

Understanding The Differences Between The Old and New Covenants

James Smyda

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Brethren, in the professing Christian world today there is a common belief that God's law has basically been done away with, that most all of the instructions in the Old Testament that, you might say there are maybe a thou shalt or thou shalt not, the rules for how mankind should go about obeying God and the standards by which they are judged by are basically just wiped clean, Those don't apply to mankind anymore and that today all someone has to do is just have a faith in Jesus Christ and believe him and accept him as their savior and that's all that's required for salvation. The basis behind this belief is the idea that when Jesus Christ came to earth and He fulfilled His role as our savior and was the perfect sacrifice and He ushered in the new covenant that not only abolished the old covenant, it abolished God's law and just took away most everything that's in the Old Testament.

As you are probably aware, we in the Church of God take a very different stance on this particular subject. We believe that it doesn't remove all of God's law. What it does remove is all of the other physical rituals, you might say. Animal sacrifices and physical circumcision and things of that nature are abolished, but the rest of God's law is still very applicable. As a result, we are oftentimes questioned on this belief and we're accused of picking and choosing, because the counter-accusation is that we like the Sabbath and the holy days and clean and unclean meats and tithing and stuff, but we are not a big fan of circumcision and animal sacrifices and stuff like that. We've just kept on with the things that we like and we've done away with the things that we don't like.

What I'd like to do today is take a look at this fundamental subject and not only review what some might say the basic doctrinal issues are, but I'd also like to look at how and why it is that we come to the conclusions that we do on this subject. If you would like a title for this sermon, it is

Understanding the Differences Between the Old and New Covenants

I am sure for many of you out there looking at this sermon you probably remember, if you have been in the Church of God for a significant period of time, about twenty years ago this particular subject was used as the backbone of an argument to throw away most everything the Church of God had ever taught. The idea was presented in the church at that time that we're now in the new covenant, which we are, but it was this Protestant idea that all of God's law and everything in the Old Testament now no longer applies and you're not required to obey these laws anymore. We just have to have faith in Jesus Christ and that's all that's required. I would like to review the basic fundamental doctrines here, because we need to do that periodically just to make sure that we're strongly tied to our foundation and we don't repeat the lessons of history. I would also like to look at this from a point of view of understanding the bigger picture of

how and why it is that we come to the conclusions that we do and the proof we're required to do that, so that we have a more thorough understanding of the subject.

First of all let's just look at this concept that there is validity to the idea that the new covenant basically abolishes the old covenant, kind of wipes it out. The covenants are very uniquely different. In fact, we are going to see here as we look at this that there is validity to this concept of one replacing the other because they are actually mutually exclusive. To see this idea, let's turn first of all to Jeremiah 31:31-34. What we're going to see here is a brief synopsis of how these covenants are different.

Jeremiah 31:31. *"Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah —*
32) *not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord.*
33) *But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.*
34) *No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."* (NKJV)

Notice, He's saying that this new covenant is going to be really different than the old one that He's referring to. He's referring to the covenant made at Mt. Sinai. He is saying that these are going to be uniquely different. We see some of the elements here that are significantly different that are mentioned in this synopsis, because He mentioned this one's going to be about writing His laws upon their heart and forgiving their sins. What this is getting at is the old covenant was a physical covenant. The new covenant is a spiritual covenant. What was happening at Mt. Sinai with the old covenant was God was making a deal with them. If they followed Him and obeyed the letter of the law, He would make their physical lives very enjoyable. As you see the promises there, He is saying as long as you consistently obey, life is going to be very pleasurable for you. You are going to have a very positive existence.

The reason is that's all the deal entailed, because they weren't being offered salvation. There wasn't forgiveness of sins involved in this, so the only way that they could, you might say theoretically, obtain salvation under that covenant was to live a perfect life and to never make a mistake, which you know human beings are just not going to do. So, there wasn't any realistic path to salvation there. It was just a physical covenant, whereas the new covenant entails not only the sacrifice of Jesus Christ to atone for our sins and to forgive them, but it also entailed giving God's spirit to enable us to build His mind and character and also the promise of salvation. You see, the reward was very different. As I mentioned, in the old covenant the promise was that your physical life will be very enjoyable. As long as you consistently obey, you will be continually physically blessed. What we're going to see here is in the new covenant it's a very different deal,

because it isn't just about this physical life. It's about obtaining salvation. Not only are you not promised to have continual blessings, we're going to see later in this sermon that you are directly promised that you will suffer adversity and you will have to suffer, even though you have done righteously. That's one of the terms of the new covenant.

Not only are these covenants very uniquely different, they're mutually exclusive. Let me explain that. Turn over to Hebrews 8:7-8.

Hebrews 8:7. *For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second.*

8) *Because finding fault with them, He says: ... (NKJV)*

The rest of verse 8 through verse 12 is quoting what we just read in Jeremiah 31. It's pretty much almost a word for word quote here, so I'm going to skip over these verses and pick up with verse 13.

13) *In that He says, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away. (NKJV)*

Notice what happens is when the new covenant comes, it's making the first one obsolete. It removes the first one and replaces it. To put it in modern day vernacular, what we're looking at here is an either/or situation, not an all of the above situation. These two covenants are unique from a lot of the other covenants that are talked about in the Old Testament. If you study the subject of covenants in the Old Testament, what you will see is there are a number of different covenants that God made with those following Him. For example, He made a covenant with Noah; the promise was He would never destroy the earth through flood again. He made a covenant with Abraham that his descendants would become great nations and be very prosperous in the future. He made a covenant with David that his line of being king, there would always be someone to fulfill that role throughout history and that line would never end. Never do you see the situation with those covenants where it ever makes the statement that His covenant with Abraham abolishes His covenant with Noah, or that His covenant with David abolishes the covenant with Abraham, because it didn't work that way. That could be an all of the above situation because they were just kind of added side by side with each other and they could complement one another and run concurrently. That's not how the old and the new covenants work, because you notice here what we just read. It said one makes the other obsolete. Turn over to Hebrews 10:8-10 and we will see a very similar comment made here.

Hebrews 10:8. *Previously saying, "Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and offerings for sin You did not desire, nor had pleasure in them"(which are offered according to the law),*

9) *then He said, "Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God." He takes away the first that He may establish the second.*

10) *By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. (NKJV)*

Jesus Christ's life and then dying as our savior is the dividing line between these two covenants. Notice He says He takes away the first that He may establish the second. Again, we're into this concept of mutually exclusive, because He's removing one to put it into the other. This is different from the other covenants that we see in the Old Testament. Never do you see that God's covenant with Abraham removed the covenant with Noah, because it doesn't work that way. They were complementary to each other. These were more of an either/or situation where one replaces the other.

We have seen here that the new covenant abolished the old covenant. What all exactly does that do away with? What all is taken away in the process of that taking place? Here is where the crux of the argument typically is, where people say, well yeah, that law, everything that's required in the Old Testament is all done away with. You don't need to keep that anymore. You can relax, take it easy. You just need faith in Jesus Christ and you don't need to worry about any of that. Is that how that works? If you think about that, it's a very radical conclusion, because what you are saying is all of God's instructions, the very handbook that God gave to mankind for how to live and how to obey, and these clear instructions that are given to us are wiped away. If you start to analyze this subject, there are certainly a number of scriptures in the New Testament that you can misapply or you can twist to make it look like that all of God's law is done away with. If you start trying to analyze all of the contradictions this creates for you, you quickly realize you have a plethora of doctrinal contradictions to try to make that idea work. We can see several times in the Bible it directly tells us that God's law is not done away with. Turn over to Matthew 5:17-18. These are the words of Jesus Christ that we're about to read. It's important to realize that not only is He the savior, He's the mediator of the new covenant. He's the one that came to usher in the new covenant. Notice what He says here about Himself.

Matthew 5:17. *"Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.*

18) For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled." (NKJV)

This is the individual who came to die as the savior. It's always said that everything was nailed to the cross but here He's directly stating that He did not come to destroy the law. Don't misunderstand that is not what this is about. He's very clearly stating that's not the case. In fact, we see even from the apostle Paul that he directly states this is not the case. You know, Paul is typically the guy that's put up as the hero who revealed that we are free of all of this and all of this is done away and made this clear to understand. If we look at Paul's own statements, he directly says this is not true. Turn over to Romans 2:12-13.

Romans 2:12. *For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law*

13) (for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified); (NKJV)

Notice here we have Paul, who is held up as the one who makes it clear the law has been done away with, telling us if you want to be justified before God, you've got to keep that law. You've got to obey Him. You see, if you start analyzing this subject, what you find is this endless number of doctrinal contradictions to try to make that idea work. If you are going to conclude that all of the holy days, the Sabbath, the laws, the Ten Commandments, everything are done away with, you can't even reconcile that with Paul's own teachings. Paul here is directly saying the law is not done away with. If you read the book of 1 Corinthians, he's teaching a Gentile congregation to keep the holy days. Why in the world would he be doing that if the holy days didn't apply anymore? You see, it doesn't really make sense. Again, there are numerous subjects like this where you can find massive contradictions that you are going to face if you try to make this idea work.

One of the important lessons is understanding when you look at this particular subject the reason most people tend to buy into this idea really isn't on the basis of what they can prove or disprove from scripture analytically to try to make it all match up. It's really more often based upon an emotional argument. Think about the way this is often put across. The idea that's being suggested here is you get all of the positives and none of the negatives to just summarize it. In other words you don't have to sacrifice anything in your life. You don't have to obey the law. You don't have to change how you live. You just have to have an intellectual belief in Jesus Christ and he does it all for you. He kept that mean old law for you and then he nailed it to the cross. You don't have to face any of that. You just believe in him and you get to slide into salvation. That is a very seductively appealing argument, isn't it? Nothing is really required of you. That's a very seductively appealing argument, isn't it, because nothing is really required of you? You get all of the benefits and no negatives. That feels wonderful to human nature. Think about it. It's a very emotionally appealing argument. We get all of the positives and no negatives and nothing is really required of us. It sounds fantastic.

It's kind of the logical equivalent you might say of how we oftentimes see diet pills advertised. How often do you see something like that advertised and basically the pitch is like this? Just take this pill and the fat will melt right off of you. No need to change your diet. No need to give up those fatty foods, you know the ones that put the weight on you in the first place. You don't need to give any of that up. You don't have to sweat and exercise and do hard work. No, sit on the couch in the air conditioning, prop your feet up. Watch TV. Eat donuts all day and take this pill and the fat will just melt right off of you. Now you don't have to be a physician to know that's logically ludicrous. If you have any basic understanding of health, that sounds nuts. How often do people fall for that kind of thing? Naturally, as human beings that just has a seductive appeal. I get all of the benefits, none of the down side. Sounds great! Sign me up. Who wouldn't want that deal? It sounds fantastic.

What you often see in this is it's a natural trait of human beings. We tend to have a susceptibility to fall for something, to make an emotional decision you might say. We hear what we want to hear and we make an emotional decision and then we turn

around and reverse engineer a kind of logic to convince ourselves that we made a smart decision. We thought it through and made a rational decision. If you analyze the logic that has come to that conclusion, you'll see it had major holes in it and it doesn't sound real sensible. If a person has done that emotionally, what you are going to find is they are very resistant to critically analyzing the logic that's gotten to that decision. What you are dealing with now is an attitude of I've made up my mind. Don't be confusing me with the facts. This is an emotional decision because of that seductive appeal.

If you remember about twenty years ago when this argument that God's law was done away with was being introduced into the Church of God, you probably witnessed this very thing where you saw friends that basically wound up biting into this idea and were resistant to critical evaluations of it. I know with myself I had friends I went to Ambassador College with that had been thoroughly versed in God's word and studied this for four years and after college this argument gets put out and it sounds wonderful. You don't have to do anything hard anymore. You don't have to sacrifice. You can just believe in Jesus and it's all done for you. They bought into this idea and were very resistant to analyzing this idea and finding the contradictions involved to get a logical answer to the obvious contradictions. They really weren't that interested in doing that. This is something we have to be aware of in lots of areas of our life, but we can also do this in doctrine as well, again making an emotional decision because it appeals to us, even when we are not really ready to critically analyze it.

As I mentioned, we in the Church of God come to a very different conclusion on this subject, because we don't look at it as God's word is done away with; His law and everything in the Old Testament is wiped away. We look at it from the standpoint that His law is still in effect, but it's all of the physical rituals, you might say, of the Old Testament that are part of the old covenant system that are suspended and no longer apply. Now I want you to logically think about that for a moment as well, because this is a very radical conclusion to come to as well. The reason I say it's a very radical conclusion is because what we're actually saying in making that argument is that multiple chapters and multiple books of the Bible that have clear specific instructions for mankind that we're directly told to obey no longer apply any more. Again, to come to that conclusion requires a significant burden of proof. You don't speculate or guess your way into that conclusion. You don't reverse engineer your way into that argument. You need substantial proof to back that up. As I mentioned, oftentimes in the Church of God we get accused of picking and choosing, because we say the Ten Commandments still apply. The Sabbath and holy days still apply and all of these things still apply. We do all of that but we don't do the sacrifices. We don't do circumcision. We don't do all of these other things. We are picking and choosing. How did we come to the conclusions that we can retain the law but yet these other things are done away with?

Before we look at the specifics of that I'd like to look at the picture in general. As I mentioned, this is a very radical conclusion when you are literally looking at it and saying multiple chapters and multiple books of the Bible with clear, specific instructions that tell us how we should live and the standards by which we are judged are

suspended and pushed aside. That is a very radical conclusion and that comes with a substantial burden of proof to back that conclusion up. What you need to find to come to a conclusion like that is essentially three things. First, and most importantly, you need scripture that directly says the things that you are alleging are suspended are actually suspended. You don't speculate or guess your way into that or reverse engineer your way into that. That's a conclusion you need specific scripture that says that. To have a coherent picture you also need a rationale from the Bible that explains why this would be the case, why this dramatic change would take place. You need an explanation you can read out of the Bible, not something you pull out of a creative imagination. You can actually turn to scripture and it states that. In addition to that, if you are taking away the rules that are commanded that this is what mankind should do to obey God and the standard by which they are judged, and you are taking that standard and pushing it aside, you need clarification on what the new rules are. You can't live a standard when you're not aware of what it is. For the burden of proof to do this, you need to be looking for these three things and you need to be able to find them from scripture. The reason I articulate this out is I want you to see that we have these three things that we can read directly from scripture to come to this conclusion. We didn't just conveniently look at this and say, we like the holy days and we like the Sabbath, but you know those animal sacrifices are just kind of bloody and barbaric. We just don't want to do all of that extra work. That circumcision, that's painful. We don't want to be a part of that. We didn't reverse engineer our way into this. We did it because of what scripture says.

Let's see from the Bible now how we can prove how we came to these conclusions. Turn over to Hebrews 9:6-9.

Hebrews 9:6. *Now when these things had been thus prepared, the priests always went into the first part of the tabernacle, performing the services.
7) But into the second part the high priest went alone once a year, not without blood, which he offered for himself and for the people's sins committed in ignorance;
8) the Holy Spirit indicating this, that the way into the Holiest of All was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was still standing. (NKJV)*

What he has just described here is specifically involving the Day of Atonement, because that was the once a year when they would go into the holy of holies. Now notice verses 9-10.

*9) It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience —
10) concerned only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation. (NKJV)*

Here we have described that these physical rituals, first of all were symbolic. It tells you that this was all symbolism and it was instituted until the time of the reformation. It's

telling you that these were instituted with an expiration date. In other words, they were intended for a period of time and they would then expire and that's directly what it's saying. The time of the reformation it's referring to here is when Jesus Christ would come to be the ultimate sacrifice for us and would become the savior of mankind and that's when this transition would take place. You can see here that we didn't just decide arbitrarily that we don't really like these things and they're not convenient for our lifestyle, so we want to make up an argument for these to go away. The Bible directly tells us that this was all suspended and part of the logic as to why is that this was all symbolic. The sacrifices and everything that were done here in the Old Testament didn't truly atone for sin. It talks about a symbolic atonement that was accomplished through these. Again, that's all it was. It was symbolism because it taught the need for Jesus Christ to come to be the true savior to atone for our sins. So, there was a teaching lesson in all of this to help Israel understand the need for Christ to come. This stuff did not truly atone for sin. If you will turn over to Hebrews 10, we can further explain some of the details here. We will start in Hebrews 10:1-3.

Hebrews 10:1. *For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect.*

2) For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshipers, once purified, would have had no more consciousness of sins.

3) But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. (NKJV)

Notice, this is a reminder of them. This ties in with what we read in Hebrews 9, where it says this was all symbolic, because this was a reminder of the gravity of sin and the sacrifice necessary to atone for sin. It was to teach them about this and to point towards Christ's coming, but it didn't truly atone for sin. If you notice in verse 4 it says:

4) For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins. (NKJV)

If you notice, in the symbolism in the sacrificial system, they were sacrificing animals and using this blood as a symbolic atonement. One of the lessons that Hebrews teaches us is without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins. This was all done as symbolism. Let's ask the question, why is it that the blood of bulls and goats could not take away sin? Why was that not possible? It very dogmatically tells us that was not even a possibility. Why is that? Well, to understand that all we have to do is go back to the foundational concepts that all of this is based upon. The very reason why there is even a need to atone for sin is because what comes with sin is the death penalty. The first time an individual sinned, they earned the death penalty. As the Bible clearly tells us, the wages of sin is death. The soul that sins it shall die. Once an individual has sinned, they automatically have gained the death penalty as a part of that. Now they would have to die as a punishment for their own sins. What the concept of atoning for sin is about is removing that penalty and another sacrifice being able to take on that penalty so this individual does not have to suffer the death penalty and permanently die as a result of this.

This does require the shedding of blood, but realize it's not just about the shedding of blood. It's also important to realize the value of the blood involved. To atone for this and to take this penalty away, you need a substitute. You need the shedding of blood of an individual who can take this penalty upon them and can have the value of equivalency to the individual. That's why we have to die for our own sins. The shedding of our own blood is a requirement as a result of that sin. So, to have an equivalency here you need something that has a value that's equivalent. See, this is why Jesus Christ was able to do this, because Jesus Christ came down and lived as a human being, so He walked in the shoes of a human being and He was tempted by sin. He was capable of sinning. It was technically possible that He could have given in to sin he would have been held accountable for that sin because He was a human being. But He lived all of His life and never sinned at all. So He can serve as a substitute because He doesn't have to die for His own sins. If He would have sinned even once, He would have incurred the death penalty to pay for His own sin. He then could not have been a sacrifice for anybody. In terms of value, remember, He was a God being prior to this. He's the creator. He has eternally existed and He had been born as a human being and lived out His life and died. Now the value of His life doesn't just equate with another human being. It equates with all of mankind. Compare this to an animal. Yes, there was the death of an animal and it had to be an animal with no imperfections, because the symbolism is teaching that you have to have a perfect sacrifice, but you are talking about an animal. This is an animal that not only does not have the spirit of God, it doesn't even have the spirit of man in it. It's not even capable of comprehending the concept of sin, let alone living without sin or being held accountable for sin. So, there's nothing in an animal sacrifice that has an equivalency that could take that value off. This is why it's not possible for the blood of bulls and goats to have covered sin and it was all symbolism. It required Jesus Christ to come and to be that perfect sacrifice to make salvation available.

This also brings up another interesting question. As you know, in the Old Testament we had a number of individuals who actually had the holy spirit and who lived out their lives as Christians, who we know will be in the first resurrection. King David is a good example. Ezekiel tells us exactly what his role is going to be in the kingdom. We know he's going to be in the first resurrection. How did this work? How do we have these individuals being able to have the promise of salvation and the holy spirit prior to Christ coming and dying for their sins? How does that work out? The answer comes down to the same thing. It's still ultimately about applying the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Think of it like this. Long before Jesus Christ ever came to earth to live as a human being to die for our sins and to be the savior for mankind, as the God of the Old Testament, He inspired numerous Old Testament prophets to prophesy not only of the events of His life here on earth and how that would turn out, but also of future events that all hinged upon the success of His life and Him successfully living out a perfect life and becoming the savior for mankind for those events to even take place. As I mentioned, if He would have sinned even once, He would have had to die to pay the penalty for His own sins. You have just eliminated the second coming now, because if He can't be resurrected and put back to God status, you can't have a return of Christ. You can't have any of the

events that happen later. All of this is prophesied, not only in graphic detail, but with great confidence that all of this is going to happen before He even comes to earth and lives as a human being. See, He knew how the movie was going to end, basically is the way to put it. He knew he was going to be successful in fulfilling all of this. He knows by the time that He does this His sacrifice is going to apply to all mankind and He can apply this to everybody. The important thing to realize here is that what those in the Old Testament that had the holy spirit and were promised salvation actually received was the promise of salvation. They don't actually receive salvation until the first resurrection with everyone else. As Hebrews 11 very clearly tells us, all these died not having received the promises, because what they had received was the promise of salvation. They don't actually receive salvation until long after Christ has come, lived out His life, died as the savior and has paid the penalty for all of our sins. They're being awarded salvation on the exact same basis that we are. It's still coming down to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. That's the pivotal thing to realize here, because all of this in the Old Testament was symbolism and nothing more. It was a teaching tool to teach Ancient Israel about the need for Jesus Christ to come to be the savior. Pick up in verse 5-7.

5) Therefore, when He came into the world, He said: "Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me.

6) In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure.

7) Then I said, 'Behold, I have come — in the volume of the book it is written of Me — to do Your will, O God.'" (NKJV)

If you have a New King James translation like I have, you will typically see that there's a note next to a lot of verses 5 through 7. If you look in the margin, it's referencing Psalms 40. What it's doing here is quoting an Old Testament prophecy referring to Jesus Christ's coming and fulfilling this. He says, it's written in the book. What I'm getting at here is notice, when I was mentioning before that all of this was prophesied to happen and they knew how all of this was going to turn out, he's referencing that very thing. It's basically that same confidence that they could promise salvation to the prophets and the patriarchs in the Old Testament. Pick up in verses 8-9.

8) Previously saying, "Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and offerings for sin You did not desire, nor had pleasure in them"(which are offered according to the law),

9) then He said, "Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God." He takes away the first that He may establish the second. (NKJV)

Again, you see that's this concept of mutual exclusivity. He removes one, replaces it with the other. All of above is not an option. It's an either/or situation. In verses 10-11:

10) By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

11) And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. (NKJV)

Again, we have that same concept here that that was all symbolism and could not actually atone for sin.

- 12) *But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God,*
 - 13) *from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool.*
 - 14) *For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.*
 - 15) *But the Holy Spirit also witnesses to us; for after He had said before,*
 - 16) *"This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them,"*
 - 17) *then He adds, "Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more."*
 - 18) *Now where there is remission of these, there is no longer an offering for sin.*
- (NKJV)

Notice he's talking about the fact of the remission of sin, the ability to give forgiveness for this. This is given through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Notice he's mentioning here that once that is available, there is no longer an offering. In other words, you no longer do animal sacrifices when the blood of Jesus Christ is being applied. As I mentioned before, we're back to this concept of mutually exclusive. It's a one or the other situation, not an all of the above, because these animal sacrifices were just symbolism to teach us the lesson of the necessity of Jesus Christ to come to be the true savior. Once His blood is applied here this is a game changer. All of this basically stops at that point. That's why the sacrificial system stops, along with all of the other physical rituals that we read about in Hebrews 9. It talks about all of the physical ordinances and stuff. All of this was instituted until the reformation, until Jesus Christ came and fulfilled His role as the savior. That's when you have this radical change.

Another thing that shows us very clearly that this stops is remember with the whole sacrificial system there was a leadership structure designed in the old covenant around this very thing. It was the Levitical priesthood. So, you have the whole priesthood, because they were very involved in all of the temple rituals and the sacrificing of animals and all of this, and this whole structure was based around this. If you look at the leadership structure described in the New Testament church, you don't have a Levitical priesthood anymore. You have a New Testament ministry. Again, you see this divider line between the two, of how they are mutually exclusive of one another. You don't combine these together, because they're completely different systems with different purposes in mind of what they're trying to accomplish. Again, not only are the covenants very different, they are mutually exclusive.

To follow through on this concept as well, I keep mentioning the concept of mutually exclusive. Not only do we see that in the scriptures that we read here, we can also see that clearly in several Biblical examples that address this very subject. What we're going to see here is you don't have to do these things anymore. You don't have to do the animal sacrifices. You don't have to be required to do physical circumcision and such. It wasn't just an issue of saying, that's no longer required. What we are going to see here is there are a couple of Biblical examples where the very issue was addressed

of trying to continue placing these old covenant rituals on new covenant Christians. The apostles very clearly teach you don't mix these two together. Again, we have two specific examples that deal with this. These examples are found in Acts 15 and the book of Galatians. I am going to summarize a good bit of this just for time's sake, just to cover the whole detail and then we'll actually look in the book of Galatians.

Just to give you the whole story, the interesting thing about both of these examples is the brethren involved are Gentiles. The reason I say 'interesting' with that is because these are individuals who don't come from a Jewish background. They don't come from a culture that is used to having the temple and the animal sacrifices and all of these rituals as a part of their culture. These are people from a pagan background and they are exposed to the message and the gospel of Jesus Christ. They're baptized and come into the church and they're pursuing new covenant Christianity. Then they encounter individuals, as Acts 15 tells us, from the sect of the Pharisees. As Acts explains it, these were folks that had been from the Pharisees and they said we're now believers, at least professing to be believers. The reason I say professing to be believers is because in Galatians 2 Paul is then referring back to this story and he refers to them as false brethren. In other words, they were originally Pharisees and were now professing that they were pursuing salvation through Jesus Christ. That's what it means by being a believer and being a new covenant Christian. What they're telling some of the Gentiles is, you have to be physically circumcised and you have to keep the law of Moses to be saved. In other words, you have to combine these two together. They could easily make the argument with these folks; you need to learn the lessons of both systems, because this isn't a part of your history. You've come from paganism and all of this is new to you and you need to combine this.

Notice how the apostles dealt with this. First of all, let me also clarify the comment they make there of keeping the law of Moses. As I mentioned there, the individuals involved in Acts 15, as the chapter clearly tells us, were from the sect of the Pharisees. If you know much about the history of the Pharisees, they were known for adding on additional things to God's instructions that were never a part of scripture. They had their own oral traditions and other things that were their traditions that they turned into commandments and tried to enforce them as commandments that were never a part of scripture to begin with. I am sure that these folks being from the sect of the Pharisees, this was involved in the picture as well.

What you'll see addressed in Acts 15 and in Galatians in detail in both cases is the concept of physical circumcision. As you know, physical circumcision was not an issue that was originated by the Pharisees. God started that off with Abraham and when He starts dealing with Israel, He instructs clearly through Moses, if you're going to take the Old Testament Passover, you have to be physically circumcised. This was very much something that was required to have a relationship with God as part of an old covenant ritual. So, realize when they are specifically addressing the subject of circumcision, one of the reasons that they're focusing on that and not so much some of the other issues in these chapters, it's very easy to refute the issues of the Pharisees and the things that they wanted to add, because that was never a part of scripture in the first place. They

didn't have a foundation where they could prove from any of the Old Testament that this stuff was commanded. This was stuff that they tried to add, whereas things like circumcision and the other rituals associated with the old covenant were from scripture. What happens here is the apostles discuss this issue, because there was controversy coming up over this issue and it was being debated back and forth. They all discuss it and come to the conclusion that, no we're not going to require this of new covenant Christians. They even write a letter that's included there in Acts 15 to help the Gentile brethren realize the apostles were all on the same page on this subject and we're not teaching that these two should go together.

What's even more interesting is if you look at the book of Galatians. The reason I say that is Paul gets several steps more dogmatic, you might say, on this issue. He doesn't just take the point of we're not teaching people that they have to put this together. He takes the point of view that combining these two together is a perversion of the gospel of Christ. Turn over to Galatians 1:6-9.

Galatians 1:6. *I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel,*

7) which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ.

8) But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.

9) As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed. (NKJV)

He can't get any more dogmatic about this. As he takes the point of view, I don't care what their title and their history is; I don't care if it's an angel from heaven that comes down and teaches you differently. They're wrong, period. He directly says this is a perversion of the gospel of Christ. What exactly is he talking about? If you read through this book, in chapter 2 one of the next things he does is he recounts the story of the Acts 15 conference and the whole issue that took place there and the stance that was taken on it. In fact, prior to doing that, in the later part of chapter 1 he goes through his history of how he had been a Pharisee and how he was kind a zealot for this system and nobody was more zealous for it than he was and then he talks about his conversion. Then he goes through in chapter 2 explaining the Acts 15 conference and how this issue was dealt with there. You can see there is a very similar thing going on here, very parallel to what happened in Acts 15. What they are dealing with is, as Paul says in chapter 2, false brethren have brought in the idea of requiring old covenant rituals on new covenant Christians and he very strongly says, no these two are mutually exclusive. That served its purpose for a physical covenant for a physical people that were being taught about the need for a savior, but you don't put these two together. In fact if you will turn over to Galatians 5:1-2, we can pick up here as he continues to address this. Notice the emphasis he places here as he discusses physical circumcision. As we know, again this was not something that the Pharisees had made up on their own and tried to insert into God's religion. This was something very clearly

commanded in the old covenant as a ritual that was required as part of the old covenant process.

Galatians 5:1. *Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.
2) Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. (NKJV)*

Understand here he's talking about pursuing circumcision as a spiritual requirement. He's not saying if you get circumcised for health reasons and hygiene reasons and things of that nature that there is anything inherently wrong with that. That's not the concept here. It's requiring it as a religious issue to have a relationship with God.

3) And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. (NKJV)

Remember, that was part of the old covenant and there was no forgiveness of sin there. The only route to salvation was living a perfect life and never messing up.

*4) You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.
5) For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith.
6) For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.
7) You ran well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? (NKJV)*

In other words they had previously understood the gospel correctly until people came along and tried to tell them they needed to combine them.

*8) This persuasion does not come from Him who calls you.
9) A little leaven leavens the whole lump.
10) I have confidence in you, in the Lord, that you will have no other mind; but he who troubles you shall bear his judgment, whoever he is.
11) And I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why do I still suffer persecution? Then the offense of the cross has ceased.
12) I could wish that those who trouble you would even cut themselves off!
(NKJV)*

He can't get much more graphic and dogmatic here.

13) For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. (NKJV)

Ultimately what I'm getting at here, as I mentioned to come to the radical conclusion that major portions of the Bible, multiple chapters and multiple books of the Bible that have clear instructions, that tell you what you are supposed to obey and the standards by

which you are judged, to be able to say, well that doesn't apply anymore. That has a substantial burden of proof that comes with that and we come to that conclusion because we can meet that burden of proof. We have clearly stated in the Bible that these things are suspended. That's pushed aside. That's part of the old covenant. That's not part of the new covenant. We have scripture that directly says that. We have a rationale that's explaining as to why. We understand what the new rules are, because it lays out for us that the sacrifice of Christ replaced all of this. That's how this system works. So, we meet the burden of proof and that's why we come to this conclusion.

There's another significant difference we need to understand between the old and new covenants as well. Not fully understanding this issue can create issues in a Christian's life. That is, you might say, the expectations for how it affects our physical life today. What I mean by that, as I mentioned before, in the old covenant, what God was offering Ancient Israel was if they obey the letter of the law and consistently do what God told them to do, He would make their physical life wonderful. I won't take the time to go through Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28, but if you read through those chapters it gives you a very clear picture of what God was promising Ancient Israel. You see it listed out. He's basically promising as long as they continually obeyed, their physical life would be wonderful. They would basically live in a physical utopia. The sky is going to open up and just rain blessings down. The weather will be good. They won't get sick. They'd be protected from diseases. Their wives will be fertile. Their kids will be healthy. Everything would be just wonderful. It'll be fantastic. They'll enjoy life. It's a great deal, but realize what He was offering them was just that. When they get to the end of their physical life and they die, that's it. It's over. There's not a promise of salvation here.

What we need to understand is when the holy spirit and salvation are put on the table, in other words when you reach a new covenant agreement where now salvation is the reward, the rules of the game change, specifically on this subject. As I mentioned before, as human beings we always are seeking the deal where I get all of the positives and none of the negatives. I get all of the rewards and no down side. That's what we always want. Very seldom does that ever correlate with reality and that's definitely the subject in this regard as well. If you look at this subject, what's the deal that we would always want? In reality, we want the benefits of the old covenant and the new covenant together and no down sides of either one. As carnal human beings isn't that what we would want? I want a lovely physical life of constant physical blessings. Don't want to have to do that circumcision and those animal sacrifices and that bloody mess and all of that extra work. Leave that out, but I don't want to have to suffer and go through trials either. I want to slide through all of this and get into salvation. That sounds wonderful. It has a seductive appeal. It does not correlate with reality or with the New Testament at all. Turn over to Romans 8:16-17. What I want you to see is the new covenant takes a very different approach on this subject in terms of what your physical life will be like while you are pursuing this.

Romans 8:16. *The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,*

*17) and if children, then heirs — heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, ...
(NKJV)*

I want you to notice the last phrase here, because this is one of the terms of conditions that we have to meet to be a joint heir with Christ.

*17b ... if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.
(NKJV)*

In other words, one of the terms of the contract of being offered salvation is suffering. It's going through adversity. It's going through hard trials. That's not just an issue of suffering because we sinned and we're paying the consequences for our bad decisions, because notice it says sharing in Christ's suffering. Remember, we are talking about an individual who never sinned, never made any mistakes, never made any dumb bad decisions. He never suffered as a result of his own actions. He suffered in spite of that. If you will notice in the book of 1 Peter 2:19, the concept of suffering as Christ suffered is very clearly defined. It makes very clear to us that this is something that we should expect to have to go through as a new covenant Christian. It's just simply how the contract works.

1 Peter 2:19. *For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. (NKJV)*

Notice the comment suffering wrongfully, in other words suffering not because you did something stupid and you sinned and this is the natural consequences. It's facing suffering when you were doing right. You were behaving righteously and this happened anyway. Continue in verse 20.

20) For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God.

21) For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: (NKJV)

That is, we're called to this and we are to do what Christ did. He suffered through no fault of his own.

22) "Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth";

23) who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously;

24) who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness — by whose stripes you were healed.

(NKJV)

Notice it says we are called for this purpose. It very clearly tells us that suffering as Christ suffered, again, has nothing to do with suffering because you sinned and you

made bad decisions and you are facing the consequences. It's when you behaved righteously, you have been obeying God and you are suffering anyway. It's taking that patiently that is a part of suffering as Christ suffered is. Turn over to 1 Peter 4:12-16. It picks up a similar concept here.

1 Peter 4:12. *Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; (NKJV)*

Notice, this is not anything unusual. What he's telling us is this isn't an "if," it's a "when." In other words this is going to happen to you, so expect it. If you are a new covenant Christian, this is just how it works.

13) but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.

14) If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified.

15) But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters.

16) Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter. (NKJV)

Notice again, it's specifically telling us this isn't an if. It's a when. It's a normal expectation for a Christian. He's saying you are going to have to suffer even when you've been righteous and have been obeying God. If you compare that to Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28, one of the things you will see laid out in those chapters, typically called the blessings and cursings, obedience always resulted in physical blessings, the things that we like to think of as blessings, the things that take pain and discomfort out of our lives and give us pleasure and enjoyment. That's how we typically define blessings as human beings. That was continually coming to them, if they were to consistently obey. What you notice also; Deuteronomy 28 even directly states it as you will be on top only and not beneath. In other words, as long as you consistently obey, you will have a physical utopia. Things will always go good for you. You will notice that adversity and hardships, things that are painful and unpleasant in life are only mentioned in those chapters in the context of disobedience.

This is radically different when you look in the new covenant, because realize when the holy spirit and salvation are put on the table, it's a game changer. Now it's about salvation. Now it's about developing the character and mind of God to be able to qualify to be in His kingdom. That's why these rules completely change. What we have to understand here is, yes we're required to suffer. That's not because God is a sadist and wants to see His children suffer and writhe in pain. It's because that's part of the process that builds the character of God in us. Turn over to James 1:2 and we can see this very thing explained.

James 1:2. *My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, (NKJV)*

That's easy to say and hard to do. As physical human beings we generally when we fall into hard trials in life that are painful and difficult, we're not thinking, oh boy, this is great. We're thinking, I'd really like this to go away and that's what we are praying and we're asking our friends to pray about and everything. Please take the pain away. I am not enjoying this. Let's notice why this is the case in verses 3-4.

3) knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.

4) But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. (NKJV)

Notice, the purpose here is because it builds godly character in us, which is why this is the case. The new covenant is a spiritual covenant. It's about developing the mind of God so that we can be born into His kingdom and in His family. The old covenant was simply a physical arrangement. It was, if you live this way, I'll give you a very enjoyable, pleasant physical life. Turn over to verse 12 and we can see this explained a little bit more here.

12) Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. (NKJV)

You know that when it is referencing the crown of life here it's talking about receiving salvation, being born into God's kingdom. Notice it says, you receive the crown of life when? It's when you've been proved. What does the word proved mean? You can see if we look at the meaning of the Greek word here, it ties into the whole concept we are talking about. The Greek word here for "proved" is transliterated into English as "dokimos". It's Strong's number 1384 and according to The Complete Word Study Dictionary of the New Testament by Spiros Zodhiates, it is defined as *to accept, receive, proved, receivable, tried as metal by fire and thus purified, hence to be approved as acceptable men in the furnace of adversity*. In other words, when do you receive the crown of life? It is when you've been tested through the furnace of adversity and you've successfully come out the other side. That's the whole reason why the new covenant requires us to suffer and requires us to face adversity and to endure through it. It's he who endures to the end who shall be saved. Think about it. If you are offered the deal of, hey you're going to get the benefit of both covenants. Life's going to be wonderfully pleasurable for you. Nothing's ever going to go wrong and you're going to get salvation at the end. Why would you count the cost for that deal? Why would you have to stop and think, look I'm going to have to endure to the end and really think through the commitment that you are making? Who wouldn't sign that contract? As long as you do your part everything goes wonderful for you. You basically get to sit on the couch, eat donuts all day, don't have to exercise, take this pill and all of the fat burns off of you. Who wouldn't want that deal? It sounds fantastic. The problem is it just simply doesn't work that way. This very concept is why Paul makes the dogmatic statement he does in 2 Timothy 3:12.

2 Timothy 3:12. *Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. (NKJV)*

Notice, it is a dogmatic, all-encompassing statement. It doesn't say, oh, we're just talking about a few people. We're just talking about the prophets of the Old Testament, just the apostles, just John the Baptist. All of the rest of you get to skip past it. It doesn't say that. It says everyone who wants to enter into a new covenant arrangement, be offered salvation and to follow Jesus Christ, because that when you are following Christ and receiving his blood and the promise of following him and making it into salvation. That's a new covenant arrangement. What that requires is that you are going to have to suffer persecution, because you have to endure through that. That's very important for us to realize today in our lives as new covenant Christians. I think a lot of us, although we would never stop and analytically make the argument that I get the best deal, I get the benefits of both covenants and not the down side, would not analytically argue that. Think about it.

As one man mentioned in his sermon at the Feast; he talked about the "why" question of times in our lives when we face very difficult trials where we ourselves are going through something like that or someone that we love and care about is going through a grueling trial. We are struggling with basically God's justice and His faithfulness and wondering why is He doing all of that. What's the basis for a lot of our struggle there? In the back of our minds what are we thinking? If He loves me, He's not going to put me through pain. He's not going to make me go through something grueling and difficult and painful. Again, what's our typical physical definition of love? Our idea of love is you take all of the pain away. You don't make me face anything difficult. Think about it. Isn't that the exact same argument the Protestants make for the law being done away with? Isn't the argument, well a loving, kind God, He would never want you to keep that mean old law. Why He wants everything to just be as easy for you as possible. That's why He did it for you. So, you won't have to keep any of that. You just believe in Him and you don't have to change anything in your life. That's a very appealing argument, isn't it? It feels wonderful. Oftentimes in the back of our minds isn't that what we're kind of emotionally struggling with? Believe me, I've been there myself. I've struggled with the "why" question. I think many of us do that very thing. What's the logical basis behind that? In the back of our mind, even though we know and even though before we were baptized; I'm sure the minister that baptized you was just like the guy that baptized me, walked me through that you have to count the cost. This is difficult. You could have to give your life. You are going to have to suffer. Even though we said all of that and said, yes, I sign up for that, when the pain happens we're going, wait a minute. I'm not supposed to feel this kind of pain. It's supposed to be easier for me. I'm a Christian. In the back of our mind we still want that deal where we get all of the positives and none of the negatives. Again, it has a very enticing appeal. It just doesn't correlate with reality. It just doesn't correlate with what the New Testament tells us. If we have realistic expectations of what being a new covenant Christian requires, we have to realize that God's going to make us suffer. He's going to make things be difficult and we're going to have to endure adversity. He also promises to be there with us through all of that to enable us a way to get through it. We have to realize that happy

ending that we're looking for, that's not in this life. That's when we get born into the kingdom. Those of you that have heard a number of my sermons, I love to talk about what I call the feel good happy ending. It's in Revelation 21:4. To end this sermon let's turn over to that particular verse. We have to keep in mind this is the pain free world that we ultimately receive as new covenant Christians, because we do not get it in this life. That's not how the contract works.

Revelation 21:4. *“And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.” (NKJV)*

See, that's the ultimate picture. That's the feel good happy ending you could say that we all long for. I think it's very important for us as Christians today to realize as we go through our Christian life we are going to have to suffer. We are going to have to face adversity. It is not an if. It's a when. God will be there with us through it all to deliver us successfully through the experience and the ultimate reward is not what we receive in this life. It's the promise of salvation. That's when we get a pain free existence and it lasts forever. You have to realize we don't get the deal of all the benefits of both covenants at the same time. It just doesn't work that way. Again, that would be a wonderful deal. Who wouldn't sign up for it? It just doesn't correlate with reality. What we're getting is a promise of a reward we can't even comprehend. It does mean pain in this physical life, but it also means a life of enjoyment forever that we can't even wrap our heads around.

When you go through those times in your life when you struggle with the “why” question, and I'm sure all of you have, (and I'll readily plead guilty that I have) keep in mind when you signed the contract at baptism, you weren't signing up for a diet pill, where you could get all of the benefits and no down side. You were signing up for a contract that required adversity, which required you to endure to the end. When you get to the end, you do get to that pain free world that lasts forever. So, the story does end with: ...and they all lived happily ever after.