

The Two Covenants: Their Relation

Read Galatians 4:22-24, Jeremiah 31:31-32, Hebrews 8:13

In His dealings with His people, in His working out of His great redemption, it has pleased God that there should be two Covenants. God does not do things arbitrarily so the clearer our insight into the reasons for there being two Covenants, and their relation to each other, the more full and true can be our personal understanding of what the New Covenant is meant to be to us.

The basics of the two Covenants

In the Old Covenant man was given the opportunity to prove what he could do, with the aid of all the means of grace God could bestow.

In the New Covenant, God is to prove what He can do with man, as unfaithful and feeble as he is, when He is allowed and trusted to do all the work.

The Old Covenant was dependent on man's obedience, one which he could and did break.

The New Covenant is one which God has promised shall never be broken, for He Himself keeps it and ensures our keeping it. He makes it an everlasting Covenant.

God and man

The chief glory of God is that He has life in Himself. He is independent of all else, and owes what He is to Himself alone.

Man was to be made in God's image. If man was really to be like God he must be given the power of free will and self-determination. Man was to be a creature made by God; and yet he was to be, as far as a creature could be, like God, self-made. In all God's treatment of man these two factors were ever to be taken into account.

Overall, however, God was always to take the initiative and to be to man the source of life. And yet man, being made in God's image, was always to have the full opportunity to accept or reject what God gave, to prove how far he could help himself and indeed be self-made.

Their Relation

The Old Covenant gave man the opportunity to do his part and to prove either what he can do or needs to have done for him. This was the ultimate purpose of the Old Testament.

Read Galatians 3:24

The law became our tutor. God was teaching man what was required. Showing him the very best that could be accomplished by external instruction. Man had every opportunity to show what he could do. Obviously, this would fail but it was God's desire that this would lead man to rely on Himself.

This is the first lesson. The lesson of sin. The Old Covenant attains its goal only as it brings men to a sense of their utter sinfulness and their hopeless inability to save themselves. As long as they have not grasped this, no offer of the New Covenant life can lay hold of them. If you do not care about your sin or you think you can overcome it yourself then the New Covenant is useless to you.

The other lesson is holiness. In the New Covenant the Triune God promises to do all. He gives and maintains the new heart. He places His own Spirit in it to give the will and power to obey and do His will.

The great demand of the New Covenant is faith that one's need, created by the discipline of God's law, will be met in a divine and supernatural way. The Old brings sinful man to God. There the New finds him, and reveals that the same God accepts him and makes him a partaker of His holiness.

The results

A real knowledge of the power of sin and our utter inability to cast it out and to work in ourselves what is good is what most Christians do not learn at first.

It is only when a person realizes the impossibility of doing what God demands that he becomes capable of appreciating the New Covenant promise and is made willing to wait on God to do all in him.