

Christian Study

Lesson 258

Be Light

Focusing on Church beyond Sunday

A "Closer Look At The New Covenant"

Given the opportunity to suggest what should be preached every time the doors of a church or a bible class is opened, without a doubt should be the "New Covenant". As we begin this most important subject in the life of a believer, I would like to give a summary of what the new covenant is in a nutshell and in the following weeks open up the shell and take a closer look at what has been ushered in by Jesus Christ and how transforming it is to put our trust in His finished work. I do hope you stay with us and please do not hesitate to send in any questions or comments you will have as we go along.

The New Covenant in a Nutshell

The key New Testament chapter for the Christian concept of the New Covenant is Hebrews 8, a portion of which is quoted below:

7 For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second. **8** For he finds fault with the people when he says: "Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, **9** not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. For they did not continue in my covenant, and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord. **10** For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. **11** And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the

least of them to the greatest. **12** For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more." **13** In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away. **Hebrews 8:7-13**

That full quotation, with partial quotations of the same text in other New Testament passages, reflects that the authors of the New Testament and Christian leaders generally, consider Jeremiah 31:31-34 to be a central Old Testament prophecy of the New Covenant.[[] Here is the key text:

31 "Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, **32** not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. **33** For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. **34** And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

Someone recently asked, "We know that the new covenant brought an end to various old covenant rituals. But what is the new covenant itself? Can you put the new covenant in a nutshell?"

Good question — and I will respond in a nutshell. Then I will expand a bit, because the central truth can be developed in many ways as we study the subject in the Bible. In simple terms, a covenant is *an agreement* between two parties. It can be an agreement between a husband and wife, a friendship pact between two people, an alliance between two nations, or an agreement between God and humans. The new covenant is an agreement between God and humans. God has set the terms, and we enter the agreement if we agree to it. God sets the terms, he makes the offer, and we respond to it with either yes or no.

How can we have a relationship with God? How can we become his friends? How can we become citizens of his holy nation? Humans aren't in a position to make deals with their Creator. As sinners, we are cut off from God. We are alienated from him. Sin and corruption cannot even come into his presence. But simply because he is good, because he loves us, God has acted decisively to end our alienation from him and bring us into his household.

God himself is the one who sets the terms of this potential relationship. He tells us in advance what he is willing to do. He calls the shots, and makes us free to respond to his terms with either yes or no.

The terms God has set are these: Believe what he says about Jesus Christ, turn from your life of self-reliance and put your confidence totally in Christ to wash you clean of sin, clothe you with righteousness and bring you into the family, the household, the kingdom of God. That is the only way we sinful humans can get off the devil's side and onto God's side, so to speak. We do it by accepting the terms of God's new covenant — the new covenant in the blood of Jesus Christ. That is the only way we can be rescued from our rebel state against our Creator, the Provider of our life. That is the only way we can be brought into harmony and allegiance with him.

At its core, the new covenant is *Jesus Christ*. He embodies everything the new covenant is. He is the Word of God and the Son of God, made flesh for us. He is the Message of God, the Mind of God, the Meaning of God, made flesh for us to see and know and love. In himself, he enables us to be friends with God. In Jesus Christ, God has given us a new basis for our relationship with God. This is the covenant God has given; we respond to Christ with either yes or no.

Now you might ask, How can a person be an agreement? It is a biblical idea. In a prophecy about Christ, Isaiah 42:6 says that the Messiah, or Christ, would be made a covenant. The Bible calls Jesus a mediator, a go-between. A mediator's purpose is to get two parties to relate positively to each other. His work is what causes the barriers to come down and the relationship to bear positive fruit. Jesus was the greatest diplomat, the brilliant negotiator of the greatest covenant, or agreement, in human history. Jesus could do that because he was both God and human. He was not only able to *represent* both parties, he was able to *be* both parties.

How does Jesus Christ make possible this positive relationship between God and us? Romans 5:8-10 puts it in a nutshell: *Christ died for us*, and because of his death we are now *justified* before God, *rescued* from God's punishment upon his enemies and *reconciled* to God as one of his own children. Through the death and life of Christ, God has personally provided the one and only means by which we can actually become the faithful and loving friends and children he created us to be.

Let's look at some additional aspects of this wonderful gift of our loving Father. Paul says that Christ died for us; he also says that Christ died for our sins (Rom. 4:25). Although he was innocent, he suffered the penalty that our sins deserved. In some ways this is a very simple concept, but there are very complex ideas under the surface — see Gal. 3:13 or 2 Cor. 5:21 for two examples.

When Paul says that we are justified, he is using a courtroom term. He is saying that in the courtroom of heaven, God declares us justified, or not guilty, because of the death of Christ. When Paul says that we are reconciled, he is referring to a relationship that has gone from animosity and hostility, to friendship and peace.

Paul also uses language from the slave market to say that we have been bought at a price (Christ himself being that price) so that we may now serve our new Master. Other biblical images include those of being cleansed, of being newly created, of being born again, of being adopted. Each of these ideas helps us see different aspects of the central picture: that we are able to have harmonious peace and friendship with God because Jesus Christ died for us and was raised again. Jesus Christ is the basis of the new covenant God has given us. We can either accept this or reject it. Because he loves us with indescribable love, he urges us to accept it — to put our faith, our trust, in Jesus Christ, that is, to trust him with our lives, and to accept him as our Mediator, our only means of salvation.

We sinners deserve to be eternally alienated from our holy God and therefore completely separated from the joy of knowing him and partaking of his eternal blessings. *But the good news is that we don't have to be eternally alienated.* Instead, we can live forever in the joy of full favor and harmony with God because of Jesus Christ, specifically because of what he did for us in his death and resurrection.

Our salvation — being rescued from spiritual destruction and given glorious restoration as favored friends and children of God — depends entirely on Jesus Christ. He is the basis of this great rescue. Accepting him is the one requirement that God makes as the basis of this magnificent agreement, or arrangement, we call the new covenant. If we accept him, and put our trust in him, then we are given a right relationship with God (and all the responsibilities and privileges that go with that right relationship). If we do not accept Christ, then we have no basis whatsoever to be brought into peaceful harmony with God. Jesus Christ is the core of the new covenant. That is why he must always be the center of our church, our preaching, our proclamation and our personal lives.

The good news of the kingdom of God is that we can enter the kingdom through Jesus Christ. Without him, we are totally disqualified. But he is qualified, because he is the Son of God. By becoming one of us, taking our sins on himself, dying in our place and being raised to glory, he has (if we believe him, accept him and give our allegiance to him) perfected us, taken us up into himself, and because we are now made one with him, we are now qualified to enter his kingdom (Col. 1:12-13). Jesus is the door, the key and the true path to the kingdom of God. Another good news is that God invites humans to enter his kingdom by putting their confidence in Jesus Christ. We cannot qualify on our own or by any amount of lawkeeping nor does lawkeeping maintain our salvation. Salvation is a free gift.

The Bible uses many ways to describe the same thing. Being in the kingdom is the same as being adopted as children of God. It is the same as being born again as his children. It is the same as being redeemed from death. It is the same as being washed by the blood of the Lamb, or justified by his death. All of these phrases are about the gift of a right relationship with God, and in all of them, Jesus Christ is the key, the focus. The "new covenant" is simply another way of talking about the very same thing.

Jesus preached about the kingdom — a kingdom we are invited to enter in this life. The apostles, however, preached primarily about salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is important to understand that these are not two different messages. The apostles were not misrepresenting the message of the Master. Rather, the apostles were inspired to explain the very same message of the kingdom of God in many different ways. The gospel is a message about how humans can receive intimate loving fellowship with God, how they can enter his kingdom, something that is made possible only by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The new covenant is, to use another nutshell, *the gospel of salvation*. It describes how we can be saved from sin and death in order to live forever in a loving relationship with God through the saving work of Jesus Christ for us.

We always keep coming back to the center-point, Jesus Christ. He is God himself, offering himself to us. If we want eternal life with God, it must be through Jesus Christ. At its core, the new covenant is the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is the message of salvation by grace through faith in him. That is why it is so important for us to understand it and teach it, no matter what the cost. It is the basis of our eternal life!

That is why we emphasize Jesus Christ. That is why we emphasize faith and grace. That is why we emphasize the new covenant, the gospel and eternal life. All these are fully bound up with each other. The gospel tells us that we can live forever with God—not because of the good things we have done—but because of what Jesus Christ did for us. God offers us this free gift of amnesty, of forgiveness, of a new and wonderfully good relationship with him. He tells us that he will accept us if we believe this message of his utter goodness and put our confidence in what *he* has done for our salvation.

As we have seen, the Bible uses several word-pictures to help us understand what Jesus did for us. We don't have to understand all of them in order to be saved. We simply have to put our faith in Jesus Christ.

When Jesus announced a new covenant in his own blood (Luke 22:20), he was announcing something dramatically new! Never before had God made a covenant using *human* blood. The previous covenants had used animal blood. Indeed, God did not even allow human sacrifices. What Jesus was announcing was not a renewal of the old covenant. Instead, it

was a completely *new* covenant, made in a way forbidden by the old covenant! Simply in making the new covenant, Jesus was announcing the fact that the old covenant no longer applied.

The new covenant has different blood, a different basis, and it presents a different basis of relationship between God and humans. The new basis is Jesus himself and his blood. Jesus did what we could not do, and he offers his sacrifice to us as a gift, as grace. To be part of the new covenant, we must admit that we can't earn our way into God's presence — we will never be good enough — but we must instead rely on his mercy. In summary, the new covenant is the new relationship we can have with God, made possible by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ — a relationship based on faith and grace rather than on works of the law.

Friends, I am deeply thankful that Christ has helped us come to know him and love him more deeply. I am awed by his mercy; I praise him for his greatness. I celebrate his life — his birth into humility — his death for me on a shameful cross — and his resurrection into glory.

Saul of Tarsus thought he knew God and what God wanted him to do. Then he met Jesus, and from Jesus he received a chance to see again. From then on, he was a Christ-centered man. He resolved to know Christ and to preach Christ. O, that we might do the same!

It is no secret, what God can do. What He's done for others, He'll do for you.

Our mission is to help people find strength and security on the foundation that can never be shaken, cracked or shattered. This foundation is the remarkable truth of God's unconditional love and His indisputable grace experienced in a relationship with Jesus Christ. The critics of Christianity have launched a full attack to discredit the person and works of Jesus Christ and the reliability of His word. We cannot be silent anymore. Let us as children of light, stand firm in the faith, because He who has taken us this far will never forsake us. You are called Christians, be careful of that name. Let not our Lord Jesus Christ be blasphemed on your account

Believe this, "Jesus did not come to make bad people good, He came to make dead people live."

[Keep It Simple](#)

Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so.

If you have any questions, comments or you know anybody else who will benefit from this study please feel free to give us their email address and they will be added to our mailing list to receive weekly lessons. The email address is santigiemando1@yahoo.com,

Remember: A candle loses nothing by lighting another candle (Ephesians 5:8)

Let's go light another candle!