

# The Light of the New Covenant

by Richard E. Bieber

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*Richard E. Bieber's sermon explores the depth of scripture and the transformative power of the Holy Spirit in the context of the New Covenant.*

**Scripture:** Genesis 15:7, Matthew 7:11, Mark 9:43, Luke 11:13, Acts 2:1

**Topics:** "Biblical Authority", "New Covenant"

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## Description

Richard E. Bieber emphasizes the importance of the Bible in our daily lives, comparing it to essential sustenance for our souls. He warns against misusing the Bible to justify self-righteousness and urges humility in approaching its truths. Bieber highlights the paradoxes found in Scripture, such as the dual nature of Jesus as both God and man, and how these contradictions lead to a deeper understanding of God's glory. He stresses the need to embrace the divine love and wrath revealed in the Bible, as well as the necessity of living by the light of the New Covenant that shines through the sacrifices made for us.

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## Transcript

The longer we walk with Jesus the more we appreciate this Bible, which once seemed so dry and hard to understand. Numberless times we have been refreshed by reading in it the anointed words of men and women whose lives were invaded by the Spirit of God and who were used in a special way to point the human race to the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Just as surely as we constantly need food and drink to sustain our bodies, we need the truth that permeates this book daily. Going to this book and seeking God in it is like eating a good meal, or taking a refreshing bath, or looking into the eyes of your beloved, or like filling your lungs with clean air after breathing dust and dirt all day. This is a book that never wears out, never loses its freshness.

- provided we use it in the right way,

- provided we remember our own limitations as we approach

this book.

All we have to do is look around us at cults which despise each other and bring their own adherents into all kinds of bondage. And on what do they base their strange myths and genealogies? The Bible.

Many of us can remember periods in our lives when we were so sure of ourselves - and so wrong. And on what did we base our rigid self-righteousness? The Bible.

To use the Bible rightly, the first thing we have to learn is that we can no more contain the truth of scripture in our minds than we can contain God in our minds. Whenever we see God's truth in scripture we need to remember that at best we're grasping only a fragment. We're touching truth, not containing it.

Fundamentalists, like the scribes and Pharisees before them, labor under the illusion that you can formulate scriptural truth into principles ---systems of thought. When you do this you have your truth not God's truth. You have a truth cut down to the size of your own puny intellect and about as reliable.

And he said to him, "I am the Lord who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess." But he said, "Oh Lord God, how am I to know that I shall possess it?" He said to him, "Bring me a heifer three years old, a she goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." And he brought him all these, cut them in two, and laid each half over against the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. And when birds of prey came down upon the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

As the sun was going down a deep sleep fell on Abram; and lo, a dread and great darkness fell upon him. Then the Lord said to Abram, "Know of a surety that your descendants will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs....When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates .....

Abram took a heifer, a she-goat, and a ram, each three years old, cut them in two, and laid the pieces opposite each other. Then as the sun was going down a deep sleep fell on Abram and a dread and a great darkness and he was shown awesome things to come. Then suddenly a light appeared in the darkness passing between the opposite pieces of the heifer, the she-goat, and the ram. That night God made a covenant with Abram which has lasted to this day.

And since that night God has spoken to men again and again by causing His blazing glory to pass between the halves of the heifer, the she-goat, and the ram.

Scripture is made up of opposites which don't seem to make sense. The more you ponder these contradictions, the more darkness presses down until suddenly the smoking fire pot appears. The flame passes between the opposites and God speaks.

For instance, the central truth of scripture is Jesus himself. And who is Jesus? Jesus is two opposites that can't be reconciled in our minds.

■ Jesus is God.

■ Yet if you stop with that you don't have Jesus at all.

■ Jesus is also man.

- But how can Jesus be both God and man?

Yet as you keep looking at both sides of the paradox a flame bursts between them and out of that flame God speaks. And every truth Jesus gives us is like Himself, blazing light burning out of a paradox.

So in scripture you have divine love revealed by Jesus with such beauty and such tenderness it's enough to break your heart.

A father waiting at the door for the return of his prodigal son.

A shepherd leaving his ninety-nine sheep in the wilderness and searching behind every crag and under every rock looking for that lost one.

A king forgiving his servant a million dollar debt.

A God who heals the leper, the lame, opens the eyes of the blind, comes to the poor of this earth with good news.

But over against this love which Jesus manifested to the ultimate by laying down His life for the sin of the world we also have revealed, by this same Jesus, a divine wrath that's enough to make you shudder for the rest of your days.

And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire.... and if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, where the worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.

Only when you keep looking at both the love and the wrath of God do you begin to see God's glory.

Every truth Jesus gives comes home to us as a flame burning between opposites.

When Jesus offers life He connects it with death.

■ To live you have to die.

When He offers exaltation He does it with a call to humility.

■ He who humbles himself shall be exalted and he who exalts himself shall be abased.

When the laborers in the vineyard are lined up to receive their pay, who are put first in line? The last to be hired because,

■ the last shall be first.

Never let yourself get misled into thinking that you have mastered scripture. Nobody has mastered scripture but the Author of scripture. No human mind can master these baffling contradictions which, when we look at them honestly, pull our minds in opposite directions until they almost break apart. All we can do is wait between the halves of the heifer, the she-goat, and the ram until the light starts to shine. And it always does.

When Jesus died on the cross you could say that for His followers the mysterious unity of the Messiah was broken.

■ His human body was laid in a tomb.

■ His divine Spirit went back into the hand of the Father.

They were in darkness. On the third day they saw Jesus again alive from the dead. And for forty days they received instructions concerning the Kingdom from the risen Lord. But the light which always passes between the pieces of the sacrifice, and through which God always speaks, did not visit them until the day of Pentecost.

Jesus had returned to heaven. They would not see Him again with their eyes. They were waiting according to His command when suddenly the flaming torch that came to Abram and changed his life came to them, and they were never the same again.

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

And as the Spirit fell on them, gave them utterance, stirred their hearts with the love of God, the result of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross was finally theirs. Now the promise of Jesus that the Holy Spirit would take what belonged to him and give it to them began to be fulfilled. From that day the power of the Son of God flowed out of their lives causing other men and women,

■ to see God's glory in Jesus,

■ to behold God's mercy in Jesus

■ to repent

■ call on the name of Jesus

- and to be baptized into Jesus' life.

Whether we've had a Pentecost of our own or whether we haven't, all of us need to learn to live by the light that shines between the pieces of the heifer, the shegoat, and the ram. Not just one blazing experience and then darkness again, but a walk in the light of the New Covenant that never ends - a Pentecost that goes on and on.

Yet, many of us are resisting the very things that would bring this about. We want to make everything fit together neat and pat, and we want our lives to be safely in our own control. And when we discover that the closer we get to Jesus the more our neat arrangements start falling apart we become confused. Why is it that,

- we can't seem to grasp anything any more?

- nothing makes sense?

- nothing fits?

Friend, how else can we become poor in spirit,

how else can we learn to mourn,

how else can we learn to be meek,

or to be merciful,

or to hunger and thirst for righteousness except as God brings us to the places where we no longer have the answers, where our very understanding of ourselves seems to break apart, where under the power of Jesus' word and the press of our baffling circumstances,

■ our lives,

■ our knowledge,

■ our self-assurance,

are cut apart and laid open like Abram's heifer, she-goat, and ram?

Darkness comes down on us and just as the darkness reaches the point where it seems unbearable, between the pieces of the sacrifice comes the smoking fire pot --- light. God speaks to us and a covenant is formed that changes us forever.

And what is this smoking fire pot that passes between the severed pieces of our broken lives? He is none other than

the blessed Comforter,

the Holy Spirit,

the revealer of Jesus,

the fountainhead of love.

If God is doing a job on you right now that's baffling you, as He baffled Job, Elijah, John the Baptist, Mary, Paul, and countless others don't presume to think you can figure it out, don't run away, don't lie down and quit.

Keep waiting between the severed pieces, keep hanging on to the promise,

"If you who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him."

And just when you think you can't stand the darkness any more you will see Light moving toward you above the ruins of your life and you will hear God speak to you. And the Light that you see and the Word that you hear will never leave you until Messiah comes.

■ The covenant God made with Abraham was made in blood

and sealed with light.

■ The covenant God makes with us was made in blood twenty

centuries ago but it is sealed with light now.

For the Spirit who came to our brothers and sisters on Pentecost has never left this earth. He is still here. He will surely shine upon us if we will but open our hearts.

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him.

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Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/richard-e-bieber/the-light-of-the-new-covenant/>

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