

Commitment, Contract, or Covenant

-Jim Hyeest-

What defines our relationship to our God? We talk frequently about commitment. We are committed to faithful attendance. We commit to certain activities when volunteers for a programmed work are sought. We are committed to sustaining a certain buzz in the building, as it were, to demonstrate our community commitment. When asked what we are committed to, we would probably respond, "To God or Jesus or the Church." Is this how we define our relationship to God? A contract is an agreement that binds two parties, who may not even know or respect each other, to fulfill certain obligations to each other that were agreed upon. I offer to sell an old lawn mower for a certain amount and you agree to pay it. We put into writing, sign it, you take the mower, but fail to pay me. I have a contract that I can take to small claims court and sue for payment. Is that how we approach God? Has He offered us life and we offer Him our lives with nebulous notions about what that entails? Have we "committed" to a contract with some "wobble room" in carrying out our part of the bargain? A covenant is much different. It may have codicils like a contract, but it is not entered into by parties ignorant of each other. The covenant is less about the details of the agreement and more about defining the relationship between the parties. In the OT the making of a covenant was referred to as "cutting the covenant." The earliest reference to such covenant making is found in Genesis. Animals were sacrificed to seal the covenant and were "cut in two, down the middle, and... placed opposite the other (Gen. 15:10)." Typically, the parties would walk between the pieces as a witness to their commitment. The implication was that failure of either party to live up to their "commitment" would result in the fate of the sacrificed animal falling upon the party that defaulted. In Abraham's case, the Lord alone passed between the halves of the carcass, not unlike Jesus going to the cross before He had a "commitment" from us. God has already lived up to his end of the bargain before we "commit." How do you define your "commitment" to God?