



Make No Covenant

By Dr. Roger W. Sapp

Spiritual men need no covenant. Carnal men cannot keep one.

What's Wrong with Making Covenant?

The theology and practice of *making covenant* has drawn its basic thought from the Bible. This theology has found great acceptance because the Bible so emphasizes the importance of covenant. It involves many good and sincere Christian people. However, the actual teaching and practice appears to be strongly contradictory to important teachings in the New Testament. Additionally, this teaching does seem to create bad fruit and divisions in the Body of Christ. The basic ideas presented in the theology and practice of *making covenant* are these:

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- *Essential relationships are established between Christian believers by making covenants. These covenants are similar to the permanent and lasting commitment expected in the covenant of marriage. These covenants have expectations on each believer involved in them also similar to marriage.*
- *These covenants often involve a less mature believer or a group of less mature leaders covenanting with a more mature leader for purposes of spiritual growth, guidance and protection. Often, this relationship is referred to as “covering”.*
- *Often, the more mature leader expects that the less mature believer will submit, obey his instructions and support him financially by ongoing giving.*
- *These covenants insure accountability and the maturing of the individual and local church and other good fruit.*
- *Breaking of these covenants is a serious matter before God.*

This is of course a generalized description of the theology behind the idea of *making covenant*. There are always minor variations in thought in any theological position and practice. However, this does express the basic ideas accurately. So *what is wrong with this?* The next few sections will elaborate on why this theology has problems and why the practice produces bad fruit.

Short History of the Practice and Theology

The practice and theology of Christians *making covenant* has a very short history in Christianity. It was invented, discovered or rediscovered by the Shepherding Movement in the 1970's and has been practiced by various charismatic groups since then within North America primarily.

The Shepherding Movement of the 1970's has been thoroughly discredited by virtue of abusive authoritarian practices by some of its adherents. However, the theology and practices that created these situations is still popular in many circles and propagated, sometimes ignorantly, without reference to the earlier discredited movement. Some have been so schooled in this way of thinking to think that this is normal relational Christianity rather than an aberration from the norm known historically in Christianity.

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No Example in the New Testament

In evaluation of any Christian doctrine or practice, there should be a search for examples and for some encouragement to do the particular practice in the New Testament. If a practice or theology is important, it should be mentioned in the New Testament several times. However, when a complete twenty-seven book search of the New Testament is done, there is not found a single example of Christian believers *making covenant* with each other. Of course, we are not including references to marriage in our search. Marriage is thoroughly validated by the New Testament.

The vast majority of the thirty-seven direct references to *covenant* in the New Testament are divided between references to the *Old Covenant* or the *New Covenant*. The few remaining general references to *covenant* are being used by New Testament writers to explain the nature of the New Covenant. There are absolutely no specific examples of *making covenant* between Christian believers, leaders or anyone found in the New Testament¹.

Added to the fact of the absence of examples, there is not a single line in the New Testament that encourages believers to *covenant* with each other either.² If *making covenant with each other* were an important aspect of Christian life, then we would expect the New Testament to teach it. However, the New Testament when examined carefully on this subject, it actually teaches against this practice in several places.

To *make covenant* with another believer requires adopting an Old Testament practice that is not validated by the New Testament at all. Not only does this void of examples and encouragement *to covenant* exist but also Christ Himself warns us not to make a covenant-like commitment. The reason that this void exists in the New Testament is so extremely simple that it is often overlooked:

Christian believers are already in covenant with each other through the work of Jesus Christ.

Already in Covenant With Each Other

Making covenant exclusively with a single believer or a group of believers fails to recognize or ignores that we *are already in covenant with all believers*. We are already in covenant with one another by virtue of what Jesus Christ has done at Calvary. The New Testament describes this as the *New Covenant*. Making another more limited covenant conflicts with and

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minimizes the importance of this Gospel truth. We enter the New Covenant automatically when we are saved by faith in Jesus Christ. The writer of Hebrews indicates this very clearly.

...And so much the more also Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant.

*...Hence, also, He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.
Hebrews 7:22, 25*

Jesus Christ is the guarantee of the better covenant, the New Covenant, for those who draw near to God through Him. Believers become partakers of the New Covenant by accepting the atoning sacrifice of Christ. His redemptive sacrifice at the cross has forever provided this blessed covenant with God for them. We are not required to do something with another believer to be in covenant. We are already in covenant through Christ. Believers demonstrate our covenant with Christ and each other each and every time we take Communion, the Lord's Supper.

Reasons Not to Make Covenant

The making of a covenant is always extremely serious and solemn matter before God. It is the most serious spiritual matter where believers can involve other people. It is so serious that making a covenant could change the perfect will of God in some matters. For instance, a believer might marry someone that is not the will of God for them. However, immediately after making this marriage covenant, it is now the will of God for the marriage to prosper and succeed regardless of how this marriage began or how it might affect God's plans for the believer. The marriage covenant now takes priority over the previous will of God even if it changes the future will of God for a believer. Making covenant of any kind, marriage or otherwise can seriously change spiritual things for a believer for the worst as well as for the better. In the case of any kind of covenant outside of marriage, it is likely that this improper covenant will be the cause of future problems.

Another clear example exists in Scripture that shows the possible difficulty and dangers of making covenant. During the time of King David as described in 2 Samuel 21:1-9, there was a three year famine. David sought God in prayer about the reason for this famine since he knew that it was God's will to bless His people with good harvest. God revealed to David that the previous king, King Saul had broken a covenant by killing the

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Gibeonites. The drought that Israel was experiencing in David's time was judgment on the King Saul's breaking of this covenant with the Gibeonites.

This is highly significant to any discussion on the solemn commitment of covenant. God was remembering a covenant that Joshua had made with the Gibeonites many generations before as described in Joshua 9:3-18. God was still holding Israel to its responsibility to fulfill the conditions of this covenant generations later. Even when no one else remembered the covenant, God still did.

This is even more significant when we realize that this particular covenant was made in disobedience to the original command of God. God had commanded Joshua to make no covenants with the inhabitants of the land of Canaan and to utterly destroy and dispossess them.

The Gibeonites were inhabitants of the land and it was God's will for them to be destroyed and dispossessed by Joshua and the people of Israel. The Gibeonites recognizing their potential destruction was coming, deceived Joshua into believing that they, the Gibeonites, were not actually in the land. The Gibeonites deceptively persuaded Joshua to make a protective covenant with them. Joshua was deceived, and was being disobedient to God's command. Despite this, God continued to require Israel to fulfill this particular covenant generations later. Joshua should have never made the covenant. This improper covenant locked up Israel into situation that was not God's perfect will for them and later caused them problems because someone, King Saul, broke the covenant.

The Gibeonites should have been destroyed and yet God's will was changed for them as a result of an improper covenant. Israel should have been enjoying God's blessing and instead they were under God's judgment because of breaking this improper covenant. The solemn seriousness of covenant should be apparent. There may be no spiritual matter more serious to God. God expects covenants to be fulfilled and becomes the enforcer and judge of covenants, even improper covenants.

Christ Warns Not to Fence Yourself In

There is a strong warning from Christ not to make this kind of permanent commitment.³ While this is a neglected teaching in most American churches, it is still extremely important. Concerning covenant-like commitments between people, Christ says:

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Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT MAKE FALSE VOWS (oaths), BUT SHALL FULFILL YOUR VOWS (oaths) TO THE LORD.' "But I say to you, make no oath (swear) at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is THE CITY OF THE GREAT KING. Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your statement be, 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no'; and anything beyond these is of evil. Matthew 5:33-37⁴

While Christ does not use the word *covenant* in His warning and commandments here, it certainly has strong similarities in principle since a formal covenant requires the solemn commitments of vows or oaths. He first reminds of what the ancients say about vows:

Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT MAKE FALSE VOWS (oaths), BUT SHALL FULFILL YOUR VOWS (oaths) TO THE LORD.'

This is straightforward. This encouragement of the ancients is simply to be faithful to your vows (or oaths) and fulfill them. While this encouragement to be faithful to your commitments is certainly found in the New Testament, Christ draws a distinction about covenant-like commitments. He greatly modifies this statement of the ancients for New Covenant believers. Christ says:

...but I say to you, make no oath (or swear) at all...

What has changed? Instead of being encouraged to be faithful to our oaths, Christ encourages us not to make oaths at all. Christ's explanation of why a believer should not make a covenant-like commitment follows in this text but may not be entirely clear until it is studied in its entirety. This is because Christ's teaching about oaths is not generally taught in churches today and therefore is generally unfamiliar to most North American Christians. The reader may need to be patient through this discussion to determine exactly why Christ says this and what this has to do with our discussion about covenant making between believers.

Christ describes these commitments earlier as *vows* and now as *oaths* in the above passage. An alternative translation allows for the use of the word *swear* as well. Christ teaches us in this passage not to swear, make a vow or an oath. Christ uses these words interchangeably in the passage.

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Translators also seem to use them interchangeably substituting one for the other.

There is a good reason for the interchangeability of these words. These words are directly related in meaning. The particular Greek word translated *oath* above is *horkos*. This word is primarily equivalent to *herkos* meaning a *fence or enclosure, that which restrains a person*.⁵ The word translated above as *vow* is alternatively translated as *swear* by the King James Version. The Greek words used are *omnumi* and *omnuo*. These two related Greek words are both used of *affirming or denying by an oath*⁶. In other words, one Greek word describes an oath or vow itself and the other Greek word describes the process of making an oath or vow sometimes translated *swear or swearing or making an oath or vow*.

What does this somewhat technical explanation of these words mean for this discussion? This is what it means:

Vows, oaths, swearing or promises before God, are always part of any formal covenant-making. Even an informal covenant means promising something before God in violation of Christ's prohibition.

If a believer is forbidden to swear, vow or make an oath then he or she is forbidden to enter a covenant with another believer outside of marriage. In the next part of this discussion, explanation will be given of the reason why this is forbidden.

Again Christ says:

...make no oath at all either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is THE CITY OF THE GREAT KING.

In this statement by Christ, He notes the tendency of the religious leaders of His time to swear using places and objects somehow thinking that a particular oath could be more binding depending upon what object or place the oath was made. Specifically, Christ mentions three places (Heaven, Earth, and Jerusalem) and one physical object (your head) that were used by religious leaders to swear by. The false reasoning by religious leaders was something like this:

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Oaths made by swearing by Heaven are more sacred and therefore more binding than oaths made by swearing by Earth.

Christ strongly rejects this distinction between oaths. All oaths are the same to Christ. He reminds His hearers that the three places- Heaven, Earth, and Jerusalem- all have a connection with God and there is no difference effectively to God between swearing by them. An oath is an oath. All oaths are binding and demand complete faithfulness. Christ rejects the idea that any oath would demand less faithfulness for any reason. Why should a believer not make a covenant or a covenant-like commitment by virtue of a vow or oath? Simply this...

A believer once committed by an oath or a covenant-like commitment, he or she is required by God to be faithful to the commitment no matter what may come or how the commitment was made. Therefore, unconditional, inflexible commitments such as these to other human beings are extremely unwise. These “spiritual fences” are so solemn and inflexible that not even God will cross them for the benefit of the believer. A believer can actually locked up himself or herself against the will of God in one of these “spiritual enclosures”. Breaking a solemn commitment, even unwisely made, may invite God’s judgment on the believer.

These are good reasons why Christ commands believers not to make these kinds of commitments. Christ follows His explanation of the nature of oaths or vows by another reason not to make these commitments. Christ says:

Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black.

Christ reveals another reason not to solemnly commit in a covenant-like fashion. Christ reminds His hearers that swearing by their head is no better since they are powerless to make one hair white or black. The idea here is this:

Awareness of the powerlessness of human beings to change or to control the circumstances of life and the lack of knowledge of the future should result in them not committing themselves in inflexible ways. God continually reveals His will for a believer and those revelations often require important changes in the life of a believer. God’s will, circumstances, and people change, therefore commitments must have some flexibility in order to make sense when situations demand change.

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Covenant-like commitments lock up believers in “spiritual enclosures” that have no flexibility or responsiveness to the ongoing revelation of the will of God in a believer’s life.

People in covenant-like commitments are often unable to do what they fully intended to do initially. Circumstances often change, as do the people at both ends of covenant commitments. Therefore, oaths and covenants make no sense, outside of marriage, when the weaknesses and needs of human beings are considered.

Jesus doesn’t say we shouldn’t commit ourselves. He simply forbids covenant-like commitments. Christ says:

...but let your statement be, 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no'...

Our plain word should good enough. If we say something at all, then if we have integrity then it should be good enough. If we don’t have integrity, then no covenant commitment will be strong enough to make us faithful.

A simple statement is all that God requires. If anyone requires something greater, then they are requiring something that Christ has forbidden. They are failing to account for the potential situation that God might lead us in a different way or to different and empowering associations in the future. If we are not able to fulfill our more limited commitment for some reason, then we will not become covenant-breakers or victims of a foolish vow. Christ finishes His statement by this:

...and anything beyond these is of evil.

Anything beyond a simple statement of commitment is *of evil*. This is very strong. Translators often fail to note that this is not a reference to *evil* in a general sense but rather a reference to *the evil one, the devil*. Some translations properly add the word *one* to the end of this verse to make this clear.

There are two implications about Christ declaring that improperly committing yourself is *of the evil one*. First, Christ is declaring that demonic activity, the activity of the devil, is involved in getting us to spiritually fence ourselves in. The devil knows that God will not cross these *covenant fences* even if they interfere with His plan for believers. There is not a more effective way for the devil to hinder a committed believer than to get them into a *spiritual enclosure* like this. Secondly, to say more than a simple statement when

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making a commitment means that the ordinary statement is assumed to lack integrity and truthfulness. Like the religious leaders of Christ's day, some today think that a greater commitment like a covenant is required to insure faithfulness. However, by requiring more than simple flexible commitments of believers, they are declaring that ordinarily believers lack integrity, faithfulness and honesty without a covenant commitment. This is an accusation against Christians in itself. This accusation leads to encouraging believers to lock themselves into *spiritual enclosures* that Christ forbids and where God's perfect will may be thwarted in their lives.

Similar Warning from James

James, the Lord's brother, also confirms this truth by telling us this in the New Testament book that bears his name:

But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath; but let your yes be yes, and your no, no; so that you may not fall under judgment. James 5:12

This is almost identical to what Christ has already revealed. It contains the same prohibition against swearing or making oaths. It has a similar reason. Christ told us that making a covenant-like commitment such as an oath comes from *the evil one*. Here James tells us that doing so will make us fall under God's judgment. *Why?* Because God especially enforces and judges covenant-like commitments, it is better not to make them. Human inability to keep them for various reasons makes covenant-like commitments exceedingly dangerous to make.

Foolish Vows Produce Loss of Freedom

The practice of making covenant constitutes making a foolish vow. It locks up the believer in unchangeable situations that may need serious adjustment in the future. For instance, the commitment of covenant to a single person or a few usually requires us to commit financial resources unconditionally. This removes God from the equation as the one who should guide believers in all matters including their giving.

The commitment of covenant to a few also generally comes along with the theology of *covering*. What happens when a *covering* authority is in conflict with Scripture? What happens to a submitting believer who cannot resolve what he believes that God is saying with what the *covering* authority is saying? A covenant may mean that the conflict cannot be resolved without a serious *covenant-breaking*. *Covenant-breaking* would not occur if there

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were normal relationships of respect between believers honoring the New Covenant. Christ would be the authority over each person. Each believer would have to acknowledge that Christ's authority over a believer must take priority over any other authority arrangement. Of course, this can be resolved when no extra covenant that requires the believer to obey what he believes may be wrong or contrary to the revealed will of God.

Covenant-making in practice tends to make less mature believers servants to more mature believers by virtue of the *covering* teaching. The New Testament has principles that discourage a loss of freedom by becoming a servant to men or a man by virtue of covenant. That principle is revealed in 1 Corinthians Chapter 7 where Paul gives guidance about slavery and marriage.⁷ In those passages, Paul encourages remaining free from entangling relationships as the best course for Christians. He encourages those who became Christians as slaves to become free if they can. He encourages, but does not command, those who are unmarried to stay unmarried as a practical means to have the freedom to serve the Lord. He says in that context:

You were bought with a price, do not become the slaves of men. 1 Corinthians 7:23

Making unnecessary and improper covenantal commitments has a way of removing the freedom to serve Christ and all other believers and replaces that freedom by bondage to serve a single man. Since covenants are binding, what began as voluntary service to a particular man might become involuntarily service, a kind of spiritual slavery, as time goes on and situations change.

Warning in Communion

Taking communion, the Lord's Supper, is an acknowledgement that all believers sharing the New Covenant. Making covenant with a few when we are already in covenant with all believers requires us to show preference of one set of believers over others in violation of New Testament encouragement to unity and not showing any preference.

Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians severely corrects the Corinthians Christians for showing preference for some believers over others in their eating together. Paul thought it was a serious enough violation of the New Covenant to invite God's judgment on them. Here are Paul's words:

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...I do not praise you, because you come together not for the better but for the worse. For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that divisions exist among you; and in part, I believe it. For there must also be factions among you, in order that those who are approved may have become evident among you. 1 Corinthians 11:17-19

Here is the context for Paul's teaching on communion. Factions and divisions exist in the church. Of course, *covenant-making* with a few Christians would have the effect of creating a faction within the Church. Those making covenant with each other are often blind to the division that they have created. After all, they are the insiders. They are the ones benefiting from this preferential relationship. Often, only those Christians who are being excluded experience the pain and problem of division when they try to relate to these Christians in preferential relationship. Paul continues his correction of the Corinthian church by writing:

Therefore when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper, for in your eating each one takes his own supper first; and one is hungry and another is drunk. What! Do you not have houses in which to eat and drink? Or do you despise the church of God, and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? In this I will not praise you. 1 Corinthians 11: 20-22

Here the facts of the biblical context take shape: Poor believers are being excluded from eating with other more prosperous believers. A faction has formed over economic status in this situation. Any faction by definition discriminates against outsiders, either overtly or more subtly. Any Christian faction existing for any reason is wrong, particularly if a covenant has been made that creates the faction. Paul continues the context by explaining that we are in the New Covenant together and that factions of any type severely contradict that important truth.

For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it, and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me." In the same way He took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes. 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

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This is pretty straightforward. The communion reminds us of what Christ has done for us. The sharing of the bread of His body and the sharing of the cup symbolically reminds us that we all share together in the sacrifice and body of Christ and the benefits of the New Covenant. There are many other truthful things that can be properly drawn from the passage above. However, Paul focuses our attention on the seriousness of taking this communion improperly. He writes:

Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself, if he does not judge the body rightly. For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. 1 Corinthians 11:27-30

Paul writes that we can take communion in an *unworthy* manner. Since the context has revealed factions existing, it is clear that he is writing about how factions create a situation where we take communion *unworthily*. Some have thought and taught that this unworthiness relates to *unforgiveness* but that is not what the context reveals. The context relates to *showing preference* to some believers over others.

Paul also says that factions make a believer *guilty of the body and blood of the Lord*. How can a believer become *guilty of the body and blood of the Lord*? We become guilty by showing preference for some believers over others. In doing this, we minimize and forget what Christ has done for other believers in giving them His broken body and shed blood just as He has for us. We ignore that the entire Church is the body of Christ not just the faction that we know well.

Showing preference invites God's judgment according to Paul. He says that some believers are *weak* because of these factions. Some believers are *sick* because of they have embraced factions. Some believers even *die prematurely* because they do not *discern the Lord's Body* in all believers. *The danger of making a secondary covenant should be apparent*. Christ will judge these kind of improper commitments that require us to show favoritism. Paul continues his correction by writing:

But if we judged ourselves rightly, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord in order that we may not be condemned along with the world. So then, my brethren, when you come

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together to eat, wait for one another. If anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, so that you may not come together for judgment. And the remaining matters I shall arrange when I come. 1 Corinthians 11: 31-34

Paul tells us that we can avoid such judgments by simply judging ourselves in relation with other believers. We must treat everyone equally as sharers in the New Covenant. We must not show favoritism or exclusive commitment. We must not form factions by making covenant commitments to a few.

This should be clear. A covenant made with other believers requires us to show preference for those particular believers. Not to show preference would be a violation of the covenant we have made with those other believers. *Making covenant* when we are already in covenant with all believers creates divisions in the Body of Christ because of preferential treatment of certain believers. Christ will correct such divisions in His Body.

Arguments for Covenant

Those that *make covenant* argue that accountability comes from such covenants. However, accountability is not connected to *making covenant* in Scripture nor is making additional covenants necessary to produce good fruit in Christian relationships. Honesty is what actually produces accountability. A dozen covenants cannot replace or produce honesty. The basic integrity of a Christian should be enough to produce accountability and proper relationships. This is true particularly as covenant is recognized as *already* existing between believers by virtue of the previously existing New Covenant. Christian ministry should emphasize the existing covenantal relationships and not require other covenants to be made in violation of Christ's teaching. To require an additional covenant is not only forbidden but reveals unbelief about the faithfulness of believers without such a solemn commitment.

Christ is the covenant-maker and He controls relationships between believers. Christ may move us from one situation to another. Therefore, our covenant commitment to Christ is unconditional and requires complete obedience but our relationships to others is conditional and subordinate to our relationship to Christ. Making a covenant with a human being improperly and dangerously changes this. It removes a freedom of association with all believers that God wishes us to have. It is also sometimes necessary to leave a relationship due to serious sin, abuse or false doctrine of another

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believer or a leader. We must have this liberty to deal with such unfortunate events.

We sometimes need to associate ourselves with other ministry gifts in order to continue our own spiritual growth. God never intended for us to receive everything that we need to serve Him from a single source that we covenanted with. However, covenant is so serious that God requires us to be faithful to it even if it cuts across and damages His perfect will and desire to bless us through other ministries. If ministries require a covenant with believers before allowing close association, it is extremely shortsighted and will lead to a destructive tearing of the relationship when it is appropriate for the believer to make a new close association. No leader should hold another believer in such bondage.

What Now? We Have Already Made Covenant

For those who have not made a solemn commitment such as a covenant, the answer is simple. Do not make one. Marriage, of course, is the one and only exception. What we have to advise here does not apply to marriage. Christ has encouraged marriage and has severely discouraged divorce except under very special conditions of sexual unfaithfulness. What we advise here is strictly for those who have made an improper covenant with another believer. So what should you do? Here is some humble advice.

Repent and Ask Forgiveness.

Repent and ask forgiveness of God and the person that you made covenant with. Since there are always two sides to a covenant, forgiveness is necessary from the other person who is in the covenant with you. This is simply because you sinned against Christ and involved this other person in your sin whether or not you understood this was wrong. The other person may not see this as sin however. Nevertheless, you need to ask their forgiveness.

Explain Your New Understanding.

Explain that you misunderstood what the Bible taught on this subject but are not rejecting them personally. This written refutation of this teaching may be help in that endeavor. Possibly, you will face hostility and argument about this refutation and your new understanding. You must stand your ground without rejecting the person. You may begin to experience from the other person why you should have never made this kind of commitment by the negative response of the other person involved.

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Ask for Release from Covenant.

After you explain in detail why you wish to be released from the covenant, hopefully you will receive a positive response. If you receive a gracious response and are released without a severe disruption in the relationship, then you are truly blessed. Sometimes, however, a heartfelt release does not come quickly and recriminations may begin. It is possible that you will have to appeal repeatedly on the basis of the New Testament for a season before you are released. God cannot release you; only the other believer in covenant with you can release you. If you do not get a clear release, then your obligation is to continue to fulfill the covenant as best you can without sinning against God. Of course, the death of a believer in a covenant releases the other believer but this is not the only hope of release in a situation like this.

Hopefully after prayer and a season of persistence, the other party in the covenant will release you. Sometimes, they will release you simply because they now consider you *spoiled* by your new understanding and will not want you to *spoil* others that they are teaching. Persons who strongly teach a heresy will most always consider the heresy *an advanced revelation* from God. When you reject that heresy, they are likely to think that you are rejecting God and ultimately rejecting them. This may not be true but if they sincerely release you, even out of misunderstanding, you are released.

Prepare for Difficulty Before and After Released

If you are released, then you have regained the freedom to serve Christ. However, the consequences of making this covenant and now breaking it may be evident by a difficult if not impossible relationship with this other believer.

Coming out of this *spiritual enclosure* will often invite accusations from the enemy. Often the believer's conscience will register sin, faithlessness and disloyalty. This is normal for anyone coming out of a committed relationship.

Some accusations may come through the other person who was in covenant and make the situation worse. Unfortunately, there is some truth in these accusations. You have broken covenant and have sinned against the person you were in covenant with. Forgiveness is genuinely needed. On the other hand, keeping the improper covenant also will cause you to sin against Christ and to disobey His commands. *There is no good news here.* You have a choice between these two difficult situations. You must serve and obey Christ by seeking release despite the consequences to the

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covenantal relationship. This is simply because the consequences of not freely serving Christ are immensely worse.

What you gain by breaking an improper covenant is regaining your freedom to fulfill your destiny with Christ. That is really good news. The only good news about making an improper covenant is that forgiveness from God is real because of what Christ has done for us.

Endnotes

¹ There is one reference to the enemies of Paul making an oath (swearing) not to eat or drink until they killed him. Of course, they broke the oath since they did not succeed.

² There are some who think that the Greek word translated *covenant-breakers* in the King James Version in Romans 1:31 offers support for the practice of making covenant between believers. It is unlikely that they would see this verse as support for this practice if they didn't already have this doctrine in their minds and have some desire to find support for it. There are several reasons why this verse offers no support for this doctrine. First of all, this Greek word is in a context where Paul is describing people who have rejected God. In other words, the verse is not describing Christian believers at all. Secondly, discouraging *covenant-breaking* is certainly not the same thing as encouraging *covenant-making*. For example, encouraging people to faithfully keep their marital vows is not the same thing as encouraging them to marry. Not to marry at all is a wiser choice for some people. If they marry, wisely or not, they should keep their vows faithfully regardless of how they married. A *covenant-breaker* in this context (about those who reject God) could be a wicked person who breaks his or her marital vows. To say that this verse means that believers should make covenants with each other requires ignoring the verse's context about God-rejecting people, misapplying the verse to believers and then completely reversing the verse's meaning from discouraging covenant-breaking to encouraging covenant-making. Again, there is no New Testament example of believers making covenant or encouragement to do so simply because believers are already in covenant through Jesus Christ.

³ Of course, this does not apply to marriage. Marriage is an extremely serious commitment but Christ commends marriage by His specific teaching and by His presence at a marriage where He performed His first miracle.

⁴ Words in parenthesis are alternative translations from King James Version added by author.

⁵ Vines, pg. 395 "Oath"

⁶ Vines, pg. 1111, "Swear, Sworn"

⁷ In Christ's time, a person could become a slave, an indentured servant, voluntarily by covenanting for service with a master for a number of years. In general, this was done for financial reasons to pay off a debt or simply because there was no other recourse for survival. Occasionally, a slave, a bondservant, chose to

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remain in slavery for various reasons usually out of love and respect for his master. The New Testament encourages us to be bondservants to Christ out of love for Him but to be free from slavery to all other men. This would include staying free from spiritual slavery to an authoritarian leader or a group of authoritarian leaders. We must remain free in order to be able to serve all believers.

This is available as a printed booklet available for order on the All Nations Ministries Website. The file was posted in free files area of that website.

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