

Two Competing Covenants

New Life by the Gospel of Grace

The two Testaments of the Bible include many covenants. By one count there are four with the nation of Israel and three with humanity in general. Why so many? Perhaps, we need a lot of examples to prove to us that God keeps His part of the bargain. Why highlight just two? Only one of the Old Testament covenants was ever superseded by another. The “Old Covenant” refers to God’s covenant through Moses with the Jewish people on Mount Sinai which gave way to the new and “better” one that Jesus made with all of us.

In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away. Hebrews 8:13 ESV

In with the New, Out with the Old

The main thing to know about covenants in the Bible is that—thanks to Jesus—we now live under a “new” and “better” covenant, commonly called the covenant of Grace, in contrast to the covenant of Law, given at Mount Sinai through Moses in the Old Testament. This is definitely something to celebrate, but it helps to understand what it is, why it is so much better, and what that means for us. It also begs the questions: “Newer and better than what?”, “What was wrong with the old one?”, and “Did God make a mistake?”

To take those last two questions first, the problem with the old one (aside from its limitations discussed below) was us. We couldn’t keep it! And no, God wasn’t taken by surprise. His purpose in giving the covenant of Law at Sinai was not to make us righteous by it, but to demonstrate to all of us that we are unrighteous through and through. We desperately need a Savior from sin. In this way the Law prepares us for the gospel and leads us to Christ. Now let’s move on to the three things we need to know so that we can raise the roof with a shout of joy.



Why the New Is Better

1) What It Is

A covenant is a formal agreement between two parties in which duties, rights and obligations are spelled out and promises are made. In the Bible such covenants are usually “signed” or ratified by the blood of a sacrifice. With the Old Covenant made at Sinai Israel agreed that their responsibility was to keep the Law.



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What makes the New Covenant so radically different is that in it God is the one taking on all the responsibilities and making all the promises. He made it without expecting anything of us. That's why it is of grace! All that God promises to do through this covenant is sheer gift to us, and He promises to keep on giving us the gift. The only "catch" is that it is still necessary for us to receive the gift by faith. It's a free will issue.

2) Why It Is So Much Better

Many reasons are given in scripture for why the New is better, the primary one being that this is a covenant of unlimited mercy and instantaneous forgiveness. The Sinai Covenant was limited in what it covered; it was also limited by how forgiveness was conveyed; worst of all, the onus was on us to summon up the obedience required. There were many sins that could not be atoned for by any sacrifice. For those select sins that were covered, each sin required a fresh sacrifice to be offered, another journey to temple or tabernacle and no real "taking away" of the sin. How much better it is that we can go boldly to the throne of grace at any moment and "obtain mercy" for anything we need to confess.

You might think that total forgiveness would be gift enough, but God didn't stop there. With the New Covenant He took the Law carved on tablets of stone and wrote it upon our hearts instead, giving us hearts like His. Under the terms of this covenant everyone has the opportunity to know the Lord as intimately as prophets and priests once did. Where the Old Covenant put Israel in bondage to the Law, this one sets its children free, upholding them by the "ministry" of the Holy Spirit (see the Scripture section). Additionally, Jesus is a better Mediator between God and us, because He able to bring us into "perfection" and shower us with an eternal inheritance! For more see [What Just Happened to Me?](#).

3) What It Means for Us

Under the generous terms of our far better covenant, God is doing or supplying everything to us that would ever be necessary for us to experience true life and right living. All that is except one thing: He cannot receive it for us. That's our part. In a sense we "ratify" or give our approval to the covenant whenever we choose to trust God for all that He says He has done and will be doing to "save us to the uttermost." You can take this to the bank: We are [saved by grace through faith](#), not by our own efforts. But that one word "through", however, defines our key role.

The One Thing for Us to Do

The one and only thing that we have to "work" at is finding a way to trust God and Jesus *enough* for two things to happen: a) we enter into the deep peace of His rest, and b) we become willing to do the next right thing as the Holy Spirit leads us. Keep in mind that you are being "wooded" by two competing covenants, each seeking your allegiance. Will you live this day under Law or under Grace?

Unlike the Israelites under the Old Covenant, we don't have to work hard at keeping the Law, we work at entrusting our life to Jesus. As we do our part the Holy Spirit is able to fulfill the Law through us by lifting and leading us into a new life of grace. Trust, trust, trust and obey. How hard is that? OK, some days it's really hard. For help with it see [How do I live now that I am saved?](#)



What Parts of the Old Still Apply?

The New Covenant rendered the covenant made at Sinai “obsolete,” but that doesn’t mean everything in the Old Testament has been rendered obsolete. For instance, the other five covenants are still on active status. Nevertheless, the Law’s punishments for sin have indeed been set aside. Our own civil laws may or may not mirror the Old Covenant’s laws and sin carries natural consequences, but God’s justice has been satisfied through the death of His Son. If we are in Christ through faith, we can rest assured that our God is not angry with us over our sins, nor does He have any desire to punish us for them. That no longer applies to us!

The dietary laws have also been set aside by New Testament revelation (thank God). The ceremonial laws touching on ritual cleanliness, the offering of sacrifices, the prescribed festivals, etc. have all been set aside now that the Temple is within us and the one Sacrifice towards which they all pointed has been made. Likewise, the civil laws of Israel do not apply to New Covenant believers, whose King and Kingdom are not of this world as the kingdom of Israel and her kings were. Even the Sabbath has been transformed through Christ from being one day of rest each week, to an endless rest of faith.

These sections of the Law continue to be deeply instructive of the inward life with Christ, but the outward form is only still required (by the scriptures themselves) of Jewish believers who have not embraced the New Covenant. Much of what Israel experienced was a “shadow” or “type” of the new reality that has come through Christ and faith. What was outward and material for them is now inward and spiritual for us. What does this leave us to obey out of all the commands of the Old Testament? The moral law. Yet, even here there is transformation: in trusting and obeying Jesus, the moral law is fulfilled through us as we walk in the Spirit. Our primary focus is not the Law, but the Lord of the Law, our Grace Giving Savior, Jesus Christ!

Two More to Explore

[Two Avenues of Grace](#) The Lord knows how difficult it is at times for us to believe in Him; how hard it can seem to only live by faith in His Word. We yearn for a “touch” from God; we want to see Him in the flesh. And He wants to meet with us! These two “avenues of grace” are His way of bringing invisible divine life into events of the material world. We make contact with Him through tangible means which are not only aids to our faith, but actually pathways for His life to enter and transform ours.

[Two Realms of Habitation](#) It is hard enough learning how to live in one world, this one. Yet, our calling is to learn to live in two realms at once. It’s no good saying you can’t—God knows you can with His help. In fact, you have already been “seated with Christ” in the heavenlies. You are in this world, but not of it: You are on pilgrimage through it looking for the “city not made with hands” which God is building with the new creations He is raising up.

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For over a decade Steve Evans and [Healing Streams](#) have been helping people recover inner peace and freedom through the free eCourse for healing, [Matters of the Heart](#). Through Forerunners4Him he has been showing how we can be saved for heaven and teaching the way to live a Spirit-filled life on earth. Go now to receive a completely free primer, [Getting to Heaven](#) and/or an introduction to [Living in the Spirit](#) at our website.



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