

The New Covenant Dynamic

I am accused, at times, of over-using *2 Corinthians, chapter three*, in my writing and preaching. I stand guilty as charged. It's not that its truths are not taught throughout the New Testament (and promised in the Old Testament), but that this chapter captures a concise presentation of what I call "*the New Covenant Dynamic*."

Flowing from the 'ministration' of the gospel through the means of faithful witnesses (vv 1-3), the sovereign and miraculous work of regeneration is effected by the Holy Spirit, writing the *letter (law) of Christ* upon the hearts of the elect (v3). From that point, *heart-fellowship with Christ* becomes the dominant factor in a life turned from idols to serve the living God (1 Thess 1:9, *repentance proper*).

This is contrasted with the Old Covenant as the difference between the *letter* and the *Spirit*, between the *ministration of death* written on stone, and the *ministration of life* written upon the heart (v6). The glory of this New Covenant *far exceeds* the glory of the *Old* (vv 7-11).

The glory of the *New* was concealed in the veil of the *Old*, and few were able to discern it. The rest were blinded, and only in Christ is sight restored and the veil taken away (vv 12 - 17).

Verses 17 and 18 express the heart of the New Covenant Dynamic. (*This is somewhat obscured in the NIV, but clear in all other translations with which I am familiar.*) In the context of grace, we are freed - liberated from the bondage of law - no longer trying in the flesh to conform ourselves to the letter; but our sanctification (being changed into His image) is progressively accomplished as we, by the Spirit and the Word, behold HIM.

I fear that there is much in New Covenant discussions that fails to properly articulate and emphasize this *fundamentally different dynamic* from the Old Covenant. Perhaps we are often distracted in the framing of our apologetic of NCT, as a *refutation*, point by point, of traditional reformed, or other, theology. While this *is* necessary, lets not lose the forest for the trees. We should always begin and end (in my opinion) with the radical newness of the New Covenant Dynamic. We may be correct in our theology, but if the *indwelling* (biblically defined), is not a dynamic reality, we've missed the boat. ●ejr3

Through the Bible in 2011: Part 10

The Ten Commandments

And the LORD spoke unto you out of the midst of the fire: ...And he declared unto you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, even ten commandments; and he wrote them upon two tables of stone. Deut 4:12-13

And [Moses] was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he did neither eat bread, nor drink water. And He wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the ten commandments. Ex 32: 28

As we come to the *second giving of the Law (Deuteronomy)*, we stop to take at more focused (albeit very brief) look at these two tables of stone that have caused so much controversy among Christians in modern times. What is their significance today? What does it mean to be no longer under the Law, but under grace? Of course, we have been looking at the law from these and other perspectives throughout our series thus far; but here, I want to present a brief, more concise summary.

As we have seen, the Ten Commandments written by the finger of God on two stone tablets, *are the covenant document* of the Old Testament. By it the children of Israel became a *covenant nation* under God. Through it, they were separated (sanctified) from all other nations, bearing witness to God's holiness and love. By it they were effectually preserved as the *womb of the Promised Seed*. It is important for us to remember that, *as a unit*, this is what the Ten Commandments (Ten Words) *are*—the *founding document* of the Old Covenant (Ex 34:28; Deut 4:13).

That this covenant has 'passed away' is clearly taught in the New Testament (*2 Cor 3:7-11; Heb 7:18-19; 8:13*). It has been replaced by Christ, our *New Covenant (Isa 42:4; Heb 10:9; Col 2:16-17)*. Israel has fulfilled her purpose in the birth of Christ; and Christ *is* the fulfillment of all that the Law portrayed in types and shadows. The glory of Christ far surpasses the glory of the Law. That which the Law could only faintly reflect is now fully embodied in the incarnate Son of God. Christ is *made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption. (1 Cor 1:30)*. The Holy Spirit now convicts the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment, not by pointing to the Law, but by pointing men to Christ (*John 16:9-11*).

So, as God's children, we are no longer 'under the Law' in our relationship to God, but we are in-lawed to

Christ (1 Cor 9:21 *ennomos*). *The Law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ (John 1:17)*. What the Law could never do in changing the hearts of men, Christ does by the Spirit and the Word, testifying of Himself, and thereby justifying men by faith, alone.

Now, this all begs the question, do the Ten Commandments have any relevance to us, today, and if so, in what way? Having already established that they are no longer relevant *covenantally* (in establishing or maintaining our relationship with God), I would hasten to say that they are still very beneficial to the believer - *all scripture* is inspired and profitable 2 Tim 3:16 - and, by common grace, to the unbeliever.

First, the commandments do provide a basic moral framework among men by which civil justice may be established. Western law is founded upon the moral tenants of the Ten Commandments and their elaboration in the rest of the 'Mosaic' Law. Further, as we have seen previously, embedded in them are presupposed '*inalienable rights*' which righteous government must acknowledge and protect. In the *first* four commandments is presupposed *the freedom of religion*, and, by extension, *free assembly and speech*; in the *fifth* and *seventh* are embedded the presupposed *primacy of the family* unit and the parental right and responsibility to raise and educate their own children as they deem proper, under God; in the *sixth* is the *sanctity of human life*, in the *eighth* and *tenth* is established the right and responsibility of *private ownership of property*; and in the *ninth* is the right to *truth in justice*. To the degree that any government recognizes and protects these rights, that government is a blessing to its people.

To the believer, the Law is part of that '*all scripture inspired*', that reveals Christ and bears witness to the truth. It is the instrument of the Spirit by which He reveals and bears witness to, and gives clarity to, the '*Law of Christ*' which He has written on the tables of the heart (Rom 2:28-29; 2 Cor 3: 3). As the believer seeks to discern Christ's indwelling, the Spirit uses the Word to separate out the many spurious voices that would deceive and lead to destruction. At the very least, anyone truly 'in Christ' will acknowledge the 'rightness' of *any* of God's commandments.

So let's take the 'fifty cent tour': **1.** *Have no other gods before me*. There is one true God (Yahweh), who is to be worshipped, and to whom all are accountable. **2.** *Make no graven images*. Having already forbidden idolatry, this command forbids the worship of the *true* God *through* the use of physical images (Deut 12:3-4; 30-31). **3.** *Don't take the name of God in vain*. More than just a prohibition of using God's name in cursing, this is a warning against falsely professing His name

while not *living* for Him. **4.** *Remember the Sabbath*. In the immediate, the Sabbath, seventh day rest, was the *sign of the covenant* in Israel (Ex 31:13; Ezek 20:12, 20). In it's prophetic application, it points to the glorious rest of Christ (Matt 11:28-30; Heb 4:9,10; Isa 11:10 (KJV); 28:11-12; 30:15). **5.** *Honor your parents*. In the context of the family unit, children are to first learn of yielding to, and showing respect for, authority, as well, certainly, as showing proper respect for those through whom the child has been given life. **6.** *Do not murder*. Because man was created in the image of God, human life is to be protected and honored (Gen 9:6). **7.** *Do not commit adultery*. Marriage is a sacred covenant established by God, and must be honored before Him. **8.** *You shall not steal*. Material possessions must be seen as the gift of God, and gained through God honoring labor. That which an individual owns is his from God, with which he is to honor God, and for which he is accountable to God. **9.** *Do not bear false witness*. Those who serve the God of truth must be truthful in all their dealings, especially in bearing witness concerning another. **10.** *Do not covet*. While reinforcing the eighth, this commandment, alone, points to the heart, warning against obsessing over the things that one does not have (lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes).

Now, I make two final points. First, these commandments, *as given*, were entirely reasonable, and not impossible to keep, *overtly*, at least for a zealous religionist. To the degree that Israel obeyed them *overtly*, they would be temporally blessed as a nation. The curses and judgments were a boundary of goads to drive them back to their covenant with God.

Secondly, as the end (*intended purpose*) of the Law is Christ, its fulfillment, He drastically and authoritatively expands its basic moral precepts to include *every thought and intent of the heart* - **an application which made every single commandment utterly impossible for any sinner to keep** (*Sermon on the Mount*). His purpose in doing so, in part, was to show that His own righteousness, alone, could measure up. In fact, it was His own holy nature that is *faintly* reflected in the law. His is the glory that exceeds. His is the only righteousness that can justify the sinner before God. Faith in Him, alone, wraps the believer in that righteousness.

...not having my own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through faith in Christ (Phil 3:9). ●ejr3

The Timbrel & Dance Weekly is published by
Pastor Ed Ross, Springwood Chapel,
2360 Springwood Road, York, Pennsylvania 17402.
Phone: 717-741-3616
Email: pastored@springwoodchapel.com
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