

The Obligations of Covenant

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The title of today's bible study is "The Obligations of Covenant." Still on the same theme that I began last week. A covenant can be nothing more than a deal. We talked about that last time. It can define a boundary between two men's property. It can define the ownership of a well. It can even deed property from one man to another. We're all familiar with this type of — even in the modern world, there are deeds of covenant. You know, there are covenants that are arrived at. You'll find echoes of this kind of usage in the bible. And what is really interesting is, in effect, God, who is the owner of everything, deeded specifically a plot of land to Abraham. Now I call it a plot of land. Some plot. This plot of land ran all the way from the Nile River to the Euphrates River. It says in Genesis 15:1 "After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am your shield, and your exceeding great reward." I would call the piece of land that Abraham is going to get 'an exceeding great reward.' "And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if you be able to number them: and he said to him, So shall your seed be. And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness. And he said to him, I am the LORD that brought you out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give you this land to inherit it. And he said, LORD God, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?"

I mean, this is an interesting little aside here, but first of all, he says I'm going to give you a piece of land. Well, for most of us that would be enough. But, you know, if you're going to pass title of a land from one person to another person there has to be some act of transfer. Something has to be done. You know, there has to be — in real estate contracts you have to have a consideration, for example, as a part of the arrangement, there has to be a date on the contract. All this stuff has to be there for the formal transfer of real estate. So Abraham, I think in a way, is asking how do I know I'm going to inherit this? How will I know that it is mine? "And he said to him, 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 to him all these, and divided them in the middle, and laid each piece one against another: but the birds divided he not." And Abraham kept the fowls off of them all day long until evening. "And when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram; and, see, an horror of great darkness fell on him. And he said to Abram— "He passed through between these, there was a smoking lamp and a burning furnace that passed through, symbolic of God meeting Abraham between the halves of these animals. This is an ancient, ancient form of the establishment of a covenant. The sealing of the deal. The setting it all together. It's far more, of course, than a handshake. It involves a blood covenant, the shedding of the blood of

the animals and animal sacrifice in the process. “ And he said to Abram, Know of a surety that your seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not their's, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance. And you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall come here again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full.”

Now, the Amorites were among the people – not the only one – but they were among the people who actually were in possession of the land at this time. And you know the old saying ‘possession is nine-tenths of the law’ and there seems to be in God’s mind a necessity of these people reaching a certain level, a certain level of decadence before it’s really justifiable to evict them from the land. And so the process of time, the deed was going to be established today with Abraham. But he would not actually inherit the land; his seed would inherit the land many, many years later, after the iniquity of the Amorites was full. It’s kind of a strange thing to us who are used to problems being solved in thirty minutes or at least an hour on television, to think in plans that reach out for ten years, fifty years or 100 years or maybe even 400 years, right? We just don’t think that way. But you encounter that very commonly in the bible. “ But in the fourth generation they shall come here again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full. And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces. In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, To your seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates: The Kenites, and the Kenizzites, and the Kadmonites, And the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Rephaims, And the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.”

This property was deeded to Abraham from the owner, and from that time forward it was his, but God was not going to dispossess all these squatters who were on the land until certain things had happened, til time had passed. The property ran all the way from the great river in Egypt, that is the Nile, all the way to the river Euphrates, and all these people who were listed here were squatters who were going to have to be evicted from that land. It’s a sobering thought, you know, that has some relevance all the way down to the 20th century. The Jordanians and the Iraqis are today squatters on that land. Who holds the deed to the land? Abraham and Abraham’s children. That’s there the deed is on that land.

Now, we think of a covenant in terms of promises, agreements, deals, contracts, laws, that sort of thing. I’ve added the idea that covenants have to do with arrangements, with dispositions of things, and with relationships. And that they define the relationships between people. Now there is no question that a covenant in the bible has to do with creating new relationships and defining relationships. That much is very clear. Now, one thing that all of these things I’ve mentioned about covenants above—that is, agreements, deals, contracts, laws, relationships, dispositions and arrangements—they all have one thing in common. They all entail obligations. Now this is something which I think, hasn’t been properly

explored in the things that I have heard in discussions about covenants and so forth in the past. They all entail obligations.

Now you know from the old western movies that whenever you get Clint Eastwood on one horse and the Indian chief on the other horse and they cut the palm of their hand and they slap their hands together and become blood brothers, that they have taken on obligations to one another. It isn't just, you know, idle promises. They have actually said these are the obligations that we are going to fulfill. If I remember the movie correctly, which is *The Outlaw Josie Wales*, he actually outlines for him what will be the obligations that he will take upon himself and what obligations he thinks the Indians should take upon themselves. The idea that you see expressed in that, as strange in some ways that it may seem, was not an uncommon thing to happen among the Indians tribes and so forth. Sometimes their covenants are deals were actually established as a result of blood brotherhoods that they have made. They all entail obligations.

In making these deals with Abraham, it's plain that God took on certain obligations, isn't it? He had an obligation to evict the Amorites and all the rest of these people and to give this land to Abraham. He had an obligation to bless Abraham and his seed because he promised to do so. You make promises, you've got obligations. Well, it's plain that God took on obligations. Here's the questions though: were there any obligations for Abraham in this deal? What did he had to do? What did God expect of Abraham? Well, the obvious answer is Abraham is to suppose to obey God's commandments. In other words, if you obey my commandments, that's your side of the deal; my side of the deal is I'm going to do that. That's true enough. But I'm going to ask you to think just a little deeper than this and go back to Genesis 26:1. Abraham is dead and gone. Now we're dealing with his son. " And there was a famine in the land, beside the first famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went to Abimelech king of the Philistines to Gerar. And the LORD appeared to him, and said, Go not down into Egypt; dwell in the land which I shall tell you of." Now I don't know what's at work here, but it may very well be I don't want you to abandon the property I've given to you. Don't go to Egypt. Stay here. Keep your tent stakes in this ground. " Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you, and will bless you; for to you, and to your seed, I will give all these countries, and I will perform the oath which I swore to Abraham your father; And I will make your seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give to your seed all these countries; and in your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed."

Now notice what he says " Because that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws" Do you see what I'm driving at here at all? What came first, the covenant or the obedience? Obedience came first. Abraham had already established himself as a man of character. He had already demonstrated his obedience to God's law before this deal was cut. So, you know, Abraham's obedience preceded the covenant. It was the causative factor in the generation of the covenant and it was not an obligation of the covenant itself. That's an interesting way of looking at this. Now don't get me wrong, disobedience would have killed the deal. I would never for a moment

say that's not true. But the obedient way of life was already established when Abraham was getting nothing in return for it. Now, think about this, there was nothing special coming to Abraham. The fact is the obedience to God's law carries its own reward. What's the reward? It's a good life. It's things work. If you break the law, things don't work. If you obey the law, things do work, that it actually tilts the table in your favor. That keeping the law of God perfectly, one does good things for one's self. That what's you do. For the perfect obedience to the law of God is essentially an act of enlightened self-interest. And you are nothing for yourself as a result of that. The obedience was important in it, though, because it demonstrated a man who understood what was of value, he was a man of character, he knew who God was, he knew right, he knew wrong, and he would teach his children the difference between right and wrong.

However, were there any new obligations that came with this deal? Did Abraham have obligations that settled on him as a result of the deal God cut with him? Apart from the fact that he had been keeping the law of God all of his life without any deal. Okay, look again in verse 4. He says "And I will make your seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give to your seed all these countries; and in your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." Now most people take this as a prophecy – this last little thing. And it surely is a prophecy. That in the time to come the nations of the world would be blessed by the descendants of Abraham. And, of course, the New Testament makes it very clear that we're talking, in this case, about also Jesus Christ who is the blessing to come upon all nations in that. But, when you think about it, this statement *'in your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed,'* doesn't that imply a responsibility? In other words, if you don't as a people, act in a certain way, then the blessings would not come upon other nations. They would not pass through to other nations unless you carry out the responsibility somehow of doing it. In your seed shall all the nations of the earth of the blessed.' Now how would that work? Well, there's a classic illustration in the book of Genesis. It's found back in the 14th chapter. Genesis 14 " And it came to pass in the days of Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of nations; 2That these made war with Bera king of Sodom, and with Birsha king of Gomorrah..." Just another Middle East war going on back there between relatively small kingdoms of men. " And the vale of Siddim was full of slime pits; and the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, and fell there; and they that remained fled to the mountain." They all ran off. Well, And they took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their victuals, and went their way. And they took Lot, Abram's brother's son, who dwelled in Sodom, and his goods, and departed."

Now I don't know if you've ever thought about that or not, but when you have 300 trained fighting men who were born in your own household as a part of your retinue of your wealth, this indicates a man of substantial wealth in any society. He could actually go out to the field among his men of fighting age only and muster a battalion of men to go out and fight a battle on this particular occasion out of his own servants. Not counting the women servants, not counting the kiddos, not counting the people who were too old to fight, and so forth. Abraham was a man of considerable substance. Well, "And he divided himself against

them [he divided his armies in two], he and his servants, by night, and smote them, and pursued them to Hobah, which is on the left hand of Damascus. 16And he brought back all the goods, and also brought again his brother Lot, and his goods, and the women also, and the people. And the king of Sodom went out to meet him after his return from the slaughter of Chedorlaomer, and of the kings that were with him, at the valley of Shaveh, which is the king's dale." And the king in verse 21 says to Abraham "Give me the persons [I just want the women back] *you take the goods to yourself.*" The man realized that he'd lost everything and there was no earthly reason why, since Abraham went and got it, that he shouldn't have it. "And Abram said to the king of Sodom, I have lift up my hand to the LORD, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth, That I will not take from a thread even to a shoelatchet, and that I will not take any thing that is yours, lest you should say, I have made Abram rich: Save only that which the young men have eaten, and the portion of the men which went with me, Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre; let them take their portion." Now here's my question for you: Was the King fo Sodom blessed by the very existence and presence in his part of the world, of a man named Abram? Sure he was. He got his people back, he got some of his goods back, whereas, in fact he could have lost absolutely everything.

Now why do I use this as an example? Well, because I really think that the children of Abraham to be expected to be this kind of a blessing in the world. In other words, they were to be an active blessing. That they were to be looking toward their neighbors and be concerned about their neighbor's welfare. That they should be a defense and a shield to the weak people who lived nearby them, or to people who were involved with them. That they should care about the neighboring nations around about them. That they should export good will to these people. And, I think, a great deal more than that. In Genesis 22:17 God says to Abraham originally " That in blessing I will bless you, and in multiplying I will multiply your seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is on the sea shore; and your seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; And in your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because you have obeyed my voice." So our obligations then, if we are God's people, is to be a blessing and a protection to people in other parts of the world.

And I can't help but think, here we are now in the 20th century and Europe is under the jackboots of Nazi Germany and who is it that comes to her aide but the United States, Great Britain and those of us who stand up and fight for the people of the continent of Europe? Who freed the French? Who freed the Italians? Who freed the Belgians? Who freed the Dutch? It was our people who did that. Were we a blessing to the people and to the nations of Europe and of Asia who were under the heel of the axis powers? Sure we were. And I tell you I really believe that this is precisely the sort of obligation that God laid on Abraham and his children. The covenant is a wonderful thing; it's got wonderful blessings. It's got great gifts that God gives to you. But those gifts – not one gift – ever comes to you from God that does not carry with it an obligation. Think about it. Nothing comes from God to you that does not carry with it an obligation. There is also, you know, as I've already mentioned, that in this is promise, is a promise of Christ who is the only really true blessing to the world. But that's of a piece with the whole obligation of this covenant.

Now Paul, writing to the Galatians makes mention of that particular aspect of it in Galatians 3:7 “Know you therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel to Abraham, saying, In you shall all nations be blessed. So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.” The whole idea is that those people in subsequent generations who would receive and carry on the faith of Abraham, would have the blessings of Abraham. Later in Galatians 3:14 “ That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. I speak after the manner of men; Though it be but a man's covenant, yet if it be confirmed, no man cancels, or adds thereto.” And it's important to understand this because once you have taken and involved yourself in a covenant, you have taken on a new relationship with the people concerned. And that relationship has obligations. Jesus actually told his disciples, you know, ‘I'm not calling you servants anymore; I'm calling you friends.’ In another place he refers to his disciples and to all of us who would come along after them, as his brothers. Now when you're a kinsman, when you're a brother, you have got certain obligations to your brother. I don't care if he is a black sheep. You've got certain responsibilities that you have to live up to as a family member. You have to take care of these things and follow through on them. It is expected.

He said “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He said not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to your seed, which is Christ. And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot cancel, that it should make the promise of none effect.” Did you hear that? “The covenant that was confirmed before of God in Christ...” Now what are those two words doing in there? What possible relevance do they have to the discussion? Because wasn't it just God that made the covenant with Abraham and that's that. No, apparently not. He says *“the covenant was made by God in Christ.”* The implication of it is that the one who actually went between the two pieces of the animal that had been split was none other than the one you and I today would call Jesus Christ. That it was Christ who entered into the covenant with Abraham in the first place. It was Christ who made the promises. It was Christ who took on the obligations. It was Christ to whom Abraham owed the obligations and all of us in subsequent years who follow the faith of Abraham take upon ourselves the same kind of obligations.

Israel of old had an obligation that came with their covenant. They were suppose to be a beacon and a witness of God in the world. Now candidly, if you've read very much of the prophets, you begin to realize over the process of time, that the failure of Israel was enormous in God's eyes. It may have been greater than you first might realize the failure of Israel might have been because of the very fact — well, if you'll turn back to Deuteronomy 4, I want to read you a section here that underlines as clearly as anything could possibly do so, what is at stake in all of this. In Deuteronomy 4:5, Moses speaking to Israel says “Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should do so in the land where you go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them; for this

is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations...” Notice this. It’s not just a matter of having wisdom and understand. It’s wisdom and understanding in the sight of somebody. And it isn’t just enough to live your Christian life. You know this. Jesus made this as clear as anyone could possibly make it. He said you don’t light a candle and put it under a bushel. You put it up on a candlestick where people can see it. And that’s exactly what God intends to do with his people. He says this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations. Why is that important? He says “which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.” In other words, people in the world were suppose to look at Israel as a beacon. As a light. As a source of wisdom and knowledge and truth. They were to learn from them. And as a result of learning from them, they might come to know God. You never thought about that, did you? I mean, maybe you did, but that Israel’s job from the beginning was evangelistic. It was the evangelism of witness and testimony, of living the life and having the world see the results of living the life among their people. That was what Israel was suppose to do. “For what nation is there so great, who has God so near to them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call on him for? And what nation is there so great, that has statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?” I mean the law that Israel was given in that world at that time, was staggering in its implications. In its wisdom, in the knowledge it conveyed and in the strength that it gave to a nation that had them.

“Only take heed to yourself, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things which your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life: but teach them your sons, and your sons' sons.” Now, if you’ll take your concordance sometime when you’re doing a bible study, take a look at the words like ‘alien’ and ‘strangers’ and all this kind of thing and go back and read in the law what the attitude of Israel was suppose to be toward non-Israelites, toward Gentiles and you’ll come across a scripture that says *“you shall love the stranger because you were a stranger in the land of Egypt.”* And you’ll find all kinds of references to the stranger and how the stranger is to be included. There was certain things that the stranger could not do. For that matter, there were certain things that every Israelite could not do. For example, enter the Holy of Holies. But there was, in general, a desire on God’s part that the stranger would become a part of the commonwealth of his people. That the strangers would come to know God. That they would become to be obedient to God. That they would come to see his commandments and laws and realize how wise and gracious they were. So that the law of God is very explicit: it is inclusive, it is not exclusive. And what is really strange is that in the process of time, the Judaism that we find when we come to the New Testament is exclusive; not inclusive. The Gentiles are given the stiff arm. They are kept out. They are warned not to pass beyond a certain place in entering into the temple. Jews were not to sit down and eat with Gentiles. They were actually treating the Gentiles as pariahs, as though a Gentile was an unclean person.

Remember the whole vision that God gave to Peter on the rooftop that day. Peter’s evaluation of it was this: God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean. Something that the Jews up to that time had definitely come to do. Peter, himself,

had gotten involved in that same approach to things when he was in Antioch. And so you see that exclusiveness had entered into to where no longer were they a witness and a light and admired by the world. The Jews were despised by the world because their exclusive-ism, their narrowness of mind and heart, and they were not the beacon they were suppose to be. So you understand, this is part of the obligation that God laid upon Israel. And so when you go to the prophets and you read of the failure of Israel, you need to understand that in God's eyes changes are the greatest failure of all was the failure to be his witness.

In Isaiah 43:1 " But now thus said the LORD that created you, O Jacob, and he that formed you, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed you, I have called you by your name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you: when you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle on you." Now this is strong stuff. You know, when you have cut a deal with someone who can do this for you, you've got a good deal going for yourself. " For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior: I gave Egypt for your ransom..." You know, I just sold Egypt down the river to get you out of there. Killed the first born of every family to get you out of there. "Ethiopia and Sheba for you. Since you were precious in my sight, you have been honorable, and I have loved you: therefore will I give men for you, and people for your life. Fear not: for I am with you: I will bring your seed from the east, and gather you from the west;" You just don't have to be afraid. What you've got to do, though, is to continue to be a light. You've got to hold fast. You've got to stand up and be seen, but don't be afraid. I'll be with you. "I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back: bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth; Even every one that is called by my name: for I have created him for my glory, I have formed him; yes, I have made him. Bring forth the blind people that have eyes, and the deaf that have ears. Let all the nations be gathered together, and let the people be assembled: who among them can declare this, and show us former things? let them bring forth their witnesses, that they may be justified: or let them hear, and say, It is truth."

Go ahead; get all these nations. Let them bring their witnesses and tell them. Then he says this " You are my witnesses, said the LORD, and my servant whom I have chosen: that you may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me." You realize what he is saying to these people? He's saying I called you, I brought you out, I'm with you because I want you to be my witnesses. I want you to testify to the world about me. Where would you have to go to find a clearer statement of the necessity of evangelism. What are you witnessing? It's the good news. That's what evangelism is. The good news about God. That he cares, that he has laws, that he has a way, that he's got a plan and he's working it out. " I, even I, am the LORD; and beside me there is no savior. I have declared, and have saved, and I have showed, when there was no strange god among you: therefore you are my witnesses, said the LORD, that I am God." Okay...did Israel have obligations under this deal? Yes they did. They had an obligation to be witnesses for God. They had an obligation to be a beacon, a light. They had an obligation to be the kind of a nation that would be envied and admired and respected by the world.

They had the obligation to be kind of a nation that the world did not have to fear, but that the world could actually admire, respect, and trust because they had their neighbor's best interest at heart. That actually they were to be a model nation in the world of what God could do with a people. And their failure, then, was all the greater.

One of the strangest things, I think, about some Christian belief systems is, that they seem to feel, as far as I can tell, no sense of obligation. Religion is a fire escape. It's a ladder to heaven. It's a way of getting out of your troubles. You know, it's simply for them. They believe they are under the new covenant, but there is no sense of the obligations that come along with **any** covenant. Underline the word 'any,' any covenant has obligations. Obligations to God. Obligations to your neighbor. Obligations to the world. Now, you've read the New Testament; you tell me. Aren't the teachings of Jesus replete with obligations to all these? Obligations to your neighbors? Obligations to your brothers in the church? Obligations to the world at large? To be a witness? To testify? To help them when they're in trouble? To give food to the hungry? Clothing to the naked? To visit those people who are in prison? Isn't this an obligation that is laid up us by Jesus Christ along with the new covenant? Sure it is. It's part of the deal. And it's a mystery to me, as clear as Jesus' teachings are on this, how come people miss it?

And when it comes time to partake of the symbols of Jesus' broken body and Jesus' shed blood, anyone should be able to see quickly enough that this is a covenant ceremony. If you study this at all, have any awareness of the background, the old Semitic covenants, as I've told you before, had to do with blood. The original ones, the oldest ones, I think, they cut themselves and each person drank some of the other person's blood. Later on, they shared the blood of an animal. Later on, they only allowed their blood to mingle together from cuts. Or they shared the blood of the same animal. In Israel you weren't permitted to drink blood and so in their cases, it was often a sacrificial meal where they animal was killed, sacrificed and then the flesh of the animal was eaten by both people. But, again, it is a covenant meal. The idea of it is entering into, sealing the covenant, setting up the deal, having a formalizing of the deal so that we understand each other and we know what the covenant is. And so when Jesus comes along and says "unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you" his audience understood what he was talking about really. There were those who wanted to make an issue out of it, but it's clear enough, he's talking about entering into a covenant. And so, consequently, in Matthew 26:27 "And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink you all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins."

Now I've already explained to you that the Greek word for testament is the word the Hebrews use for covenant. That's the Greek word they use for covenant. The Septuagint version, when the time came to translate covenant, they used *ditheke*, the Greek word that is here translated testament. What Jesus is saying "*This is my blood of the new covenant.*" And whenever you partake of that, you are either entering into if it's the first, or you are renewing the covenant that you originally made with Jesus Christ, symbolically, at that time. And

everybody knows that the new covenant is a personal covenant. Right? It's a personal covenant between the individual and Christ. Then why, if that's the case, is the Passover or the Lord's Supper, not a personal ceremony that you do at home? You know, the original Passover was one that you did do at home. The original Passover, you killed the lamb, you ate it inside the doors of your own house. You might be in somebody else's house too; you might have shared it together, but it was something that you did at home. Why did Paul set up the ceremony concerning the Last Supper not as a ceremony in the home, but is something we do together. Why did Jesus not send his disciples all off to do it by themselves? Why did the twelve do it, all of them together? Listen to Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:20 "When you come together therefore into one place, [you might want to underline that because by this time, the church's custom in the observance of the Lord's Supper was to come together in one place; not to take it severally and separately at home] this is not to eat the Lord's supper. For in eating every one takes before other his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken."

Now you notice the way I emphasize the inflections of that. What Paul is not attempting to create a new name for this service, he isn't trying to call it the Lord's Supper. What he's trying to say is it's not the Lord's Supper you're eating, it's your own supper you're eating is the contrast he's trying to draw. And later in verse 23 he says "For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered to you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do you, as oft as you drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as you eat this bread, and drink this cup, you do show the Lord's death till he come." And then there's verse 33 "Wherefore, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait one for another.." Notice this is not a home ceremony; this is something we come together to do if we can. "And if any man hunger, let him eat at home; that you come not together to condemnation. And the rest will I set in order when I come."

Now when you think about it, it makes perfect sense that we should come together to observe the Lord's Supper. When you get married, you create a new relationship with one person, right? Wrong. You create a relationship with one person and her family or his family. You don't just marry a woman; you marry her family. You don't just marry a guy; you marry his family. And the obligations – this is important to understand – the obligations are all there just as though they were your own brothers, your own mothers, and your own fathers. If a man takes his wife and enters into a relationship with his wife, he takes on a relationship with the family so that when her father is sick, he has to treat that man the same way he would if his own father was sick. These are the kinds of obligations that come our way when we get married. When we enter into a new relationship with one person, we have taken on a much broader relationship than that. I think everybody understands that, and, by and large, believes that.

Now when you entered into the relationship with Jesus Christ, you also enter into a relationship with all his relatives. Some of whom who may be a little bit unsavory. At least seem so to you. That's too bad. You see, every covenant contains not only promises, it contains obligations. And so that whenever you enter into this covenant – on Tuesday night you sit down and you partake of the symbols of Christ shed blood and of his broken body, you should realize that you are not merely renewing your relationship with Christ; you are renewing your relationship with one another. And you have obligations to one another as a result of that relationship which the covenant produces. Notice the word 'obligations.' We are obliged to one another because of the relationship that we share with Jesus Christ and he expects us to act that way. When we renew it with him Tuesday night, we also renew the covenant with one another along with all its obligations.

Finally, 1 Corinthians 12:20 “ But now are they many members, yet but one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of you: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. No, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary: And those members of the body, which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness. For our comely parts have no need: but God has tempered the body together, having given more abundant honor to that part which lacked.” And I've heard some of the lamest sermons down through the years of people saying well, you know our toes are kind of ugly and they are the weaker part of the body, but they are necessary and we enclose them in leather, and so forth...well, okay, I can accept that as kind of analogy, but we had a baby here just before the bible study, guess where the absolute total focus of attention was for quite a little while around here. It was that baby. The most feeble person in the room. And in a family it's that way. The most feeble person in the family gets all the attention, all the honor, pictures are taken, spread all over the place. People act like idiots talking baby talk. You know, everything works this way right around to this child. The most feeble one among us. And you know, it really should be that way in the church. That those among us we are feeble, those among us we are weak, those of us who are less able, should become and should be the focus of more attention for that very fact in order that we would be a balanced body of Jesus Christ.

“For our comely parts have no need: but God has tempered the body together, having given more abundant honor to that part which lacked. That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it.” This is the obligation. Church membership – I don't know what people think about sometimes. “Well, I'll just join this church over here. I'll join this church over there.” But, the church is more than something that you just join like that. A church is a body of believers. A church is the body of Christ. It is a body which belongs to Christ and we're suppose to become one. We're suppose to be like the interlocking pieces of a puzzle. That once they are put together, will not come apart so very easily. And so that we share in the things that we do, and whenever one becomes a member of a church, one takes on

obligations because it is, in a sense, a covenant relationship. A covenant relationship that is symbolized every year when we come together and we partake of the shed blood and the broken body of Jesus Christ.

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