

COVENANT, THE CONCLUSION

Hebrews 9:16, 17: "For where a covenant is, there must of necessity be the death of the one who made it, for a covenant is valid only when men are dead, for it is never in force while the one who made it lives." The old covenant was never in force as long as that animal was running loose out in the lot. But once the animal was slain and offered upon the altar the old covenant came into being. As long as Christ was living the new covenant was not in force. The heavenly things were not real to the people, they were not available to man. It was only after Christ died, only after the cross that the new covenant and the heavenly things came into being. Jesus lived under the old covenant. He lived and died under the Law. He lived and died in what we call "the Old Testament." This means the events and teachings before the death of Christ must be interpreted in the light of his covenant death. We will now discuss some examples of this.

That's why he said to his disciples in John 14:12: "Truly I say unto you, *he who believes in me*, the works that I do, shall he do also; and *greater* works shall he do *because I go to the Father*." It was only after the death of Christ and the beginning of the new covenant that this could take place. The question, then, is how can this be true of all "who believe"? To answer this question we must understand that John makes a distinction between Jesus' "works" and the performances of his "signs." We generally think of the "works" Jesus says all who believe in him will do as referring to his miracles. Note that John refers to all the miracles of Jesus as "signs" and mentions his "works" many times as something different from his "miracles." This is peculiar to the Gospel of John. None of the other writers designate the miracles of Jesus as signs. Only Matthew uses the word "works" and is used once in a question from John the Baptist when he heard of the "works" of Jesus and questioned if Jesus was the "coming one." To answer John's question he referred to his miracles (Matt. 11:2-5). Jesus did not say the believers would do the same and greater "signs" than he did, but they would do the same and greater "works" than he did. John 20:30, 31 tells us the purpose to his signs: "Many other signs therefore Jesus also performed in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book, but these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God; and that believing you may have life in his name." This being true Jesus does not expect believers to do these and greater signs. Jesus' works were to show God had a man in His image on the earth to do what Adam failed to do. Therefore Jesus represented the Father and did His work while he was upon the earth. But he ascended to the Father. Who would now represent God and continue His work on earth that Christ began? Here we begin to see the work believers are to do. It was through the work of Christ that God created a new man to represent Him. He "broke down the barrier of the dividing wall that in himself he might make the two (Jew and Gentile) into one new man, thus establishing peace" (Eph. 2:14, 15). Believers as the body of Christ, continues the work he "began to do" (Acts 1:1). In his physical absence, believer stands on the earth in his place: "Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us, we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (II Cor. 5:20). Instead of Christ being here in the body as he was for thirty- three years, he is now here by the Holy Spirit dwelling in the believer. This means the works of the believers are the same and greater

works of Christ because God now, instead of having one man on the earth to represent Him, has "many sons" (Heb. 2:10).

In John 3 Jesus speaks to Nicodemus and tells him he must be born again...born from above or born anew. The religious world has thrown that term around and used it very loosely. Why did Jesus talk in language which confounded even this learned ruler of the Jews? Nicodemus did not understand what Jesus was talking about. Jesus said, "you have to be born from above." Nicodemus had never heard of such a thing. "You have to be born again, are you speaking of a physical birth? Can I enter my mother's womb a second time and be born?" Jesus didn't explain it to him. He just said, "Unless you are born of water and the Spirit you can't even see the kingdom...that which is born of the flesh is flesh and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." Nicodemus didn't have the foggiest idea what Jesus was talking about.

The same thing is true with the woman at the well in the fourth chapter of John. Jesus told her that if she knew who she was talking to, he would give her living water and she would never thirst again. She said to Jesus, "Sir, you have nothing to draw with and this well is deep, where then do you get this water?" She did not know what the water was that Jesus was talking about. Jesus did not explain it to her, but John gives us a note on this in John 7:37-39: "Now on the last day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, 'If anyone is thirsty let him come unto me and drink. He who believe on me, as the Scripture said, from his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.' But this he spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed on him were to receive; for the Spirit was not given because Jesus was not yet glorified." The woman could not know that, and no one could have known it until Jesus died, arose, ascended and sent the Holy Spirit because he said that when the Spirit comes it would teach you and bring to remembrance all things and make them plain to you. Then they would understand these things, but not now. Jesus talked to Nicodemus and told him he must be born again. It is only after the day of Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit that people understood that being "born again" meant the receiving new life, receiving the Holy Spirit...Christ coming to dwell in your life.

During his earthly ministry Jesus dealt directly with people concerning salvation. For example: The woman taken in the Act of adultery and condemned by the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus said "I do not condemn you. Go. From now on sin no more" (John 8:11). To the chief tax collector, Zaccheus, "Jesus said, 'Today salvation has come to this house'" (Luke 19:9). To the paralytic carried by four men, Jesus said, "Son your sins are forgiven" (Mark 2:5), and to the dying thief on the cross "Jesus said to him, 'Truly I say to you today, you shall be with me in Paradise'" (Luke 23:43). All these are simply lessons Jesus is teaching in veiled language because He has not yet died and arose, and he cannot fully reveal what is in the new covenant until after his death and resurrection. After Jesus died, arose, and ascended the new covenant began and the Holy Spirit was given. The book of Acts explains salvation and what it means to be a part of the kingdom. To know how to be saved we don't go back to the woman at the well, we don't go back to Zaccheus, we don't go back to the sick of the palsy, we don't go back to the woman taken in adultery, and more importantly, we don't go back to the thief on the cross. We are living in the days of the new covenant and all that happened before his death happened under the old

covenant and none of the blessings of the new covenant were realized until after his death, burial, resurrection and ascension.

There are a lot of people in life who have put more trust in the thief on the cross than they have in Jesus Christ, always going back to the thief on the cross. If he was saved on his "death bed" then anyone can be saved on their death bed. He was saved without baptism; I can be saved without baptism. He never partook of the Lord's supper; it is not important to me. He was not a member of the church; so I don't have to be a member of a church. All I have to do is say, "Remember me Lord when you come into your kingdom." The thief on the cross was dying under the old covenant. He was just like the woman taken in the act of adultery of whom Jesus forgave and told her to go her way and sin no more. He was like Zaccheus, of whom Jesus said, "salvation has come to your house." He is like the sick with palsy whom Jesus told to take up his bed and walk all his sins were forgiven. Also others Jesus dealt with upon a personal basis. We are living in the days of the new covenant and all that happened before his death happened under the old covenant. None of the blessings of the new covenant were available until after his death and ascension.

Hebrews 9:11 states "But when Christ appeared..." all the limitations of the old covenant, necessary but temporary, changed. The stated purpose of Christ, and his concern, was to prepare a people to be able to serve the living God. Hebrews 9:14 states: "...the blood of Christ through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God." What the new covenant is all about is that he has prepared a people, not simply to perform divine service, not to continue in regulations of divine worship, but He has prepared a people who can serve the living God...not in tabernacle or holy place, but in a kingdom that is in covenant relation with Him to serve the living God. For this reason "he is the mediator of a new covenant (Heb.9:15) that is, he applies the new covenant to his people and gives it meaning. It is more than ritual and service that characterized the old covenant.

In Hebrews nine and ten the meaning of the covenant is shown clearly in three things Christ did, and these three are being mediated today in the church. In 9:12 it is stated that it was through his own blood that he obtained eternal redemption, that says that he *first of all loved us*. Any time we read of the fact of Christ giving his blood, that is he died, speaks of the great love of God. In Revelation 1:5 Jesus is described as "the faithful witness, the first-born of the dead, the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and released us from our sin by his blood." In Deuteronomy 7:7 speaks of the great love of God to Israel (and no less to us) in these words: "The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any people, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but because the Lord loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the Lord brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery. Know therefore that the Lord is your God, He is God, the faithful God, who keeps His covenant and His lovingkindness to a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments." His covenant with us is based upon the fact that he loves us, and there is no other explanation for it.

We respond to the great love God has for us by loving one another. (I John 4:11: "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." John 13:35: "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." The basic criteria Jesus gave

to identify Christians is the one criteria that is seldom mentioned in the religious world today as being means whereby we judge or discern the church. It is not by the church's doctrine, or by knowledge, or position, attendance record, or participation in the church program, but by this...all will know you are my disciples, that you love one another. This is the only criteria Jesus gave.

The second thing He did in making covenant is that He not only loves us, but beyond our comprehension, *He forgave us*. Hebrews 9:14: "how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" There is no longer any consciousness of sin because we have been forgiven. That's what covenant is all about. One of the Apostle Paul's favorite words is "justified." He has forgiven us and we stand before him as if we had never sinned. Colossians 2:13: "and when you were dead in your transgressions, He made you alive together with him, having forgiven us all our transgressions. The basic element of covenant is brought about by the fact that God loved us through Christ is that He also forgave us, and that forgiveness is complete. He quotes from Jeremiah 31:34: "And their sins and lawless deeds I will remember no more." The Psalmist says our sins "are removed as far as the east is from the west" (Ps. 103:12). So Hebrews 10:18 states: "Now where there is forgiveness of these things there is no longer any offering for sin. There is no more anyone can do other than what he has already done. No wonder Paul said "There is therefore no condemnation to those that are in Christ Jesus" (Rom.8:1).

The third element of covenant life is that "*He has accepted us*." This is manifest in Hebrews 10:19: "Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus (the "holy place" is said to be heaven itself: (9:24)...let us draw near with sincere assurance of faith..." (10:22). We have confidence to know that we are at any time and at all times in His presence. We have the words of Ephesians 2:13 "we have been brought near," something that in the Old Testament even the high priest could not understand. We have been brought near is described as "He being in us and we in him." In other words He has accepted us. It is through his blood that we have been "brought near." One version translates Ephesians 1:6 that we have been "accepted in the beloved." The new covenant means that He loved us, He forgave us, and it means He accepted us.

The church is the one place on earth where people should be accepted...no matter what they are, no matter who they are, no matter what they have done, or how they look, or smell, or how they act. We do not accept their sin, but we must accept them because God has accepted us. Who is the church ministering to today? We are ministering to righteous people. That's why we build our massive cathedrals and our 1,000 member congregations, and that is why we let the para-church organizations care for them

The realization of covenant, for us to live the covenant life, and to be a new covenant people experiencing all the privileges of covenant, then what he did to make covenant a reality must be worked out in our lives. He has done this in order that we might serve the living God. To serve the living God, and be a part of covenant life, and to see this life worked out in our lives as Paul said "work out your own salvation," that is, what He has worked in you, work it out in your life. In order to do that, we must love as he loved, we must forgive as he forgave, and we must accept as he accepted. The church has wandered away from that. We have strayed from the reality of that because have not understood covenant. Let's take another look at how we are living our lives. Is it covenant life?