

MURRAY MCLELLAN

**NEW COVENANT
HOLINESS**

**WHAT DIFFERENCE
DOES IT MAKE?**



Presented by Murray McLellan (an unworthy sinner upon whom the glorious sovereign of the universe has bestowed his mighty grace— “But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God – and righteousness and sanctification and redemption – that, as it is written, ‘He who glories, let him glory in the Lord.’” 1 Cor. 1:30-31)

I do not claim to be, nor seek to be original in the preceding article. I seek to magnify and exalt the Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. Unto Him belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

“Because it is written, ‘Be holy for I am holy.’”

1 Peter 1:16

All Scripture quotations in this article are taken from the New King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

CONTENTS

THE NEED	5
PROGRESSIVE REVELATION	7
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS	9
A NEW MOTIVATION	13
A MORE COMPLETE PICTURE	17

THE NEED

I once heard an audiotape message by William Sasser in which he told the following story to emphasize the need of a clear biblical hermeneutic.

A fellow was candidating for a position as a Bible teacher. In an attempt to discern just how well this individual knew his Bible, the selection board asked the man to tell them the story of the good Samaritan. "Well, gentlemen," the man began, "There was a man traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho, but he fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked him. And as he went, he didn't have any money. But he met the Queen of Sheba, and she gave him 1,000 talents of gold, and 100 changes of raiment. Then he got into a chariot, and drove furiously. And while he was going, he passed under a big juniper tree. And while he was going under that juniper tree, his hair caught on a limb of that tree, and he hung there many days and many nights; and the ravens brought him food to eat and water to drink. And he ate 5,000 loaves of bread and two fishes. One night he was hanging there asleep, and his wife, Delilah, came along and cut off his hair, and he dropped and fell on stony ground. But he got up and went on. Soon it began to rain, and it rained 40 days and 40 nights, so he hid himself in a cave. And he lived on locusts and

wild honey. Then he went on until he met a servant who said, "Come take supper at my house." But he made an excuse and said, "No, I won't, for I have married a wife and I cannot come." And the servant went out into the highways and hedges and compelled him to come in. After supper, he went on until he came down to Jericho. And when he got there, he looked up and saw that old queen, Jezebel, sitting way up high in a window, and she was laughing at him. And he said, "Throw her down," and they threw her down. And he said, "Throw her down again," and they threw her down again. And he said, "Throw her down yet again." And they threw her down seventy times seven. And of the fragments that remained thereof, they picked up 12 baskets full, besides women and children. Now whose wife do you think she will be on that great judgment day? And you ask me if I know the Bible?"

Though this example obviously is extreme for the sake of humor, yet it truly does underline the need to read and understand the context of any passage and statement of Scripture. As I strive to be holy, am I allowed to eat pork or shrimp? May I wear clothing made of mixed threads of linen and wool? May I plant carrots and peas in the same garden plot? Since all of these things are forbidden in clear statements in the book of Leviticus (Lev. 11:7-8, 10-12; 19:19), what do we tell someone who sees us enjoy a tasty ham sandwich? Our consciences will be clear only when we understand the relationship between the Old and New Testaments, and the progressive nature of the Scriptures. [Please note: I will use the terms 'testament' and 'covenant' interchangeably in this article, as they are two translations of the same Greek word διαθήκη (diathē kēs).]

PROGRESSIVE REVELATION

The Bible is not a compilation of proof texts; it is an organic whole. The Scriptures contain the unfolding of redemptive history – centered in Jesus Christ (Heb. 1:1-3). What better theme could there be!

We properly understand individual parts of the story only when we read them within their correct context. Each part sits against the background of what has gone before and prepares the way for what comes afterward. Only from the vantage point of the story's conclusion can the reader observe the way in which the divine author has directed every part so that each contributes collectively to the end.

The Bible tells one main story; the unity of that story is perceived only from the standpoint of the story's conclusion or goal – Jesus Christ! He and the glorious New Covenant that he established through his blood is the fulfillment of it all (Matt. 5:17-18).

We need to see how each detail fits into the overall scheme of God's plan as he discloses it. In the Bible, the revelation of the

Christ unfolds progressively. The nature of progressive revelation requires that the earliest part of that revelation is incomplete. Thus, we need to grasp the partial and elementary nature of the Old Testament revelation.

In Genesis 3:15, we have the first promise of the seed to come. The Scriptures then progressively unfold more details regarding this promised seed – this deliverer. In Genesis 22, we learn that the deliverer would be a substitute, provided in the mount known as Moriah. As we continue through the Scriptures, we discover the need for blood sacrifice. By the time we reach Isaiah 53, the description of the deliverer and his atoning sacrifice has become more explicit. We continue from the age of promise and the time of anticipation in the law and the prophets until that preliminary era reaches its revelatory climax with the prophet John. “For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John” (Matt. 11:13).

A voice came crying in the wilderness; the forerunner proclaimed that the promised kingdom was dawning. “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). The light of the world had dawned. A new day was unfolding --- a day that would fulfill all that had been foreshadowed by the law and the prophets. We are not surprised to read that the prophets prophesied, but we also must note that the law, too, prophesied until John. There was a prophetic aspect to the law. Jesus Christ, in his incarnation and accomplishment of what had been promised for his people, brought the law and the prophets to their goal. He fulfilled what they foretold, foreshadowed, and anticipated.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS

Holiness under the Old Covenant and holiness under the New Covenant are distinct from each other in the same way that redemption in the Old Covenant and redemption in the New Covenant are. In order to avoid misunderstandings, let me explain the word redemption in its various contextual settings. The Old Covenant people of God were a redeemed people. The New Covenant people of God are a redeemed people. Does it mean the same thing? Are they redeemed in the same way? (Please note: I am not referring to “believers” in the Old and New Covenant eras, I am referring to the nature of the two covenants and their members.) There is a huge difference. The first pictured and foreshadowed the second, which is the true or ultimate redemption.

The Old redemption was physical and temporary.

“He [God] saved them [Israel] from the hand of him [Egypt/Pharaoh] who hated them, and redeemed them from the hand of the enemy.” (Psalm 106:10)

The New redemption is spiritual and eternal.

“Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law...” (Gal. 3:13)

“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace” (Eph. 1:7)

The Old Covenant people had a redeemer – Moses. He was a faithful mediator who stood in the gap. The New Covenant people have a Redeemer – Jesus Christ. He is a better mediator. Moses, the old mediator, made the people of Israel drink the bitterness of their sin and idolatry (Ex. 32:20). Our New Covenant mediator, Jesus, drank the bitter cup of his people’s iniquity himself, that they might drink a cup of blessing. Jesus is a superior mediator.

The Old Covenant people were a freed people (i.e. from physical bondage). The same is true for the New Covenant people of God. However, the citizens of the holy nation of the New Covenant are freed, not from the bondage of physical slavery, but from spiritual bondage.

The typological relationship between Old Covenant/New Covenant events is true also of objects under each covenant. The Old Covenant had a temple. The New also has a temple – one made of living stones, which is Christ’s body, with Jesus himself having become the chief cornerstone. That old temple had a veil that warned, “Keep out or die!” In the new, the veil is Christ’s flesh, through which we may boldly draw near into the presence of God, on the basis of Christ’s all-sufficient sacrifice (Heb. 10:19-20).

You probably can think of many more physical/spiritual connections between the two covenants, such as the examples listed in the following table:

OLD COVENANT	NEW COVENANT
Were God's people physically	Are God's spiritual people
A covenant people (most unbelievers)	A covenant people (all believers)
The promises were physical and temporary	The promises are spiritual and eternal (better!)
Had a Sabbath where the people ceased from their labors one day a week	Has a Sabbath who is Christ, and thus, we have ceased from our labors and found our rest in Christ and his finished work!
Had a Passover lamb	Has a better Passover Lamb! (Jesus)
Were a holy people (separated in a physical sense – i.e. no bacon; stay away from those Gentiles!)	Are a holy people (separated in a spiritual sense – i.e. may eat all things, may live in the world, but not live as if we are of the world)

When we talk about holiness in the Old and holiness in the New, there is a definite relationship. In fact, 1 Peter 1:16, the New Covenant command to be holy, is a direct quote from Leviticus 19:2 (See also Lev. 11:44, 45; 20:7). However, the question we want to consider is if the particulars that define holiness are the same in both contexts. “But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy for I am holy’” (1 Peter 1:15-16).

As we examine the command in both contexts, the first point to consider is that God did indeed command his people in both covenants to be holy. Is the same reason given in both covenants? We see it is – because God is holy. Now, does the fact that Peter quotes Leviticus mean that I must go back to Leviticus and read all those lists of commands to learn how to be holy now? Do I go back to the Mosaic Law to discover how I am to live my daily life? This is an important question to consider. Too often, I have heard Sunday School lessons or Bible teachers make a statement and then list verses with no real regard for their context – not even their covenantal context. How often have you been exhorted to be obedient by a lesson that teaches “do and be blessed”? Have you ever wondered how good you have to be, or how much you have to do in order to be blessed? Is it not perfection? Or is God satisfied with sincere effort; you will be blessed if you give it your best shot? Christ alone can provide the required righteousness for blessing. In him, we are blessed, and so we “do” – out of love. This is an entirely different motivation.

A NEW MOTIVATION

Under the Old Covenant, the Mosaic Law provided a motivation for obedience – externally. The Old Testament Jew was obligated to obey from without; he was under the threat of punishment - do or die. In the New Covenant, God’s people are motivated internally because the law is written on the heart. We are motivated by our love of Jesus. We do not have the Ten Commandments written on our heart; we have the love of God poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5). In the New Testament era, Jesus sets a higher principle, love, grounded on the fact of his death, not on the threat of our death. The New Covenant guarantees that all the members of its community will have clean hearts that love God and obey him because of that love.

“Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.” (Ezek.

36:25-27)

I believe that Jesus is referring to this passage in Ezekiel when he states in John 3:5, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” We know from John 3:10 that Jesus told Nicodemus that a teacher of Israel ought to know the truths of which he was speaking. The source of truth and knowledge of God upon which Israel’s teachers relied was the Hebrew Scripture --- what we call the Old Testament Scriptures. Something in Nicodemus’ Holy Word should be the reference point for Jesus’ words in verse 5. In our passage in Ezekiel, there is a clear reference to both water and the Spirit. In the New Covenant kingdom, a sinner is both cleansed (justified) and given a new heart (for sanctification) [see also 2 Thess. 2:13-14 and Titus 3:3-7]. Since God has caused the believer to be born from above, he or she is spiritually alive with a new heart. A Christian is an incurable God-lover! He is someone whom God has called out of the darkness of unbelief and self-centeredness into the light of knowing God and living for him.

The New Covenant believer understands that he has rebelled against the God of heaven and earth and thus, he deserves God’s unending wrath. This is why God’s grace is so overwhelming to him. The New Covenant member recognizes that when he sins, he sins against God. Sin is not simply about breaking a rule in God’s book. Rather, it is a personal offense against God himself, and this is why a believer’s own sin grieves him so much.

In the Old Covenant era, there were holy places, holy people

(i.e. priests), and holy times. These things were set aside from common, everyday use and consecrated solely for use in serving God. In the New Covenant era, everything is to be holy (used for serving God), for all his people are holy (set apart). Thus, every place that we are in becomes the holy place of God's presence. We are all holy priests. Every day is a holy moment to be used for God's glory. When we gather in a meeting room, it is not the sanctuary or a holy building; we are!

In the New Covenant, all the commandments are tied to Christ. Wives, submit to your husbands ... as to the Lord. Husbands, love your wives ... just as Christ also loved the church and gave himself for her. Children, obey your parents ... in the Lord. Servants, suffer under your masters ... as to Christ. Give ... as Christ became poor and gave himself – oh, what an indescribable gift! Forgive ... as Christ forgave you. Be kind to one another and walk in love ... as Christ also has loved us. Truly, our love of Christ is the issue, the wellspring from which all else in our lives flows. The New Testament Scriptures do not call us to moral behavior divorced from Christ. They do not simply say, “do this,” or “do not do that.” Grace, not moralism, motivates the believer.

You cannot be justified by the law, and you cannot be sanctified by the law. The book of Galatians is clear about this. Additionally, Romans 5:20 tells us that the law covenant breeds sin. In the New Covenant, grace takes care of both justification and sanctification. We are justified and granted forgiveness (i.e. washed clean; born of water), and we are sanctified and granted a new heart (i.e. born of Spirit).

The preaching of the law will not empower anyone to live a holy life. (I believe Romans 7 illustrates this clearly). The power for holy living comes from preaching Christ, the holy one who suffered under sin, to the one who loves him. "...whom having not seen, we love" (1 Pet. 1:8). The Lord has promised the crown of life to those who love him (James 1:12).

When I ponder that he who is without sin did not condemn me – a spiritual adulterer, caught in the very act - I am overwhelmed. I am guilty, yet Jesus dispelled all my accusers and declared authoritatively, "Neither do I condemn you." How can this be? It is because he stooped low and died, condemned in my place. Such grace motivates me to go and sin no more (see John 8:1-12).

A MORE COMPLETE PICTURE

The law covenant was weak and unprofitable.

“For on the one hand there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness, for the law made nothing perfect; on the other hand, there is the bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God.” (Heb. 7:18-19)

“For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. ... In that He says, ‘A new covenant,’ He has made the first obsolete.” (Heb. 8:7, 13a)

That first covenant could not externally transform a physically redeemed people into a spiritually holy people. The Mosaic legislation spelled out in clear detail exactly what was allowed and what was forbidden. This kind of explicit detail is necessary in a law that governs a population made up mostly of unbelievers. While the law provided comprehensive particulars about every aspect of life, it was powerless to change the heart, to clear the conscience, or to produce love for God. Under the New Covenant,

Christ informs his people of what pleases God, and he enables them to obey out of love. When I sin blatantly, it is not that I do not know it is wrong, but rather that my love has grown cold.

There is a teaching that says the law pushes you to Christ to be justified, and then Jesus pushes you back to the law and Moses to be sanctified. The truth is, however, that the law demands perfection and cannot bless anything less than that (see Deut. 28:1, 2, 14, 15).

You cannot render to that law the obedience it demands and rightly deserves. Even as the old priesthood has passed away, so has that old law – both fulfilled in the greater. “For the priesthood being changed of necessity there is also a change of the law” (Heb. 7:12). In the remainder of this article, we will consider some of the ways in which the law has changed.

In the Old Testament, one of the ways in which Israelites could stay away from sin was by hacking their pagan neighbors to death. In 2 Chronicles, God rebukes Jehoshaphat the king through Jehu the seer because the king had been too kind and loving to the wicked (2 Chron. 19:1-2). Earlier, Samuel rebukes Saul and tells him that the Lord has taken away the kingdom from him for not hacking Agag to pieces (1 Sam. 15:18 - 33). In the New Covenant era, the law is different.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be

sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.” (Matt. 5:43-48)

According to Jesus, our neighbor is anyone with whom we cross paths (Luke 10:29-37). Our mission is to gather the true people of God from the world by loving everyone as Christ loved us.

The command to love your neighbor is given in both the Old Testament and New Testament Scriptures (Mark 12:31; Lev. 19:18). The wording in both passages is the same, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” but the meaning changes in the New Covenant era. The context of the Old Testament passage shows that a neighbor in the old era was a fellow Jew.

“You shall not take vengeance nor bear any grudge against **the children of your people**, but you shall love **your neighbor** as yourself; I am the Lord.” (Lev. 19:18, emphasis added).

Now, in this New Covenant era, it would be an incredibly sinful act to live like an obedient Israelite. If I were to go and chop up my pagan neighbors because of their wicked false religion, I would be rebelling against God. I would be breaking the law of Christ my Lord. Destruction of pagans was a God-glorifying act for an Israelite in the Old Covenant era. Obviously, the command has changed radically. New wine is put into new wineskins!

In Leviticus 19:2, we read the Old Covenant call to be holy. The rest of chapter 19 unfolds how to answer that call. For example:

- Keep the Sabbaths (v. 3)
- Do not eat any offering after the second day beyond the original day of sacrifice (v. 6)
- Do not steal (v. 11)
- Love your neighbor as yourself (v. 18)
- Do not mate different kinds of animals (v. 19)
- Do not plant your field with two kinds of seed (v. 19)
- Do not wear clothes woven of two kinds of material (v. 19)

Was an Old Covenant Jew morally obligated to observe these statutes? Yes! Did he or she sin if he or she planted mixed vegetables in the garden, wore blended fabric, or bred a mare with a donkey to produce a mule? Yes! We are not sinning if we plant carrots next to our tomatoes, or wear something other than one-hundred percent cotton, or breed a horse and a donkey. Under the Old Covenant, all those actions are sin. Under the New Covenant, they are not. All of God's law is moral and is based on the holy, righteous character of God, but God unfolds his character progressively. First, he reveals himself in pictures and shadows; then, he reveals himself fully in Christ.

A commandment such as “you shall not murder” anticipated a righteousness, a holiness, that is more complete than merely abstaining from homicide. In the New Covenant, you shall not hate. In fact, you are to love as Christ loved us. The Old Testament law had sanctions for murder, but no sanctions for hatred in the

heart. The Old Testament law had sanctions for adultery, but no sanctions for lust in the heart.

In the new heavens and new earth there will be no signs posted that declare, “You shall not murder.” Apart from the fact that it would be hard to commit murder with resurrection bodies, and apart from the fact that we will be so transformed that murder will not cross our minds, we will love one another and we will not hate. Therefore, the law that forbids murder is obsolete, not because it is not a good law, but because it is not the law in its fullest expression. “You shall not murder” has been fulfilled and the perfect holiness it anticipated has come. Jesus’ community lives beyond Moses’ community. The Old Testament laws anticipated the full-orbed righteousness that Jesus brings in the New Covenant. What Jesus expects for citizens in his kingdom is a holiness that far outstrips the legal strictures of even the most disciplined of the Pharisees (Matt. 5:20).

The law would not pass away until its fulfillment came in Christ – that to which the Law and the Prophets pointed. “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. 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.” (Matt. 5:17-18). The condemnation would remain until Christ accomplished the redemption of his people from the curse of the Law.

The Old Testament anticipated the perfection of the New. The law covenant anticipated the new and better covenant. The Old

Covenant had laws for sinners. The New Covenant has laws for saints. The Body of Christ has no hard-hearted, unregenerate sinners. The law of Moses was given to a physical nation composed mainly of unregenerate sinners, but the law of Christ is given to a spiritual nation of regenerate saints.

Jesus does not contradict Moses' law, any more than he contradicted Aaron's priesthood. He fulfilled it. Jesus brought both to their full and perfect completion, in a better covenant. A greater than Moses is here! God's final Word is Jesus (Heb. 1:1-3). Jesus has replaced Moses, the servant through whom God spoke partial and preparatory truth. Jesus supercedes and replaces Moses as the true and final lawgiver in the same way that he supercedes and replaces Aaron as the true and final High Priest.

“For the priesthood being changed of necessity there is also a change of the law.” (Heb. 7:12)

“For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” (John 1:17)

God did reveal himself, his holy character, in the law, but he reveals himself most fully in Jesus, who is the express image of his person! It is not the Old Covenant laws that are the final word in what is “good”; that final word is expressed in the manifestation of God's love and holiness in and through his beloved Son.

It is good for us to love one another because Christ first loved us (John 13:34-35). It is good for us to please our neighbor because

“Christ did not please himself” (Rom. 15:2-3). It is good for us not to be self-centered because Christ made himself of no reputation and gave his life a ransom for many (Phil. 2:3-7). It is good for us to avoid illicit sexual relations because he purchased our bodies with his own blood (1 Cor. 6:18-20). It is good for us to freely give of our material goods to those in need because Christ became poor, that we might become rich (2 Cor. 8:9). Our standard of holy living is the person and work of Jesus Christ!

If, in response to the cross, we are not moved to change our way of life, all the commandments in the world will not produce holiness in us. If the love of Christ does not compel us, nothing will (2 Cor. 5:14). Christ has freed us and given us his Spirit so that we can walk in righteousness --- not grudgingly, but from the heart. Therefore, his commandments are not burdensome (1 John 5:3).

Judaism made “law” their Christ, but Jesus Christ came to replace the “torah” – he is the superior revelation of the will of God. Thus, Christ and his gospel are the standard by which all behavior is measured. Moses commanded love for one’s neighbor, but, as we have seen, Jesus has taken this to its ultimate holy level. He did this by expanding the definition of neighbor to include even our enemies, and by exalting the definition of love to the way in which he loved us. We stand in awe of the Lord Jesus Christ who loved us, even when we were his enemies, even to the point of death on the cross. The one who loved us is none other than God’s own dear beloved Son. Let us hear him (Matt. 17:1-6; Luke 9:28-36; Acts 3:13, 22-24; Matt. 28:18-20)!



www.gracesask.com