

I. Read II Corinthians 3:6-11

Note from Simon J. Kistemaker, taken from his commentary on II Corinthians:

Last, Paul introduces the words new covenant, which Jeremiah prophesied (31:31), Jesus spoke at the institution of the Lord's Supper (Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25), and the writer of Hebrews quoted and applied to Christ (9:15). To say that Paul is speaking of the New Testament's formation in its rudimentary form is incorrect. Paul stresses not the canon but the covenant that God has made with his people. And God appointed him to be a servant of this new covenant. As Moses was given the appointment to be the mediator and prophet of the old covenant in Israel (Ex. 24), so Paul has been commissioned to be the mediator and prophet of the new covenant in the Corinthian setting.

Noteworthy is the parallel between Moses and Paul as servants of the old and new covenants respectively. When God called Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, Moses doubted his own ability (Ex. 4:10). And when Paul reflects on his task of preaching the gospel, he questions his own competence (2:16b). Moses relied on God to grant him ability; so did Paul. Another parallel is that of Moses receiving from God the Decalogue written on two tablets of stone (Exod. 24:12; 31:18; 34:29). Paul says that his ministry is written on tablets of human hearts (v3). But his ministry surpasses that of Moses, for he is privileged to be the mediator of Christ's new covenant.

The new covenant has come forth out of the old covenant (v14), and the adjective new indicates that this covenant has a quality that is superior to the old. Jesus inaugurated the new covenant in his blood at the time he instituted the Lord's Supper (Luke 22:10; 1 Cor. 11:25) and thus fulfilled the prophecy recorded by Jeremiah. More than six hundred years earlier, through Jeremiah, God announced the coming of a new covenant that he would make with Israel (31:31-34). Note that God took the initiative for making both the old and the new covenants: the old at Sinai and the new in Zion. And God made these agreements with his people for their benefit and well-being.

The benefits of the old covenant were God's daily provisions of food and water, protection from sickness, fertility and full-term pregnancies, a long life span for every Israelite. God would fight for them by driving the nations out of the promised land, so that his people could take possession from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean, from the southern border of the desert to the northern part of the Euphrates (Exod. 23:25-31). The people were obliged to obey God by keeping the laws of the Decalogue, those pertaining to protection and responsibility, and those that promoted justice and mercy in social life (Exod. 20-23). In fact, the blessings and the obligations of the old covenant are recorded in these four chapters.

The new covenant is superior to and differs from the old in respect to the place of God's law, promise, knowledge, and remission of sin. In the new covenant, the laws of God are written not on stone or paper but on human hearts and minds. They are part of the people's inner being. God fulfils his promise by proving that he is their God and they are his people. Also, God's revelation becomes so universally known that it covers the earth "as the waters cover the sea" (Is. 11:9; Hab. 2:14). Throughout the world all classes of people knew the Lord. And last, God forgives sin and remembers it no more (Jer. 31:31-34; Heb. 8:10-12). He grants complete remission through his Son Jesus Christ, who shed his blood on Calvary's cross. "Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Heb. 9:22b).

- A. In verses 6-11, the Apostle Paul alludes to the outworking of Covenantal Theology. A key premise of Covenantal Theology is that God deals with man through the framework of covenants. The foundational covenant upon which the others rest is the Covenant of Redemption. In this Covenant, which was initiated before time, God decreed the plan of redemption. (Read Ephesians 1:4.) In I Peter 1:2, the *economy* (who does what) of that plan of redemption is explained. What part do the Father, Son and Holy Spirit play in redemption or the plan of salvation?

As mentioned above, the Covenant of Redemption is the foundation of the covenants God established with man. There are two key or primary covenants in the outworking of God's plan of redemption for man. They were both initiated in Eden — the first before the Fall, the second following the Fall. What are they?

What were the conditions or terms of the first covenant and what is its status now?

What were the conditions or terms of the second covenant?

Summarize the three major covenants explained by the questions and answers above.

Are there other covenants?

Note: For those wanting a more in-depth study of Covenantal Theology, I recommend the excellent study entitled "Covenant of Grace" by J.G. Vos. (available in the office)

- B. There is an opposing interpretive framework (in opposition to Covenantal Theology) in biblical theology which attempts to explain the covenants as merely subsequent and alternative plans of God by which He *tested* man. These alternative plans or *tests* are referred to as *dispensations*.

This approach is called Dispensationalism. It appeared on the scene in the early to mid-1800s. It has many flaws, but the most serious ones are implicit rather than explicit. For the whole system to make sense (God testing man, etc.), God could not have known whether or not man would pass the various *tests* He offered. Further, God Himself would have had to change His plan according to man's response to each test. Therefore, God cannot be omniscient, immutable (unchanging), and sovereign. The strength of Covenantal Theology is that it considers and does justice to *the attributes of God* and is consistent in its understanding of God's plan of redemption throughout the Old and New Testaments.

Another important mistake the Dispensationalist school of interpretation makes is in supposing that the plan of salvation changed from Old Testament to the New Testament. How did Paul explain God's plan of salvation in Galatians 2:21; 3:6-8; Romans 4:1-3; 8:3-4?

C. In 2 Corinthians 3:9, reference is made to “the ministry of condemnation” and “the ministry of righteousness.” To what is Paul referring?

D. To what is Paul referring in II Corinthians 3:11? (“*that* which remains is in glory”)
Note from Kistemaker’s commentary:

“...Paul stresses the abiding nature of glory in the ministry of the new covenant. The process of being set aside is compared with that which remains. Paul speaks not of making the glory of Moses’ face ineffective but of the ministry in its totality as it pertains to the old covenant.”

“The meaning of the Greek verb katargein is “to put aside.” The verb has a variety of meanings depending on its context, but in the current passage the verb indicates that which is transitory or evanescent. The ministry of the old covenant is put aside in its passing significance. Also, the verb to put aside is in the passive voice and has the people as the implied agent. Hence, human beings who are rebellious make the covenant useless. Because of their persistent disobedience, the Israelites made the old covenant ineffective (see Jer. 31:32b; Ezek. 36:16-23) and caused its glory to vanish.”

“The glory that accompanied the old covenant ministry is nothing in comparison with the glory that is permanent. The previous verse (v10) described the surpassing glory of the new covenant, but this verse mentions permanency. In verse 10 Paul spoke of degree; here he notes duration.”

“Paul reveals himself as a person who has left the framework of the old covenant and has fully embraced the new. He skillfully points out the transitoriness of the old and the lasting significance of the new covenant. As a Jew who became a Christian, he now addresses his fellow countrymen and others. At the same time, he vigorously opposes those Jews who attack him in Corinth and elsewhere. ‘In this argument the Apostle has chiefly in view the Judaizers who made the Law indispensable and superior to the Gospel.’” (Kistemaker)

E. What is the *visible church*?

What was the *visible church* during the Old Testament?

What is the *visible church* in the New Testament?

F. What is the *invisible church*?

G. Are the *visible* and *invisible church* ever the same thing?

H. How is this distinction between the *visible* and *invisible church* important to Covenantal Theology?

I. Comment on the following:

The Covenant of Grace began in Eden following the Fall and continues in our day. Though the Covenant of Grace was administered differently in the Old Testament than in the New Testament, it is still the same Covenant of Grace.

The New Testament is concealed in the Old; the Old Testament is revealed in the New.

