

Let's Make A Deal
Sermon by David Reed
Crossroads Christian Fellowship September 30, 2007
Jeremiah 31:31-34

A Wedding Ring is a sign— what does it mean? (commitment, fidelity, a life binding that also has a legal basis) How and why do you continue to stay married to someone? (because of a choice and a commitment to a shared life, a commitment to God, staying together through struggles, giving yourself completely) Is it a conditional or unconditional relationship? (both: based on fidelity, mutuality...a commitment that often perseveres through breaking the agreement of faithfulness and fidelity)

This little discussion will lead us into the message for today. What comes next might sound like a lecture but please sink into it. It is a foundational part of who we are today and I trust you will go away with a deeper understanding of God.

We have spent some time recently clarifying humanity as created, and in God's image - for heaven...to be with our loving creator today and forever. We've also come face to face with humanity, ourselves, created in God's image - as fallen into sin. We have explored how God's heart has ached to restore us to the place we were made to be. Today, we will consider how since the creation of the world, God's relationship to humanity has been defined by specific requirements and promises.

Our first step is to acknowledge that God defines how he desires people to live or act and he binds himself with a promise of how he will act toward them/us. The Bible records several summaries that define the relationships that occur between God and humanity. These are generally referred to as "covenants". A Biblical covenant can be defined as "an unchangeable, non-negotiable, legally binding agreement between God and humanity that stipulates the conditions of their relationship." (Genesis 15; 17; Jeremiah 31:31-33)

Essential elements of a Biblical covenant –

- A clear definition of the parties involved
- A binding set of conditions
- The promise of blessing for obedience (and consequences for disobedience)

Disclaimer #1. Because of God's sovereignty there is no option of negotiation...but only of acceptance or rejection of the covenant agreement. Period.

Disclaimer #2. No where will we ever find that God set out to make equals but loved, forgiven and blessed children. (2 Corinthians 6:16-18)

While offering a good, working definition it comes off as cold. That's not God. If we see the Bible as God's self-revelation we are forced to deal with an amazing love that defines

God's heart and actions and an amazing plan for redemption of God's lost treasure. Over and over God reveals that he desires a relationship where he is God and we are his people. But, because I -God- am pure and perfectly holy I can't have this relationship while they are guilty of disobedience, rebellion, moral failure, evil acts, sensuality, and all that destroys my image within them. I will deal with their guilt and get them back.

Let's just say for our sake that God decided a bazillion years ago – I really love these people and don't want to lose them even though they are constantly turning away from me. I'm going to make a deal with them...I'm going to offer a series of non-negotiable deals, each one building on the last that together will lead them to restoration for ever and ever.

And so it began. Let's make a deal...
Choose a deal...

1. Noaic Genesis 9:8-17

Made with Noah and his descendants and all life subject to human dominion.

The covenant was the granting of an unconditional divine promise never to destroy all earthly life with a natural event. The covenant sign was the rainbow.

9:11 I'm setting up my covenant with you that never again will everything living be destroyed by floodwaters; no, never again will a flood destroy the Earth." **12** God continued, "This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and everything living around you and everyone living after you. **13** I'm putting my rainbow in the clouds, a sign of the covenant between me and the Earth.

2. Abrahamic Genesis 15:9-21 and Genesis 17

Made with Abraham and his descendants because of his faith.

The first part of the covenant in Genesis 15 was an unconditional grant, a divine promise to fulfill the gifting of a land for his people to dwell.

17:4 That's when God made a covenant with Abram: "I'm giving this land to your children, from the Nile River in Egypt to the River Euphrates in Assyria –

The second part was a conditional covenant, providing Abraham remained faithful to God, to be the God of Abraham and his descendants – to make a great nation from him. The sign of acceptance of the covenant was circumcision of the males.

17:4 "This is my covenant with you: You'll be the father of many nations. **7** I'm establishing my covenant between me and you, a covenant that includes your descendants, a covenant that goes on and on and on, a covenant that commits me to be your God and the God of your descendants. **8** And I'm giving you and your descendants this land where you're now just camping, this whole country of Canaan, to own forever. And I'll be their God." **9** God continued to Abraham, "And you: You will honor my covenant, you and your descendants, generation after generation. **10** This is the covenant that you are to honor, the covenant that pulls in all your descendants: Circumcise every male.

3. Mosaic or Sinaitic Exodus 19-24

Made with Israel as the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as the people God has redeemed from slavery to an earthly power.

The covenant was a conditional divine pledge to be Israel's God –as her protector and the guarantor of her blessed destiny. The condition was Israel's total consecration to God, through obedience to the law, as his people – his kingdom – who live by his rule and serve his purposes in history.

3 So Moses went to the people and told them everything God had said - all the rules and regulations. They all answered in unison: "Everything God said, we'll do." **5** Then he directed young Israelite men to offer Whole-Burnt-Offerings and sacrifice Peace-Offerings of bulls. **6** Moses took half the blood and put it in bowls; the other half he threw against the Altar. **7** Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it as the people listened. They said, "Everything God said, we'll do. Yes, we'll obey." **8** Moses took the rest of the blood and threw it out over the people, saying, "This is the blood of the covenant which God has made with you out of all these words I have spoken."

4. Davidic 2 Samuel 7:5-16

Made with faithful king David after his devotion to God as Israel's king.

The covenant was an unconditional grant to establish and maintain the Davidic dynasty on the throne of Israel providing her with a godly king like David. This line of David would culminate in the messiah (Isaiah 9:7; 54:10; 61:8; 2 Samuel 7:14-16) and bring Israel to rest in the promised land. (1 Kings 4:20-21; 5:3-4)

7:10 And I'm going to set aside a place for my people Israel and plant them there so they'll have their own home and not be knocked around any more. Nor will evil men afflict you as they always have, **11** even during the days I set judges over my people Israel. Finally, I'm going to give you peace from all your enemies. **12** When your life is complete and you're buried with your ancestors, then I'll raise up your child, your own flesh and blood, to succeed you, and I'll firmly establish his rule. **13** He will build a house to honor me, and I will guarantee his kingdom's rule permanently.

5. New Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 8; 10

Made with Israel as she was about to be evicted from the promised land because of her unfaithfulness and disobedience (Leviticus 26:27-39; Deut. 28:36-37; 45-68)

The covenant was an unconditional grant to unfaithful Israel to forgive her sins and establish a relationship on a new basis by “writing his law on their hearts” – a covenant of pure grace that fulfills all the covenants and promises made before.

31:31 "That's right. The time is coming when I will make a brand-new covenant with Israel and Judah. **32** It won't be a repeat of the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took their hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt. They broke that covenant even though I did my part as their Master." God's Decree. **33** "This is the brand-new covenant that I will make with Israel when the time comes. I will put my law within them - write it on their hearts! - and be their God. And they will be my people. **34** ...They'll know me firsthand, the dull and the bright, the smart and the slow. I'll wipe the slate clean for each of them. I'll forget they ever sinned!" God's Decree.

WHAT A DEAL!

God is faithful to his promises –all of them.

There is only one of the covenants that has become obsolete. The Mosaic covenant of the obedience to law and sacrifices for sin. Hebrews 8:**6** But Jesus' priestly work far surpasses what these other priests do, since he's working from a far better plan. **7** If the first plan - the old covenant - had worked out, a second wouldn't have been needed. **8** But we know the first was found wanting, because God said, Heads up! The days are coming when I'll set up a new plan for dealing with Israel and Judah. **9** I'll throw out the old plan I set up with their ancestors when I led them by the hand out of Egypt. They didn't keep their part of the bargain, so I looked away and let it go. **10** This new plan I'm making with Israel isn't going to be written on paper, isn't going to be chiseled in stone; This time I'm writing out the plan in them, carving it on the lining of their hearts. I'll be their God, they'll be my people.

The call to obedience still stands. God still calls for obedience to his word and way. Jesus did what the law and sacrifices could not do – take away guilt and give life (Galatians 3:15-25; 2 Corinthians 3:6). Jesus fulfilled the condition of obedience to the law so that we could be obedient in the heart.

What becomes clear through all the covenants are three things **first**, no good works or any outward sacrifice can remove the guilt of sin and give life. **Secondly** - that we can not live as we want to live and expect God's blessing. **And finally**, God wants to have you and I as his children. He doesn't give up or forget his promises.

The covenant in Christ is mediated by grace, undeserved forgiveness where we are held not guilty of sin before our Lord. For those who accept God's deal - It establishes God's rule in their hearts and lives. It overcomes the forces of evil. It removes the consequences of sin including death and all that diminishes our spiritual life. It establishes a new order of righteousness and peace

Signs of agreement and continuation in the covenants

Old: Circumcision was the sign of acceptance of the old covenant. The signs of continuing to be faithful were observance of the festivals, and ceremonial laws given at various times.

New: Baptism is the sign of acceptance and obedience to the new covenant in Christ (believe and be baptized) and communion is the way we show that we are continuing in the covenant.

Obedience to God's word and service to God as our king has not changed. God still wants all of our hearts and all of our will and all of our lives to be hearts and lives for him. In Christ we do so out of love not for our salvation.

Remember the covenant with Abraham where God promised to bless all the families of the earth through him as the father of a great nation? Out of that nation came Jesus and here we are being blessed.

Remember when Moses sealed the covenant with God by pouring the blood from the sacrifices into two bowls and throwing one on the altar? That bowl symbolized God's forgiveness and acceptance of the offering. Then Moses threw the other bowl over the people symbolizing their oath that binds them to obey. A covenant made and sealed in the blood of a sacrifice.

In 1 Corinthians 11 we hear Jesus Saying "this is the new covenant in my blood" Jesus brought together the promise of God's forgiveness, God's acceptance of the sacrifice of himself for our sins, and God's requirement for a perfect obedience - all together. One cup. His cup for us.

And the words of Jeremiah echo in our hearts: The time is coming when I will make a brand-new covenant with Israel and Judah. I will put my law within them - write it on their hearts! - and be their God. And they will be my people. I'll wipe the slate clean for each of them. I'll forget they ever sinned!"

No more guilt

And a promise of life full of God's blessing

What a deal.

To accept the covenant Jesus said **believe in me** – that I am the Son of God and the messiah. Do you believe?

All that was made before was made to lead us to Christ. Because God would not give us up. It was and is an amazing plan God laid out in eternity and has not forgotten nor abandoned. As we come to the communion table today we are made able to come only because of Jesus.

Let us come with thankful, forgiven hearts as pronounced not guilty before our God. This table is for all believers in Jesus Christ as God's son, who became flesh, Died on the cross for our sin, rose again, and will come back for his followers whom he will take with him to heaven.