

# BIBLICAL ETHICS

2 Timothy 3:16-17

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## Old and New Testament Views of God's Law

(Part V)

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[Discontinuity Between the Covenants, continued]  
III. The New Covenant Reality Supersedes the Old Covenant Shadows

(A) The New Covenant Secures the Redemption Foreshadowed in the Old Covenant.

One of the greatest points of dissimilarity between the old covenant and the new covenant is found in the area of redemptive rituals, for example the Old Testament sacrifices, priesthood, temple, covenant signs, etc. The way in which the laws pertaining to such redemptive ritual were observed prior to the coming of Christ is much different than the way in which they are observed today. By bringing in the substance foreshadowed in the old covenant and realizing the hope anticipated in the old covenant, the new covenant gives us a new perspective on the laws which regulated expiation, priestly service, and the like. Whereas the old covenant believer looked ahead to the work of the Savior and showed faith by observing the redemptive ritual of the old covenant, the new covenant believer looks back upon the finished work of the Savior and shows faith by clinging to Him for salvation totally apart from the old ceremonies. From Scripture it is evident that the new covenant arrangement is better than the old covenant pertaining to redemption, and accordingly those redemptive laws have been made outwardly inoperative. Here is a discontinuity between the covenants which can be suppressed only at the cost of totally misunderstanding the teaching of the New Testament.

The logic of the writer of Hebrews is that, if a new covenant has been given, then it must be a better covenant which as such makes the old covenant outmoded. Moses himself witnessed to the provisionary glory of the administration of God's grace found in the Pentateuch by looking beyond the shadow and promise to the realization to come (Heb. 3:5 b). Likewise, Jeremiah, spoke for God of a "new" covenant to come, and that very fact (according to the author of Hebrews) indicated that already the Mosaic administration was deemed obsolete and passing away, ready to vanish (Heb. 8:13). Saying this leads the author of Hebrews right into a discussion of the first covenant's ritual ordinances (9:1ff.). The work of Christ is in every way superior to these. He is "the surety of a better covenant," "a better hope" (7:22, 19) because His priesthood is everlasting (7:21, 24-25) and His sacrifice of Himself is totally efficacious (7:26-28). The very repetition of the old cove-

nant sacrifices demonstrated that they were temporary and imperfect (Heb. 10:4ff.). The superiority of Christ's ministry over the old covenant's levitical ministry is found in the fact that Christ's priestly work is exercised in the true, heavenly tabernacle rather than in the earthly, shadowy one (Heb. 8:2-5). The priestly work carried on in the earthly tabernacle was figurative or anticipatory (Heb. 9:19), whereas Christ's ministry is the realization carried on in a greater tabernacle in heaven (9:11-12, 23-24). The levitical ritual of the old covenant revealed by Moses was parabolic of the present order in the new covenant (9:9a). In themselves the priestly rituals of the old covenant could not perfect the conscience as Christ does (9:9 b); thus they were necessarily temporary, used until the time that everything is made right (9:10). The old covenant saints greeted the promises of God from afar (Heb. 11:13). By contrast, Christ fulfills the promises and secures redemption, the promised inheritance, and transforming power by His saving work (9:15; cf. 8:6-10). The redemptive rituals of the Old Testament law, then, could not perfect the believer they were but a shadow of the good things to come (Heb. 10:1).

Accordingly, with the accomplished work of the Redeemer now in the past, we no longer use or apply the Old Testament laws regulating sacrifices, the priesthood etc. in the same way. Discontinuity is definitely to be observed. And it is precisely the word of God which instructs us to see an altered application of those laws; indeed we are warned against reverting back to the imperfection of the outmoded administration of God's grace in the Old Testament levitical system. It is not surprising that the earliest Christians were accused of opposing the temple and the Mosaic law's rituals (e.g., Acts 6:14; 21:28). The new covenant word teaches that some of God's old covenant ordinances were not intended to be continuously observed in the same manner throughout redemptive history. With the coming of the Savior and His perfect priestly work, necessarily the levitical priesthood has been changed (Heb. 7:12). Hence the sacrifices, feasts, etc. of the old order are not binding upon the believer today in their shadow forms (cf. Col. 2:13-17). They are observed today by faith in Christ.

(B) The New Covenant Redefines the Covenant People of God.

Under the old covenant order, Israel was constituted as a nation and adopted as the people of God, but under the

new covenant the people of God is an international body comprised of those who have faith in Christ. The kingdom has been taken from the Jews (Matt. 8:11-12; 21:41-43; 23:37-38; I Cor. 14:21-22), and the church is now "the Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16), "the commonwealth of Israel" (Eph. 2:12), the "kingdom of priests" (1 Peter 2:9), the "twelve tribes" of the Dispersion (Jas. 1:1; 1 Peter 1:1), and the seed of Abraham (Gal. 3:7, 29). Faithful Israel of old is included within one household of God comprising the church (Heb. 3:1-6); Israelites and Gentiles are separate branches, but part of one olive tree of faith (Rom. 11:17-18). Thus the New Testament church is the restoration of Israel (Acts 15:1-5-20), and the new covenant to be made with Israel and Judah is actually made with the apostles who are foundational to the church (Luke 22:20; cf. Eph. 2:20). This biblically-grounded redefinition of the people of God brings with it some corresponding alterations in the application of the Old Testament law.

(1) Because the new covenant does not define God's people as an earthly nation among others, it does not require political loyalty to national Israel as did the old covenant (Phil. 3:20). Christ's kingdom, unlike Old Testament Israel, is not to be defended with the sword (John 18:36; cf. 2 Cor. 10:4).

(2) Because the significance of Canaan as the promised land of inheritance has passed away with the establishment of the kingdom which it foreshadowed (cf. Gal. 3:16; cf. Gen. 13:1-5; Heb. 11:8-10; Eph. 1:14; 1 Peter 1:4), old covenant laws which are directly concerned with this land (e.g., division of the land into family portions, locations of the cities of refuge, the levirate institution) will find a changed application in our day.

(3) The separation from unholiness required by God through the dietary laws, which symbolized this separation by a separation made between clean and unclean meats (cf. Lev. 22:2-26), will no longer be observed by avoidance of the Gentiles (Acts 10) or typified by abstaining from certain foods (Mark 7:19; Acts 10:15; Rom. 14:17). This separation for the Christian is now from any ungodliness or compromising unbelief anywhere they may be found (2 Cor. 6:14-18).

#### IV. The New Covenant Surpasses the Old Covenant In Finality.

(A) It surpasses the old covenant law in clarity.  
With the giving of further relevant information in the

scriptures of the new covenant, God's moral requirements are made even clearer to us. For instance, Christ corrects misinterpretations and narrowing of the law's demand (Matt. 5:21-48). Moreover, His own life is an illustration of what the law would have us do and thus is a new example of what love requires. The radical character of love is so dramatically displayed in the atonement that the old commandment of loving one another can be considered a "new command"; Christ's explanation of love surpasses that of the old covenant when He says that His people are to love one another "even as I have loved you" (John 13:34-35; cf. 15:12-13; 1 John 2:7-11; 3:11-18, 22-24; 4:7-11).

(B) The new covenant surpasses the old in its efficiency.

Through the Old Testament God's moral demand was progressively revealed and explained; a revelation of His requirements would be followed by later revelations which amplified the first. However, with the coming of the new covenant, the law of God will receive no further additions. The canon is complete and closed. Once and for all God has set down the moral standards which we are to faithfully apply to our lives. Everything needed for complete equipping in righteous living has now been given (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

(C) The new covenant brings greater responsibility for obedience.

With the giving of new light and new power in the new covenant, the responsibility of men to obey the voice of God is increased. To whom much is given much is required (Luke 12:48). God no longer overlooks any people's disobedience but requires all people everywhere to repent because of His appointed Judge and Day (Acts 17:30-31). The revelation of the new covenant is even more inescapable than that of the old covenant (Heb. 12:25), and to it we should give "the more earnest heed" (Heb. 2:1-4).

Our study of the new covenant scriptures has shown us, in summary, that there are definite discontinuities between the new covenant relation to the law and that of the old covenant. The new covenant surpasses the old in glory, power, realization, and finality.

(For further reading along these lines see Theonomy in Christian Ethics, Craig Press, 1977. The book may be ordered from me for \$9.50 at 2244 East Grove Ave., Orange, CA 92667; include check and address.)

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