

GOD'S COVENANTS

NEW COVENANT AND THE CHURCH

On May 17th the first major American sport will reopen, after having closed for the coronavirus pandemic. Forty NASCAR teams will race cars around the track at Darlington Raceway in South Carolina.

Seven hundred people will be present, *but no fans*.

Team members, stadium personnel, and broadcast crews **only** will be allowed to attend the event. NASCAR will be catering to a television-only audience.

And I'd suppose the vast majority of video cameras will be positioned above and in the curves. Watching cars fly down a straight-away can get boring. But it's in the turns that cars jockey for placement. Coming in and out of the turns *moves are made and crashes occur*.

And reading the Bible is a lot like watching a NASCAR race. Pay special attention to **the turns**.

The Bible is the story of a loving God who has worked tirelessly to establish a relationship with human beings. Seven times in the Bible God has proposed a covenant with mankind... the **Edenic, Adamic, Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and New Covenants**.

God's covenants are the **"turns"** in the story of man's redemption. And crashes have occurred in *this human race*. Often mankind fails to live up to his part in the relationship. **Yet God never fails**. He responds to our blunders with new terms and with new covenants.

Understand, God doesn't just want any type of relationship. He has expectations and desires.

And **His covenants define His terms.**

Real fellowship between two parties doesn't just happen. It's not meaningful or sustainable without a covenant. A real relationship is governed by agreed upon understandings between both parties.

Take two single people, they forego marriage and decide to shack up... *Hey, they like each other, it's convenient, even cheaper, and they want to have sex.*

Who needs the promises, and expectations, and stipulations, and provisos that come with marriage?

And all might go well for a while... *But who buys the groceries and mows the grass?... What if the guy brings home another girl?... Or the gal wants a break?... Or one of them invites a friend to move in?...*

Without a covenant who defines the relationship? It's all up in the air. This is why a non-covenantal arrangement lacks the value and stability to survive.

In Amos 3:3, God asks, **"Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?"** The obvious answer is **"no."**

Lasting relationships are based on covenants. And the same is true in our relationship with God!

Amazingly, God wants a relationship with us, and God is the one who sets out the terms. He doesn't negotiate. You don't

sit down and work out a covenant that's convenient for you and that also works for God.

God never haggles or brokers a deal. His covenants are always *take it or leave it* propositions. **You either play by God's rules or you can't join God's team.**

This is why it grieves me whenever I hear someone say, **"Well, Me and the Man Upstairs... we're tight."**

Or **"I'm cool with God. We've got an understanding."**

Or **"I've worked out my own relationship with God."**

Say that, and you're revealing your own blindness. God doesn't go around striking up individual deals.

Seven times in human history God has laid out covenants with mankind... And they were important enough to be recorded in Scripture. These covenants are what the Bible is all about. God's covenants are the means by which God plans to restore a fallen world.

It's a tribute to God's amazing grace that whenever man rebels and sins, God's response is a covenant!

When the first man, Adam, sinned, God didn't shrug His shoulders and says, **"boys will be boys."** No!

Something had to be done. According to the Edenic Covenant **"the wages of sin is death."** There was a proper way to cover sin and shame. God used leather to clothe the first sinners. He sacrificed an animal.

And because of Adam's sin, death or entropy entered all of nature. You and I now live in a fallen world that's under the sway and influence of Satan.

God's answer to that was another covenant with Adam - **the ancient promise of "the woman's seed."**

The ultimate offspring of Eve, the virgin born Son of God, would crush the serpent, or Satan's, authority.

When fallen humanity became so polluted God had to purge the Earth with a flood - He started over with an undefiled family. He made a covenant with Noah.

When Noah's descendants disobeyed God, and launched a coup d'that at the Tower of Babel, God busted up the party, and started over with a covenant.

Rather than work with humanity as a whole, He chose one family and made a covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Israel. He promised Abraham **a land**, and **a nation**, and **an heir who would bless the world**.

Remember the Abrahamic Covenant consists of three promises: **sod**, **seed**, and **salvation**.

After the nation of Israel exited Egypt God prepared His people for the Promised Land. He set them apart from other nations, by making a covenant to Moses...

The Law... the sacrifices... blessings and cruses.

God even promised Israel an *eternal kingdom* and an *eternal king*. God made a covenant with David that his heir

would sit on his throne forever. He would rule the world and live forever. He was called “**Messiah.**”

But when the Babylonians conquered the Jewish kingdom and took the nation to Babylon a chill settled over the more knowledgeable rabbis. A son of David no longer ruled in Israel. *Had God’s covenant failed?*

Nearly 2000 years earlier God called Abraham out of Babel, the land of idols. Now God’s people were back in Babylon. Tragically, they had come full circle...

Psalm 137 was written in tears by the exiled Jews...

“By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept when we remembered Zion. We hung our harps upon the willows... For those who carried us away captive asked us a song, and those who plundered us requested mirth... How shall we sing the LORD’s song in a foreign land? If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill...”

The Jews longed to return home to Israel.

And just like the gracious God He is, Almighty God responded to His people’s longing **with a covenant.**

At their darkest hour, He shined the brightest light.

Jeremiah still living in Israel, and Ezekiel among the exiles in Babylon announced a **New Covenant** that God would make with His people, *and with all people.*

It too included three promises... Israel would be **regathered** to their land. Spiritual life would be reborn, or **regenerated.** And a King would come to **re-establish** the throne of David and kingdom of Israel.

And God sent His only Son, Jesus, to ratify this covenant. All God's covenants are signed with blood.

And the **New Covenant** was no different...

The night before He was crucified, Jesus took the Passover cup and redefined its meaning. The Lamb of God said **"this is My blood of the New Covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins..."**

Jesus came to activate the New Covenant.

At the time of Jesus the Jews had been **regathered**.

With His death on the cross, and its payment for sin, it was now possible for sinful men to be forgiven, and be given new life - it was the miracle of **regeneration**.

And as we discussed last time, if the Jews had received the Gospel, and Jesus as their Messiah, there's evidence from Peter's preaching, that Jesus would've returned in the first century to **reestablish** the throne to David and set up God's kingdom on earth.

But the Jews didn't! They still haven't! And for 2000 years now God's New Covenant has been on pause.

He offered His Kingdom to the Jews, but they refused, and chose to remain under the blessings and curses of the Mosaic Covenant. It was a tragic mistake.

Over the centuries, the curses of Deuteronomy 28 have come upon the Jews over and over again...

Shortly after their rejection of Messiah in 70 AD the Romans sacked Jerusalem and burned the Temple.

Thousands of Jews were crucified or sold into slavery. The Romans leveled the Temple Mount, and built a temple to their own idolatrous god Jupiter.

They even renamed Jerusalem, “[Aelia Capitolina](#),” after the Emperor Hadrian’s family. Eventually, Rome barred the Jews from their own holy city. The nation was no more, and the Jews were a scattered people.

And if you’d just been following the OT storyline you would’ve cried. The New Covenant was the last of the covenants... *God’s plan ends with His people’s failure?*

But God had a secret. He had kept back vital information from the Jewish prophets. *God can do that!*

Did you know God has secrets? I love Deuteronomy 29:29, “*The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever....*” Put together those two thoughts and you get the notion that God has His secrets and He likes to reveal them to His people.

I got a story to tell you... It was first reported in the Boston Globe. The events occurred in June of 1990.

A young lady from Boston had grown up in a poor family. She even spent time in a homeless shelter.

Yet through hard work and a successful business she had risen out of squalor. Her life seemed perfect. She met a man, and they decided to get married.

In preparation for the reception this lady contracted with the downtown Hyatt - ordered a meal with all the trimmings, expensive centerpieces, formal waiters, even an orchestra for entertainment. The price tag for the big shindig was \$13,000. At the time a lot of money.

But here's where the plot thickens...

A few days before the wedding the groom got cold feet. He said he didn't know if he was ready for a big commitment like marriage. After a painful conversation with his finance, the boy backed out... The spurned bride immediately went to the Hyatt for a refund, *but to no avail*. The contract she'd signed was binding.

She had two options... cancel and forfeit 90% of her money, *or* go through with the party. Though at first it seemed crazy, the more the jilted bride thought of going on with the party the more she liked the idea.

Here's what she did... First, she changed the night's menu to **boneless chicken - in honor of the groom**.

Then she sent out invitations to all of Boston's homeless shelters and rescue missions... That night, Hyatt waiters, dressed in tuxedos, served delicious hors d'oeuvres to bag ladies, and panhandlers.

People who normally ate half-gnawed pizza feasted on chicken cordon bleu. Vagrants sipped champagne, and street people ate chocolate wedding cake.

They all danced into the night to big-band melodies.

You could sum it up with one word, “**Surprise!**” The jilted bride did the unthinkable. Rather than waste a good party, she invited folks who would appreciate the blessing. She hosted a feast and invited strangers.

And this was the secret God kept from Israel.

Here’s where we need to read our text, Ephesians 2:12-13. It’s addressed to Gentiles - people who aren’t the chosen Jews. It reads, “**That at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.**

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.”

Like the jilted bride, God had been jilted by His people Israel. When they refused to believe in Jesus, He made an unprecedented move that no one expected. God had a perfectly good covenant - paid for by the blood of His own Son... *why let it go to waste?*

So God sent shock waves through the halls of heaven. He took promises and covenants intended specifically for the children of Abraham, and offered them to everyman - to the Gentiles - to strangers...

Understand, this was like a dog breeder who specializes in properly-pedigreed pups, suddenly opening up the kennel to mutts and mongrels.

God took the status He'd reserved for His special, chosen people, Israel - *and offered it to any human with a pulse.* **Gentiles were offered God's covenants.**

Here's the secret God refused to reveal to the OT prophets... Israel would reject their Messiah, **but God would not be without a people.** He would make a new people group out of both Jews and Gentiles.

Anyone believing in Jesus was invited to the party.

Remember the story Jesus told in Luke 14...

A man hosted a great supper. But the people he invited all had excuses not to come. So he told his servants to invite the **"poor, maimed, lame, blind."** *Yet despite their efforts there was still room for more.*

So he sent his servants into **"the highways and hedges"** to recruit anybody and everybody for his party. **The host's only priority was a full house...**

And here's the meaning of the parable - God will fill up His kingdom with misfits, and nobodies - not just blue bloods. In Christ, God opens the door to all men.

In Matthew 21 Jesus teaches this same truth again... A landowner planted a vineyard, and leased it to a crew of viticulture workers who didn't like paying rent.

All they really wanted to do was *whine...* (Laugh)

So when He sent his servants to collect the rent, this malicious bunch beat, and stoned, and killed the servants. *That's no way to treat a friendly bill-collector!*

So the landowner sent his own boy. Figured, “They will respect my son.” But the men saw it as a chance to kill the heir and steal the owner’s estate.

It’s revealing, later in Matthew 21 we’re told, “When the chief priests and Pharisees heard His parables, they perceived that He was speaking of them.”

Of course He was! The Jews were enjoying New Covenant blessings without bearing New Covenant fruit. They occupied the land, and looked forward to the kingdom, but they had rejected God’s messengers.

They killed His Son and had practiced on His prophets. The vinedressers of Judaism were destined for judgment. Jesus delivers the moral of the story when He says, “The kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it...”

This is what Paul in Ephesians refers to as a “**mystery.**” In 3:4 he speaks of the “the mystery of Christ, which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel...”

Understand, God keeps secrets. Paul calls them “*mysteries,*” and His biggest mystery was the Church.

I don’t know about you, but I like a little mystery in my life... A predictable life is a boring life. I love surprises. Kathy and I

have been married for 39 years, but she still surprises me. She supplies lots of mystery.

And it's the mystery that keeps me intrigued and enchanted. *Don't you like to keep a secret - then spring it on that special someone.* It's a thrill. It stirs up love.

Well, **the Church is the mystery of the New Covenant.** All along God knew what He would do, but He kept it a secret - *so that He could spring it on us!*

Don't ever think of the Church as **God's Plan B.** *Oh, since the Jews wouldn't dance, God was stuck with the Gentiles as His partner.* Granted, that's how it seems.

But plenty of passages state that it was always God's will to include the Gentiles in the New Covenant.

He just kept it a secret. It was **a mystery.**

I love how 1 Peter 2:9 addresses the Church - *Jews and Gentiles.* "You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people..."

That's how God spoke of Israel under the Mosaic Covenant. Now He refers to the Church with the same language. We're "*a holy nation,*" a "*special people.*"

Remember, at the Tower of Babel, God confused the languages and scattered the Gentiles. That's when He turned His attention to one family, the Hebrews.

But Abraham's family rejected the salvation God offered under the New Covenant, and He turned His attention back to

the rest of humanity. On the Day of Pentecost God started a new work among the nations.

He reverse what He did at the Tower of Babel.

Rather than confuse the languages, God gave the Church the gift of tongues so they could speak in other languages the praises of God. **It unified the crowd.**

In a supernatural way, God ended the language barrier that had kept mankind segregated. The nations God drove apart at Babel were reunited at Pentecost.

God was forming a new people group.

As Peter puts it in 1 Peter 2:10, “(those) who once *were not a people... are now the people of God.*”

Understand what God is doing in the Church. He’s creating in us a whole new species of human being.

Before *this mystery* was revealed there were only two kinds of humanity on planet Earth - Jews and Gentiles. *But that changed with the Church.* When God invited Gentiles to join in the New Covenant He was creating out of Jews and Gentiles a new distinction.

Listen to how Paul puts it in Ephesians 2:15, “**So as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross...**”

Today, there’s no longer just Jews or Gentiles, there’s a third breed of humanity, called “**Christian.**” In Christ **a New Covenant community** has been born.

For a time, the Church has replaced Israel as God's focal point on the Earth. *Not forever! Not hardly!*

“The restoration of all things” is a promise God made to Israel. God will again turn His attention to the children of Abraham. God's ultimate rule on Earth will be from the throne of David, and in the land of Israel.

But according to Romans 11, for the moment, Israel is the branch that's been cut off from the vine. And the Church - a new group - has been grafted in its place.

Remember under the OC, where did Israel come to worship God? They came to the Jewish Temple.

It was God's designated meeting place with people. In fact, it was a sin to sacrifice on any other altar.

Part of the Davidic Covenant was that David's son would build God a Temple. When Solomon got his certificate of occupancy, God dedicated the new Temple with divine fireworks. Fire fell from heaven and consumed the meat. *It was a new day in Israel...*

But again, God repeated the miracle at Pentecost. When the Holy Spirit was poured out on the Church flickers of fire appeared on the heads of the disciples.

God was dedicating a new Temple.

The fire of the Spirit had fallen on the sacrifice, but this time not dead meat, the sacrifice was alive and kicking. God likes His sacrifices rare. He likes *living sacrifices*. He wants us to be totally dedicated to Him.

Yet here's the point, **today the Church is the Temple of God.** We're the place where men now come to worship Him! We're "A house of prayer for all nations." As the Temple was under the Mosaic Covenant, today the Church reflects God's glory.

1 Peter 2 refers to believers as "living stones." We're stacked up on Jesus, our chief cornerstone!

With the time we have left, let me help you grasp what it means to be a New Covenant believer. How **the third breed** differs from the first two, Jew and Gentile.

Think of it this way, the Gentiles were **unrighteous.**

Ephesians 2:1 describes their nature as "dead in trespasses and sins." And dead means dead.

There're no degrees to death. You can't be partially dead - you're dead or your not... The Gentiles were hostile to God - "children of wrath" - dead in their sin.

But the Jews weren't any better - they were **self-righteous.** This was our Lord Jesus' biggest beef.

He was kind and merciful to the tax-collectors and prostitutes, but He was intolerant of the self-righteous, legalistic, hypocritical, prejudicial people the Jews called "Pharisees." Jesus called them "sons of hell."

The Gentiles were "unrighteous."

The Jews were "self-righteousness."

But the New Covenant refers to the Christian as "the righteousness of God." *This is amazing!* 2 Corinthians 5:21 puts it, "For (God) made (Christ) who knew no sin to be sin for

us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” In Christ, we receive, and then we become **the righteousness of God!**

Recall the middle promise of the NC - **regeneration**.

In John 3, Jesus explained it to Nicodemus, as being “**born all over again.**” It’s a spiritual awakening.

In Jeremiah 31:33 God explains what He’ll do, “**I will write My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts... No more shall every man teach his neighbor...“Know the LORD, for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest...”**

Fail to understand these promises and you’ll live a life well below your privileges as a Christian...

Under the Mosaic or Old Covenant, God wrote His laws on stone tablets. Moses brought down from the mountain The Ten Commandments written by the finger of God. But under the New Covenant God writes His will in us. His desires become our heart beat.

Before I came to Jesus my instinct was to resist God and *do my own thing*, and mostly my own thing was *a bad thing*. On occasion it might be *good thing*, but it was always *my thing*. I was selfish at the core.

But when I embraced Jesus a change took place inside me. He etched into my heart a love for Him and a love for others. I now desire to obey. **My former *spirit of defiance* was replaced with a *spirit of compliance*.**

You could say it like this, before I knew Jesus, on occasion I would slip up and do a good deed. God's desires and my desires might accidentally cross paths.

But my inner compass pointed away from God.

Yet now as a Christian everything has flip-flopped.

On occasion I might slip up and sin, but God's desires and mine remain in sync. My heart's desire is to please God. Now my inner compass points to God.

Once I was at home with sin, now that I'm a Christian when I participate it feels out of character. It's not me.

There's a Christian bumper sticker that teaches bad theology. Perhaps you've seen it over the years. It reads, "[Christians aren't perfect, just forgiven.](#)"

I understand the basic sentiment. It's trying to say that what sets Christians apart isn't that we live a perfect life. It's that we've thrown ourselves on the mercies of God and have receive His forgiveness.

But implied in the statement is that when a person becomes a Christian all that changes is their rap sheet.

Their sins get expunged, but nothing really happens inside them. **And that couldn't be more false!**

The New Covenant highlights the transformation that Christianity promises - the [metamorphosis](#) that occurs inside the Christian. As an ugly, earthbound caterpillar turns into butterfly, we too are transformed spiritually.

God changes what we are - and we're given power to soar above our sin and treat others in a new way.

The New Covenant changes our heart's desire.

We get a new set of wants. The Law of Moses *prohibited sin*. Under the NC *I no longer want to sin*.

2 Corinthians 3 compares the covenant written on stone, with the covenant written on human hearts.

Whenever you put a thought down in print you run the risk of it being misinterpreted, or misunderstood. And that's what happened to God's Law. The Jews interpreted it in a stilted, wooden, legalistic manner.

That's why under the New Covenant God avoided that pitfall. He wrote His will on the parchment of the heart. God in-beds His will into the fabric of our spirit.

Paul explains God's motivation, *"the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life."* Under the New Covenant *keeping the rules* is replaced with *being led by the Holy Spirit*.

2 Corinthians 3 compares the glory of the Old Covenant as *a fleeting and fading glory* - while the glory of the New Covenant is *a transforming glory*.

When Moses received the Old Covenant his face glowed with God's glory. He had to cover his face with a veil. The glory was off-limits to everyone but Moses.

But in contrast, Paul says, *"Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."* Everyone under the New Covenant is invited to behold God's glory. As Paul puts it, we all now come before God with an *"unveiled face."*

You and I have access to God. This was the promise of Jeremiah 31, “No more shall every man teach his neighbor... “Know the LORD, for they all shall know Me...” Here’s the lasting relationship with God that all the other covenants sought to accomplish, but didn’t.

Paul now encourages us in 2 Corinthians 3:18, “Behold as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, (we) are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.” Under the New Covenant we grow more holy, and reflect His glory, and become more like Jesus - *by spending time with Him!*

It’s a mirror effect. The more you look at Jesus, the more you absorb His reflection and radiate His glory.

Here’s what I’m saying, the Gentiles have become part of God’s family through the New Covenant, not the Mosaic Covenant. Hebrews 7:22 speaks of the New Covenant that Jesus authored as “a better covenant.”

Jesus’ Covenant can’t fail because it rests on His work, not mine. It’s His work in me, not my work for Him. Jesus died for our sins once and for all. Recall our Savior’s final words on the cross, “It is finished.”

It reminds me of a joke!... Moses and Jesus were sitting around in heaven reminiscing about their time on earth, and the various miracles they performed.

Moses wondered if he still had it what it takes...

They both decide to revisit the earth and renew old times. Moses is by the Red Sea. He turns to Jesus and says, “Well,

here's hoping!" He raises his rod, and sure enough, the sea splits in two just like before.

Moses says, "Wow, it's nice to know I still got it."

Next they're on the shore of the Sea of Galilee.

Jesus says to Moses, "Well, it's my turn now. It's been years since I've walked on water. Let's see if I can still do this..."

Jesus strides off the shore and walks several hundred yards out into the water.

He turns around and grins at Moses. He comments that it feels good to be back on top of the water.

But when He tries to walk back there's a problem...

He takes a few steps and sinks to his ankles. He walks a few more yards and he's trudging in water up to his knees. Finally, He sinks, and Jesus has to swim to shore. Jesus can't figure out what went wrong!

That's when Moses points to His feet. He tells Him, "Lord, You forgot about the holes." *It's not just a joke!*

Here's the difference between Moses and Jesus, not *the miracles*, but *the mercy!* Jesus, not Moses, loves you enough to die in your place. He is the guarantee of a covenant *with no holes* - a far better covenant!

And here's the big question... **Are you living under the Old Covenant or the New?** I know Christians who don't understand how real righteousness works.

It's not a list of dos and don'ts we're trying to keep. It's not elbow grease... Rather, we trust God and spend time with

Him - and in return He works in us. He writes it on our hearts. He changes us from **inside out**.

Yet too many Christians live as if they're under the Old Covenant. They live from outside in... *They obey the do's and don't and grind it out on their own.* They rely on their own willpower and never experience the power of God's Spirit. **Don't be unrighteous or self-righteous. Receive God's righteousness by faith.**

Romans 11:25 is another passage where Paul writes of the "mystery" of the Church, but he takes it one step further. He tells us why this has all happened.

He says in verse 11, that "salvation has come to the Gentiles" to "provoke the Jews to jealousy."

This is God's New Covenant plan for evangelism.

Often we think of evangelism as an altar call or passing out a track. But it's far more comprehensive.

God wants the Church to be a witness of what life is going to be like in God's Kingdom. Our fellowship with God and with each other should be so rich - so full of grace and truth - it makes the Jews and the world around us jealous of our faith, and our riches in Christ.

Hey, this is the power of the Church!

Our greatest influence in the world is not our ability to mobilize politically - or pool our resources financially.

We need to see the New Covenant Church through God's eyes... *We're the temporary home for Kingdom citizens.* The

Kingdom of God won't come physically until Israel has been **re-gathered** and **regenerated**.

Right now we're living in the meantime. We're a stopgap measure. We're God's unfolded mystery.

And our purpose is to be living out the values of the future Kingdom in our relationships with each other now. We're an advertisement for *God's Kingdom come*.

You could say of the church - we are an outpost of heaven existing and operating behind enemy lines.

We're like a "**Little Havana**." If you want to know what life is like on the streets in Cuba; then visit Little Havana in Miami. You'll get a taste of Cuba in America.

And likewise, if you want to know what heaven's like, all you should have to do is visit the Church. We need to offer a taste of heaven here on earth - *which is another reason why we need to be meeting in-person!*

Isn't it ironic, the last of God's covenants is called **the New Covenant**. For God is a God of newness.

He wants to make all things new in your life...

Bow before King Jesus today - trust His Spirit to etch God's will upon your heart - and you'll enjoy the mystery of the riches that are ours in Christ Jesus!