

## **Good News for Broken Church Camp Commitments** **by Chelsea Kingston Erickson**

Have you ever made a promise to change yourself or committed to become a better person? Maybe even this summer you've had a mountaintop experience at camp or on a youth group trip, and as a result you've pledged to live differently.

I vividly remember one such promise from the summer after my sophomore year of high school. My experience at church camp had made a big impression on me, and I wrote in my journal, "This year is going to be different. This year I'm going to be the best student, the best daughter, the best sister, the best friend, and the best Christian."

I shudder when I think about those lofty promises I made to myself—because I know the story of the year that followed. As much as I *wanted* to obey Jesus in all areas of my life, I fell painfully short.

The people of Israel had a similar story. God made a covenant with them, which is an ancient way of saying that he pledged his commitment to be their God. As part of the arrangement, God gave the people commands to obey. When the people received God's law, they were on something of a summer camp high, and they made a promise they couldn't keep.

*"All the words that the Lord has spoken we will do"* (Ex. 24:3; cf. 19:8).

You probably know that Israel didn't even come close to doing all the Lord had said. They failed and failed again to uphold their part of the covenant.

If you are at all like Israel and you've ever tried to change yourself and failed, the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah has good news for you:

*For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, "Know the Lord," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.* (Jeremiah 31:33-34).

Jeremiah brought God's words to God's people after they had tried and failed for centuries to obey the covenantal law. God's law was once etched on tablets of stone (Ex. 24:12), but God made a promise that one day he would make a new covenant in Jesus, forgiving sin and writing the law on the hearts of his people.

You see, God knows the effect this broken world has on our hearts. He knows that in our sin, we are not able to keep the law. So he promised to come and do for us what we can't do for ourselves. God's promise to write the law on the hearts of his people is his communicating, "You can't measure up on your own, but I will do the thing *in you*." God sent Jesus to live the perfect life we have failed to live and to die and rise again in our place. Our new relationship with God means that his law is in us; it's on our hearts.

Years later, the apostle Paul would tell the early Christians that Jesus came so that all of the requirements of the law might actually be fulfilled in us (Rom. 8:4).

If you belong to Jesus, then when God looks at you, he doesn't see your failure to keep the law or your inability to live up to your commitments to change. He sees Jesus standing in your place, keeping the law on your behalf. As you trust in Jesus' perfect obedience for you, having the law on your heart means that it will become more and more a delight to you—you'll actually want to keep it. But you'll never be able to do it in your own strength. And when you try to keep it and fall short, you'll need God's grace in Jesus again.

God knows that we are utterly helpless to keep our church camp commitments and to remake ourselves. That's why we need Jesus! By sending Jesus to perfectly obey the law and by giving us the Holy Spirit to live in us, God has fulfilled the promise that you and I so often fail to keep: He has put his law of love within us.