

YOUR "NEW COVENANT"

31 Yes, the 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 It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers, when I took them by the hand and led them out of the land of Egypt. They broke that covenant of mine, although I was a husband to them, declares the Lord. 33 But this is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord. I will put my law in their minds, and I will write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. 34 No longer will each one teach his neighbor, or each one teach his brother, saying, "Know the Lord," because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord, for I will forgive their guilt, and I will remember their sins no more. (Evangelical Heritage Version)

"I'll invite you over for dinner, if you wash my car." No, don't take me literally; I can't feed all of you in my home today. I made that statement to emphasize a Bible term that is essential in our text: covenant. If, after the service, I told you, "If you wash my car, I'll make dinner for you," and we shake on it, we made a covenant. God makes a covenant with us, too, but it is something more important than clean cars. It involves clean sinners. ***"Yes, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant,"*** he promises. This statement says two things. There was an old covenant and there is a new covenant. Today we will see why we need a new covenant and then we will look at the terms of this new covenant.

I. Why we need a new covenant.

The word "covenant" in the dictionary means, "A binding agreement made by two or more persons or parties; a law; a formal, sealed agreement or contract." Though there are minor differences, you can say that covenant, contract, and agreement all mean the same thing. We can't live without covenants. A student going off to college makes a covenant with that college, "I'll pay you money if you give me an education." We have covenants at work. "I will give you so much money and these benefits if you do this." Parents and children make covenants all the time, though they may be in the negative. "Clean your room or no TV tonight." An insurance policy, bank account, loan, and credit card are all covenants. They do this if you do that.

Covenants are good. With them we can buy things, earn money, get an education. The problem comes when one side breaks the covenant. You default on a bank loan, they will take your car or house away and your credit score tanks. You come to work late too many times, they will fire you. If the child doesn't clean his room, there is no TV tonight. If you don't wash my car, no dinner.

In the Old Testament, God made a covenant with the Israelites. We call it the Sinaitic covenant because it was made at Mt. Sinai. God told the Israelites that he would be their God if they would be his people and do everything he tells them. It includes the Ten Commandments, but it is much more than that. Almost every aspect of Jewish life was governed by those laws from the kind of food they ate to touching dead bodies. This covenant required endless animal sacrifices. It established a hereditary priesthood based on membership in one family, that of Aaron. This covenant was placed on only one people, the Israelites.

So why did God give them this covenant. Paul tells us in Galatians, ***"Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law."*** Parents, why do you get babysitters for your small children? To keep an eye on them, feed them, and protect them until you get home. Is the babysitter a parent to the children? No. Can the babysitter declare the children as dependents on her tax form? No. She takes care of them until you get home. This is the Sinaitic covenant. It acted like a babysitter. It was to set aside God's people and preserve his promise of a Savior until that Savior comes to earth. But it did it more than that. With that covenant God taught his people an important lesson. There was no way that any Israelite could perfectly keep God's Old Testament laws. Time and time again they broke it. That is exactly what God wanted them to know. He was showing them that weak, sinful humans can't join a covenant where they must do things to win salvation.

"I'll invite you to dinner if you wash my car." But what if you didn't wash my car or the wash job is bad, should I still make dinner for you? No. The truth is, we can never enter into a two-way covenant with God. It is true. The Sinaitic covenant is gone. Christ has come and so the babysitter went home. But look at the Ten Commandments. Yes, they are a part of the Sinaitic covenant, but they are not gone. They were there before Sinai. That is why we know Cain murdered Abel, a sin against the Fifth Commandment. And they are still around today. They tell us what it takes to be able to live with God in a perfect, sinless heaven. Let's just pick one of them, the Third Commandment, remembering the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Let's say I give you just one thing to do, come to church every time. If so, then you can go to heaven. Sounds easy enough, doesn't it. But what if you had a flat tire on your way to church. Well, you broke the covenant and you can't go to heaven. What if you had surgery and couldn't come? What if you were called up to fight in a war and you can't go to church? Well, you broke the covenant and you can't go to heaven. What if you got lazy? Now apply this to the other commandments, loving God above all

things, never using his name in vain, loving your neighbors as yourselves, always obeying teachers and parents, never saying a bad word about anyone. You break the covenant, you can't go to heaven.

There is no way we can keep a two-way covenant with the Lord. But that is exactly what God wants us to realize.

II. The terms of the new covenant.

³¹ Yes, the 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 It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers, when I took them by the hand and led them out of the land of Egypt. They broke that covenant of mine, although I was a husband to them, declares the Lord.

A covenant doesn't have to always be two sided. Yes, by definition, a covenant must have at least two parties, but both parties don't have to agree to do something. "I'll invite you over to dinner if you wash my car," is a two-sided covenant. But what if I said, "I'll give you dinner." That is a one-sided covenant. Two people are involved, but only one does something.

Now let's say that I offered you dinner if you washed my car, but you couldn't. Sheepishly you have to admit you didn't and you probably expected me to call off dinner. But if I said, "I will give you dinner anyways," then a two-sided covenant has been replaced by a new one-sided covenant. The old covenant was broken, so I made a new one, a one-sided covenant.

Let me take you to 2 Corinthians. ***"God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. ... God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."*** God replaced the broken, two-sided covenant with a one-sided covenant where he does everything. The truth is, where there is forgiveness, someone has to take a loss. If you failed to wash my car but I gave you dinner anyways, I will have to eventually go out and wash it. If the bank forgives your debt, they must absorb the loss themselves. To forgive you, God absorbs the loss. His Son, Jesus paid for our sins. As a result, God makes a one-sided covenant with us. "I'll forgive your sins and give you a place in my heaven instead of hell," he says.

Isn't this a better covenant? ***"³³ But this is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord. I will put my law in their minds, and I will write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. ³⁴ No longer will each one teach his neighbor, or each one teach his brother, saying, "Know the Lord," because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord, for I will forgive their guilt, and I will remember their sins no more."*** At first this sounds like we don't have to evangelize anymore. But that is not what it is saying. All one has to do is hear about Jesus and believe and he is saved. You don't have to learn a certain language. It isn't like school where you get a diploma from gradeschool, than high school, than college, progressively learning more. We don't have to persuade someone about Jesus. Just share him and let them believe and be saved. This new covenant governs our hearts and not just our outward lives. And this new covenant isn't just for one nation on earth; it is for all people.

If someone invites our family over for dinner, we ask if there is anything that we can bring and they usually say no. But we want to bring something anyways—a bottle of wine, some dessert, something—to show our appreciation. So how does this new covenant affect you? We don't have to do anything for it, but is there something we want to bring? How about hating sin and loving what God says is good? We can bring that. How about a part of the blessings God has given us, our time to listen to and teach his Word, for prayer, a bit of our income for church work, for helping our neighbor? How about bringing another person to heaven as we witness about Jesus? How about the way we deal with one another?

This new covenant is something that makes the Christian church stand out. The old covenant is everywhere even if people don't use the Bible. They live by the old, two-sided covenant. Do good, get rewarded. Do bad, get punished. All other religions, and even pagans, live under that.

We preach a new covenant, a one-sided covenant where God does the action and we benefit from it. May this new covenant never disappear from this church. And this was LES week. That is why we started a school, not to compete with the public school. We started it and maintain it so we can tell the kids something new, how God was reconciling them to himself through the death of his son.

This is the covenant God establishes with you. He invites you over to the wedding banquet in heaven and you don't have to wash his car. INJ Amen.