

Covenant Renewal

Joshua 24:1-28

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Introduction

Naturally, the idea of covenants is threaded through nearly every page of the scriptures and even in our natural lives, we are surrounded by them. A covenant can be generally defined as a solemn bond, sovereignly administered, with blessings for covenant-keeping and curses for covenant breaking.

Numerous times, the Elders have been asked why we have corporate confession of sin in addition to individual confession in our call to worship. The reason is because there is indeed a sense in which God sees us individually, but there is also a great sense in which God sees us as being connected with others. Although you are distinct and different from your family members, there is also a connection you have with your family that God recognizes. A husband and wife are connected to such a degree that in some senses He views them as one being. The same is true for our church: there is a connection between the families of this church which makes us one body and connects us with those who have gone before. These connections appear to be established, observed and upheld by God when He deals with us and therefore we must think this way as well. Today we will be looking at one example of the renewal of the terms of a covenant.

Exposition

Joshua 24:1

- “ We see here that Joshua has just reminded all of Israel of the blessings and curses of the covenant made with Moses which was the outworking of the covenant that God made with Abraham. The fact that they are gathered at Shechem is very important. First, Shechem was the place where God made a covenant with Abraham and promised to give the land to his descendants in Genesis 12:1-9. Secondly, in Genesis 35, before he presents himself to the Lord, Jacob cleanses his household and all who were with him by removing all their foreign idols and burying them in Shechem. Thirdly, Shechem is located between Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal which were the two mountains where the blessings and curses of the covenant in Deuteronomy 28 were read. Here Joshua is recalling the promises made to Abraham and he cleanses Jacob’s house once more. Today, Shechem is called Tell Balata and is located in the northern Palestinian occupied territory.
- “ God has just lead the people through an amazing conquest of the land of Canaan. Just as He promised, God has brought the descendants of Abraham into a good land and simultaneously given the Israelites blessings of strength and fortitude and given judgment to many God-hating cities and nations by dispossessing them. But the people have transgressed the covenant by which they stand. They have served foreign gods and Joshua calls them to repentance.

Joshua 24:2-13

- “ Joshua gives them a history lesson on how the people got to this place and how their presence marks the divine foreordination and sovereignty of God. We can see that Abraham was plucked out of an idolatrous family and given the faith to believe. As a result, he becomes the pattern by which all the world would be saved—those who are of the faith of Abraham. God reveals that He is the one who has orchestrated every detail of their history. From beginning to the end, God has used sinful man to accomplish His purposes; He has also held sinful man accountable for his rebellion. What’s more, God has chosen to bless sinful men through reconciliation, union, communion and promises.

Joshua 24:14-25

- “ Having reviewed how God has been faithful to keep His promises, Joshua reminds them of their obligations under His covenant. But covenant renewal is not just a simple reminder. While they are called to remember what God has done for them and how they have sinned against their God, they are also called to cleanse themselves by putting away all forms of idolatry. Covenant renewal includes the placing of the terms of a covenant upon yourself in a refreshed way. In covenant renewal you are re-dedicating yourself to the provisions and obligations which are upon you.
- “ Joshua commands the people to serve God in sincerity and truth. But if serving Him seems wrong to them, then pick which pagan idol they will worship. Notice there is no option of *not* serving. If you are not serving the one, true God, then you are by necessity serving an idol—there is no neutral ground on which to stand or hide. Given the track record of the people, Joshua had reason to doubt their profession of allegiance. Now that we know the rest of the story, we see that his concern was well-founded, but note that this is exactly why the covenant must be renewed—because of sin. The knowledge that we are likely to sin against God tomorrow, does not preclude us from confessing and repenting today.

Modern Applications of Putting Away Our Idols From Beyond Our River

While the situation of Joshua and the people of Israel is not the same situation that we find ourselves, clearly it is written for our benefit so that we might make application to ourselves. Today, we are generally not tempted to chop down a tree, carve it into some image and then bow down to it. However, this is not to say that we are free from the temptations of idolatry which is defined as anything which takes the rightful place of worship of the one, true God. Many times this idolatry comes to us in very subtle terms.

The Nameless, Faceless and Boneless god

- “ This is the god that is Republican, the god of civic activities like prayer breakfasts with the Mayor, the god of mottos printed on coins, the god of disasters not covered by insurance and the god we sing to at baseball games. We have become so afraid of offending others that we refuse to call the true God by name nor declare our need for repentance and obedience to Him through His Son. This god, who is pleasing to all faiths and non-faiths, is really no god at all.

The Holier-than-Thee god

- “ The worship of this god is rampant in the church but probably nowhere more pervasively than in those who label themselves as Reformed. There is great temptation to puff ourselves up and look down our long noses toward those brothers who have not been made divinely privy to all the inside scoop that we have. Although we wholeheartedly believe that the doctrines of the Reformation are at the heart of true Christianity and we believe that much of the modern church is adrift because it has abandoned these doctrines, we must not think that we have the corner on truth. We must strive for unity of mind while maintaining unity of spirit until the day comes when God has brought us all to the same maturity of faith.

The Slot Machine god

- “ This is the god of wealth and prosperity that doesn't want anybody to be poor. This god, if served long enough, is sure to pay out big for every one of its followers. This god never brings trials but supplies big savings accounts and retirement funds. While it is true that material blessing is a gift from God, this material blessing is not an indication of righteousness nor is the presence of simple means an indication of faithlessness. God is not egalitarian—to each He gives different measures of material blessing and to each He will call them to account. It is not somehow more righteous to consider the blessings of God as curses but is indeed self righteousness.

Put Far Away and Come Near for Renewal

- “ While we have only considered three examples, there are a multitude still to discuss. But these are not the examples of our neighbor's sins—they are ours. The way we renew the New Covenant is through regular, thoughtful and faithful confession of sin, calling on the blood of the covenant to wash us clean. This puts our sin far away, never to be seen again. However, if there are things in your life that are sources of temptations, it may be good to purge your home or life of them as well. Seek the wisdom of the Scriptures and the counsel of the wise and most of all, crave the sanctification that renewal brings.
- “ As an example of God's tender love for us, He not only provided a means by which we may forsake our idols, He has also provided the means of taking in good things. He bolsters our faith through baptism and He feeds us in the observance of the bread and the cup. The covenant meal is a tangible reminder of how the covenant is not only remembered but its provisions are renewed to us each time we partake.