

Comparing God's Covenants

What makes the New Testament distinct from the Old Testament? Many of us wonder about the differences between these two covenants. Since much of the Old Testament concerns the Law of Moses and Israel's keeping with it, the way we evaluate this matter underscores our faith and whether we favor Law or Grace in our theology. For instance, some believe that the entire Law, including the Ten Commandments, was abolished with the advent of Christ. Yet they manage to argue for observing specific parts of it, such as "do not commit murder" or "do not steal", etc. While others believe that only the Ten Commandments are relevant in our current dispensation and all the rest made obsolete. Then there are those who believe in keeping ALL of the Law, every part of it. And while acknowledging Christ as high priest and men's perfect atonement, anticipate a future theocracy in which the temple priesthood and sacrificial system will commence once again like before. With all of these alternate views, one wonders where the former covenant ends and the new one begins.

The following study is an attempt to examine the major differences between the Old and New Covenants and to resolve some of the problems that arise from the various models of interpretation. Our focus will be to avoid veering off too far into left field (no Law) or too far into right field (legalism).

THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Bible is a progressive revelation of God's plan for mankind. Beginning in Genesis, God seeks to restore fallen man from the curse incurred by Adam and Eve's transgression. Every hallmark event thereafter is designed to bring man one step closer to complete redemption. Before focusing our study on the Old Testament it is imperative to understand the Bible in this manner. Otherwise, many of God's prior dealings will seem to conflict with His future ones.

The Old Testament is comprised of four major covenants brokered by God with specific individuals and their descendants. They are as follows:

1. Adamic (Gen 3:16-19)
2. Noahic (Gen 9:9-17)
3. Abrahamic (Gen 12:1-3)
4. Mosaic (Ex 20)

When comparing the stipulations of the first covenant with those of the last, we find that God's expectations of man increase from one phase of history to the next. For example, the first and second covenants introduce the concept of blood sacrifice, and within the third, circumcision is added as a requirement for all of Abraham's descendants. However, it is the fourth Old Testament covenant, the Mosaic, which is most significant. Moses gave the Law to Israel after meeting with God on Mt. Sinai. The Law, or Pentateuch, stands out more prominently than the rest simply because it was established with an entire nation. It is also the most cumulous revelation from God to man in the entire Old Testament.

THE LAW'S PURPOSE

So why the Law? What was God's purpose for giving Israel all 500 plus regulations if later Christ would come to establish a new and better "Way"? This question is foundational to our understanding of the New Covenant. After all, if we can't explain the purpose of the Law, we are left to wonder what it is that Christ sought to accomplish by dying on the cross.

There are several reasons for the Law, and they are as follows:

God Sought for a Holy Nation of Kings & Priests

God was after a people who would be peculiar and represent His character and holiness to the world. By obeying His commandments, they would achieve the status of Kings and Priests among the nations: *Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, **then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation*** (Ex 19:5-6).

To Define Sin

The Law functions as a standard by which we may define sin. Without it, sin is ambiguous and the lines of right and wrong blurry: *What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. **Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet*** (Rom 7:7).

As a Consequence for Disobedience & Hardness of Heart

Not all of the Law was meant to safeguard man from sin. Some of it was intentionally designed to punish Israel because of their disobedience and hardness of heart (Mat 19:8). As a result, it quickly became burdensome:

Notwithstanding the children rebelled against me....then I said, I would pour out my fury upon them, to accomplish my anger against them in the wilderness. Nevertheless I withdrew mine hand, and wrought for my name's sake, that it should not be polluted in the sight of the heathen, in whose sight I brought them forth... **Wherefore I gave them also ***statutes that were not good, and ***judgments whereby they should not live** (Ezk 20:21-25).

Clearly, the **entire** Law, with all of its oppressive rules and regulations was not meant to benefit man. On the contrary, by reading Ezekiel 20, we find that God “**also**” gave Israel “**statutes and judgments that were not good and whereby they should not live**”. Could this be the reason for the complex ceremonial and national rulings? Many of them disqualify individuals on the basis of physical health and appearance. Or even worse, elevated one class of individuals above the other (man vs. woman, slave vs. master, etc) and overruled mercy in favor of cruel and unusual punishment (stoning, etc). Peter understood this when raising objection to circumcision and **the observance of the entire Law** at the first council of Jerusalem:

...Peter rose up, and said unto them... why tempt ye God, **to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither ***our fathers nor **we were able to bear?** (Act 15:7-10).

Yet even more passages exist to demonstrate the fact that much of the Law was used as a disciplinary measure against Israel. It was not a blessing and did not bring them redemption. In fact, it was an imposing enemy that continually condemned them and brought them under bondage:

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 (Eph 2:15).

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 (Col 2:14).

Which stood only in **meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation** (Heb 9:10).

*Which things are an allegory: **for these are the two covenants**; the one from the mount Sinai, **which gendereth to bondage**, which is Agar... (Gal 4:24).*

To Bring Men to the End of Themselves

One of the most important functions of the Law was to bring men to the end of themselves in order to point them to Christ, the better Way. Therefore it deliberately frustrated men's efforts to obtain righteousness by it and placed impossible demands upon the nation of Israel. For if one rule was broken, all were considered broken (Jas 2:10). Such was the severity of the Law that no man could be justified thereby (Rom 3:20). As a result, it drove men to seek something better and more liberating. It exhausted their efforts until they could no longer continue striving and threw themselves fully upon Christ as their only means of salvation. Consider the following verses:

*Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster **to bring us unto Christ**, that we might be **justified by faith** (Gal 3:24).*

*For as many **as are of the works of the law are under the curse**: for it is written, **Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things** which are written in the book of the law to do them (Gal 3:10).*

***For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all** (Jas 2:10).*

For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I... O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? (Rom 7:15; 24).

“TILL ALL BE FULFILLED”

Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven (Mat 5:17-19).

Jesus was born with a human body like ours. He endured all of the same feelings, emotions, thoughts, and temptations that every person experiences. But as a Jew, born under the dispensation of Law, He was fully subject to its commands and dictates. Therefore He was obedient to the Law in every aspect, and had to be, in order to qualify as our atoning sacrifice. So what exactly did He mean when proclaiming that, “He did not come to destroy the Law, but rather to fulfill it”? This question is pivotal to our study. Many sincere Believers struggle to understand what Christ meant by this declaration. And as a result, it’s often engendered a fair share of controversy. But to truly understand this text we must realize that Christ’s advent fulfilled a very important ministry. **For Jesus to usher in the New Covenant dispensation of grace, He had to be the one and only man who lived in sinless submission to the Law, thereby fulfilling ALL of it.** The word “fulfill” is quiet tricky, though, and seems to be the cause of all the confusion. So what does this word really mean? Properly defined, something that is fulfilled is **complete**. In other words, completion and fulfillment are the same thing. You see, by living in perfect submission to the Law, Jesus Christ **fulfilled and completed its intended purpose.** To read Matthew 5:17 in this manner makes a lot of sense. Notice:

*Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, **but to fulfill (COMPLETE)**. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, **till all be fulfilled (COMPLETED)** (Mat 5:17-18).*

THE ABOLISHED LAW

Now that we understand the meaning of the word “fulfill”, we should ask the following question: Has Christ fulfilled the Law or not? According to the above passage, He has! Jesus came and successfully completed His mission. He lived subject to the Law and obeyed ALL of it. He then died, not only to become our perfect atoning Lamb, but also to serve continually as our high priest before God. As a result, much of the Law is now **abolished** and done away with. Here is proof:

*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 (Eph 2:15).*

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 (Col 2:14).

Which stood only in **meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation** (Heb 9:10).

In that he saith, **A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away** (Heb 8:13).

And not as Moses, which put a veil over his face, that the children of Israel could not stedfastly look **to the end of that which is abolished** (2 Cor 3:13).

Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. **He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second** (Heb 10:9).

THREE CATAGORIES OF LAW

So we recognize that God's Law was fulfilled by Christ and thereby completed. And we also acknowledge that much of it has been abolished and no longer applies. Yet we must realize that God's Law is still valid and binding even today because it is eternal. How do I mean?? To best understand this principle, we must first divide God's Law into three separate categories as follows: (1) **the Ten Commandments**, (2) **the Levitical or ceremonial laws**, and (3) **the national laws (aka "right rulings")**.

Since the Ten Commandments were etched in stone by the very finger of God **TWICE** and were the only portion of the Law to be placed into the ark of the Covenant (Exo 31:18; 34:28; Deut 9:10), **they comprise God's eternal Law. You will never find a single instance where Christ modified or made changes to the Ten Commandments. So therefore the Ten Commandments will remain valid, binding, and unchanged until Christ returns to set up His Kingdom.**

However, the ceremonial and national portions, applying respectively to the temple and nation of Israel, are to be treated differently. They contain hundreds of regulations that are entirely unpleasant and nearly impossible to comply with. As mentioned earlier, God set them in place in order to punish Israel for their hardness of heart and rebellion (Ezk 20:21-25). Later, both the ceremonial and national portions of the Law would come to be meaningless with the destruction of the Jewish temple and the nation of Israel in 70 A.D.

THREE THEOLOGICAL POSITIONS

It is often the differences between the three categories of Law previously outlined that seem to trigger the most confusion in respect to the Old and New Covenants. As a result, Christians will pull apart Paul's writings in favor of one of three theological positions:

A. All of the Law is still binding today and the ceremonial portion will be in full practice when the third temple is rebuilt and Christ returns.

B. None of the Law is binding and has been made obsolete through the atonement of Christ.

C. The ceremonial and civil portions are abolished by Christ, but the Ten Commandments still remain.

From a careful examination of Scripture, option C appears most feasible. However, I also find certain laws that fall outside of the Ten Commandments, yet are still valid in the New Testament period. I will address this point a bit later.

Nevertheless, let's examine some of the Scriptures that confuse many Christians and appear to support option A:

*Do we then **make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law** (Rom 3:31).*

*For not the hearers of the law are just before God, **but the doers of the law shall be justified** (Rom 2:13).*

***Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good** (Rom 7:12).*

*If then I do that which I would not, **I consent unto the law that it is good** (Rom 7:16).*

***But we know that the law is good, if a man use it legitimately** (1Ti 1:8).*

*I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; **but with the flesh the law of sin** (Rom 7:25).*

*And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, **which keep the commandments of God**, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ (Rev 12:17).*

As mentioned before, the above Scriptures are used most frequently to support the view expressed in option A. But I believe that they are clearly misappropriated. Paul isn't speaking out of both sides of his mouth here. His writings in Hebrews and elsewhere, which were quoted earlier, indicate beyond doubt that God wrapped up and concluded with the Law, **as expressed in the Levitical and Civil portions**. Yet it's easy to see how some can misunderstand what Paul is saying. While he isn't at all suggesting that we *could* "be justified by keeping the law" (Rom 2:13) or that faith does not in fact void out the appropriate portions fulfilled by Christ (Rom 3:31), he is nevertheless upholding the Law as expressed in the Ten Commandments. Paul recognizes the perfect and good nature of the Ten Commandments (Rom 7:12; 16). He also recognizes that the Law is good if used legitimately (1 Ti 1:8), and that we can't obey the Ten Commandments with our mind only, but must obey it with our bodies as well (Rom 7:25). Therefore none of the instruction contained in the above passages is in conflict with any of Paul's other writings. We must realize that Paul isn't referring to ALL of the "Law" everywhere it is mentioned, but rather as it relates to specific portions. Thus understood, his writings make perfect sense.

Now what about option B? How do Christians come away with the idea that all of the Law is abolished and no longer applicable? Let's look at some verses that are used to support this camp of thinking:

*Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. **On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets** (Mat 22:37-40).*

*For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: **therefore love is the fulfilling of the law** (Rom 13:9-10).*

For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: **against such there is no law** (Gal 5:14;22-23).

That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit (Rom 8:4).

Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin (Rom 3:20).

Here again, we must be careful not to misappropriate Scripture just to make it mean whatever we want it to. This is the danger in not taking the whole Word of God in combination when studying a particular issue. Quoted above are some of the teachings of Christ and Paul concerning the keeping of the Law. Clearly, Jesus taught that the whole Law was summed up in “love God and neighbor”. And likewise also Paul echoes this principle in his own writings. But both of them are not suggesting that **the Law is now useless or of no account**. Rather, they are affirming that all who love God and neighbor, as instructed, will naturally comply with the whole Law as a matter of consequence. When the Ten Commandments are thus honored, *against such there is no law*. Meaning, none of it applies any longer to those who “love God and neighbor”.

Those who fulfill these two primary commandments will undoubtedly satisfy the rest also. So, then, the righteousness of the Law **will** be fulfilled by those who walk according to God’s commandments in the Spirit (Rom 8:4), and they alone will be justified before God (Rom 3:20).

Option C is the last to be considered. The remainder of our study will be devoted to demonstrating why this final position makes the most sense.

PRIMARY DIFFERENCES

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Because God’s revelation in Scripture is **progressive**, the New Testament brings into sharper focus principles that were introduced in the Old Testament. The book of Hebrews describes how Jesus is the true High Priest and how His one sacrifice replaces all previous ones, which were mere ‘foreshadowings’. The Passover lamb of the Old Testament (Ezra 6:20) becomes the Lamb of God in the New Testament (John 1:29). The Old Testament gives the Law.

The New Testament clarifies that the Law was meant to show men their need of salvation and was never intended to be the means of salvation (Romans 3:19).

The Old Testament saw paradise lost for Adam; the New Testament shows how paradise is regained through the second Adam (Christ). The Old Testament declares that man was separated from God through sin (Genesis 3), and the New Testament declares that man can be restored in his relationship to God (Romans 3—6). The Old Testament **predicted** the Messiah's life. The Gospels **record** Jesus' life, and the Epistles **interpret** His life and how we are to respond to all He has done.

So what are some of the highlights that set these two covenants apart, and how are we to recognize them? To best answer this, let's take a look at the following list:

God's Permissive Will Vs. God's Perfect Will

*Who in times past **suffered all nations** (INCLUDING ISRAEL) to walk in their own ways (Act 14:16).*

*And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth **all men every where to repent** (Act 17:30).*

*The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee **a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken** (Deu 18:15).*

***And now** also **the axe is laid unto the root of the trees**... (Mat 3:10).*

*And he answered and said unto them, What did Moses command you? ... And Jesus answered and said unto them, For the **hardness** of your heart **he wrote you this precept** (Mar 10:3-5).*

*For the law made **nothing perfect**, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh unto God (Heb 7:19).*

*...Sacrifice and offering and burnt offerings and offering for sin thou wouldest not, neither hadst pleasure therein; which are offered by the law; **If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood**, (for under it the people received the law,) what further need was there that another priest should rise after the order of Melchisedec, and not be called after the order of Aaron? Who is made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life (Heb 10: 8-16).*

*Ye have heard that it hath been said, **An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth:** **But I say unto you...** (Mat 5:38).*

As demonstrated above, God permitted all who were under the Law to abide within His **permissive will** (Act 14:16; 17:30). Only when Jesus came was God's **perfect will** truly discovered. For He was the only One able to live and teach it. Yet Christ's advent and His ministry of ushering in this crucial transition between the permissive and perfect was prophesied as far back as Deuteronomy 18. Israel was expressly told to expect His coming and to fully comply with His authority. And once Jesus had finally arrived, He did the impossible. He accomplished what none before Him could. **He laid the ax to the root of the tree** (Mat 3:10). **No doubt this "tree" to which the ax was applied is symbolic for sin. While the OT dealt with the visible elements of sin (stem and branches), the NT deals with the root of sin, that which is invisible.**

Mark 10 further expounds this principle. We are told that God's permissive will functioned to address the problem of a **heart hardened people**. That's why God allowed certain **concessions** or loopholes around the Law, even though they essentially violated His perfect standard. So whereas the Law was unable to make Israel perfect (Heb 7:19), it was necessary until the coming of the Messiah.

Now some say that Jesus didn't modify the Law at all. That He rather eliminated its traditional understanding as practiced by the Pharisees. They further claim that His rhetoric with the Pharisees was a negative reflection upon the Talmudic writings of the Jews, not the actual Law. But this is not entirely true. Jesus revealed God's perfect standard expressed in the **heart of the Law, not its letter** (Rom 7:6; 2 Cor 3:6). For instance, we can't deny that Mathew 5:38 deals with the principle of fair justice ("eye for an eye"), which is clearly found in the Law: ***And if a man cause a blemish in his neighbour; as he hath done, so shall it be done to him; breach for breach, eye for eye, tooth for tooth: as he hath caused a blemish in a man, so shall it be done to him again*** (Lev 24:19-20).

So how did Jesus modify this part of the Law? Notice: *Ye have heard that it hath been said, **an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth:** **But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also** (Mat 5:38-40).*

Clearly, Jesus is canceling fair justice as defined in the OT. He is eliminating any form of retaliation contrary to the instruction of the Law. But some would still claim that Jesus is only restricting personal retaliation in favor of letting the higher authorities address our grievances for us. In other words, He was prohibiting men from taking the law into their own hands. Yet while this may be true, what do you do with Christ's last piece of instruction: **And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also.** How do you get around the fact that those who are sued at law are now being asked to relinquish much more than the Mosaic Law or any human government would ever demand of them? In other words, Christ's final advice cannot be found ANYWHERE in the five books of Law. Clearly, Christ was adding to God's Law and modifying its original function to match the principles of His Kingdom. And as God of the universe, He had full authority to change, add to, or revise His own Law.

But by far the plainest example of God's permissive will functioning in the Old Testament is displayed in Deut. 17. When Israel demanded to have a king set over them like the Gentiles, God capitulated to their demands (Deut 17:14), but only after including several stipulations as part of the "package". No king was to multiply **wives** or amass **wealth** (silver and gold) so that His heart didn't depart from God (Deu 17:17).

Yet every king of Israel lived in direct violation to this law. What's most interesting is that we simply don't find a single Old Testament prophet rebuking them for this obvious infraction? Why didn't God ever address this grievance, not even once?? It's obvious, as spelled out in Acts 17:30, that in *times past God winked* at their open defiance to His commandments. "But now commands all men everywhere to repent". **This means that we may no longer walk according to God's permissive will, because His perfect will has now been displayed to mankind.**

A Shadow of Things to Come

For **the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things**, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect (Heb 10:1).

What would you think of the man who walked around clutching his wife's photograph close to his chest while his actual wife was only a few feet away?

Such a man would be considered mad! In a very real sense, this same action characterizes those Christians who are infatuated with the Old Testament Law after the New Testament has been established as the new and better **reality**. These Christians appreciate the shadow of the real thing more so than the actual substance. The verse above demonstrates plainly that the Law was a mere shadow of “good things to come”, and not the reality. For this reason, we have to be careful not to hammer out our doctrines based on the principles of the Mosaic Law.

DISTINCT ISSUES

Capital Punishment

He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses (Heb 10:28).

*Thine eye **shall not pity him**, but thou shalt put away the guilt of innocent blood from Israel, that it may go well with thee. And the judges shall make diligent inquisition: and, behold, if the witness be a false witness, and hath testified falsely against his brother; Then shall ye do unto him, as he had thought to have done unto his brother: so shalt thou put the evil away from among you. And those which remain shall hear, and fear, and shall henceforth commit no more any such evil among you. **And thine eye shall not pity; but life shall go for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot** (Deut. 19:18-21).*

It's important to ask ourselves whether we really want to subject ourselves to the full letter of the Law. After all, the Law executed without pity many a criminal action. Do Christians truly want to live under such regulations? I hope not!

Priests vs. Laity

The Old Testament firmly established a dichotomy between the priests and lay people of Israel. This separation was also part of the political and religious hierarchy of that time. The one group was eligible to serve before God in the Temple and enter into the Holy of Holies, while the rest were not (Ex 38:21). The priests were called to be the “middle men” and mediate between God and man. When Jesus died on the cross, He once and for all abolished this middle wall of partition between God and man so that we could come before the Father boldly and with full access (Eph 2:14; Heb 4:16). He is now the only qualified mediator and stands at the right hand of God mediating continually on our behalf (Rom 8:34).

Sadly, many Christians today set up their Churches according to the pattern of the OT Temple system and maintain the same dichotomy or hierarchy between Church leaders and laity. This practice is denounced by Christ as unbiblical and wrong: **But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren** (Mat 23:8).

Theocratic Government

Israel was taken out of Egypt, a **physical** country, and brought into a **physical** location called the “Promised Land”. Soon they became an earthly kingdom and employed God’s Law to govern their nation. They set up a theocracy. Like any other nation, they had to be defended from enemy and foe through **physical** means.

In contrast, the New Testament is formed on the basis of a **spiritual** Kingdom called the Church (1 Pet 2:9). Christians are called out of a **spiritual** place called the World, and are journeying to a spiritual destination known as the “**New Jerusalem**” (Gal 4:26, Heb 12:22). Therefore the Church isn’t called to protect itself against physical enemies through physical means (Eph 6:12). Our primary focus should be to expand God’s kingdom using non-combatant activities such as evangelism and prayer. We exist by allowing God to defend us: *Jesus answered, **My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence*** (Jon 18:36).

Church and State Unified

Old Testament Saints were governed by the Church of that day. Because Church and state were combined into one, membership and citizenship were also joined into one. As a result, circumcision in the OT and baptism in the NT (Roman Catholicism) is applied to infants because as soon as they are citizens of the state they must be members of the church.

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The formation of the Roman Catholic Church was largely due to a marriage of church and state contrary to the teachings of the New Testament. The church leaders, in trying to gain power over the people, began acting as a state institution. Both should be governed by God’s will in their respective roles with the church being the spiritual guide and the state being the protector of the people. They exchanged evangelism as the Biblical means of growing the church for the state method of growing the state – conquering with the sword. They dealt with “heretics” the way the state deals with criminals - execution.

Tithe became tax, and baptism was now for infants; because they became citizens and members at the same time. Doctrine was now established by state legislature, not by preaching and exhortation based on Scripture with the example of godly living. There is a delicate balance of power when both the church and the state are trying to fulfill God's will. They will work in cooperation without trespassing the respective roles and boundaries God has ordained for them. Roman Catholics developed a church hierarchy much like the Old Testament with priests, temples, altars, and the communion became their sacrifice. Ultimately, they usurped Christ's role as the one mediator between God and men when they made it illegal to give the Scriptures to the common people and taught confession of sins to the priest for forgiveness. These gross errors were produced by power hungry men in church positions, who became worldly and apostate; but didn't want their positions challenged or their powers lost. This error was promoted by denominational bias and pride that wanted the state's help in eliminating the opposition. Thus we have 1200 plus years of terrible persecution called "The Dark Ages". The reign of the Anti-Christ system showed its true colors, and justified its slaughter of over 50 million non-conformist believers by saying they were just trying to "discipline erring sheep". This mother of harlots had a number of daughters (protestants) who abused the state-church union and also persecuted any who didn't agree.

Government & Political Process (Voting)

Under the Mosaic Law, participation in government was encouraged and perfectly acceptable. Remember, this Law functioned to address the needs of national Israel and their physical kingdom. The New Testament Church is distinct from Israel in that it's a **spiritual** Kingdom governed by **spiritual** principles. As such, its recourse should not be physical or political. There are several reasons for this: ... [Read More](#)

Non-Resistance

What is non-resistance? Non-resistance is simply a doctrine taken from Scripture supporting the idea of abstention from violence and retaliation toward evil (Mat 5:39). It also encourages Believers to exercise non-participation in military or civil justice (policing), which require the use of lethal force and violence. This teaching, now largely rejected by modern evangelicals, was once the predominant practice of the early Church and became the creed of many from the Reformation era such as the Anabaptists, Waldenses, and Huguenots.... [Read More](#)

The Sabbath

The Sabbath rest has been at the center of much controversy since the earliest times. Over the centuries numerous attempts have been made to settle the argument surrounding which day of the week truly constitutes the seventh day Sabbath, and if such a day is even relevant any longer. The traditional view claims the New Testament substituted the seventh day with Sunday, the first day of the week upon which Christ arose. Yet evidence for this position hasn't been forthcoming and few scholars have been able to substantiate it with valid text. The now growing trend is to simply eliminate any type of physical resting day in favor of spiritualizing the Sabbath and its observation....[Read More](#)

Dietary Laws (Clean & Unclean)

Perhaps the most significant distinction between the Old and New Testament is the Law's ruling on matters of "clean and unclean". Many prohibitions exist in the book of Leviticus describing various health conditions, practices, and foods that were deemed "unclean". While few Christians still consider them valid or applicable, a growing number still do, especially in areas of diet, such as kosher meats, etc. Among them are the Seventh Day Adventists and the Hebraic Roots proponents... [Read More](#)

Tithing

Old Testament tithing was part of Israel's tax code and was governed by the Mosaic Law. It was to be distributed among the Levites as compensation for their service in the temple and also among the poor. If you add up the total amount of tithes required of Israel annually, it exceeded 23%. Ten percent went for the temple work, ten percent for festivals of worship, and ten percent every third year for the Levites and poor (Ex 29:28; Lev 27:30-32; Num 18:20-32; Deut 12:17; 14:22-29; 26:12) ... [Read More](#)

Circumcision

Under the Mosaic Law circumcision was a legal requirement and constituted the first right of passage into the Hebrew culture. The New Testament, however, clearly invalidates this practice as profitless. Some, though, still circumcise merely on account of its hygienic or medical value, while others are adverse to it. Both Jew and Gentile are free to act as they wish in regards to this matter. In brief, here are a few scriptures that can be used to expand our knowledge of this issue:

*And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, **Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them** (Act 15:1-2).*

Therefore if the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision (Rom 2:26).

For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God (Rom 2:28-29).

Seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith (Rom 3:30).

Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God (1 Cor 7:19).

For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love (Gal 5:6).

And I, brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? then is the offence of the cross ceased (Gal 5:11).

For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh (Php 3:3).

In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ (Col 2:11).

Polygamy

Note: The following was written to an individual who tried to prove polygamy could be defended as a legitimate practice in the New Testament. I wrote this up as a rebuttal, but it nicely ties into our examination of the primary differences between the Old and New Covenants.

The Mosaic Law never forbade the practice of polygamy. It allowed the Israelites to retain more than one wife at a time as long as none were neglected and all were treated equal (Deut 21:15, Ex 21:10, 1 Sam 1:2, 2 Crn 24:3). The New Testament, however, informs us that this practice was tolerated by God and overlooked because Israel was a “stiff-necked” and “hard-hearted” people—Matthew 19:4-6. But even in the Old Testament, **God’s perfect will is distinguished from His permissive will**. This is best revealed in the prohibition against polygamy located in Deuteronomy 17. God warned Israel that her kings should not multiply wives (polygamy) lest they forsake Him: *Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away: neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold* (Deuteronomy 17:17). It would seem that God was aware of the danger in having more than one wife at a time. Perhaps one of the main reasons why Israel forsook God for idols was simply because they ignored the prohibition in Deuteronomy 17, most notably, King Solomon....[Read More](#)

WHAT OT LAWS ARE STILL RELEVANT TODAY?

Not all of the Law’s ceremonial (Levitical) or civil rulings are invalidated by the New Testament. While many insist that *only* the Ten Commandments are still binding, none would argue that the prohibitions against bestiality (Lev 18:23), homosexuality (Lev 20:13), fornication (Lev 19:20), cross-dressing (Deu 22:5), body carvings/tattoos (Lev 19:28), and blood consumption (Deu 12:23; Act 15:20) are voided in the New Testament simply because they weren’t written in stone. So how do we know which laws still apply and which do not? What rule can be used to define such guidelines?

After all, imagine having to sort through all 500 plus laws contained in the Pentateuch just to figure out which ones are still relevant. Such a process would take up all of our time and energy! So while there is no simple way around it, there *are* several tests we can take to decide this question such as the following:

- Does the New Testament void it or reinforce it?
- Can we honestly say that it is God glorifying (1 Cor 10:31)?
- Is there room to doubt it (Rom 14:23)?
- Does it violate our conscience or any underlying NT principles?
- Can we walk it out in peace (Rom 14:15)?

OLD TESTAMENT CONTINUITY OR PROGRESSIVE REVELATION?

So far we've demonstrated that God's pattern of revelation, as witnessed by the Scriptures, is progressive. Old Testament continuity is impossible to prove without forcing our bias on the Bible or breaking key rules of interpretation. It may be argued that God's character is immutable, and rightly so, but His dealings with mankind have certainly changed between covenants. Moreover, we've seen that the Ten Commandments, written in stone, are God's eternal Law, and that Christ simply enriched them with spiritual depth and meaning. So we simply can't ignore the great schism that exists between the Mosaic Law and the New Testament, especially in terms of their character and application. God's Old Testament dealings with men were part of His **permissive will**. His **perfect will** though wasn't revealed until Christ came to bring about **total reformation: ...imposed on them until the time of reformation** (Heb 9:10). The Bible is clear. The Levitical and Civil portions of the Law **HAD** to be changed: *For the priesthood (Levitical) **being changed**, there is made of necessity a change also of the law* (Heb 7:1).

But some still try to deny that this obvious change has also affected the moral portions of God's Law. They simply can't fathom that God's moral code can be modified in any way. And as a result they try to impose OT continuity in the Law's moral application. Yet if God's moral commandments never changed from one covenant to the next, how do we account for the New Testament's prohibition on polygamy and divorce and remarriage (both moral issues)? Why don't we follow the same guidelines in the treatment of female slaves and victims of rape (Deut 22:19-22)? And why aren't we still stoning adulterers, homosexuals, transvestites, etc? Such thinking is filled with illogical problems and can't be explained reasonably. So those who still prefer to believe that Jesus did not come to correct or change what Moses wrote should first consider these hard-line questions.

Progressive Revelation Encapsulated

Dietary law is a prime example where the progressive nature of the Bible between God's covenants is clearly displayed. So let's focus on it a bit to see how it supports the view of progressive revelation:

1. Noahic Covenant—All Foods are Acceptable

Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things. But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat (Gen 9:3-4).

2. Mosaic Covenant—Only Certain Foods are to be Eaten

And every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth shall be an abomination; it shall not be eaten (Lev 11:41).

3. NT Fledgling Church (Acts period)—All Foods may be Eaten Except Strangled Animals with their Blood

*But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, **and from things strangled, and from blood*** (Act 15:20).

4. Mature Church (epistles period)—No Questions Asked—Eat Everything

Whatsoever is sold in the marketplace, that eat, asking no question for conscience sake. If any of them that believe not bid you to a feast, and ye be disposed to go; whatsoever is set before you, eat, asking no question for conscience sake (1 Co 10:25-27).

In Genesis 9, God clearly allowed Noah and his descendants to eat anything they wished as long as they disposed with the blood. This was the condition stipulated by the Noahic covenant. The Mosaic Law, however, which was the next phase in God's program, regulated against certain living creatures being eaten, which were deemed unclean. Next we come to the book of Acts. Here we find a fledgling Church doing its best to discern which matters of Law were still valid and which had now expired. After all, they didn't have a compact New Testament to consult in the event they erred on a certain doctrine. They relied strictly on the guidance of the Holy Spirit. And God's Spirit gave them as much "light" or knowledge as was needed for this **fragile period of transition**. Therefore it was decided that Gentile Christians abstain from strangled meats and blood. Later on, the Spirit gave Paul even more illumination, leading him to conclude that Believers were free to eat pretty much anything they wished for the purpose of survival or evangelism.

These four scripture passages teach us the following in respect to the Bible:

- The Bible is not "flat" □ equal throughout. Instead, it is a progressive book and continuity is applied to a point.
- Old Testament scriptures cannot be relied upon conclusively to settle matters of doctrine.
- Certain texts may appear to conflict with each other when in fact they serve as individual building blocks in the overall superstructure of God's eternal program.

What we need to realize is that while certain transitions occur between God's covenants, they only serve to bring us closer to perfection and the ultimate understanding of truth. But it's important that we also understand what progressive revelation **doesn't** teach. Namely, that these changes continue to occur after the completion of the New Testament canon, which we view as a sealed or closed book. We also believe that nothing in the apostolic writings is contrary to the teachings or principles laid out for us by Jesus Christ. Lastly, progressive revelation treats the book of Acts cautiously in regards to small doctrinal particulars, realizing that the book's main purpose was to chronicle the early Churches' progression into maturity.

CONCLUSION

I hope this study has both challenged and reaffirmed your view on the distinctions between God's primary covenants. More importantly, perhaps the confusion in how to apply the commandments of the Old Testament in the New Testament period has now been cleared up sufficiently to warrant confidence in the valid application of the Law. If so, then my purpose for this writing has been satisfied and I pray that we may now pursue the better and more excellent way found in Christ... (Heb 6:1).

John A.