

Your Questions Bible Answers

What Is Grace? (Part 4)

A covenant is the relationship that God desires to have with man. These relationships are founded on His grace, contain stipulations that will keep man in the covenant relationship and depend on man's faithfulness for the relationship to be maintained. So far we've noted a successful covenant (God's covenant with Abraham) and a covenant that failed (God's covenant with Israel). This relationship was ruined because Israel failed at faithfulness. However, God promised that the days were coming when a new covenant would be established (Jeremiah 31.31-34).

In this lesson we examine how the blood of Christ was essential to the forming of the new covenant and then what it means for us to live in this new relationship. We will see that God's grace abounds to us in the forming of this covenant and in the blessings of living in this relationship with Him.

The new covenant in His blood

"This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood" (Luke 22.20). With those words Jesus proclaimed that the covenant promised through Jeremiah was about to be realized.

1. Jesus' relationship to the Old Covenant
 - a. The writer of Hebrews wrote at length of the new covenant, showing how Jesus fulfilled the prophecy of Jeremiah 31 (Heb. 8.9-12).
 - b. He also revealed the critical weakness of the old covenant, a weakness not attributed to God but to a faithless people: the blood of bulls and goats could not "make perfect those who draw near" (10.1). A constant reminder of this failing was seen as sacrifices were continually made for the sins of the people, sacrifices that bore the remembrance of the people's guilt.
 - c. Enter Jesus, One who came to do the will of God, to keep His covenant. "Sacrifice and offering you have not desired, but a body you have prepared for Me; In whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin you have taken no pleasure. Then I said, 'Behold, I have come (in the scroll of the book it is written of Me) to do Your will, O God'" (10.5-7). We are reminded of Jesus' many statements while on the earth which revealed His determination to do the Father's will: "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work" (John 4.34); "I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me" (John 5.30); "I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me" (John 6.38); "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will" (Matt. 26.39). He was tempted to violate the covenant in all the ways Israel had failed, yet without sin (Heb. 4.15).
 - d. Israel may have constantly broken covenant, but Jesus exemplified faithfulness to the Father's will and in doing so He fulfilled the covenant of Sinai and brought into

existence the promised new covenant. "Then He said, 'Behold I have come to do Your will.' He takes away the first to establish the second" (Heb. 10.9).

2. The greatness of the New Covenant

- a. God's covenant with Israel was based on His grace, but the new covenant would outshine the one He made at Sinai. "He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises" (Heb. 8.6).
- b. The covenant mediated by Jesus would fulfill God's covenant promises to both Abraham and David. It was declared before His birth, "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end" (Luke 1.32-33). Also, "He has given help to Israel His servant, In remembrance of His mercy, As He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and his descendants forever" (Luke 1.54-55). After Jesus' ascension Peter proclaimed the resurrection as central to the fulfillment of God's promise to David (Acts 2.29-31) so those under the new covenant have the security of God's Son reigning over them. Furthermore, Paul revealed that the promise to Abraham can now be fulfilled among all people: "if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise" (Gal. 3.29).
- c. Finally, God promised that under the new covenant iniquities would be forgiven and sins no longer remembered (Jer. 31.34), and now we rejoice that "by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified" (Heb. 10.14). Partakers in the Heavenly Kingdom, blessed by God, sins forgiven, better promises indeed!

3. Ratified in His Blood

- a. But like the Mosaic covenant before it, the new covenant required blood. When Israel first entered into covenant relations with the Lord, Moses read the commandments of the covenant to the representatives of the people and they responded, "All the words which the Lord has spoken we will do!" (Exod. 24.3). Moses then wrote the words down, constructed an altar and sent young men to sacrifice burnt and peace offerings (v. 4-5). Next, he sprinkled half of the blood from the offerings on the altar, read again the commandments of the covenant and the people again professed fidelity. Finally, the covenant was ratified as Moses sprinkled the remaining blood on the people and declared, "Behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words" (v. 8).
- b. It was this ratification that the Hebrew writer referenced when speaking of the necessity of Jesus' death to bring about the new covenant (Hebrews 9.15-20)
- c. Debate has swirled around this passage as to whether the image is that of the covenant sacrifices required for ratification, the death of a testator necessary for a will to be enforced or both. It seems most likely that the dual meaning of *diathēkē* (generally meaning "will" or "testament" but consistently translated as "covenant" in the LXX and NT) is reflected in the passage. Regardless of interpretation, the meaning of the passage is clear: the new covenant could not come into existence without the death of Jesus. Covenants must be ratified by sacrifice, wills cannot go into effect until the death of the testator. Here is the meaning of Jesus' words to His disciples on the

eve of His betrayal, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood" (Luke 22.20). The new covenant built on better promises was about to be ratified by His sacrifice, by His blood!

4. God's Grace & His Blood

- a. One more consideration regarding the blood of the covenant should be made, this one having to do with God's grace, the bedrock of His covenants. As we have already noted, Israel was reminded of God's grace in bringing them out of Egypt as they entered His covenant: "You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you to Myself" (Exod. 19.4). This deliverance was brought about by the final plague on Egypt as the Lord struck the firstborn, a plague Israel escaped by the blood of the Passover lamb.
- b. Significantly, it was while Jesus and His disciples were commemorating this illustration of God's grace that He instituted the Lord's Supper and said, "this is the blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins" (Matt. 26.28). The blood of the covenant in this case speaks not only of the ratification, but of the grace that frees His disciples from the spiritual bondage of sin. This blood was required for God to be "just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Rom. 3.26), bringing to pass the promise of the new covenant: forgiveness of sins.
- c. The Passover blood delivered Israel from Egypt and sacrificial blood brought them into covenant with God, so blood was an essential component of both grace and ratification. Likewise, Jesus' blood of the new covenant delivers us from sin (grace) and brings us into covenant (ratification). His blood has been shed, God's grace has been showered on us and now we can have a relationship with Him!

New covenant Christianity

1. Christians are now in covenant relationship with God!

- a. God promised that in the New Covenant, "I will be their God, and they shall be My people," and "they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," (Jer. 31.33,34). This relationship is now achieved in Christ! "But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ" (Eph. 2.13). We were once "strangers and aliens" but now we are "of God's household" (v. 19).
- b. The covenant at Sinai was also about relationship, God bestowing His grace on Israel by making them His own people, but that relationship was dependent on Israel keeping His covenant (Exod. 19.5). Israel failed at faithfulness, thereby losing their relationship with the Father.
- c. But, the promise of the new covenant is of iniquities forgiven and sins no longer remembered (Jer. 31.34). Christ's blood has been shed, forgiving the transgressions of those who will believe, ratifying God's new covenant with people of faith. We are truly brought near by His blood, we are God's people, His children, His dwelling place. We have an everlasting relationship with Him!
- d. However, while this is a "new" covenant, we must not deceive ourselves into thinking that its basic features are different from God's previous covenants. All His covenants

are based on His grace, contain covenant law and require man's faith in keeping the covenant. So, let's conclude by noting the practical implications of new covenant Christianity.

2. Grace in the New Covenant

- a. Partakers in the new covenant are the beneficiaries of the fulness of God's grace. Christ's sacrifice has purchased our eternal redemption (Heb. 9.12), now we can serve God with our consciences cleansed from dead works (9.14) and having transgressions forgiven, "those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance" (9.15). His sacrifice has "put away sin" (9.26) and those in Him can long for when He "will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him" (9.28). By His offering we have now been sanctified (10.10) and perfected (10.14) in the sight of the Holy One. We are part of the new and better covenant, truly enacted on better promises!
- b. So, why do we find ourselves worrying and fretting so much over present circumstances, over physical things that perish and trials that can only be temporary? Have we forgotten that the better promises of the new covenant have nothing to do with monetary gain, absence of physical pain or our preferred choice in government? Wouldn't it be wiser to spend less time ranting over the failure of elected officials, and spend more time praising Him who has brought us into covenant relation with Him, a covenant that has brought us into the Heavenly Kingdom where Christ reigns? We are members of the new covenant and every day should bring to our lips, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. 1.3).

3. Law in the New Covenant

- a. Shocking though it may seem to some, the new covenant contains law. The One who ratified the new covenant in His own blood also commanded for us to "observe all that I commanded you" (Matt. 28.20). Partakers in the new covenant are warned not to sin and transgress against the covenant because "there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins" (Heb. 10.26) and while death was required under the Mosaic covenant at the testimony of two or three, "How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?" (v. 29). Our relationship with the Holy One depends on our keeping His commands, instruction aimed at producing holiness and righteousness in our lives (cf. 1 Pet. 1.14-16). God is light, so our maintaining fellowship (covenant relationship) with Him requires that we also walk in the light (1 John 1.5-7).
- b. God said that in the New Covenant, "I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it," (Jer. 31.33). Do you count yourself a Christian? Then how do you treat His Law? Can you say that it is within you, written on your heart? No more trying to skirt around His commands, let us give further diligence to doing all that He has said. He has given covenant law, law that is aimed at keeping His people holy, law that is necessary for us to maintain a relationship with Him.

4. Faith in the New Covenant

- a. Finally, let us never diminish the importance of faith, the bridge between the promises of the covenant and our adherence to covenant law. The Father who desires covenant relationship with us is deserving of our faith. "Let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful" (Heb. 10.22-23). He has always been faithful! He kept His covenant promises with Abraham and David and His people live and die in faith, knowing that "God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them" (11.16).
- b. Ever struggle with a command of God? Have faith, trusting that He will help you through and knowing that holiness is worth any sacrifice you face. Ever waver in the face of trial? Have faith, trusting that He is always with His people and that what He has promised is worth any sacrifice, even your life (Hebrews 10.36-39).