

BLOOD COVENANT

Paul R. Wild, July 6, 2009, Revised May 4, 2020

Why does God get so thoroughly offended by divorce? Well, perhaps I'm jumping the gun in the way I pose the question. Dennis Rainey of Family Life spoke at an I Still Do conference in Houston back in 1999 and stated that, for the first time in American history, the divorce rate for U.S. Christians exceeded that of the general U.S. populace. I have no reason to believe anything has changed since then. Given that divorce is running rampant through the Body of Christ, and since many of our members now seem to think little of getting out of marriage at the drop of a hat, perhaps I should rephrase the question more along the lines of, "Does God get thoroughly offended by divorce?" Many of our members seem to act in a way to suggest that He does not. Does Scripture succinctly answer the question for us?

For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he *hateth* putting away [divorce]: for one covereth violence with his garment, saith the LORD of hosts: therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously.

Malachi 2:16

So, we can unequivocally state that He hates divorce. Why? Besides the fact that it is sin; that it shreds the human soul (it is fitting that the first two letters, di-, bring to mind the feelings that people describe when going through it, as if a loved one has di-ed); that it creates a whirlwind of chaos, confusion, and consternation; that it cascades brokenness down through multiple generations; is there something bigger that, when it occurs, tears at the very fabric of the universe? Yes, there is.

God is an *intense* God. You can see it in how He inspired the writers of the Scriptures to describe His emotions. Take James, for instance:

Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God. Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us *lusteth to envy*? But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.

James 4:4-6

It's that central verse that really catches the eye: **lusteth to envy**. Wow. You can see it again in Song of Solomon (Canticles), that book that directly deals with the love of an earthly, married couple yet hints at the relationship between the heavenly Bridegroom and His Bride, or at least the relationship that will someday exist upon His return.

My beloved is mine, and I am his: he feedeth among the lilies.

Canticles 2:16

I am my beloved's, and his desire is toward me.

Canticles 7:10

He states this attribute of Himself ever so boldly in the following:

For thou shalt worship no other god: for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God:

Exodus 34:14

For the LORD thy God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God.

Deuteronomy 4:24

You see, God functions consistently with His nature, so that what He loves He forever loves; and what He desires He forever desires; and what He commits to He forever commits to; and His commitment to that which He desires is made at the same level of intensity as the desire itself. He committed with His blood; He committed with His bone; He committed with His flesh so that He might make us, His Bride, "bone of [His] bones, and flesh of [His] flesh." Recall that He wants the things of earth to model the things of heaven, the physical to model the spiritual, the natural to model the supernatural.

So, this commitment, what is it, what is it called, how is it manifested in Scripture? Are there clues in Scripture for naming it? Well, since blood is such a powerful theme in Scripture, one wonders if it can help us with terminology. So central to God's working out his plan of salvation is blood that we must investigate whether there is a connection between the intensity of God's desire for us and the necessity of blood in His plan.

Covenant is also a theme presented prolifically in Scripture. This word is used in 280 verses of Scripture and most often is related to a solemn promise that God makes to His people. And we are told repeatedly in Scripture that we, the New Testament (NT) believers and the entire nation of Israel that will be redeemed in the latter days, are a party to a new covenant, a new plan, a new agreement that is not based on the hardness of the tablets of stone that God cut for Moses in the wilderness but on new tablets, ones of the tender flesh of our hearts.

And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh:

Ezekiel 11:19

A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.

Ezekiel 36:26

Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Jeremiah 31:31,33

In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away.

Hebrews 8:13

And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.

Hebrews 12:24

This new covenant had to be written with an eternal ink, an unfading one – the blood of Jesus Christ. So, we see, we can combine the two themes to arrive at the proper terminology for Christ's commitment to us, His Body:

Blood Covenant

I have selected two passages, one from the Old Testament (OT), one from the NT, to introduce the necessity of blood in God's covenantal plan of salvation.

For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul.

Leviticus 17:11

And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission.

Hebrews 9:22

It is first interesting to note that, whether old or new, God never changes, and concepts that were first introduced in the OT are not discarded in the NT but rather amplified and clarified. Scripture cannot be broken. Blood is central to God's work. As the two passages indicate, on the one hand, there is life in the blood; on the other, the deliberate shedding of it to cause death brings forth a purging, a cleansing, to the point of forgiveness. In two powerful passages of Scripture, we see another example of one of God's mysterious but magnificent principles – the Principle of Opposites. The Principle of Opposites is derived from a most peculiar pattern that emerges from Scripture as one diligently studies from Genesis to Revelation. God seemingly works backwards from the way we would work. Whereas we would give the pre-eminence to the prominent, the prosperous, and the

powerful, God gives the pre-eminence to the least, the last, and the lost. A sampling of God's reverse pattern is now in order.

The foolish things shame the wise.

But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty;
1 Corinthians 1:27

The older serves the younger.

And the LORD said unto her, Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger.
Genesis 25:23

That which dies gives life.

Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened [brought to life], except it die:
1 Corinthians 15:36

Sins that are scarlet shall be white as snow.

Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.
Isaiah 1:18

Where sin abounds, grace abounds all the more.

Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound:
Romans 5:20

Those members of the body which seem to be the more weak are necessary.

Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary:
1 Corinthians 12:22

Power is perfected in weakness, for when we are weak, we are strong.

Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.

2 Corinthians 12:10

The barren woman rejoices for her fewer children of the promise rather than for the plenteous children of the lost.

For it is written, Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband.

Galatians 4:27

The King of Glory was born in a stable.

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

Luke 2:11-12

The last shall be first and the first last.

And, behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last.

Luke 13:30

To save your life you must lose it, and to lose it you will find it.

For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.

Matthew 16:25

The generous will increase, but the greedy will decrease.

There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty.

Proverbs 11:24

Blood covenant expresses this Principle of Opposites and is a doctrine unto itself. As for any Biblical doctrine, for a complete understanding of blood covenant we must begin with the beginning, Genesis. We are told that blood was spilled to provide a covering for Adam and Eve after their sin. Physical death first entered the world as a result of the spiritual death of man and, in response, God sacrificed an animal and took the skin to cover their nakedness and shame. In the beginning, God was already demonstrating His blood

covenantal relationship with man by taking of His own assets to meet the need of the other party to the covenant.

What is a covenant, anyway? Probably all of us understand to a degree that it is some form of agreement. Two parties enter into an agreement to do certain things, and each makes an affirmation of their intent to honor it if the other party agrees to honor it. In legal terms, these agreements take on various forms and may be called contracts, mortgages, legal tender, stocks, bonds, etc. For example, take legal tender, or money. The government agrees to back the money if the citizens pay their taxes, and the users agree to exchange goods and services in return for receipt of it. This instrument and the others are all legal instruments with limitations on the expectations placed upon those who enter into the agreements.

A covenant, at least the way it is used in Scripture, goes well beyond the limitations of the various forms of agreements cited above. In essence, from God's perspective, there are no limitations. It is lifelong, come what may, till death do us part, all assets, all liabilities, and cannot be broken. Of course, as it relates to our salvation, the only One who can make and keep such a commitment is God, but His operation within that commitment serves as a model for how we are to operate.

Where else in Scripture can we find blood covenant manifested? Again, begin with the beginning. In Genesis 15, God promises Abraham a son from his bride of promise, Sarah, and promises the land of Canaan, which might signify the Father's dowry given on behalf of Sarah, the bride of promise. He then instructs Abraham to sacrifice certain animals as a faith response to God's answer to his question, "...whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?" Abraham laid out "each piece one against another," which is to say they were equally split (the parties are to have equal value and significance in the covenant) and placed opposite each other (the parties face each other to make the commitment), perhaps a few feet (to place between them the duties, assets, and liabilities of the covenant). As is always the case in our relationship with God, Abraham played a small part, and as is most often the case in our relationship with God, he, as we, tried to take on a greater part by shooing the carrion birds away, as if God needed his help. God found it more expedient to put Abraham to sleep to keep him from making a mess of it all and to make it abundantly obvious that Abraham was not the Initiator or Maintainer of the covenant. And once again, as is always the case in our relationship with God, the larger part, the defining part, was played out by God Himself, for God the Father - the smoking furnace - and God the Son - the burning lamp - cut an everlasting blood covenant between Themselves. We can envision Them moving in a figure 8 pattern between the animal parts, making the mathematical sign of infinity to demonstrate an unending commitment to the children of the promise, the children of faith.

The covenantal duty of the Son was to shed His blood to bring many sons to glory; the covenantal duty of the Father was to give the Son the preeminence, make His throne an everlasting one, give Him the scepter of righteousness, anoint Him with the oil of gladness above His companions, and cause every knee to bow and every tongue to confess that Jesus

Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. To His apostles and through them to us, He had stated at the Last Supper that His blood was the blood of a new covenant. The assets and liabilities of the covenant were not only the apostles who were with Him but all of us, His Bride:

...Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are...I kept them in Thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost..."

John 17:12

Since we are the reflection of God's glory, and we are to model on earth the truths found in the heavens, it would seem reasonable to think that there might be a human manifestation of blood covenant. I mean, there should be something in Scripture or in nature that demonstrates this doctrine through human relationships, human action, or human physiology. Well, this happens to be the case in several instances.

Let's start with a relationship. David and Jonathan were the closest of friends, but even more than that, they became "blood brothers." I remember as a child I saw a children's TV show, maybe a Hallmark Hall of Fame Special or something of that sort, where the two heroes, pre-teen best buddies, became blood brothers, as they termed it, by cutting slices across the palms of their right hands and then clasping them together to mingle their blood. They "cut a covenant." They went on to agree that they'd watch out for each other and go through hell or high water for each other to the end of their days. This is essentially what David and Jonathan did, but their covenant went beyond promises to watch out for each other and extended to all possessions, all assets, all liabilities – everything.

You can see the totality of their covenant when you study what David did when he came into his kingdom. He inquired of his staff if there were anyone left alive of the household of Jonathan, and they informed him that the son of Jonathan, Mephibosheth, lame from an injury as a child, was helplessly stuck out in the wilderness in the military outpost of Lodebar. Ponder this: the weak, sickly, helpless man, prohibited from ascending to the royal throne because of the sins of his forefathers, was now graciously being beckoned to the throne room of the king because of the prior blood covenant of his father. Don't miss the spiritual parallel here: *by grace, weak, helpless sinners lost in the wilderness of spiritual darkness are called into the light of the throne room of the King by the blood of the covenant made by the Father.* It does not get any better than this!

Now turning our attention to the example of human physiology, the purpose for one particular feature of the woman has perpetually mystified human kind. Certainly, scientists who hold to a naturalistic, Darwinian world view have no definitive reason for it from their religion, evolutionary theory. The world of medicine sees no medical necessity to it. But seen through the lens of a creationist world view, with an understanding that God places things in the physical world to shed light on the spiritual world, the reason for the woman's hymen becomes known. For those who enter into sexual intercourse lawfully by God's

standard as husband and wife, it is an instrument for the cutting of a covenant. The physical union between bridegroom and bride models the spiritual union between Bridegroom and Bride. Blood is shed as the hymen breaks, as the husband, the bridegroom, initiates the most intimate of unions and covenants to take on all of the assets and liabilities of the wife, his bride, and the bride gives herself freely to her husband to take on all his assets and liabilities. Of course, the analogy can only go so far in that our Bridegroom has no liabilities.

Lest the brides think they got an overly bad deal on that, i.e., the temporarily painful loss of a minor physiological feature, consider the loss of the bridegroom through the act of circumcision. The pain of circumcision is neither contemplated nor remembered by an infant boy, but it has not been always the case for older males undergoing the procedure. There are currently some third world cultures wherein the circumcision is performed on fully cognizant, adolescent boys, and it was first performed on a fully cognizant Abraham and the male members of his household. Meditate on Abraham having to perform it on himself. Meditate on the men of Shechem's city who were willing to undergo it on account of the defilement of Dinah, Jacob's daughter, to make peace with the sons of Jacob. Why, then, this onerous procedure? Beyond some hygienic benefit, there is no medical necessity to it. But once again, seen through spiritual lenses, a covenant is cut and blood is shed, that the physiological feature for passing on the seed of the man should be for a sign of a royal race, "...a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people..." (1 Peter 2:9) a people that would have circumcised hearts.

The upshot of all this is that Jesus Christ, the Lord of Glory, cut a blood covenant with His Bride, His Body, to make us one flesh with Him. It was not sentimental, syrupy giddiness that compelled Him to ascend to the cross to cut that covenant but a commitment to see us sanctified, consecrated, and liberated at **all** cost. He set His face like flint.

I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting. ⁷For the Lord GOD will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded: *therefore have I set my face like a flint*, and I know that I shall not be ashamed. ⁸ He is near that justifieth me; who will contend with me? Let us stand together: who is mine adversary? Let him come near to me.

Isaiah 50:6-8

The giddiness came later. For the *joy* set before Him, Jesus Christ endured the cross, despising the shame (Hebrews 12:2), yet He fully embraced the need to cut a blood covenant with His Bride to sanctify her and set her apart, i.e., *to become one with her*. That is the meaning of blood covenant: *to become one*. Can we not see the intensity of the passion of our God, His jealousy, His overwhelming desire for us? Can we not see how divorce is a full, frontal assault on His blood covenant with us when the earthly blood covenant that is designed to model the heavenly blood covenant is broken? Can we not see that it serves the purposes of Satan to afford him the opportunity to make a mockery of things in the heavens? Can we *now* see why God is so thoroughly offended by divorce?

What would we be like as a Body if we set our faces like flint and went to the mat with the enemy of our souls and the things of this world to wrestle with them and defeat them on behalf of the other members of the Body? More specifically, what if every husband and every wife understood the depth of our God's commitment to us and approached their marriages in the same way, understanding that each party to the marriage has cut a blood covenant – lifelong, come what may, till death do us part, all assets, all liabilities, and cannot be broken?

Capture the vision, beloveds, for where there is no vision, we perish.