

New Covenant

Christian Belief 103-11

A covenant is a legal agreement that God has imposed on His relationship with man.

1. *God prefers a covenant of grace*

The loving Creator-God wanted Adam to live under His grace (see 1 John 4:8b).

The tree of life was also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. ...And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Genesis 2:9b, 16-17 NKJV).

- Respecting the freewill He has given to man, God allowed Adam to choose for himself to eat of the fruit of 'the tree of life' which will give man eternal life (see also Genesis 3:1, 5). He actually did not want him to partake of 'the tree of the knowledge of good and evil' which will inflict a process of death ('die' in this scripture literally is 'dying you shall die'). Satan (means the 'adversary or 'accuser'), lied to Adam and pushed him to choose death rather than to receive eternal life. Ever since, Adam depended on his own effort to be good and to keep away from evil. The 'flaming sword' which signifies judgment, turning every way to block sinners from returning to God by their own ability (see Genesis 3:24).

The unchangeable God remains loving and gracious to man.

I will cause you to become the father of a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and I will make you a blessing to others. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you. All the families of the earth will be blessed through you (Genesis 12:2-3 NLT).

- He offered Abraham a covenant of grace that blesses the undeserved and forgives their failures (see also Genesis 22:11-18; Romans 4:2, 5).

Israel's journey from Egypt to Sinai was an experience of God's grace.

The blood you have smeared on your doorposts will serve as a sign. When I see the blood, I will pass over you. This plague of death will not touch you when I strike the land of Egypt (Exodus 12:13 NLT).

- It was by God's grace that the Israelites were spared from the judgment of death on the first born by putting the blood of a Passover lamb on their door frame.
- God had performed ten great signs to set them free from slavery but they failed to put their trust on Him. When they were pursued by the Egyptian army and the Red Sea was before them, they complained that Moses had misled them (see Exodus 14:11). Yet God opened up the Red Sea for them to cross over safely (see Exodus 14:19-30). Soon they complained about the bitter waters, but God made it fit for consumption (see Exodus 15:23-25a). They complained bitterly for food but God rained manna from heaven everyday for forty years (see Exodus 16:2-4). They complained again for water yet God gave water out of the rock (see Exodus 17:3-6). None died at this period of time. At every complaint, there was a demonstration of God's faithfulness to His grace-covenant with Abraham.

The old covenant started at Sinai in the heart of slaves.

"Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel. "...Then all the people answered together and said, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do." So Moses brought back the words of the people to the Lord (Exodus 19:5-6, 8 NKJV).

- Because of the legalistic slave-mentality, they could not appreciate God's grace in making them a spiritual nation to carry His presence to all places.
Then all the people answered together and said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do." So Moses brought back the words of the people to the LORD (Exodus 19:8 NKJV).
- Like they simply said 'yes' to their slave masters, Israel said to God that they were well able to do all that He requires. They had presumptuously entered a covenant of self-righteousness. In return, God had to give them the 'you shall not' kind of laws, which was later called the Law. What they did not know was that by following this legalistic system of obtaining righteousness by keeping the Law, if they fail in one commandment they are guilty of all (see James 2:10; Matthew 5:21-22, 28). From then onwards, every time they

complained, many died (see Numbers 11:1, 33; 14:29-30; 16:31-35, 49; 21:7-8; 25:9). Blessings depended on obedience. Every failure would be punished, even by death. The Law became 'the ministry of death' and 'the ministry of condemnation' (see 2 Corinthians 3:6b-9).

2. *A new and better covenant*

The covenant of grace has replaced the covenant of the Law.

For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. Because finding fault with them, He says: "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they did not continue in My covenant, and I disregarded them, says the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more." In that He says, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away (Hebrews 8:7-13 NKJV).

- The 'first covenant' is the Ten Commandments which 'God made with their fathers in the day when He took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt', was 'faulty' in the sense that Israel could not keep it fully by their effort. Because God had to repeatedly 'disregard them' when they broke that covenant again and again, He replaced it with a 'new covenant' and promised to enable them to keep it without any help from their 'neighbor'. The Holy Spirit is the 'Promise' of the Father (see Luke 24:49) who came to 'dwell' in us, 'guide us into all truth', and enable us in holy living (see John 14:17, 26; 16:13; Galatians 5:16).

The new covenant bases entirely on God's grace towards those who believe.

- In this 'new covenant' of grace, God 'will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds He will remember no more'. This new covenant was established when Christ shed His blood on the cross, being condemned for all our failures in obeying the whole Law, to fulfill it on our behalf (see 1 Corinthians 11:25; Matthew 5:17). Forgiveness is based entirely on Christ's finished work on the cross when He cried out on the cross, "It is finished" (see John 19:30). Christ 'had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God' (see Hebrews 10:12). In the tabernacle, there was not a chair for priests to sit on. Their work of offering sacrifices was never finished. Just by 'one offering' Christ has 'perfected forever those who are being sanctified' (see Hebrews 10:14).

There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1a NKJV).

- In Christ, you have total forgiveness 'now' and will never be condemned. For God does not condemn sin twice. Even when you fall short of God's standards, He will still see you through the blood of Christ as forgiven.
- The behavior of the father of the prodigal son is contrary to the Law that demands him to bring a stubborn and rebellious son to the elders of the city to stone him to death. He did not even give his son the opportunity to finish his rehearsed speech. Jesus revealed the Father's heart of grace and forgiveness. The Father is waiting to clothe you with the robe of righteousness, put the signet ring of authority back to your finger, and let you wear the sandals of right standing (see Deuteronomy 21:18-21; Luke 15:11-24).
- According to the Law, the woman caught in adultery was supposed to be stoned to death. Jesus showed her grace, did not condemn her, and instructed her never to live in sin again (see John 8:4-11; Leviticus 20:10).
- The woman came to Jesus with an alabaster flask of fragrant oil, simply fell at His feet and worshipped Him just as she was—a sinner! After that, Jesus declared: "Your sins are forgiven" (see Luke 7:37-48).