

Biblically: Is "covenant" a noun or a verb; a process or a document? ...or is a choice? It is most certainly a root theme of scripture. It occurs in many places and times, but never in precisely the same shape. Who initiates covenant -human beings or God? Can covenant be refused?

Historically: In congregational (Congregational) tradition, "covenant" has strong historical meaning. The framers of the American Constitution were steeped in this tradition and shaped our government by their understanding of covenant. They understood that a covenant –

- a. defines a people
- b. creates a body politic (the "incarnational statement")
- c. describes common goals and values
- d. outlines the institutions through which the people will act collectively

Biblical covenants do the same thing. The major difference is that Biblical covenants are instituted by God; historical covenants are instituted by people. The quintessential covenant statement is: **I will be your God, and you will be my people.**

What does it mean to be in covenant as a people, not as individuals? As pervasive as covenant language is in the United Church of Christ, those who come from E&R backgrounds rather than the Congregational tradition are not steeped in that concept. Also, many people have come to the UCC from other, more hierarchical denominations, or from a position of being un-churched. Therefore, we cannot assume that the concept of covenant is equally understood

In discussing the difference between a covenant and a contract, it was suggested that

- (a) A contract is based on law, and built on fear; a covenant is based on grace, and built on love.
- (b) A covenant "has a gratuitous, growing edge which nourishes rather than limits."
- (c) Each addresses accountability differently. In a covenant, accountability must remain mutual
- (d) Covenants require public affirmation and re-affirmation.

CONTRACT

Based on law, built on fear
Limits
Accountability may be one-sided
Requires no other attention in order to remain enforceable

COVENANT

Based on grace; built on love
Nourishes
Accountability is always mutual
Requires (re-)affirmation in order to live