

K-485 Covenant Keeping (1 of 3)

by Art Katz

Art Katz emphasizes the importance of covenant keeping through personal accountability, understanding grace, and the significance of the Sabbath in a believer's life.

Duration: 37:00

Scripture: Exodus 20:8, Exodus 31:18, Matthew 6:33, Luke 14:33, Romans 8:1, Romans 8:4, Hebrews 4:9

Topics: "Covenant Keeping"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker expresses his concern about the passive nature of the church and the lack of engagement from its members. He shares an example of a church that distributed study outlines for personal Bible study at every level, which helped the congregation to actively participate and apply the teachings in their lives. The speaker suggests that God's dealing with Israel is a reiteration of the same themes of sin, judgment, and resurrection that humanity needs to learn from. He emphasizes the importance of understanding and observing God's provisions, even in the face of opposition, as it brings honor to God.

Transcript

You know what the word terse means? T-E-R-S-E? To be compact and to be able to express yourself without proliferation of words. I don't know if I've ever recovered from being a high school teacher and having to wade my way through long pages of nothing. It's deadening to the senses.

So to be explicit and clear and have your words well chosen and that they express and convey meaning is no small thing. And you don't come to that by pulling off a log. You have to write and rewrite and it will do you good.

The world of good. Because something is happening. Habits of mind and you're breaking into the power of slosh and indifference.

My great lament and complaint about the Church is that it does not require enough of its people. This passive sitting and this nodding in agreement with a sermon going home and to the ballgame and forgetting it has left us dull. And I said to someone, I only know of one fellowship for 30 years where they would distribute an outline for personal Bible study at every level.

The adults would have their level and the children their level over the same subject. And then it was related to the sermon that would come on Sunday and then they had to answer questions with regard to that in the light of the study they had already been doing. And their papers would be submitted to their group leader like their cell group, their home group.

And in it if he would pick up any personal problem then he would see that person and talk about it and help him pray with them. But that people was growing. Tremendous.

And so if those things are not required of you, why not voluntarily embrace them? Why wait for an assignment? Why not give yourself one? And say, Art, I've been thinking about this subject that had come up in class but we went on and didn't devote too much time. But it had really intrigued me and I've been working on it and I'd like for you to evaluate these three pages I've written on this subject. Boy, would I be blessed.

So if you want an A for the day, voluntarily give yourself an assignment. And continue. Make it a lifelong practice.

I wrote these papers without any thought that they would necessarily be used at the prophetic school. But God will get his value out of your work and you will grow in the process. So any questions about anything? Okay.

And look at the precious publisher you're going to have if you're working as a team. Yeah, all those questions. Okay, picking up from yesterday, the consequences of the neglect or the rejection of covenant.

Just as a thought in passing, why would anyone want to reject covenant anyway? Seeing that the consequence of rejection or neglect is curse. Why shouldn't this be as easily kept, as easily forgotten? But no one has mentioned what seems to me the most simple and most elementary aspect of the failure to keep covenant or to keep the law. Namely, that it's difficult to do what God asks.

Thou shalt not. Thou shalt. How about keeping the Sabbath? Is that the fourth commandment? Supposing that that were required of us, as non-Jewish believers, that having come into the spiritual commonwealth of Israel and under the requirements of God to the people of God, the Israel of God, that we also were enjoined to keep the Sabbath, how much of a snap would that be? Especially on the explicit day that God has chosen, the Sabbath day, Saturday, the day you were going to go fishing, or that your wife was going to do the wash, or the family was going to go out for the thing that you needed to wait for the week to end and wanted to do.

And God says, Thou shalt not. Thou shalt keep my Sabbath. I've given you my Sabbath that you might keep it or observe to do it.

How many of us would succeed if it meant a restriction on the way in which we thought that that day should be spent? And Isaiah says, the prophet defines the Sabbath resisting from seeking your own pleasure and doing your own thing and speaking your own words on the Lord's Day. Think of that. Can you do that for a day? Now, we have only to attend church for an hour or two.

But imagine keeping a day for the Lord in which you resist from seeking your own pleasure in an entire day. Imagine if an entire people could keep that. What a visible testimony to the unbelieving world around us that there's an invisible God who is so regarded and so esteemed by those who believe Him and love Him that they are visibly keeping themselves away from necessary work and pleasure and sacrificing an

entire day doing nothing.

These people must be mad or there must really be a God whom they are honoring at their own visible cost. So, what do you think? We've gotten off easy. We're not under the law, we're under grace.

Has God dismissed the requirements of the law? Not one jot, but the whole thing. I think it's fair to say that the word grace to the generality of Christians means to be absolved from the obligation to fulfill the requirements of God. Is that a proper definition? No.

Is grace something freely given by God by which those requirements can be fulfilled? Amen. That's it. What's the key verse in Romans that really hits this right on? Where the law might be fulfilled not by religious well-meaning intention or legalistic requirement, but by a grace, by the spirit of the law of liberty in Christ Jesus.

That the righteousness of the law might now be dismissed from any requirement by those who are believers. It doesn't say that, but that's the way the church carries on. That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit.

I really wanted to make the point that covenant breaking, the failure to keep the requirements of God, is the statement of a people who don't want to pay the cost of discipleship, that obedience is costly, it's sacrificial, the flesh shrinks from it, even though it's told that the consequence is self-addressed, that there's a curse for failure to keep it. You think of Israel's initial enthusiasm, we will fulfill, and they even committed to generations yet unborn to the same covenant. There's a confession, a national confession, that hasn't cost us much.

If you're not familiar with that text in Genesis 15, that the covenant was Abraham, and the terror of the dark that came, and the sleep, and the covenant maker walking between the pieces with the lamp, and that's charged with such symbolism and significance about the genius of covenant, and the God who gives it, what Karl Barthes, the heart of Karl Barthes as a theologian, is his hatred of religion. His divine hatred, the godly hatred of religion, sounds like a contradiction in terms, comes to give you life, and that more abundantly. So for example, there's a religious way in which the law can be kept, and Orthodox Jews have been very proud of the way in which they have kept it, but when you say that God has lessened the requirement or enlarged and deepened it in the New Testament faith, the latter.

It's much easier to keep the Sabbath if it's rabbinically defined. You can walk only this far, and you can do only this, you avoid conspicuous work, you attend the synagogue. What would be the New Testament definition of observing the Sabbath in order to keep it? It's not defined by rabbis, or the Biblical Council.

It's not even defined by Scripture. How is it defined? You desist from seeking your own pleasure, speaking your own words. So whose pleasure are you doing? Whose words are you speaking? How do you know that? How do you find that? To come into that rest is to cease from yourself.

Just to nail this a little bit. If we are really keeping a spiritual Sabbath, not by law, but by the Spirit, would any two of us be keeping it and observing it in exactly the same way at the same time? How come? Because what is the Lord's pleasure for you, on his day, and his pleasure for me? What if his pleasure is to go on a picnic, or to go fishing? Would you be violating the Sabbath, or keeping it? No, I hear what you're saying. But that puts the premium on what? If you're religious, there's no way that you can even begin to enter such a dimension.

It puts the premium on a sensitivity to God by the Spirit, by those who come before him with an earnestness and say, Lord, what would you have for me to do? That's entering into his rest, which is much more demanding than just following a religious prescription. You cannot keep that Sabbath without a true knowledge of God. Whereas if it's a matter of religious ordinance, of external obligation, you can pull it off, and applaud yourself and be proud of it, and even distance yourself from God in the name of God.

God's ultimate purpose is having learned from the seventh day the way of God and the way of rest by trusting in him, and not living from our own strength, but his. That would be the pattern for all of our days. In fact, the millennium is called the Sabbath.

It's the seventh millennial day in which the believers enter into a millennial rest and cease from themselves eternally. So the Sabbath is a significant model for God's eternal future. A good picture is how Moses received the law.

Come unto me and be there, and I will give you the tablets of the law which I have written that you might do them, or teach them. So God, in the very first instance, predicates the knowledge of the law and the teaching of the law, which is to say also the keeping of the law, on the basis of relationship with himself. First, come up to me and be there, and I will give you.

If you reverse that pattern and seek to appropriate the tablets of the law independent of their relationship, you've got plastic, rather than something written by the finger of God. So, again, the first instance is telling. You need to fancy with the paradigm, the pattern, the model that God gives and how Moses himself received the law, out of relationship.

Because it's out of that relationship by which he received the law that he received the enablement for the fulfillment of the law. And to sever that connection is to make you only legalistic and religious. A Christian organization in England, this issue is devoted to church apostasy, and one of the first questions that they take up is the substitution of Sunday for Saturday in the observance of God's day, which they call a deviation at the beginning of apostasy introduced by Constantine when the Holy Roman Church was established by him.

And they moved away from Jewish practices and substituted pagan innovations. The Sunday, the worship of sun and other nature pagan practices that were put in the place of Jewish things, just to consciously move away. And if that's true, and I think it is, that part of the restoration are the things that have been lost by the introduction of those deviations.

Maybe that God is wanting, I don't want to make this an issue here, but the restoration of Sabbath as a seventh day that God himself has sanctified and set apart and implied a particular blessing on that day that has been lost to the church for its ignorant dismissal of it as being only Jewish. So this is moving in a direction I didn't intend, but my only thought was just to remind us the penalty that has come to Israel for the failure to keep covenant and that keeping of it requires an extraordinary relationship with the Lord. Even today, among observant Jews in Israel, a way in which the requirements of the law can be maintained outside of relationship with God is through technology.

They have devices electronically that turn the lights on and off that give them all the advantages of things that they need in their kibbutz senior agricultural communities but which they don't personally perform and therefore they're saved from the violation, technically, of the letter of the Sabbath by the use of technological innovation. For example, on the seventh year your fields are supposed to lay fallow. Well,

how do you do that and maintain your economy in a competitive society? And the answer is that you legally sell your fields to neighboring gentiles.

They work it out with the local Arabs and then they continue to operate it but it's not theirs. So they have not been doing their land. They found a legal loophole and feel completely confident that somehow this is God's army.

So how deformed is that thing? They miss the spirit of it. It's just remarkable when you contrast it with what God's intention really is through his ordinance and his requirements. In fact, it's not an exaggeration to say that everything that God has given by way of ordinance or law or requirement has this as its end.

To bring the true believer into the intimate knowledge of himself. To make clear the desperate need of God as reality and not as concept in order to fulfill what he's required. The Sabbath is given for man God says.

Because somehow in putting God first our own humanity is benefited and established. And look what's happened with the loss of the Sabbath and subsequently the loss even of Sunday. Businesses open seven days a week and the whole frenzy of the world continues unabated even on the Sunday that we are purportedly to observe as the worst day.

In fact, they become more frenetic and more harried and more full of frenzy and coming and going and buying and spending. The parking lots are more filled on the weekends than on the weekdays. So in effect, everything has been lost.

But where is there a witness, people who are Sabbath keepers and will visibly exhibit to the unbelieving world a sensation from their labor, from their activity, even when it costs them something by not doing it. I think one of the finest expressions of the faith that I've ever encountered was in Milan, Italy by a group of Italian Seventh-day Adventists who had come into the baptism of the Holy Spirit. And they had the advantages of both.

This thing that has been written into their life through their Seventh-day Adventist experience and background and the blessedness of the Holy Spirit, they were precious. And they told me what it has cost them in Italy to keep their Seventh-day. Because in Europe, kids go to school on Saturday.

Their kids were not allowed to go. And somehow God gave them such a grace that the school authorities worked it out in a way to compensate for the absence of the kids on that day. One man was telling me he worked for an airline and he had to tell his employer, I cannot work on Saturday.

And instead of being fired or not being hired, he was respected all the more and some adjustment was made by which he had that time off and made up for it another way. So the kingdom suffers violence and the violent take it by force, though the world conspire against it. Though the world is too busy, though there's never any time to shut down, those that will do it and obey and observe, God will honor and God will be honored by that observation.

Well, those who are listening to this tape, this doesn't count. This is a digression that we didn't intend, but we leave it with you for whatever value. The point is, keeping the law, keeping covenant is an exacting requirement that can only be performed consistently out of a relationship with God as really known and loved.

One of the requirements of the covenant was the treating of the stranger in your midst, the alien who is in the land. And you were once aliens in Egypt and now you're to treat the alien in the land, the stranger who is with you in your midst, as you would treat yourself. If that's a covenant requirement, then maybe the heart of a covenant requirement that when you drift from covenant, the first thing that you will fail in and most violently profane is how you treat the alien in your midst.

In fact, I'm very fond of saying that the measure of any nation and any people is how the weak and the defenseless are treated in their midst. What we do with the defenseless and the weak is what we are. And if that's true, you can draw your own conclusions about what Arabs and what the Palestinians have experienced at the hands of Israelis presently and in recent times as being covenant failure.

And covenant failure always invokes a curse so that Israel is living on a powder keg that could go off at any time. I want to take up the subject of the continuity of a judgment. When is a nation absolved from its covenant obligation? And the question of whether present Jews are still under covenant obligation under the indictment of failure.

What has happened to nullify the validity of covenant? How is Israel now more qualified for what was rejected then? What has changed in the character of the nation that was cast into exile for covenant failure than the nation that exists now? Understand what I'm asking? So there's a timelessness to judgments that the modern mind cannot grasp. To think that God would still judge on the basis of covenant obligation lies in the face of modern thinking. But a God who requires and a God who will judge for failure and judge violently is totally out of keeping with the modern mindset.

Maybe nothing more reveals the contradiction between the modern mind and God's timeless biblical requirement than the issue of covenant. What assured ancient Israel that somehow these judgments would not fall? That though the curse was clear and written in Deuteronomy and Leviticus, somehow in their deepest part, even though the games were being played with God and their hearts were far from Him, they did not expect the fulfillment of the curse that resulted in the destruction of Jerusalem, the nation, and their expulsion from the nation? Why is it that the thought about a modern mind, maybe this is a mentality that's as old as man, that somehow this shall not come upon us? There's a phrase that I use called the inviolability of Zion, where something is so horrible that we cannot consider it as a possibility, though God has said so. How can He destroy what He Himself has given? How can He allow the holy city to be destroyed and the sanctuary to be destroyed? They are inviolable.

Yet, nevertheless, what happened? They were destroyed. And what would be today's inviolability of Zion when today's Israeli or Jewish person, or even a sympathetic church person, would say, present Israel is not going to suffer again another expulsion and another exile. God would never do that again.

That something is inviolable, given of God, that He would not allow the story to be a contradiction. Maybe the nation itself? There was great instruction intended by God in the sending of a son to die. And the failure to understand the divine logic, which can only be understood in proportion to our understanding of sin and judgment and righteousness, we then have had to experience historically the same issues work out in our whole national destiny.

So maybe God's final dealing with Israel is a reiteration again of the same great themes, sin and judgment and resurrection, that we have to learn through the painful experience of an entire nation, to which only a fragment will survive because we have failed to understand it in the provision of God itself, in the sending of this remarkable one. If you've heard me say this work here, the book by Meyer, it's a book of works,

F.D. Meyer on Abraham. This memorable sentence, it almost leaked off the page when I read it.

Abraham, knowing the terror of sin, P-E-R-R-O-R, rose up early in the morning and saddled his ass, cut the wood and took Isaac and made of him a sacrifice. Notice he never quibbled with God. He never said how come or why are you requiring me to take my son that I love.

Knowing the terror of sin, there was some instinctive and intuitive depth of knowledge in Abraham as the friend of God, even though he may not have been conscious of personal defection or boo-boos or failures, but of iniquity being breathed in and breathed out. Have you ever played that? Though you're not conscious of any personal violation, you didn't rape anyone today, you haven't lied or stolen, but your iniquity is ever before you. You're breathing it in and breathing it out.

It's with your humanity, you cannot escape it. Knowing the terror of sin, he rose up early in the morning, no questions asked, and he knew that sacrifice had something to do with the requiting of sin. Well, this is a knowledge that we don't have.

We don't even have it as believers who have been saved from sin, let alone an Israel who is yet on the other side of the tail. This consciousness of sin, covenant, law, requiting, the righteousness of God, failure to keep, has not sufficiently been registered in our souls, and for that reason we have not been oracles of God to the nation. We have instead given a false comfort and placated and patted them on the back and encouraged them to go on, but have not brought the true comfort, which is to tell Jacob their transgression and Israel their sins.

Because you can only be told by priests. Remember what we said this morning? Only by identification, not some fiction, some fictitious thing that we put on as an affectation to show, yes, I'll take my shoes off if I identify with Israel in their transgression, but a real heartfelt, and I've not come to it, a real heartfelt anguish, that as Daniel, when Daniel prayed and identified himself with the sins of the nation, he was not just praying officiously, like, I know that I should really identify, so therefore I'm saying that he was identified. For him it was true, and that's why when the angel came and said, from the moment that your prayer went up, God heard.

The only reason that the answer was deferred is that the principality of Greece held me back the moment that your prayer went up. Because God instantly heard a true priestly identification. And maybe therefore the whole issue of Israel is really the issue of the church.

Our recognition, our heartbroken recognition, and that we can speak a word that is convicting, not out of condemnation, this critical spirit of the people who are failing, but as people who have failed and do fail. And see ourselves, like Paul, as the chief of sinners. That was not just Paul's statement of his earlier life, that was his continuing and present life.

You want an A for the day? How does a chief apostle, who is the very epitome of holiness, calling the church to blamelessness that they might be found without blame on the day of the Lord's appearing, see himself as the chief sinner? How come he knows it wouldn't leave? Because he was a murderer at the beginning. I don't want to give you guys the answer. It'll be your answer when you can lay hold of this and express it.

And this is a great question. It's not only Paul's question, it's our question. Because until we come to Paul's place, we are not apostolic, and we have no apostolic ministry.

It's critical that in order to be that kind of power in the world, we need to see ourselves as the chief of sinners. We've got to settle this, guys. This is critical, or we will condemn ourselves to a lifelong superficiality and be cut off from being of any apostolic use to God.

Remember what I said about this American preacher at that Ukrainian messianic congregation? It was painful to hear him there. My God, I wanted to put my fingers in my ears and run out. And yet every word he was saying could not be faulted doctrinally or scripturally.

And he was speaking about sin and the pungent in the blood. And yet it was excruciating to hear him because we would never have been brought to the consideration of this kind about our own understanding on the issues of guilt and sin except that it had come up in the context of Israel. And that we are not fitted to be God's article to that people if we are still in a place of superior disdain and don't see ourselves as a chief of sinners.

I think when the day of the Revelation comes, God will show the Church that its sins in every way are comparable and equal to those of Israel. In fact, in the light of what we're seeing, it's hard to conceive that the two foundational Apostles of the Church, Peter and Paul, could have been that without first having been either a murderer or having denied the world three times before the Copts. That this is somehow essential and necessary if there to be foundation of the world of Church.

Only out of the brokenness of an experienced profound failure of even your best intentions. Though all the world deny you, yet will I deny you never. And then right on that, before that echo has even dissipated, comes the denial.

I wonder though Paul speaks of the great falling away if that's not the preliminary to the great resurrection. That the great falling away is not a permanent and enduring and eternal falling away, but a necessary preliminary in shame and scandal and flight from God because of the difficulties of the last days and not wanting to be believers under such circumstances. To see our abject failure and then to recognize that the only basis is His life and to come into it in trying to be a last days modern people and earn the crown and to ascend to our glory.

That only a resurrected son of man can speak a word of resurrection to raise the dead nation. It's not that Israel had to die, that was the offense, but that the Church had to die in order to be to Israel the life-giving instrument that has brought more recoil and more backlash and more rejection from any message that I have ever before spoken because it pinches the Church and makes it to consider that there's the prospect of death its own death before Israel's in order. Can you see the genius of God in this? That's the issue of Israel that brings us to our own crisis.

We would not have come to the crisis if betrayal were not except for the issues presented to us by the nation in its final extremity as was presented to the disciples by Jesus in His final extremity when they forsook Him and fled. It's a reiteration, it's a reenactment again of a final drama and evidently it's no shortcut. The disciples could never have seen their condition.

They really believed it when they said, though all the world deny you, yet will we deny another. They said, we have to die and believed it until the night of terror came. That stark thing, you don't have a word for it, you know you can talk about something theoretically but when men come with their torches and their Roman authorities and apprehend and lay their hands on and all of a sudden the light goes out from you and you flee.

Why was I driven to an anguish of soul listening to that preacher in that Messianic congregation of Teal saying all the right things because he had never passed good in his own experience. He did not know sin as the chief of sinners and here he's giving us palaver about sin and atonement. It was lifeless because it was not the word of truth in his mouth.

So, no greater danger than just the convenience of subscribing to the things that are merely doctrinally correct. For God to spit out on the beach of the church men who have been swallowed up in the belly of the whale for three days have rotted and corrupted in the digestive system of that beast and are spit out on the beach as men of the resurrection whose very appearance let alone their word compels people to repentance. In other words, that God will send people into the church who are a fragrance of life unto life for some and death unto death for others.

The church needs to see the reality to which they were ultimately brought. They need a model of other possibilities than what they have known. They've been fixed at a verbal, abstract, generalizing level and have not seen the actuality.

And that's what they model with Jesus. His authority. You don't speak as one of the scribes if you have an authority.

And that kind of authority is not cheaply obtained. So the cross is always at the center and how critical that there will be a remnant who have embraced it and can appeal to the shallow and the nominal who also come in this way and be saved from the other crisis that will compel them to see their defeat and their death. That experience with Peter, I mean who has a word to describe the mortification when Jesus came out blood running down his head bashed and kept up through the night and knocked from pillar to post and naked and derided and comes out and looks at the man who has denied him three times.

What a look that must have been. That must have been devastating to the soul. Despite his loud profession that he would never deny him.

Talk about repentance and breaking and death. And all of that to prepare him to be emptied out of all of his Peter-like presumption and haughtiness and arrogance that he could wait like a dead man for ten days in that room until life would come. That's the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

Anything else and other than that that is called that by the charismatic movement I think is largely a fraud. We have not been profoundly enough emptied that we might be profoundly filled. And we need to see ourselves as betrayers of God.

You know a question that I most frequently hear from my own Jewish counsel? What do you mean saved? Saved from what? It's the very grace of God to show us what we need to be saved from. Because we will not see it in this life we'll see it on the day of eternity when it cannot be remedied. And we carry those sins and oppositions to God into eternity.

Eternal things hanging in the balance. Entire nation at stake. And through that nation other nations are restored.

Israel is God's key to the restoration of the nations.

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