

XII

THE NEW COVENANT

. . . 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 . . . (Heb. 8:8).

Perhaps no subject in the Bible is more exciting, or misunderstood, than the New Covenant.

A proper understanding of this concept involves going "beyond the veil" in the truest sense of the word. It is intrinsically associated with "knowing" God and being "born again."

To "know" in the Biblical use of that word means to become intimate with so that a new life is produced. In this respect Adam "knew" his wife and she conceived and bare him a son named Cain (Gen. 4:1). When the Scriptures inform us that Joseph and Mary did not have sexual congress before the birth of Jesus, that truth is expressed in these words, ". . . and (Joseph) knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name Jesus . . ." (Matt. 1:25).

BEYOND THE VEIL

To “know” means to become intimate with so that a new life is produced. When Adam unveiled his wife and became intimate with her a new life was produced. It is precisely this terminology and imagery which the Scriptures use to communicate truths regarding the “new birth” and the “New Covenant.”

It is not by accident that the church is called the “bride” of Christ. Those who belong to Jesus experience with Him the intimacy of the marriage union in a spiritual sense. We stand before Him with total submission and vulnerability recognizing that “. . . all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do . . .” (Heb. 4:13). The marriage commitment, however, is not one-sided. Not only does Jesus have unlimited access to our innermost being beyond the door, or veil, of our hearts, we also have boldness to enter beyond the veil into the innermost recesses of His heart. This concept involves the very essence of conversion.

Just as husbands and wives develop the ability to communicate “nonverbally,” so also the devout believer gains insight and guidance which is not available to others. The believer can pray for wisdom with the absolute assurance that it will be received (James 1:5-8). But the Sword of the Spirit cuts both ways. With reference to those who do not believe, the Scriptures state, “Let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord. . . .”

When we open our hearts to receive Christ, our bodies become temples of the Holy Spirit. It is no longer necessary for us to journey to Jerusalem to worship the Father, for He dwells by faith in the innermost chambers of our mind and heart. In ancient times He met with Israel between the outstretched wings of the cherubim. They were located on top of the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies. Today we have the privilege of making our own heart the ark of His blessed covenant where we can meet with Him at any moment of the day or night . . . and He has promised never to leave us or forsake us (Heb. 13:5).

Since a proper concept of the New Covenant strikes at the very heart of Christianity, permit me to take a few moments and try to correct some prevalent misconceptions.

For the past 1,500 years virtually all of Christendom has called the first 39 books of the Bible the "Old Testament" and the last 27 books of the Bible the "New Testament." This is not so! It never has been, and it never will be!

The Bible actually contains at least eight covenants or testaments. They are:

1. The Covenant with Adam - Hosea 6:7
2. The Covenant with Noah - Jer. 53:20, Gen. 9:9
3. The Covenant with Abraham - Gen. 12:1-3; Gal. 3:17
4. The Covenant of Circumcision - Acts 7:8
5. The Ten Commandments - Deut. 4:11-13, 5:1-3
6. The Covenant of Peace - Exod. 40:13-15; Num. 25:12-13
7. The Covenant with David - II Sam. 7:12-17; Jer. 33:20-21
8. The New Covenant - Heb. 8:8-13

When Alexander Campbell commented upon these covenants he observed that commands, promises, appointments and ordinances are all equally called "covenants" in the Scriptures. He further noted that every covenant mentioned in the Bible originated with God and not with man.

When the Holy Spirit, however, speaks of the Old Covenant, as opposed to the New Covenant, it is invariably done with reference to the Ten Commandments. In the language of Scripture, we may say emphatically that the Old Testament or Covenant is in fact the Ten Commandments and not the first 39 books of the Bible.

As proof of this, please consider the following:

1. There is not one verse of Scripture which ever refers to the first 39 books of the Bible as a Covenant or Testament.
2. The Scriptures teach that the Old Covenant was made when God took His people by the hand to lead them out of the land

of Egypt (Heb. 8:9). The Ten Commandments were given at this time but most of the inspired men whom God used to write our Bible were not even born when God took His people by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt.

3. God made a covenant with His people in Horeb (Deut. 5:2) or in the language of Galatians 4:25, "Mt. Sinai in Arabia." The first 39 books of the Bible, however, were not written in "Mt. Sinai in Arabia," but in Palestine, Babylon and Persia.

4. The Old Covenant had been broken by the time of Jeremiah. He stated so quite clearly in Jeremiah 31:32. Some books of the Hebrew Bible, however, were not yet written at this time.

5. The Scriptures teach explicitly that Moses received a covenant while he was 40 days upon Mt. Sinai; this covenant was written upon two tablets of stone; this covenant was called "The Ten Commandments"; and the Scriptures teach that once these Ten Commandments were completed, God "added no more" to them (Deut. 5:22). See also Exodus 34:27-28; Deuteronomy 4:11-13; 5:1-3; 9:11, etc.

6. Once the Ten Commandments were completed they were placed in a box, or receptacle, called the "Ark of the Covenant" (Num. 10:33, etc.).

Thus the logical mind is forced to the conclusion that the Old Testament or Covenant is the Ten Commandments and not the first 39 books of the Bible. This covenant was written in tablets of stone at the time when God took His people by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt. It was placed in the Ark of the Covenant which was normally kept in the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle and Temple. It was the spiritual hub or focal point around which Hebrew worship revolved, and it was a covenant which Israel did not keep.

The Old Testament, that is the Ten Commandments, is allegorically presented to us in Scripture by reference to Ishmael and his mother, Hagar (Gal. 4:24). The Bible calls Ishmael a "wild man" and predicted that "his hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him . . ." (Gen. 16:12).

Even the most cursory reflection upon the Ten Commandments will reveal their controversial nature and help us to understand why Ishmael is used to illustrate their impact upon society.

By way of illustration let us consider the shortest, and perhaps the most obvious and simple of the Ten Commandments, "Thou Shalt Not Kill." These four words seem so obvious and simple that on the surface it is difficult to imagine how they could ever be misunderstood or considered as controversial. We want to shout, "God said what He meant, and meant what he said" and let that be the end of it!

Unfortunately, however, that is not the end of it, and people begin to ask questions about what these four simple words mean.

Plants and animals are alive. Is it wrong to kill them? Most of us would think not, but there are a great many people in India who hold every form of life so sacred that they will not even step on an insect.

Even in the Christian community, however, there is a wide difference of opinion on capital punishment, military service, abortion, and war.

Since each of us is at a different stage of growth intellectually, socially and spiritually, it is doubtful if we will ever come to understand these four simple words in identically the same way.

Here is a simple test with only 25 questions. The extenuating circumstances, definitions, and controversies surrounding these questions are the stuff that legal libraries are made of. There are literally thousands of books which have been written to answer questions about the legal ramifications involving manslaughter and murder, and to this very date even the experts are not always agreed on what constitutes justifiable homicide.

After considering this little questionnaire I think you will discover that even the Christian community will not always agree on what "Thou shalt not kill" actually means.

TRUE OR FALSE

1. I can kill anyone who breaks into my house.
2. I can kill anyone who threatens my life, but not my property.

BEYOND THE VEIL

3. I can kill in defense of my family but not in self-defense.
4. I can kill in defense of my country.
5. I can become a police officer and kill in the line of duty.
6. Christians in Britain had every right to kill Argentinians over the Falkland Islands.
7. Christians in Argentina had every right to kill Britains over the Falkland Islands.
8. Capital punishment is ordained by God.
9. Treason is a capital offense.
10. The United States has every right to execute a person convicted of treason.
11. The Soviet Union has every right to execute a person convicted of treason.
12. English soldiers had every right to kill our forefathers for revolting against their king.
13. Our forefathers had every right to kill English soldiers in our struggle for independence.
14. Americans have every right to kill foreigners who invade our land.
15. The American Indians had every right to kill our ancestors who invaded their land.
16. "Savages" have no rights.
17. Since life begins at the moment of conception it is murder to use a form of "morning after" birth control.
18. Abortion is murder under any circumstance.
19. Abortion is permissible to save the mother's life.
20. Christians can kill animals and birds just for pleasure.
21. A Christian can only kill animals and birds if they are used for food.
22. It is more fun to shoot an animal with a gun than a camera.
23. Rape is a capital offense.
24. Adultery is a capital offense.
25. The words "Thou Shalt Not Kill" are clear and do not need to be interpreted.

I suggest for your thinking that our answers to these questions will not be identical unless we cease to think and allow

someone else to answer all of these questions for us. As we develop and gain new insights and information we might conceivably even change our own minds on some particular point.

SO WHAT?

A study of the Old Covenant may seem far afield from the burning issues of modern life. We may be tempted to forget about the "covenant" as irrelevant to our personal needs and plunge into our problems with the feeling that with hard work and diligence we will somehow get the job done.

Unfortunately, sometimes we discover just the opposite. Sometimes the "hurrier we go, the behinder we get."

Our own personal problems and needs cannot be divorced or disassociated from our relationship with the church. The church is the Body of Christ. When we are born again we are added to the church. As members of His Body we are linked together in such a way that when one member suffers we are all affected by that pain (I Cor. 12:13-27).

In this regard we need to understand that a fully functioning, unified Body is the key to world evangelism and power. This is so precisely stated by Jesus in His High Priestly prayer of John 17, that the meaning ought to be obvious to all.

He prayed,

Neither pray I for these alone, (that is, not just for His Apostles) but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me . . . (John 17:20-21).

Today, however, believers are not united . . . and neither does the world believe. These two indisputable facts need to be seen together. We can never experience world evangelism and the ultimate expression of Christian power until believers are united.

BEYOND THE VEIL

Probing into this very problem brings us back to a study of covenants. This is so absolutely foundational to our relationship with God, and also with one another, that we must pursue it further.

The Old Covenant was written on tablets of stone. It was cold, rigid and inflexible. As we have pointed out, it was always the subject of debate and the focal point of division. We have mentioned "Thou Shalt Not Kill," but perhaps a more obvious source of controversy is the command to "Remember the Sabbath Day and keep it holy." Jewish scholars have debated this command for literally thousands of years and they are no closer to agreement now than when they began.

The point needs to be seen that literally everything written down becomes controversial when it is considered from a legal point of view.

I once attended a court proceeding which resulted from an injury accident. A farm hand had fallen from a tractor and been run over by an implement. He had sustained permanent injury. If I understood the case correctly, the outcome hinged upon a technical interpretation of one small clause in the insurance policy. One attorney argued that the presence of a comma and not a semi-colon indicated that this injury was indeed covered by the insurance policy. In his judgment the two debated phrases were, therefore, definitely linked together. The other attorney countered with the argument that similar, if not identical, cases had already been debated before the legal system and a court precedent had been established to the contrary.

The judge took the case under advisement and I never heard the outcome. Regardless of how he renders judgment, however, someone will be mad.

God completely by-passed the argument, debate, and division with His New Covenant by not writing it down where other people could read it. He said,

. . . 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):

God is without variation or shadow cast by turning, but we are not. God's Word remains eternally the same, but we do not. Every day for us is a day of transition. Our perception of God and His Holy Word is in a constant state of flux and change. From the moment we were born until the moment we die our hearts and minds are either developing or declining. Sometimes through injury or illness we suffer traumatic experiences which alter our view of almost everything.

In the Christian community debate is not a virtue, it is a sin. It is categorized as a work of the flesh and is not associated with the fruit of the Spirit (see Gal. 5:19-24).

THE NEW COVENANT

This brings us to consider the New Testament, or Covenant, and to emphatically point out that it is not the last 27 books of the Bible as many have assumed.

As proof of this please consider the following:

1. Not once do the Scriptures ever refer to the last 27 books of the Bible as a covenant or testament.

2. The Christian Scriptures were written with paper and ink (see II John 12; III John 13; etc.) but the New Covenant is not written with ink, but with the Spirit of the Living God (II Cor. 3:3).

3. The New Covenant became a reality on the first Pentecost following our Lord's resurrection. Thousands were saved and became covenant people, but it was years before the first words of New Testament Scripture were written.

4. The Scriptures came gradually as God guided inspired men into all truth. The canon of New Testament Scripture was not completed until near the end of the first century and was not generally accepted throughout Christendom until many years later. The oldest extant list of canonical books which corresponds to our own, dates back only to the fourth century. The New Covenant was a complete reality before one word of Christian Scripture was written and literally thousands of Christian

BEYOND THE VEIL

martyrs died as covenant people before John wrote the book of Revelation.

5. The Old Covenant was written upon tablets of stone, but the New Covenant is written upon the fleshly tables of the heart and in the inner workings of the mind (II Cor. 3:3; Heb. 8:8-10).

6. The Old Covenant was in the Tabernacle or Temple, but the New Covenant is in our hearts so that our bodies become temples of the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 6:19). Just as God's glory was associated with the Ark of the Covenant in Old Testament times, we also are to "glorify" God in our body and in our spirit which are the Lords.

I MUST STATE EMPHATICALLY, THAT,

ALL SCRIPTURE IS GIVEN BY INSPIRATION OF GOD, AND IS PROFITABLE FOR DOCTRINE, FOR REPROOF, FOR CORRECTION, FOR INSTRUCTION IN RIGHTEOUSNESS: THAT THE MAN OF GOD MAY BE PERFECT, THOROUGHLY FURNISHED UNTO ALL GOOD WORKS (II Tim. 3:16-17).

Nevertheless, the Scriptures are not the covenant, and to attempt to make them such would be to live a B.C. life in an A.D. world.

If we make the mistake of considering the Christian Scriptures as the New Covenant then we will face the same divisive problems with them that the Jews did with the Ten Commandments.

Take, for example, the qualifications for a bishop which are recorded in I Timothy 3. Let us consider verse 2 and the expression "husband of one wife." The Greek words so translated mean literally "one woman man."

Again I will burden you with a brief questionnaire and the absolute assurance of controversy if you choose to pursue these words from a legal point of view.

TRUE OR FALSE

1. A bachelor cannot in any circumstance be a bishop.
2. A man who is divorced cannot in any circumstance be a bishop.

3. A man may become a bishop if he was divorced before becoming a Christian.
4. A man may remain a bishop if his wife leaves him.
5. A man who has had pre-marital sex cannot be a bishop.
6. A divorced man cannot be a bishop but a man with an annulled marriage can.
7. If a bishop's wife dies he must resign.
8. If a bishop's wife dies he must resign if he remarries.
9. A man who has been unfaithful to his wife can never be a bishop.
10. A secret affair might not disqualify a bishop if he repents.
11. The words "one woman man" have nothing to do with homosexuality.
12. A bishop can have a homosexual affair and still be a "one woman man."
13. A bishop who commits adultery in his heart should resign.
14. The qualifications of a bishop were mainly given to exclude polygamy.
15. The qualifications of a bishop were mainly given to exclude adultery.
16. These qualifications mean only that a bishop can have only one wife at a time.
17. Sexual sins committed before becoming a Christian do not affect a man's qualifications to be a bishop.
18. It is impossible to give a blanket statement regarding sexual sins that involve the qualifications of a bishop.
19. A man who loves only one woman can still be a bishop even though he does not marry her.
20. This qualification should not be construed as requiring marriage, only excluding promiscuity.
21. A polygamist cannot be a Christian.
22. Paul was not qualified to be a bishop.
23. If Paul was once married and his wife was dead he would be qualified to be a bishop.
24. The qualifications of a bishop are more strict than the qualifications for an apostle.

25. The qualifications for a bishop are clear and do not need to be interpreted.

The Old Testament is allegorically presented to us in Scripture by Hagar and Ishmael. It was a fleshly and carnal relationship that brought about disputes and endless controversies. Remember Genesis 16:12 which teaches that Ishmael “. . . will be a wild man; his hand will be against every man, and every man’s hand against him . . .”

The New Covenant, by contrast, is allegorized by Sarah and Isaac. The name Isaac means “laughter.” His birth and his very nature are supernatural and transcendent. Christians are not to be distinguished by controversy, but by love. Jesus said, “By this shall all men know that you are my disciples if you have love one to the other” (John 13:35).

SYNERGY

Synergy is defined as “The joint action of agents so that their combined effect is greater than the algebraic sum of their individual effect.”

R. Buckminster Fuller provides this illustration in his book, *Synergetics*, which was published by MacMillan Publishing Company.

Note the tensile strength of the following commercially available metals:

Iron	60,000 lbs. p.s.i.
Chromium	70,000 lbs. p.s.i.
Nickel	80,000 lbs. p.s.i.
Carbon	50,000 lbs. p.s.i.
Total mathematical strength of these metals	260,000 lbs. p.s.i.
Strength of chrome nickel steel alloy	350,000 lbs. p.s.i.

This is the principle of synergy. If you consider these four metals as links in a chain, the chain will be no stronger than its

weakest link and will fail at 50,000 lbs. p.s.i. which is the strength of carbon.

If you consider these four metals as strands woven into a cable, you add their combined strengths together and come up with 260,000 lbs. p.s.i.

The synergic concept, however, transcends either illustration. When these four metals are melted together so that each loses its own identity, a brand new metal is formed. The chrome nickel steel alloy is stronger than the algebraic sum of its individual parts.

There is a sense in which we also as Christians gain new power when we die to self and lose our own identity. When the Holy Spirit melts us into oneness with Jesus, we also become one with every other believer who shares with Him the intimacy of the New Covenant.

When you pray for something as an individual it is somehow different from two or three people coming to "agree" in prayer.

The Holy Spirit invites you to enter in boldly beyond the veil by the blood of Jesus Christ.

I just wanted to prepare you for the possibility that you might encounter others in the Holy of Holies with God that you might not expect to see there.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS FOR CHAPTER XII

1. What was the Old Covenant?
2. Where was it kept?
3. Why was it the object of disagreement and controversy?
4. What is the New Covenant?
5. Where is it located?
6. How does it avoid disagreement and controversy?
7. How might a misunderstanding of the New Covenant result in division?
8. How is Christian unity associated with world evangelism?
9. Why did Jewish people fear to go beyond the veil?
10. Where do Christians get boldness to enter beyond the veil?

