

Genesis 1:26-28

# COVENANT RENEWAL

Matthew 28:18-20

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## A NEW COVENANT OUTLOOK (The Covenant Structure in John Nine)

by Sutton

The Gospel of John is my favorite Gospel. It is simple Greek, yet it has a certain complexity about it that has baffled New Testament scholars. It has caused most difficulty because its structure seems rather obscure. What is John doing in his Gospel? Where is he going? A number of emphases overlap.

### New Creation in John

The most predominant theme is new creation. John is the Genesis of the New Testament. He begins the Gospel, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God" (John 1:1), paralleling Moses' opening statement, "In the beginning God made the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). After obviously setting up his Gospel with a Genesis-beginning, John orchestrates a symphony of creation themes and structures, consistently arranging the central ideas of the Gospel in sevens. He does so with his famous seven miracles, as well as the seven-days-of-creation structure of the book as a whole.

As for the seven miracles of the book, they track the seven days of creation. The first week of creation went in the following manner: Day one: ball of water/first light; day two: separation of the water; day three: land and vegetation; day four: great lights, the sun and the moon; day five: animal world; day six: man; day seven: rest.

The seven miracles of John form a perfect parallel to the miracles. Notice the progression: water to wine (new creation: John 2:1-11), raising of a son when the father is separate from him (new separation: John 4:46-54), healing of a lame man (new footing by the stirring of the waters: John 5:1-9), feeding of the five thousand (new food: John 6:1-15), calming of the sea at night (new light in the midst of darkness: John 6:16-21), healing of a blind man with clay (new body: John 9:1-7), and the raising of Lazarus (new rest: John 11:38-44). Each miracle builds on the previous. The miracle of Lazarus continues the work of the healing of the blind man in John nine. He was given new sight. Lazarus is given complete new life. He is literally "unbound and let go" from the wrappings of death (John 11:44).

John also organizes the whole Gospel around the seven days of creation. His first day of creation is the initial chapter of the Gospel where the theme is first light, paralleling the first light on day one of creation. John the Baptist is called a witness of the first light (John 1:8), Jesus. Where Christ goes, first light begins to shine, especially in the call of the first witnesses, the disciples (John 1:19-51).

John's second day of creation presents water-separation scenes, consistent with the theme of day two of crea-

tion. Water is changed to wine at Cana (John 2). The work of the Spirit is distinguished from water with Nicodemus (John 3). The woman at the well is called to separate from her water and drink of Jesus' water that flows from Him (John 4). A lame man is healed and led away (separated) from the pool of water outside the temple (John 5). Thus, the second major section of John touches on different aspects of separation from the old creation.

John's third day shows the new land where Christ's disciples receive new food, which is made from vegetation that grows on the land; this matches the themes of day three of creation. In John six, Jesus leads the people through a new exodus at the time of the Passover to a new land that provides new manna. In John seven, Jesus goes to the Feast of Tabernacles, which was symbolic of a new Eden,<sup>1</sup> and He announces that He is the new drink of the world.

John's fourth day follows day four of creation by dealing with light in some way or another. Jesus says He is the light of the world in chapter eight (v. 12) and He heals a blind man in chapter nine.

John's fifth day is in sync with day five of creation, which speaks of the people of God in terms of the animal kingdom. Jesus refers to Himself as the Shepherd and describes the politics of the sheepfold (John 10).

John's sixth day emphasizes all of the many aspects of the sixth day of creation: creation of man, woman, giving of commandments in the form of the cultural mandate, and so forth. Jesus raises up a new man (John 11). He gives new commandments (John 13). He addresses the aloneness need that will be created in the disciples when He departs, analogous to the aloneness need addressed by God the Father on the sixth day of creation (Genesis 2:19). He speaks of the work of cultivation (Genesis 2:15) when He calls His Father the "cultivator," which is the literal translation but most versions translate the Greek, "vinedresser" (John 15). He speaks of overcoming the world and then He prays for rest to come (John 16-17).

John's seventh day of creation closes the book on day seven creation themes. Jesus is betrayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, is judged, and raised from death, just as on day seven of creation Adam and Eve fell, were judged, and raised from death by God's gracious provision. Finally, Jesus provides new rest and peace at the end of the Gospel, concluding the new creation development of the book.

### The Covenant of John

John's Gospel also follows the covenant pattern, which

is not surprising since creation and covenant patterns always conflate: creation is a covenant expression. First, the transcendence theme is presented in the first chapter where Christ is established as the first and new beginning of all things.

Second, Jesus raises up a new hierarchy of representatives, called witnesses, through a series of special encounters: wedding at Cana (John 2), Nicodemus (John 3), woman at the well (John 4), the lame man (John 5), the five thousand (John 6), the converts at the Feast of Tabernacles (John 7), the woman caught in adultery (John 8), the blind man (John 9), the sheep (John 10), Lazarus (John 11-12). Each of these situations develops aspects of the new hierarchy of the New Covenant.

Third, Jesus issues new commandments 'which are not new in the sense of novel, but they are renewed commandments from the Torah. This is the ethics section of the Gospel (John 13-17).

Fourth, Jesus establishes a new oath with the world by receiving the sanctions of His suffering and death (John 18-19), matching the sanctions aspect of the Biblical covenant.

Fifth, Jesus concludes the book by creating new heirs, as He goes to them – instead of having them come to Him as Moses did – at the meal and breathes the Spirit into them (John 20). They become His successors before He departs just as Moses made Joshua his heir. before he died.

Thus, the entire Gospel of John can be analyzed in terms of new creation, the tabernacle (which I did not take time to develop), the Feast of Tabernacles, and the covenant. The Biblical covenant appears all through the Gospel. Certain chapters such as John nine also follow the covenant pattern.

#### Themes of John Nine

This chapter continues the theme of light. One commentator has summarized this well by making a number of contrasts between John eight and nine. He says, "In John 8 we behold Christ as 'the light' exposing the darkness, but in John 9 He communicates sight. In John 8 the Light is despised and rejected; in John 9 He is received and worshiped. In John 8 the Jews are seen stooping down – to pick up stones; in John 9 Christ is seen stooping down – to make anointing clay. In John 8 Christ hides Himself from the Jews; in John 9 He reveals Himself to the blind beggar. In John 8 we have a company in 'whom the Word has no place (v. 37); in John 9 is one who responds promptly to the Word (v. 7). In John 8 Christ, inside the Temple, is called a demoniac (v. 48); in John 9, outside the Temple, He is owned as Lord (v. 36). The central truth of John 8 is the Light testing human responsibility; in John 9 the central truth is God acting in sovereign grace after human responsibility has failed."<sup>2</sup>

John nine offers another aspect of light: sight. It does so through the powerful healing of a blind man. "This is unusual. Blindness is never healed in the Old Testament. Yet, in the New Testament, the Gospels record more cases of blindness being healed than any other affliction. There was one deaf and dumb healed, one sick of the palsy, one sick of a fever, two instances of lepers being healed, three dead raised, but five blind are healed (Matthew 9:27-31; 12:22ff.; 15:30ff.; 21:14; Mark 8:22-26; 10:46-52; Luke 7:21ff.). The closest thing to the healing of a blind person in Acts is when Ananias lays hands on Paul and his temporary blindness disappears.

Blindness appears in the Old Testament as a symbol

of death. The Patriarchs are taken with blindness as they near the end of their lives. Eli, the High Priest, has loss of sight toward the end of his life, which theologically refers to a period of death in the life of Israel.

#### Transcendence: Miracle Six (John 9:1-7)

The miracle at the beginning of the chapter starts on the covenantal emphasis of transcendence. Jesus does a creative work, which distinguishes Him from humanity. He is God for only God could perform such a transcendent act.

This miracle is the sixth of the miracles in John's Gospel, continuing another creation pattern. It matches the sixth day of creation, the day on which man was made. The relationship is obvious. The healing involves putting life in clay to make a man see. On the sixth day of creation, God made man out of the dust of the earth. Specifically, however, the following indicates that this healing is a new creation.

v. 1: As Christ leaves the Temple (8:59), He meets a man blind from "birth" (9:1), implying that his first eyes were like old "ones. At his birth, he was old. Thus, the cured man receives new eyes as though he were born for the first time: a new birth.' Now he is old yet he has new eyes, the eyes of a new person. The blind man becomes a new creation!

Light enables man to see. Without light, he would not be able to do anything. Hence, the chapter begins with a blind beggar outside the Temple. He has very little usefulness in society.. He cannot see. He has no mobility. He has no direction. He has no skill or ability to apply a skill. He is useless.

w. 2-3: A theological question is raised. The disciples assume that this man or his parents have committed some sin that has caused his blindness. They become like Job's accusers (Job 22:5-11): The loss of sight is automatically assumed to be a curse. Yet, Jesus assures' the disciples that sicknesses or defects in the human body are not all a direct result of personal or generational sin. This man has been made blind that the "works of God might be made manifest" (9:3), meaning he had been born blind for such a time as this.

The blind man was born blind for the purpose of being healed, specifically for the purpose of bringing God glory. God gives some people afflictions for this reason. Not all of man's misery is due to his personal or generational sin. I believe that this explains why God sometimes heals, and at other times, He doesn't. As a matter of fact, the blind man does not even exercise faith until after he has been cured (John 9:38). Faith was the result not the cause!

v. 6: Spitting on clay is an act of new creation. Christ mixes moisture from His mouth with dust from the ground to form a new man. This is analogous to breathing life into man at the original creation. It should also be remembered that Christ is the New Temple (John 1:14). Saliva from His mouth would be an image of water flowing from the Temple. These are new life actions.

v. 7: The imagery of this verse is as powerful as the last. The man commanded to "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam," a command that man could not have carried out by himself. Someone would have had to lead or carry the blind man. The action of washing symbolizes cleansing. The blind man's eyes were cleansed by waters that literally mean, "Sent." This pool was given its name at the time of Nehemiah (Nehemiah 3:15; Isaiah 8:6). It flowed from the "Virgin's Pool." The symbolism is powerful: water meaning "Sent One" flowing from a virgin. John calls Christ the Sent One time and again. Thus, the blind man is cleansed by Christ.

The symbolism also points to the reversal of the curse.

2. A. W. Pink, *Exposition of the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, [1948] 1971), pp. 59-60.

Dust had been cursed since the Fall. It alienated man from God, representing man's sin to him. It theologically contaminated man and animal, demonstrated in the clean/unclean laws pertaining to animals. Any creature in the animal kingdom that did not have something between it and the dust, such as scales or hooves (a form of shoes), was considered unclean. In the miracle of the blind man, Christ transforms the dust with His spittle. He turns an object of curse into one of blessing. By putting His moisture into the dust, it becomes the means for the restoration of sight.

### Meaning of Miracle Six

The blind man represents Israel's condition. Israel was to be the light for God, a witness to the Gentiles. Instead, it was blind, as this passage will develop. It cannot recognize the Messiah. It is blind like Samson of old. It needs new eyes. Only Christ can provide this sight because He is the true Light of the world!

As we have seen in the previous miracles, these wonders are more than simple proofs of Christ's Deity. They are. For example, this miracle teaches the omnipresence of Christ. He sees everything because He is everywhere.

Each miracle also teaches the Death, Resurrection, and Ascension (Transformation of the world) of Christ. These aspects are just as important.

First, can you see the message of death in this passage? The blind man is theologically dead in that he has no sight. One of the characteristics of a dead man is that his eyes are open (unless someone closes them), yet he does not see. Death appears in another way. Christ covers the dead man's eyes with dirt. This is a form of burial. Yet, Christ's dirt has His saliva in it. By being covered with Christ's moistened soil, the blind man's condition is changed.

Second, can you see the Resurrection in this passage? The blind man is also theologically raised from the dead. He is sent to waters and told to wash. As he comes away from the waters that are applied to his head, he is raised up. Coming away from the waters is Resurrection: Noah and his family came away from the Flood; Israel came away from the Red Sea; Christ came away from the Jordan.

Resurrection also appears in that his previous condition had rendered him immobile. He would have sat or laid on the ground to beg, if he did this activity for any period of time. When Christ healed him, he was able to walk and move.

Third, can you see the Ascension or the transformation of the world in this miracle? There is a twofold effect of transformation having to do with the new eyes. Christ enables man to see God and the world to be seen. Man without Christ cannot truly see the world for what it is and as it is. He either sees the world as something to be raped or he deifies/humanizes it. Animals such as dolphins and whales take on the status of humanity. A century ago, they were considered gods by pantheists.

Also, man is given ability to see God at work in the world. Man can see providence and common grace. The Bible does not teach that man can be an atheist. Rather, it teaches idolatry as man's alternative to believing in God. So man sees God carrying out His redemptive purposes with new sight instead of some other power carrying out his (her?) will.

The practical result of the transforming effect of new eyes is a new outlook on life. Jesus says, "If your eye is clear your body is full of light" (Matthew 5:22-23). Christians have a different outlook on their world, family, children, future and so forth.

### Hierarchy: Validation before Representatives (9:8-23)

After the miracle, the healed man is brought before the

covenantal representatives of Israel: neighbors, Pharisees, and parents. In some way or another, each denies the miracle which is to deny the new Suzerain of the covenant.

The remainder of the chapter also verifies the miracle by following the process of detecting leprosy in the Old Testament (Leviticus 13), which was also a process of allowing the hierarchical authorities to make a judgment.

If a person were suspected of leprosy, his neighbors would go to the priests and tell them. The priests would come and examine the places on the body of the person. They would wait one sabbatic period, seven days. If there was still question, they would pass judgment for another seven days. If after two sabbatic cycles the man was considered leprosy, the priests would put him out, for a leper was not allowed to remain among the covenant people (Leviticus 22:4).

This process of two sabbatic evaluations after being turned over by the neighbors is followed in John nine. Notice the progression of the chapter. The neighbors question the man (John 9:9-12). They bring him to the Pharisees for the first interrogation (9:13-23). The Pharisees question him a second time, finding him guilty of false teaching (9:24-34). They then excommunicate him.

The fact that the Pharisees used the pattern of detecting leprosy explains aspects related to the eyes.

First, blindness is a form of leprosy. This disease in the Bible is an affliction of the flesh. The flesh in Scripture involves the inner man, the heart. It is the clothing between the world and the heart. It is the way to the heart; corrupt it and the heart will also be corrupted. If something happens to the skin, such as becoming contaminated by a leprosy infection, it leads to corruption of the inner man according to the imagery. Thus, disease or blindness of the eyes indicated a defiled inner man, as Jesus says, "The lamp of the body is the eye; if therefore your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness." (Matthew 6:22-23).

Second, if the eyes are part of the flesh, connecting to the heart, they are blinded often in Scripture as a judgment to protect, as much as to punish. For example, Samson was the "eyes" of Israel; since the eyes are in the head, they also symbolize leadership. When he broke his covenant with God through Delilah, he jeopardized his entire walk with God as well as the whole civilization, his heart and the heart of the nation. God judged him with blindness. As a result, Samson turned back to God, his heart being protected and Israel was saved. Blinding the eye protects the heart. Jesus even says to "pluck out the eye" if it offends the body.

Third, the action of the Pharisees proves their own blindness. If they excommunicated someone who can see, they are the ones who are blind. They are the ones who need to be healed. They are the ones who need a deliverer because they are the real beggars, explaining why their leaders catered to Rome. But they throw out the one who has been given sight, the only one who can lead them in their state of blindness to Christ. They in a sense shoot their own seeing eye dog!

Fourth, the action of the Pharisees proves their own leprosy. They have unclean flesh. They also have unclean hearts on the basis of Christ's statements. Moreover, they are the lepers removing the clean flesh from their midst. Isn't this what they did to Christ? They cast out Christ and treated Him as a leper when they were the unclean ones. Pilate tried to wash his hands as Naaman the leper had done (1 Kings 5), but he couldn't remove the guilt. Naaman washed in the waters of Jordan, symbolizing the covenantal waters of God. The Jordan was the first place where the covenant was cut. The waters were "rolled back," as

the text says in circumcision language, for the people to walk across. The land was circumcised and brought into the covenant. After the people crossed, a memorial was established for Naaman. To wash in these waters meant entrance into the covenant. But when Pilate washed his hands, he was using defiled waters from the Jordan or the land of Israel. He could not be like Naaman who honored and obeyed his prophet. He instead killed the Prophet and treated Christ as a leper. Why? Because he himself was the leper like the people of Israel. The lepers killed the One who could heal them. Pilate and the people did this to Christ because they were blind.

The healing of the blind man should have been a warning to the Jews. It wasn't because they were totally blind and leprous, as the passage indicates. It did show that Christ, however, is the One with true, clean eyes.

### The Neighbors (9:8-12)

v. 8: The "neighbors" begin to ask questions about the man. The role of the neighbor is a covenantal one in a Biblical society. The neighbor is a brother in the covenant, so there are specific responsibilities. His property is protected. But members of the covenant community have an obligation to report anything that would jeopardize the covenant. They would obviously turn in a leper because his condition affects everyone and everything around him; remember, Biblical leprosy could infect the walls of the house (Leviticus 14:33-53).

v. 9: These neighbors are portrayed as bad neighbors. They don't know who this man is. In a close society, their ignorance is quite a profound statement. They have no regard for man. In fact, this becomes quite obvious in the text. They should be rejoicing over his healing.

v. 12: Instead of rejoicing, the neighbors only want to know where Jesus is. So, they turn him over to the authorities.

### First Sabbath Interrogation (9:13-23)

v. 16: The Pharisees' initial response is similar to the people. They were not rejoicing over the fact that this man was healed, specifically cleansed. Their first concern is over sabbath breaking.

v. 17: The next issue raised by the Pharisees moves in the direction of Christ. Their logic is: "This couldn't be true because sinful men can't make blind people see." The premise of their logic was correct but they came to the wrong conclusion. No amount of evidence or logic can convince a blind Pharisee. Van Til calls this the "bottomless pit phenomenon." Try to convince the unbeliever by endless facts and they keep falling into the "bottomless pit," meaning something else has to change, namely the heart, before a person properly applies the facts.

vv. 18-23: The logic of the Pharisees shifts back to denial that this man is who he says he is. He is an imposter. To prove their new premise, they call the parents. They place the man's parents, his family, in the position of condemning him. If they said he was their son, he would be thrown out of the synagogue (v. 22). They would indirectly be acknowledging Jesus as the Christ because the

Pharisees had already said, "No sinful man can make blind people see" (v. 16). Admission that this man is their son would also be an admission that he was really healed and that he had been healed by a sinless Person.

### Ethics: Rejection of Moses (9:24-34)

A second time the healed man is brought to the Pharisees. This time, the law of Moses is emphasized in the text (v. 28), paralleling the ethics theme of the Biblical covenant. The Pharisees violate the law with faulty reasoning and they wrongfully excommunicate him.

v. 24: The following interrogation proves the Pharisees are really after Christ for the wrong reason. They try to force a false confession out the man's mouth in the name of a religious action, "Give glory to God."

v. 27: The Pharisees ask to hear how the man was healed. The man exposes them with his response. He questions their motives for asking. He asks if they want to know so that they can become Christ's disciples "too."

The "too" implies that the man had become a disciple, a follower of Christ. Yet, he does not believe until later. This implies layers of disciples among Christ's followers. There are those who follow but who don't believe (yet or maybe never). There are those who believe but who are not part of the twelve. There are those who are the twelve. Then there are those who are part of the circle nearest Christ, the three: James, John, and Peter.

v. 31: The Pharisees say, "God does not hear sinners." This is a distortion. If God does not hear a sinner then how could anyone convert? For that matter, how could anyone be heard by God, since man's sin is not eradicated. The Pharisees' statement reveals the worst theology. They imply that man can reach a state of sinless perfection. And, they indicate that they have reached that state, since they are the ones whom God hears. The correct statement is that God sometimes does not answer the prayer of the unbeliever. At other times, however, God may give the unbeliever exactly what he wants as a judgment!

### Oath: New Ruling (9:35-39)

vv. 35-39: Jesus admits the man into His temple, the Body of Christ, the Church, making a new judgment, which is the theme of the oath segment of the Biblical covenant. He finds the man after he has been excommunicated. He leads him to faith. He explains the healing, but most of all, He ushers the man into a better Temple. He ratifies a new covenant with him.

### Succession: Disinheritance of 'False Heirs (9:40-41)

vv. 40-41: Christ condemns the Pharisees. He exposes them as sinners, essentially disqualifying them as heirs of the covenant. This is a gracious act for to confront their sin is to take the first step in leading them to Himself. Christ does not cast them out of the covenant community, however, as they had done to the healed man. Their excommunication would come later. The content of the final section of the chapter, therefore, matches the major theme of the final section of the Biblical covenant: succession of the righteous, disqualification of the false heirs.