

Witnessing in the New Covenant

"Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the *goodness of God leads you to repentance?*" (Romans 2:4)

One of the best things I've heard said about this series is one who said, "I've learned that the New Covenant is *really* new." Old things have passed away and all things have become new. Sacrifices, the festivals, commandments, the ceremonial laws, all have been fulfilled in Christ. Now the question becomes, "How do we witness this side of the cross? How do we tell of Jesus?" There has been a great deal of disagreement over this issue for centuries. Take a close look at the differences between the 17th century English Baptists (New Covenant Christians) and the Presbyterian (also Lutheran, Episcopalian, and Reformed) view on witnessing to the lost in 1646.

The 17th century Presbyterian view of the Law:

Chapter 19 "Of the Law of God" in the Westminster Confession of 1646

*This law, after Adam's fall, continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness; and, as such, **was delivered by God upon Mount Sinai, in ten commandments, and written in two tables: the first four commandments containing our duty towards God; and the other six, our duty to man.***

The moral law does forever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof; and that, not only in regard of the matter contained in it, but also in respect of the authority of God the Creator, who gave it. Neither does Christ, in the Gospel, any way dissolve, but much strengthen this obligation.

Although true believers be not under the law, as a covenant of works, to be thereby justified, or condemned; yet is it of great use to them, as well as to others; in that, as a rule of life informing them of the will of God, and their duty, it directs and binds them to walk accordingly; discovering also the sinful pollutions of their nature, hearts and lives; so as, examining themselves thereby, they may come to further conviction of, humiliation for, and hatred against sin, together with a clearer sight of the need they have of Christ, and the perfection of His obedience.

The 17th century Baptist view of the Law:

Article 25 in the 1646 London Confession of Faith

*The preaching of the gospel to the conversion of sinners, is absolutely free; **no way requiring as absolutely necessary, any qualifications, preparations, or terrors of the law, or preceding ministry of the law, but only and alone the naked soul, a sinner and ungodly, to receive Christ crucified, dead and buried, and risen again; who is made a prince and a Savior for such sinners as through the gospel shall be brought to believe on Him.** John 1:12; 3:14,15; 7:37; Isaiah 55:1; John; 1 Timothy 1:15; Romans 4:5, 5:8; Acts 5:30,31, 2:36, 1 Corinthians 1:22,24.*

Romans 2:4: *"Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the **goodness of God leads you to repentance?**"*

It is God's GOODNESS that leads sinners to repentance, not our legalistic efforts of trying to impose conviction on sinners (and even on Christians!) with statements like, "You are going to burn in hell if you don't repent!"

What sinners need is to know that God loves them. The problem we get into is "how to define 'sin'" in the New Covenant? (Appendix 7). Sinners need a Gospel and a Savior, whose power alone is sufficient to deliver sinners from their sinful nature. Jesus told Nicodemus the miraculous moment of regeneration is a "New Birth" where, *"that which is born of the Spirit is spirit"* (John 3:6). Either a person is born of the Spirit or not. There is no middle state. Neither the Law of Moses nor the "Law of Christians" can produce this new birth. Only the Holy Spirit can do the work of regenerating the human spirit through the power of the Gospel (Romans 1:16).

We are not in the Holy Spirit's position to judge the "quality" of someone's *faith and salvation*. Jesus was very clear on this matter, *"Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment"* (John 7:24). We can only inspect the fruit to know the outcome of anyone's faith. That's righteous judgment. In the final analysis, the work of conviction of sin, of righteousness, and of justification is God's work. Our role is to effectively preach the gospel, invite sinners to repent and believe on Jesus Christ. What happens in a person's heart is God's work. When Christians try to "add" to God's work, they invariably end up imposing their version of the "law" in which people are only as "saved" as determined by others.

*"But the Holy Spirit also witnesses to us; for after He had said before, **"This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them,"** then He adds, "Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more." Now where there is remission of these, there is no longer an offering for sin"* (Heb. 10:15-18).

But someone might object by saying, "Paul says "law" is good in that it shows us our need!" Agreed! The notion of forgiveness is not even comprehended unless one understands sin. Sin is any transgression of the Law of God. The question becomes: What Law?

*It is sufficient for a person to be so familiar with **Natural Law** that anything and everything that is needed said in terms of conversing with one in need of salvation is clear.*

In other words, Nature's God has given each of us an innate a sense of morality, and we all know we've failed. It is Christ in His love for sinners that causes us to understand His goodness. So show a sinner how Christ loves failures. Explain to a sinner what Christ said, and then proclaim to that same sinner what Christ did! It is the goodness of God that leads to repentance.