



THE NEW AND BETTER COVENANT

Part 2

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Throughout the word of God, we find God dealing with His people based on covenants or agreements. Of the various ones we could cite, there have been two primary covenants through which God has interacted with His people as a whole. The Old Covenant was with fleshly Israel and contained promises and conditions that ultimately related to how God used His chosen nation to facilitate His eternal purpose for all mankind. This covenant was with one nation – the Jews – the children of Abraham by physical birth. Likewise, today, God has a covenant with His chosen people but those included are not of a particular nation but all nations! It includes not only some of the children of Abraham by birth to whom it was first offered but all of those who are Abraham's children by FAITH – that includes all the saved, Jew and Gentile alike. (Galatians 3:26-29) And that covenant is far superior to the first one. What happened to the old covenant? If God was going to replace it all along, why did He give it in the first place?

In Hebrews 8, beginning in verse 6, the apostle says: "But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. Because finding fault with them, He says: "BEHOLD, THE DAYS ARE COMING, SAYS THE LORD, WHEN I WILL MAKE A NEW COVENANT WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AND WITH THE HOUSE OF JUDAH— NOT ACCORDING TO THE COVENANT THAT I MADE WITH THEIR FATHERS IN THE DAY WHEN I TOOK THEM BY THE HAND TO LEAD THEM OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT; BECAUSE THEY DID NOT CONTINUE IN MY COVENANT, AND I DISREGARDED

THEM, SAYS THE LORD.” (Look now at verse 13) “In that He says, "A NEW COVENANT," He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.”

In our study these two weeks, we’re looking at a few of the things that make the NEW COVENANT much better and like the apostle was warning the Hebrews, it is folly and spiritual suicide to go back to the OLD one.

We left off last week talking about one of the purposes of the Old Testament or Old Covenant. Of course, when we hear the term “Old Testament” we tend to think of the 39 books of scripture from Genesis to Malachi, but we call those books the Old Testament because they chronicle the history and the revelation of what is actually the OLD COVENANT that God had with the ancient Jews. ‘Testament’ and ‘covenant’ refer to the same thing which simply is an agreement – in both cases, old and new, it refers to an agreement or contract between God and man. The Old Testament scriptures detail God’s dealings with man leading up to and then under a different covenant before Jesus came, while the New Testament scriptures explain the economy through which God deals with us today. There are NOT two covenants still in force. When the New became effective with the death of Christ (Hebrews 9:15-17), the Old became obsolete and passed away. And with the Destruction of Jerusalem and its temple, priesthood, and sacrifices, nearly forty years later in AD 70, man’s ability to even try to serve God under the covenant vanished from the face of the earth, regardless of how many may claim to be living under it today. So, why did God remove that covenant? What makes the new one better? What is wrong with trying to live under the old or under both old and new? That’s the theme of our study which we began last week.

We pointed out then that the New Testament is a spiritual covenant as opposed to the fleshly nature of the Old one. Because of that, all people regardless of their race or ethnicity can be party to this covenant relationship with God. All who with faith in Christ Jesus, obey the gospel of Christ enter into this new agreement which includes salvation or the forgiveness of sins. Through the New Birth by water and the Spirit (as opposed to a fleshly birth into the lineage of Abraham) one is included in the wonderful spiritual blessings of God found in Christ. The second thing we saw was that the New Covenant has a better mediator – Christ – than the Old Covenant which was mediated by Moses. Christ has brought what Moses could not.

So, if Moses’ law was insufficient and only made them painfully aware of death and condemnation, why did God give His people such a law to begin with? It wasn’t that the law was wrong, or it was bad. It was a perfect law and man would be blissfully and eternally happy and right with God if man could have kept it, but therein lies the problem. Nobody, except Jesus, could do that! In Galatians 3:21-22, Paul says: “Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.” What did the old law do? For one thing, Paul says that it made mankind conscious of sin. Romans 7:7 “What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not

known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.” This passage goes to show, by the way, that the Ten Commandments were part of the Old Testament law that Paul is talking about in this context, which he shows was unable to save and was taken out of the way that we might be married to Christ. But he says this Old Testament law brought an awareness and a consciousness of sin, thus showing the need for Christ, our Savior.

I might illustrate it this way: Suppose that you’re in the market for a new car and someone says that you should try driving one of those Ford so and so’s or one of those Chevy so and so’s. You say that you haven’t seen one of those so and so cars, and they tell you to go down to the dealership and check one out. That if you drive it, you might be surprised, you might like it. Well, you go down there and ask them to show you one, and it’s beautiful. You look at the wonderful design and the various features of the car. You get behind the wheel, take it for a spin, and decide it’s just what you’ve been looking for. You decide to buy it. Chances are, when you drive off the lot, you’re going to notice something you didn’t notice before. You’ll probably go a little way and see another car just like yours. And in a few more miles, you’ll probably see another one and in a couple of days, you’ll see another one parked down the street. Until it seems like everywhere you’ve gone, you’ve seen a car just like yours. Is that because when you decided to go buy that car, everyone else decided to go buy one, too? No, chances are, those cars were there all along; you just didn’t notice them. Something brought those things to your awareness and consciousness. That’s what the law did for man in regard to sin. It made man aware of sin. It showed him the need for Christ. But the law that Jesus brought to man—the New Covenant—James calls *‘the perfect law of liberty’* (**James 1:25**). That New Covenant provides salvation by grace through obedient faith, and it is dependent on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ to take away our sin and do what the old law could not do.

That doesn’t mean that obedience to Christ is unnecessary, by the way. God forbid! Anytime God has a law, we are required to obey that law. But it means that the New Covenant actually provides the remission of sins by grace through obedient faith in Christ – not prospectively or by promise as was available under the sacrificial system of Moses – but we now understand God’s forgiveness in a way they could not and have a peace and freedom that was difficult for the people under the old law to comprehend or appreciate. Why would people desire to try to go back and be justified under the Old Covenant when the new is far superior? Why return to a covenant that is unable to save? Come to find out, that’s a problem that goes back a long, long way. There were people in Paul’s day who were trying to do that very thing, and he did not mince words when he told them the consequences of leaving the covenant of Jesus Christ and going back to the old law. Would you believe that despite the warnings and pleadings of the apostle Paul, there remain those today (much like the Judaizers of Paul’s day) who claim to believe in Christ, yet want to go back and seek justification and vindication by the Old Testament law? By the law of Moses? It is folly to do so. It is a misunderstanding of scripture to do so.

Third, the new covenant is better because it provides a better High Priest. A priest in the Old Testament was a minister who led the worship of God’s people and represented the people before God and performed rituals to atone for the people’s sins. Ordinary priests were many

back then. And today, we have no such men between us and God. It is a misnomer when people today refer to their preacher or some special man as their priest for the New Testament teaches the priesthood of every believer. Revelation 1:5-6 says, "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, And hath made us kings and priests unto God." Every Christian is a priest who waits before God. But in the Old Testament, there was a special class of priests that could be traced back to the sons of Aaron. These men were called "high priests". And they served a very special purpose in the atonement of the people's sins. There was a special day called the "Day of Atonement" and it happened every year on the tenth day of the seventh month. On this all-important day, the high priest would sacrifice an animal for himself and on behalf of the sins of the people. The high priest would then enter the most hallowed and sacred place on earth, the Holy of Holies or Most Holy Place in the temple. He would ever so reverently and humbly take the blood of the sacrifice and sprinkle it upon the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant, which was considered God's throne among them.

What an awesome and even frightening occasion this must have been for the high priest...to enter the very room where God dwelt and where no other man dare tread, to perform this sacred and essential duty. The bible teaches us that when the high priest brought the blood to the mercy seat, God would accept the offering and His demands for sin (in view of the sacrifice of Jesus which that blood foreshadowed) those demands were satisfied at that time. The problem was, the atonement was only for that year and when that sacred day came around again the next year, another sacrifice had to be made by the High Priest on his own behalf and on behalf of the people. You can see then that the work of the High Priest wasn't within itself really dealing with sin -- it was staying sin's judgment until Christ would come as the perfect and unblemished Lamb of God and take away the sin of the world.

We call that a system of limited atonement because that's what it was. It was limited and did not have the power, in and of itself, to forgive sin. But the Hebrew writer teaches us that Christ is our great High Priest and His one offering, for all time, DID take away sin -- the sins of all the faithful from Adam until the end of time. And He is a better High Priest because He not only was sinless himself, and needed not to offer Himself on His own behalf (he had no sins to atone for) but He was able to do one time what the High Priests of the Old Testament had to do every year. Hebrews 9:6-12 says, "Now when these things were thus ordained, the priests went always into the first tabernacle, accomplishing the service of God. But into the second went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people: The Holy Ghost thus signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing: Which was a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience; Which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation. But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us."

Isn't that wonderful? Sometime soon after the cross, Jesus went bodily into the presence of His heavenly Father in Heaven, the true holy of holies, bringing His own blood to offer as the atonement for our sins. Those high priests of old went every year, but He went one time and accomplished the full and final forgiveness of our transgressions. And quoting again, this time from Hebrews 10:1 says; "For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect". He paid the debt in full so that we don't owe our own lives in payment for sin. The new covenant truly provides a better High Priest! But what millions of gallons of animal blood that was shed upon Jewish alters could not do, one drop of the precious blood of Christ accomplished. Hebrews 9:13-14 says, "For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"

Paul warned the brethren not to leave the church and repudiate the gospel by going back to the law of Moses. He said that such would have eternally damning consequences, for one reason because that old system did not provide the sacrifice ultimately needed to pay the price sin exacted. That's exactly what he meant in Hebrews 10:26-27; "For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation..." He's not saying that it's impossible for a wayward Christian to return to Christ and be saved. He's saying that those who go back to the law of Moses are placing themselves in a state where there is no sufficient sacrifice for sin and they bring upon themselves the sure judgment of God. Now, with that in mind, why would people today want to try to subject themselves to the Old Testament law? Christ died to free us from that law and its certain condemnation and we make the death of Jesus a vain and unnecessary thing when we forsake Christ and go back to that law as our means of vindication with God. You ask, are men really doing that today? In some ways, yes. They uphold many of their practices and teachings, not by what the New Testament says, but by what the Old Testament said to the Jews back there long ago. I hope you can see we have a better covenant offered to us today that is built upon better principles and promises than the one that came through Moses.

Friend, the Old Testament was merely a shadow of the NEW. In reference to the ordinances and ceremonies of the old law, Paul said; "Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ" (Colossians 2:17). In speaking of the priests of Israel who offered sacrifices back in that old dispensation, Paul said in Hebrews 8:5; "Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things..." So the things practiced and taught in the Old Testament were shadows of the things we now enjoy in this day and age. Now, a shadow is not the real thing. It is only a crude picture of something else. Take for example the Tabernacle the children of Israel carried with them thru the wilderness – it foreshadowed the church of Christ today – God's full system of redemption and those who are forgiven through Him and thus serve before God today. Also take the example of the Jews' observing the Sabbath. Christians are never required to keep the Sabbath. In fact, in Colossians 2:14 and 16, Paul taught that the old law was done away at the death of Christ, and as a result, we are to let no man judge us about Sabbath days or any other

holy days or ceremonies of the old law. Like the Tabernacle, the Sabbath day was a picture of the rest that we now enjoy in Christ, having been freed from the yoke and labor of the law and the burden of sin (Hebrews 4:1-11). Some want to use the worship of David and others under the Old Testament dispensation to justify their practices in worship today such as instrumental music, because there isn't any teaching in the New Testament that allows for instrumental music. But to do so is to try to make the shadow, the real thing. We've received a new and better covenant today. It came through Jesus Christ, and we should be content to live within its teachings and enjoy its blessings and not look to something else or some other system of justification.

In closing, listen to the words of the Hebrew writer in chapter 10, verses 19 -23; "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; And having a high priest over the house of God; Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised)."

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