

The Difference Between Old and New Covenant

by Zac Poonen

Zac Poonen explores the profound differences between the Old and New Covenants, emphasizing the transformative power of Grace over Law in the believer's life.

Scripture: Exodus 26:31, Psalm 103:2, Matthew 11:11, John 1:17, Romans 6:14, 2 Corinthians 12:9, Ephesians 2:8, Hebrews 4:16, James 4:6

Topics: "New Covenant", "Christian Living"

Description

Zac Poonen delves into Romans 6:14, highlighting the crucial difference between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. He emphasizes that being under Grace means sin cannot master over us, contrasting it with being under the Law. Poonen explains that the New Covenant through Jesus surpasses the Old Covenant mediated by Moses, enabling believers to reach a higher standard of life and fellowship with God. He challenges Christians to understand and embrace the fullness of Grace, which empowers them to overcome sin and live victoriously.

Transcript

Let us look at a verse in Romans 6, which states the essential difference between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant in a nutshell. We read in Romans 6:14 : 'Sin shall not be master over you, when you are not under Law but under Grace'. The word 'Law' here symbolizes the Old Covenant, God's agreement with Israel, and the terms and conditions of that Old Covenant. And Grace, in one word, sums up God's new agreement through the Lord Jesus Christ, and all the terms and conditions of that new agreement. This verse tells us that we can be either under Law or under Grace. And the proof that you are not under Law, but under Grace is that sin cannot be master over you. We could read this another way: that on the other hand, if you are not under Grace, but under Law, then sin will have the mastery over you.

So ultimately, the way we discover whether we are under the Law or under Grace, is not by testing whether we're legalistic in relation to a lot of rules and regulations, but by a far more deeper test: does sin have the mastery over you? Or do you have the mastery over sin?

This is a very important question, because a lot of people do not understand the difference between what Jesus has come to give in the New Covenant, and what Moses came to give under the Old Covenant. If I were to ask you a simple question: who is greater, Moses or our Lord Jesus Christ? The answer would be

clear, Moses is a servant and the Lord Jesus is the master. It is clear that Jesus is far greater than Moses.

Since we understand this clearly, let me tell you that in exactly the same way, just as Moses is inferior to Jesus, the Old Covenant that God mediated with Israel through Moses, is inferior to the New Covenant that God mediated through Jesus. The resulting implication is that if Moses and the Law could bring people in the Old Covenant to a certain standard of life, Jesus and the New Covenant should be able to bring people to a higher standard. You will agree that the New Covenant has to be a higher standard. It would be something comparable to a bicycle versus an aeroplane. There's a lot of difference between a bicycle and an aeroplane, in the speed and the ability of each to move from place to place. In comparing a bicycle and an aeroplane, you can see the difference between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. The Old Covenant can also take you from one place to another, like a bicycle can. But the New Covenant can take you from one place to another like an aeroplane can, and there's a world of difference between the two! The Old Covenant can bring a man to a certain point of fellowship with God, but not beyond that. In the Old Testament tabernacle, God illustrated this by putting a thick curtain between the Holy Place and the most Holy Place, and telling the Israelites, "Nobody can come into this Most Holy Place, this veil blocks you. You can come so far, but not further". Beyond that veil, God Himself lived in that Old Testament temple, and no one could go there. Even the high priest could go only once a year, and that was only a token. No one could go there whenever they wished. But when Jesus died on Calvary, that veil was rent, torn from top to bottom, showing that the way into God's presence was open now. Now that the veil is torn, and the way into the Most Holy Place, into God's presence, is open, should our standard of life be higher or lower than people in the Old Covenant? The answer is clear. If with just the Law, without personal fellowship with God, people could come to a certain standard of life, how much higher our standard of life should be, once we come into fellowship with God Himself inside that torn veil? And yet, many, many Christians don't seem to have understood this. For example, why do we sometimes hear of Christians falling into some terrible sins? Can you imagine Elijah or John the Baptist, running after women or running after money? They did not have Grace; they did not have the open access into the Most Holy Place like we have; and yet, without it they came to such a life. How much more we can come to if we only would have faith and rise up to our privileges under the New Covenant?

That's what Paul is saying in Romans 6: sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under Law but under Grace. In Matthew 11:11, Jesus said that the greatest human born until that day, was John the Baptist (Jesus was not born of a human father so Jesus himself is excluded, but among all others, John the Baptist was the greatest). Jesus went on to say: But the one who is least in the Kingdom of Heaven - in God's kingdom - is greater even than John. What he was trying to say, was that the highest that the Law could take a man, was still inferior or less than where Grace could take the weakest of God's children. So it's not going to be just an occasional believer who rises to a higher standard of life than John the Baptist. God's will is, that every single one of His children who come under Grace, rise to a higher level than John the Baptist. Whether we will actually live that New Covenant life is quite another thing. But the possibility is there if we understand and receive Grace as God offers it to us, through our Lord Jesus Christ.

When we compare the word 'Mercy' - as we read for example Hebrews 4:16, we're told that we are to come with confidence to the Throne of Grace that we may receive Mercy, and find there Grace to help in time of need. There is a difference between 'Mercy' and 'Grace'. 'Mercy' is an Old Testament word, used very frequently in the Old Testament, for example, "the Lord whose Mercy endures forever". David often speaks about Mercy, and as a result of Mercy, people in the Old Testament have their sins covered and forgiven. Yet they could not be cleansed of sins. David could only say, 'Blessed is the man whose sins are

covered'. No one's sins could be cleansed until Jesus died on Calvary's cross. They could only be covered and forgiven. In the well-known Psalm 103, David said, 'Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits, who forgives all your iniquities'. That was Mercy, and all of us need it too; we need Mercy, we need our sins to be forgiven. But there's something more than Mercy that we have in the New Covenant, and that is Grace; something to help us in the future, and something to help us overcome the passions in our nature. It says here, we can come to the Throne of Grace and in the same place where we receive Mercy, we can find Grace to help us in our time of need.

What is our time of need? Our time of need is when we're under tremendous pressure from the lusts in our flesh, and from the devil, to sin. In that moment, when we're tempted to sin and to fall, God says Grace can help me; Grace is help for my need, whatever it is. If my need right now is that I need help to overcome a particular sin, God's Word says, Grace can help me in my time of need. It's like, if I were climbing a mountain, and I were about to slip and fall, if I ask for help, God can lift me up and make me stand so that I don't fall. But if I don't ask for help, I struggle on my own, I slip and fall and break my bones, and I then ask God for help, and an ambulance comes and picks me up: that's help too. But that's Mercy. Mercy is help after I have fallen: that God picks me up, forgives me, takes me to His hospital, patches me up, and restores me. That's the experience of many Christians. They fall, and then they ask God for help. But isn't there a better way? There is - Grace to help me in my time of need.

Why don't you try it the next time when you find the pressure of temptation so strong that you're about to fall, try this out and see if it doesn't work. Ask God at that moment: "Lord, I'm unable to overcome this, I want you to help me. Give me Grace to overcome this". And you will see in that moment, Grace coming to carry you through.

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