

Lesson 15: Unit 2 summary

We have, in our last two units, studied the origin of sin in the universe and on this planet. Then we've studied God's plan to save humanity from sin. And we have seen how God's character of love has determined everything he has done in response to sin in his universe. We have seen how God often took a more difficult, expensive route because to do otherwise would have conflicted with love.

We also learned that in order to understand God's plan to fix humanity we had to know what was wrong. We learned that sin is the fear and selfishness that replaced love in the hearts of Adam and Eve once they no longer trusted God. Since the problem was a lack of trust in God, brought about by believing Satan's lies about God's character, the solution was to reveal the truth about God and restore the trust Adam and Eve lost.

Once we trust God, we will give him permission to apply the remedy to our sinful condition, a new character that matches the human character Jesus perfected when he lived and died as a human. Only if he has our permission can God fix our hearts without “creating” a different individual.

Many have speculated about why Satan does so much to try to stop people from being saved. Some have even speculated that Satan gets punished longer for every person who is saved, so he wants as many to be lost as possible to shorten his sentence. But that would make Satan our sin-bearer, so that idea has problems.

A more likely explanation is that Satan hates Jesus. As people are saved they begin to look more and more like Jesus. Satan doesn't want people to become like Jesus because he hates Jesus, so he does what he can to prevent people from coming to God and being saved. But it's also possible that Satan does these things because it has become his nature to do so. He is as trapped by his sin as we humans are. He doesn't do what he wants, he does what the sin inside him compels him to do.

To conclude this unit we'd like to examine one more detail about the “new covenant” mentioned in Jeremiah and in Hebrews. Understand that the “new” covenant is really how people were saved from Adam and Eve down to our day, making it in reality older than the so-called “old covenant.” But in the New Testament time the way the Jews had done things for centuries was old, while Jesus and his teaching were new to them. Here's a fuller quotation of the passage:

“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 broke my covenant,
though I was a husband to 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 it on their hearts.

I will be their God,
and they will be my people.
No longer will a man teach his neighbor,
or a man his brother, saying 'Know the LORD,'
because they will all know me,
from the least of them to the greatest,"
declares the LORD.
"For I will forgive their wickedness
and will remember their sins no more." (Jeremiah 31:31-34)

Notice that this passage specifically mentions the covenant that involved the ten commandments. The author of Hebrews makes an interesting observation about this "old" covenant.

But the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which is a mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises. (Hebrews 8:6)

What promises were there in the old covenant?

"Everything the LORD has said we will do." "Will will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey." (Exodus 24:3, 7)

Who said these things? The people; the children of Israel; the ones to whom God has spoken the ten commandments. We know they didn't do everything God had said, for less than a year later they had made a golden calf to worship, in direct violation of the second commandment. So were they lying when they made these promises? No.

Recall what we said about the deceitfulness of the human heart? The people wanted to do what God had told them to do. They believed these were good things to do. But when things got to be difficult they fell back on the things they were familiar with; the things they thought had worked in the past. One writer put it this way, their promises were like "ropes of sand."

Human promises aren't very good because humans aren't very good at knowing their hearts and therefore don't know what they're going to do in the future. No matter how much they may want to do the right things, the fear and selfishness that are part of their makeup drive them to break those promises.

But the new covenant isn't based on human promises. Repeatedly the LORD says "I will..." God is love and part of love is faithfulness. When God promises to do something nothing can stop him. Nothing, that is, except our own choice, for we have already seen that God cannot change us without our permission, something we can withdraw at any time. That's how we are to understand the following promise:

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:37-39)

The only thing that can separate us from God's love is our own choice. That's how the new covenant is based on better promises. It's based on God's promises, not our own.

Further Study:

Read Ezekiel 37:1-14, the vision of the valley of dry bones. Discuss how this story demonstrates the new covenant.

Read Romans 5:9-11. Paul seems to divide salvation into two matters, justification and salvation, or reconciliation and salvation (NIV). According to Paul, which is easier for God.? What do you think he means? Does the theme of the rest of the chapter (vss. 12-21) help you understand?