

Five Important Things to Remember about the Two Covenants

I Corinthians 11:25; Hebrews 10

The Old Covenant was a covenant of Law: *Obey Me and be blessed; disobey Me, and be cursed.* The New Covenant is a better agreement where God says, *Trust Christ and be eternally blessed.* So the New Covenant is an agreement between God and sinners where *God's favor abides upon sinners who place their faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ* and not their own obedience.

In order to understand the significance of the New Covenant you must understand its pillars.

1. The Two Covenants have *different peoples, different conditions, and different results.*

The Old Covenant had Israel as a people, obedience as a condition of blessing, and failure.

Exodus 19:5-6: "If you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be to me a chosen people, and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

Exodus 24:7 – "All this we will do!" said the nation of Israel, but within forty days the covenant was broken by idolatry (Exodus 32). The history of the Old Testament is of foreign nations raised up by God to capture and/or destroy Israel. God told Israel "Obey Me and keep My Law and be blessed in the land; disobey Me and be scattered." Israel failed. God "divorced" Israel for their disobedience (Hosea 1:9) and established a new agreement.

The New Agreement is made with the world (John 3:16), not just one specific ethnic people.

Jesus Christ inaugurated this New Agreement for all (I Corinthians 11:25 and Hebrews 10).

The Old Covenant Law spoke of Christ, and Christ came and fulfilled every "jot and tittle."

People were saved in the same manner in the Old Covenant days: by grace through faith.

What Israel failed to do in the Old Covenant (obey God), the true Israel fulfilled in the New.

"But you who trust Christ are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY

NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the

glory of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light (I Peter 2:9).

2. The Two Covenants represent progressive revelation of God's justice and mercy.

It is often said that in the OT we see God's righteousness and in the NT we see God's mercy.

Rather, in the NT we see *more clearly both* the righteousness and mercy of God (**Rom. 3:26**).

By faith the justified LIVE in the New Covenant (See Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38).

"NT revelation, due to its finality, must be allowed to speak first on every issue it addresses."

Think about pacifism: You may not agree with it, but the churches who do base it on the N.T.

Now, let's think through baptism and the Sabbath. Those who do not hold to the priority of

the New Testament would argue for *infant baptism*. Likewise, the Sabbath would still be law.

Yet Paul clearly states in the NT that the Sabbath is a matter of indifference (**Romans 4:5-6**).

He who esteems one day above another has not yet understood transition from Old to New.

3. The Two Covenants have different Law-givers and different Law.

The word "slave" (Gr. *duolos*) is one of the important titles for a Christian in this covenant.

Jesus "died and rose again" (Rom. 14:9) so that he might become the "master" of His people.

The language is harsh, but it is clear. *We are subject to an alien will, the will of our owner.*

For this reason, **Jesus is our Lawgiver**. Not Moses, not Elijah, but Christ! (Mark 9:2-8).

Jesus tells us that "anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:8-9). This means

that when Christ taught, God taught. He is the highest revelation of God's character. When Jesus died on the cross, Jesus died loving us (Jn. 15:13). He represented God's love (Jn 3:16). Real New Covenant Christianity is obeying Christ (I Cor. 14:37; John 13:34; II Cor. 4:1-6).

Matthew presents Jesus as the New Lawgiver as opposed to the Old Lawgiver Moses.

- (1). The early Christians divided Matthew into five books, similar to the Law of Moses.
- (2). The Sermon on the Mount is preceded by water baptism and forty days in the wilderness. The whole narrative of Jesus (childhood, exodus, baptism, wilderness, mountain, law) is precisely the narrative of Israel and Moses (childhood, exodus, Red Sea, wilderness, etc).
- (3). Matthew calls Jesus greater than Solomon (12:42), greater than the Temple (12:6), greater than Jonah (12:41), Lord of the Sabbath (12:8), and greater than Moses (17:5).
- (4). It is not knowing Jesus Christ that is deemed "lawlessness" (anomia) in Matthew 7:23.
- (5). Jesus instructs His disciples to teach all that "I have commanded" (28:18-20).

4. The Two Covenants represent Biblical theology and not necessarily man's theology.

What is biblical theology? It is what the *biblical writers*, under divine guidance, believed, described, and taught in the context of their own times. It lets the writer speak for himself, without our attempting to synthesize or systematize the writers' words with other writings. This doesn't mean that Paul contradicts James, or Jesus is set against Paul. *It means we don't discount the impact of New Covenant writing by making confessions sync with the Old.* Give logical priority to the NT over the OT; give logical priority to Jesus Christ over His predecessors, give logical priority to the text over our systematic theologies and those of others.

Here's what is taught in order to merge the practice of believers with the Old Testament

- (A). Jesus built on and advanced the Law ... "He added what was wanting" (Tertullian).
It's like Moses' Law was the seed and Jesus is the tree. It was completed (Augustine).
- (B). Jesus interpreted the true meaning of Moses ... "He tells what Moses meant" (Calvin).
Jesus is merely articulating and clarifying what Moses intended—the old law remains.
- (C). Jesus set aside the Old Covenant Law ... this was the position of the Ana-Baptists.
- (D). Jesus binds all of the Old Covenant Law on believers ... this is called theonomy.
- (E). Jesus sets aside the Old Covenant Law for a season ... this is dispensationalism.

The above views are what many Christians teach regarding Moses' law and our relation to it. But I believe that Jesus simply made a statement that He "fulfills" the Law and the Prophets. The Old Testament is about Him. It predicted Him, foreshadowed Him, prophesied Him. "It is Jesus who pronounces with supreme authority what is the will of God, and it is His teaching which forms the ultimate standard of righteousness" (see esp. Colossians 2:17).

5. The Two Covenants and the radical distinctiveness and discontinuity is real.

Just because the early church believed something strongly doesn't necessarily make it right. However, when you see what those early Christians believed, you know it was important. From Irenaeus of Lyons (103-202 AD) to Origen (185-254) to Augustine (354-430), to Aquinas (1227-1274), all saw a **huge discontinuity and difference that characterizes the transition from Moses to Christ** (from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant). Do you?