most vivid and frightening picture, because it shows the fearful severity of God when His people are stubborn and rebellious. I'm going to read from verse 32 through verse 38.

> "And that which cometh into your mind shall not be at all, that ye say, We will be as the heathen, [as the nations, as the gentiles] as the families of the countries, to serve wood and stone."

There was a period at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of this century when the Jewish people in Europe, and principally in Germany, decided it wasn't worth being a Jew any longer. There was too much persecution, too many problems. Why not let's forget it? Let's get assimilated. Let's get baptized, join a church and lose our identity. And that was a movement that was very strong in Europe, particularly in Germany, before and after World War I. God says, "Don't think that you're going to be able to do that. You're not. I have other plans. Now listen."

> "As I live, saith the Lord GOD, surely with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out, will I rule over you: . . . [This is addressed to the Jewish people scattered around the earth, but particularly in Europe.] And I will bring you out from the people, and will gather you out of the countries wherein ye are scattered, with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out. [God says, 'Your stubbornness and your rebelliousness has caused Me to act towards you in fury.'] And I will bring you into the wilderness of the people, and there will I plead with you face to face. Like as I pleaded with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so will I plead with you, saith the Lord GOD."

Personally I believe that still lies ahead. I believe there will be a period when Israel will be dealt with sovereignly by God and in a wilderness experience. I believe it's prophesied in Hosea, in the book of Revelation and other places, but I'm not dealing with that now. Listen, verse 37:

> "And I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant: ..."

Now the picture is a shepherd re-gathering his sheep and getting them back into the fold, and every Oriental or Middle Eastern shepherd did not let every sheep back into his fold. He made sure that they were his and they were in condition to be admitted. And so he held the rod in front of them, stopped each one, examined it and only lifted the rod and let it pass if he approved it. And God says, "I'm going to bring you back into a relationship with Me like the shepherd counting the sheep back into the fold, and I'll bring you into

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the bond of a covenant." The modern translations can't understand it and they change it, but actually the King James here is the accurate translation. That's precisely what God intends to do.

He's going to bring us back into the fold through bringing us into the bond of the covenant. And then notice the next verse,

> "'And I will purge out from among you the rebels, and them that transgress against me: I will bring them forth out of the country where they sojourn, and they shall not enter into the land of Israel: and ye shall know that I am the LORD.'"

Now that's what frightens me, because God did that. He brought six million Jews out of where they sojourned and they did not enter the land of Israel. They perished in Hitler's concentration camps. The lesson for me, if not for you, is when God gets severe you better look out. And if God dealt like that with Israel I do not believe that God will deal any differently with a backsliding, gainsaying, stubborn, rebellious, self-willed church. And I believe in essence we're presented with the alternative—do you want to go on being rebellious or will you come back into the fold through the bond of the covenant? I really believe that's precisely the issue which God is setting before you here tonight, and before the whole Charismatic movement in this nation. Which do you want—continued rebellion, self-will, stubbornness, self-pleasing, independent, arrogant? Or will you submit, come back into the fold, and the bond of the covenant and lose your liberty, which isn't liberty but license? Cease to be a bone rattling around just where you please and get bound together with the ligaments, which is a covenant.

I'm so glad the King James says "the bond of a covenant." You read the other versions, they don't say it. They try to make it sound good and they miss the point. You see, one of the blessings of the King James is that when they didn't understand things they still translated them. Many modern translations when they don't understand, produce something they do understand, which is wrong. I mean I'm not saying the King James is perfect, but as we said before it was the version that Paul used! All right. I can't dwell there. I hope I've shown you the picture. God is re-gathering His people out of dispersal, out of exile, out of emptiness and frustration, He's bringing them back to Himself, but the condition of re-entering the fold is coming into the bond of a covenant.

Now, let's take another statement about covenant in Hebrews 9—Hebrews chapter 9. I'm fighting to get through what I want to get through and I'm not sure I'm going to succeed, and if I don't I'll just have to believe God didn't want me to. Hebrews 9 verses 16 and 17—as Bob would say, "It's just half past seven." When I have something a little awkward to say I quote Bob Mumford, then it sounds like him and not me. All right, Hebrews 6:16 and 17. Now in most of your versions, including the King James, it says "a testament," but bear in mind it's the same word covenant. The New Testament is the New Covenant.

There's not two different words—it's one word, and I'm going to translate it covenant.

> "For where a [covenant] is, there must also of necessity be the death of the [one who makes the covenant]. For a [covenant] is of force after men are dead: [wherefore] otherwise it is of no strength [or validity] at all while the [one who makes the covenant] live[s]."

Now, I have to try to get something across which is hard to convey, but when you make a covenant you lay your life down. You have come to the end of disposing of your own life. My wife doesn't like me quoting this saying, but for once, in a way, I'll ignore her advice and do it anyhow. I have been gripped in a way that I cannot express by a statement made by Lenin. Now I don't usually quote Lenin, least of all in church. I'm sure you know Lenin is the father of communism, or one of them. Lenin said this, he said, "Communists are dead men on furlough." What did he mean? He meant that when you become a communist your life is no longer your own. You're headed for a jail or a firing squad or some other sticky end. In the period between becoming a communist before you die, "You're a dead man on furlough. You see? Now what in a way grieves me is that that's what Christians should be—dead men on furlough. Revelation 12:11 says this:

> "They [the believers] overcame him [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and [don't stop there, it says] they loved not their lives unto the death."\

The only people that can overcome Satan are the people who do not love their lives to the death. In other words, I interpret that to mean when you're committed to Jesus

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Christ, staying alive is not the important thing. The important thing is doing the will of God, and if that means death, okay, it means death. We should reckon ourselves dead. Paul said, "For me the world is crucified and I'm crucified to the world." That ended all that. I'm a dead man on furlough. As long as I live I'm living just by the mercy of God. I'm living for one purpose, to fulfill the will of God. So when you enter into a covenant it involves your death. You better pause and think carefully before you enter into one. A covenant is of no validity while the one who makes the covenant lives.

Let me show you the covenant that Abraham,— God made with Abraham in Genesis 15. I really need a week to present these truths and yet I feel God wants me to do it tonight. Genesis 15 verse 8 and following:

> "[Abraham] said, 'Lord GOD, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit [the land that You promised me]?'"

And the answer that God gave Abraham was to make a covenant with Him. In other words, the strongest assurance that God could give Abraham was a covenant, and when He made a covenant that was a total, unreserved commitment. Now in making the covenant this is what He told him to do. Verse 9 and following:

> "And he [that is, the Lord] said unto [Abraham], 'Take me an heifer of three years old, and a she goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon.' And he took unto him all these, and divided them in the midst, and laid each piece one against another: but the birds divided he not."

Why did he,— What did he do with the sacrifices? He killed them, cut them half and laid the two halves opposite to one another.

Now just for a moment look in Jeremiah 18:34, just to find out why this was done. There doesn't seem to be a Jeremiah 18:34. I wonder if I'm in Jeremiah 34:18—let's see if that's right. Yes, I did— didn't I— Jeremiah 34:18—I did. Now I can't go into the background but this is what the Lord says:

> "'I will give the men that have transgressed my covenant, which have not performed the words of the covenant which they had made before me, when they cut the calf in twain, and passed between the parts thereof, ...'"

So, in entering into a covenant you took a sacrifice, you killed it, you cut the sacrificial body in two pieces, put them one against another, and the people entering into the covenant walked together between the pieces of the sacrifice. Now going back to Genesis 15, read the last few verses, that's verse 18:

> "In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abra[ha]m, ..."

How did He make the covenant?—this is fascinating. He told him to take the sacrifices, kill the sacrifices, cut the beasts in half and then the Lord and Abraham together walked between those pieces of the sacrifices. And in walking through the dead bodies, they entered into a covenant. What was the meaning? I lay down my life for you, you lay down your life for Me. From now on we are totally committed to one another. And what blesses me is that the Lord totally committed Himself to Abraham; likewise Abraham totally committed himself to the Lord. The significance of it was, the mark of it was that they passed between the two parts of the sacrifice. They entered in through a death into a new relationship, and that's exactly what Hebrews means when it says, "When there is a covenant there must of necessity be the death of the one who makes the covenant." A covenant is of no validity while you live.

Now, let me take you just a little further to 1 John chapter 3 and verses 16 and 17. First John 3:16 and 17:

> "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."

All right, what's the mark of love?—laying down your life. Christ laid down His life for us; we ought, we are obligated, to lay down our lives for the brethren. And then in the next verse John applies it in a very practical way.

> "But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his

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> bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?"

Verse 17 explains verse 16. It means that when you and I love one another with covenant love, I'm committed to your needs; you're committed to my needs. And if I do not supply your needs, I'm not honoring my covenant. When you and I walk through the sacrifice together, from now on, your need is my need, my need is your need. Your supply is my supply; my supply is your supply. That's the meaning of a covenant. I've lost complete individual, personal ownership of what I have, and that's how it was in the early church. I'm not talking about a commune. I'm not even talking about community. I'm talking about committed covenant relationships with other believers. When you do that, you've laid your life down. It's no longer yours. And so just so that you should not get super-spiritual, John says, in other words, "If you've got money and your brother needs it, it's his." Okay—there's not one "Praise the Lord" for that.

Now, I'm going to take you a little further, God helping me. I want to point out to you now that Christian love is not an option—it's a commandment. Jesus hasn't given us any option about loving one another. He's commanded us to do it. You remember what I said? If it's a commandment, it lies in the area of the will, not in the area of the emotions. Let's look at some of these statements—John 13:34 and 35:

> "'A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.'"

How much did He love us? He laid down His life for us. How much are we to love one another? We're to lay down our lives one for another. It's very clear.

> "'By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one [for] another.'"

Francis Schaeffer says that God has given the world the right to judge the church. If we love one another, the church will acknowledge we're His disciples. If we don't, the world has a right to say, "You're not disciples." "By this shall all men know..."

This is the mark of the true church. It's not speaking in tongues, it's not doctrinal orthodoxy. It's loving one another. How much and in what way? As He loved us. This is not an option. You're not given the choice of whether you'll do it or not. It's a commandment. But you see, I believe in understanding covenant that we find out how to obey the commandment. If it's just emotion, it's floating around.

There's no way of knowing whether you're doing it or not and it's totally impermanent and unstable.

Let's look in John 15—John 15 verse 9:

> "'As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love.'"

Notice, there's a chain of love. As God the Father loved Jesus Christ the Son, Jesus Christ loved the disciples, and the disciples are to love one another. The same kind of love is to go all the way down. The love that the Father has for the Son, the love that the Son has for the disciples, is to be the love that the disciples have one for another. We're not given an option as to what kind of love. It's exactly specified — the same love that the Father had for the Son, the same love that the Son had for the disciples is to be the love that we have. What kind of love is that? Covenant love. That's the secret. Without covenant we'll never have this kind of love. We'll always live in fornication and not in true marriage.

It's the covenant that brings the love. Isn't that true with marriage, really? I believe it is. Maybe you consider I'm cynical, but I believe the majority of men would be unfaithful to their wives if it rested only on emotion. You've only got to take a man away from his wife for a few weeks and put him with some attractive sympathetic ahh . . . Need I say more? If it's emotion, he's got fifteen good reasons for adultery. Isn't that right? It's right where I live. You know when you have to love your wife the most? When she's least lovable. If you can only love your wife when she's lovable, you don't love her very much. Married love is in the will, not the emotions. It's a commandment: Husbands, love your wives. Don't argue about it—do it.

All right, we're going on in John 15 verses 12 and 13:

> "'This is my commandment, That ye love one another, [how?] as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. [Verse 17:] These things I command you, that ye love one another.'"

Is it possible to keep that commandment? I believe it is specifically, practically possible, just as it's possible for a

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man to get married to a woman. That's not a big intellectual problem. It's a practical commitment.

I believe that's what God is talking to the church about, loving one another with a covenant love as the Father loved the Son, the Son loved the disciples. A covenant commitment to one another, which does not leave us free to walk off and leave the person I'm committed to when I no longer like him or he no longer does the things I like or his need is too great for me to meet. It's a permanent, sacred commitment, just as sacred as marriage.

Now can you stand another ten minutes? You're too polite to say no, but the thing is I want to show you what I believe is an untapped secret which is that covenant doesn't start on earth or in time, it's eternal. And I believe it's the secret of the relationship between the Father and the Son. That's why I brought out that Scripture: "As the Father loved the Son, the Son loved the disciples, the disciples are to love one another." In other words, I believe there's an eternal covenant in heaven, and I want to give you about five Scriptures just to open up that thought to you—not to settle it, not to tell you all about it but just to open it for you and for me.

All right, I want you to look in 2 Timothy 1:9; 2 Timothy 1:9. Bob has already quoted this verse from another angle, 2 Timothy 1:9:

> "[God] hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, ..."

Now where the King James says "before the world began," the New International Version, which somebody kindly gave me, says, "before the beginning of time." What the Greek actually says is "before eternal times." I understand it to mean before any ages started rolling, God gave us His grace in Christ.

How could He do that? What does it mean? I think it means something very specific.

Now look in Titus chapter 1 verse 2. Without going into the background,

> "... in hope of eternal life, which God, [who] cannot lie, promised before the world began; ..."

It's the same phrase—before the ages start to roll God made a promise. To whom did He make the promise? As far as I understand, there were no created beings to make the promise to. You know what I believe, my opinion? The Father made the promise to the Son and He said, "Son, if You'll do what I command You, I'll commit Myself to raise You from the dead." If I'm right.

Now look in Hebrews 13:20. In other words, the basis of all redemption is a covenant between the Father and the Son. Hebrews 13:20—where's that found?

> "Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, ..."

It's an everlasting eternal covenant. It didn't begin with time, it won't end with time. This is the covenant between the Father and the Son by which the Father said, "If We create and You have to die to redeem, I'm committed to raise You from the dead." And I believe that this was expressed in a covenant which is objective. I don't know whether I dare to speak about writing, but I don't know any other way to express it. I believe the Father made a written commitment to the Son, and what I'm coming to is: That's what we need to do to one another. Everything I'm saying is practical. It's directed towards something that affects us. I'm not going back into eternity just for the sake of being interesting, but I believe there's a principle there which we need to know.

All right. Now I'll give you two other Scriptures and basically we'll close. Look in Revelation chapter 11 verse 19; Revelation 11:19. We're very near the close of the age. Everything's coming to its climax. There's tremendous upheaval, earthquake, war, uproar, God's about to intervene finally and conclusively and it says in Revelation 11:19:

> "The temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in [the] temple the ark of his testament: and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail."

Right at this point there's something unveiled in heaven which is the temple of the ark of the testament. The temple contained the ark, the ark contained the testament. Now on earth Moses was commanded to make a tabernacle, an ark and a testament that were the patterns or shadows of the heavenly things. But the pattern was there in heaven, and

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all Israel's whole life were centered around the tabernacle which contained an ark which contained the testament. What was the testament? The two tables of the covenant. If what I'm saying is true, the entire life of Israel, God's people, centered around an invisible covenant which was kept in an ark which was kept in the tabernacle. The supreme purpose of the tabernacle was to house the ark. The supreme purpose of the ark was to house the testament of the covenant. And now we are told here in Revelation that in heaven there's an eternal temple that houses an eternal ark that houses an eternal covenant.

All right, Revelation 15:5—Revelation 15:5.

> "And after that I looked, [I beheld] . . . I looked, and, behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened: ..."

So there was a temple to hold the tabernacle, to hold an ark, to hold the testimony, which is the covenant. So the entire religious life of heaven (for any want of a better phrase), centered around this sacred eternal covenant. And when we come to the end of human history and all God's purposes, what is revealed is the ark of the covenant—because that's the source of everything that ever happened.

Let me give you just one Scripture from 1 Kings just by way of illustration. First Kings chapter 8; 1 Kings chapter 8, verse 1 and verse 6—just to show you that it was the covenant that was in the ark.

> "Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel, and all the heads of the tribes, the chief of the fathers of the children of Israel, unto king Solomon in Jerusalem, that they might bring up the ark of the covenant of the LORD out of the city of David. . . . [Verse 6:] The priests brought in the ark of the covenant of the LORD into [its] place, ..."

So there was a tabernacle, later it was made into a temple, which contained the ark, which contained what was called the testimony, which was the written covenant of God with Israel, and all that was a heavenly shadow of an earthly shadow of a heavenly reality. In heaven, there is a temple that contains a tabernacle that contains an ark that contains a covenant. Between whom is the covenant? Between the Father and the Son. Before time ever started to roll or ages ever took their course, God the Father committed Himself to God the Son by a covenant. So Solomon— so sacred was this covenant that it was established in a special temple in heaven.

What does that tell us? It tells us this is the pattern of enduring commitment and relationship. The Father loved the Son with covenant love. He committed Himself by a covenant. Jesus the Son with the same kind of love, loved His disciples with covenant love. He committed Himself to lay down His life for them, and He did it. Do you think He enjoyed it? Do you think He felt blessed? No, He didn't do it on the basis of emotion. He did it on the basis of will and He says, "As My Father loved Me, I've loved you, and I want you to love one another."

What does that tell us practically? It tells us that the kind of love that Jesus is speaking about is covenant love, where I'm committed to you through the laying down of our lives one for the other. We pass between the pieces of the sacrifice, Through a death we enter into a relationship in which each one of us is committed to other, to death, and I believe that this is the next major phase in God's restoration of the life of a New Testament church.

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Sermon

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