

Fulton County Gospel News

Good News About Christ And His Church For All Of The World

“... Christ is the head of the church: and He is the Savior of the body.” - Ephesians 5:23

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THE COVENANT GOD

by Chris Perry

In Exodus 5, Moses appears for the first time before Pharaoh and speaks the simple command, “*Let my people go*” (Exodus 5:1). However, Pharaoh asks, “*Who is the Lord?*” and refuses to set the Israelites free. Instead, he increases their burdens, forcing them to make brick without straw, an essential ingredient. The people complain to Moses, and Moses in turn goes to God with a heavy heart (5:22-23). As chapter 6 begins, however, God reveals a part of Himself that should have removed all doubt for both Moses and the children of Israel. He responds to Moses’ pleas by stating:

*...I am **Jehovah**: and I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, as God Almighty; but by my name **Jehovah I was not known to them. And I have also established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land of their sojournings, wherein they sojourned. And moreover I have heard the groaning of the children of Israel, whom the Egyptians keep in bondage; and I have remembered my covenant** (Exodus 6:2-4, ASV, emphasis mine, CP).*

This passage of Scripture reveals much about God as the Covenant God, and Christians today would do well to examine these truths.

The exact origins of the word “Jehovah” are obscure at best. However, the general consensus is that the word is related to the Hebrew

word that means “to exist, be, or become.”¹ Hence, Jehovah means “self-existent or eternal,” and identifies God as the Unwavering, Everlasting and Faithful Deity. The statement, “*but by My Name Jehovah I was not known to them*” (Exodus 6:2) does not indicate that such a name had never been used to describe the God of heaven; on the contrary, Abraham had referenced the name when he said, “*I have lifted up mine hand to the Lord [Jehovah, ASV]*” (Genesis 14:22). Rather, the statement refers to a change in the way Israel was to view God from this point forward—He was to be the Covenant God. The everlasting and faithful nature of Jehovah was especially important in lieu of the fact that God’s promise to Abraham (“*I will make of thee a great nation,*” Genesis 12:2) and, by extension, to his people and all of humanity (“*and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed,*” Genesis 12:3) was just now beginning to be fulfilled. As God said, “*I have remembered My covenant*” (Exodus 6:4).

Of course, to understand God as the Covenant God, one must understand the nature of the covenant. One scholar noted, “The covenant is not [a] special agreement to this or that particular effect, but [a] bond of troth and life-fellowship to all the effects for which kinsmen are permanently bound together.”² Thus, covenants are extremely strong, for they bind in fellowship two parties based on the *honor* and *honesty* of both. Examples abound in Scripture of covenants between two parties of equal stature

(cf. Genesis 26:28; 31:44; 1 Kings 15:19). As well, there are instances in which agreements were made between two parties who were not of equal stature, as is the case with the agreement sought between Nahash the Ammonite and the people of Jabesh-gilead (1 Samuel 11:2). However, the covenant between God and man fits into neither of these categories. Although it is an agreement between two non-equal parties (God is eternal and infallible; man is neither), the blessings of the covenant flow toward the weaker party rather than the stronger. Therefore, the covenant between God and man is a supreme example of His love and favor toward His creation.

So what does all of this have to do with Christians today? The answer is two-fold. First, we must understand that **there is no place for negotiation in God’s covenant**. The reason is clear: man, so unworthy to even stand before God (Exodus 33:20), has no leverage by which to negotiate. God offers salvation through His covenant, something mankind is not able to provide for himself, and therefore God is solely in position to declare the terms of the covenant. With Paul we all must cry, “*O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?*” (Romans 7:24; the answer in verse 25). And, with the privilege of life—again, something we cannot provide for ourselves—comes an automatic amenability to the conditions of the covenant, which conditions are clearly delineated in God’s word (John 12:48). Men over the centuries have tried to “pen-knife” the word of God (Jeremiah 36:23), amend it, reduce it, and make other feeble attempts to negotiate

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continued from page 1

God's expectations, forgetting that "forever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven" (Psalm 119:89). What will it take for some of us to say with Jeremiah, "O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jeremiah 10:23)?

Another lesson that we must glean from an understanding of God as the Covenant God is that **God cannot and will not waver from His covenant**. God cannot lie (Titus 1:2); it is, in fact, impossible for Him so to do (Hebrews 6:18). Interestingly, both of those statements are given in the context of God's **promises**. As well, God will not forget or change His mind. As Peter makes clear, "*The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance*" (2 Peter 3:9). Sometimes, however, it seems that many try to convince themselves that God **will**

alter the course of His covenant. They live their lives as they please, betting their souls that God's mercy will override His justice. However, God has bound Himself to His covenant with man, and this means both the blessings and the curses. When God set forth the blessings and the curses under the Old Covenant (Deuteronomy 28), He had no choice but to carry out the curses when Israel neglected their part of the agreement. And dear friend, the same is true today. No matter how many times we ask, "*Where is the promise of His coming?*" (2 Peter 3:4), we cannot escape the fact that God will make good on His promise to reward the faithful and condemn the wicked (John 5:28-29).

Our God is the God of the Covenant. He offers salvation out of love for mankind, and He binds Himself to His covenant out of love for truth and justice. No negotiations can change His expectations, and no pleading will make Him change His mind. I beg of you, friend, do not bet your soul on a change in the Covenant God—you will regret it for eternity.

¹ The New Strong's Complete Dictionary of Bible Words.

² International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, quoted in *Studies in Exodus*, East Tennessee School of Preaching, 1997.

"I SEE MEN AS TREES, WALKING"

by Lee Moses

"*I see men as trees, walking.*" This is how a formerly blind man described his newfound ability after Jesus Christ had performed a miracle of healing upon him (Mark 8:22-24). He was now able to see—but being unaccustomed to seeing, he lacked the ability to distinguish between a man and a tree, other than one's walking about while the other remained stationary. It took a second

miracle of healing by the hands of Christ for the man to comprehend what he now saw (verse 25).

Jesus often likened eyesight to the ability to understand His teachings (Matthew 6:22-23; 13:13-16; Mark 8:18; John 9:39-41; Acts 26:18). God has blessed each individual reading this article with the ability to reason and come to an understanding of certain matters. Nonetheless, for some reason many fail to reason and come to an understanding of the Bible. It is not because God, the Author of the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16), has difficulty communicating to man (Psalm 33:9; 1 Corinthians 14:33). Neither is it because God **chooses** to be obtuse in His communication to man. As the psalmist observed, "*The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple*" (Psalm 119:130). When Jesus spoke, "*The common people heard him gladly*" (Mark 12:37). The apostles, miraculously endowed with the "*mind of Christ*" (1 Corinthians 2:16), used "*great plainness of speech*" (2 Corinthians 3:12). Yet so many people fail to comprehend what they have the ability to see. They never get past the point of "seeing men as trees, walking."

There are many reasons why some remain at this point. Some fail to handle the word carefully. Indeed, there are some things in the Bible that are "*hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned*" ("ignorant," American Standard Version) *and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction*" (2 Peter 3:16). Each person has the responsibility to heed Paul's admonition, "*Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth*" (2 Timothy 2:15).

All too often it is the case that people **choose** to "see men as trees,

walking.” For whatever reason, they refuse to open their eyes to learn the truth. Some enjoy their present comfort level in life, and do not want anything to disturb it. They have financial security, and the respect of their peers and community. Jesus warned that such things could hinder coming to the knowledge of the truth, as He asked, “*How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?*” (John 5:44). Note that Jesus said this to the religious leaders of His day, who were the most learned and respected people among the Jews. All too often it is the case that those who are learned and respected refuse to temper their egos with an honest heart in search of the truth (compare with 1 Corinthians 1:26-31).

The trained mind outs the upright soul,
As Jesus said the trained mind might,
Being wiser than the sons of light,
But trained men’s minds are spread so thin
They let all sorts of darkness in;
Whatever light man finds they doubt it,
They love not light, but talk about it.¹

Many are beset with various afflictions of pride that keep them from properly receiving the life-giving word of God. It may be a determination to remain in a sinful lifestyle that hinders some. This is why the Holy Spirit instructs, “*Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls*” (James 1:17). There are others that have followed after men their whole lives, and will not be deterred. Their high esteem of others keeps themselves from doing what is right. They refuse to consider that men

have feet of clay, and should not be followed unless they happen to be following Christ (1 Corinthians 2:5; 3:4; 7:3; compare with 11:1; Deuteronomy 16:20; Ephesians 5:1; Philippians 3:16-19). Others are blinded by hatred (1 John 2:11; compare with Luke 6:11; Mark 15:10).

God desires and expects us to use the ability with which He has blessed us. God’s further blessing is contingent upon our willingness to reason and accept what He has to say. As He told the Israelites,

Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it (Isaiah 1:18-20).

Christ is not going to perform a second miracle of healing to enable us to move past the point of “seeing men as trees, walking.” However, just as the formerly blind man, we do remain dependent upon Him. He has provided His word, which in turn provides what is necessary for complete sight (Psalm 119:105; John 8:12). Each person who will honestly and determinedly bring his ability to reason to a study of the Bible has all that he needs to become an heir of eternal life:

Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby

are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust (2 Peter 1:2-4).

¹ John Masefield, *The Everlasting Mercy* (1936), p. 47.

PRACTICAL BAPTISMAL REGENERATION

by Lee Moses

It is not terribly uncommon for members of the church of Christ to be accused of believing in “baptismal regeneration.” Baptismal regeneration claims that baptism “is the channel of grace by which regeneration, in the sense of the impartation of new life, is **alone** received” (emphasis mine, LM).¹ This is a false charge—while we stand upon the Scriptures, which teach baptism is essential to receiving new life in Christ (John 3:3-5; Romans 6:3-4), faithful brethren have always firmly asserted that baptism **alone** will save no one. Sadly, however, there are some today who teach and live as though the false doctrine of “baptismal regeneration” as defined above is true.

Some would have you believe that one who does not understand what he is doing can be saved by baptism. By this teaching, denominational baptisms would be just as acceptable as Bible baptism (contrast with Ephesians 4:5). But hearing and understanding the Gospel is essential to salvation. In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus said when one fails to understand the word, the devil takes the word away from that person (Matthew 13:19). It was when the Romans “*obeyed from the heart that*

form of doctrine” that they were “then made free from sin” (Romans 6:17-18, emphasis LM). The “heart” (Greek *kardia*) is the “center and source of the whole inner life, with its thinking, feeling, and volition.”² So one’s thinking, emotion, and will must be fully employed to obey the Gospel properly. This is part of the reason why infants are not suitable candidates for baptism. If one could be given new life by immersion in water without understanding what he was doing, then every person who had ever been swimming or otherwise under water would have been born again (contrast with Acts 19:1-5).

Others would have you believe that one who fails to repent can be saved by baptism. That is, one can remain in a sinful state (e.g., an unscriptural marriage) and yet begin to walk in newness of life. But Paul affirmed that central to the message he preached to the world was “*that they should repent, and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance*” (Acts 26:20). Never, under any dispensation, has man been able to live pleasing to God while remaining in sin (Genesis 6:5-7; Isaiah 59:1-2; 1 John 3:9). Repentance is a prerequisite to Scriptural baptism (Acts 2:38).

There are some who live as though the baptism they received years ago gives them *carte blanche* to do as they please in the time following. As such, they effectively affirm that baptism alone saves. But Scriptural baptism is only the birth that begins a **new life**. As Paul wrote in Romans 6:5, “*For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death* (through baptism, verses 3-4), *we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection*” (through faithful Christian living, verses 1-2, 11-16). Baptism is not merely a way for one to “get his ticket punched” to heaven—it implies that the one submitting to it will live a new life

for God.

Indeed, baptism is essential for receiving the new life that comes as we are saved from our sins (Mark 16:16; 1 Peter 3:21; Acts 22:16). But let us ensure that we do not add to nor take away from the word of God (Deuteronomy 4:2; Revelation 22:18-19). If we teach or live as though baptism **alone** gives new life without any required acts of obedience, we teach “practical baptismal regeneration.” Rather, let us all “*obey from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.*”

¹ J.H. Garrison, *The Story of a Century* (St. Louis: Christian Publishing Company, 1909), p. 196

² Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: Univ. Of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 508.

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GOD’S PLAN OF SALVATION

1. Hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17; Acts 16:32).
2. Believing what is taught (Mark 16:16; Hebrews 11:6).
3. Repentance (Acts 2:38; Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30).
4. Confession (Romans 10:9, 10; Acts 8:37).
5. Baptism (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; 1 Peter 3:21; Romans 6:3, 4).
6. After the above five steps, faithful Christian Living (1 Peter 2:11, 12; Revelation 2:10).

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

1. The Bible is its only guide (Romans 1:16; I Thess. 2:13).
2. Wears a Biblical Name (Romans 16:16).
3. Established at the right place (Isaiah 2:2, 3; Acts 2).
4. Established at the right time (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2).
5. Established on the right person (Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:36).
6. Saved are in it (Ephesians 5:23; Acts 2:47).
7. Its members are enrolled in heaven (Hebrews 12:23).
8. Membership in it is obtained by obedience to God’s commands including baptism (Acts 2:41-47; 1 Corinthians 12:13).

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