

LESSON ESSENTIALS

CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

LESSON 6: GOD OF THE COVENANTS

The doctrine of the Covenants of God can be stated this way:
Covenants are the means by which God has chosen to converse and connect to us, to redeem and glorify His people. Our relationship with God today is defined by the new covenant made through Jesus Christ.

Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations (Deuteronomy 7:9).

Covenants are legal, binding agreements with great responsibility and implication. They often deal with finances, business obligations, mergers, relationships, and exchanges of service.

While we understand that Jesus Christ is the mediator of a new covenant based on His sacrifice and His blood (Hebrews 12:24), that does not mean the covenants of the Old Testament were bad. They too were beautiful examples of the promise-keeping God being faithful to His people.

The concept of covenants can seem very cold and business-like at first glance. In Biblical times, covenants were agreements between two or more people that defined a commitment between the parties to act in specific ways towards one another. Promises were made and consequences were laid out in the case of one or more parties breaking those promises.

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This sounds very calculating and cold.

However, when you look at the covenants that God initiated, you see a binding agreement based on love and faithfulness, a real demonstration of the commitment that God has to His people.

While we understand that Jesus Christ is the mediator of a new covenant based on His sacrifice and His blood (Hebrews 12:24), that does not mean the covenants of the Old Testament were bad. They too were beautiful examples of the promise-keeping God being faithful to His people. From the covenant with Noah, to the covenant with Abraham, to the covenant with Israel through Moses, God's covenants were pictures of His redeeming, loving, rescuing, protecting faithfulness.

The essential doctrine of covenants is a gift to believers because it forms the basis for our assurance as Christians. When we consider the need to persevere to the end, we know that we are unable to do so in our own strength. We may feel fearful knowing that our eternal security is in jeopardy because of our human frailty, weakness, and tendency towards disobedience. But praise the Lord that His covenant with us is made for our good based on the strength of His faithfulness. He takes full responsibility for our salvation, cancelling our debt with His blood. He takes full responsibility for our holiness, filling us with His Holy Spirit. He takes full responsibility for our eternal security, having chosen us before the creation of the world. Yes, we are called to follow His ways: every covenant has responsibilities for all parties. But the reassuring part of this covenant is that Jesus Christ gives us everything we need to fulfill our side of the agreement.

The consequences for breaking the covenant have also already been endured by Christ. He has initiated this covenant, He has perfectly upheld His end of the covenant, He has ensured that we are equipped and able to uphold our end of the covenant, and He has endured our consequences

for breaking the covenant. He is the covenant-keeping God: He is so faithful!

If we do not cling to this doctrine, the whole burden of salvation, sanctification, and perseverance is our full responsibility – and we will fail. If we reject the truth of the covenants of God, then we have no choice but to try and fulfill both sides of the covenant on our own, fighting for our own salvation, trying to develop our own ability to live rightly, and struggling in the flesh to persevere.

Instead, when we rest in the life-giving truth of the covenant, we see God's love for us, we understand our duty, and we see the freedom and joy there is to serve Him and to live as the covenant requires. When we grow weary, we rely on His faithfulness to keep us in the covenant by His sacrifice and His blood. When we feel weak and unprotected, we rest in the rescue and defense that the Lord provides for us in this covenant.

Jesus, speaking of His people who were to be bound to Him through the new covenant of His blood, said: "I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand" (John 10: 28-29). This is the assurance that believers have as they marvel at the beauty of the essential doctrine of covenants: we are bound to Christ, and nothing can snatch us away or break that covenant. He is faithfully keeping us united to Him. Praise the Lord!

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IN REVIEW

- While covenants are legally binding agreements, they are not necessarily cold and unfeeling. The covenants between God and His people are expressions of His great love for His people.
- The new covenant sealed by the blood of Christ is the perfect example of God's complete faithfulness in provision. The covenant meets our greatest needs through Christ's work on our behalf, and yet, Christ also provides us with all we need to uphold our side of the covenant responsibilities.
- Once we are in covenant with Christ, nothing can snatch us out of it!

HAVE YOUR SAY

- Meditate on the faithfulness of God to you through the covenant He has made with you. Make a list of all the promises that are yours because of Christ upholding His side of the covenant. Make a list of all the responsibilities that you have in the covenant. Then notice how the promises of Christ completely equip you and provide for you what you need to uphold your side of the covenant. (This will take time, prayer, and on-going observation as you read the Word of God. Take the time to do this, even if it is a year-long project. It will be worth it!)

- Think of other earthly covenants that you are in: marriage, business agreements, financial obligations. Consider the example of the faithfulness of Christ in His covenants and pray for wisdom to know if you need to be more careful in your duties in those earthly covenants. You can be a witness and a reflection of Christ in how you fulfill covenants in front of a watching world.

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