

## Getting To Know God

The New Covenant vs. The Old Covenant

John W. Ritenbaugh

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We are going to begin in Jeremiah the 31st chapter, the 31st verse.

**Jeremiah 31:31-34** "Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord. But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it in their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

This is the prophecy of the New Covenant. It is the one that we have made with God. Now this is repeated in Hebrews the 8th chapter, but it is in a different kind of context. In Hebrews 8, it is part of an argument that is used to persuade people how much better Christianity is than anything that has ever been offered to mankind before.

**Hebrews 8:7** For if the first covenant had been faultless, . . .

That word faultless is somewhat misleading because it might give the impression that somehow or another God made a mistake. That the first covenant had a tragic flaw in it. Well, the Old Covenant had no flaw in it. It was adequate to what God was working out at the time. But a better word might have been that it was *deficient*. That is, deficient when compared to the New Covenant.

Within the context of the entire book of Hebrews, the word gives the sense of dissatisfaction on God's part because the Old Covenant was not good enough. And thus the New Covenant has things added to it that are not within the Old Covenant. And it did make things a great deal better for us.

Now there is a reason why I began in Jeremiah 31 rather than Hebrews 8. Because of the way that it is translated in Jeremiah 31. I want you to notice verse 33 again.

**Jeremiah 31:33** But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds.

In the King James Version it is translated inward parts. In Hebrews it says into their mind. Now both are correct. But inward parts, I think, makes clear one of the major differences between the two and one that is exceedingly important, making the New Covenant immeasurably superior to the Old.

Now in what way is it immeasurably superior? Well, for one thing, the Old Covenant consisted largely of what one might call or term externals. You will recall that even the design of the Tabernacle and the Temple revealed that the Israelites were essentially cut off from God. Now this is shown symbolically. God's dwelling place even had a veil hiding Him from view. In addition, He was in a building that they, meaning the Israelites, except for the priests performing their services, were not even allowed into. And symbolically they had no access to Him whatsoever.

The Israelite was forced to perceive God as somewhat distant. And so He was forever a powerful but inscrutable, mysterious, unapproachable being. Now directly addressing this deficiency, verse 34 promises.

**Jeremiah 31:34** No more shall they shall teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know Me.

A prophecy when that was first uttered. In other words, one of the benefits of the New Covenant is that access to Him is open. And those making the New Covenant are no longer cut off in order that they might come to know God.

Now is this important? Well in John 17, verse 3 there is something that we should all have burned into our minds.

**John 17:3** "And this is eternal life [Jesus said], that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."

Here, Jesus, in a succinct statement says that eternal life, which I hope every one of us wants, is to know God. Now how can one get to know God when you cannot even get close to Him? So the New Covenant opens the possibility for one to move beyond merely knowing *about* God to actually *knowing Him intimately*. So intimately, that we are actually preparing to marry Him.

Now let us consider knowing Him or the importance of knowing from a different angle. This is from God's angle. In Matthew the 7th chapter, verses 21 through 23. Again, Jesus is the speaker.

**Matthew 7:21-23** "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; . . .

You see, this works both ways. We have to get to know God. God has to get to know us. And just like He said to Abraham at one point, "now I know." And He got to know him by his obedient submission to the requirements that God put him to.

**Matthew 7:23** . . . depart from me, you who work lawlessness!"

Iniquity [KJV] is lawlessness. And anybody who is iniquitous is not going to be known by God.

Now how is it possible to get to know Christ enough that a marriage can take place? Well, what is the process by which two human strangers come to know one another so well that they will marry? Now the process is quite

similar in our relationship with God. The process begins with learning things about Him. But the process does not end there. But at the same time, learning more and more and more about Him should *never* end. And we should always be seeking more in order to impress upon our minds what an awesome person this is that we are dealing with. Well, the key word here; it is not just awesome, it is *person*.

I just had one aspect of His greatness revealed to me about a month ago. Now we have all heard that God calls all the stars in the heavens by name. And there are hundreds of billions of them. Can you imagine keeping hundreds of billions of names of stars in your mind?

We have learned also with the discovery of DNA that God has created a process by which every single individual ever born is unique. What I learned just about a month ago through one of those CSI-type programs is that the DNA of every sycamore tree is also unique. Now if this is true of sycamores, why not every tree?

Now what this does is open the door to the possibility that every tree in the world is unique in much the same manner as every human is unique. And if it is so with trees, is it possible that every living thing, though it possesses much in common with others of its kind, is nonetheless also unique from all others?

What kind of a mind are we dealing with?! This is the mind that God wants us to become intimately familiar and associated with. Things like this open the door to a stronger, vitally alive faith. But we cannot merely stop there merely knowing things about Him. There are many people who know things *about* Him, but they still do not know Him.

When I was young, I read many books voraciously about significant things on earth and they fired my mind with imagination and a desire to see them. And one of these things was the Grand Canyon. I did not get to see it until I was 36. And despite all the reading that I had done about those things, there was nothing that compared with actually seeing it and experiencing it in real life. It was almost overwhelming! I felt that I was in the presence of a great masterwork of awesome design and power, and I know that I did not even want to speak for fear that somehow it would be disturbed. Now to me this

demonstrates that actually experiencing gives an intimacy to *knowing* that goes far beyond knowing *about*.

Now there are many people, perhaps very famous people in political life, entertainment, or academia that we may hear about, but it is not until we at the very least make an acquaintance of them and feel the force of their personality while in their presence that we have any chance at all of really beginning to know them. Hearsay is superficial and shadowy, and our knowledge in this case is external. But when we actually experience the presence of or fall under the influence of another's character and personality, then we can begin to say with Job, when he said to God, "I have heard of You by the hearing of my ear, but now my eye sees You."

Job then had a grasp of God that he had not had before. And that is what is involved in the New Covenant. It is the act of experiencing life with God that changes theology into heartfelt religion and doctrine into facts so that faith blossoms. We must never forget that God is a person. He does not want us to merely know about Him but to be on speaking terms with Him and to have a familiar acquaintance with Him, to be in loving intercourse with Him.

Notice what He said in verse 23, because it specifically draws our attention as to why God did not even know them. They were workers of lawlessness. They did not obey Him. They did not share the same standards and without that, they could not possibly come to know Him because they would never experience life in the same way that He did.

Let us go back to Psalm 34, and we will finish here. David wrote,

**Psalm 34:8** Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who trusts in Him!

Now this is what the New Covenant invites us to do. To taste Him by experiencing life in communion with Him, never forgetting that He is a person with character, personality, incredible genius, artistry, and power beyond our imagination. Taste pictures the first step toward taking something into the body so that it becomes a part of the strengthening,

healing, building, and changing. And it happens through sharing life in study, in prayer, in meditation, and obedience. All aimed toward knowing Him and intensifying the community with Him.