

discipleship essentials

Essentials for Spiritual Leadership
Study Guide

CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

LESSON 6: GOD OF THE COVENANTS

INTRODUCTION

This lesson is part of a Discipleship Essentials module titled Christian Doctrine. This series of lessons examines doctrines which are foundational to our faith, with an emphasis on how incorrect doctrine can negatively impact true faith. Doctrine is the set of beliefs that determine how we practise our faith. It is critical that Christians understand correct doctrine about the nature of God and salvation, especially if they are engaged in teaching and discipling. This module examines scriptures related to a number of core doctrines of the Christian Church, and also some of the areas of confusion and error associated with each doctrine.

The Study Guide is intended for an individual to look deeper into a specific lesson on their own. The lessons can be used in conjunction with other Discipleship Essentials materials, such as the video and audio productions found on www.discipleshipessentials.org.

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CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

LESSON 5: SIN AND SALVATION

WHAT IS IT ABOUT?

This lesson looks at the covenants in the Bible through which God chose to relate to His people. It examines the importance of the old and new covenants to every believer.

JUST SO YOU KNOW...

Throughout the Bible, God demonstrated how we as humans can have a personal relationship with Him. He often did this through covenants. The Bible itself is divided into the story of redemption based on the law, and the story of redemption focused on grace. This lesson concentrates on the way God revealed His plan of salvation through the covenants He made with His people. It is important that every Christian knows they are not bound by the law (which would bring death), but are free to live because of God's grace. This grace is not a licence to sin, but rather a gift to help us overcome our sinful nature. Grace is never earned, but given out of love.

GETTING STARTED

1. Can you name some of the promises that God has made to all believers? Which promise is most precious to you right now?

2. What are some of the laws contained in the Old Testament that we no longer follow? Why is this? Did God change His mind about what He wanted from His people, or are there other reasons?



STUDY

❖ **WHAT IS A COVENANT?** In order to have sound doctrine which will contribute to our spiritual health, we must not only accept the authority of the Bible, but also understand what it actually communicates. The Bible is a record of covenants between God and humankind. It is comprised of 66 separate books, which are divided into the Old Testament and the New Testament. The original word for ‘testament’ can be translated ‘will’ or ‘covenant’.

- Covenants in the Bible were binding promises never to be broken, and often accompanied by symbols and sacrifices. They were never entered into lightly, and many had consequences, such as death or being cut off from God, if they were broken. Some covenants were for a set period of time, and others extended for all time and to all people who obey and follow God.
- It is important to understand that God used covenants as His chosen method to converse with and connect to His creation. Through covenants, God set out expectations for our behaviour and offered us promises and blessings. It is through these agreements that God chose to save us and offer us eternal life!
- **The doctrine of the Covenants of God can be stated this way: Covenants are the means by which God has chosen to connect with us, and to redeem and glorify His people. Our relationship with God today is defined by the New Covenant made through Jesus Christ.**

❖ **Covenants in the Bible:** All of the covenants in the Bible vividly describe God’s plan for His people. The original phrase, "make a covenant", has the meaning of cutting meat for the purpose of sacrifice. In the new covenant, Jesus became the ultimate sacrifice to bring us into relationship with God. The following are just a few examples of covenants that help us understand our relationship with God and His love for us.

- **Covenant Between God and Noah:** Early in Genesis, God saw that His creation had fallen away from relationship with Him, and He desired restoration ([Genesis 6:11-22](#)).

God’s Covenant with Noah	
What were the promises? (Genesis 6:18, Genesis 9:9-11)	
What were the conditions? (Genesis 6:13-14, 18)	
What was the sign? (Genesis 9:12-17)	
Who was it for? (Genesis 9:9-10,15)	

God used this covenant to communicate that sin brings destruction and that He will not tolerate wickedness. This demonstrated that sin must be punished, and in order for us



to have a relationship with God, sacrifice, faith and obedience are required. There are blessings for obedience, and curses for unbelief.

- **Covenant between God and Abraham:** After a time, God chose one man to be the father of a nation with whom God would have a special relationship and to whom He would reveal Himself. This was a change in how God dealt with His Creation, and like the covenant He made with Noah, there were promises and conditions. Through this special nation, God would bless all people.

God's Covenant with Abraham	
What were the promises? (Genesis 12:1-7, 15:2-6)	
What were the conditions? (Genesis 15:6, 17:1-2)	
What was the sign? (Genesis 17:9-14)	
Who was it for? (Galatians 3:29)	

- o We who belong to Christ are spiritual descendants of Abraham, and just like Abraham was counted righteous because he trusted the promises of God, so we are counted righteous because of our faith in Jesus Christ.
- o In this covenant, we see animals sacrificed as part of the covenant ceremony. God instructed Abraham to kill two birds and three animals, cutting them in half, and separating the halves from each other. This ceremony was common in covenants between two people (Genesis 15:9-17). Both parties of the covenant were required to walk between the separated halves of the animals as a sign that if the covenant was broken, they should likewise be split in two. (Jeremiah 34:18-19 also references this act).
- o Abraham, however, did not walk through the pieces of the sacrificed animals. God alone walked through the pieces, signifying that God was claiming responsibility for both parties in the covenant. God demonstrated that if the covenant was broken, He himself would provide the sacrifice (which was fulfilled in Jesus' death on the cross).

- **God's Covenant with Moses:** As Abraham's family grew, it became a nation of people. God again made a covenant with His people through Moses. God chose Moses to lead them out of slavery and into the land of Canaan where they would be an independent nation.



God's Covenant with Moses	
What were the promises? (Exodus 19:5-6, Deuteronomy 11:13-14)	
What were the conditions? (Exodus 19:7-8, Exodus 24:7, Leviticus 18:1-5)	
What was the sign? (Exodus 31:12-18)	
Who was it for? (Jeremiah 31:31-34)	

- o The law given to Moses on behalf of his people defined who the nation of Israel was supposed to be as God's chosen people. The law contained three types – moral, civil and religious. The civil law established organization for them as a nation, the religious law defined the worship of God and the practical means to demonstrate their faith in God.
 - o The purpose of the law was to set them apart from the people they lived among, and to define sin and their need for God. The law was never capable of saving anyone. It did, however, provide a specific set of rules to follow in order to demonstrate their faith.
 - o The people, of course, could not keep this covenant. In fact, it was broken before it came into being! But God was forgiving and merciful to them. See [Exodus 34:6-7](#). God continued to renew the covenant. God promised that a new covenant would come someday of which this was just a shadow – a covenant where the law would not be written on stone and breakable, but written on our hearts.
- **God's Covenant with David:** This covenant is transitional between the old and the new covenants. It announces the kingdom of God being established forever (2 Samuel 7:8-16). It finds its roots in David's kingdom, and even though many of the kings who followed in his line were disobedient to God, Jesus (God's Son who was born in the lineage of David) has become the King of kings and the Lord of lords whose kingdom will never end.

God's Covenant with David	
What were the promises? (1 Chronicles 17:11-14)	
What were the conditions or was it unconditional?	
What was the sign?	Preservation of the people of Israel
Who was it for?	For David's descendants, for the whole world



- o God’s people longed for a King. God Promised a Kingdom would come, and that it would be a Kingdom that would bring people back to Him (Psalm 89:36-37, Psalm 72:5, 8, 17, Luke 1:33, Revelation 11:15).
- o Through this covenant, God refers to promises made in the previous covenants (2 Samuel 7:10-13) and then expands these promises to describe a kingdom that will extend past his child Solomon, and be eternal.
- o God's covenant with David, announcing His eternal kingdom, looks into the future when Jesus the Messiah would enter our world in human form, give His life as a ransom for all sinners, and rise from the dead assuring that His Kingdom is eternal.

➤ **The New Covenant:** The covenants in the Old Testament all point to a New Covenant which would supersede and fulfill all the previous covenant agreements God had made with humankind. It was promised in Jeremiah 31:31-33.

The New Covenant	
What were the promises? (Jeremiah 31:31-34)	
What were the conditions? (John 11:25, Acts 16:31)	
What was the sign? (1 Corinthians 11:26, Acts 2:38)	
Who was it for?	The whole world – all who come to faith in Jesus

- o This covenant is promised in part through the previous covenants – it is through Abraham’s children that all nations of the world would be blessed. Jesus Christ was a descendant of Abraham, and it is through Him that the whole world can come to relationship with God. Jesus Christ came to fulfill the law of Moses (Matthew 5:17), and to be a sacrifice that would fulfill the requirements of the previous covenants (Hebrews 9:15).
- o Instead of the law being written on stone tablets, it is now written on our hearts. God gives us a new heart and an ability to obey, not based on our own strength but on His power within us. Obedience is an outward sign of our love for and faith in God, not the requirement of the covenant.
- o Just as sacrifices were offered in past covenants, Jesus Christ was the sacrifice that initiated the new covenant. He completed and ended the previous covenant of law, so that new terms of our relationship with God could be established.
- o In the New Covenant, it is our faith (that God fulfilled the requirement of the law through Jesus) that makes us righteous in the sight of God. We are saved not because we have earned it, but by God’s grace.



❖ **God’s Redemptive Work through History:** The plan of God was always to redeem (rescue, save) His people. Every covenant He made with His people allowed them to be restored to Him on the basis of faith.

➤ **God’s History:** The story of God and His people can be told in a succession of covenant agreements. It was through the breaking of God’s law in Eden that sin entered the world for all people. God’s plan was to create a people for Himself whom He would rescue from the curse of death. This plan was carried out in many steps through many covenants.

Eden→	Noah→	Abraham→	Israel→	The Church
All People→	One Man→	One Family→	One Nation→	All People

➤ **God’s Covenant Relationship:** When we study the way in which God relates to us, we learn much about who He is and what He desires from us. Covenants bind the two parties together in purpose, and their relationship supersedes all others. Remember that God made a covenant with His people because of His great love for us. When we could not keep our terms of the covenant (the law) and so deserved death, God took upon Himself our punishment (1 Peter 2:24).

➤ **Promises:** God has the power to keep all the promises He has made. Every one of them comes true! God demonstrates His faithfulness to us through His covenants. All of His promises are fulfilled in Jesus (2 Corinthians 1:19-20, Psalm 105:8).

➤ **Law and Grace:** For the Christian today, we must understand that the current terms of the agreement we have with God are those of the *New Covenant*. We are set free from the obligations of the old covenant of law, and the promises of God to us are eternal life and the gift of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 2:8-9).

❖ **ERRORS IN THE DOCTRINE OF COVENANTS:** There are several misunderstandings and errors regarding God’s covenants that could hinder our spiritual growth. We must be careful not to make the following errors:

➤ **Error #1 – The Old Testament is irrelevant:** It would be a mistake to disregard everything taught in the Old Testament. It is true our relationship with God is now defined by the new covenant, but there is still much to learn about God from the Old Testament. The law and all that was written in the Old Testament served as our ‘guardian’ or ‘teacher’ to show us our sinful nature and need for forgiveness. The whole Bible is useful and helpful for the believer

o 2 Timothy 3:16, Galatians 3:24

➤ **Error #2 – The Old Testament laws still apply:** Some people live as though every law and curse under the Old Covenant (the Law of Moses) still apply to Christians today. This is not so! The law had a purpose – to restrain sin, to preserve the people of God



and to point them to a Saviour. When Jesus came, the law was no longer needed! We demonstrate our faith by our obedience to God, His Word, and His Spirit alive in us – not by adhering to the law which could never and still does not save us. Following all the laws of God cannot make us perfect or righteous before Him.

o Hebrews 8:7-13, Hebrews 10:1

- **Error #3 – We can do as we please because we are under grace, not the law:** The opposite position is also false – that no law applies and we can do just as we please because God forgives. Jesus, who fulfilled the law of Moses, gave us a new set of laws to follow. These laws won't save us because we are made righteous by faith alone. However, the laws that are repeated in the New Covenant give us our new covenant conditions. Even though animal sacrifices were made for sins under the old covenant, the people were rebuked for taking sin lightly. Today we are forgiven when we repent! When we willfully sin and take God's grace lightly, we have not repented.

o 1 John 3:9, 1 John 5:18, Hebrews 10:26, Romans 6:1-2

- ❖ **CONCLUSION:** Getting to know God and what He desires from us is our duty and joy as Christians. God's covenants rescue us from sin and bring us back into relationship with Him, where we are loved, protected, defended, and blessed! The covenants teach us about who we are, how we follow God, and what the Bible means to us today. They are vital for our understanding of salvation.

SUMMARY

- ❖ Covenants are the means by which God has chosen to connect with us, and to redeem and glorify His people. Our relationship with God today is defined by the New Covenant made through Jesus Christ.
- ❖ One of the first covenants was the covenant between God and Noah, in which God promised never to destroy the earth with a flood again.
- ❖ God made covenants with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob promising that the whole earth would be blessed through their descendants. Other similar covenants were established through Moses and David.
- ❖ We live now under the New Covenant by which we are made righteous in the sight of God through faith.



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Consider your relationship with God in terms of a covenant. If you were to describe this relationship to someone, what would you say are the promises of the covenant, the conditions, the signs and the sacrifice involved?

2. Has God dealt with you differently at various times in your life? For example, was there a period of time when He extended special grace to you, or perhaps a time of discipline or teaching, etc.? How did you benefit from these? Why is it important that Christians today continue to study the Old Testament in addition to the New Testament?