

1 Cor. 11:25; Jer. 31:31-34 What is “New” in the New Covenant?

Today as we prepare to take the Lord’s Supper I would like for us to consider the words: “**This cup is the new covenant in my blood.**” The reason I have chosen to do this today is because we are preaching through the Ten Commandments, which is the principal part of what ethnic Israel considers to be the Law of God. As NT Christians, looking back on that time and those instructions, we consider Mosaic Law to be part of the Old Covenant. Now, all of a sudden, Jesus says to his disciples in the upper room on the night before his death, “*This is my body broken for you . . . and this is the cup of the new covenant in my blood.*” What are we to make of this “New Covenant?” With the full canon of Scripture in our hands, how are we to understand this new covenant. What is it? What does it mean for us today? I would like to use an OT text as our starting point this morning. Please turn to Jeremiah 31, where we will focus on vv. 31-34. It is interesting that this passage from Jeremiah is the longest OT quotation in the NT, which we find in Heb. 8:8-12. Let’s read it together. This morning I have 6 truths from this passage that will answer the question: “*What is New about the New Covenant?*” This will help us as we focus on Jesus’ words, “*This cup is the new covenant in my blood.*”

1. God (not man) Is the ONE Who Makes the New Covenant. God alone is the author and perfecter of this covenant. Notice the words throughout this passage: “I will make. I will put. I will write. I will be their God. I will forgive. I will remember sin no more. We see the sovereignty of God in this great work! The emphasis here is upon God and his working, not the work of man. And what I would like to point out here is that all the covenants we see in the OT took place in time. In other words, they were covenants given by God to man, given by God to a people, in clear historical context. The Mosaic Law (or covenant) is just this. God gives the covenant to Moses on Mt. Sinai. Then, Moses gives the covenant terms to the people and in the end they say, “*This is good. We will obey.*”

Well, the NC is not like the old Mosaic covenant (or the other covenants in the OT). The reason is that this covenant is an eternal covenant. This new covenant is the basis and fulfillment for all the other covenants in the OT in that it began before the foundation of the world in the sovereign plan of the triune God. You see, only God can fulfill an eternal covenant because He alone is eternal. It is a great mystery. But we serve a God who is one, yet exists in 3 persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Before the foundation of the world (eternity past) there is an eternal covenant. Look with me in Eph. 1:3. As I read, notice the work of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in this eternal covenant. “**Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,⁴ even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love⁵ he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will,⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace,⁸ which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight⁹ making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ¹⁰ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.¹¹ In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will,¹² so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might**

be to the praise of his glory. ¹³ **In him** you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were **sealed with the promised Holy Spirit**, ¹⁴ **who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory**” (Eph. 1:3-14). In this great eternal covenant, God the Father sends the Son. The Son does the work. The Holy Spirit applies what the Son does. In eternity past, the Father says to the Son, “*I will send you.*” The Son says, “*I will go.*” And, the Spirit waits to be sent to accomplish and apply the work of the Son.

Do you see the difference and the superiority of this new covenant? It did not stem from some deficiency in God. It did not come because God needed us. It comes from the pure pleasure of God, stemming from his manifold wisdom. This covenant is the culmination of all covenants and fulfillment of all covenants. To God be the glory; Great things he has done! This is the real covenant, the one to which all the others point.

2. The New Covenant Will Not Be Broken. As the Old Covenant (represented by all the covenants made with man) was broken, the NC will not be broken. Look at v. 32. Jeremiah says [this covenant] is “**not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD.**” I don’t need to give you evidence from the Scriptures that Israel broke the Mosaic covenant. They did; over and over and over. As for us in relation to the perfect, holy, law of God in all that it means, we also break it. Paul says in Rom. 7:12: “**So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.**” There is nothing wrong with the law of God as represented in the Old Covenant. The problem has always been with man. We are law breakers. You may say this morning, “*I’m not so bad.*” But I say to you that if you’ve broken one command you’ve broken them all. Men, if you’ve looked at a woman with lust in your heart you are an adulterer. If any of you have ever thought evil about another person, you also break the spirit of the law not to murder. If you have not been content with your situation, you covet, wanting more than what God has given.

So what is the difference between the old covenant and the new? What is new about this eternal covenant? You see, when Christ came and died on the cross and rose again, he secured heartfelt obedience to the law for those who trust in him. You see the old covenant failed to produce obedience in the ones to whom it was given. The people broke it. In the new covenant, as we have seen, the work of the Son secures obedience. When Jesus said, “*It is finished,*” it was finished. The eternal covenant finds its culmination (fulfillment) in Christ’s death and resurrection.

This is why today, though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. While you were yet a sinner, Christ died for you. Jesus is the end of the law in that He kept it perfectly in both motive and deed. And, he offered himself up to God as an eternal sacrifice, appeasing the wrath of God for covenant breakers. If you are in Christ today, it is because Christ regarded your helpless state and shed his blood for your soul. And, if you are in Christ today, your sins, past, present, and future, have been paid for by the blood of Christ, who ushered in a new covenant. This covenant cannot be broken because Christ, the Son of the eternal God kept the covenant. And, it cannot be broken.

3. In the NC there is an internalization of the Law of God. Look at v. 33. **“For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts.”** The new covenant does something that old did not and cannot do. Here we see that in this new covenant God will do something in the hearts of men. We see this same idea in some of the other prophets. Concerning a great time in the future Ezekiel says of God, **“And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh.”** It is the same principle when God asked Ezekiel, **“Son of man, can these bones live?”**

In other words, the new covenant will be a covenant that spiritualizes the law in such a way that sinners love and delight in the law of God. Here is what I think this means. In writing the law upon the heart, in giving Israel a believing and obedient heart, God is fulfilling the original intent of the covenant at Sinai. The law will become the wellspring of all they think, say and do. In other words, God’s people will love the law because their hearts love Him. And, here is the way Jesus defines obedience to the law. He said, **“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. And, love your neighbor as yourself.”** In Matt. 7:12 Jesus said, **“So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.”**

Let me give a practical illustration from my own life. Until the law of God was written on my heart in the way Jeremiah is speaking, I worked and I worked and tried to be good. Everywhere I turned, I failed. I wasn’t faithful in Bible reading. I wasn’t faithful in church attendance. I wasn’t faithful to be kind to my neighbors. I wasn’t faithful to love God as I knew that I ought. Oh, how I failed. But, God, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love toward me, even when I was dead in my sins (and in my inability to keep the law), made me alive together with Christ—by grace I was saved—and raised me up with and seated me in the heavenly places in Christ. . . For by grace I was saved through faith, and this was not my own doing, but was the gift of God, not a result of my works, so that I would not boast. For I am his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand (in this eternal covenant), that I should walk in them.

One application for us is this: God’s people love God. And, because God is the one who keeps the covenant, all praise and honor and glory go to Him. This means that God’s people are motivated in this: They love God. And because they love God, fruits of this motivation flow naturally. There is great power to obey God. And, this “keeping” is to the glory of God.

4. In the New Covenant All God’s People Are Teachers. Look at v. 34. **“And they shall not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, Know the LORD, for they shall all know me, . . .”** So, what is new about this teaching? As far as I know, there is no reference in the OT to Israelites teaching Israelites. There are some references to parents teaching their children. When we see this word “teach” in the OT it normally refers to God teaching his people through his Word or to a specially called person or official group of teachers commissioned to teach Israel. In the OT who are these people? Think about it. They are the prophets. They are the priests. They are the kings. With the new covenant, this changes. Part of the newness of Jeremiah’s covenant seems to be a “democratization” of the teaching office. In

other words, all the people teach. I believe the reason for this flows from the previous point. In the new covenant all will have more access to revelation than did even the teaching priests and prophets of the former age. The emphasis here is not so much on the actual role of teaching, but on the availability of revelation made known to the new covenant believer through the Holy Spirit.

The prophet Joel speaks of this New Covenant when this will be fulfilled. He says, **“And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions.”** ²⁹ **Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit.”**

In the OC the prophets, the priests, and the kings teach are given a portion of the Spirit in order to teach the people. Special revelation comes to them. In the NC, EVERY believer is given the Spirit fully. If you are in Christ today, the revelation you have through the Spirit in this “new” covenant is far greater and clearer and more effective than any gift given to the prophets, priests, and kings, or anyone under the OC.

5. In the NC All of God’s People Will Know Him. Look at the end of v. 34: **“for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD.”** What does this mean: *“all know me?”* After Egypt God gathered a people together and set them apart. Although they spent 40 years in the desert, God still provided. God still protected. God still brought them into the Promised Land. In this way, we see an ethnic Israel, a people of God that were clearly identifiable. But, I must ask, *“Did all of ethnic Israel “know” God by faith?”* Absolutely not! Many of the Israelites benefited as God’s people, but yet had no faith. So what does it mean to know God? In Rom. 2:28-29 Paul says, **“For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical.”** ²⁹ **But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.”** Yes, they all received his blessings, but not all were circumcised in their hearts. There was still a remnant. In Jer. 31:7 we see the entire context for this passage: **“For thus says the LORD: Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob, and raise shouts for the chief of the nations; proclaim, give praise, and say, O LORD, save your people, the remnant of Israel.”** In the new covenant, all who are in Christ are the remnant. All of those who are in Christ, know God.

And what follows from this truth is that now, the nations are included in this remnant. All God’s people include the nations, not just ethnic Israel. The OT is full of these kinds of prophecies. This is new. I have heard that the motivating verse for William Carey to give his life in service to reaching the nations in India was Is. 54:2 which says, **“Enlarge the place of your tent and let the curtains of your habitations be stretched out; do not hold back; lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes. For you will spread abroad to the right and to the left, and your offspring will possess the nations.”** Listen to what the Father says to the Son in Ps. 2:8: **“Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession.”** This is part of the “new” in the new covenant. All God’s people, whether ethnic Israel, or English or German, or Latin, or Tatar, or Kazakh or American Indian; ALL of them will know me. (For exs: see Is. 56:4-8; 66:18-24; etc.) The implications for this are huge. Here are just a few: God will accomplish his purpose. The nations will be gathered. When we go the ends of the earth, the nations will respond. The nations were also included in this everlasting

covenant from before the foundation of the world. We see very clearly the definite work of the Spirit in bring sinners to Christ. In the fact that ALL will know him, paves the way for us to say, "God's people will produce fruit." On and on we could go. What a glorious truth!

6. In the NC God forgives and forgets sin? Look at v. 34: **"For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."** In the new covenant, there is finality to the work of God in forgiving sins. In other words, Christ is the basis for all forgiveness. Why is this? In the OC, we see that sacrifices were made week after week, month after month, year after year, so that there was no finality to their sacrifices. But, in the NC it is not so. All the work of forgiveness is fulfilled and finished in the blood of Christ. In the new covenant, God will cure the disease of sin forever. This will be based on principles of righteousness. It will culminate in the finished work of Christ. Let me read one passage before moving to some application. Rom. 3:21: **"But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it--²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction:²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.²⁶ It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus."**

Application – I hear people all the time talk about God doing something "NEW." "Let's get on board with something "New" God is doing. Let's wait on God doing something "NEW." We hear it over and over. We hear of people driving for hours and hours to attend a particular "revival" meeting (Ex: 12 Days at Elevation.) People have this mindset that they want to change something to get on board with some new "movement" of God. In church circles all the time, we hear about people wanting "more" or "new." I would say this morning, "the new has come" and in one aspect the work of God is finished. When Jesus said, "*It is finished*," the NC began and the OC was made obsolete. And, all we are waiting for now is his return. The reason I believe so many Christians, or so called Christians, are looking for something bigger and better is because they don't understand the principles of the NC. They don't understand that ALL spiritual blessings are found in Christ. So, I would say to you this morning, "Just BE a Christian." We don't need bigger and better. We don't need all the things we think we might need to be a NT church. We need Christ. And, we need to understand that all the spiritual blessings of this life and the life to come we have in Christ (Eph. 1). It is finished. Simply rest in Christ, who is the Lord of the Sabbath.

I am convinced the institutionalized church is full of people who do not know these things. And because they do not know these truths, they are lost. There are so many church members that are unspiritual people thinking they are spiritual. They make spiritual decisions in their churches with no regard to principles of righteousness found in the NC. I listen to sermons all the time. Your elders listen to sermons all the time. Many of you listen to sermons all the time. And sadly, these sermons do not grasp the truths from this NC. And in their lack of knowledge, (though they may tickle your ears and tell you you are "ok," they do not preach the Gospel of Christ. And if this gospel of Christ is not preached, there is no fruit that leads to repentance.

As we take the Lord's Supper today, consider, remember, understand, what is new. 1) God is the one who makes this covenant. 2) It will not be broken. 3) It will produce fruit in our lives and give us power to obey God. 4) All God's people have special revelation by the Spirit in that all of us are teachers. 5) ALL of God's people know him. 6) All our sins are forgiven based on the person and work of Christ.

This is the new covenant!