

## Make sure your understanding of the New Covenant is not diluted!

By now, you hopefully understand that telling people, “Smile, God loves you,” does not fulfill your duty to evangelize. Unbelievers must first gain a proper intellectual understanding of the gospel. It is our privilege to help them do so. But an intellectual understanding alone is not sufficient. The gospel must be brought to bear on their hearts. They must be convinced in their hearts that the gospel is true, and that its promise of eternal life is real. God is the only **One who can bring this about**,<sup>1</sup> but He has commissioned us to participate in this glorious process. Our role is to help unbelievers understand what God expects of those who enter into the New Covenant made possible through the shed blood of God’s only begotten Son. Only when they understand the seriousness of this will they become engaged with their hearts. And since these matters are so rarely taught in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, you also may need some recalibration in your thinking on this subject so please read on.

From the beginning, God has been making covenants with people that specified His promises to them and any obligations of those in those covenants. These covenants formed the foundation for the relationship between God and His people. (If a person is not in covenant with God, they cannot be in a relationship with Him.) Until the advent of Jesus Christ, none of the covenants that God made with human beings addressed their greatest need – reconciliation with God that makes it possible for them to dwell with Him **forever**.<sup>2</sup>

The Bible teaches that unless they are **reconciled to God**<sup>3</sup>, all people are alienated from Him because of their sins. God considers them hostile rebels against Him. Out of mercy, God has made a way for sinners to be reconciled to Him through the sacrifice of His Son. Now, through the shed blood of Jesus Christ, human beings can be reconciled to God by entering into the New Covenant with Him. Jesus spoke about this New Covenant on the night before He was to be crucified:

*“He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matthew 26:27-28 NKJV).*

The salvation promised under the New Covenant is a gift. It must be laid hold of by faith. It cannot be earned through works. It is a free gift graciously offered by God and made possible through Jesus who earned His righteous standing by perfect obedience, even to the point of death on the cross. But the fact that this great salvation is a free gift does not diminish the infinite cost involved in procuring it.

The New Covenant promises the remission of the sins of all those who enter into it rightly and by faith. Because it required the shedding of the blood of God’s only begotten Son, this covenant is not to be entered into lightly. To enter into it in a flippant manner shows utter disregard for this infinitely valuable gift. It is like a slap in the face of God. Christians have a duty to help those considering Christ, to understand that God takes this matter very seriously. People need to understand up front what is required on the part of all who enter into the New Covenant.

Years ago, I heard a pastor teach that the New Covenant is a unilateral covenant between two parties, namely, God and the individual who believes in Jesus. He said that it specifies things that God promises to do and that, since salvation is by grace and not of works, he also said that it does not place any obligation on the other party (the individual who believes in Jesus), except to believe. He said that God promises to do everything. The one who believes is not required to perform any work or payment to reciprocate. When I heard this explained, it sounded right because of the all-important truth that salvation is by grace through faith and not of works. Upon closer analysis, I now know that the pastor’s teaching missed the mark and was overly simplistic. The New Covenant does place requirements on those who believe. Consider Jesus command/invitation:

*“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. “Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. “For My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30 NKJV).*

Indeed, salvation cannot be earned by works. It is obtained by grace through faith. But genuine faith always responds in obedience to God’s commands. Because they believe that they will obtain rest, those who labor and are heavy laden will indeed come. Because they believe Jesus’ promise, they will surrender their lives unto Jesus and happily be yoked to Him from now on. Because they believe Jesus is awesome and worthy of all their attention, they will gladly seek to learn everything they can about Him and from Him. Though these are expressions of their faith, they are nevertheless required responses under the New Covenant. Only those who respond in obedience to Jesus’ command will be benefactors of the New Covenant.

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<sup>1</sup> Jesus said, “Without Me, you can do nothing.” (See John 15:5.) God is the One who raises spiritually dead people to new life. Not us. And the unbeliever is unable to raise himself up to new life because he is dead in his trespasses and sins. (See Ephesians 2:1-6.)

<sup>2</sup> Though they did not understand the details of the New Covenant, those in covenant with God prior to the advent of Christ still benefit from it by grace through faith like those who entered into the New Covenant after the advent of Christ. For details, see my **Commentary on Romans** concerning Romans chapter 3.

<sup>3</sup> They must be reconciled in a way that meets God’s righteous demands.

So, we see that the New Covenant does indeed obligate both parties. Besides many other things, God promises to remit the sins and give eternal life to the individual who believes. To benefit, the individual who believes must (and will) relinquish control of his life over to Jesus (take His yoke upon him) and learn of Jesus. He now considers himself **a student**<sup>4</sup> who looks to Jesus as His teacher. (A "student" is the same thing as a "disciple.")

The individual who believes now realizes that prior to coming to Jesus, his entire way of thinking was **distorted**.<sup>5</sup> He now realizes that he has been an utter fool who needs desperately to be retaught to think true things. He is very happy to be one of Jesus' disciples so that he can be totally transformed by the **renewing of his mind**.<sup>6</sup>

Though it is rarely mentioned these days, the New Covenant specifies that those who enter into it must relinquish their entire life over to Jesus. Just as Jesus willingly died on the cross, His disciples must be willing to **die like this**.<sup>7</sup> They understand that they were purchased by Jesus' blood. They no longer consider themselves **their own**.<sup>8</sup> If anyone is not willing to put himself at risk of dying on account of Jesus, he **cannot be Jesus' disciple**.<sup>9</sup> He cannot be a benefactor of the New Covenant as long as he retains ownership of his life.

Most people who are being evangelized are not taught these things. They think they will partake of the benefits of the New Covenant without fulfilling the obligations demanded by it. If they die in this state of ignorance, they will be greatly surprised in the day of judgment.

If you have not understood these things before, I hope you now see that entering into the New Covenant is not to be taken lightly. To make this New Covenant possible, God sent His only begotten Son as the righteous sacrifice for sins. It required the spilling of His infinitely precious blood. Therefore, God is greatly offended if anyone takes it lightly and promises vengeance on all who do so:

*"Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord. And again, 'The LORD will judge His people.' It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:29-31 NKJV).*

When anyone takes the New Covenant lightly, he counts the blood of the covenant as if it is a common thing, not a big deal. This is highly insulting to the Spirit of grace. God will avenge severely. What does it mean to take the New Covenant lightly? What types of attitudes and actions demonstrate that a person counts the blood of the covenant a common thing? Here are just a few:

- To claim allegiance to Jesus while retaining ownership of your life.
- To attend church regularly while living according to the dictates of your flesh.
- To keep your identity as a Christian secret because you are ashamed of what people will think of you.
- To think that God will accept you into heaven because you are a good person.
- To look down on other people as inferior because they are not "Christians" (like you).

Essentially, every time we commit sin, we show that, at least in that moment, we are taking the New Covenant lightly. We are showing a low regard for the blood of the covenant by which we were sanctified. This is why the New Testament teaches that we (Christians) should **fear God**.<sup>10</sup> The more we fear God, the more we will highly regard the blood of the covenant by which we were sanctified. We will intensely appreciate the gift Jesus made possible by shedding His own blood. We will see more clearly that we do not deserve this great gift. We will more deeply love Jesus and desire to please Him with all of our life.

After reading this far, perhaps you understand better why the New Covenant demands continued adherence on the part of anyone who enters into it. Yes, an initial decision must be made by anyone wishing to enter into the New Covenant. Hopefully, that initial decision is an informed decision. And part of the information that must be taken into account is the New Covenant's demand for

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<sup>4</sup> A student is one who studies in order to learn.

<sup>5</sup> *Although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened" (Romans 1:21).*

<sup>6</sup> *"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2).*

<sup>7</sup> In the days and culture of Jesus, anyone condemned to die by the authorities (Rome) was sentenced to die on a cross. This is why Jesus said that His disciples must be willing to "pick up their cross" and follow Him. They understood that they must be willing to be condemned for Jesus' sake and die a cruel death on a cross.

<sup>8</sup> *"Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's" I Corinthians 6:19-20).*

<sup>9</sup> *"Whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:27).*

<sup>10</sup> *"Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (II Corinthians 7:1).*

continued adherence to it. A one-time act of faith such as repeating a prayer, joining a church, or being baptized does not fulfill the obligations of the New Covenant.

The command to believe the gospel is present tense which demands continued believing. And, there are ample warnings throughout the New Testament that anyone who turns away from Jesus and remains that way will spend eternity away from Jesus and the glory of His power.

The following passage immediately follows the warning about more severe punishment for anyone who takes lightly the blood of the New Covenant. It is a very small sampling of a plethora of New Testament passages that convey the New Covenant's demand for ongoing adherence to it and the promise of perdition to those who fail to do so:

*"But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings: partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated; for you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven. Therefore, do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise: 'For yet a little while, and He who is coming will come and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith; but if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him.' But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul" (Hebrews 10:32 – 39 NKJV).*

#### ***The implication of these things for you personally:***

If you claim to be a Christian, you surely will agree that examination of your beliefs, your actions and your teachings should be ongoing. Any true Christian wants to verify whether they properly regard the blood of the New Covenant. If he becomes aware of it, any true Christian always wants to discontinue any belief, action or teaching that treats the blood of the New Covenant cheaply. If you are a serious Christian, you will habitually ask God to show you about any wrong thoughts, attitudes or actions so that you can discontinue them at once. He is the most capable teacher and convincer.

#### ***The implication of these things for those you evangelize:***

Because the welfare of unbelievers you evangelize is at stake, let me suggest a few things that you must do or avoid when teaching others in order to avoid cheapening the blood of the New Covenant.

-Always instruct unbelievers that God takes the blood of the New Covenant very seriously. It is the blood of His only begotten Son. He promises to pour out His wrath on anyone who does not regard it properly.

-Never give an unbeliever the impression that a single act on his part fulfills his obligation under the New Covenant. He must be taught that he was purchased with the infinitely valuable blood of God's only begotten Son. Therefore, he must relinquish his entire life over to Jesus from now on! You must teach the unbeliever that the New Covenant requires that he must confess and keep confessing the Lord Jesus to others even if it will cost him his life for doing so.

-Always make sure the unbeliever understands that if he enters into the New Covenant, he is obligated to remain loyal to His Master Jesus until he dies. Warn him that if he turns away from following Jesus and remains in that condition, God will repay him with much severer punishment than those who never hear or believe the gospel. *"Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord" (Hebrews 10:29-30 NKJV).* The unbeliever must not enter into the New Covenant lightly.

-Make sure that unbelievers understand that by refusing to enter into the New Covenant, they are offending God greatly and **will suffer everlasting torment unless they repent.**<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> "Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little" (Psalm 2:11-12)