

INTRODUCTION

People who work in advertising agree that two of the best words to move a product are "New and Improved." For instance, if you are looking for better diapers, check out these new and Improved Luvs. But it makes you wonder what was faulty about the old Luvs! Some people say the words, "New and Improved" are an oxymoron. If it's a brand-new product, it can't be improved.

So actually these words are used for old products that need to be improved. To avoid claims of false advertising, the FTC has ruled that there must be some minor change in the product to be called new. For instance, a salsa company must change their recipe to be able to claim, "New and Improved." And the FTC has ruled that a product can't be advertised as "new" for more than six months.

But sometimes "New and Improved" fails, because there was nothing wrong with the old and the unimproved. Coca-Cola discovered that in 1985. How many of you remember the New Coke they released? Coke was afraid Pepsi was cutting in to their market share, so they created a smoother tasting Coca-Cola. The problem was they took the real Coke off the market. It was a huge failure. People took to the streets in protest. People rushed to the store to buy out every old Coke they could purchase.

Ninety days later Coca-Cola brought back the old Coke as Coke Classic. Later the new Coke became Coke II, but is now no longer sold. In 2009, the term "classic" was dropped from the old Coke. That's a perfect example of who something that was advertised to be new and improved turned out to be a total bust.

But when it comes to the Bible we really do need something that is new and improved. It's called the New Covenant. In this we see how the New Covenant is a new and improved version of the Old Covenant. The word "new" appears ten times in Hebrews and we find it three times in these few verses.

Hebrews 8:6-13. "But the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises. For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another. But God found fault with the people and said: [from Jeremiah 31] 'The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not remain faithful to my covenant, and I turned away from them,' declares the Lord. This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will they teach his neighbor, or say his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."

By calling this covenant "NEW," he made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and outdated will soon disappear.

There was an old covenant based on the Laws of God confirmed by the blood of all the animal sacrifices. And there is a new covenant based upon the love of Jesus and confirmed by His precious blood. At the Last Supper, Jesus took the cup and said, "This is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you." (Luke 22:20)

When Jesus announced the New Covenant, the Jewish people shouldn't have been surprised, because 600 years earlier the prophet Jeremiah had communicated God's plan for a new covenant. It would be one written on the hearts on His people, not on tablets of stone.

Let's see five reasons the new covenant is better.

1. We read about it in a NEW Testament

In the next chapter of Hebrews we are going to study this verse: "And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance." (Hebrews 9:15 KJV)

There are 66 books in our Bible. Thirty-nine books are in the Old Testament and 27 books are in the New Testament. There is one theme for the entire Bible and I can summarize the entire Bible in seven words: God's redemption of lost humanity through Jesus. If you want to understand the Bible, you shouldn't read it like a novel or textbook. You don't start in Genesis and keep reading. If you do that you'll be thoroughly confused when you get to Leviticus and start reading about all the rules and regulations about kosher food, Jewish festivals, and strange punishments like stoning your rebellious teenager—although that may be close to where some of you parents are now!

You really have to master the New Testament before the Old Testament makes sense. Augustine the great pastor from the 5th Century wrote: "The New is in the Old concealed; the Old is by the New revealed." That means once you understand the Bible, you see the Old Testament as the prophecies and anticipation of Jesus. And then when you understand the New Testament, the Old Testament makes sense. These laws and regulations were only temporary. They were all fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

As we compare the New Covenant with the Old Covenant, I don't want to give the impression that the Old Covenant was bad. It wasn't Plan A that failed, so Jesus was Plan B. The Law wasn't a mistake because God doesn't make mistakes. It was all part of God's Master Plan. The Psalmist sang a song that said, "The Law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul. The testimony of the Lord is sure; making wise the simple...More to be desired are they than gold; yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb." (Psalm 19:7,10 KJV)

So the problem of the law wasn't with the law. It was with the people trying to keep the law. Did you notice in verse 8 that God found fault in the people, not in His Law?

Let me try to explain it in a way we can understand. There's a sign out on I-20 that says, "Speed Limit 75 mph." Now, let's all be honest. Raise your hand if you have ever driven 76 mph or faster on that part of I-20. There's nothing wrong with that law. It's a good law, put there for public safety. It's not the problem: We are. We have a bunch of law-breakers sitting right here in church! So the main purpose of the law was to show people they couldn't keep it and they needed a Savior.

2. We enter it through a NEW birth

The Bible says, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." (1 Peter 1:3)

In John 3, a hyper-religious man named Nicodemus came to ask Jesus about how have eternal life. Nick came to see Jesus at night. You might say it was the first Nick-at-night! This man was a Pharisee who fasted two days a week, gave alms to the poor, and memorized much of the Torah. He attended synagogue religiously. Yet Jesus pointed out to Nick that something was missing. He told him religious activity would never get him into heaven. He had to be born again. Nicodemus didn't catch it at first and asked the obvious question, "Can a man go back into his mother's womb?" Jesus pointed out that Nicodemus was talking about physical birth and He was speaking about a spiritual birth. In John, Jesus said, "Unless a man is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God. Flesh gives birth to flesh and Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You MUST be born again.'" (John 3:5-7 PHILIPPS)

What does it mean to be born again? You receive a new nature. When we are born the first time, we receive the natural human nature of our ancestor, Adam. When we are born again, we receive the supernatural nature of Jesus.

One of the most touching scenes from the movie Forrest Gump is when he and Lieutenant Dan are in a bar on New Year's Eve. They are with a couple of ladies who had lived the rougher side of life. They're watching the scene in Times Square as the people count down the seconds. One of the women looks at the TV and says, "Don't you just love New Year's? You get to start all over. Everyone gets a second chance." That's what the New Birth is. It is God giving us a second, third, and millionth chance.

3. We are changed into a NEW creation

The Bible says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" (2 Corinthians 5:17)

When you undergo a new birth that you read about in the New Testament, God changes you into a new creation. That means we receive a new identity. Those two words "in Christ" are two of the most important words in all of the Bible. The Apostle Paul used it 97 times in his letters. You may wonder, I've heard of "Christ in me," but this is "me in Christ." Which one is it? Yes.

I spoke about Coca-Cola earlier. To me, the best-tasting Coke ever was when it came in a six-ounce bottle and you paid a nickel for it. And then you could take the bottle back to the store and get two cents for it. What a deal!

So let's imagine I have an empty Coke bottle and a big bowl full of water. The empty Coke bottle represents me B.C. (Before Christ). When I plunge the bottle into the water, the bottle fills up with water. So is the bottle in the water, or is the water in the bottle? Both. In the same way, I am in Christ and Christ is in me.

One of my favorite preachers when I was in college was Dr. R.G. Lee. He was the long-time pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis. It's hard to believe he's been in heaven for forty years now. Before he died, my friend Adrian Rogers was pastor of Bellevue. He went by to visit Dr. Lee on his deathbed and said, "Dr. Lee, after your die, is there any chance that I could have them transplant your brain into my head?" Dr. Lee said, "Son, that would be like trying to put a grand piano in a broom closet!"

Dr. Lee grew up in South Carolina in the last years of the 1800s. I heard him tell a story several times that I've never forgotten. In his town there was a mean, tough man named John. He was the local blacksmith. He was a huge man with bulging muscles and a thick black beard. Because of his strength and his temper people called him Big John. He had killed a man, but had escaped conviction on some legal technicality.

R.G. Lee said that once day an evangelist came to the town when he was a teenager. R.G. told him that he wanted to be a preacher, so the evangelist asked him to make some visits with him that week. He asked R.G. who was the meanest man in town, and R.G. immediately said, "That would be Big John."

So the evangelist took R.G. and they visited the Blacksmith shop. The evangelist said, "John, I'm preaching a revival this week at the church, and I'd like for you to come hear the Gospel." Big John didn't say anything. He just kept pounding away with his hammer on the anvil. So the evangelist said, "Well, John, at least let us pray for you." So they started praying right there. R.G. was afraid. He said with that big, mean killer standing only feet away with a huge hammer in his hand he was afraid to close his eyes. So he said he decided to "watch and pray." He kept one eye on the blacksmith while the evangelist prayed. After the prayer, apparently John was touched that someone would care enough to pray for him, so he said, "I may come hear you preach."

When the evangelist told the pastor that Big John might come, all the blood drained from the pastor's face. He said, "He can't come!" The evangelist said, "Why not?" The pastor said, "Big John killed the husband of our church pianist. She is a sweet Christian lady, and I don't think

we should subject her to the pain of seeing her husband's killer in church." The evangelist said, "Well, we've already invited him, so we'll see what happens."

That night everyone was shocked to see Big John enter the church building and sit near the back. They looked at him and the church pianist and she continued to play. The evangelist got up and preached his heart out about the love of God for sinners. When the invitation was given, Big John was the first one down the aisle. He put his big calloused hand in the hand of the pastor and said he wanted to be saved. They knelt right there and the old blacksmith was born again. The whole time the pianist never stopped playing the invitation hymn. But when Big John stood up, she stopped playing. She stood up. Everyone was expecting her to walk out. But instead, she walked down to the front and gave Big John a hug and said, "Welcome to God's family." Then she returned to the piano and continued to play.

Later that night, her friends crowded around her and said, "How could you do that? How could you hug the man who killed your husband?" She said, "Oh, that wasn't the man who killed my husband. That was a new creation in Christ." She believed in the power of God to change the hardest sinner into a saint.

4. We receive a NEW name

In Revelation we read where Jesus said, "To the one who is victorious, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it." (Revelation 2:17)

We read about in the New Testament; we enter it through the new birth; we become a new creation; and God gives us a new name. There's a beautiful meaning behind the custom of the white stone with a new name on it.

Back in New Testament times, when two people became very close friends, they would enter into a covenant relationship. It would be like our tradition of two friends becoming blood brothers. Back then, to symbolize their friendship, they would often take a thin white stone, and break it in half. Each person would write their name on it and then they would exchange stones. That was their way of saying, "I belong to you, and you belong to me. All that I have belongs to you."

So if later you came into your friend's town, all he owned was at your disposal. So it was a valuable stone; you wouldn't leave home without it. Your friend's name was written on it so his family would treat you like they would treat your friend.

And that's what Jesus is saying here. It's not that He gives us a new name by which we are called. It is His name written on white stone that we receive. After we are born again, we know God by a different name. He's not just some uncaring heavenly force. He's not just the Creator, the Judge, or the Avenger. Once you are born again you know Him as "Abba, Daddy, Papa."

We know God in a personal, intimate way. Each of us can know God in such a personal, intimate way that is known only to us. So who is Jesus to you? Is HE just the man upstairs? Or is He your savior, sustainer, the rose of Sharon, the bright and morning star?"

5. We are headed for a NEW heaven and a NEW earth

The Bible says, "But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness." (2 Peter 3:13) And in Revelation 21:1 John wrote, "I saw a new heaven and a new earth. For the first heaven and the first earth were passed away."

Heaven is the dwelling place of God. Jesus told the thief on the cross, "Today, you will be with me in paradise." (Luke 23:42) Right now there are millions of saints in heaven. And as the song says, "Heaven is a wonderful place; It's filled with glory and grace. I want to see my Savior's face 'cause heaven is a wonderful place."

I believe heaven is a real place. It's not some mystical, ethereal state of being. I believe heaven is as real as this platform I'm standing on. It's actually more real, because one day everything in this world will pass away, but heaven is eternal.

But as great as the current heaven is, the Bible teaches that one day there will be a new heaven and a new earth. Even eternity will be new and improved! If you want to learn more about the present heaven and the future heaven, read Randy Alcorn's book entitled *Heaven*.

Dr. Harry Rimmer was an interesting scientist. He lived from 1890 to 1952. He was a scientist before he became a Christian, and after he accepted Christ, he became a great spokesman for the truth of the Bible. He was an archaeologist and a Paleontologist (someone who studies fossils). He wrote many books, one of which was *Dead Men Tell Tales*.

As he was in his dying days, he enjoyed listening to the national radio broadcasts of Dr. Charles Fuller, the founder of Fuller Seminary and speaker for the Old Fashioned Revival Hour. On one program, Dr. Fuller announced that on the next Sunday he would be speaking about heaven. Dr. Rimmer composed the following letter to sent it to Dr. Fuller:

Dear Dr. Fuller,

Next Sunday, you're going to talk about Heaven. I'm interested in that land, because I've held free title to a bit a property there for over 50 years. I did not buy it; it was given to me without price. But, the donor purchased it for me at a tremendous sacrifice.

For more than half a century, I've been sending materials up to the greatest Architect of the universe, who has been building a home for me, which will never need remodeling or repairing, because it will suit me perfectly. Termites can never undermine its foundation, for it rests upon the rock of ages. Fire cannot destroy it. Floods cannot wash it away. No

locks or bolts shall ever be placed upon the doors, for no vicious person can enter the land where my dwelling stands. It's almost complete and ready for me to enter.

There's a deep shadow, between this place where I live and that to which I shall journey in a very short time. I cannot reach my home in that city without passing through this valley. But, I'm not afraid, because the best Friend I ever had went through the same valley long, long ago, and drove away all of its gloom. He will be with me as I walk through the valley of the shadow. And, I shall not lose my way when He is with me.

I hope to hear your sermon on Heaven next Sunday, but I have no assurance that I shall be able to do so. My ticket to Heaven has no date marked for the journey, no return coupon, and no permit for baggage. Yes, I'm ready to go. I may not be here while you're talking next Sunday, but I'll meet you there some day.

Harry Rimmer

And Harry died before the next Sunday, and he became an instant expert on heaven.

CONCLUSION

Thank God we are no longer under the Old Covenant. God has given us a new covenant that is New and Improved. We used to sing a song that said, "Give me that old time religion." But the faith of the Bible is all about newness. We read about it in a *new* Testament; we enter through a *new* birth; we become a *new* creation; we receive a *new* name; and one day we'll live in a *new* heaven and a *new* earth. And on the last page of our Bible Jesus says, "Behold, I make ALL things *new*!"

OUTLINE

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"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." *1 Peter 1:3*

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



*David O. Dykes, Pastor
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