

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Remember, Don't Mix Up Your Covenants! (Part II)

Charles Spurgeon was one of the greatest preachers of all time, and one of the reasons is that he was a very keen theologian. He clearly understood the importance of not mixing up the covenants. He declared, "There cannot be a greater difference in the world between two things than there is between law and grace. And yet, strange to say, while the things are diametrically opposed and essentially different from each other, the human mind is so depraved, and the intellect, even when blessed by the Spirit, has become so turned aside from right judgment, that one of the most difficult things in the world is to discriminate properly between law and grace. He who knows the difference, and always recollects it—the essential difference between law and grace—has grasped the marrow of divinity. He is not far from understanding the gospel theme in all its ramifications, its outlets, and its branches, who can properly tell the difference between law and grace. There is always in a science some part which is very simple and easy when we have learned it, but which, in the commencement, stands like a high threshold before the porch. Now, the first difficulty in striving to learn the gospel is this, between law and grace there is a difference plain enough to every Christian, and especially to every enlightened and instructed one; but still, when most enlightened and instructed, there is always a tendency in us to confound the two things. They are as opposite as light and darkness, and can no more agree than fire and water; yet man will be perpetually striving to make a compound of them—often ignorantly, and sometimes willfully. They seek to blend the two, when God has positively put them asunder."¹ We have been examining Heb. 12:18-29 and Gal. 4:21-31, two parallel passages that address the subject Spurgeon expressed grave concern over—mixing Law and Gospel. This is the central theme in Paul's epistle to the Galatians and also key to understanding the epistle to the Hebrews. We turn our attention to another passage in the glorious book to deal with this theme...

- (1) The writer to the Hebrews conceives of spirituality, as *access to God* (cf. 7:19; 10:19-22). We have been saying that this is possible by: (a) Priesthood, or *divine mediation*; (b) Sacrifice, or *divine redemption*; (c) Covenant, or *divine promises* cf. 8:8-12 "no more."
- (2) Therefore, Hebrews hangs upon *three* great Scriptural declarations: (a) Ps. 119:4, which speaks of a *new priesthood*; (b) Ps. 40:7-9, which speaks of a *new sacrifice*; (c) Jer. 31:31-37, which speaks of a *new covenant*.
- (3) The *new priesthood* has been discussed (7:1-28), so our writer now turns to the *new covenant*. The word was mentioned in 7:22, but is now picked up for further treatment (cf. 8:6, 7:13). Altogether, the word translated COVENANT (Gk. DIATHEKE) is found 17 times in Hebrews.

I. THE SUPERIOR SANCTUARY (vv. 1-2)

NOTE: The author hesitates here for a moment to urge his readers to keep their eyes on the main point.

A. The Sum (v. 1)

The aim of the letter is to point readers to a seated High Priest within the veil. "The first step then is a review," observes H. C. G. Moule, "a summing up, a 'look again' upon the true King of Righteousness and peace (vv. 1, 2). SUCH A HIGH PRIEST *WE HAVE*. It is a wonderful affirmation not only of His existence, but of His relation to 'us.' His people, *WE HAVE* Him. He has taken His seat indeed *AT THE RIGHT HAND OF THE THRONE OF THE MAJESTY IN THE HEAVEN*. But this great exaltation has not removed Him for a moment out of our possession; we have Him."²

B. The Sanctuary (v. 2)

The presence of God, where the Priest serves, and where He wishes to bring us now. "The SANCTUARY and the TRUE TENT should be, understood," remarks Hughes, "as referring to the same thing and the KAI (Gk) accordingly is epexegetic and should be translated as EVEN, thus: A

MINISTER OF THE SANCTUARY, EVEN (or which is) THE TRUE TENT (cf. NEB).”³ (This is called in Gk. Grammar the Granville Sharp’s rule.)

II. THE SUPERIOR SERVICE (VV. 3-6)

Note: As a priest, He OFFERS SOMETHING (v. 3), but, since He is excluded from the Aaronic priesthood, He does not offer on earth, but in heaven (vv. 4-6).

A. The Pattern which was shown you on the mountain (v. 5, cf. Acts 7:44; Ex. 25:40)

The tabernacle was to be patterned *after* the heavenly model. “The material tabernacle,” says Vincent, “was an *emblem* of a spiritual, heavenly sanctuary. The Levitical priests, therefore, serve only as a *copy* and *shadow*.”⁴

B. But now (cf. v. 4 since Christ is not a priest after the Levitical order) He hath obtained a more excellent ministry (v. 6, cf. 9:15)

It consists in a better covenant, containing better promises, mediated by a Son who dies (cf. 9:15; 12:24). Christ is our MEDIATOR (Gk. MESITES, comes from MESOS, which in this case, means, *in the middle*. A MESITES is therefore *one who stands in the middle between two people and brings them together*. Further, in legal Greek, a MESITES was a *sponsor*, a *guarantor* or a *surety*. He went bail for a friend who was on trial; he guaranteed a debt or an overdraft. The MESITES was the man who was willing to pay his friend’s debt to make things right again.⁵

III. THE SUPERIOR STIPULATIONS (VV. 7-13)

Note: How and why is the New Covenant ministry better? The writer now explains.

A. The Inferiority of the Old Covenant (v. 7-8, cf. 7:11)

It could never provide for the faultiness of its possessors (cf. Rom. 8:3). It could only *discover* and *state* it. Why do marriage covenants so often fail? It’s not the covenant that is at fault, but *those* who enter the covenant. This is brought out in v. 9; it is with THEM, the possessors of the old covenant. “But,” says Griffith Thomas, “it is particularly striking that it was God and not man who realized the inadequacy of the covenant and, in opposition to the tenacity of Israel in holding to the Mosaic covenant, it is here shown that God Himself set it aside as inadequate.”⁶ (In all due respect to Griffith Thomas, the word “realized” is not theologically proper to ascribe to God, although I am sure he knew all too well.)

B. The Superiority of the New Covenant (vv. 8-12)

The negative characteristics are set forth first (the first did not provide forgiveness and enablement), then the positive (chiefly, the forgiveness of sins). Barclay observes, “This covenant will not only be new; *it will be different in quality and in kind*. In Greek there are two words for *new*. NEOS describes a thing as being new in point of time. It might be a precise copy of its predecessors, but since if it has been made after the others, it is NEOS. KAINOS means not only new in point of time, but new in point of quality. A thing which is simply a reproduction of what went before may be NEOS but it is not KAINOS. This covenant which Jesus introduces is KAINOS, not merely NEOS; it is different in quality from the old covenant. The writer to the Hebrews uses two words to describe the old covenant. He says that it is GERASKON, which means not only *ageing*, but *ageing into decay*. He says that it is near to APHANISMOS. This is the word that is used for wiping out a city, obliterating an inscription or abolishing a law. So the covenant which Jesus brings is new in quality and completely cancels the old.”⁷

1. The basis, or cause: forgiveness of sins (v. 12)

“One design of the Epistle to the Hebrews,” wrote George Smeaton, “was, to point out the inseparable connection between the atonement and the remission of sins, or the sprinkling of conscience (cf. Heb. 9:14; 10:2; 22). The epistle does not deny forgiveness to O.T. saints who lived before the incarnation. It certainly denies that *efficacy* to animal sacrifices, and connects the *actual* redemption which the O.T. saints received with the death of Christ; for the apostle speaks of the *effect* of the atonement in canceling sins under the Old Covenant (Heb. 9:15).”⁸

2. The result: universal knowledge of God (v. 11)

Unlike the Old Covenant, the New Covenant stresses that “knowledge of God can now come direct, without the need for intermediaries. Fellowship with God will be such that everyone will know him among his people. This rules out at once the idea of a privileged class of special initiates

who alone could teach others, as existed for instance in the mystery religions and was certainly fostered to some extent in the scribal system of Judaism. Moreover in the new covenant community there would be no class distinctions due to age or rank, for the knowledge of God would be available over the whole range, *from the least of them to the greatest*. The true Christian community is intended to be a group in which all are on an equal footing through a common and personal experience of the Lord, *for all shall know me.*⁹

CONCLUSION: A. W. Pink wrote a number of significant books during his lifetime. In one of them he noted, “In contradiction to the Gospel of Christ, the Gospel of Satan teaches salvation by works. It includes justification before God on the grounds of human merits. Its sacramental phrase is ‘Be good and do good;’ but it fails to recognize that in the flesh there dwelleth no good thing. It announces salvation by character, which reverses the order of God’s word-character by, as the fruit of, salvation. Its various ramifications and organizations are manifold. Temperance Reform movements, ‘Christian Socialists Leagues,’ ethical culture societies, ‘Peace Congresses,’ are all employed, perhaps unconsciously, in proclaiming this Gospel of Satan-salvation by works, the pledge card is substituted for Christ; social purity for individual regeneration, and politics and philosophy, for doctrine and prophecy. The cultivation of the old man is considered more practical than the creation of the new man in Christ Jesus; whilst universal peace is looked for apart from the interposition and return of the Prince of Peace. The *apostles* of Satan are not saloon keepers and white-slave traffickers, but are, for the most part, ordained ministers. Thousands of those who occupy our modern pulpits are no longer engaged in presenting the fundamentals of the Christian faith, but have turned aside from the truth and given heed to fables. Instead of magnifying the enormity of sin and setting forth its eternal consequences, they minimize it by declaring that sin is mere ignorance or the absence of good. Instead of warning their hearers to ‘flee from the wrath to come,’ they make God a liar by declaring that He is too loving and merciful to send any of His own creatures to eternal torment. Instead of declaring that ‘without the shedding of blood there is no remission’ they merely hold up Christ as the great Exemplar and exhort their hearers to *follow in His steps.*”¹⁰

Things have actually gotten worse since Pink penned those words. Today, as we have noted periodically in the sermon notes, we have self-professing *evangelicals* banging the drum that *all* roads evidently lead to God. Some have argued for what is called *inclusivism*, that is the view that God saves people, regardless of their religious views, because of the universal and cosmic work of Christ. Others argue for a *postmortem* opportunity for salvation. Still others openly embrace a full-blown *universalism*, i.e., salvation for all humanity and even Satan and the demons. There is an element of truth in the statement that all roads lead to God. **They do.** Other religions, i.e., Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Islam, Mormonism will bring you to God—but only as Judge and *NOT* as Father. This is exactly what our Lord declared in John 14:6: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to **the Father** except through me.” Other Religions only bring us to God as **Judge**. They would bring their advocates, regardless of how sincere they might be, clothed in the unspeakably filthy rags of our human works (Isaiah 64:6), without excuse, hopeless, guilty and doomed (Ecclesiastes 12:14; Matthew 12:36; Acts 17:31; Romans 1:20, 32; 2:16; Revelation 20:11-15), falling continually and infinitely short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). **The only way** to God as *Father* is through the Lord Jesus Christ. Born again by the sovereign grace of God (John 1:12-13), adopted as sons of God through Christ (Ephesians 1:7), blessed with the spirit of adoption whereby we can cry out “Abba! Father” (Romans 8:15), which is the Spirit of God’s own Son sent into our hearts (Galatians 4:6). All other religions lead to God – for damning judgment.¹¹ Only through Jesus Christ can we approach God as *Father*.

ENDNOTES

¹ C. H. Spurgeon The New Park Street Pulpit Sermon preached March 2, 1856, available at <http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/0069.htm>.

² H. C. G. Moule, Messages from the Epistle to the Hebrews (Hodder & Stoughton, 1908) p. 46.

³ Philip E. Hughes, A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews (Eerdmans, 1977) p. 282.

⁴ Marvin Vincent, Word Studies in the New Testament IV (rpt. Baker, 1975) p. 470.

⁵ Wm. Barclay, The Daily Study Bible Series: The Letter to the Hebrews (The Westminster Press, 1955) p. 89.

⁶ W. H. Griffith-Thomas, Hebrews: A Devotional Commentary (rpt. Zondervan, 1961) p. 30.

⁷ Barclay, p. 92.

⁸ George Smeaton, The Atonement According to The Apostles (rpt. Alpha Publications, 1979) p. 343

⁹ Cf. D. Guthrie, Hebrews: Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (IVP, 1981) p. 177.

¹⁰ A. W. Pink, Satan and His Gospel (Bible Truth Depot, 1917) p. 52.

¹¹ Robert Reymond develops this in greater detail, available at <http://teampyro.blogspot.com/2009/09/all-religions-really-do-lead-to-god.html>.