

The New Covenant in Communion

by Doc Greenway

The new covenant is a personal, effectual, and eternal agreement between God and man, mediated by Jesus Christ, who serves as the sacrifice, priest, and redeemer.

Duration: 22:18

Scripture: Hebrews 9:14

Topics: "Communion"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the concept of the inward law of sin and the inward law of the Spirit of life. He explains that the Spirit within the believer prompts, directs, and controls them to fulfill the desires of the Lord. The preacher then shares a story about a young boy accused of stealing, highlighting the importance of personal responsibility. Moving on to the biblical text, the preacher focuses on the epistle to the Hebrews, specifically chapter nine, verses fourteen and fifteen. He emphasizes Jesus as the mediator of the New Covenant, highlighting his role as the sacrifice and the priest. The preacher emphasizes the significance of Jesus shedding his own blood for the redemption and sanctification of believers. He concludes by urging the congregation to remember Jesus' sacrifice as they partake in the communion table.

Transcript

I would like to speak to you this morning from the Epistle to the Hebrews, chapter 9, verses 14 and 15. Hebrews, chapter 9, verses 14 and 15. It reads thus, How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works, to serve the living God? And for this cause he is the mediator of the New Testament, or the new covenant, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first covenant, they which are called, might receive the promise of eternal life.

That's a long text, but it is a very important part of God's Word. And especially when we think of the institution of the Lord's Supper, that at that time our Lord said, this cup is the new covenant in my blood. And so the word Testament, as I mentioned, may be translated covenant.

And the covenant is very important. The word itself has a history in the nation of Israel. And it is brought over into the New Testament, slightly modified in its application, but still bearing in the main the principles underlying the idea of a covenant made by God with men.

Now, I would like this morning for a little while to look at the meaning of the covenant, and then at the mediator of the covenant, as he is mentioned here. And finally, if there is time, at the measures of the covenant. How the new covenant differs from the old.

The meaning of the covenant, then, what does it really mean? We use the word very often under the form of Testament. But what does the covenant really mean? It derives from a Hebrew word, berith. And the root meaning of that word is to bind.

To bind. And hence it is that which binds two parties together in an agreement. When it was a covenant made by Jehovah with men, he bound himself by a solemn oath, and provided the terms of the covenant were fulfilled by the people concerned, then his promise of blessing was secure.

When the nation of Israel turned against the terms of the covenant, then God withdrew his hand, and the result was consternation, until again they would turn to him, and in repentance seek his face. But the covenant was something binding from God's standpoint. The covenant in olden times was ratified by a sacrificial offering.

Then when the sacrificial offering was placed before the covenanting parties, they partook of the meal, and the blood of that sacrifice was sprinkled upon them. In this way they were united. In this way they solemnly agreed to fulfill the terms of the covenant which had been made.

And the sacrificial meal and the sprinkling of the blood were the visible means by which this covenant was ratified and agreed upon. And so when we come to the table of the Lord, here is the symbol of the blood of sprinkling, and here is the symbol of the sacrificial meal. And the new covenant therefore retains this idea from the old covenant days that God has bound himself by a solemn oath to bless his people, and his people have bound themselves to fulfill the will and purpose of God.

And so this is a table of covenant, not simply a table of remembrance. And I think it is good for us to understand this. Now what does the covenant mean to us? Well I would say first of all that it is a spiritual and not a material covenant.

Granted there are material elements present, but these point to a spiritual principle and to something which is not at all material in itself. The wine and the bread are symbols of spiritual cleansing and spiritual renewal. Cleansing by the symbol of the blood, renewal by the symbol of the bread.

And in this way you see we come together in fellowship not because it is our habit to do so, but because we approach a table of covenant and there expect to receive in the terms of the covenant cleansing and renewal in a spiritual sense that we might go on our way rejoicing. It is a spiritual and not a material covenant. And so the writer of the Hebrews asks, For if the blood of bulls and goats sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh, that's the old covenant, how much more shall the blood of Christ purge your conscience from dead works? This is the new covenant and it is therefore a spiritual thing.

It is in this sense that we may say further that the covenant which is new and which we understand belongs to us as God's people is an effectual and not simply an ideal covenant. The terms of the old covenant, you remember, were expressed in the moral law. This was its ideal.

But who could fulfill the law's commands, fulfill every one of them and not fail in one single point? Well, we know the answer to that one. No one possibly could. But there was the ideal.

God could never lower the ideal. It was set. And so he came in with a means of meeting them in their ineffectual attempt to fulfill his law.

He instituted the sacrificial law, the Levitical law. And so when they failed, a sacrifice was slain and the death of the sacrifice was accepted on their behalf that so they might live again and not die. It was a temporary measure, as we shall see.

But the new covenant is an effectual covenant, not an ideal one. In Jeremiah 31 and 31, speaking of the days to come, the prophet of God said under inspiration, Behold, the days come, saith Jehovah, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel. I will put my law in their inward parts and I will write it upon their hearts so that their walk in the light of a new covenant is not controlled by external prohibitions but by inward compulsions to seek and to do the good pleasure of the Lord.

And thus when Paul writes to the Romans, he can say to them that the righteousness which is of the law may be fulfilled in us, not by us, but in us who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit. As there is an inward law of sin, so there is an inward law of the Spirit of life which enables the believer to please God because the Spirit within prompts him, directs him, and if he is prepared, controls him that he might fulfill the desires of the Lord. I remember when I was just a young fellow in Wales, a little boy was brought into court, into the children's court, and he was accused of stealing.

And the magistrate said to him, Tommy, you know this isn't the first time. There have been two other occasions when you have been caught stealing. Why do you do it? And his mother was in court and she stood up, Please sir, she said, don't be hard on him, he is a very good boy really.

I don't know why he does this sort of thing, but he is very good really. And then Tommy said, please sir, if you could only tie my hands, he said, that they wouldn't steal, then I think I would be safe. And the magistrate very wisely said, Tommy, hands do not steal.

It is something behind the hands that does the stealing. And how true this is, that sin is not some external thing. It is inward.

But God be praised, the law of the Spirit of life is inward too. And so in the terms of the new covenant, we have something which is effectual and factual, not simply ideal, some standard at which to aim. It is rather a life, which may be fulfilled.

And once again, this new covenant is personal, and not general as a covenant. You see, the old covenant was made by Jehovah with the nation. For no Israelite had any entity, any identity, apart from his nation.

To be cut off from his nation was to be cut off from God. This was the worst thing that could befall an Israelite. He was not an individual in that sense.

He was one of a nation. And apart from the nation, he had no existence in the eyes of the law. That covenant, as I mentioned earlier, was broken by Israel.

They sinned against Jehovah. But the new covenant is not to be made with the nation, or with the church, with the organized community of God's people, as such. It is to be personal, not general.

And so Jeremiah the prophet, who had this revelation, also emphasized that the new covenant was to be an intensely personal one. And because of this, it was to be an eternal covenant, never to be changed.

And not a temporal covenant which might pass away as the old covenant did.

And so we come this morning to the realization that when we approach this table of the Lord, this table of covenant, we must of necessity do so as individuals. The fact of belonging to a church, Presbyterian, Methodist, anything else, has no significance where the new covenant is concerned. We come as persons, as individuals, separate.

And we come against backgrounds which are uniquely our own. We come with our own feelings, our own needs, our own weaknesses, our desires, our hopes, our fears. We come in this way.

But we come to a God who is the God of the individual. A God who deals with us on a personal level. Under the terms of the old covenant, the nation was everything.

Under the terms of the new covenant, the individual is everything. And we come as persons into the presence of God. It is not the organized church then, nor membership in that organized church, which ensures fellowship with God.

But it is our personal relationship, the sense of our personal loyalty, our personal devotion, our personal dedication to the will and purpose of God. This is what makes the covenant a new covenant to each one of us. And new every time we come to the table of the Lord.

Because here we renew our vows of loyalty and our pledge of love and devotion to the Christ who died. This is something of the meaning of the covenant. But what about the mediator of the covenant? The new covenant, as I said, unlike the old, shall never pass away.

And that is because it centers not in our obedience, not even in our faithfulness, but because it centers and coheres in Jesus Christ, who can never change and who will never fail. He is the mediator of the new covenant. And it centers in Him in three relationships.

First, as the sacrifice. Listen to the words again. How much more shall the blood of Christ purge your conscience? He is to be seen then as the one who ratifies the covenant, not in the blood of bulls and goats, but in His own precious blood.

As the sacrifice for man's sin. Through the shedding of that precious blood, the Bible teaches us, we are justified, we are sanctified, we are redeemed. The new covenant centers in Jesus Christ also as the priest.

How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God. He is not only the offering, He is the offerer. Not only the sacrifice, but the priest who offers Himself as the sacrifice.

Here is the mediator of the new covenant. And He does this through the eternal Spirit by means of the Holy Spirit. For in Gethsemane, when Christ sweated, as it were, great drops of blood, medical evidence has it it was because His heart was literally ruptured, broken.

And He could not have lived above a few minutes in that awful state. How then was it possible for Him to go through the sufferings of the trial and the agony of the climb at Golgotha's Heights until He died as God appointed upon that hill, low and grey. How could He have maintained the spark of life? It was by means of the Holy Spirit.

Who upheld Him. Who took His human frailty by the hand and supported Him and led Him unerringly to the place of God's appointment. Through, by means of, the eternal Spirit, this great High Priest offered Himself.

And He is to be seen here as the Redeemer. How much more shall the blood of Christ who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God. The priest, having offered the Lamb in sacrifice, then returned from the holiest of all to sprinkle the people, having sprinkled the mercy seat first and the Ark of the Covenant and the golden lampstand and the offer of incense and the table of showbread and the liver of brass and the sacrificial altar in the Ark of the Covenant, then turned and sprinkled the people.

By this means, they were pronounced clean for another twelve months until the next great day of redemption. But this man, and this man alone, pronounces the words, I will be thou clean, having Himself fulfilled the work that was necessary to make the statement effectual in the experience of men. For Jesus Christ, the Son of God, not only speaks the word, but He paid the price.

And so He is the mediator of this covenant as the sacrifice, as the priest, and as the Redeemer. What a lovely thing it is this morning to know Him as one's personal Savior, to know Him as the sacrifice for one's own sins upon Calvary, to know Him as the priest who represents one's own needs at the throne of God, and to know Him as the Redeemer who has really entered into one's own life to take up the reins of government and authority. What a lovely thing it is to know this.

Mel Trotter, the leader of a great mission in America who himself used to be a hopeless alcoholic until God laid hold upon him, was once speaking in his mission, and a man who was half-drunken sitting in one of the back seats called out, How do you know you are saved, Mel? With a smile on his face he said, My dear brother, I was there when it happened, and I ought to know. And it is a grand thing to be sure you were there when it happened. And that is how you know that Christ to you is more than a figure in history, more than the head of the organized church, that He is your Savior and your Lord.

This is the covenant that we remember. The measures of the covenant, let me just mention this. It is called the New Covenant in Hebrews 9.15 because it is contrasted with the Old.

It is called the Second Covenant in Hebrews 8.7 for the first has been done away at Calvary. It is called the Better Covenant in Hebrews 7.22 because it is based on a better sacrifice. It presents a better hope.

It provides a better redemption, something lasting that time cannot efface or experiences discount. A sacrifice of redemption which is secured. On February 28, 1638, the Scottish National Covenant signed on parchment in Greyfriars Churchyard, Edinburgh.

Their names as a pledge of their loyalty to the true faith of Jesus Christ. And out of this came the solemn League and Covenant in 1648. And out of this the reformed faith which we affirm was born.

And on that parchment, there are some signatures signed in blood. As we come this morning to this table to pledge our loyalty, in the New Covenant, symbolized in the wine and the bread, let us remember that Jesus signed it in his own blood. If he died for me, can I not live for him?

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