

The NEW Covenant — Does it Abolish God's Law?

Thousands have asked if the New Covenant does away with God's Commandments. Here's the TRUTH on this question.

by Raymond C. Cole

NEARLY everyone has been taught that the Old Covenant was the Ten Commandment law — that the New Covenant contains only grace and promises, but no law. Hence it is argued that since the Old Covenant has been abolished, God's law has also been abolished.

This teaching would lead you to believe that the law of God was harsh, cruel, and enslaving — that the FAULT of the Old Covenant was with the law, and since God gave the law, the FAULT must have been His!

Later, according to this common teaching, Jesus came with a new covenant which had no law, only promises and liberty to do what you please.

Certainly there is something terribly wrong with this concept.

Why the New Covenant?

There is a vital need for the New Covenant. Why? Paul wrote: "For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. For *finding fault*..." (Hebrews 8:7, 8). So the first covenant had a fault, for "finding fault..." with what, the law? No!

"For finding fault *with THEM*, he saith, Behold, the days come saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah."

Then the fault wasn't with the law, but "with *them*," THE PEOPLE, the children of Israel "because they continued not in my covenant" — because they *disobeyed* (Heb. 8:9). If the fault were with the law, then the law would *not* have been perfect; but David said, "The law of the Lord *is perfect*, converting the soul" (Psalm 19:7).

It was to correct *the fault with the people* that God said He will make another covenant. Now let's find out what the Old Covenant really was, so we can know HOW the New Covenant will correct that fault.

What Is a "Covenant"?

The real reason most churches don't understand the truth about the covenants is that they don't even know what a "covenant" is! Webster defines a covenant as "a mutual *agreement*, a legal undertaking to do or to refrain from some act, *a document containing the terms of agreement*."

A covenant is an agreement between parties.

The Eternal God *proposed* the Old Covenant with Israel in Exodus 19:5, 6. Here were the parties to the agreement or covenant. Notice what it says: "If ye [Israel] will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant" — that was Israel's part of the agreement, "*then*" — and this was the ETERNAL'S part of the agreement, the part He promised to do — "ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation."

Did the people accept this *proposal*? "And all the people answered together, and said, All that the Lord hath spoken *we will do*" (verse 8).

The Old Covenant a Marriage Agreement

Very few know it, but the Old Covenant proposed by the Eternal was a *marriage agreement* between Him and Israel! Israel was organized as both church and state.

Here is what Ezekiel wrote about this covenant, "I sware unto thee, and en-

tered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord God, and *thou becamest mine*" (Ezekiel 16:8).

Again, in Jeremiah 31:32 you read, "My covenant they brake, *although I was an husband unto them*, saith the Lord."

Do you see, now, that the covenant was not just the Ten Commandments, but *an agreement* between the Eternal and the nation — the church of Israel? They accepted the terms that He gave to them. They bound themselves by this first covenant to refrain from any adulterous or whorish relations with the "gods" of other nations (Exodus 34:12-17). In turn, the Eternal promised to remain *faithful* to Israel, and provide for them and bless them even to a thousand generations (Deut. 7:9).

But what were the conditions of the Old Covenant to which Israel agreed?

The Terms of the Old Covenant

There is a great deal of needless misunderstanding about what constituted the first covenant with Israel. In Exodus, the 19th chapter, God made arrangements to declare the conditions of His covenant to the people. Then in the 20th chapter God spoke every word of the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments are a perfect and complete law in themselves. When the Eternal God finished speaking them "HE ADDED NO MORE. AND HE WROTE THEM IN TWO TABLES OF STONE" (Deut. 5:22).

The Ten Commandments were a *distinct part* of the terms of the Old Covenant to which Israel agreed. They were the TABLES OF THE COVENANT (Deut. 9:9, 11).

Now notice Exodus, the 24th chap-

ter. In verse 7 Moses "took the BOOK OF THE COVENANT, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient." Besides the *tables* of the covenant, containing the ten basic spiritual laws (Rom. 7:14), there was a *book* of the covenant containing the civil laws of the covenant between Israel and the Eternal.

From the 21st to the 23rd chapters inclusive, the Eternal revealed these specific *civil laws*, which *Moses wrote in a book* (Exodus 24:3, 4), were based on the principles of the ten great and broad *spiritual* precepts — the Ten Commandments.

After God spoke the Ten Commandments to the people, after Moses received the civil laws from God and delivered them to Israel, you will find that the first covenant was sealed with blood — it became binding (Exodus 24:8 and Hebrews 9:18-20).

Since Israel had accepted the Eternal God as her husband, she was to be obedient to Him just as the wife is to be obedient to her husband. The Eternal was head of the nation Israel. Israel was to keep herself unspotted from the evil of the world by being faithful to the laws or terms of the agreement which would make their relationship a perfect union.

When God spoke the Old Covenant to Israel at the time they were brought out of Egypt, He did not command them "concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices: But this thing commanded I them saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people" (Jeremiah 7:22, 23).

The ceremonial and ritualistic laws were *added later because of transgressions and as a reminder of sin* — after the Old Covenant was sealed. They were not a part of the covenant because they came after the marriage agreement was completed. The spiritual laws of the Old Covenant *DEFINE* sin, the civil laws amplify them and prescribe punishments for disobedience.

Remember that the spiritual and civil laws were not instituted by the Old Covenant. They were already in existence and had to be included in the

covenant. (See Genesis 26:5 and Exodus 16:28 and 18:16.)

Old Covenant Had Only MATERIAL Promises

Since the ETERNAL was as a husband to Israel, He agreed to provide for His holy nation. Carefully notice that IN NO PLACE IS THE BLESSING OF ETERNAL LIFE PROMISED, NOR IS ANY OTHER SPIRITUAL PROMISE GIVEN. Every promise given to them was *material* — they were to be fruitful and multiply greatly, their cattle and all livestock were to be very productive, their land would give abundant produce, they would become the greatest nation on earth IF THEY WOULD OBEY AS A WIFE OUGHT TO. God promised to walk *among* them and be their God. He did *not* promise to dwell *in* them through the Holy Spirit.

But if they disobeyed and did not remain faithful they were to be cursed by punishments in this world only. Hunger, sickness, famine, sorrow and war would overtake them just as *material* troubles ensnare any wife who is disobedient to her marriage vows and seeks promiscuous relations with others than her husband (Lev. 26 and Deut. 28).

Israel Was Divorced

Now read Jeremiah 11:10. Did Israel remain faithful to the covenant?

"They went after other gods to serve them: the house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken my covenant which I made with their fathers."

Israel and Judah did not remain faithful; the marriage agreement — the Old Covenant — *was broken*. Listen to what the Eternal says in Jeremiah 3:8: "And I saw, when for all the causes whereby backsliding Israel committed adultery I had put her away, and given her a bill of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah feared not, but went and played the harlot also."

The relationship became so bad that the Eternal was finally forced into divorcing His own people. He first sent Israel into captivity by the Assyrians and later Judah by the Babylonians (Ezek. 23).

Now that we have seen what happened to the first covenant, let's observe the fault with it.

What Was the Fault with the Old Covenant?

Paul said the fault with the Old Covenant was not in the laws, but in the people with whom it was made. Why?

Because it was *not* possible for them to remain faithful to the righteous conditions God had prescribed in His covenant. "O that there were such a heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them" (Deut. 5:29).

Here was the weakness of the Old Covenant. *The people did not have the strength of character to be faithful to their vow*. The law was "weak through *the flesh*" (Romans 8:3). The righteousness under the first covenant was to be accomplished only through human obedience, fleshly effort, because *there was no spiritual promise of receiving the Holy Spirit*.

Israel was unable to serve the Eternal because they did not have a God-fearing nature within them. This condition will be changed in the New Covenant.

How the Fault Will Be Corrected

Remember that the first covenant had the spiritual laws written on two tables of stone and the civil laws in a book. Obedience had to come from carnal flesh alone. Now notice what will happen in the New Covenant.

It won't be according to the agreement made with ancient Israel. Observe the differences: "For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; *I will put my LAWS into their mind, and write them in their hearts*" (Heb. 8:10; Jer. 31:33).

So there will be *laws*, GOD'S LAWS, the *same* laws which stand fast forever and ever (Psalm 111:7, 8); but this time they will be written in the hearts and minds of the people. They will be "written not with ink, *but with the Spirit of the living God*; not in tables of stone, but in the fleshly tables of the heart" (II Cor. 3:3).

Then the New Covenant will be made only with those who have God's law indelibly written in their thoughts and actions.

And what is the power that writes God's laws in our hearts and minds? "The Spirit of the living God."

The love of God which fulfills the law is "shed abroad *by the Holy Spirit* which is given unto us" (Romans 5:5). The Holy Spirit is one of the *better* promises of the New Covenant (Heb. 8:6).

Also notice that the New Covenant will be made with ISRAEL — the house of Israel and the house of Judah. The New Covenant will not be made with those who remain Gentiles as most people falsely assume. The covenants and the promises pertain to Israel (Rom. 9:4).

Since the New Covenant will be made with Israel, what about the Gentiles? Are they totally left out? Or has God provided some way by which they may receive the same blessings which are promised to Israel?

How Gentiles Can Enter

In Ephesians, the second chapter, Paul wrote to those who were "*in time past* Gentiles in the flesh... that at that time ye were without Christ."

Why?

"Being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world."

How then can Gentiles come into the same promises that were granted Israel? The next verse tells us, "But now *in Christ Jesus* ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ" (Eph. 2:11-13).

So it is *through Jesus Christ* that Gentiles "are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints" (Eph. 2:19). Paul says in Galatians 3:29, "And *if ye be Christ's*, then are ye Abraham's seed [no longer considered Gentiles] and heirs according to the promise."

So Gentiles have to *belong to Christ* in order to become part of the spiritual commonwealth of Israel — the church. Paul, in Romans 11:17-18, pictures the

Gentiles as branches of wild olive trees who are grafted into the natural olive tree — Israel begotten of the Spirit. Gentiles can be partakers of the same Spirit of promise and of the blessings to Israel.

But carefully notice, the Gentiles by nature do *not* receive the promise. They must become transformed into the Spirit-begotten commonwealth of Israel before they can receive any of the blessings.

How could Christ make it possible for Gentiles to be heirs to the promises made to Israel?

Christ, the Heir of Abraham

The promise of eternal inheritance of the earth was unconditionally made to Abraham and his "seed" (Gen. 26:3). But Abraham died without inheriting the promises (Hebrews 11:13). It remained for Jesus Christ the *one* heir who was without sin — the promised "seed" through the lineage of Abraham — to inherit the promises (Gal. 3:16).

Jesus came in the flesh to confirm the promises made to the fathers (Rom. 15:8). He also was the minister of a new *testament* or *will* by which He would bequeath His entire inheritance to His heirs in case of death. Remember the new testament contained the promise of *eternal inheritance* (Hebrews 9:15).

Christ's *testament* or *will* did not have any force until His death. "For a testament is of force *after* men are dead" (Heb. 9:17). When Christ died, then His heirs had the right to the eternal inheritance made possible through the Holy Spirit which imparts eternal life. But who are the heirs of Christ?

No one is Christ's *unless* one believes, repents, and is baptized (Acts 2:38; Gal. 3:27). So you can become an heir of Christ if you fulfill this condition and receive the Holy Spirit which puts — immerses — you into the church whether you are Israelite or Gentile (I Cor. 12:13). We are Christ's because Christ *bought* us by giving His life in our stead to pay for our sins (I Cor. 6:20).

New Covenant Not Yet Completed

Christ is the Mediator of the New Covenant (Heb. 8:6). According to the prophecy of Daniel 9:27, *Christ has not yet completed* His work of confirming the covenant. Therefore the New Covenant must yet be completed *in the future* — "For this is the covenant that I *will* make with the house of Israel *AFTER THOSE DAYS*, saith the Lord; I *will* put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts" (Heb. 8:10; Jer. 31:31-34).

The New Covenant will not be made with fleshly, carnal Israelites who can still sin — it will correct that fault. This time it will be made with Spirit-born Israelites who have been forgiven their sins and who have God's laws written in their minds and hearts so they can't sin and break the covenant. The apostle John reveals that it is only at the resurrection when we are *born again* — composed of spirit — that we won't be able to sin because we will have God's nature permanently implanted in us (I John 3:9). Jesus told Nicodemus that we must be born again — of the Spirit — before we can inherit the kingdom and gain eternal life (John 3).

Bear in mind that the new *testament* or *will* of Jesus Christ has been in force since His death. But His testament or will has conditions which we must meet before we can inherit the promises. The Greek word for "testament" also means "covenant." Since the *New Testament* involves our agreement to fulfill these conditions, it also becomes a *covenant* — and that new covenant will not be confirmed with us — we won't *inherit* the promises — *until* we are first made immortal and have God's nature so we can't sin (II Peter 1:4).

New Covenant a Marriage Agreement

All that the Scripture says concerning Israel and the promises under the New Testament pertains to the *church*. It is the *church* that is Israel begotten and soon to be born of the Spirit (Acts 26:6, 7). Under the Old Cove-

nant Israel could have become a kingdom of priests (Ex. 19:6); under the New Covenant the church will become a kingdom of priests governing *the physical nation* Israel (I Peter 2:9; Rev. 5:10; Acts 1:6).

As the church is Israel — Abraham's seed and heirs of the promise — then it is the church with whom the New Covenant will finally be made. But we read in II Corinthians 11:2 and Ephesians 5:32 that Christ Jesus at His second coming will marry the church which is now his espoused bride. Therefore the New Covenant will be ANOTHER MARRIAGE AGREEMENT! Christ will be the husband, the church will become His wife.

Remember that the ETERNAL was the husband of ancient Israel. Under the Old Covenant Israel could never remarry her husband once the divorce was given and she was defiled by relationships with heathen gods. So the Eternal — *not* the Father — but the

Word who became Jesus, was born into human flesh to die so that Israel would be free to remarry. That's why we read in Revelation 19:7, that before the coming marriage between Christ and the church takes place it will be said: "The marriage of the Lamb is come, and His WIFE [*not bride*] hath made herself ready." This could not be said of the church unless it was Jesus and not the Father to whom Israel had once been married.

New Testament Has Promises and Curses

The New Covenant has better promises — eternal promises — but there are also curses!

We know that during the time of the Old Covenant a violator of the law died without mercy under two or three witnesses. What about the person who spurns the terms of the New Testament? "*Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye,*" continues Paul in Hebrews

10:29, "*shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing?*"

Under the old, they perished at the hands of men. Under the new the wicked will perish at the hand of God in the lake of fire.

How important it is that we understand the truth about the New Covenant! In *no* place does God say that He will take away His laws or give us *different* laws. The New Covenant doesn't abolish the Commandments, it establishes them in us according to the spirit and intent, not just in the letter. I hope you will not be found rebellious toward God because you haven't awakened to the fact that God wants to pardon you through the sacrifice of His Son and give you the Holy Spirit, so you can live by His commands for your own good.