

Jeremiah 31:31

by Conrad Murrell

The New Covenant is a living reality that brings about a new heart and a new spirit, and it is characterized by the grace of Christ and the new commandment to love one another.

Duration: 30:28

Scripture: Jeremiah 31:31, Matthew 5:18, John 1:17

Topics: "Christian Life"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher addresses the debate over the importance of observing the Fourth Commandment and the idolization of the Ten Commandments. He argues that Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount surpass the importance of the Ten Commandments. The preacher emphasizes the significance of understanding the new covenant and its impact on Christian doctrine and church life. He believes that ignorance of the new covenant and the imposition of the old covenant have led to various issues within the church. The sermon concludes with a call to explore and embrace the riches of the New Covenant life in Christ.

Transcript

Chapter of Jeremiah, and thirty-first verse. Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah. Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, which covenant they break, although I was an husband to them.

Behold, the Lord comes. One of the most wholesome and beneficial theological developments today is a robust interest, examination, debate, and airing of the new covenant. It has been long coming.

Not that the theology of the new covenant has been here, heretofore unknown in Christianity. It was the doctrine taught by the Lord Jesus in His earthly ministry, not immediately comprehended by the twelve apostles. The early church tried to mix in much with the old wine of Moses and the new wine of Christ.

They won't mix. But when God called and separated Paul, He revealed through His preaching and epistles that the old covenant had been utterly abolished. Its government and rituals rendered nothing, and that the Christian church was an entirely new people.

We are not padded up, popped up, reworked Jews. We are a new people. From those early confrontations with Judaism, the fledgling church fervently pursued an entirely new covenant until the appearance of Constantine, the Constantinian hybrid of church and state, paganism, and Christianity.

It was not called or known as the new covenant theology in those days, for theology was not yet an ecclesiastical word. It was simply the teachings of the Lord Jesus, the light of the Holy Spirit on Old Testament scripture. It still is.

When Christ died on the cross, rose from the dead, ascended on high, poured out the Holy Spirit, the promise of the Father, bringing in on all the hope of the Old Testament promises, the old covenant, with its government and economy, was abolished forever. The new covenant became a living reality in the life and vitality of God's elect people. When Constantine became emperor of Rome, establishing Christianity as a state religion with himself as its head, the established church lapsed immediately back into old covenant sacralism.

New covenant church life survived in just bits and pieces. Underground in the outlawed rival churches, which were given various heretical labels, the Reformation of the 16th century stopped far short of reestablishing new covenant doctrine and the life of the church. The Reformation failed because it was an attempt to reform religion, a religious system that was hopelessly corrupt.

An apostate and the reformers themselves were not yet free from Romanism and old covenant mentality, nor have any of the myriads of Protestant denominations springing up since then been able to fully grasp and implement the new covenant truth, each being obsessed when formulating, prosecuting, and propagating various doctrines and creeds aimed at disguising and distinguishing themselves from the erroneous herd from which they each split. To do so, they are constrained to employ legalistic measures in order to assure their purity. This, of course, from the outset excludes such a church from the spirit and life of the new covenant.

So it is little wonder that even the best of churches today, precious few, have more than a vague idea of what Jesus meant when He took the cup after supper, saying, This cup is a new covenant in my blood. We know, of course, that He was saying that the cup represents the new covenant and that His blood speaks of His death. But what is this new covenant, and how does it bear on sound Christian doctrine and church life? Nearly fifty years of gospel labor in the pastorate and evangelism, in Bible conferences of all sorts, wrestling the principles and teachings employed in all sorts of gospel ministries, has persuaded me that an ignorance of the new covenant on the Christian church, along with an unlawful imposition of the old covenant on the Christian church, is responsible for more abuse, more impotence, more deadness, more unbelief, more joylessness, more corruption, more decay and apostasy than any other deficiency in ecclesiastical disciplines.

May the Holy Spirit help us to extricate ourselves from this ruinous bog. Our Bibles have been divided into two parts, commonly called Old Testament and the New Testament, the former being a record of God's divine revelation prior to the advent of Christ, and the latter that was prophesied of Him in the former. The terms Old and New Testament can be misleading when we speak of an Old Testament, Old Covenant, and a New Covenant.

The Hebrew word for covenant is bereth. The Greek word is diatheke, which in turn is translated in our English Bible both as covenant and testament. We commonly call the first section of our Bible the Old Testament and the last section the New Testament.

But we must dismiss from our minds the idea that when we speak of the Old Covenant and the New Covenant, we are not speaking of the literary division of the Bible into the New Testament and the Old Testament. We are speaking of two different arrangements called covenants, one which by God formerly governed ethnic Israel and the other by which He now covers His elect people, the Christian Church. The Hebrew word bereth comes from a root meaning to fetter, to bind, and is intended to express an agreement between two parties by which they bind themselves to certain commitments to each other.

It is important to note that this does not necessarily imply an equality between the two. It may be, as in the New Covenant, expressly unilateral in that God undertakes to secure the obligation of both parties. In this sense, the word testimony or testament can be equated with the word covenant since we are now talking about what God has testified and declared and therefore immutable, invincible, and perpetually binding.

We see this application in the Old Testament as well as in the New Testament where the ark of the covenant is also called the ark of the testimony. In the various times that the law of the Decalogue, God's revealed will, is translated God's covenant. This sometimes leads to the erroneous conclusion that the abolition of the Old Covenant is equal to the abolition of God's fixed immutable law.

He hasn't changed that law. There was nothing wrong with it to begin with. He hadn't changed anything about it.

It still requires every jot and every tittle. His revealed will and testimony cannot be changed. Opinions vary as to the number and names of the covenants which God has made with various men or peoples in the Bible.

It will be helpful to our present discussion to examine each of these, although some of them may be referred to as what is profitable. Rather, we will confine our thoughts to what is called in Scripture an Old Covenant and what is called a New Covenant. The Bible knows nothing of a so-called covenant of works or a covenant of grace.

These are creedal inventions of Reformed theology and are useful only in the fallacious sad creeds. The Old Covenant is identical with what is sometimes called the Mosaic Covenant after its administrator or the Sinaitic Covenant after the region in which it was delivered to the Israelites and their sojourn from Egyptian bondage. We find that in Exodus 19 and 24.

This covenant was reaffirmed in Deuteronomy 29, following the graphic catalog of blessings or cursings contained in chapter 28, which God promised to visit upon the nation Israel conditioned in the event of their obedience or disobedience in the terms of the covenant. This is the heart and soul of the Old Covenant. Do these things and live.

Disobey these words and perish. Romans 10 and 5. It was a legal covenant and by nature required ability and will to perform and to maintain a righteousness which fallen men were utterly unable to fulfill. That is why it is failed and why it is abolished.

In this generation you and me haven't been improved a bit. We ain't got nothing they didn't have. We have all the weaknesses and impotence that they have.

There's nothing defective or imperfect in the law. The fault lies entirely in the ability of an unregenerate people with wicked hearts to obey a holy law. The Old Covenant was made with an ethnic nation, Israel, the natural descendants of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob.

Its promises derive from those made to Abraham and to the designated descendants of no other. These ethnic people became a national political entity with a geographical possession. This Hebrew nation was sacralistic in its religion and government.

That is, all its citizens were members of its religion. To be born into the nation was to be born into its church. And the Puritans in this country didn't improve on that a bit.

That's the reason they sprinkle those babies. They baptize them real quick so they won't go to hell. To be born into this nation is to be born into the church.

Its magistrates were subject to its priests and had the power and responsibility to enforce religious law. This, of course, was not a new arrangement but the common one in the world. And until the advent of Christ and the New Covenant, there was no such thing as separation of church and state.

Christ is an inward spiritual kingdom of the heart. And coexistence exists peaceably with, though entirely separate from, the political entities of this world. You take care of what's down at the church house and let the politician take care of what goes on at the White House.

The world still cannot comprehend that. Nor does a Christendom that includes unregenerate people in its covenant and communion, which the Puritans had, and which was aggressively active in shaping and controlling civil government by political process, irrespective of lofty-sounding Christian names given such churches and denominations, its people still live under the old covenant, having only the restraint and constraint of outward law. They are coerced into compliance with outwardly written laws by magistrates or ecclesiastical authority of some sort.

Deficiencies in Contemporary New Covenant Debate Unhappy, much of the polemics around the New Covenant today is not wholesome. Perhaps the fact that it can be classified as a debate is indicative that a Christian spirit is either missing or has been rendered by weak and hot, intemperate, dogmatic, uncharitable souls, a religious scrap. As I approach the subject, I feel that I cannot fully explore all the arguments on each side of the issue without entering into some sort of debilitating spirit myself.

I will, however, rehearse some of these distractions from the blessed realities of the New Covenant and illustrate why they are false issues. The Law vs. Grace Issue This is by far the oldest, most enduring, and varied of all.

John 1.17 is taken to have covenantal reference declaring no grace to be in the Old Covenant and no law to be in the New Covenant. Law is set in opposition to grace and Moses to Christ. This is absurd.

Was there also no truth in what Moses taught? Was Christ's teaching unlawful? God's law is always gracious and His grace is always lawful. The same gracious. Righteous God is the author of both covenants.

Moses declared Christ to be a prophet like me. It is true, of course, that the Law is more in focus in the Old Covenant and grace more prominently displayed in the New Covenant. That is only necessary because unregenerate Israel, being unable to meet the Law's requirements, fell under its condemnation.

Spiritual Israel, under the New Covenant, on the other hand, having a surety to make up the shortfall, exult in the grace brought to us by Christ. So far from opposing the Law of God, the grace of Christ magnifies its righteousness by fulfilling all its spiritual purpose in His people. That is something.

A perfect law. And God perfectly fulfills it in His people. They are made holy, sinless.

He ain't got no dirty linen hanging around. Not in His house. Nothing is said of Jeremiah's prophecy of abolishing the Law and replacing it with grace, but a rewriting of the Law in the hearts of the people, rather than the tablets of stone.

Nothing is said here of an old law and a new law. Nor is anything said in the New Testament of an old law or a new law. There is a new commandment.

Not an entire legal code given by Christ to love one another. Not an entire legal code, but it is given by Christ to love one another as He has loved us. And there is a newness of spirit and an oldness of letter.

Romans 7, 6, but the same immutable divine law is in view. The antinomian legalism debates, intemperate zealots for the grace of God, hurl accusations of legalism against those who are jealous for a righteous compliance with God's written precepts. You are not legalistic if you want to do what God said.

You ought to. And if you want to, you will. If you don't, you didn't.

If you don't do it, you didn't love it that way. There are those who hold a high view of moral rectitude in the people of God, are horrified when these, reveling in the liberties of Christ, declare themselves free from legal obligation, railing against them as antinomian or against the law. While Christendom certainly does include within its pale true antinomians who assert justification apart from repentance and faith, as well as legalists who trust in an outward legal compliance with the law letter, no true Christian can be in either one of these.

Abolition of the Law On the grace side of the debate, it is commonly argued that the advent of Christ fulfilled all that the law prophesied and required and rendered it obsolete and unnecessary. Usually, these see the old covenant either identical with or inseparable from the Decalogue. Since this covenant was made with the Hebrew nation, its laws were only relevant to that particular people.

They have no universal value to people in general. These hold that the law was abolished not only in its governmental function, but its didactic purposes also. It is impotent to justify us and of no use to instruct us in grace.

Since we have Christ in the heart, it is argued that the eternally written precepts are superfluous and therefore abolished from the believer's vision of God's law in His revealed will, intended to reflect His ineffable person. Since God is unchanging and eternal, His law is also immutable and everlasting. Moral, civil, and ceremonial law.

Those who hold a high view of the word of God in the Old Testament as authoritative for all the time are obliged to confess that some parts of that law seem to have been set aside. Civil laws, which apply to civil order among the citizens, of that Israel would not apply to people who are neither Israelites nor living at that time. Also, some laws seem to serve no moral or governmental purpose at all and seem to be strictly ceremonial, prophesying spiritual realities to be fulfilled in Christ.

These laws also seem to have been abolished. So a division has been determined into one entire legal code handed down by the Almighty. Moral law is retained.

Civil and ceremonial law abolished. As reasonable as they may seem to human logic, there is no biblical authority for them. Rules in the Church, no different from rules at the White House.

Sabbatarianism and Anti-Sabbatarianism, Sunday or not. The above unscriptural division of the law makes for difficulties with the decalogue for those who wish to yet hold that God wrote in stone the divine finger as holy and good and permanent. The Sabbatarian holds a high view of the Fourth Commandment and does not wish to enforce it in a harsh and strict way.

It was applied in the Old Testament. The Sabbatarian has devised arguments for converting the Old Testament Sabbath to a New Testament Lord's Day, changing it from Saturday to Sunday and modifying it to a day worship combined with a refraining from overt domestic and commercial enterprise. Quite an undertaking with no biblical authority.

The Anti-Sabbatarian consistently abolishes the Fourth Commandment with the other nine. He then avoids accusation of abolishing moral restraint by inventing another unscriptural principle. All the Old Covenant law is abolished except for that which is reinstated in the New Testament.

Since there is no positive command in the New Testament to keep the Sabbath, the same is abolished. This makes the pro-law, anti-law debate narrow down to endless wrangling over the Fourth Commandment. Astounding, but folks still doing that.

How can it be that otherwise intelligent and devout men could abandon the gospel and squander their precious time and energies and resources quarreling over how one observes a day. Still others have very nearly made an idol or at least a whole Bible from the Decalogue, the Ten Commandments, and feel the word of God is rendered of no effect if those ten words are not held up as the heart of divine revelation and the sole banner of rectitude. The teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ leave those ten words, graven in stone, far behind His own.

You have heard it said, but I say unto you, Sermon on the Mount, if He is not putting behind those things what was His meaning there. You have heard it said, but I say unto you. The Decalogue needs no defense.

What is wrong with Ten Commandments? What is wrong with doing right? The Decalogue needs no defense, but we will need far more than those letter words to know and live the new covenant Christianity. He who thinks he can keep those Ten Commandments perfectly does not know what they are. We all have to have grace.

At the best of us, at the best we can do externally, we fall. It has got to be by grace. One of the ironies of all this is that those devoting their preaching and writing to those controversies on both sides draw heavily on the writings of the Reforms and the Puritans, writers who rejected the whole biblical doctrine of two covenants.

Rejecting the biblical terminology of an old covenant and a new covenant, these words held to covenant theology, which contends only for one covenant of grace, having two administrations, one to Israel and the other to the Church. This will do very well for those holding a strong outward law ministry, but no place for the new covenant theology to prove the reign of grace. Rich as the legacy left us by the Puritans was, it is still principally an old covenant one.

Using their writings to shine light on the new covenant is to pile darkness upon darkness. The new covenant may be discovered nowhere but in the inspired word of God. Happily, most of the new covenant, old covenant debate has been confined to conferences and writings addressed to and appealed to those of a contentious demeanor they like to fuss, theologians and ministers with an itch for doctrine and debate wrestling over fine theological points.

It has captured very little interest by the man in the pew. Up to this point, that's good because very little of it has been practically profitable to the normal, usual Christian seeking to lay hold on the riches of Christ and to walk in the Spirit. But that is the very person whom we wish to help with the realities of a new covenant.

So I cannot attempt to debunk all the above piecemeal without entering into the very rhetoric which I wish to silence. I would have to write volumes, and having done so, I would have done nothing but weary the saints, inflame my brethren with more philemics, and accomplish nothing. Nor do I wish to cast any shadow on the sincerity and godliness of those who, in my view, have sacrificed their excellent and wholesome ministries to some of these side issues.

They are some of God's finest. Rather, I hope to simply take the scriptures and expound the glorious and riches of the new covenant life in Christ. In so doing, every one of the distractions that we have mentioned, along with a host of others, will evaporate.

Amen. Father in Heaven, what shall we say to these things? Here we are at the dangling end of a people who have struggled through the years, through the ages, through the colleges, through the seminaries, through the battlegrounds, seeking you. We seek you this morning.

We desire, O Lord, to love you. We desire to live holy and pure lives. There is nothing in your commandments, in your word, that is not true.

Teach your people and glorify yourself in us. For it is in Jesus' name we pray.

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