

## THE ETERNAL COVENANT

Joyce Baldwin in *Tyndale's Old Testament Commentaries* wrote: "The church has lost its nerve. An earthbound, rationalistic humanism has invaded Christian thinking as to tinge with faint ridicule all claims to see in the Bible anything more than the vaguest reference to future events." This was said in reference to prophesy but is equally true in reference to covenant. We refer once again to the title of Greg Deuble's book on the trinity: *They Never Told Me This in Church* and apply it to covenant: the majority of believers have never heard a sermon on covenant. We begin this series with a quote from Malcolm Smith's book *The Lost Secret of the New Covenant*: "The discovery of the new covenant made in the blood shed from the wounds of the Lord Jesus gave to me a new Bible. My vague sea of Christianity gave way to solid land and, the island of truth and experience came to gather as a whole. I was introduced to the rest of Christ and an understanding of the place of the Spirit in my personal life and of the church that I had never known prior to my discovering the covenant."

The word *covenant* is found 286 times in the Old Testament and 33 times in the New Testament. In both the old and New Testament the word *covenant* basically means "a mutual undertaking between two parties, each binding himself to fulfill obligations, a promise of an undertaking, human or divine." When Jesus instituted the great memorial of his death, He said "*this cup is the new covenant* in my blood" (Matt. 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; I Cor.1:25). When enumerating the special blessings God had conferred upon the Israelites, Paul declared that to them "belonged *the covenants*" (Rom. 9:4). Other passages in the New Testament where covenant is mentioned basically refer to the covenant of the Old Testament (Acts 3:25; 7:8, Rom. 11:27, II Cor. 3:6, Gal. #;15, 17). To the Galatians Paul compared the "*two covenants*" (Gal 4:24-31). None of these passages above explains the *new covenant*; however, the entire Epistle to the Hebrews is an exposition of *the new covenant* with Christ the mediator. It is upon the basis of this book, Hebrews, that we write a series concerning the covenant.

We begin this series by quoting Hebrews 13:20-21 from the last chapter of the book: "Now the God of peace who brought up from the dead the Great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever. Amen." He has given us enough in the book of Hebrews to be able to understand what he is saying in verse 21: "Jesus will equip you in every good thing to do His will." He continues: "God will work in us that which is pleasing in His sight." These two facts are what the book of Hebrews is all about. God has equipped the believer in everything. He has made it possible for us to draw upon the resources of heaven. He has showed us how He did that through Christ. Christ being our high priest, the way has been opened and we actually live in His presence. It is God who equips us, we do not have to do it ourselves, we cannot do it ourselves, what God wants His people to do upon the earth is simply to do His will, do what He wants done, and He equips us to do that, and then He works in us that which is pleasing in His sight.

The Apostle Paul wrote in Philippians 2:13, "for it is God who works in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure." The question is how does God do that? This is the same question Abraham asked in Genesis 15:8: "Oh Lord how may I know I will possess It (this

land)?" God did not answer Abraham with a clap of thunder, a ball of fire, or some majestic voice assuring him that He would keep His promise. The way God answered him was to send Abram to get the animals, gave him instruction on what to do, and in verse 18, "on that day the Lord made covenant with Abraham." God's answer to him concerning the promise He made was by making covenant with him. Hebrews 13:20, 21 gives us the answer to our question how do we know these Scriptures will work in our life? "Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead, even Jesus our Lord, the great shepherd of the sheep, *through the blood of the eternal covenant.*" God equips us through covenant, a subject God's people know little about. Covenant is when two people agree to something, binds themselves to do it and then carry it out. God has bound Himself to His people in Christ and He will do what He says He will do. It is as simple as that. God will equip us in every good thing to do His will and He will work in us what he wants done in us and through us because He has entered into covenant with Christ. In Christ God is dealing with us in the same way He dealt with Abraham. Hebrews 6:17 states: "In the same way God, desiring even more to show the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, in order by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we may have strong encouragement we have fled (to Christ) for refuge in laying hold of the hope set before us." God secures our claim upon Him because He has entered into covenant with us in Christ.

The covenant then became the security and the guarantee that the purposes of God are sure. God will do exactly what He said He would do. He gives us assurance because He has made covenant with us in Christ. The reason people cannot accept, cannot live by it and cannot understand it is because in our society we know so little about covenant. In Hebrews 8:7-12 the writer quotes the prophet Jeremiah's prophesy of the new covenant (Jer. 31:31-34). He begins the prophesy by pointing out Israel's failure to keep their covenant with God. God "found fault with them" (ver. 8) because they did not believe what God said, they did not live up to the covenant agreement, so God did not give them what He promised because God promised them upon the basis of covenant, if they did not enter into it, did not believe it, did not walk in it, then God was under no obligation to fulfill His promise to them, and God withdrew. He had the right to do that. They had no hold upon Him because they did not fulfill their covenant obligation.

Jeremiah is very blunt, even brusque in his description of Israel's unfaithfulness. For example Jeremiah 7:21-23: Ver. 21: "Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, "Add your burnt offerings to your sacrifices and eat flesh." That is a strange thing. God is saying instead of offering your offerings and sacrifices to Me, burn them and eat them. Ver. 22: I did not speak to your fathers or command them in that day I brought them out of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices." God did not talk to them about burnt offerings and sacrifices. That was not what He wanted. Ver. 23: "But this what I commanded them, saying 'Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and you will be My people, and you will walk in all the way which I command you, that it may be well with you.'" That is what God wanted. In our language, God did not want church attendance, Sunday school attendance, worship services, giving of your money, building massive buildings, getting crowds and going through all these services we go through...these are not the things God wants. They may be helpful, even necessary, but God wants us to obey His voice "and I will be your God and you will be My people, and you will walk in the way I command you." Why? That

it may be will with you. It is not just service God wants, it is not just ritual and sacrifice. He told Israel through Jeremiah, to take their sacrifices and eat them yourself...He wanted them to obey His voice. In verse 26 we read: "Yet they did not obey or incline their ear but walked in their own counsels." They did as they pleased, did not listen to what God had to say, did not accept His word, "and in the stubbornness of their evil heart went backward and not forward." This will happen every time. Look at how far backward the church has moved in the last 2000 years; instead of forward to what God has had for us to enter into ever since He accepted Jesus' sacrifice allowing Christ to ascend into heaven where He made it possible for His people to enter the holy place made without hands and have free access to God. And the modern religious system calls this "progress." When people walk in the stubbornness of their heart, they will go backward instead of forward. That is covenant, and that is the way it has worked in the church since Jesus ascended.

God says in Jeremiah 32:40: "I will make an everlasting covenant with them." That is what we are discussing here. It is the *eternal covenant* by which "God brought up from the dead the great shepherd of the sheep, Jesus our Lord." who will "equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight" (Heb. 13:20, 21). It is the book of Hebrews that describes just what the eternal covenant is. It is access to the throne of God (chapters 2 and 4). The emphasis is on the fact that the way has finally been opened where we can come directly, and even boldly, into the presence of God. The believer is, in Paul's words "seated with Christ in heavenly places." The veil has been torn away, the restriction has been lifted, and God's people have been taken into the very presence of God. New Covenant life is described as intimate knowledge and understanding of God. In chapter 8 we have a new understanding of God, we can be intimate with God, we are His sons and daughters, and He is dwelling in us...something Israel never really experienced. Eternal Covenant life is realizing we have forgiveness of our sins (chapters 8 and 10). It is a significant thing for Christians to realize they do not have to go on making any kind of sacrifice or making any kind of offering for sin. His death on the cross was sufficient for all sin for all time and we have complete and total forgiveness. This forgiveness (9:9-14) even reaches and purifies our conscience. It "cleansed our conscience from dead works in order that we might serve the living God" (ver. 14). He talks about the worshipers having a "perfect" conscience. We can't go about excusing ourselves because of sin. His blood is so powerful and so far reaching that it reaches into the inner most part of our being and cleanses our conscience...and that is what enables us to serve the living God. Covenant life is described as receiving an "eternal inheritance" (9:15): "...He is the mediator of the eternal covenant, in order that since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been call may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance." Many transfer this to somewhere in the future, thinking that we might inherit the kingdom. However, this inheritance is that which we experience here and now and continue to experience throughout eternity. But if we do not begin to experience inheritance now, we will not have any inheritance in eternity. It is an eternal inheritance, and we are partakers of it now because it is a part of covenant life. Eternal Covenant life is having no consciousness of sin (chapter 10:1-14). This is a little foreign to most church people. Throughout the Old Testament there was a continual, daily and hourly consciousness of sin. "For the law. since it was only a shadow of good things to come and not the very

substance or the form of things, can never by the same sacrifices year by year, which they offer continually, make perfect those who draw near, otherwise would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins" (10:1, 2). That this applies to us is seen in verses 12 and 14: "but he, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God, for by one offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified." When he says you are perfected in His sight, accept that as being true and live in it. This doesn't mean you don't sin, but it means that he takes care of your sin. The sacrifice of Christ is sufficient, and that which cleanses you in the beginning continues to cleanse you in your daily walk. If you are in Christ, you have been perfected for all time in God's site. It is not what we feel or think, it's what God declares us to be. It's what He accepts us as being, not really what we actually are because John says we all sin and we are not to say we don't sin or that we haven't sinned. But God doesn't count that against us. He accepts us as being perfect in Christ.

Another mark of eternal covenant life is that we have confidence before God (Chapter 10:18-22): "Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer any offering for sin. Since, therefore, we have confidence to enter the holy place (Heaven itself 9:24) by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which he inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God since we have all this going for us) let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith..." (Let us have confidence before God). We are not afraid of God. There is no dread, regardless of what our songs say, there is no dread of standing before God and meeting Him because He is our Father, and we are His sons and daughters.

In Hebrews 8:8-12 the writer quotes Jeremiah 31 in which he says: "This is a covenant I will make after those days," and it is applied to the church. Note Hebrews 13:20 again: "Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the *blood of the eternal covenant* even Jesus our Lord." In the eternal covenant, Christ becomes the one who is representing us, and he is the one with whom God made covenant. That is why the eternal covenant cannot be broken, God made a covenant with Christ, a sinless man, not with us, a sinful man. Isaiah 42:6 states: "I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness, I will also hold you in my hand and watch over you as *a covenant to the people.*" Christ is given to the people as a pledge of the covenant. God made an agreement with Christ and the eternal covenant cannot be broken because Christ will not break it. It is eternal covenant because neither God nor Jesus will break it. For us, God will not withdraw His promise. He will fulfill them. We cannot break the covenant because it is made between Christ and God. Christ represents his people. He is not going to break it. We can be unfaithful to the covenant, reject it and have no part of it. Even if the whole church turns away from God, just as Israel did. The eternal covenant still stands. The eternal covenant is not made with a stumbling, bumbling people who are prone to turn to idols, turn to sin, and walk in their own way. It is made with a representative of the people whose name is Jesus, the Son of God, who represented us, who became one standing in our stead. Isaiah 42:6 shows Christ was "appointed as a covenant to the people." It cannot be broken. It is an eternal covenant. (continued next month)