

The Reason for Two Covenants

Andrew Murray

In entering into covenant with us, God's one objective is to draw us to Himself, to render us entirely dependent upon Himself, and so to bring us into the right position and disposition in which He can fill us with Himself, His love, and His blessedness. The reason for there being two Covenants is to be found in the need of giving the Divine and the human will each their due place in the working out of man's destiny. God ever takes the initiative. Man must then have the opportunity to do his part, and to prove either what he can do, or needs to have done for him.

Two Covenants

"It is written, that Abraham had two sons, one by the bondmaid, and one by the freewoman. Howbeit, the one by the bondmaid is born after the flesh; but the son by the freewoman is born through promise. Which things contain an allegory: for these women are two covenants" –Galatians 4: 22-24.

THERE are two covenants, one called the Old, the other the New. God speaks of this very distinctly in Jeremiah, where He says: "The days come, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, not after the covenant I made with their fathers" (Jer. 31).

The clearer our insight into the reasons and Divine reasonableness for there being TWO covenants, and understanding their relation to each other, the more full and true will be our apprehension and comprehension of what the New Covenant is intended to be for us.

If man was *really to be like God in image*, he needs to have the power of free will and self-determination. Man was to be a creature made by God, and yet he was to be, as far as a creature could be, like God, self-made. In all God's treatment of man these two factors were ever to be taken into account.

- (1). *God was ever to take the initiative, and be to man the source of life.*
- (2). *Man was ever to be the recipient, and yet at the same time the disposer of the life God bestowed.*

When man had fallen through sin, and God entered into a covenant of salvation, these two sides of the relationship had still to be maintained intact. *God was ever to be the first, and man the second.* And yet man, as made in God's image, was ever, as second, to have full time and opportunity to appropriate or reject what God gave, to prove how far he could help himself, and indeed be self-made. His absolute dependence upon God was not to be forced upon him; if it was really to be a thing of moral worth and true blessedness, it must be his deliberate and voluntary choice. **And this now is the reason why there was a first and a second covenant**, that in the first, man's desires and efforts might be fully awakened, and time given for him to make full proof of what his human nature, with the aid of outward instruction and miracles and means of grace, could accomplish. **When his utter impotence, his hopeless captivity under the power of sin had been discovered, there came the New Covenant**, in which God was to reveal how man's true liberty from sin and self and the creature, his true nobility and God-likeness, was to be found in the most entire and absolute dependence, in God's being and doing all within him.

The Organic Growth from One Covenant to Another

In greater or lesser degree it is seen in every member of the body, as well as in the body as a whole. Under the Old Covenant there were men in whom, by anticipation, the powers of the coming redemption worked mightily. In the New Covenant there are men in whom the spirit of the Old still makes itself manifest. The New Testament proves, in some of its most important epistles,—especially those to the Galatians, Romans, and Hebrews,—how possible it is within the New Covenant still to be held fast in the bondage of the Old.

Abraham and the Two Boys Representing the Two Covenants

In the home of Abraham, the father of the faithful, Ishmael and Isaac are both found—the one born of a slave, the other of a free woman; the one after the flesh and the will of man, the other through the promise and the power of God; the one only for a time, then to be cast out, the other to be heir of all. A picture held up to the Galatians of the life they were leading, as they trusted to the flesh and its religion, making a fair show, and yet proved, by their being led captive to sin, to be, not of the free but of the bond woman. Only through faith in the promise and the mighty quickening power of God could they, could any of them, be made truly and fully free, and stand in the freedom with which Christ has made us free.

We shall see how the one great cause of the feebleness of so many Christians is just this, that ***the Old Covenant spirit of bondage still has the mastery***. And we shall see that nothing but a spiritual insight, with a whole-hearted acceptance, and a living experience, of all the New Covenant engages that God will work in us, can possibly fit for walking as God would have us do.

The Old Covenant Temple and Distance from God

This truth of there being two stages in our service of God, two degrees of nearness in our worship, is typified in many things in the Old Covenant worship; perhaps nowhere more clearly than in the difference between the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place in the temple, with the veil separating them.

Into the former the priests might always enter to draw near to God. And yet they might not come too near; the veil kept them at a distance. To enter within that, was death. Once a year the High Priest might enter, as a promise of the time when the veil should be taken away and the full access to dwell in God's presence be given to His people. In Christ's death the veil of the temple was rent, and His blood gives us boldness and power to enter into the Holiest of all and live there day by day in the immediate presence of God. It is by the Holy Spirit, who issued forth from that Holiest of all, where Christ had entered, to bring its life to us, and make us one with it, that we can have the power to live and walk always with the consciousness of God's presence in us. **It is thus not only in Abraham's home that there were the types of the two covenants, the spirit of bondage and the spirit of liberty, but even in God's home in the temple.** The priests had not yet the liberty of access into the Father's presence. Not only among the Galatians, but everywhere throughout the Church, there are to be found two classes of Christians. Some are content with the mingled life, half flesh and half spirit, half self-effort and half grace. Others are not content with this, but are seeking with their whole heart to know to the full what the deliverance from sin and what the abiding full power for a walk in God's presence is, which the New Covenant has brought and can give. *God help us all to be satisfied with nothing less.*