

God of Covenants

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Jeremiah 31: 31-33 [NKJV]

31 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— 32 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. 33 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.

1. God Has Established Covenants with Men

The Bible of the Christians consist of two parts, the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament covers the period from the creation to the time prior to the birth of Jesus Christ, approximately 4,000 years, whereas the New Testament covers the period from Jesus Christ to the end of the world including the eternal kingdom of heaven. During these two segments of time God has repeatedly entered covenants with men.

You may be somewhat confused because of the implication that there might be more than two covenants involved between God and men. Yes, it is true. A covenant can be understood as like a contract of modern days. Legal entities and people enter written contracts by placing their signatures on documents that contain such contracts. A legal contract includes the signature parties involved, the purpose or goal of entering a contract, the obligations and restrictions of each party, terms or limitations of the contract, benefits and penalties of the parties as effected by the contract and other pertinent clauses. By placing their signatures, the parties of a contract agree to abide by all stipulations of the contract.

One significant example of a contract at a national level in the United States is the nation's constitution, which was established on June 21, 1788 in Philadelphia Convention attended by 55 representatives of the then 13 colonies of the British Empire. The 39 signatories that signed this important document legally represented all peoples in the 13 colonies, which formed the nation of the United States of America. Therefore, the legal effectiveness of this document has been carried to this date and affect all manners of the government, legal entities and the people of the nation. Here, my goal here is not to delve into the details of the constitution. I am only trying to illustrate the significance of the Bible as a contract document between God and men whether you want to be included in it or not.

God the Creator has made the first man Adam and established a covenant with him. After the great flood that destroyed the entire living beings during the lifetime of Noah, God entered a covenant with him and his family, from whom the entire human population of today came into being. Some years after the flood God saw Abraham as a righteous person, called him out of his homeland and made a covenant with him and renewed it several times during his lifetime. Later the descendants of Abraham went down to Egypt and were living as slaves to the Egyptians. God used Moses to bring them out of Egypt and established a covenant with them during the 40 days they spent in what is today the southwestern wilderness of the Arabian Peninsula. God made a covenant with King David and also with his son Solomon. God also made covenants of with a number of faithful people as found in the Bible. Thus, the Scripture is a record of God making covenants with the humans, the prime creature of all things He created.

In each of these cases of covenants with men God initiated covenants first and no man has first asked Him, "God, let's make a contract." God proposed to establish a covenant and neither modified or reneged on them without first being provoked by the human counterpart. In each case of broken covenants, the human counterpart broke the key terms of his covenant with God while he had accepted the covenant proposed by God. Often the cause of such renegeing or breakage was that the human contractor had been deceived by Satan or evil influences surrounding him so that he decided that it would be beneficial to him to neglect keeping the terms of the contract and eventually to unilaterally negate the contract in its entirety.

In fact, you and I are in a covenantal relationship with God. He is the Creator and we are His creatures. Just as a baby, when it is borne into this world, automatically enters a parent-child relationship with its parents, we have been borne into a Creator-Creature relationship with God without an exception. This relationship that is tagged onto us at our births did not come about by our choice but by the good will of God the Creator, so that, just as a child is borne to be an inheritor of his/her parents' love and providence, we also have been imbued with the innate rights and privileges of receiving the unspeakable love and providence of our Creator. Such was the plan of God's love toward His created children.

[1 John 3: 1-3] 1 Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore, the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. 2 Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. 3 And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

Suppose you detested your parents so that you have severed the ties with your parents and have lived without ever making a phone call or writing a message to them. Does such a cold attitude of yours nullify the parent-child relationship into which you were borne at birth? Even when you thought you have severed all ties with your parents and now live as total strangers, you are still in their hearts the little darling baby in their arms who used to give pure delight and joy to them that they would do anything to protect and to care for you regardless of circumstances. Such is the heart of every parent because God made them so. In fact, if you look into your own self, what kind of heart you have toward your own child, you would know that God put the same heart into you that He had put into your parents' hearts.

Likewise, even if you might be living in sin, denying God and refusing to allow His power and love work in your life, God still loves you. He had Jesus Christ, His Son, to die on a cross on Calvary hill outside of Jerusalem after suffering shame, torture and abuse unjustly some 2,000 years ago so that He shed His blood on the cross as the price for all repenting souls. Have you ever tried to imagine the heart of God looking down from Heaven onto His Son suffering and dying on the cross? The death and resurrection of Jesus the Savior, who is now sitting at the right hand of God the Father and looking down into each of us, are still effective as the only means of human salvation. Such a covenantal relationship we have with God cannot be negated or shut away no matter how hard we try. The extended hand of God is still there toward you and me.

In the quoted text from Jeremiah, we can read the grievance God had toward His chosen people of Israel. Here, God is telling His people, who had broken the terms of the covenant He established with them in the wilderness of the Arabian Peninsula upon leading them out of Egypt under the leadership of Moses and Aaron. He is telling them through the prophet Jeremiah that He would establish a new covenant with His people instead of the Old Covenant. This declaration of the coming of a new covenant was made some 600 years prior to the coming of Jesus Christ, who would come to establish this new covenant. God is making clear to them the reason for this decision, that is, because the people of Israel, who were like God's own wife, had been unfaithful to their husband God and thus reneged on the mutual covenant of marriage. God so loved His own people that He called them His own wife!

Upon creation of Adam, God desired to make a wife for him. He took a rib from Adam and made a female called Eve. Upon seeing her, Adam loved her by saying, *"This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh [Genesis 2:23]."* Then, God spoke to both of them, *"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh [Genesis 2:24]."* Because Adam and Eve did not have parents from whom they were borne, God's definition of the human marriage relationship was addressed to their posterity.

When the people of Israel were led out of Egypt after spending some 200 years in bondage of slavery, they were to form a chosen people to God as the key component of the kingdom of God here on earth. This was the covenant they entered with God in the wilderness by Mt. Sinai. However, upon entering the promised land their hearts were affected by the idol-worshipping gentiles of the land. As a result, they chose to enter into the curse of Satan instead of the true life and blessings of God. They were a foolish people who chose to renege on the terms of the covenant with God.

For this reason, God foretold through the prophet Jeremiah that He would establish a new covenant with His people instead of the old testament established with Israel in the wilderness. He describes the nature of the new covenant, or New Testament, as follows:

[v33] 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.

As a way of understanding this new covenant, let us look into the 'parable of the lost son [Luke 15],' spoken by Lord Jesus. As we know, Jesus came into this world as God the Son in the form of a human so as to fulfill God's plan of human salvation. He spoke a number of parables and sermons to teach people about this new covenant. One of them is this story of a lost son who came back to his home in repentance. This story teaches us the heart of God in establishing the new covenant.

This story tells of a father who had two sons, one of whom demanded the father to give him what was to be his future inheritance because he did not wish to live under his father's wings. He took the inheritance with him to a foreign land, wasted it totally by living wantonly, and eventually got a job under a pig farmer because he had nothing left. He was so hungry and poverty stricken that he became remorseful of what he had done when he thought how plentiful was living in his father's home. And he decides to return home in repentance by saying to himself like this:

[Luke 15: 17-20] 15 But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! 18 I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, 19 and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants."

This prodigal son now confesses that he has despised the father-son relationship he had with his father while he was at home and jumped into a sinful life of his own free will. He confesses that he "has sinned against heaven." He realizes now that he forsook the creator-creature relationship between him and God so that he willfully violated the Ten Commandments of God, in particular, the command to honor his father and mother. So, he confesses that he is a sinner before God and before his father because he violated the two covenants he has with God and with his parents. And he has taken a humble attitude by confessing to himself, "I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Please take me in as one of your hired servants." With such confession of sin and humility of heart this young man took courage to return home.

Since this prodigal son had taken his inheritance from his father before the due time and squandered it through a wanton living, he no longer had any inheritance left to receive from his father. His future outlook was bleak indeed as a consequence of his sinful life. However, his father is taking certain remarkable actions starting even before his son's arrival.

[Luke 15: 20-24] But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. 21 And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.' 22 "But the father said to his servants, 'Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. 23 And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; 24 for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' And they began to be merry.

Lord Jesus testifies of the heart of God through the character of the father in this story. The father was waiting for his lost son to come back. And when he sees the dirty, pathetic looking son coming toward him at a distance, he does not show a spirit of judgment, reprimand, or complaint, but welcomed the son with a loving and forgiving heart. So, he runs to the son, hugs him and kisses him. This act of loving and forgiving is expressed before the son's confession of sin. Then, the son makes his confession, which he has already rehearsed to himself, and the father issues commands of blessing to this unworthy, repentant son. "Take off his dirty clothes, wash him clean, put on the best robe, put a new ring of covenant on his finger, and put new shoes on his feet." These blessings effectively transform a ragged, sinful, dirty prodigal son to an heir in the father's household with all due honors and blessings. Then, a feast is held in honor of this lost son returned home. To the father this young man was a lost

son, but is now recovered from the grip of sin and death. He is now a precious son of his father with a renewed covenant. So, a big feast is held in merriment with the entire household rejoicing.

When this son left home, he must have had the ring given by his father on his finger that signified he was an heir of the household. However, in the course of a wanton living he must have sold it to keep himself from starving. That is why the father noted the absence of the ring on the son's finger when he returned home. And a new ring of covenant was given to the son. The son, just as Esau slighted the value of the first-born son status, slighted the significance of the ring, which symbolized the father-heir covenant he had and sold it for money. Only after he fell to the bottom of deprivation and desperation, he came to realize what a great value the father-heir covenant had. And he returned home in a repentant spirit of earnestly desiring to restore the precious covenantal relationship with his father.

Our life can be viewed in light of this story. We are all borne with the creator-creature covenantal relationship based on God's good design. God is the source of all life that sustains and gives growth in us. Our body and soul with all their constituents speak of God's creative work and no one can deny this truth. God's creative design is apparent in all things around us, whether living or non-living. As the season is now in full spring, seemingly dead tree branches are now being clothed with ever growing leaves and young shoots. They are changing the environ each day with lively colors and shapes. All God's creation speaks of His almighty power and infinite wisdom. They all testify the creator-creature relationship in full measure so that we have no excuse at all for not believing God's presence, power and divine providence, as the apostle Paul wrote so eloquently.

*[Romans 1: 18-21] For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who [d]suppress the truth in unrighteousness, 19 because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. 20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that **they are without excuse**, 21 because, **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.***

Lord Jesus illustrated this point using an example of wild flowers that grow on fields. When a wild flower blooms, it shows the God-given creative design in full measure in response to the nature given to a tiny seed by the Creator. He speaks as follows to teach a very important lesson to us all.

[Matthew 6:28-30] So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; 29 and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 30 Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

Lord Jesus makes a truly remarkable statement in this teaching. "Even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these lilies." This statement teaches us the following three points: 1) Lord Jesus teaches the marvel of God's creation, which He freely gave to each of His creation including wild flowers and humans. 2) Secondly, the worth before God's eyes of the entire wealth and glory that Solomon enjoyed, which is comparable to the total asset value of Bill Gates in today's dollar values, is not even so great as that of a little wild lily. The reason is because Solomon departed from serving God faithfully and he lost God's favor in his final years. Solomon not only failed in his spiritual life, but also failed to rear faithful children and wives and caused a serious failure of the nation of Israel.

3) Thirdly, Lord Jesus teaches how precious and beautiful is the covenantal relationship between a child of God and the Creator when a person accepts Jesus as his/her savior by faith. The greatness of this new covenant relationship can be far greater than the wealth of Solomon and the total wealth of Bill Gates. I hope you come to see the potential of you becoming a very rich person before God, not necessarily in this world, by entering into this new covenant relationship with God the Father, God the Son and Holy Spirit, who form the Triune Godhead. Just as the repentant prodigal son came to wear a new ring of covenant although he was not worthy, we feel we are

unworthy sinners before God. However, the precious blood of Jesus shed on Calvary's cross ensures that you can also come into this marvelous covenantal relationship with God. What a blessed place you could be today!

Just as the prodigal son returned home in repentance, I encourage you to leave the sinful place where you might be and come back to the house of our Creator Father, who is waiting for your return. You will meet Jesus Christ just as you decide to return and He will help and guide your journey home. This story of the lost son speaks of God's heart and what awaits you. Jesus spoke this story 2,000 years ago and the gospel is still reaching out to all repentant souls of men and women. Come to Jesus and enter into the blessed house of God where you may enjoy life everlasting and heavenly blessings. Amen.