

## LESSON 5

### Blood Covenant: Inter-Union with God

The relationship that Jesus demonstrated with his Father was the example to us of how we should live in relationship with God. Jesus came with the express reason to connect people back to God, so it was important that he show us how we should live in relationship with God. Jesus is described as *“the last Adam”* [1] because he was the prototype of the new person *“in Christ”* [2]. We find in him what he means to be a person fashioned in the image of God. This is why it is necessary for us to examine the lifestyle of Jesus.

It is demonstrated on every page of the accounts of Jesus’ life (the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, referred to as the ‘Gospels’) that the focal point for Jesus was his inter-union with his Father. In this regard, Jesus made the following two crucial statements which summarize his position with the Father:

*“... I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does.”*

John 5:19

*“For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it. I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say.”*

John 12:49-50

Jesus lived in absolute dependence upon, and absolute obedience to, the Father. He made no conscious or deliberate decision independent from his Father. He submitted himself completely and

would not act or speak without the leading of the Spirit. This is how we too should live.

### **God's design for a real human being – Jesus**

It is difficult for some to accept this because they see the Father and the Son as having a unique relationship which is unattainable for mere mortals. In one sense Jesus is unique – *“the one and only Son”*[3]. However, he demonstrated the way that *every* person was to live in relationship with God. He set his divinity to the side when he took on the form of a man.[4] Although being God, he did not live as God upon the earth but as a man. (All the miracles Jesus performed were through the power of the Holy Spirit who came upon him when he was baptized; not through his own divine power.[5])

Jesus is our example of God's design of what a real human being looks like. Because of the fall, sin marred man's image and man became defective. Jesus demonstrates for us what we are supposed to look like – how we are to think, speak and act, only and always out of relationship with God. This is why the scripture says *“...This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.”*[6]

Jesus is the model, therefore, that we are to look to and copy ourselves upon. Not that we can achieve this alone through human effort. Just as Jesus lived only in absolute dependence upon his Father, and relied upon the leading of the Holy Spirit, we too must do the same.

In Jesus' high priestly prayer (on the night before he was crucified) he emphasizes the importance of oneness, and that exactly the

same relationship he had had with his Father would be available to us:

*“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, **Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us** so that the world may believe that you have sent me. **I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me.** May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and **have loved them even as you have loved me.**”*

John 17:20-23

Jesus knew that complete unity with God was everything, and that this was only and ever God’s intention for us. If we would come to that place of inter-union with God it would be inevitable that the world would be impacted. Just as Jesus had been revealed as the Son, we would be revealed as sons of God reflecting his person and demonstrating his power. Nothing would be withheld from us because just as the Father had loved the Son, so we too would be loved in exactly the same measure.

### **Oneness with God, the ultimate prize**

Oneness with God is the greatest and only pursuit of man. Every other objective is meaningless, empty and futile. King Solomon, perhaps more than any other man, gave himself over to every worldly pursuit a man could desire – knowledge, power, wealth and women (his wives and concubines numbered 1,000!). He discovered that every worldly ambition was meaningless, utterly meaningless, except one: *“Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole [duty] of man.”*[7]

While oneness with God is the highest pursuit it also comes with the greatest price – death to self. To walk in oneness with God is to submit your will absolutely and totally to him. To bring every thought, every word and every act into submission to him. This is why Jesus said: *“For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.”*[8]

True relationship with God means the denial of self and the fusing of our will with his. We lose our personal identity, and become identified with him. This is a pivotal message of the Bible, and to fully comprehend its importance and its outworking, it is necessary to know the meaning and significance of a blood covenant.

### **Blood Covenant**

The Bible is in fact structured around two *Blood Covenants*:

The Old Testament records the *‘Old Blood Covenant’* God cut with a man called Abram and the subsequent outworking of that Covenant through the dealings of God with Abram’s descendants i.e. the nation of Israel.

The New Testament records the *‘New Blood Covenant’* that God cut with mankind through his Son Jesus Christ and its outworking through God’s (new) covenant people i.e. the church.

The word *‘testament’* is an old English word which means *‘covenant’*. If you look up the cover pages of the Old and New Testaments of a 19<sup>th</sup> century King James Bible you will read the

words “The Book of the Old Blood Covenant” and “The Book of the New Blood Covenant”.

Although nations in the West have generally lost the knowledge of a blood covenant, there are certain blood covenant symbols that remain in our culture. Some examples include:

- when two persons become ‘blood brothers’ by cutting their palms and bringing them together;
- the raising of the right hand to swear an oath in court;
- the exchange of rings in marriage; and,
- a wife assuming the surname of her husband.

The Bible itself does not explicitly explain the details of a blood covenant – why it is made, how it is made and its binding consequences – because it takes for granted that the reader would be familiar with its features. All cultures the world over have vestiges of blood covenant practices. For this reason, it is believed that God himself taught the concept to man prior to the Tower of Babel and in all likelihood in the time of Adam and Eve. Certainly, Abraham who lived just some 400 years after Noah’s flood understood it fully.

In essence, a blood covenant is the uniting of two persons to become a single entity. When two people cut covenant they each ‘die’ individually, and their lives become fused into one: like two rivers that flow together to become one, whose waters become indistinguishable and inseparable. It is the total surrender of oneself to another, whereby each individual willingly forfeits their personal identity.

**A modern day example**

A good example of the practice of a blood covenant is found in the journey of Captain Stanley who was sent on a mission by the New York Herald in 1869 to locate Dr. David Livingstone. Livingstone was a famous English missionary who was the first white person to trek into some of the remotest parts of central Africa. He had not been heard from in some years so Stanley was commissioned by the newspaper to find him. Eventually, Stanley was successful and upon meeting up with Livingstone he said these now famous words “Dr. Livingstone, I presume?”.

On his journey Stanley cut no less than 50 blood covenants with the native Africans. Here is an account of one covenant he cut early in his adventure when he happened upon a large tribe.

The chief of the tribe sought to cut covenant with Stanley because this guaranteed that the two parties would not fight one another and remain at peace. Their custom of cutting covenant was to first exchange gifts. The chief wanted Stanley’s goat. Stanley was most reluctant because he suffered from a stomach complaint and the goat’s milk eased the pain. However, the chief was adamant and Stanley could not dissuade him. In return Stanley received, what appeared to him, to be a crude spear with a copper winding. Stanley thought he had been cheated. Then they each presented a substitute person – a member of their company – whose flesh was cut to establish covenant.

Subsequently, much to Stanley’s surprise and delight, as he travelled throughout that region and the spear was displayed, the natives would respond to them most politely, providing them with safe passage and provisions. The reason, Stanley discovered, was that the chief he had cut covenant with was very powerful and the

lesser tribes recognized Stanley's association with him when they saw the spear. The spear was a symbol of the chief and his tribe, much like the flag of a modern state. They knew that to be hostile to Stanley would bring the wrath of the great chief upon them, who would come to fight on Stanley's behalf because of their covenant. Blood covenants to this day are practised throughout parts of Africa. The worst of rogues will abide by its principles because to break covenant means certain death.

### **A typical Hebrew covenant**

The following is an account of how two people in Old Testament times might have typically cut a blood covenant together. There is no one Bible passage that contains every element in order. However, each is represented in the scriptures.

Two individuals would announce to their family and friends that they were going to enter into covenant. They called them all to witness their commitment by attending a solemn ceremony in which they would cut covenant.

The first act of the proceedings undertaken by the two persons, was to exchange their coats. The giving of one's coat represented the giving of one's own life to the other. As one put on the coat of the other, he was putting on the life of the other. They also exchanged their belts and weapons – which comprised their sword and dagger. From that moment on they were committed to the defence of each other. If one were to be attacked by an enemy, the other would come and fight, even to the point of death.

Next, an animal (usually a bull) was prepared in a very unusual fashion; it was literally split in two, from nose to tail along the backbone and the halves were separated several feet apart. The

two men would stand in the midst of the carcass back to back and then proceed to walk a figure 8 to return facing each other. The significance of this act was that in walking in the midst of death, and through death, they had 'died' as individuals.

They now cut their right palms or wrists and brought them together, lifting them up and usually binding them together with a leather cord. Thus their blood was intermingled as it flowed down their united arms. Blood represented life, and by this act their lives 'flowed' together to become one: the giving of blood was the giving of life, the receiving of blood was the receiving of life. While joined together each swore allegiance to the other and pronounced a curse, pointing to the animal and saying "If I break this covenant may God do this to me and more".

The scar that remained represented the '*seal*' of the covenant.

While standing together, the 'terms of the covenant' were read out (often by an attending priest). Prior to the ceremony they had each declared their personal assets and abilities, and the items recorded in these inventories were hereafter available to the other person if ever they had need of them.

Next, they shared a meal together and each, in turn, gave bread and wine to the other. Once again this represented the giving and surrender of one's total self to the other. The bread and the wine were symbols of a person's very being, their own body and blood. Finally, a memorial was erected – e.g. a head of stones, the planting of a tree – which served as a reminder of the cutting of covenant.



The two persons were now known as *'friends'*, and each compounded their own personal name with the name of the other person.

(Note: Firstly, it was also possible for a *substitute* to be used when covenant was cut, i.e. a nominated representative could stand in the place of one who was entering into covenant relationship. This is in fact what occurred in both the Old and New Covenants that God cut with man. And secondly, descendants were also included in the covenant, if they chose to abide by its principles.)

### **The Old Blood Covenant**

God cut covenant some 4,000 years ago with a man called Abram. God's intention was that through this covenant, all the peoples of the earth would come to a knowledge of him and enter into covenant relationship with him. God wanted to produce a 'kingdom of priests' from the descendants of Abram (the nation of Israel) who would minister to all the nations of the world and establish God's rule and reign.[9] However, Israel broke covenant with God. They rejected him and spurned the destiny he had planned for them. Eventually, God overturned the 'Old' Covenant by establishing a 'New' – and better – Covenant through his Son, Jesus Christ.

### **The Old Covenant cut**

*Genesis 15: 1-18*

1 ... the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward."

2 But Abram said, "O Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?"

3 And Abram said, "You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir."

4 Then the word of the LORD came to him: "This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir."

5 He took him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars— if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."

6 Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

7 He also said to him, "I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it."

8 But Abram said, "O Sovereign LORD, how can I know that I shall gain possession of it?"

9 So the LORD said to him, "Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon."

10 Abram brought all these to him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other; the birds, however, he did not cut in half.

11 Then birds of prey came down on the carcasses, but Abram drove them away.

12 As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him.

13 Then the LORD said to him, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and ill-treated four hundred years.

14 But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterwards they will come out with great possessions.

15 You, however, will go to your fathers in peace and be buried at a good old age.

16 *In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure.”*

17 *When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking brazier with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces.*

18 *On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram ...*

In v1 God offers to Abram to be his shield (promising God’s own protection!) and very great reward (promising God’s wealth!). In making these statements, Abraham immediately understood that God was initiating a covenant. Incredibly though it seemed to Abram, the God of the universe was asking Abram if he would enter into covenant.

At first, Abram was reticent. In that day, the most important thing in life was a son. Abram had no son, therefore, as far as he was concerned, there was no point of entering into covenant with God. All the benefit he might derive would be lost upon his death, because there was no heir to receive its heritage.

God assures Abram that he will have a son (v4-5), removing the obstacle in Abram’s mind. In v6, Abram agrees to enter into covenant – *“Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.”* The Hebrew word translated *“believed”* literally means ‘a confident and unqualified committal of oneself to another’. Abram committed himself to God as a covenant partner, and God declared him to be righteous. Abram willingly united himself with the Lord, and he was credited as righteous in order for that relationship to be consummated.

Therefore, the fundamental belief of Christianity that righteousness is obtained through faith,[10] is founded upon blood covenant principles. Faith for salvation must be expressed through a desire to enter into an intimate relationship with God. 2Chronicles 16: 9 tells us that God is constantly looking for persons like Abram who are willing to commit themselves to him: *“For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him.”*

The covenant which Abram has agreed to is now cut (v9-10, 17). God asks Abram to take particular birds and animals, and cut the latter in two arranging the halves opposite one another. In a vision Abraham then observes two persons represented by a *“smoking firepot”* and a *“blazing torch”*, pass between the pieces. These persons executed the covenant by completing the covenant walk. They were God the Father and, a substitute provided by God for Abram, God’s own Son, Jesus Christ.

God later confirmed the covenant with Abram in Genesis 17:1-14. At this time, the compounding of the two party’s names occurred and God declared what the seal of the covenant would be. Abram’s name was changed to **Abraham** and Sarai’s name was changed to **Sarah**, thus their names were compounded with God’s name (**Yahweh**). Hereafter, God’s own name would be mixed with a man’s name as he became known as the *‘the God of Abraham’*. Furthermore, the seal (or sign) of the covenant was to be male circumcision, which indicated God’s express desire for the descendants of Abraham to be a covenant people.

And Abraham was called a *‘friend of God’*. [11]

The terms of the covenant contained the following elements:

God's obligations:

Make Abraham a great nation	12: 2
Bless him	12: 2
Make his name great	12: 2
Bless those that blessed him	12:3
Curse those that cursed him	12: 3
All peoples on earth blessed through him	12: 3
Be his shield	15: 1
Be his great reward	15: 1
Give him a son	15: 4
Make him the father of many nations	17: 4
Kings would be amongst his descendants	17:6
To be his God, and his descendants' God	17: 7
To give him the whole land of Canaan	17: 8

Abraham's obligation:

To walk before God and be blameless	17: 1
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**The covenant tested**

The only requirement of Abraham was that he walk in intimate relationship with God and remain true to their covenant, which he did. When God asked him to sacrifice his own son, Abraham did not hesitate but set out immediately to complete the task God asked of him.[12] According to covenant, Abraham had relinquished all personal rights to himself or to his possessions. His greatest 'possession' was his own son. Abraham was therefore required by covenant even to give up his own son.

To the Hebrew way of thinking, a son's life was worth more than his father's. This was to ensure the continuation of the family line. Abraham could have reasoned away the request of God. He could

have denied the request even to the point of offering himself in place of Isaac, however, all this would mean he would be breaking covenant, which he was sworn never to do.

Abraham passed the test. He offered his son, convinced that God would raise him to life again. This episode prefigured what God himself would do. He would subsequently sacrifice his own Son upon the cross of Calvary. God was obligated to provide his only Son for Abraham, and all those who would desire to enter into relationship with him, in order to satisfy the requirements of eternal justice.

Every person since Adam was born in sin and incapable of becoming righteous. It was impossible for sinful man to enter into relationship with a Holy God. Man had to once again become like God in order for relationship to be established. Jesus' sacrifice was absolutely necessary in order to provide the 'new birth' for man, and God was obligated to provide his Son.

The outworking of the Old Blood Covenant is contained in the rest of the Old Testament. The way in which God dealt with the descendants of Abraham, the nation of Israel, was according to the covenant he had cut with Abraham. In particular note:

- The call of Moses. [13]
- The escape from Egypt and the journey through the wilderness.[14]
- The command to Joshua.[15]
- David's defeat of Goliath.[16]
- The Law, sacrifices, blessings and cursings.[17]
- Israel's rejection of God, the breaking of Covenant and its consequences.[18]

The Old Blood Covenant, which was ratified and enlarged upon with the Israelites under Moses, however, was incomplete. God used it to point to the need for the sacrifice of his Son and the new birth. Under the Old Covenant, certain persons experienced the Holy Spirit coming *upon* them – prophets, kings and priests – but never dwelling *within* them. God wanted to connect with man not just externally but internally, Spirit to spirit. That is why Jesus said of John the Baptist:

*“I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”*

Matthew 11:11

John died before the cross. He never experienced the new birth. He was the last of the Old Covenant prophets. He experienced the Spirit of God coming upon him – he was anointed with the Spirit while in his mother’s womb![19] – however, he never experienced God coming into him. Jesus referred to New Covenant persons when he said *“the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he”*. Persons under the New Covenant would enter inter-union with God. [20] They would be granted a new birth and be made anew in the image of God; as God’s very own sons and daughters.[21] Their bodies would become *“temples of the Holy Spirit”*.[22] They would be transferred into the *“kingdom of the Son”*, now in this world.[23] That is why even the least would be greater than John.

### **The New Blood Covenant**

The New Covenant superseded and set aside the Old Covenant.[24] The New Covenant was cut, not in the blood of an animal, but in Jesus’ own blood. Jesus was again, as he was in the Old Covenant, the substitute for man in establishing a blood covenant between God and man. Through his sacrifice the way was

made open for us to receive *eternal life*, which is inter-union or oneness with God.

Jesus defined eternal life in John 17:3:

*“Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”*

The Greek word translated “know” – *“ginosko”* – does not mean merely to ‘know about’, by hearing or reading about God. Rather it means to know through actively experiencing God. Vines Expository Dictionary of Bible Words says “In the New Testament *ginosko* frequently indicates a relation between the person “knowing” and the object known; in this respect, what is “known” is of value or importance to the one who knows, and hence the establishment of the relationship ...”

The New Covenant was built upon better promises than the Old Covenant. What the Old Covenant was not able to accomplish – freedom from the sin nature – the New Covenant achieved through the sacrifice of God’s only begotten Son.

Jeremiah prophesied concerning the New Covenant:

31 *“The time is coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.*

32 *It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD.*

33 *“This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,” declares the LORD. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.*



34 *No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."*  
 Jeremiah 31:31-34

The writer of the book of Hebrews confirmed that this 'new' covenant, prophesied by Jeremiah, was fulfilled in and through Jesus Christ (see Hebrews 8).

### **The Terms of the Covenant**

Jeremiah 31:31-34 (and Hebrews 8:6-13) records the astonishing terms of the covenant. Each element is focused upon inter-union with God. God wants it to be plainly understood that an intimate relationship with him is his ultimate objective:

- *"I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts"* v33 – This statement prefigures the new birth. Through this birth we are made new creatures. Our 'heart of sin' is replaced with a 'heart of righteousness'. Christ now dwells *in* us and through him we are set free from sin and enabled to live holy lives.
- *"I will be their God, and they will be my people."* v34 – God wants you to live in the reality of his kingdom here and now, experiencing a life of abundance as he makes his love, his power and his wisdom available to you.
- *"No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest."* v34 – No longer will there be intermediaries between God and people. There would not be distinct priests who taught the people about

God, for *all* would be priests; and *all* would know God personally.[25]

No longer would people be held back from intimacy with God, as portrayed under the Old Testament by the curtain which separated and hid the Holy of Holies. (No-one could enter the inner most room of the Temple called the “*Holy of Holies*” where the *shekinah* presence of God resided, except for the High Priest who once a year entered to make atonement for the nation.) This 150mm thick curtain was torn from top to bottom the very moment that Jesus died; signifying the end of separation and the way now open for man to enter into inter-union with God.[26]

God wants to reveal himself to you personally. God desires an intimate relationship with you – no-one is excluded, “*the least to the greatest*” encompasses everyone.

- *For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more. v12* – Your sins which once stood as a barrier between you and God are blotted out. There is no longer any impediment, therefore, holding you back from entering into, and remaining in, an inter-union with God.

Your responsibilities within the covenant are carefully explained in certain passages of the New Testament (see Romans 6:6-7, Galatians 2:20, Mark 8:34-38). It principally includes death to sin, self and independence, and to live a life of purity and holiness, out of a love relationship with God. You relinquish all personal rights, and lay down your own personal agenda. Your life is no longer your own. You live for God, and consent to his will and purposes. He becomes the most important object of your desire and affections.

You choose to love him with all of your heart, all of your soul, all of your mind and all of your strength. You walk in humble and reverential obedience to God, glorifying him in your body, as you are led by his Spirit. This is what it means to be an authentic son/daughter of God.

*Have you truly entered into covenant relationship with God? You may have received Jesus and decided to follow him, just like his disciples – Peter, James, John and the others – but you may never have given yourself totally and unreservedly to him. The disciples themselves only discovered what this meant after his death. They walked with him personally for three years never fully committing themselves in covenant relationship. Why not make this commitment, as they too finally entered into, right now. Pray:*

*“Father, I acknowledge that you are the God of the universe, the Creator and Sustainer of all life. I accept that you have created me out of your great love, and that I should live in inter-union with you. Jesus, you provided the way by which I might come into covenant relationship through your own blood. I now willingly choose and give myself to you completely and unreservedly. I lay down my life, as you laid down yours, in order to become one with you. From this moment on, Holy Spirit be my constant companion and guide. I pledge my unqualified obedience to you. Teach me your ways that I might walk in them. May the kingdom of God now come upon me, and may the will of God be done in my life here and now, and always, as it is in heaven. Amen.”*

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## Lesson 5 Footnotes

- [1] 1Corinthians 15:45
- [2] 2Corinthians 5:17
- [3] John 3:16
- [4] Philippians 5:2-11
- [5] Matthew 3:16-17, Acts 10:38
- [6] I John 2:5-6
- [7] Ecclesiastes 12:13
- [8] Matthew 16:25
- [9] Exodus 19:5-6
- [10] Ephesians 2:8-9
- [11] Isaiah 41:8, James 2:23
- [12] Genesis 22:1-18
- [13] Exodus 3&4, especially 4:24-26
- [14] Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy; especially Exodus 24:1-11, Deuteronomy 29 & 30
- [15] Joshua 1
- [16] 1Samuel 17, especially v26, 45-47
- [17] Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy especially Deuteronomy 28, 30:11-20
- [18] 1&2 Kings, the Prophets
- [19] Luke 1:39-44
- [20] 1Corinthians 6:17, Colossians 1:27, 3:3
- [21] 1John 3:1, 2Corinthians 5:17, 21
- [22] 1Corinthians 3:16, 6:19
- [23] Colossians 1:13
- [24] Hebrews 8:13, 2Corinthians 3:14-16, Romans 7:6
- [25] 1Peter 1: 9; Acts 2:17-18; 1Corinthians 14: 31
- [26] Mark 15:38, see Hebrews 10:19