

Leadership And Covenants (Part Five)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Forerunner, "Personal," July-August 2016

With this article, we will begin to delve into the Bible's first covenant to learn the characteristics of leadership God desires to produce in His children. Recall that a leader is first a follower, so it is of critical importance that we follow the patterns God Himself laid out for us, which is what Jesus did in accomplishing the work set before Him. We cannot go wrong if we walk in His steps, if we imitate Him.

The covenants are designed to provide an overview of the way God wants us to relate to Him and to His creation. It helps to understand in simple terms what He is looking for, which will go a long way toward developing what He desires to see in us. At this point, we should not focus on specific qualities because nobody knows exactly what challenges each individual must meet and overcome on the path God has chosen for him or her. Instead, we should think more generally, which will allow room to include more specific traits later.

God desires faithfulness in meeting our responsibilities as disciples of Jesus Christ. If we could fulfill our responsibilities sinlessly, it would glorify Him tremendously, but given the record we have already shown by our lives, that is unrealistic. Deuteronomy 7:9-11 draws attention to this vital trait by showing us God's character in reference to a covenant:

Therefore know that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments; and He repays those who hate Him to their face, to destroy them. He will not be slack with him who hates Him; He will repay him to his face. Therefore you shall keep the commandment, the statutes, and the judgments which I command you today, to observe them.

God, who cannot lie, states His record to be one of faithfulness, and He will certainly continue to be so. However, our record is questionable at best. We need to show God in our pattern of living that we believe Him and love Him.

In Hebrews 3:1-2, 5, God singles out Moses as an example of a faithful man despite the difficult responsibilities given to him to accomplish:

Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus, who was faithful to Him who appointed Him as Moses also was faithful in all his house. . . . And Moses indeed was faithful in all his house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken afterward.

Hebrews 10:36-38 also admonishes us in this regard, revealing the importance of being faithful:

For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise: "For yet a little while, and He who is coming will come and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith; but if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him."

A faithful person is one who adheres firmly and devotedly to God and His Word, meeting even the difficult challenges that God permits into his life in a steadfast spirit while not wavering in his belief. A faithful person trusts that God is leading him and humbly submits.

The Edenic Covenant

The Edenic Covenant is not so named by the Bible. Men have given it this title due to Eden being the site where this foundational statement of mankind's responsibilities in his relationship with God appears. It is universal in scope, applying to all mankind whether or not one believes in God and His Word. Within the context, Adam and Eve are the ones directly spoken to and about. However, since all humans are counted as descending from them, this covenant is directed broadly to include everyone born since then too.

Before focusing specifically on the particulars of this foundational covenant, we will review the seven major, broad overviews within which mankind's specific responsibilities are addressed:

1. This covenant introduces the sovereign Creator God Himself. In Genesis 1:1-5, He stands alone; the focus is on Him and what He wants us to learn first about Him. He stands at the beginning of all things and precedes everything. Everything He gives to man—God is the sovereign Creator and Giver of every good gift—he must use responsibly within God's purpose. This pattern of focusing on the sovereign Creator God and His purposes appears in all covenants with Him. God rules!
2. This covenant reveals that He is orderly. Every step in creation is taken in a scientifically logical progression, establishing that the creation and His purposes are not haphazard. Randomness is not part of His nature. God is purposeful and already has a plan that He is following step by step.
3. In the beginning, like God Himself, everything was morally perfect. No sin is present, nor are any demons there to interrupt His thoughtful construction of a practical and beautiful place for Him to work out His purpose for mankind.
4. No aspect of the creation is to be worshipped. Everything God made and gave to mankind is a product of and inferior to the One who made all things. No animal or object is to be used as an intermediary between the Creator and mankind. Only the Creator is to be worshipped.
5. Beginning with Adam and Eve, humanity is charged with populating the earth and subduing it. Men are not to have an adversarial relationship with the earth but to harness its potential and use its resources for human benefit. In this case, subduing indicates activities like cultivating its fields and mining it for mineral riches. Mankind is not to rape the earth but to work to manage properly what he has been given. Humans, created in God's image, are to exercise their God-given authority as His servants to care for the earth as He would. That is, men are to follow God's pattern. There is, of course, far more to being made in His likeness, but ruling is part of the reason for it.
6. Simply being born gives a person a stewardship responsibility. People are to treat God's wonderful gifts with the same loving care in which God designed and created them.

7. Mankind is to enjoy the foods produced in the Garden as well as the bountiful productivity God placed within humanity's purview.

God-Given Responsibility

Genesis 1:26-28 reads:

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it, have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

Two things are made especially plain. God states three times in verse 27 that man is created. In verses 26-27, He says four times that man is created in the image of God. He wants us to grasp those points because the same applies to us! Even though we are now about 6,000 years from when He first spoke those words, these realities have not changed one iota.

In addition, God clearly gave us beings created in His image authority over animals. That authority has not been taken from us. This dominion implies responsibility in managing them that we owe to our Creator.

Many people seek to escape the responsibility of answering to our Creator, devising complex explanations to deny His existence to themselves and others. They may reason that, if He does not exist, how can they be responsible for submitting to His commands? They will move heaven and earth, as the saying goes, looking for proof to back their denial of God. The great bulk of mankind lacks the resources, the time, or the education to make such a search, so for their own benefit, they simply deny His existence by ignoring Him. These two categories of people are part of the "Nones"—those who claim no spiritual attachment whatever—of this generation.

Others, without making any real effort to search out the truth, create a god or goddess they are comfortable with and worship him or her to salve their consciences. They do not seem to grasp that their dodges do not alter their responsibility to conform to what God laid out in the beginning.

Another category is quite worrisome: the sincere folk who consider themselves Christian. However, either due to false teaching in their churches or perhaps their own laziness, they believe that much of the Old Testament no longer applies to them. In their minds, it has been "done away" along with what they consider Old Covenant laws, deliberately ignoring what Jesus Himself says about those same laws (Matthew 5:17-20).

However, God's Word still stands, and mankind is still responsible to follow this covenant, as Romans 1:20-21 declares:

For since the creation of the world, His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead [margin,

divine nature], so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

God's Blessing

Genesis 1:28 reads: "Then God blessed them and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it, have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'" This verse contains the first words God spoke to mankind. The Hebrew word translated as "blessed" can also at times signify a curse. Here, without a doubt, it signifies that God's conferring of good on the newly created couple is to be shared by their descendants.

This divine act not only confers dominion over what God created, but it also establishes that, even as God is the Creator and Giver of His wonderful creation at that moment, He is also the Giver of its continued blessings through time to Adam and Eve's descendants. In His first oral communication to them—an authoritative command to spread over the earth and enjoy His creation's benefits—He desires to establish in their minds that everything before them was a gift from Him to prepare them to face life.

The physical creation of earth, which culminated in the creation of Adam and Eve, parallels the spiritual creation this same God is undertaking in us. Even as God supplied all that Adam and Eve needed for life, so is He supplying all that we need for our spiritual creation. The apostle Paul confirms this in Philippians 4:19, "And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." Our responsibility is to hold fast to His promises in faith.

We have been given much, but much more is required of us than is required of the unconverted because God has given us gifts not given to them. This principle of God's judgment appears in Luke 12:47-48:

And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.

The overriding thought in the foreground of this first and universal covenant is that the entire creation—including us and the spiritual life given us, but in context, especially earth and what it contains—is a gift from God to aid us in making our way through the physical life He has provided. This is a reality: We live and have being, and we think, plan, build, and look to the future all *because of what God has done*. This reality must be foundational in our relationship with Him because it provides solid footing for the humility that is necessary to make it work. Because He is the Giver of all good things, our thinking about ourselves in relation to Him must begin here.

In the context of Genesis 1, these blessings, these gifts, are somewhat similar to the gifts of the Spirit listed in I Corinthians 12. A dissimilarity, though, is that I Corinthians 12:11 says, "But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He will." Here, God

supplies gifts for functions He assigns within the church rather than for all of life. But an important similarity that we must live by is that God is still gifting to meet the needs of those He is creating, but in this case the gifts are spiritual rather than physical.

The following truth is not stated in Genesis 1-3, but it is a conclusion gathered from this covenant's entire context combined with understanding gathered elsewhere in God's Word: All of God's gifts are aspects of His grace given to aid us in succeeding within His purpose.

The emphasis should be on His purpose. For example the entire creation is a gift. Whether one is converted or unconverted, it stands as a major teaching device, and receiving it bears responsibilities. Serious and honest consideration of it should lead to answering many questions about our place in a relationship with God, and to realizing some of our responsibilities. This is why Paul declares mankind "without excuse." The fulfillment of these responsibilities lies in the uses we make of the gifts God has given.

Why should anyone be concerned about this? Because of mankind's past and present track record. Human history is telling. Recall Solomon's declaration in Ecclesiastes 7:29: "Truly, this only have I found: that God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes." Gifts freely given, even gifts from God, are not always used well by the recipients. An obvious example is that people can examine their own lives and the earth itself and not discern the Creator as the Giver of these awesome gifts. Rather than declaring the glory of God's bountiful mercies in even these obvious gifts, they loudly proclaim that all of creation arose from nothing and proceed to ignore the Giver, doing as they good and well please!

Why is this so? Romans 8:6-8 reminds us: "For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those that are in the flesh cannot please God." Under the influence of the arch-deceiver, Satan, mankind has been persuaded that God, the Giver of every good and perfect gift, is the enemy. So, like Eve and then Adam, we are turned against God until He personally and mercifully intervenes with more gifts to help us escape our confusion.

An Additional Blessing, the Sabbath

As the sixth day ended, the creation week was not yet complete. One more day and a major blessing remained to be given to mankind to aid it in accomplishing God's purpose for all. Genesis 2:1-3 states:

Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished. And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.

God created the Sabbath by resting on it and sanctified it as a blessing for mankind to observe in a similar fashion. God did not need to rest because He had grown tired, as we humans do. We are assured in Psalm 121:4, "He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep." He rested as an example to us, showing what we must do on the seventh day, as well as to sanctify it as a special day to accomplish His purposes in creating us.

He did not do this for any other day. The Sabbath is part of the Ten Commandments, and as nearly the middle commandment, functions as a bridge between the law's two parts. It is the only one of the ten directly mentioned in this covenant, even though others are certainly implied when Adam and Eve sinned.

Why has observance of this day fallen into such disrepute? It is not only disregarded by most, but even hated within some circles of the "Christian" world, as if keeping it is a curse. Though many do not necessarily hate it, they make no effort to observe it despite God singling the seventh day out as different from the other six days. The reason for this disregard is that, because it is so vital to our Creator's overall purpose, Satan has gone to great lengths to obscure its value.

Jesus states unequivocally in Mark 2:27, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath." The Sabbath, a special creation, was made for the benefit of mankind. He did not make it only for the Israelites, who did not even exist when He created it. Jesus uses "man" here to stand for all humanity beginning with Adam and Eve, not just one particular group or race or family of people. Jesus would certainly understand this, as He was the One who created the day for mankind (Colossians 1:15-19).

God specifically identifies Himself with no other day of the week. In Ezekiel 20:12-24, He specifically calls them "My Sabbaths" six times. He does not refer to them as belonging to Israel but to Himself. He also identifies Himself with those who keep the day:

And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak also to the children of Israel, saying; surely My Sabbaths you shall keep, for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the Lord who sanctifies you. You shall keep the Sabbath, therefore, for it is holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whoever does any work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people. Work shall be done for six days, but the seventh is the Sabbath of rest, holy to the Lord. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death. Therefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever; for in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed." (Exodus 31:12-17)

His statement explicitly establishes non-observance of the Sabbath as sin, and the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23)!

God sanctified or hallowed the seventh day, the Sabbath. It takes a holy God to make holy time, and He made no time holy other than His Sabbaths. Though people can be made holy by God, they cannot make something holy because they do not possess a holiness that can be transferred to anything else. Since only a holy God can hallow something, any day other than what God has made holy—even though billions of people may proclaim it to be holy—cannot be holy time. It is utterly impossible. No day can be holy except the one God made holy.

This means that the Sabbath is worthy of respect, deference, and even devotion that cannot be given to other periods of time. It is set apart for sacred use because it is derived directly from Him and made holy at creation. Because of God's assignment of the word "holy" to the Sabbath, this day is changed into something special. Even though it is a part of the cycle of the week, the Sabbath is

separate from the other six days. It is different from the common or ordinary. The other six days are common, given for the pursuit of the ordinary things of life. The Sabbath is a day God has reserved for man's benefit for special things, different things—spiritual things.

The Sabbath is not holy merely because God assigned it as such, though by itself, if we truly fear Him, that should be enough. How do things become holy, even things like the soil of the ground, or in this case, time? The Bible shows they become holy because He puts His presence in them. By the fact of His presence, they become a spiritual creation. God's presence is in the weekly Sabbath as well as in the annual Sabbaths, which He also created and made holy for the spiritual guidance of those He has a relationship with.

Luke writes, "So [Jesus] came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read" (Luke 4:16). Jesus kept the weekly Sabbath as well as the annual Sabbaths (see John 7:2, 10). The book of Acts reports the apostle Paul and the New Testament church keeping the weekly and annual Sabbaths, even Gentiles.

Nothing in the Bible changes the day God set aside and made holy at creation. The Catholic Church publicly lays claim to changing the day of worship to Sunday and charges the Protestant churches with following their lead. Can the Catholic Church make anything holy?

Everything that truly matters reveals the Edenic Covenant to be universal in application. This means that, along with everything else in that covenant God charged us to submit to, the Sabbath is still in effect. Nothing holy has been created to replace the Sabbath God created in the first week.

The Blessing of Marriage

Within the covenant, the blessing of the establishment of marriage is preceded by God preparing Adam's mind for his need for a companion suitable to him. Notice Genesis 2:18-20:

And the Lord God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him." Out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them. And whatever Adam called each living creature, that was its name. So Adam gave names to all cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him.

This was no casual activity. It involved a display of the intellectual powers that God gave to Adam. God undoubtedly caused animals or groups of animals to gather for Adam to observe, study, and classify, to see what he would call them. In giving each animal group its name, Adam demonstrated his right as God's human regent. He was given dominion over the animals, and he used that authority. Furthermore, it appears that the names Adam gave them "stuck." They did so because he demonstrated good insight into their characteristics, and his descendants later used the names he initially gave the animals.

This exercise demonstrated to Adam that there was no one like him in the animal world. No animal was created in the image of God. If he had chosen one of them, communication and all it entails would necessarily have had to remain at the animal's level. He was now better prepared for God's gift of Eve. Genesis 2:21-24 records Eve's creation and Adam's response:

And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from the man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. And Adam said: “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.” Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

The warmth and beauty of this creation is fitting, a crown on all that God had created for the man and woman to prepare them for life in the world. Adam’s response shows his pleasurable agreement with this added gift.

Feminists take issue with Scripture’s reference to Eve as a “helper” (Genesis 2:18), but there is nothing demeaning in the term. It simply means “one who helps.” God Himself is referred to as our “help” several times (see Psalm 115:10-11). Remember, Genesis 1:27 asserts, “So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.” With both sexes created in God’s image, neither can claim superiority.

With our knowledge of DNA, it makes perfect sense for God to have built Eve from a small portion of Adam’s body because his body already had within it every means for Eve to be his perfect female match. Adam did not know this technical, biological reality, but he was still in naming-mode after his experience with the animals. So, when he saw her he said, in effect, “She is me!” meaning she is like him, not like an animal, naming her “woman.” (In Hebrew, “man” is *ish* and “woman” is *isha*.) Each was made to be the perfect companion for the other. The concluding comment in Genesis 2:24—that a man and his wife are to become one flesh—reinforces this.

Today, marriage is not at its most stable state in our Western cultures. Yet, God’s intention is plain. When asked about divorce and remarriage, Jesus declares God’s original intent in Matthew 19:8-9:

Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery.

Mankind’s marriage problems do not stem from God’s creation of the institution. They lie in the hardness of heart of both men and women.

Jesus’ clear statement is the reality that the modern demand for “equality”—especially from feminists—opposes, and such opposition affects the stability of marriages to such an extent that more than a third of all marriages end in divorce. Some remarry and divorce several times, throwing both family life and society into turmoil. The entire culture is badly fractured.

Feminist anger over God’s making Eve for Adam reveals that they are anti-God in their outlook on marriage. They forget, or conveniently overlook, that Adam was made for Eve too, and in addition, that she was made from man, meaning that she was part of him. Genesis does not suggest in any way that she was created as man’s servant. Adam himself perceived her as a delightful companion.

Are men and woman equal? The answer depends on the particular context. Generally, they are not equal in physical feats of strength, for instance, but they are equal in many ways, especially in mental and spiritual terms. Both are created in the image of God, which starts them on the path to being fit

companions for each other. Both are under moral responsibility to God. No place in Scripture states either a man's or a woman's sins are the worse. Both men and women are recipients of God's grace and can be forgiven by the blood of Jesus Christ. Both are equal in terms of being offered salvation and receiving eternal life and reward in God's Kingdom.

The true cause of marital problems lies in the ignorance of both men and women of their responsibilities within a marriage. Compounding this is another reality: the self-centered, carnal character of each personality involved. These two factors—ignorance of responsibility and selfish carnality—result in multitudes of mistakes and misapplications in many areas of the relationship, creating discouragement and anguish rather than satisfaction and joy, as God intended.

We will continue exploring this covenant in the next article.