

- ***READ Jeremiah 31:31-34*** What about the thief on the cross? Why don't we worship on Saturday, Why can't we use mechanical instruments of worship? Why are we allowed to eat bacon now? I'm sure each of us has been posed with the questions in one way or another from a friend or family member when a religious discussion comes into the conversation. Hopefully, we have been diligent enough in our study to be able to explain why it is that we would answer each of these questions the way we would, but maybe it is that we ourselves have questions about these particular issues. Or maybe it is that we just don't know the best way to go about answering or addressing these questions. Maybe we have studies to prepare ourselves, but we're still looking for maybe a better way to explain why it is that we do what we do.
- One of the things that really complicates these issues in particular is that the Bible is very clear at times on these subjects, but we today don't subscribe to following them. For instance, instruments of music are very much present in the Old Testament, but we don't use them today. Why not? Sabbath worship was a staple for the Israelites, but why not today? Sadly, the Bible does teach in **Leviticus 11:7** that pork is an unclean animal...but if I'm being honest with you...I ate some bacon this morning. Why would I so blatantly violate something that the Bible so clearly teaches? I must be some kinda heathen, right??
- Ok, don't answer that...but can I suggest to you that many of these questions and much of our confusion and others confusion on subjects such as these come from a misunderstanding of covenants within the Bible. This is something that I can come to recognize as something that many people aren't exactly sure about. Sure we understand Old vs New Testament, but the problem is that simply saying that something is in the New Testament so we do it isn't exactly accurate. And to say that something is in the Old Testament so we don't do it, believe it, or teach it isn't exactly accurate either. So I want to make some time to this evening and possibly in the future to considering God, Man, & Covenants.
- To begin with, you might be sitting there thinking to yourself, "well, Nick...what exactly do you mean by covenants?" Very simply stating, and I say it simply because God's covenants with man aren't exactly rocket scientist or lawyer level in their writing or understanding, but a covenant is simply an agreement of terms between individuals and/or parties. So what we are talking about are the agreements that God has made with His creation that we see all throughout the Bible. The greatest of which is prophesied of in **Jeremiah 31:31-34** which we just read and which we will reference a bit more later on in the lesson. My hope is that a better understanding on this subject will help us and others to better know our Lord and His will for us in this life.

I. The God of heaven is a God of covenants.

- A. Let's begin by establishing that the God of heaven is a God who has always established covenants or agreements between Himself and those whom He seeks to have serve Him or to be in fellowship with Him. From the very beginning, God sought to establish covenants with man.
 - The first such we can find is in **Genesis 2:15-17** when God establishes the agreement between Himself and Adam and Eve. They could live and inhabit the Garden of Eden as long as they did not eat of the forbidden tree of the knowledge of good and evil.
 - God established a covenant with Noah concerning Him never destroying the whole earth with a flood. (**Genesis 9:8-17**)
 - One of the greatest covenants in the Bible is that between God and Abraham and his descendants concerning their future nation, land, and Messiah. (**Genesis 12:1-3**)
 - The covenant between God and the people of Israel governed their entire way of living from personal life to government to religious observance and practice. (**Exodus 24:1-11**)
 - David's covenant with God established his descendant's throne forever. (**II Samuel 7**)
 - Finally, as Christians we live under the covenant of Jesus. (**Jeremiah 31:31-34**)
- B. Through these examples, we can easily come to recognize that God is a covenant God. He is one who seeks to be in agreement with His creation. He seeks to show mankind His desire and nature to be in fellowship and agreement with us. He did so in the old days through sharing His covenant name with those whom He was in agreement with. The Hebrew word of YHWH (we pronounce Yahweh) is used often in the context of covenants or blessings from God to man throughout the Old Testament. In most modern translations it is simply shown as the word "Lord."

- Eve referred to God as YHWH when she talked about the blessings of her children. (**"I have gotten a man child with he help of the Lord"** Genesis 4:1)
 - Noah spoke of YHWH when he said *"Blessed be the Lord, the God of Shem; and let Canaan be his servant."* (Genesis 9:26)
 - When Moses asked what God should be called when the people asked who sent him, God replied with "I AM" which is a reference to YHWH being eternal and everlasting. (Exodus 3:14)
- C. All of this is shared simply to show that YHWH is a God of covenants and He seeks to establish His relationships with man through the use of such.

II. God extends covenants to man as a means of security and guarantee that He will do as He says.

- A. Something very important to keep in mind with all of this, however, is to remember that God's covenants with man are not for His good, but He does such for our good. Our finite minds and limited sight and knowledge often lead to insecurities and ignorance in respect to how it is that we ought to see, approach, and respond to God. So God helps us out through lowering Himself to establish covenants with insignificant man so that we might come to have a sense of knowledge, security, and a guarantee that God will do as He says if we keep our part of the agreements set forth.
- B. But something we need to recognize is that God's covenants with man can be broken. Man can choose to break God's covenants, and thus God often speaks of His covenants with man in conditional terms. The Lord will use the big little word of "if" when speaking of man's part, but we never have to question whether or not God will hold to what He has said He will do for us.
- *"Know therefore that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God, who keeps His covenant and His lovingkindness to a thousandth generation with those who love Him and keep His commandments"* (Deuteronomy 7:9)
 - *"For the mountains may be removed and the hills may shake, But My lovingkindness will not be removed from you, And My covenant of peace will not be shaken," Says the Lord who has compassion on you."* (Isaiah 54:10)
 - *"I will make an everlasting covenant with them that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; and I will put the fear of Me in their hearts so that they will not turn away from Me."* (Isaiah 54:10)
 - *"For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Romans 8:38,39)
- C. God's desire to be in covenant relationships with man is for our good! He knows that we need to have structure and know exactly what is expected of us, and thus He enters into these agreements with us so that we will know what to do and what to expect from God. His word is sure and we can have confidence that what He says will happen we will simply have faith and trust in Him and obey.

III. God dictates the terms of man's covenants with Him.

- A. In none of the examples that we have considered this evening has man approached God and demanded a covenant to be made based upon what man desires and what he expects of God. I honestly wouldn't want to be the human that demands anything of God. God makes the terms of His covenants and agreements with man.
- B. Jacob tried to do something like this, but it was truly foolish of him. In **Genesis 28:20-22**, we see Jacob making a vow and seemingly demanding that God keep him safe and if He would then he would allow God to be his God. This seems to be nothing but arrogance on the part of Jacob and just kinda dumb as well because God had already detailed the terms of His covenant with Jacob in the dream of the latter earlier in **Genesis 28:10-16**. God already stated that He was the Lord of Jacob's fathers and He would bless as He had promised. God set the terms of Jacob following Him as his fathers had done and then he would be blessed. Jacob's little "if, then" proposal to God was worthless because God had already set the terms of the agreement.
- C. We must not get too big for our britches and think that we have any bargaining power with God. He is the eternal God of all, and He is the only one who will be determining any agreements. We, as powerless man, ought to simply be thankful that God cares for us so and loves us as He does.

IV. God gives far more than He demands from man, and He does it for our good.

- A. We should never allow this point to escape our minds for even a second. Some people scoff at the idea of God demanding that we serve Him if we want to be blessed, but the truth is that servitude of God is far outweighed by the blessings that He promises to shower upon us. Just think about this for a second and consider some examples.
- Adam and Eve were promised a perfect life of bliss if they would only take care of the garden and enjoy all of the spoils of the garden except one tree. I think that's a pretty awesome agreement on their end.
 - Abraham was promised blessings unimaginable for all of his descendants if he would go to a land he had never been before. Even the request that sacrifice his son pales in comparison to what God was willing to do for all of mankind.
 - Today, we are told live a life in the name of Jesus on this earth for a limited number of years so that we might spend eternity with God. Oh and by the way, God Himself as the Son came to earth and literally gave His life on an unjust cross so that we might have the chance to have such. **(Philippians 2:4-8)**
- B. God's covenants with man are very much overloaded on the good side for us. He has done far more than we are deserving of so that we might have the chance to enjoy blessings before comprehension. May we never be so foolish as to think that our sacrifices in our covenants with God are not worth it.

V. Our covenant with God through Christ is the only means by which we can enjoy God in His glory.

- A. Finally, let's go back and consider the grandest covenant of all that was spoken of by the prophet in **Jeremiah 31:31-34**. Why was it that God put so much planning and work into preparing mankind for this covenant? It was because it is only through this perfect covenant that man could truly come to know and understand the glory of God. This foundational text shows the true necessity of God's perfect covenant with man through Jesus.
- *"I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it"* From our very core and foundation... to the very essence of who we are as individuals... God wants to impress upon us in those places exactly who He is and what He has done for us so that we might long to be with Him forever.
 - *"I will be their God, and they shall be my people."* This is the whole reason that man ought to long to be in a covenantal relationship with God. It is the opportunity to truly belong to God as people who can live this life knowing that God watches over, protects, and provides for their greatest needs. If we are a person of God, then we can have assurance that He will care for us.
 - *"They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying 'know the Lord'"* Wilson makes reference to Jesus's teaching of the Father drawing the people to Himself. How is it that God can do such a thing? I am convinced that the Lord draws people to Himself through the example of what Jesus did for them. Each person is now "taught" of God and His love for us all through Jesus's sacrifice on the cross.
 - *"They will all know me"* It is not just that we will know of God or know that He exists, but we can know God in the sense that we have that close intimate relationship with Him through His covenant with us that was made possible by the blood of Jesus.
 - *"I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more"* In no way can we come to truly grasp the glory of God than in knowing that our sins are forgiven and held against us no more. This is only possible through the covenant relationship that all those who have given themselves to Jesus can enjoy. A clean slate, a new start, and a new life are found only through the covenant established by faith and obedience to Jesus through the power of His death and resurrection.
- B. These things are not possible apart from being in a covenant relationship with God through Jesus the Christ. If these things sound good to us then we must be willing to enter into this agreement with God and keep our end so that God can fulfill His. In this way can we truly come to know the awesome glory of our Awesome God.

Truly the foundation of our faith can be understood if we can understand the covenants that God desires to have with us. If we can come to grasp His desire to be in agreement with us, and if we will submit ourselves to His terms then we can enjoy blessings beyond anything this life can offer, and we can go from there seeking to share those blessings with others. Thank God for His grace and mercy that pushes Him to seek relationships with those who are so unworthy. May we honor God wishes by honoring His covenants. ***PRAYER***