

Covenant and the Bible Part 6

Last week, we began our survey of the New Covenant as conceived by the authors of the New Testament. We first began looking at Paul. We noted that we cannot escape that the Mosaic Covenant/Old Testament had created the theological terminology that he uses to describe what has taken place in Christ. We reviewed the following covenant words/themes found in Paul:

- mediator (1 Tim.2:5)
- minister/servant (Rom.15:8,16; Eph.3:7)
- law (Rom.2:12; 3:19; Gal.2:16)
- commandment (Rom.7:13)
- bless/curse (Rom.12:14; Gal.3:10)
- righteousness (Rom.4:3; 2 Cor.3:9)
- Father/Son (Rom.1:3-4; Phil.1:2; Col.1:2)
- sin/transgression/iniquity (Rom.3:23; Gal.6:1; 1 Thes.4:6)
- atonement/propitiation (Rom.3:25)
- Sabbath (Rom.14:4; Col.2:16)
- heir/sonship/adoption (Rom.4:13; Gal.4:7; Eph.1:5)
- redeem/redemption (Gal.4:5; Tit.2:14)
- witness (2 Cor.1:23; Phi.1:8)
- offering/sacrifice (Eph.5:2; Phil.2:17)

We focused on 2 Corinthians 3:1-4:6. In this passage, he zeroes in on the Letter/Spirit contrast between the Mosaic and New Covenants. He even goes as far as to label the Law of Moses as “the ministry of death” (vs.7) and “condemnation” (vs.9) as it was, written on tables of stone. He contends that this “letter” brings death, surely drawing from his argument in **Romans 7:7-11**:

What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet." But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. Apart from the law, sin lies dead. I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died. The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment deceived me and through it killed me.

He likens the Law to the glory that was on Moses face which needed to be concealed to Israel by a veil over his face (vs.7). Even then, there was a veil over their hearts every time they read the Law (vs.15) because their hearts were hardened by it (vs.14). However, the glory of the New Covenant revealed in Christ is infinitely superior because it does not fade and has no end (vs.11). It is written not on tablets of stone, but on the tablet of the heart (vs.3), drawing on Ezekiel 36:26 and Jeremiah 31:33. Since this covenant is imparted directly by the Spirit on the heart with no outside mediator, those

in it are now with “unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord and being transformed into the same image” (vs.18). So we can summarize by saying that the Letter/Spirit contrast is about the difference in the **nature** of the Mosaic and New Covenants.

I. The New Covenant in Galatians 3-4

In Galatians 3-4, Paul focuses on the **purpose** of the Mosaic Covenant in light of the New Covenant.

Galatians 3:1 - 4:31 *O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. 2 Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? 3 Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? 4 Did you suffer so many things in vain- if indeed it was in vain? 5 Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith- 6 just as Abraham "believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"? 7 Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. 8 And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed." 9 So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. 10 For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them." 11 Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for "The righteous shall live by faith." 12 But the law is not of faith, rather "The one who does them shall live by them." 13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us- for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"- 14 so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith. 15 To give a human example, brothers: even with a man-made covenant, no one annuls it or adds to it once it has been ratified. 16 Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, "And to offsprings," referring to many, but referring to one, "And to your offspring," who is Christ. 17 This is what I mean: the law, which came 430 years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void. 18 For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise. 19 Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made, and it was put in place through angels by an intermediary. 20 Now an intermediary implies more than one, but God is one. 21 Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. 22 But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. 23 Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. 24 So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. 25 But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, 26 for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. 27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there*

is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise. Galatians 4:1 I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, 2 but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. 3 In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. 4 But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. 6 And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" 7 So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God. 8 Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. 9 But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more? 10 You observe days and months and seasons and years! 11 I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain. 12 Brothers, I entreat you, become as I am, for I also have become as you are. You did me no wrong. 13 You know it was because of a bodily ailment that I preached the gospel to you at first, 14 and though my condition was a trial to you, you did not scorn or despise me, but received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus. 15 What then has become of the blessing you felt? For I testify to you that, if possible, you would have gouged out your eyes and given them to me. 16 Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth? 17 They make much of you, but for no good purpose. They want to shut you out, that you may make much of them. 18 It is always good to be made much of for a good purpose, and not only when I am present with you, 19 my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you! 20 I wish I could be present with you now and change my tone, for I am perplexed about you. 21 Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law? 22 For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman. 23 But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise. 24 Now this may be interpreted allegorically: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar. 25 Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. 26 But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother. 27 For it is written, "Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear; break forth and cry aloud, you who are not in labor! For the children of the desolate one will be more than those of the one who has a husband." 28 Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. 29 But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now. 30 But what does the Scripture say? "Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman." 31 So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman.

He is trying to remind the Galatians very forcefully that no one will be justified by the works of the Law (3:11). In other words, no one can please God at the final judgment by trying to execute their duties as prescribed by the Law of Moses. The reasons for this are because no one is truly able to execute this covenant so we are cursed in trying to do so (3:10), and the purpose of the Law was to make transgression fully visible and never

to offer eternal life (3:18-19). This covenant came to bring us into slavery and imprisonment so that we could be rescued by Christ (vs.23-24). So Paul is setting up two different covenantal strands that find their culmination in the allegory of Hagar and Sarah in 4:21-31. Hagar corresponds to the slavery that exists under the Mosaic Law and is demonstrated in the contemporary Judaism that is visible in Jerusalem (vs.25). Sarah corresponds to the freedom that exists under the New Covenant and is demonstrated in the promises God offers His people in the New (spiritual) Jerusalem (vs.26-28). So the Mosaic Covenant existed to serve as a physical template that would anticipate the spiritual realities to come in the new age that has been inaugurated in the death and resurrection of Christ. Thus, in order to partake of this inaugurated Covenant, we need to believe in what Christ accomplished on our behalf and so cast out the "slave woman" (the Mosaic Covenant) (vs29-31).

II. The New Covenant in Hebrews

Some other major passages that go into detail on the contrast between the Mosaic and New Covenants are found in Hebrews.

Hebrews 8:1-13 *Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, 2 a minister in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man. 3 For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices; thus it is necessary for this priest also to have something to offer. 4 Now if he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all, since there are priests who offer gifts according to the law. 5 They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, "See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain." 6 But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises. 7 For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second. 8 For he finds fault with them when he says:*

"Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, 9 not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. For they did not continue in my covenant, and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord. 10 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 11 And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. 12 For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more."

13 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 12:18-29 *For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest 19 and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. 20 For they could not endure the order that was given, "If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned." 21 Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I tremble with fear." 22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, 23 and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, 24 and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. 25 See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven. 26 At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens." 27 This phrase, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of things that are shaken- that is, things that have been made- in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain. 28 Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, 29 for our God is a consuming fire.*

In light of these passages, I think it is evident that the Mosaic/Old Covenant was an external code which does and can only demand. God designed it this way in order to magnify sin in Israel, as Israel is simply Adam on a corporate/national scale (Hosea 6:7). Neither Adam nor Israel could ever have kept, executed, or complied to the Law given to them. Even if they could have, there was no promise for eternal life. It wasn't the function of the Law given to them. But, both Adam and Israel's failure have become the canvas for God to promise grace in the death of Jesus. The death of Jesus ratified the New Covenant which does and can only promise eternal life. In the New Covenant there is no code to keep or demand upon us, but the promise of life in Christ itself produces faith in us which will result in us keeping the law of God/Christ, which is essentially loving God and loving our neighbors.