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The New Covenant pt. 1

I want to talk about the New Covenant today. I have been studying the New Covenant for a little while and have been seeing things that have truly excited me. And, if I'm really honest, I know that I have greatly misunderstood this covenant in the past – and I'd bet that many of us have.

So I want to look at the New Covenant today. And I may spend some weeks on this. I don't know.

Lets start with this question: What is a covenant? I think a simple but functional definition of a covenant is an agreement or understanding by which two parties enter into some kind of relationship.

And often covenants have some sort of sign that signifies the agreement and the permanent nature of it.

- Example ~ An example of this would be God's covenant with Noah. God destroyed the earth with water and then made a covenant with Noah never to do that again. The rainbow was the sign.
- Example ~ Another example would be Jacob making a covenant with Laban that they would not pass into each other's land to do one another harm, and that Jacob would not take any other wives besides Laban's daughters. And they made a big pile of rocks as the sign.

So that, roughly, is what a covenant is – an understanding or agreement by which two parties enter into some sort of relationship.

And, generally speaking, in terms of God's relationship with a people, there are just two covenants in the Bible. There are several covenants mentioned, but with respect to God relating to humans, we have just the Old Covenant and the New Covenant.

And both of these covenants are an understanding or agreement by which God and people (these are the two parties) enter into some kind of relationship.

Now these covenants have one very important thing in common, but are radically different in substance and reality.

The important thing that they have in common is that they are both relating to Christ. But the way that they do that is what is so entirely different.

The first covenant is only the type and shadow, the prophecy and promise of the second. The second covenant is the fulfillment and experience of all that was foreshadowed, prophesied, and promised.

So, though they both speak of Christ....

- In the first covenant God said “build a temple”. In the second Christ was the temple.
- In the first God said “build an ark”. In the second, Christ was the ark.
- In the first God said “make a sacrifice”. In the second Christ was that sacrifice.
- In the first God said “make show bread, instruments, altars, laws, regulations, ceremonies, feasts, curtains, etc. In the second, Christ was all of these things.

So in all things, the first was pointing to the second. The first was the testimony of what would come in the second. The first was the promise and prophecy, type and shadow, of all that was coming in Christ. But they both concern themselves with Christ.

Now, here was the agreement, here was the understanding, here was the first old covenant. God says “You don’t even understand fully what all of this is pointing to, and how all of this is to be fulfilled in the person of My Son, BUT....nevertheless...live according to this understanding of what is coming in Christ. If you want me to be your God, and you to be my people, live in such a way that all things that you are and do, point to my Son.

So, here’s what I want you to do:

- build a temple that points to my Son
- put on white priestly garments that point to my Son
- perform these sacrifices that point to my Son
- live according to these laws that are the nature of my Son

“Live according to this covenant of type and shadow and prophecy and promise – and put your faith in me for the fulfillment of all of this – and I will be your God and you will be my people. Here’s the agreement, the understanding of how we will enter into a relationship. Here’s the covenant.”

And so, in so many ways, the Old covenant was like a testimony of what was to come and what was to be fulfilled in Christ. It’s a testimony that says “there is a time coming when I will dwell in your midst” “there’s a kingdom coming, a greater temple coming, a city coming, Zion is coming, a righteousness is coming”

“Now walk according to this testimony...and as you do I will lead you by the hand and guide you and I will be your God and you will be my people”

And that covenant was written on stone (The 10 commandments). And that covenant was written on parchment. We’ll talk more about that shortly.

And that's why so much of the writings of the New Testament is devoted to demonstrating how everything promised and prophesied is fulfilled in Christ. The Gospels always saying "this was fulfilled, that was fulfilled".

The epistles continually testifying of fulfillment in Christ. . Remember what Isaiah said – that was fulfilled in Christ. Remember what Jeremiah said? That was fulfilled in Christ.

Especially Hebrews says "remember this? That was fulfilled in Christ. Remember the high priest – that was Christ. Remember the temple? Christ in you is it. Remember the Sabbath rest? Jesus is that too. Remember the veil? It was Jesus' flesh.

And so now we come to the New Covenant. Now the New Covenant is also an agreement or understanding by which God and man come into relationship. And I want to focus today on the following questions, because wrong answers to the following questions will keep us from walking in the experiential reality of that covenant.

- #1 What is that agreement/understanding. In other words, what is that Covenant?**
- #2 Where was that Covenant written?**
- #3 How is that covenant learned?**

If we can just briefly cover these three questions this morning, that will be enough for today.

1. What is the agreement/understanding by which God and man came into relationship. What is the covenant.

Now I'm just going to cover this briefly, and if you're visiting with us this morning, you may want to grab a few old teaching CDs for this to be more clear. We've been talking about the gospel as an exchange of life. Not merely the forgiveness of sins, but also the death of one nature and the life of another. We need to see the gospel as an exchange of life in order for us to understand the covenant.

But, in a nutshell, the new covenant, the new agreement/understanding, came on the cross. Jesus says it in all three synoptic gospels "this is the New Covenant in my blood". In other words its in the cross. Its in the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And what is the understanding? What is the agreement? Simply this – **that Adam has been judged and that Christ is the life.**

- In other words its "I have been crucified with Christ, it is no longer I that live but Christ that lives in me"
- In other words the agreement is that the body of death is done away with so that you could walk in the newness of His life.

- In other words the agreement is that Christ is the life that is acceptable to God.
- In other words its that “the flesh profits nothing, the Spirit gives life”.
- In other words it’s the eternal purpose described in Ephesians 1 – that all God has, He’ll have it in His Son.

Now if you’re new with us, you may not see how all of this is saying the same thing. What is it saying? Its all saying that God, at the cross, removed the nature of the flesh, the nature of Adam, and gave the life of His Son...because the only life acceptable to God is that of Christ. And Christ Himself, in us, is how we are to live in this relationship.

We are to live by His life, and not our own, in order to live in this New Covenant. The covenant, simply put, is this – “Not I, but Christ...and that because of the Cross”. There’s one life acceptable to the Father. Yours has been crucified with Christ, and you have been given that life.

The covenant is my death, burial, and resurrection with Christ...so that He is now the life. And the sign is the cross.

I would love to speak more on that, but I just can’t. But this was the agreement, the understanding by which we come into a relationship with God. This is the covenant – not I but Christ.

2. Where was that covenant written?

Many people believe that the New Covenant is simply the New Testament. And that just simply isn’t so. The old covenant IS the old testament...because it was written on tablets. It was written on parchment. The New Covenant was not written on paper.

Now, before you raise the heresy flag...just hear me out. It is so important that we understand this. The New Testament is the testimony, the description, the Spirit-given explanation, the infallible depiction of the New Covenant. But the New Covenant was **written** somewhere else. And if we don’t know where its written, we’ll never know how to learn it.

Lets look at some verses that teach us about this.

- Jer 31:31 ¶ "Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, :32 not like the covenant which I made with their fathers **in the day I took them by the hand** to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them," declares the LORD. 33 "But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD, "**I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it**; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. 34 "**They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they will all know Me, from the least of**

them to the greatest of them," declares the LORD, "for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

- Ezek 36:25 "Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. 26 **"Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.**
- 2 Cor 3:3 being manifested that you are a letter of Christ, cared for by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on **tablets of human hearts.**

So we can see where this covenant is written. It is written on human hearts. That understanding, that agreement, that it is no longer I but Christ, is given of God and it is written, not on stone or parchment, but on the human heart.

As I said, the new testament describes, explains, testifies to this covenant, but to find the substance of this covenant...the place where it is a reality, you need to look on the human heart because that's where it was written.

The Old covenant can be read. Its written on paper. It can be read and studied and learned. The Bible tells us that the Old Covenant was to be written to the doorposts of houses and bound to the head and engraved in stones so that all could read it. It was to be read and learned. And it could be taught of man. A man could teach his neighbor the Old Covenant.

It is not so with the New Covenant. You can read the New Testament over and over again and just get more religious and dead. Because the words aren't the covenant. The covenant is the reality the substance the Truth, that "it is no longer I but Christ" and that covenant is written on the heart of man. The understanding and agreement of that covenant is written on human hearts.

And that's why Jesus, in his teaching, was always trying to make people see the source of their problem. The Old Covenant written on stone and parchment didn't free them from themselves. It never freed them from sin. It never dealt with the problem where it needed to be dealt with.

And so He says:

- Matt 23:25 ¶ *"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence. 26 "You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also.*

- Matt 23:27 ¶ *"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness.*
- Matt 12:34 *"You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart.*
- Matt 15:18 *"But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man.*
- Luke 6:45 *"The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil {man} out of the evil {treasure} brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart.*

You see living according to an understanding or agreement...a covenant...of types and shadows and promises and prophesies...that was written on paper wasn't getting the job done. The problem was much deeper than that, and so the New Covenant had to be written where it could be learned and lived internally.

Now, of course, many of the Jews had supposed they were righteous by trying to obey the first covenant. To them Jesus says:

- "you have heard that it was said do not murder, but if you hate somebody in your heart you have murdered them already".
- "you have heard that it was said do not commit adultery, but if you do it in your heart, you have committed adultery already"

We need to move on, but a quick review. **The New Covenant is an understand and agreement by which God and man came into relationship. The nature of that relationship was union. The substance of that agreement was "Not I, but Christ". And the place where it was written was the human heart.**

3. How is that covenant learned?

Well, as we've seen the old covenant could be learned by reading and study. It was a covenant of the letter. It could be studied and memorized and obeyed outwardly (to some extent at least)

But the New Covenant cannot be learned/experienced/walked in simply by reading a book. The substance of that covenant does not exist on pages. (Though it is true that the Lord does use reading and preaching as mediums or vehicles to reveal to us the substance of the covenant.)

There is a huge difference between reading the New Testament and walking in the New Covenant. Or learning the New Testament and walking in New Covenant reality. It's the same difference between believing in Christianity and abiding in Christ.

This New Covenant reality is written on the heart – the inward place of man. And in order to learn it, to walk in it, to understand it, **it must be revealed to us there**. That is where it is learned.

Paul says in 2 Corinthians 3 – its not a ministry of the letter, it's a ministry of the Spirit. It was written on your heart by the finger of God, and the Spirit of God is the one that teaches you this Covenant. No person can teach you the New Covenant. A person can read you the New Testament. A person can teach you theology. But a person cannot teach you the new covenant in such a way that it becomes reality.

That is why it says in Jeremiah 31

33 "But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD, **"I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it;** and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. 34 **"They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,"**

“They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying “know the Lord”. Why not? Because of where that covenant is written. And because of how that covenant is learned.

The covenant is written on the tablets of human hearts. And there is one teacher of that covenant – and Jesus told us who that would be.

Remember when Jesus said in Matt 23:8 *"But do not be called teacher; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers."*

What did Jesus say? “the Spirit of truth will teach you all things, will guide you into the truth, will take the things of me and disclose them to you, will cause you to know the things freely given by God”

The spirit of God teaches us the covenant, the agreement, the understanding by which we walk as one.

Lets just close by looking at one verse. It's a verse we've looked at in the past, but I think it may strike you in a new way after what we've talked about today. Its Col 3:3.

Col 3:3 For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 Whenever (Gr. “as often as”) Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed together with Him in glory.

It starts off by reminding you of the covenant. “You have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God”. There’s the reality. There’s the understanding and agreement.

And then he goes into teaching how we live in who we really are. How we change. How we are transformed.

- “*Whenever Christ, who is your life*”~ **he reminds them of the covenant again!**
- “*is revealed*” ~ **there’s the way it is learned...**
- “*then you will be revealed together with him in glory*” **there’s the nature of the relationship – glorious union**