

The New Covenant and Our End of the Bargain

Description

The New Covenant and Our End of the Bargain

A study related to the SDA
Sabbath School Lesson for 2021, 2nd Quarter
The Promise: God's Everlasting Covenant
Week 2
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This week's lesson is entitled, "Covenant Primer," and begins by saying this:

"This week is a quick summary of the whole quarter, as we take one day each to look at the early covenants, the ones that in their own way were all present-truth manifestations of the true covenant, the one ratified at Calvary by the blood of Jesus, the one that we, as Christians, enter into with our Lord." Sabbath School Quarterly Lesson, Saturday, April 3, 2021

The lesson goes on to cover the covenant made to Noah, the covenant made to Abraham, the Covenant made at Sinai, and of course, the covenant, as the lesson says, that was "ratified at Calvary by the blood of Jesus, the one that we, as Christians, enter into with our Lord."

Sunday's lesson is entitled "Covenant Basics," and explains God's covenant with man like this:

"Like the marriage covenant, the biblical covenant defines both a relationship and an arrangement. As an arrangement, the biblical covenant contains these basic elements:

1. God affirmed the covenant promises with an oath (Gal. 3:16; Heb. 6:13, 17).

2. The covenant obligation was obedience to God's will as expressed in the Ten Commandments (Deut. 4:13).
3. The means by which God's covenant obligation is ultimately fulfilled is through Christ and the plan of salvation (Isa. 42:1, 6).

Sabbath School Quarterly Lesson, Sunday, April 4, 2021

I think this sums up what most Christians think the gospel is all about. Sunday's lesson continues,

In the Old Testament, the sacrificial system of types instructed the people regarding the entire plan of salvation. Through its symbols, the patriarchs and Israel learned to exercise faith in the coming Redeemer. Through its rites, the penitent could find forgiveness for sin and release from guilt. The blessings of the covenant could thus be retained, and spiritual growth—restoring the image of God in the life—could thereby continue, even when humankind failed to uphold their end of the bargain. Sabbath School Quarterly Lesson, Sunday, April 4, 2021

Many Christians think this is exactly what the gospel is all about—a one-sided covenant where God holds up His end of the bargain, but we aren't expected to. The thought is, since Adam and Eve fell, humanity is so lame and helpless that all of the Old Testament covenants were only intended to point to Jesus—the only human that could ever one day hold up our end of the bargain, and because of Jesus's covenant-keeping prowess, we are all off the hook as far as covenant-keeping goes—because even after the cross we are still totally lame and helpless against the sin nature.

Now people may bristle at this overview of the gospel, because it sounds pathetic—but this is truly what many SDAs think the gospel and the covenant is today. And we used to think this exact thing too! Many Christians end up leaving the faith because of this understanding of the "gospel"—because think about it—if humanity is seen as pathetic and helpless, how is the world ever going to improve? Most people want more for themselves and the world. Believing in Christ and still being a pathetic covenant-keeper is not very compelling to most, especially young people today. Where is the victory in that? Do we just wait for Jesus to return, hoping He will then be able to do something magical to our souls that He couldn't do, or chose not to do, the first time He came, and tell as many people as possible about this lame "gospel" until He does? Is the judgment all about who believes this version of the "gospel" and who doesn't?

Well, to answer this, let's look at Thursday's lesson entitled, "The New Covenant," and read Jeremiah 31:31-34.

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 that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, "Know the Lord," for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more. Jeremiah 31:31-34

As you can see, there is nothing in this passage that says that the new covenant is one-sided or that human participants in it don't have to keep their side of the bargain. In fact, one of the major differences between the old covenant and the new covenant is that the old covenant was so easily broken since the law was only written on stone. With the new covenant, on the other hand, the law is written on hearts and minds. The human participants in this new covenant will know God and be saved from their sins.

We can see this in John 17:3-4 which reads:

And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. John 17:3-4

Notice this statement was made in the Gospel of John even before the cross. Yes, Jesus finished his work—the work of teaching people how to know God and thus receive salvation—as spoken of in Jeremiah 31—even before He was crucified! By being true to the character of the Father even while being tortured and crucified added even more proof that God is love, in that Jesus did not sin even while going through the most intense trial a human could go through. Jesus never gave in to the temptation to sin, proving that it is possible for a human to live in a two-way covenant relationship with God.

Obviously God always wanted to have a relationship with humanity that would only be possible if God's ways were our ways too—if God's laws were written on our hearts and minds. This is the covenant of God in which both sides keep the covenant—not because it is written on stone, but because we understand it in our minds and love it in our hearts. This is the same thing as having the mind of Christ. God wants us to be righteous just like He is. Only then can we keep company with the angels, and with heaven.

To think that the cross somehow negates our end of the bargain is just a deception from the enemy. How is this end result any different from the condition of Israel as stated in Jeremiah 31? How did Israel break the covenant back then? By breaking the law obviously. The new covenant is supposed to put the law in our hearts and minds—so we won't break the law.

Psalm 119: 9-11 reads,

9 How can a young man cleanse his way?
By taking heed according to Your word.
10 With my whole heart I have sought You;
Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments!
11 Your word I have hidden in my heart,
That I might not sin against You.

Righteousness, as this Psalmist articulates, comes from meditating and understanding and loving God's law. In the same way, by meditating on the sacrifice of Christ, we can see the beauty of selflessness, sacrifice, and love—so that we might not sin. Through the lesson of the cross we can see all the horrifying effects of sin on a sinless man—the man Jesus Christ. This is the fresh way God established his new covenant. The cross in no way gives us a pass to continue to break our end of the deal. It was meant to teach us about the love of God, the power of obedience to God's law, that it is possible to keep the law of God in sinful human flesh (Romans 8:3), and that sin has horrible consequences as can be seen in the cruel murder of an innocent loving man, Jesus. (See 1 Corinthians 2:8; Acts 2:36-37; Acts 7:52-53)

Let's take this one step further: Is it even possible for there to be a genuine one-sided relationship between any two people? This certainly isn't what is conveyed by the word—covenant!• But Satan has twisted things to make people believe the gospel is just that— one-sided. God wants a relationship with us, — a two-way relationship like anyone else would. His promise is to help us to come up to His ways, His thoughts, through the living water offered to us by the power of the Holy Spirit. This living water is given to us through the spiritual gifts, namely, the Spirit of Prophecy — which is the Holy Spirit speaking to us through the means of a spokesperson: a prophet chosen by God living in our midst. We believe that there is a prophet of God alive today in the midst of the SDA church. Please see our video study *What Does it Mean to Have the —Spirit of Prophecy?*• as well as our written study *What is the Spirit of Prophecy? (SDA edition)*.

Ellen White said,

“Jesus came to our world to make manifest in his life the character of God. He took upon him our nature, combining humanity with divinity. He set before us a perfect example of holy obedience to God’s law, and we are exhorted, “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus”• Ellen White, RH February 4, 1890, par. 4

So here we see that Jesus is our example; he is a pattern that we can actually follow. He was able to live a life of perfect obedience because of his way of thinking – his mind. We can have his same way of thinking and thus live in perfect obedience just like he did. This is our part of the bargain: to keep our way of thinking in harmony with his way of thinking – to keep the law of God in our hearts and on our minds. If we do this – if we store up the law in our hearts, we won’t sin against God. This is what the new covenant is all about! Freedom from sin today! Enter into covenant with God!

“Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts.”• Hebrews 4:7b

For a deeper study on this, see *The Lost Gospel of Christ* by Trent Wilde.