

The Birthday of the Church



“The church comes out of Christ’s side in the sleep of His death.”

WILLIAM JENKYN

REFLECTION and PREPARATION

Which matters most to you...

- WHERE you were born
- WHAT RACE you were born with
- HOW you were born
- THAT you were born
- TO WHOM you were born

Your answer reveals how you see your identity.

LESSON AIM:

- The central aim of this lesson is to understand the unique *inception* of the church and what makes the Christian’s *incorporation* into the church’s membership distinct from the Old Testament saints.

DISCUSSION: Are the following statements true or false? (circle one)

- The church is the new Israel. T F
- Man can have a relationship with God apart from a covenant. T F

THE INCEPTION OF THE CHURCH

When was the church born and why does it matter?

In order to understand WHO we are as the church as well as WHEN we came into existence, we must unpack the biblical revelation of God's dealing with human beings on the basis of a COVENANT. As you survey the entire landscape of Scripture, it is clear that every relationship in which God has been engaged with people throughout history has fallen under one of five covenants. First, let's define our terms.

What is a **COVENANT** (Heb. *berith*)? A covenant is...

"...an enduring agreement which establishes (or formalizes) a defined relationship between two parties involving a solemn, binding obligation to specified stipulations on the part of at least one of the parties toward the other, which is taken by oath under the threat of divine curse and ratified by a visual ritual."¹¹

That's a mouth full! Here are the highlights...

- A defined relationship between two parties
- A solemn, binding obligation to specified stipulations
- Taken by oath
- Ratified (formally approved) by a visual ritual

Discussion: Is there a difference between a **contract** and a **covenant**? Explain.

Let's squeeze the definition of a covenant down further. R.C. Sproul Jr. says,

"Covenants, rightly understood...are not merely contracts, the legal forms of legal relationships. Neither are they formless sentimental feelings that bring people together as long as those feelings last. Instead, they are both. In covenant we have real obligation. Real promises are made, and real sanctions hanging down when promises are broken. But underlying all of that is grace, love, and relationship."¹²

Let me bottom line it for you:

- A covenant is a *legally (binding) agreement with a family relationship.*

Why does any of this matter and how does it work?

God has ever only dealt with mankind under one of a variety of covenants. Here are the six covenants we find in Scripture:

¹¹ Daniel C. Lane, *The Meaning and Use of the Old Testament Term for Covenant*, p.314

¹² R.C. Sproul Jr., *One Covenant Under God*, Article from *Tabletalk Magazine*, October 1, 2006

1. ADAMIC COVENANT

This was the agreement between our first parents, Adam and Eve, and God which featured a "cultural mandate" (*Gen.1:28*) and the Edenic stipulation (*Gen.2:15-17*). What happened?

- **Hosea 6:7**—But like Adam they have transgressed the covenant; There they have dealt treacherously against Me.

Adam served as "federal head" of the human race. He not only represented all human beings, he acted on our behalf. When Adam sinned, all from whom he was standing are accounted as having sinned. When he fell, all whom he represented fell. When he died, they died.

2. NOAHIC COVENANT

This was the agreement established between God and Noah, his wife, his three sons, their wives, and Noah's offspring after him as well as with every "*beast of the earth*" (*Gen.6:8-10, 18-22; 9:9-10*). This was a unilateral (one-sided) promise on God's part to never "*curse the ground on account of man*" nor "*destroy every living thing*" by water from a flood (*Gen.8:21*). The visible sign of this agreement is the bow in the cloud (*Gen.9:13-15*).

3. ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

This agreement is found in Genesis 12-17 and is established between God and Abraham. It features the divine purpose to make the patriarch a great nation, to bless him, and to make his name great. It also involved a blessing which would come to the entire world, for in Abraham "*all the families of the earth shall be blessed*" (*Gen.12:2-3*). The visible sign of this agreement was circumcision (*Gen.17:10-14*).

4. MOSAIC COVENANT

This is the most familiar covenant presented in Exodus 19-24. It is formalized in a beautiful statement where God expresses His intention for His people (*Ex.19:5-6*). It also included the revealing of the law of God (*Ex.20:1-17; 24:3-8, 12-18*) as well as the binding obligation of obedience in which blessing is promised upon the people and cursing for disobedience (*Deut.28; 29-9-29; 30:1-3, 6; 11-20*). This covenant contained civil, ceremonial, and moral laws. In this covenant, Moses foresees a future apostasy of the people of Israel of such proportions that God Himself will banish them to every corner of the world for disobedience to His covenant stipulations. What is significant here is that the old covenant under Moses anticipates a time in which it will fail and be replaced by a new agreement with God, which involves a new circumcision of heart, causing the people to obey.

5. DAVIDIC COVENANT

This unilateral agreement was established by God with David in 2 Samuel 7. It involved the king David himself, the immediate offspring of David, Solomon, the descendants of David, and the establishing of an everlasting house, kingdom, and throne upon which a Son of God will reign (*2 Sam.7:14-16; Cf. Ps.89:28-35*).

Summary:

- The **Adamic Covenant** is a covenant with Adam and Eve concerning *their relationship with God and creation order or the entire human race*. There have been but two federal heads—Adam and Christ, with each of whom God entered into a covenant. Each of them acted on behalf of others, legally representing a definite people, so much so, that all whom they represented were

regarded by God as being in them. Adam represented the whole human race. Christ represented all whom the Father had, in His eternal counsels, given to Him.

A.W. Pink—"The relationship of our race to Adam or Christ divides men into two classes, each receiving nature and destiny from its respective head...these two men are Adam and Christ. The two facts (in history) are the disobedience of the former, by which many were made sinners, and the obedience of the latter, by which many were made righteous. By the former came ruin, by the latter came redemption, and neither ruin nor redemption can be Scripturally apprehended except as they are seen to be accomplished by those representatives, and except we understand the relationships expressed by being "in Adam" and "in Christ."¹³

- The **Noahic Covenant** is a covenant between Noah and his descendants and the human race, who emerges after the catastrophic flood—still wicked with a fallen condition (*Gen.8:21*), nevertheless *God intends to be merciful*.
- The **Abrahamic Covenant** is a covenant where God promised to take one man, *Abraham*, and *multiply a particular people through him so as to bring blessing to "all the families of the earth"* (*Gen.12:3*).
- The **Mosaic Covenant** is a covenant in which God intended to instruct the particular descendants of Abraham about *how to live in covenant relationship with God*. This covenant failed because of the people of Israel's sin.
- The **Davidic Covenant** is a covenant between God and David and *blessings to come through the Davidic line*. Though all the kings of Israel failed to uphold their obligation of covenant obedience to God, the hope remained of a King who would also be a "Son" (*Is.9:6-7; 11:1-10; 55:3-5*).

REVIEW: What you should have learned at this point is that *every relationship in which God has been engaged with human beings has been structured according to some type of covenant.*

Quick test: Under which covenant were the following people in the Bible?

1. Joshua
2. Job
3. Jonah
4. Daniel
5. Ruth
6. Samson
7. Jeremiah

¹³ A.W. Pink, Chapel Library, *Studies in the Scriptures, Vol.XIII*, No.10, p.14

Here is the obvious question: **IN WHAT TYPE OF COVENANT RELATIONSHIP IS GOD ENGAGED WITH THE CHURCH? Read Jeremiah 31:31-34,**

"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."

- **Answer:** The _____ COVENANT

Distinct features of the relationship that God has with the church under the New Covenant:

1. It will be a new, improved, and far *superior covenant* than the old covenant. (vv.31-32)—"*when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers.*"
2. It will provide a new inner power in that God's divine law is inscribed on the heart so obedience flows from it. (v.33a)— "*I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it;*"
3. It will provide a new promise of relationship so that the arrangement that God intended and envisioned will be realized and materialized. (v.33b)—"*...and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.*"
4. It will provide a new personal, intimate, firsthand knowledge of the Lord. (v.34a)—"*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.*"
5. It will provide a new pardon by God who will deal decisively with the problem of sin through forgiveness. (v.34b)—"*for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.*"

Jesus said...

- **Matthew 26:26-29**— While they were eating, Jesus took *some* bread, and after a blessing, He broke *it* and gave *it* to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." ²⁷ And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave *it* to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; ²⁸ for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins. ²⁹ But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom."

THINK ABOUT IT!

No longer are we given merely commands to attempt to keep in our own strength, but POWER on the inside to actually fulfill His will.

- **John 14:16-17**—I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; ¹⁷ *that is* the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, *but* you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you. (Cf. 2 Cor.3:3, 6; Colossians 1:27; Acts 1:8)

No longer is there the expectation of what you should be, but the realization of WHAT YOU ARE.

- **1 John 3:1-2**—See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and *such* we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. ² Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.

No longer are we given a secondhand knowledge, but a firsthand, REAL, WARM, and SAVING KNOWLEDGE.

- **John 10:14, 27**—I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me... ²⁷ My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me;

No longer is there *the weight or guilt of unpardoned sins*, but an ASSURANCE that my sin has been completely forgiven!

- **2 Corinthians 5:17**—Therefore if anyone is in Christ, *he is* a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

POWER. IDENTITY. SAVING KNOWLEDGE. ASSURANCE. We could stop right here and rejoice for a while. Amen! But hang on...it gets better!

There are two other passages in the Old Testament that heighten the anticipation of the New Covenant. The prophet Ezekiel and Joel prophesy of an unprecedented new element of the New Covenant.

- **Ezekiel 36:24-27**—For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land. 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.

This new element and centerpiece of the New Covenant is the permanent indwelling and work of the HOLY SPIRIT causing the people of God to obey instead of disobey.

- **Joel 2:28-29**—“It will come about after this
That I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind;
And your sons and daughters will prophesy,
Your old men will dream dreams,
Your young men will see visions.
²⁹ “Even on the male and female servants
I will pour out My Spirit in those days.

Under the Old Covenant, the HOLY SPIRIT was at work in many ways through the leaders, judges, kings, and prophets of Israel.

- He *stirred* the leaders/judges of Israel and enabled them. (*Judges 3:7-11, 12-30; 6:1-7:25; 1 Sam.16:13*)
- He was *withdrawn* from kings because of persistent disobedience. (*1 Sam.16:14*)
- He *spoke* through prophets. (*Ezek.2:1-7; Mic.3:8; 2 Pet.1:19-21*)

But now under the NEW COVENANT, the Holy Spirit's presence would be *permanently* poured out on ALL God's people—*male/female, young/old, slave/free*. In other words, regardless of gender, age, or class among God's people, the Holy Spirit would be given as the greatest and indispensable blessing.

What then is the difference/contrast between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant?

Using a rabbinical form of argument from the lesser to the greater, Paul explains several differences from 2 Corinthians 3:1-18.

1. The Old Covenant—*written with ink of tablets of stone. (v.3)*
The New Covenant—*written with the Spirit on the tablets of human hearts.*
 - **2 Corinthians 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.
2. The Old Covenant—*adequacy came from self (vv.4-5)*
The New Covenant—*adequacy comes from God.*
 - **2 Corinthians 3:4-5**—Such confidence we have through Christ toward God. ⁵ Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as *coming* from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God.
3. The Old Covenant—*the letter (Law) kills* (it commands: do this and live, don't and die). (v.6)
The New Covenant—*the Spirit gives life* (it promises—I will and you shall.).
 - **2 Corinthians 3:6**—who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.
4. The Old Covenant—*was a ministry of death (vv.7-8)*
The New Covenant—*is a ministry of the Spirit*
 - **2 Corinthians 3:7-8**—But if the ministry of death, in letters engraved on stones, came with glory, so that the sons of Israel could not look intently at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face, fading as it was, ⁸ how will the ministry of the Spirit fail to be even more with glory?
5. The Old Covenant—*was a ministry of condemnation (v.9)*
The New Covenant—*is a ministry of righteousness.*
 - **2 Corinthians 3:9**—For if the ministry of condemnation has glory, much more does the ministry of righteousness abound in glory.

6. The Old Covenant—had *a lesser glory* (v.10)
The New Covenant—has *a glory that surpasses it*

- **2 Corinthians 3:10**—For indeed what had glory, in this case has no glory because of the glory that surpasses *it*.

7. The Old Covenant—had *a fading glory* (v.11)
The New Covenant—has *a glory that remains*

- **2 Corinthians 3:11**—For if that which fades away *was* with glory, much more that which remains *is* in glory.

It is important to understand that the Old Covenant was not *defective* or *useless*, in fact, it was *good* (Rom.7:12), it was just *inadequate* to grant the righteousness that we needed, and which God required in order to be right with Him (Cf. Heb.8:7-13; Rom.3:20-26; Cor.5:21).

REVIEW:

- God deals with all human beings on the basis of a covenant.
- The previous covenants before Christ were inferior.
- The church is the church of the New Covenant.

APPLICATION:

Under the New Covenant, everything is BETTER!

Our Savior has a *better name*.

- **Hebrews 1:3b-4**—When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, ⁴having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they.

Our benefits include *better things*.

- **Hebrews 6:9**—But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way.

Christ's priesthood offers a *better hope*.

- **Hebrews 7:19**—(for the Law made nothing perfect), and on the other hand there is a bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God.

His Person and work is the guarantee of this *better covenant*.

- **Hebrews 7:22**—so much the more also Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant.

The New Covenant which Jesus mediates is enacted on *better promises*.

- **Hebrews 8:6**—But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises.

EVERYTHING IS BETTER! Finish these statements with your own words.

If I am a part of the new covenant,

- Read 2 Corinthians 3:5-6. I am a _____.
- Read 2 Corinthians 5:17. I am a _____.
- Read 2 Corinthians 5:18-20. I am an _____.
- I have a binding relationship with God because of _____.
- I am permanently indwelt by _____.
- The visual sign of my new covenant relationship is _____.
- What this means for me today is _____.



HART-TO-HEART

Jody Hart, *Editor and Director Mountaintop Resources*

Covenant Love

The landowner said, "the rent is due,"
Did he see my lack? Does he have any clue
That things are not stable; income not there?
I could try to explain, but I'm not sure he would care.

Contract. That contract I signed is weighing me down,
Keeping me stuck, my wallet is bound
To give him each month what I said I would pay
No excuses are warranted, it's a scheduled day.

There's another Landowner—yes, a capital "L"—
Who expects a payment from me as well.
His rights over me, even heavier than the first
For He knew me, even formed me, before my birth.

The dues that I owe, from accumulated sin
Every thought, word, and deed, things without and within.
The stakes are much higher. The payment more severe.
Death, both physical and eternal, is what I owe here.

Contracts are not what this Landowner uses
Yet we all still owe...there are no excuses.
The difference here, one aspect so key,
The relationship we have in His family.

Covenant love is what's placed in our hearts
When He calls us to Himself, this is where we start
To experience a reality known from times past
This love for His own that will forever last.

All that I owe has been paid on the cross.
All of it...every single part.
That thought, that word...THAT deed....all paid.
Love has the victory, a full payment made.

ANSWER KEY:

DISCUSSION

- False
- False

THE INCEPTION OF THE CHURCH

Quick test: Under which covenant were the following people in the Bible?

1. Joshua—Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants
2. Job—Noahic Covenant
3. Jonah—Davidic Covenant
4. Daniel—Davidic Covenant
5. Ruth—Mosaic Covenant
6. Samson—Mosaic Covenant
7. Jeremiah—Davidic Covenant

IN WHAT TYPE OF COVENANT RELATIONSHIP IS GOD ENGAGED WITH THE CHURCH?

- **Answer:** The NEW COVENANT

APPLICATION:

If I am a part of the new covenant,

- Read 2 Corinthians 3:5-6. I am a servant.
- Read 2 Corinthians 5:17. I am a new creature.
- Read 2 Corinthians 5:18-20. I am an ambassador for Christ.
- I have a binding relationship with God because of the Person and work of Christ.
- I am permanently indwelt by the Holy Spirit.
- The visual sign of my new covenant relationship is the Lord's Supper and Baptism.
- What this means for me today is (answers will vary).

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