

QUESTIONS WE WANT ANSWERED

7 What Is Meant by the New Covenant?

Scripture: Exodus 19:1-8; Hebrews 8:7-13

It has been our custom through the years to observe the Lord's Table on the first Sunday of the month. Very often the words of I Corinthians 11:25 are read during our celebration. Here Paul reflects upon the statement of Jesus, *"This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."* Our study this morning has to do with the meaning of the words, *"the new covenant."*

First, it is important that we have our vocabulary well in hand. There are several words associated with the study of Biblical covenants. A **covenant** is a compact, an agreement between two parties, a conditional or unconditional promise. In the Old Testament the word *"berith"* is used, and suggests a mutual voluntary agreement or an arrangement imposed by one party on another. Examples are found Exodus 34:10. Isa1ah 59:21 and Jeremiah 31:33-34. In the human realm we have covenants between equals. This is an agreement between two wills and is more of a contract. When God establishes a covenant with man there is the relationship of a superior being promising to do something for an inferior being conditionally or unconditionally, and often there is included the threat of chastisement for disobedience or the promise of reward for faithfulness.

In the New Testament the word *"diatheke"* is used. It sometimes means testament and is the kind of covenant that a person makes in which he promises to provide for his heirs. A testament does not go into effect until the death of the testator, so the New Testament we have is a book of provisions made available to the heirs of Christ by His death. Another way in which the word is used is understood by the word "constitution." The powers of government reside in and are granted by our constitution. What the constitution is to a republic, the covenant of God is that by which He governs the world. God's dealings with man, His plans and purposes, are thus declared in covenant form, so that we have the basis of an ethical relationship between persons. (Matthew 26:28; Hebrews 7:22, 9:15-17, 12:24, 13:20)

Another word associated with our study is **mediator**. A mediator is one who is called in to arbitrate between two parties, and to reconcile them. Christ is

spoken of as the “*mediator of a better covenant.*” (Hebrews 8:6, 9:15, 12:24) The word **ratify** means to endorse, to accept or sanction. The covenant of grace and the covenant at Sinai were both approved, ratified and sealed with blood. (Exodus 24:5-8; Hebrews 9:19-20; Luke 22:20)

I. GOD'S COVENANT WITH MAN TAKES MANY FORMS IN SCRIPTURE:

Theologians speak of both theological and Biblical covenants. Covenant theologians emphasize God's central purpose of redemption under but two Biblical covenants. Others feel that this same purpose is best understood as history is viewed through eight biblical covenants. These emphasize the distinctions in history. The following covenants are mentioned with the progress of revelation. Let me just say at this point that God's covenants are a vital and exciting part of our belief. We hold that the eternal and creator God has entered our world of experience. Eternity has intersected with time. The Almighty has condescended to be an agreeing party with the creature. What can compare with this?

1. THE EDENIC COVENANT: Genesis 2:15-17

This was a conditional covenant God made with Adam. It was given in negative form and was a covenant of works. Had Adam obeyed God he would have been confirmed in his spiritual condition and in some way gained eternal life.

2. THE ADAMIC COVENANT: Genesis 3:14-19

This was an unconditional covenant in which God informs man of what he can expect in life. There is also the promise of a redeemer.

3. THE NOAHIC COVENANT: Genesis 9:1-18

This is an unconditional covenant whereby no recurrence of the flood is promised, human government was established and there was a prophecy about Shem being the line through which Messiah would someday come. (Genesis 9:25-27)

4. THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT: (Genesis 15:18)

This was an unconditional covenant about the establishment of a redemptive nation. Notwithstanding Israel's many failures, through this people the Scriptures were written and the Savior did come.

5. THE MOSAIC COVENANT: Exodus 20:1:-31:18

This was a conditional covenant. Obedience would bring blessing. Disobedience would bring discipline. (Deuteronomy 4:13; Exodus 19:3-8, 24:3, 32:1)

6. THE PALESTINIAN COVENANT: Deuteronomy 30:1-10

It looks forward to the possession of the promised land by Israel.

7. AN UNCONDITIONAL COVENANT: II Samuel 7:4-16

Describes an unconditional covenant promising David an unending royal throne and an everlasting kingdom.

8. THE NEW COVENANT: Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; Hebrews 8:6, 10:16**II. THERE ARE TWO COVENANTS SHARPLY CONTRASTED IN SCRIPTURE:**

These covenants are the new and the old according to Hebrews 8:13, and are also designated as the first and second according to Hebrews 8:7. The old covenant referred to an historical event, the giving of the ten commandments which became the basis of the covenant with Israel. (Exodus 19:3-8, 24:3-8, 32:1, 19) This covenant was ratified in blood. (Hebrews 9:19-20) This is the record of the making of the first or old covenant. God promised to make them his peculiar people on the condition that they keep his commandments. Three times they promised to obey. Within less than forty days after making this covenant, while Moses tarried in the mount, the people broke the law of God and were idolatrous. The great object and secret of the old covenant is revealed here. It was to teach the people their inability to keep the law of God. Like the law itself, the old covenant was designed to compel people to draw upon the provisions of a new and everlasting covenant. The lesson Israel needed to learn is the lesson every individual must learn, there is no salvation for anyone while trusting in self. No one can keep the law. The breaking of the tablets of the law signified that the terms of the covenant had been broken. (Exodus 34:1, 28) The Covenant of works is dead. It is all over. It won't work. Thousands of years ago it was laid aside.

But God has instituted a new covenant called the covenant of grace. The entire rest of the Scripture is all about grace. God did not merely give laws at Sinai, He gave a whole sacrificial system by which God's wrath might be avoided. The various covenants listed above are but different aspects of the covenant of grace

progressively revealed throughout the Bible. God administered the one covenant of grace differently at different times. He administered it one way before Abraham and another way after Abraham, and another way after Moses. But it was not a number of different covenants, it was the one covenant of grace with different dispensing's of that by God.

The conditions of the covenant of grace are faith and repentance. The new covenant is an everlasting covenant, it is ratified by the blood of Christ, it has a mediator, it provides for the forgiveness of sins, and its law is written in the heart. The reason for a new covenant is that the people could not fulfill their part of the old covenant. The message of the new covenant is that salvation is of God. From inception to completion, it is totally Of God.

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