

Title: A New Covenant  
Text: Exodus 20:1-17  
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What is a covenant?

In legal terms a covenant is a promise to engage in or refrain from a specified action. Normally, when we speak in religious terms, a covenant is a formal alliance or agreement by God with a religious community or with humanity in general.

A covenant that many have made is called marriage. We have promised to keep several promises and to refrain from certain behaviors. Some see that covenant as unconditional and seek to fulfill the stipulations. Others see it as conditional and feel free to disregard their promises if they view the other party as a promise-breaker.

As you can see, a covenant can promote relationships or be the cause of relational dissolution.

For instance, a little 5 year old girl was having a troubled-filled day, arguing back and forth with her mother. Finally, her mother in exasperation said, "Jenny, I want you to sit in the corner right now! And don't you get up until I tell you to!" Little Jenny went over to the corner and sat down a few minutes, and as she thought about it, she yelled out to her mother, "Mom, I'm sitting down on the outside, but I am standing up on the inside! Is that okay?" Every one of us has an "I'm-standing-up-on-the-inside" nature. Every one of us wants to buck authority and resist the rules. That is why we have trouble with the Ten Commandments. We view God as a Judge and a cosmic killjoy. When we think of the Ten Commandments some of us will think of Charlton Heston. In this message I hope we see the Ten Commandments in an entirely new way.

**Exodus 19:1**

*In the third month after the Israelites left Egypt--on the very day--they came to the Desert of Sinai.*

\* Let's do a little review. God revealed himself as "I am that I am" and with mighty power brought the new nation out of Egyptian slavery into freedom. God's plan is to be with us. God wants to be with his people.

\* So what is the main idea: The Big Idea of the whole Story is God's declaration, "I want to come down and dwell with you." God continues to say in effect, **"For me to live with you, three things must be worked out."**

**I. God gives rules for how we treat God and each other.**

**Exodus 20:1-7**

*And God spoke all these words:*

[2] *"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.*

[3] *"You shall have no other gods before me.*

[4] *"You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below.*

[5] *You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, [6] but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.*

[7] *"You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.*

- A. God wants a community of love that reflects His love for us.
- B. The Ten Commandments shape the community of love.

1. Commandments 1- 4 guide how we treat God.

#### Vertical relationship

- I am the LORD your God
- You shall have no other gods
- You shall not make any graven images or likenesses
- You shall not take the LORD's name in vain

2. Commandments 5-10 guide how we treat other people.

#### Horizontal relationships

- Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy
- Honor your father and your mother
- You shall not kill
- You shall not commit adultery
- You shall not steal
- You shall not bear false witness
- You shall not covet

- C. Our sin nature resists God's guidelines.

1. While Moses was away getting the 10 Commandments Aaron built a golden calf and the people worshiped it.
2. God will not be with rebellious people. Moses interceded so that God would not wipe out his rebellious people.

#### ***Exodus 32:22-23***

*"Do not be angry, my lord," Aaron answered. "You know how prone these people are to evil. [23] They said to me, 'Make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him.'"*

\* When it came to building the tunnel under the English Channel connecting England with France (later called the "Chunnel"), the French had the perfect word for it: *bicephale*, two-headed. There were two mammoth firms built from scratch to complete the project: one charged with finance and operation, the other responsible for building it. Each of these companies was also two-headed: equally French and British.

No one was allowed to take charge. Leadership, more times than not, was reduced to the management of conflict. Said a high-ranking executive, "The project...created a lot of tension because it [was] not geared to solving problems; it [was] geared to placing blame." The English yelled at the French, and the French yelled at the English. Said another executive, "There were nervous breakdowns galore."

The problems were primarily from a lack of shared standards. The two countries had a different word for everything. The French had their accounting system, so did the English. The French ran on 380 volts, and the British ran on 420. Instruction manuals were bilingual. There were even two different standards used to measure sea level.

"When you have people coming from two different nations," said one of the engineers, "each believes that only their regulations are right."

*Robert Lewis with Rob Wilkins, The Church of Irresistible Influence (Zondervan, 2001), pp. 205-206; submitted by Lee Eclov, Vernon Hills, Illinois*

\* We want to receive the good from God and place the blame for wrong decisions on someone else. How does that happen? We fail to live by God's standards.

## II. God desires a place to dwell among us.

\* In Exodus 25, God describes that place. It is called "a sanctuary" or "the tabernacle".

A. God gave specific directions for the making of the Tabernacle.

**Exodus 25:8-9**

*"Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them. [9] Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you.*

1. God would dwell in the "Most Holy Place" and no one could see God's face.
  2. Only the High Priest could enter the Most Holy Place once a year on behalf of the people.
- B. The Tabernacle was portable tent. God would guide his people with a moving cloud during the day and by a column of fire at night.

\* God desired and still desires to dwell with us.

### **III. God requires that sin be atoned for (covered) by shedding of blood.**

\* The Book of Leviticus.

- A. The sin nature is the main thing that keeps us separated from God. Each one of us has a sin nature. Sin must be dealt with, covered, atoned for.
- B. The sacrificing of animals becomes institutionalized in the priestly sacrificial system so that sin could be constantly atoned for (covered).
- C. The new nation needed their sins covered so that God could dwell with them. The rebellion of the golden calf, the intercession of Moses, and the gracious forgiveness of God made it possible for God to dwell with his people.

**Exodus 33:14-16**

*The Lord replied, "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest."*

*[15] Then Moses said to him, "If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. [16] How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?"*

**Application:**

1. Jesus is our great High Priest and his blood once and for all atones for (covers) our sin. With the blood of Jesus on the doorframe of your life, you are forgiven and given direct access into the Most Holy Place.
2. We are the place where God dwells. We are the new tabernacle. The church is not a building, the church is us and we are the place where God resides.

**1 Cor. 3:16-17**

*Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? [17] If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple.*

3. The Great Commandment is the guideline Jesus gives to and models for us. It is a guideline of sacrificial love.

**Matthew 22:38-40**

*This is the first and greatest commandment. [39] And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' [40] All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."*

**John 13:35**

*By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."*

Are you sitting down on the outside, but standing up on the inside, or have you discovered this new covenant that allows us to experience the love of God and express a love for others?

What do you choose today?