

¹¹ *‘And people will not be teaching, each one his neighbour and each one his brother, saying, “Know the Lord”, for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest.’*

• *The new covenant promises are about a community*

• *Freedom from class-discrimination*

• *‘Nominal Christianity’ will be virtually banished*

• *The basis of all of the other promises being fulfilled is the forgiveness of sins*

1. Forgiveness is rooted in mercy

• *The only unforgivable sin is refusing the gospel*

• *We are to fear unbelief, not fear believing in his goodness*

2. All kinds of sin are forgiven

The new covenant promises are about a community. There will one day arise an entire people who know the Lord. This is one of many indications in the Bible that there will be ‘a latter-day glory’ for the church of the Lord Jesus Christ^{□1□2□3}.

The mark of the mature people of God in their ‘latter-day glory’ will be freedom from class-discrimination. There is a hint of this in the descriptions of the Day of Pentecost, ‘All who believed were together ...’, but it will become more true than ever when people ‘from the least of them to the greatest’ all know God in a living and practical manner. Social distinctions are real. The New Testament mentions ‘both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave’^{□1} but the mature people of God will have them all represented and they will all know the Lord.

The promise seems to be – although it seems almost too good to be true – that when the new covenant reaches its heights ‘nominal Christianity’ will be virtually banished from the professing people of God. Our Lord Jesus Christ is administering the new covenant to make sure that it happens.

¹² *‘For I will be merciful toward their unrighteous deeds, and I will remember their sins no more.’*

The first five promises will be fulfilled because of the sixth one. The basis of all of the other promises being fulfilled is the forgiveness of sins. We do not begin to know God’s mind or share his heart, we do not begin to experience him as our God or represent him as his people or know him – until we are sure that our sins are forgiven. The sixth and last promise here is logically the first. It begins with the word ‘For’. We cannot grow in God until we have this as our starting point.

1. Forgiveness is rooted in mercy. God promises that if we are his people he will be merciful to us. The only unforgivable sin is refusing the gospel. Even when God takes an oath of wrath and something is lost, there is still forgiveness! When God took an oath in anger in Numbers 14, God said, ‘I have forgiven them...But...’^{□1}. Even God’s oath of wrath does not mean that there is no forgiveness. And in the new covenant there is abundant mercy. God saves us, ‘being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us’^{□2}. He saved us ‘not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration-and-renewal by the Holy Spirit’^{□3}.

We are to be ready to trust in God’s mercy. Most of us can hardly believe that God is as gracious as he is. We become so fearful of misusing grace that we back away into legalism and into fear. But God is merciful. We are to fear unbelief, not fear believing in his goodness. We fear his chastisements if we become unbelieving, but we are not to fear that God will no longer be merciful. Our writer has already told us to ‘draw near to the throne of grace with boldness, in order that we may receive mercy’^{□1}.

2. All kinds of sin are forgiven. At this point the law and the gospel are very different. The mercy of the new covenant is greater than the mercy of the old covenant. The law of Moses could only show mercy to

□1 see also
Romans
11:12,15
□2 Ephesians
4:11-16; 5:27
□3 Isaiah 2:2-4

□1 Revelation
13:16

□1 14:20-22

□2 Ephesians
2:4

□3 Titus 3:5

□1 4:16

• *Whereas under the old covenant serious sins were capital offences*

• *In the new covenant there is forgiveness even of the worst sins*

• *David, who sinned seriously, had to go directly to God*

3. The forgiveness is radical and total

• *God forgives and forgets*

• *We too should put the burden of past sins out of our minds*

certain kinds of sin. Serious sin was threatened with death. 'Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses'¹. The high priest could 'deal gently with the ignorant and wayward'² but could not do anything to help with serious sins. Adultery, idolatry, sabbath-breaking, juvenile disobedience to parents, these sins were all capital offences. But the new covenant is very different. The sin-bearing death of Christ has power to bring forgiveness of even the worst sins. Hebrews 5:2 told us the old Mosaic priests could deal with two categories of sinner: 'He can deal gently with [i] the ignorant and [ii] the wayward'. But there were three categories of sinner in the Old Testament period. There were also those who committed sins 'with a high hand'. Numbers 15:30 said, 'The person who does anything with a high hand, whether he is native or a sojourner, reviles the Lord, and that person shall be cut off from among his people.' There was nothing the law could do to help such a person. When David committed serious sins of adultery and murder he had to say, 'You will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering'³. There was no help for David in the Mosaic law when he was guilty of serious sins. All he could do was to ignore the Mosaic law and go directly to God.

3. **The forgiveness is radical and total.** 'Their sins I will not remember any more', says our letter. It is an amazing and daring promise. God's forgiveness is greater than many of us can really take in. He forgives 'many offences'¹. It all comes by the death of Christ. 'His blood cleanses us from all sin', says one verse in the New Testament². 'This is my blood, which is shed for the remission of sins', says another³. 'Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world', said John the Baptist⁴. In Christ all the pictures of the Mosaic law are fulfilled. It is surprising that the Bible should talk about God's being forgetful! Surely a lapse of memory is one thing we cannot imagine in God. I suppose it is only picture-language, but what a wonderful picture it is! It is as if when we go to God and are conscious of our sins, he says nothing about them, once they have been forgiven. Sometimes we remember our sins ourselves. I suppose it might help us to stay a little more humble! But it is no good to talk to God about forgiven sins. He will say to us, 'Oh, did you really do that? I can't remember!' His forgiveness is so radical that our sins are not on his mind. And if they are not on his mind it does not have to be so much on our minds. I suppose we can learn a few lessons from our past sinfulness and learn to be wary of falling into them again. But we really do not need to be burdened with guilt. They are buried in the ocean of God's forgetfulness. They are as far away as the east is from the west. God cannot even remember them!

1 10:28
2 5:2

3 Psalm 51:16

1 Romans 5
2 1 John 1:7
3 Luke 22:20

4 John 1:29



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