

Teaching Sound Doctrine

Old Testament and New Testament

Part 2

The Old Testament Is Not Binding Today

Early Christians had trouble understanding the change in covenants, just as do many people today. There are several books of the New Testament that specifically are designed to address this change, including Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews, with various texts also found in other books. Here are several Scriptures that teach that men are no longer living under the Old Testament:

1. Ephesians 2:14-17. Paul wrote, “For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh.” Notice that the “law of commandments” was “abolished in his flesh.”

2. Colossians 2:14-17. Speaking of this change of covenants, Paul wrote, “Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; and having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it. Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.” The “handwriting of ordinances” was nailed to the cross. As a consequence, men are no longer obligated to observe the Jewish feast days (such as Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacles), the new moon feast, or the sabbath day.

3. Galatians 5:1-4. The book of Galatians argues extensively that men are saved, not by keeping the Law of Moses, but by faith in Christ Jesus. In developing this theme, Paul emphasizes that the Law served as a schoolmaster to bring men to Christ but, now that the faith of Christ has come, men are no longer under this schoolmaster (3:24-25). He then addresses those Judaizers who tried to impose the keeping of the Law of Moses on Gentile Christians, specifically as this applied to the law governing circumcision. He wrote,

Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace (Gal. 5:1-4).

Not only is one not bound by the Law of Moses, Paul argues that those who impose the keeping of the Law of Moses on man are (a) obligated to keep all of the Law of Moses, not just a part of it, (b) Christ has become of no effect to such a person, and (c) he is fallen from grace.

4. Hebrews 7:12. The entire book of Hebrews develops the theme of the superiority of the New Covenant over the Old Covenant. There are many passages in the book which show the change of covenants. In Hebrews 7:12, the writer argues that the Law must have changed in order for Christ to be priest. "For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law" (Heb. 7:12). The argument is simple. The Old Testament mandates that the descendants of Levi be priests (Heb. 7:11). Since Christ is from the tribe of Judah, he could not be a priest unless the Law changed. The change in Law came when Christ died on the cross.

And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance. For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth (Heb. 9:15-17).

The necessity for a new covenant is also shown by the need for a better sacrifice than was offered under the Old Testament. The blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sin (Heb. 10:4); consequently, a superior sacrifice for sin was needed which need was filled in the sacrifice of the atoning blood of Christ.

There are many other Scriptures that emphasize the same truth that the Law has changed. Men are no longer living under the Old Testament but under the New Testament (for example, see 2 Cor. 3).

Application

Understanding the change of Laws has definite applications for today. Here are some of them:

1. One learns what to do in order to be saved from studying the New Testament. The conditions for salvation through the shed blood of Jesus Christ are found in the New Testament, not in the Old Testament. Today, one must search the pages of the New Testament to find the conditions for pardon from sins.

2. The laws regulating life in the Old Testament are not binding today. This applies to all of the Old Testament, both those things popularly recognized and those that are not so well understood. Men are justified by the blood of Christ. Consequently, there is no need for animal sacrifices. All Christians are priests (1 Pet. 2:5), so there is no need for a separate priesthood descended from the tribe of Levi. One does not have to go to Jerusalem to worship at the Jewish Temple on three annual feast days (Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacle), because where one worships is unimportant (John 4:20-24).

In moral issues, one is not allowed to practice polygamy as once was acceptable during the Old Testament (see Exod. 21:10-11); rather, each man is to have his own wife and each woman her own husband (1 Cor. 7:1-5). The Law regulating divorce and remarriage has changed. The Law of Moses allowed divorce and remarriage for both parties in a divorce for “uncleanness” (adultery was punishable by death). Christ allows only the innocent party, who divorces his mate for fornication, to remarry (Deut. 24:1-4; Matt. 19:9). There is no binding law for a civil state that punishes fornication and adultery by death (Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:21-24; John 8:4). These are some differences in moral law between the Old Testament and New Testament.

3. The laws regulating public worship for the church must be found in the New Testament. Were the Old Testament binding on mankind today, men would assemble for public worship on Saturday, the Sabbath. In the Temple animal sacrifices would be offered and other rudiments of the Jewish worship service would be observed. Since the Law has changed, men are not regulated by the Old Testament, but the New. What is done in worship must be found in the New Testament. New Testament saints assemble for worship on the first day of the week, not on the Sabbath (see Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1-2; Rev. 1:10). The New Testament provides no authority for Sabbath observance, a separate priesthood, instrumental music in worship, a separate choir, burning incense and lighting candles (as acts of worship), tithing, and a host of other practices common in many churches.

The modern practice of going through the Old Testament in smorgasbord fashion to pick and choose which parts one wants in the local church is logically inconsistent and biblically wrong. The Law has changed. Men are no longer bound by the ordinances and statutes of the Old Testament.

Conclusion

What is recorded in the Old Testament is true, for the testimony of the Lord is sure (Ps. 19:7). There are valuable lessons to be learned from the study of its pages, as Paul indicated as follows: “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope” (Rom. 15:4). However, Christians are not bound by its teachings as a Law for the church. Christians live under the New Testament, under the authority of Christ.