

## Taking Hold of the New Covenant



David Wilkerson April 27, 2015

My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips" (Psalm 89:34). The term "covenant" plays an integral part in the Christian faith. Yet in all my years I have never heard a preacher or teacher adequately describe the significance of "covenant" in a Christian's life. The Bible itself is divided into two Covenants (or Testaments), Old and New. Throughout the Old Testament, God makes one covenant after another with humankind. What are all these covenants about? More importantly, what do they have to do with us today?

A covenant is an agreement or pledge between two or more parties, like a contract. It contains terms or duties each party must perform to fulfill the agreement. Such covenants are legally binding, and once they're finalized each party can be penalized for not fulfilling its respective terms.

In creating the New Covenant, God puts his amazing love for humankind on full display. Yet the church has been blind to this incredible doctrine for decades. As a young Christian I was taught that "covenant theology," focusing on the New Covenant, was a licentious doctrine. The prevailing thought was that the New Covenant is so marvelously freeing that people might misuse it, indulging in permissive lifestyles.

Yet the more I understand the New Covenant, the more I'm convinced we need its assurance in these perilous last days. Its pledge has the power to release in God's church all the overcoming strength we need to be more than conquerors in any situation.

Who are the parties in the New Covenant?

The New Covenant is a formal contract between Father and Son. And today we, the seed of a spiritual Israel, are brought into this covenant by faith. "Now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises" (*Hebrews 8:6*).

God formed this "better covenant" with his Son, agreeing on its terms before the world's creation: "In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised [covenanted] before the world began" (*Titus 1:2*).

The heavenly Father wasn't willing to lose his beloved creatures to the powers of hell. So he formed a rescue plan for us: "Thou spakest in vision to thy holy one, and saidst, I have laid help upon one that is mighty; I have exalted one chosen out of the people" (Psalm 89:19). The Father said to his Son, "Humankind is going to grow weak and miserable because of their sin, helpless to find their way back to me. I appoint you as my holy one to help them and bring them back into my favor."

Next we hear the Son's own covenant words: "I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart" (*Psalm 40:8*). Everything Jesus did on earth was in fulfillment of his terms of the covenant: "I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak" (*John 12:49*).

The Bible states these terms clearly. Jesus was to divest himself of all heavenly glory, taking on a human body: "(He) made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of

men" (*Philippians 2:7*). He was to endure reproaches and suffering, "a man of sorrows" acquainted with grief. He was to grow up undesirable to the world: "He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him" (*Isaiah 53:2*). After all this, he was to submit himself into the hands of wicked men, and in great agony lay down his life as an offering for humankind's sin. In making atonement he would have to endure God's wrath for a season.

God then laid out the type of ministry his Son would undertake to redeem humankind. He told Jesus, "Your ministry is going to be that of a priest. I've known all my children from the foundation of the world, and now I give them as a flock for you to shepherd." Jesus testified on earth, "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" (*John 6:37*).

Finally, the Father instructed his Son, "If you choose to go, these works will be required of you: You must preach good tidings to the meek, bind up the brokenhearted, proclaim liberty to the captives, open prison doors to those in bondage, bear with the weaknesses of the frail, bear tenderly with the ignorant, supply their shortcomings with your strength, feed the flock, carry them in your bosom, gently lead the young, lend your strength to the weak, guide them all with your counsel, promise to send them the Holy Spirit to carry on the work of their freedom, and bring them home to glory with you."

In return, the Father gave his Son everlasting promises. He would give him the Holy Spirit without measure: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me" (*Isaiah 61:1*). He would always be present with him, watching over him to preserve him: "I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles" (*Isaiah 42:6*). In addition, the Father would counteract every discouragement from the enemy: "He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law" (*Isaiah 42:4*). And he would display his glory in his Son: "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow" (*Philippians 2:9-10*). Once Jesus' work was finished, the Father would bring him back to glory: "Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?" (*Luke 24:26*).

These are all the terms of the covenant, laid out in black and white for the world to know. They are not hidden from us because we are to be encouraged by them all!

Jesus met every term of the covenant.

As we reread the gospels now, we see that everything Jesus did on earth was to fulfill the terms of agreement he'd made with the Father. He went after lost sheep, opened the eyes of the blind, raised the dead, opened the prison doors of death, spoke words of eternal life, performed miraculous works, cast out devils and healed all manner of infirmities. In every verse of the gospels, Jesus was fulfilling the things the Father had sent him to do.

Through it all, Jesus appropriated his Father's covenant promises to him: "My God shall be my strength" (*Isaiah 49:5*). "I will put my trust in him" (*Hebrews 2:13*). The Father's faithful words kept Jesus through his agonizing death: "I was not rebellious, neither turned away back. 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" (*Isaiah 50:5-6*).

When Jesus uttered his final prayer, we see once more the open-covenant dealings between Father and Son: "Now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was" (*John 17:5*). And before he returned to glory, Jesus reminded the Father of his part in the covenant: "Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee... I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do" (*verses 1, 4*).

What does all of this have to do with you and me? It's a picture of God's love for his beloved creation! He formed this covenant because he was unwilling to lose a single child to destruction. Jesus is saying here, "Father, I've fulfilled my part of the covenant. I have brought about the redemption of humankind, and I've made your body one. Now let's talk about what's going to happen to my seed, all who believe in me."

In short, God gives his Son, the Son gives his life, and we get all the benefits. "His seed also will I make to endure for ever, and his throne as the days of heaven... My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips" (*Psalms 89:29,34*). At this point, Jesus tells the Father, "We agreed I could bring into our covenant everyone who trusts in me. I ask you to bring these beloved ones under the same covenant promises you made to me." "Now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through

thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are" (*John 17:11*).

Was the Father true to his terms of the covenant? Did he lead and guide Jesus as promised? Did his Spirit hover over his Son giving him encouragement and consolation? Did he bring him through all of his trials and usher him home to glory victorious? Yes, absolutely! And the Father has pledged an eternal oath to do the same for us.

Jesus said, "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil" (*verse 15*). "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world" (*verse 16*). Christ was saying, in essence, "Father, sanctify them through your truth. Make them holy and pure and keep them from the wicked one. Be with them through all their temptations. Let the promises you gave me be theirs as well."

By keeping the word of his covenant in love, the Father's glory was displayed to the world: "The glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one. I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me" (*John 17:22-23*).

The next time you struggle with a besetting sin, you may hear an accusing voice: "You've gone too far and sinned too often. God has turned you over to a reprobate mind. You're unclean, unholy, no good, a disgrace to the gospel. You've driven the Holy Spirit from your life completely." When this happens, remind God, the devil and yourself: "I am one in covenant with the Father and Son. Jesus co-signed the covenant with his own blood, and the Father promised to keep me through all my trials. He'll hold my hand no matter what comes and will never remove his love from me. He'll lead me to victory!"

By revealing his covenant to us, God wants to remove any doubts we have about his ability to keep us. It's as if he's saying, "I'm going to treat you as if you have no faith at all. I'll make such a strong oath to you, you'll have no choice but to believe in me." We are to stay in Christ—abide in him, trust him, depend on him. If we do, we will surely see his glory!

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