

The Two Covenants

— AND THE LAW OF GOD AND THE GRACE OF CHRIST

How does the Old Covenant relate to the New Covenant? Which one should we be under? Which one is covered by the enabling grace of Christ? Is obedience to God's law necessary under our covenant with Christ? — Vance Ferrell

ORIGIN AND BASIS OF THE COVENANT

“As the Bible presents two laws, one changeless and eternal, the other provisional and temporary, so **there are two covenants.**”

“**The covenant of grace was first made with man in Eden, when, after the Fall, there was a divine promise that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head. To all men, this covenant offered pardon and the assisting grace of God for future obedience through faith in Christ.** It also promised them eternal life on the condition of fidelity [loyalty, faithfulness] to God's law. Thus, the patriarchs received the hope of salvation.

“**This same covenant was renewed to Abraham in the promise, ‘In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.’ Genesis 22:18. This promise pointed to Christ. So Abraham understood it (see Galatians 3:8, 16), and he trusted in Christ for the forgiveness of sins. It was this faith that was accounted unto him for righteousness. The covenant with Abraham also maintained the authority of God's law.** The Lord appeared unto Abraham and said, ‘I am the Almighty God; walk before Me, and be thou perfect.’ Genesis 17:1. **The testimony of God concerning His faithful servant was, ‘Abraham obeyed My voice, and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws.’ Genesis 26:5. And the Lord declared to him, ‘I will establish My covenant between Me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee and to thy seed after thee.’ Genesis 17:7.**

“**Though this covenant was made with Adam and renewed to Abraham, it could not be ratified until the death of Christ. It had existed by the promise of God since the first intimation [usually subtle mention, indication, or hint] of redemption had been given; it had been accepted by faith; yet when ratified [formally approved, confirmed] by Christ, it is called a new covenant. The law of God was the basis of this covenant, which was simply an arrangement for bringing men again into**

harmony with the divine will, placing them where they could obey God's law.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets, 370-371.*

WHY WAS THERE AN OLD COVENANT?

“**Another compact—called in Scripture the ‘old’ covenant—was formed between God and Israel at Sinai, and was then ratified by the blood of a sacrifice.**”—*Patriarchs and Prophets, 371.*

“But if the Abrahamic covenant contained the promise of redemption, why was another covenant formed at Sinai? **In their bondage, the people had, to a great extent, lost the knowledge of God and of the principles of the Abrahamic covenant.** In delivering them from Egypt, God sought to reveal to them His power and His mercy, that they might be led to love and trust Him. **He brought them down to the Red Sea—where, pursued by the Egyptians, escape seemed impossible—that they might realize their utter helplessness and their need for divine aid, and then He wrought deliverance for them.** Thus they were filled with love and gratitude to God and with confidence in His power to help them. He had bound them to Himself as their deliverer from temporal bondage.

“But there was a still greater truth to be impressed upon their minds. **Living in the midst of idolatry and corruption, they had no true conception of the holiness of God, of the exceeding sinfulness of their own hearts, their utter inability in themselves to render obedience to God's law, and their need of a Saviour. All this they must be taught.** God brought them to Sinai; He manifested His glory; He gave them His law, with the promise of great blessings on condition of obedience: **‘If ye will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then...ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests and an holy nation.’ Exodus 19:5, 6. The people did not realize the sinfulness of their own hearts and that, without Christ, it was impossible for them to keep God's law; and they readily entered into covenant with God.** Feeling that they were able to establish their own righteousness, they declared, ‘All that the Lord hath said will we do and be obedient.’ Exodus 24:7. They had witnessed the proclamation of the law in awful majesty and had trembled with terror before the mount; and yet **only a few weeks passed before they broke their covenant**

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2 **with God and bowed down to worship a graven image.** They could not hope for the favor of God through a covenant which they had broken; and **now, seeing their sinfulness and their need of pardon, they were brought to feel their need of the Saviour revealed in the Abrahamic covenant and shadowed forth in the sacrificial offerings.** Now, by faith and love, they were bound to God as their deliverer from the bondage of sin. Now they were prepared to appreciate the blessings of the new covenant.

“The terms of the ‘old covenant’ were, Obey and live: ‘If a man do, he shall even live in them’ (Ezekiel 20:11; Leviticus 18:5); but ‘cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them.’ Deuteronomy 27:26.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, 371-372.

TERMS OF THE NEW COVENANT

“The ‘new covenant’ was established upon ‘better promises’—the promise of forgiveness of sins and of the grace of God to renew the heart and bring it into harmony with the principles of God’s law. ‘This shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel: After those days, saith the Lord, I will put My law in their inward parts and write it in their hearts.... I will forgive their iniquity and will remember their sin no more.’ Jeremiah 31:33, 34.

“The same law that was engraved upon the tables of stone is written by the Holy Spirit upon the tables of the heart. Instead of going about to establish our own righteousness, we accept the righteousness of Christ. His blood atones for our sins. His obedience is accepted for us. Then the heart renewed by the Holy Spirit will bring forth ‘the fruits of the Spirit.’ **Through the grace of Christ, we shall live in obedience to the law of God written upon our hearts.** Having the Spirit of Christ, we shall walk even as He walked. Through the prophet, He declared of Himself, ‘I delight to do Thy will, O My God; yea, Thy law is within My heart. Psalm 40:8. And when among men He said, ‘The Father hath not left Me alone; for I do always those things that please Him.’ John 8:29.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, 372.

“He [Christ] committed to them the new covenant, by which all who receive Him become children of God and joint heirs with Christ. By this covenant every blessing that heaven could bestow for this life and the life to come was theirs. This covenant deed was to be ratified with the blood of Christ.”—*Desire of Ages*, 659.

“The atoning sacrifice is full and sufficient. **It is the new covenant, sealed with His blood,** which was shed for many for the remission of sins. This Christ declared at the last supper. In this cup,

there is to those who drink in faith, peace-making, soul-cleansing efficacy. It is the balm of Gilead, which God has provided to restore health and soundness to the sin-stricken soul.”—*5 Bible Commentary*, 1102.

IS OBEDIENCE TO THE LAW NECESSARY?

“The blessings of the new covenant are grounded purely on mercy in forgiving unrighteousness and sins. The Lord specifies, I will do thus and thus unto all who turn to Me, forsaking the evil and choosing the good. ‘I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more’ [Hebrews 8:12]. **All who humble their hearts, confessing their sins, will find mercy and grace and assurance. Has God, in showing mercy to the sinner, ceased to be just? Has He dishonored His holy law, and will He henceforth pass over the violation of it? God is true. He changes not. The conditions of salvation are ever the same. Life, eternal life, is for all who will obey God’s law....**

“Under the new covenant, the conditions by which eternal life may be gained are the same as under the old—perfect obedience. Under the old covenant, there were many offenses of a daring, presumptuous character, for which there was no atonement specified by law. In the new and better covenant, **Christ has fulfilled the law for the transgressors of law, if they receive Him by faith as a personal Saviour.** ‘As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God’ [John 1:12]. **Mercy and forgiveness are the reward of all who come to Christ trusting in His merits to take away their sins. In the better covenant, we are cleansed from sin by the blood of Christ.**”—*7 Bible Commentary*, 931.

“There are two errors against which the children of God—particularly those who have just come to trust in His grace—especially need to guard. **The first, already dwelt upon, is that of looking to their own works, trusting to anything they can do, to bring themselves into harmony with God.** He who is trying to become holy by his own works in keeping the law is attempting an impossibility. All that man can do without Christ is polluted with selfishness and sin. **It is the grace of Christ alone, through faith, that can make us holy.**

“The opposite and no less dangerous error is that belief in Christ releases men from keeping the law of God; that since by faith alone we become partakers of the grace of Christ, our works have nothing to do with our redemption.

“But notice here that obedience is not a mere outward compliance, but the service of love. **The law of God is an expression of His very nature; it**

is an embodiment of the great principle of love, and hence is the foundation of His government in heaven and earth. If our hearts are renewed in the likeness of God, if the divine love is implanted in the soul, will not the law of God be carried out in the life? **When the principle of love is implanted in the heart, when man is renewed after the image of Him that created him, the new-covenant promise is fulfilled.** 'I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them.' Hebrews 10:16. **And if the law is written in the heart, will it not shape the life? Obedience—the service and allegiance of love—is the true sign of discipleship.** Thus the Scripture says, 'This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments.' **'He that saith, I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar and the truth is not in him.'** 1 John 5:3; 2:4. **Instead of releasing man from obedience, it is faith, and faith only, that makes us partakers of the grace of Christ, which enables us to render obedience.**"—*Steps to Christ, 59-61.*

THE NEW COVENANT AND PERFECTION OF CHARACTER

"In His teachings, Christ showed how far-reaching are the principles of the law spoken from Sinai. He made a living application of that law whose principles remain forever the great standard of righteousness—the standard by which all shall be judged in that great day when the judgment shall sit and the books shall be opened. **He came to fulfill all righteousness and, as the head of humanity, to show man that he can do the same work, meeting every specification of the requirements of God. Through the measure of His grace furnished to the human agent, not one need miss heaven. Perfection of character is attainable by every one who strives for it. This is made the very foundation of the new covenant of the gospel.** The law of Jehovah is the tree; the gospel is the fragrant blossoms and fruit which it bears.

"When the Spirit of God reveals to man the full meaning of the law, a change takes place in his heart. The faithful portrayal of his true state by the prophet Nathan made David acquainted with his own sins and aided him in putting them away. He accepted the counsel meekly and humbled himself before God."—*1 Selected Messages, 211-212.*

THE COVENANT REMAINS TRUE TODAY

"The sacrificial service that had pointed to Christ passed away; but the eyes of men were turned to the true sacrifice for the sins of the world. The earthly priesthood ceased; but we look to Jesus, the minister of the new covenant, and 'to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.' 'The way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest while as the first tab-

ernacle was yet standing... But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands... by His own blood He entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.' Hebrews 12:24; 9:8, 11-12.

"Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them.' Hebrews 7:25. **Though the ministration was to be removed from the earthly to the heavenly temple;** though the Sanctuary and our great high priest would be invisible to human sight, **yet the disciples were to suffer no loss thereby. They would realize no break in their communion and no diminution [less, decrease] of power because of the Saviour's absence.** While Jesus ministers in the Sanctuary above, He is still, by His Spirit, the minister of the church on earth. He is withdrawn from the eye of sense, but His parting promise is fulfilled. 'Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.' Matthew 28:20. While He delegates His power to inferior ministers, His energizing presence is still with His church.

"Seeing then that we have a great high priest... Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. **Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.'** Hebrews 4:14-16."—*Desire of Ages, 166.*

COVENANT OF OBEDIENCE IS FOREVER

"'Till heaven and earth pass,' said Jesus, 'one jot or one tittle shall in nowise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled' [Matthew 5:18]. **By His own obedience to the law, Christ testified to its immutable [permanent, can't be changed, fixed] character and proved that through His grace it could be perfectly obeyed by every son and daughter of Adam.** On the mount He declared that not the smallest iota should pass from the law till all things should be accomplished—all things that concern the human race, all that relates to the plan of redemption. **He does not teach that the law is ever to be abrogated [abolished], but He fixes the eye upon the utmost verge of man's horizon and assures us that, until this point is reached, the law will retain its authority, so that none may suppose it was His mission to abolish the precepts of the law. So long as heaven and earth continue, the holy principles of God's law will remain.** His righteousness, 'like the great mountains' (Psalm 36:6), will continue, a source of blessing **sending forth streams to refresh the earth.**

4 **“Because the law of the Lord is perfect, and therefore changeless, it is impossible for sinful men, in themselves, to meet the standard of its requirement. This was why Jesus came as our Redeemer. It was His mission, by making men partakers of the divine nature, to bring them into harmony with the principles of the law of heaven. When we forsake our sins and receive Christ as our Saviour, the law is exalted.** The apostle Paul asks, ‘Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law.’ Romans 3:31.

“The new-covenant promise is, ‘I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them.’ Hebrews 10:16. While the system of types which pointed to Christ as the Lamb of God that should take away the sin of the world was to pass away at His death, the principles of righteousness embodied in the Decalogue are as immutable [cannot be changed] as the eternal throne. Not one command has been annulled, not a jot or tittle has been changed. **Those principles that were made known to man in Paradise as the great law of life will exist unchanged in Paradise restored.** When Eden shall bloom on earth again, God’s law of love will be obeyed by all beneath the sun.

“Forever, O Lord, Thy Word is settled in heaven.’ **All His commandments are sure. They stand fast forever and ever,** and are done in truth and uprightness.’ ‘Concerning Thy testimonies, I have known of old that Thou hast founded them forever.’ Psalm 119:89; 111:7, 8; Psalm 119:152.”—*Mount of Blessing, 49-51.*

THE PRINCIPLES ARE ETERNAL

“God’s work is the same in all time, although there are different degrees of development and different manifestations of His power, to meet the wants of men in the different ages. Beginning with the first gospel promise, and coming down through the patriarchal and Jewish ages, and even to the present time, there has been a gradual unfolding of the purposes of God in the plan of redemption. **The Saviour typified in the rites and ceremonies of the Jewish law is the very same that is revealed in the gospel.** The clouds that enveloped His divine form have rolled back; the mists and shades have disappeared; and Jesus, the world’s Redeemer, stands revealed. He who proclaimed the law from Sinai, and delivered to Moses the precepts of the ritual law, is the same that spoke the Sermon on the Mount. **The great principles of love to God, which He set forth as the foundation of the law and the prophets, are only a reiteration [repetition] of what He had spoken through Moses to the Hebrew**

people. ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.’ Deuteronomy 6:4, 5. ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.’ Leviticus 19:18. **The teacher is the same in both dispensations. God’s claims are the same. The principles of His government are the same.** For all proceed from Him ‘with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.’ James 1:17 [Dispensation: a system of revealed commands and promises regulating human affairs at a particular time].”—*Patriarchs and Prophets, 373.*

HOW DOES THE COVENANT RELATE TO THE SANCTUARY IN HEAVEN?

“As anciently the sins of the people were, by faith, placed upon the sin offering and through its blood transferred, in figure, to the earthly sanctuary, so in the new covenant the sins of the repentant are by faith placed upon Christ and transferred, in fact, to the heavenly Sanctuary. And as the typical [symbolic, used for earthly] cleansing of the earthly was accomplished by the removal of the sins by which it had been polluted, so the actual cleansing of the heavenly is to be accomplished by the removal, or blotting out, of the sins which are there recorded. But before this can be accomplished, there must be an examination of the books of record to determine who, through repentance of sin and faith in Christ, are entitled to the benefits of His atonement. The cleansing of the Sanctuary therefore involves a work of investigation—a work of judgment. This work must be performed prior to the coming of Christ to redeem His people; for when He comes, His reward is with Him to give to every man according to his works. Revelation 22:12.”—*Great Controversy, 421-422.*

THE COVENANT FROM ETERNITY

“When Christ spoke these words [“It is finished” John 19:30], He addressed His Father. Christ was not alone in making this great sacrifice. **It was the fulfillment of the covenant made between the Father and the Son before the foundation of the earth was laid.** With clasped hands, they entered into the solemn pledge that Christ would become the substitute and surety for the human race if they were overcome by Satan’s sophistry [subtle, deceptive reasoning and argumentation]. **The compact was now being fully consummated [accomplished]. The climax was reached.** Christ had the consciousness that He had fulfilled to the letter the pledge He had made. In death He was more than conqueror. **The redemption price has been paid.**”—*5 Bible Commentary, 1149. — Vance Ferrell*