

# The New Covenant of the Spirit

John Hay

*Notes prepared for the communion ministry, 23 August 2020*

## Introduction

In the book of Jeremiah, we read of the New Covenant that God would establish with His people through the coming of Jesus Christ. '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 neighbour, 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.' Jer 31:31-34.

In this paper, we will compare the Old and New Covenants, highlighting the point that the New Covenant is not like the Old Covenant. We will also highlight the work of the Holy Spirit, who is the Helper to the sons of God in the New Covenant.

## The Old Covenant

The covenant that God made with the children of Israel under the leadership of Moses is known as the Old Covenant. Exo 34:27. It also became known as the Law Covenant. The Israelites lived under this covenant for 1500 years. The focal point of the Old Covenant was the ten commandments which God gave to them as their rule, or law, for life. He said, 'You shall observe My judgements and keep My ordinances, to walk in them: I am the Lord your God. You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgements, which if a man does, he shall live by them: I am the Lord.' Lev 18:4-5. The Lord stated that if the children of Israel were able to keep the Law, it would give them eternal life. Luk 10:25-28.

From the book of Deuteronomy, we also note that keeping the Law was righteousness. Specifically, Moses said to the children of Israel, 'Then it will be *righteousness for us*, if we are careful to observe all these commandments before the Lord our God, as He has commanded us.' Deu 6:25. In response to these instructions, the children of Israel endeavoured to attain the righteousness of God through their own fleshly efforts to keep the Law. Of course, they were unable to do this. Rom 9:31.

The apostle Paul noted that the nation of Israel was unable to keep the Old Covenant because of *the weakness of their flesh*. Rom 8:3. The Law, which *could* have brought eternal life, only resulted in death for them. Rom 7:10. In Chapter 7 of the book of Romans, Paul highlighted the dilemma that was faced by the children of Israel. He explained that whenever a person attempts to keep the commandments of God by the exercise of their flesh, they will fail. In fact, their fleshly effort will result in the practice of the very evil that they are trying to avoid. Rom 7:15. This is the operation of sin and the other law in a person's life. Paul noted this operation in his own life. 'But I see another

law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.’ Rom 7:23.

For Israel, the outcome of this way of living was that they served the Law of God with their minds, but with their flesh they served the law of sin. Rom 7:25. In other words, they were *wretched* – carnal and sold under sin. Rom 7:14. They had no capacity to live as the sons of God whom they were predestined to be. Instead, they were like little children who were locked under the guardianship of the Law, with no capacity to grow or mature. Gal 4:1. Ultimately, through idolatry, Israel broke the covenant that God had made with them and fell under the curses that were proclaimed by the covenant.

Now, of course, God did not establish the Law Covenant with Israel to cause them harm. God had given Israel the Law Covenant to reveal the nature of sin within mankind, and to teach them that a person could only be justified, or made acceptable to God, through faith in Christ. Rom 7:13. Gal 3:24. The nation of Israel was to wait for the coming of the Son of God, who would establish a New Covenant. In accordance with this covenant, Yahweh would put His Spirit within His people to enable them to walk in His statutes and to keep His ordinances. Eze 36:27. Paul described this as ‘the promise of the Spirit through faith’. Gal 3:14.

## The New Covenant

The New Covenant was established in Jesus Christ as He journeyed from the last supper to Calvary, through seven wounding events where His blood was shed. When Jesus was lifted up at Calvary, the Father was giving Him to the world as the New Covenant. The New Covenant began to shine as a great light to all the nations of the earth. In this regard, Isaiah prophesied, ‘I, the Lord, have called You in righteousness, and will hold Your hand; I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people, as a light to the Gentiles, to open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the prison, those who sit in darkness from the prison house. I am the Lord, that is My name.’ Isa 42:6-8. Through the ministry of the New Covenant, a great multitude of sons would be born again of the life of God, and brought to glory.

Paul described the New Covenant as ‘the covenant of the Spirit’. 2Co 3:6. This is an important point. Our participation in the New Covenant, which enables us to become sons of God, is *entirely reliant on the help and guidance* of the Holy Spirit. We recall that Jesus told His disciples that it was to their *advantage* that He went away, so that He could send the Helper, the Holy Spirit, to them. Joh 16:7. Let us now consider how the Holy Spirit helps the sons of God to participate in the New Covenant.

In the New Covenant, we are born again by the word of the Father. This message is the word of present truth. It is ministered *by the Holy Spirit*, through the messengers of Christ who have been sent by the Father. As we respond to the word of the Father, we receive the Holy Spirit, and the capacity for righteousness that He brings. In this regard, we remember that Paul said that we receive the Spirit by the hearing of faith. Gal 3:2. The grace of God comes with the word of God, giving us the capacity to hear and believe what the Lord is saying to us, and to receive the Holy Spirit. We are now a *temple of the Holy Spirit*. 1Co 6:19.

The Holy Spirit within us now motivates us to be joined to the fellowship of Christ’s offering and sufferings through baptism into Christ. This is an important point. The fundamental work of the Holy Spirit is to help us to walk as a son of God who is abiding

in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings. The apostle John noted that 'the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, *you will abide in Him*'. 1Jn 2:27.

When we are baptised into Christ, our new creation life dies with Christ and is hidden with Christ in God. Through the baptism of the Holy Spirit, we receive the Holy Spirit as the firstfruits of our eternal sonship. Rom 8:23. This means that He is now the expression of our identity, life and name as a son of God, in Christ. Through the help of the Holy Spirit, we are able to do the works that the Father has prepared for us to do, and we are becoming the righteousness of God in Christ. 2Co 5:21.

## The New Covenant is not like the Old Covenant

Under the Old Covenant, a person's goal was to attain the righteous requirement of the Law through their own effort. As we noted earlier, the righteousness of God was not attained by anyone living under the conditions of the Old Covenant. The New Covenant is not like the Old Covenant. The New Covenant declares a completely *new* way to live as God's people. God Himself writes the New Covenant upon our heart by the Holy Spirit, and He enables us to be part of the New Covenant by the power of new creation, which comes from the fellowship of Yahweh. Let us consider this further.

The word of the New Covenant is proclaimed every week at the communion table by the Holy Spirit, through the messengers of Christ, who have been sent by the Father. We eat and drink the elements of the New Covenant in faith for our participation in the offering and sufferings of Christ every day. As we receive this word, the Holy Spirit rejoices within us, bearing witness with our spirit that we are the son of God whom the word is proclaiming. Rom 8:16. He also illuminates us, renewing our mind, so that we can understand how to walk in obedience to this word.

Under the Old Covenant, the children of Israel endeavoured to obtain life through their ability to keep the Law. Lev 18:4-5. In other words, they attempted to draw life from the word of God through the exercise of their flesh. This led only to condemnation. Under the New Covenant, the Holy Spirit is *not leading us this way*. The Holy Spirit is leading us to present ourselves, by the faith that we have received in the word of the New Covenant, to participate in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings by the capacity of Eternal Spirit. In this fellowship, our fleshly ways are being put to death, and Christ's life is being multiplied to us as we do the works that have been prepared by the Father for us to do.

The first, and perhaps most fundamental, aspect of our participation in the New Covenant is *prayer*. Jesus went from the last supper, the first meal of the New Covenant, to Gethsemane to pray. The Holy Spirit will be leading us to do likewise. He is leading us to watch and pray in the fellowship of prayer with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. As we have considered previously, we do not even know how to pray as we ought. Thankfully, 'The Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered'. Rom 8:26. The Holy Spirit is praying on our behalf, and joining us to the fellowship of Christ's offering. In this fellowship, Christ is priesting His life to us so that we can participate in the will of God being done. As Paul explained, 'Now He who searches the hearts [i.e. Christ] knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.' Rom 8:27-28.

The Holy Spirit continues to lead and guide us through every moment of our day. As we walk in fellowship with Him, praying in the Spirit and listening to His voice, He motivates us toward the works of our sonship. Jud 20-21. Through the Holy Spirit's guidance, we can know what we should be doing each day. Rom 7:18-20. At times, the Holy Spirit leads us in ways that we do not expect. We remember that the Holy Spirit unexpectedly led Philip to speak the word of the New Covenant to an Ethiopian official on the road from Jerusalem to Gaza. Act 8:27-29. Sometimes, we find that we don't actually want to do the things that we should be doing. However, the Holy Spirit helps us. He pours the love of God into our heart so that the faith that we received by hearing the word at the communion table is able to work. Gal 5:6.

The love of God is the divine nature and capacity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, given to us 'without measure'. Joh 3:34. This love is the capacity for our sonship. As we walk in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings, the Holy Spirit pours the love of God into our heart so that it becomes our new motivation in life. 'Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.' Rom 5:5. The love of God, as a motivation, is giving us everything we need to walk in obedience to the word of the New Covenant. 2Pe 1:3.

Importantly, when the Holy Spirit pours the love of God *into* our heart, He is actually writing the New Covenant *on* our heart. This is a wonderful promise! As prophesied by Jeremiah, the Holy Spirit is putting God's Law, the Law of love, in our *mind*, and writing it on our *heart*. Jer 31:33. Paul noted that the Old Covenant was a covenant of the letter of the Law, written on tablets of stone, which led to condemnation and death through the weakness of the flesh. 2Co 3:3-9. The New Covenant is not like the Old Covenant. The New Covenant is a covenant of the Spirit of the living God, written on our hearts. And, unlike the Old Covenant, which ministered death and condemnation, the New Covenant of the Spirit ministers life and righteousness. Praise the Lord!

Of course, there will be times when we set our mind on the things of the flesh, and walk according to the flesh. Rom 8:5. In other words, we will attempt to obey the word of the New Covenant according to the principles of the Old Covenant. This is because sin, and the other law, still dwell in our members. Paul testified of this fleshly activity in his own life. He noted that when the word of the New Covenant came, sin revived in him and provoked him (i.e. his other law) to attempt to obey the word through the exercise of his flesh. Rom 7:9. When we live this way, the works of the flesh - frustration, agitation, anxiety, anger, depression, etc. - will be evident. These are the obvious indicators that we are walking according to the flesh.

Thankfully, the Holy Spirit resists our fleshly endeavours. Indeed, Paul noted that 'the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another'. Gal 5:17. The Holy Spirit urges us to remember the word of the Father, which is proclaiming the life and works that belong to our sonship. As we turn to the Lord in repentance, our other law is circumcised from our heart, and the life of Jesus Christ is multiplied to us to become our life. The love of God which is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit enables us to love and to give according to our name as a son of God and a member of Christ's body. In this way, we fulfil the works of our sonship in the fellowship of Christ offering and sufferings.

## Ministers of the New Covenant

As we conclude, it is important to realise that we are not just *participants* in the New Covenant. God has called us to be *ministers* of the New Covenant. As Paul reminded us, 'Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the New Covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.' 2Co 3:5-6.

The New Covenant is ministered by the Holy Spirit, through *testimony*. Our testimony is not just what we *know* about the New Covenant; it describes the way we *live* and *participate* in the New Covenant. Paul declared his own testimony to the Galatian Christians when he wrote, 'I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me'. Gal 2:20.

Every day, the Holy Spirit joins us to the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings. By the capacity of Eternal Spirit and the love of God that is poured into our heart by the Holy Spirit, we are enabled to do the works that have been prepared for us by the Father. We are becoming the righteousness of God through Christ. As we portray the dying and the living of the Lord Jesus Christ through our ongoing fellowship in His offering, the word of the New Covenant is being ministered in every place where the Spirit leads us. It is in our mouth, and it is demonstrated by the way that we live.