

The New Covenant Part 1: “In My Blood”

Scripture Readings: *Jeremiah 31:31-34; Luke 22:14-20*

Rev. Nollie Malabuyo • August 7, 2022

Dear Congregation of Christ: A feminist theology once said, referring to Jesus’ bloody sacrifice on the cross, “I don’t think we need a theory of atonement at all... folks hanging on crosses and blood dripping and weird stuff.” This woman was one of the speakers in a Re-Imagining Conference held in Minneapolis in 1993. The purpose of this ecumenical gathering of mainline Presbyterians, Baptists, Lutherans, Mennonites and Catholics was to promote the LGBTQ agenda way back 29 years ago.

Here are some of the other bizarre, blasphemous and outright heretical statements in this gathering: “The Church has always been blessed by gays and lesbians ... witches ... shamans ... artists.” “[The church] centered its faith around the cruel and violent death of Christ on the cross, sanctioning violence against the powerless in society.” And another one declared that Mary and Martha were not actual sisters but lesbian lovers.

But the most blasphemous statements and actions of these women centered on pagan worship. The gathering offered songs and prayers to Sophia, the goddess of wisdom. They held a communion-like service using bread, milk and honey, which include this pagan prayer: “Sophia, Creator God, let your milk and honey flow. Sophia, Creator god, shower us with your love...Our sweet Sophia, we are women in your image.”

The Scriptures and historical writings, however, clearly affirm the bloody sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ for human sins, specifically, the sins of God’s chosen people. In the very beginning, God slaughtered an animal and used its skin to cover the nakedness—symbolizing sin—of Adam and Eve. From that day on, God required a bloody animal sacrifice to atone for human sin. That is, until our Lord Jesus Christ sacrificed himself on the cross as the once-for-all sacrifice for all the sins of all his people. Therefore, there is only one true God whom man must worship, offer prayers to, and commune with, not Sophia or any other gods.

The first appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ ushered in the new covenant that was foretold by the prophet Jeremiah. Our Lord’s bloody sacrifice on the cross was the foundation of this new covenant, which is, as he said when he instituted the Lord’s Supper, “*the new covenant in my blood.*” These two covenants are both under one covenant of grace. However, this new covenant is not all new, but is the continuation and fulfillment of the old covenant with Israel under Moses. Therefore, the old covenant is often referred to as law and promise, while the new covenant is often called gospel and fulfillment. These are just a few of the similarities, continuities, and differences between these two covenants that we will study in this sermon.

So today, we will proclaim and expound, **The New Covenant Part 1: “In My Blood,”** under three headings: first, **“The Old Covenant That They Broke”**; second, **“The New Covenant Written on Their Hearts”**; and third, **Forgiveness of Sins in the Old and New Covenants.**

“The Old Covenant That They Broke”

Jeremiah begins his new covenant prophecy by saying that *“the days are coming... when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah.”* When did these “days” come? After John baptized Jesus, Jesus started his earthly ministry, *“From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand’”* (Matt 4:17). On that day, Jeremiah’s “coming days” began to be fulfilled by Jesus. The coming of Jesus signaled the end of the old covenant and the inauguration of the new covenant. This new covenant in Jeremiah 31 has two main features of note.

The first feature is that the old covenant was made by God only with the Israelites under Moses when they arrived at Mount Sinai from Egypt. The Lord established them as his *“treasured possession among all peoples... a kingdom of priests and a holy nation”* (Exo 19:5-6). As his chosen people, the Israelites were placed under God’s covenant laws concerning their moral, ceremonial and civil regulations. The moral laws are summarized in the Ten Commandments. The ceremonial laws regulated their worship of God which included the building of the tabernacle, the duties of the priesthood, and sacrifices and offerings. Lastly, the civil laws ordered their society.

All of these laws under Moses were given only to the Israelites as God’s treasured people. Except for the moral laws that were hardwired into every human being’s mind at creation (Rom 2:15), no other people or nation received these laws. As well, the Promised Land of Canaan was earthly and temporary, conditioned upon their obedience (Exo 19:5). God also blessed them with an earthly temple, an earthly priesthood, and an earthly sacrificial system. Such was the narrowness of the old covenant. This is why except for a few foreigners, including many in the city of Nineveh, salvation came only to the Israelites.

The second feature is that the old covenant was breakable by God’s people. In verse 32, God says, *“my covenant that they broke.”* All throughout their history—from right after receiving God’s covenant laws at Mount Sinai, to the wilderness wanderings, to the conquest and settlement of Canaan, to the judges, kings and prophets—Israel broke God’s covenant laws. Finally, God’s patience run out and he sent evil empires to conquer and enslave them, as the Egyptians did.

But why was the old covenant breakable? The reason is that the old covenant provision was not internalized by the Israelites. They followed the ceremonial and civil laws closely because they were easy, external demands such as offerings and sacrifices and obedience to civil laws. But the moral laws—those against idolatry, murder, adultery, theft and lying—are more difficult to obey. In other words, the old covenant was considered by the Israelites as an external, ritualistic religion, so it is only by the letter, not the Spirit. The sign of circumcision signified the circumcision of the heart, but their hearts were not circumcised (Deut 10:16). Their hearts were as hard as stones.

However, Paul says the law was holy, righteous and good (Rom 7:12). It was the people who were evil because they had no faith, so they broke the law. They still practiced the works-principle of God’s covenant with Adam. God called the faithless and disobedient people to amend their ways, but they thought that by mere rituals and swearing by the temple, God would not judge them (Jer 7:3-4). Therefore, after they continued breaking God’s covenant laws, they were destroyed by God through the Babylonians.

Still, God did not completely forsake them. After he destroyed them, he declared, *“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge”* (Hos 4:6). Though the Jews had forgotten and violated God’s laws, and destroyed by God, he still was a husband to them (Jer 31:32). He will even woo her back and speak tenderly to her even if she had been an adulterous wife who worshiped pagan idols (Hos 2:14). In the new covenant, God will restore them as his Bride and make them faithful and obedient.

“The New Covenant Written on Their Hearts”

In this promised restoration, God announced a new covenant *“with the house of Israel.”* This new covenant has features distinct from the old covenant at Mount Sinai. But it also has features that are similar to the old covenant in that these features continue, expand and fulfill the provisions of the old covenant.

The first distinction is that the new covenant will be internalized by God’s people. In verse 33, the LORD declares, *“I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”* Who would receive God’s blessing of the law written on their hearts? Every true member of God’s new covenant would have their hearts circumcised and renewed so they would cherish the law, love the law, and live the law. Unlike old covenant Israel, no longer would they obey the law because they had to, so they did it as a ritual. Rather, they would meditate on it day and night (Psa 1:2) and desire it more than gold because it is sweeter than honey (Psa 19:10).

However, we must note that even in the old covenant, there were some—out of a multitude—Israelites who had the law written on their hearts and were saved. These are the ones who had faith in God and therefore were obedient to God’s laws. They were saved not because they obeyed the Law of Moses to the letter, but because they obeyed through the enablement of the Holy Spirit. Look at the “heroes of the faith” in Hebrews 11. These were all faithful ones in the old covenant, beginning with Abel, down the line to Noah, Abraham, Moses, David and the prophets. Even Rahab, a pagan prostitute, and Samson, who also married a pagan woman, are in this “hall of faith.” They had saving faith because God had renewed their hearts and written his law on their hearts. God called them “his people,” and he is their God.

A second significant distinction of the new covenant is the people’s knowledge of the Lord: *“And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest”* (31:34). All of God’s chosen ones from the least to the greatest— rich and poor, men and women, Jews and non-Jews, slaves and free—will have a saving knowledge of him (Gal 3:28). This is the result of God circumcising and renewing their hearts: *“you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live”* (Deut 30:6). And the outcome of this saving knowledge of God is that all his covenant people will not teach each other to know the LORD, because all of them will know him. They will all desire, study, meditate and obey God’s laws day and night.

Ezekiel 36:26-27 prophesied the same new covenant blessing on God's chosen people: a new heart and new spirit, and the indwelling Holy Spirit will cause God's people to walk in faith and obedience to God's laws.

Forgiveness of Sins in the Old and New Covenants

The last blessing in Jeremiah's new covenant is the forgiveness of sins, *"For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more"* (31:34). There is both continuity and discontinuity in the old and new covenants.

The continuity is that God was merciful and gracious to his people in both covenants only through the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ. But how were the old covenant people forgiven of their sins through Christ's sacrifice when Christ has not even appeared? We read the answer in Hebrews 8-10. In the old covenant, worshipers offered bloody animal sacrifices to atone for their sins. And once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest entered the Most Holy Place and sprinkled blood on the ark of the covenant to atone for his own sins and the sins of the people (9:6-7). These sacrificial offerings were only effective because they looked forward to, and were a shadow (8:5), of the sacrifice of Christ on the cross for all the sins of all his people. The people and the high priest offered these bloody sacrifices repeatedly because their sins continued throughout their lives. They *"cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper"* (9:9).

The discontinuity is that all old covenant sacrifices are now abrogated and replaced by Christ's once-for-all sacrifice on the cross. God's solution for this seemingly unending sacrifices is the once-for-all sacrifice of his Son, *"He entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption"* (9:12). If he did not offer his own body and blood on the cross, no one would be forgiven of their sins, not in the old covenant, not even in the new covenant, *"For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins"* (10:4), and *"without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins"* (9:22), that is, the blood of Christ.

Dear brothers and sisters: On the night when he was betrayed, Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, saying as he took the cup, *"This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood"* (Luke 22:20). He was fulfilling the old covenant sign that Moses did at Mount Sinai when he sprinkled the people with the blood of animal sacrifices.

Praise be to God for his grace, mercy and love in giving us the blessings of the new covenant. Because of Christ's once for all sacrifice on the cross, we do not have to offer bloody animal sacrifices on the cross. He has fully atoned for all our sins—past, present and future. We still break God's covenant laws daily, but he has provided forgiveness of sins through Christ. The Lord has given his moral laws to us—not for our salvation—but in order that we may obey them in our lives. Give thanks to God that he has renewed our hard hearts and written his laws on our softened hearts so we may be saved and live holy and righteous lives. Glorify God that he has included in the new covenant believers from all nations, tribes and languages forever. So we glorify Christ when we sing, *"His oath, his covenant, his blood / support me in the whelming flood; / when all around my soul gives way, / he then is all my hope and stay"* ("Solid Rock," Edward Mote).