

# **New Covenant Theology**

## **Or**

# **The revelation of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ**

The Bible! What an incredible unfolding of the tale of the Christ! How pleasurable to meditate and enjoy and rightly respond to the wonders recorded for us by the grace of God.

*"Praise the LORD! I will praise the Lord with my whole heart, in the assembly of the upright and in the congregation. The works of the LORD are great, studied by all who have pleasure in them."* (Ps. 111:1-2)

My prayer and heart's desire is that every reader of these notes would have a growing allegiance to Jesus Christ the King. May we have a heart-felt longing to know him who is true, to love him, to follow him, to delight in him, to rest in him, to hope in him, to treasure him above all, and may that longing to be satisfied day by day as we study the revelation of God in the face of Jesus Christ. May God open our eyes to the wonder of who he is in truth, so that we can delight in who he is. May he, in and through Jesus Christ, cause our minds to behold him in all his fullness that our hearts might be ravished with him and his great and wonderful works - in particular, the so great salvation Christ has purchased for us in his death, burial, and resurrection.

## Theology Unfolded in the New Covenant

God, before the foundation of the world, purposed to manifest his glory in an unfolding way. This eternal purpose would be accomplished in and through Christ Jesus our Lord (see Eph. 3:8-11). This is the heart of what is called New Covenant Theology.

The name *New Covenant Theology* is a label given to what the God-breathed Scriptures unveil for us. *Theology* comes from two Greek words: *Theos* - referring to the one true and living God; and *logos* - the word or expression or revelation from and of this glorious God. The *New Covenant* is the very Word or expression or revelation of God. At the very core of the New Covenant is the Lord Jesus Christ himself. This is what was foretold by the prophets of God.

*"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.**" (Isa. 42:6-7)*

*"...I will preserve You and **give You as a covenant to the people. . .**" (Isa. 49:8).*

Jesus is the Word - the *logos*.

*"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."* (John 1:1, 14)

Thus, in the term *New Covenant Theology* we declare that God, for his own delight, has revealed himself and manifested his glory ultimately in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ and his complete and perfect work on the Cross through which he has established a New Covenant in his blood.

*"God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by [literally, in] His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. . ."* (Heb. 1:1-3).

## **God's Eternal Plan: The New Covenant**

Prior to the incarnation, all of history and all of Scripture had progressively been moving toward and aiming at the great day of Christ and the New Covenant reality that would glorify God

forever and ever. This was God's eternal plan, worked out through the creation of a physical world and universe; a way of going public with his glory in an incredible way for his own delight (Eph. 1:9-12; 3:8-11). This resounds to the praise of the glory of his grace!

God foretold the new thing he would do, and in the fullness of time, he did it (Is. 42:6-9; 43:19; 45:21-25; 46:9-13). He established the Lord who reigns over a kingdom of redeemed people upon whom the Spirit has been poured. These kingdom citizens relate to God on the basis of a New Covenant in which Jesus himself is their High Priest, Judge, Shepherd, King, Prophet; their very life!

*"But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son. . ."* (Gal. 4:4)

*"...know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."* (Acts 2:36)

*"...Jesus has become a surety of a better covenant... He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as he is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises...But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is not of this creation...For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified."* (Heb. 7:22; 8:6; 9:11; 10:14)

This was God's eternal plan. That is why Jesus is referred to as "*the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world*" (Rev. 13:8). This would be "*the everlasting covenant*" (Heb. 13:20)." It will last forever because there will never be a need for another one. It is everlasting simply because it will need neither amendment nor addition in any way. Christ our covenant is perfect and "by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified" (Heb. 10:14). His is the kingdom that is an everlasting kingdom that will not pass away. His kingdom is the one that shall not be destroyed (Daniel 7: 14), but will remain, for it cannot be shaken (Heb. 12:22-28). All of God's previous revelation, including the Mosaic era, anticipated and led to the coming of Christ (Gal. 3:19). Even that Old Covenant was a "shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ" (Col. 2:17; see also Heb. 10:1).

*"For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us."* (2 Cor. 1:20)

This glorious New Covenant was planned before the foundation of the world, when God chose a people in Christ to be holy and blameless before him in love. In fact, this people were predestined to be adopted "as sons by Jesus Christ to himself!" The good pleasure of his will that would abound to the praise of the glory of his grace is this: sinful rebels would be made accepted in the Beloved - redeemed through the blood of the everlasting covenant - and would receive the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of his grace. What incredible wisdom and insight to conceive of such a plan, where in the dispensation of the fullness of the times, God might gather together, in one, all

things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth . . . to the praise of his glory (see Eph. 1:3-14)!

## **Reading the Bible in Light of the New Covenant**

Thus, the pinnacle of God's unfolding revelation comes to us in the New Testament Scriptures, in the face of Jesus Christ. Behold Immanuel! What fullness of joy comes to those who were born blind when they behold the Lord Jesus Christ. To God be the glory!

*"For it is God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." (2 Cor. 4:6)*

Here in the New Testament Scriptures, the Spirit, through his chosen apostles, gives us our Lord's words about the mystery of Christ, "*which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men*" (Eph. 3:5). The two testaments proclaim the same message, but from differing standpoints. The first, sometimes using veiled and symbolic language, points forward in anticipation and the other, in clear and unmistakable terms, declares completion/accomplishment. Thus, we must read all of Scripture in light of the New Covenant, established in Jesus Christ (Matt. 5:17; Luke 10:23-24; 24:27, 44; John 5:46; 8:56; Heb. 10:7). We must read Scripture in context. The Bible needs to be understood and communicated not only in its parts, but also in the whole.

*"For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God."* (Acts 20:27)

Since there is one Divine Author behind all the human authors of Scripture, it is essential that we seek to understand how all the parts of Scripture fit together to communicate the whole purpose of God. It seems consistent with God's revelation that true biblical theology is the recognition of God's purpose, unfolding and weaving its way from Genesis to Revelation on the timeline of redemptive history, culminating in Jesus Christ. Dr. D.A. Carson, in *The Gagging of God* writes, "Each major strand [of biblical theology] must be woven into the fabric that finds its climax and ultimate significance in the person and work of Jesus Christ." [(Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 545] New Covenant Theology aims to pass on the vision and purpose of God in Christ, so that students of the Word will not only learn to understand Scripture in its parts, but will gain and cherish a breath-taking sense of the Christ-centeredness of all of Scripture.

## **The Hope and Glory of Israel: The New Covenant**

When we use "Christ-colored glasses" to gaze into the words of the Old Testament prophets like Isaiah, we behold promises that look forward toward a hope and glory promised to Israel. We see their hope in great promises like these:

*"But Israel shall be saved by the LORD with an everlasting salvation; you shall not be ashamed or disgraced forever and ever"* (Isa. 45:17).

Indeed Paul quotes from the Old Testament Scriptures and declares in Romans, “*Whoever believes on Him [Jesus who is Christ the risen and ascended Lord] will not be put to shame.*” Jesus brings the promise to its full and lasting expression in the New Covenant through his blood.

Isaiah reveals in Isaiah 45:25, “*In the LORD all the descendents of Israel shall be justified, and shall glory.*”

Who are these descendents of Israel? What has happened? God clarifies his purposes for us in the New Testament Scriptures.

*“But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the seed [descendents] of Abraham; but, ‘In Isaac your seed shall be called.’ That is, those who are the children [descendents] of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed [descendents]” (Rom. 9:6-8).*

*“Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham” (Gal. 3:7).*

*“And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed and heirs according to the promise” (Gal. 3:29).*

What glory for Israel - elect Israel - the sons of promise! To be IN CHRIST: forgiven in him; justified in him; alive in him; free in him; accepted in him; and glorified in him - wow! Oh blessed Israel! You are indeed blessed of the Lord. This New Covenant is your promised glory. What fullness! Oh Israel, your day has come!

*“But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, 'Abba, Father!' Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ” (Gal. 4:4-7).*

## **Gentiles Grafted into the New Covenant**

What about me - a Gentile? The church is the glory of believing Israel; now spiritually redeemed as the people of God. The church, created in Christ Jesus, and all its gracious blessings, is the remarkable way God had planned to fulfill His promises to elect Israel. God, in Christ, would now take a remnant from the people he had redeemed from bondage in Egypt and deliver them from the spiritual bondage of the Old Covenant, for the praise of the glory of his grace. However in Isaiah we read another astounding declaration. The Son of God is so worthy that the Father declares to his beloved Son:

*“It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of*

*Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth” (Is. 49:6).*

I, as a believing Gentile, have been made a partaker of Israel’s spiritual blessings (see Rom. 15:27), because **Christ** is so worthy! No wonder there is no room for boasting (Rom. 11). I, who have not borne the heat of day and the burden of the law; I, who loitered aimlessly in the marketplace; I was called and made equal unto Israel! I, who am called uncircumcision by what is called the circumcision made in the flesh by hands --- I, one who was without Christ, an alien from the commonwealth of Israel and a stranger from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world, have been grafted in to the Vine. Now in Christ Jesus, we who believe, who once were far off, have been brought near by the blood of Christ!

*“For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity [ that I, too, might cry out, ‘Abba, Father!’] having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity, and He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father” (Eph. 2:14-18).*

I rejoice that true Israel (the sons of promise - See Galatians 3-4) does indeed approve and support and embrace the gospel. The Messiah has been enthroned on high with all authority and has poured out His Spirit - bringing Israel (sons of promise - elect from before the foundation of the world) to humble repentance, and then spreading outward to the elect from every nation (Acts).

### **God's Promises Fulfilled in the New Covenant**

God has kept his promise to the seed of Abraham. They are bound up in the Promised One - Jesus Christ. In Christ, God has made good on *all* his promises. "For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us" (2 Cor. 1:20).

Seeing this, Zacharias, filled with the Holy Spirit, cried out with an unveiled face, "Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people..."

Seeing this, Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, cried out with an unveiled face, "And we declare to you glad tidings - that promise which was made to the fathers. God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that He has raised up Jesus!" (Acts 13:32-33).

Seeing this, as many as have been appointed to eternal life believe, and filled with the Holy Spirit, they continually cry out with unveiled faces, "Blessed be the name of the Lord! Amazing grace! God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I

to the world. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation. The Lord be magnified!”

The Deliverer has come and established his covenant through his blood and taken away our sins. One day it will be revealed in all its fullness in his unveiling - his glorious *parousia*!

In the Scriptures, God exalts himself as supreme (e.g. Is. 42:8; 48:9-11). This is right and good, for this is reality. The supremacy of God is good news of happiness for a chosen people from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. Had God not set out to glorify himself, there would be no salvation for sinners like you and like me. Clearly, God did not set his love upon us because of something intrinsically worthy in us; but for his own name sake he acted.

*"For My name's sake I will defer My anger, and for My praise I will restrain it from you, so that I do not cut you off. Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction. For My own sake, for My own sake, I will do it; for how should My name be profaned? And I will not give My glory to another" (Is. 48:9-11).*

The glorious gospel and the formation of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the promised kingdom (Acts 13:22-41; 19:8-9; 24:14; 26:6, 22-23; 28:20, 23, 28, 31) that would abound to the glory of the name of the Lord. Thus, New Covenant Theology declares that the gospel of Jesus Christ is the key to interpreting the whole Bible. It is Jesus Christ – His Person

and His work – that gives meaning to the whole Bible. Is this not a sweet theme? What could be more desirable to the redeemed heart than to have Jesus as the theme of the Scriptures – first in the shadows of the Old Testament history and prophetic words, and then in the ultimate reality of Jesus Christ in the gospel as the goal of all God’s revealed purposes. Graeme Goldsworthy in *The Lion and the Lamb* writes, “The gospel is not a digression from the prophetic fulfillment but rather the very essence of it.” [ (Nashville, TN, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985), 18]

## Christ is the New Covenant

Christ is the agent, purpose, and goal of creation – in whom, through whom, and for whom all things were created . God created the heavens and the earth with the express purpose of bringing all things to their ultimate goal through the suffering and death of Christ and His entering into His glory. May we who believe, never cease to give God thanks, for it is He “*who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the*

*preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.” (Col. 1:12-20)*

Oh that I might continually praise the Lord of glory - the Preeminent One among many brethren - Jesus, the King of the Jews; the King of the kingdom of God - my Lord and my God! Indeed the Lord Jesus Christ, the Light of the world, is the awe-inspiring revelation of the glory of God!