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Old Covenant vs. New Covenant pt. 1

We're going to take a break from our study of the book of Ephesians this week. The last two weeks as we've been looking at Ephesians chapter two, I've gotten into the topic of New Covenant verses Old Covenant reality. I've touched a little on the fact that until the spiritual relationship with God called the New Covenant is revealed by the Spirit Himself, we will try to relate to God according to the only relationship that makes sense to the flesh – the Old Covenant. And maybe not the specific institutions and requirements of the Mosaic Law, but certainly with an Old Covenant mentality.

Last week I said something that I want to repeat. God is no longer relating to humans according to the Old Covenant. That is not the nature of the relationship that He has with any person. So He doesn't just wink at us when we try to relate to Him according to an Old Covenant relationship. He simply doesn't acknowledge it. We have to understand that that relationship, that kind of association, doesn't exist to Him, though it exists in the darkness of our unrenewed minds. And, that being the case, we must to learn to walk in the reality of the relationship that He does have with us – the New Covenant. Everything other than that is not only fictitious, it is actually keeping us bound to lies.

You might say – that doesn't seem like that big of a deal. No, it's a huge deal. Spiritual reality is very black and white. If it's not part of the Truth as it is revealed by the Spirit, then it is part of the lie. There's no third option.

There are other ways to say this same thing, but I'd like to suggest to all of you this morning that nearly all of our struggle, sorrow, deadness, complacency, lack of change, whatever, stems from the fact that so many of us have such an anemic comprehension of the covenant that we have with God. Or you could say we have an anemic understanding of the relationship that God has established with us in Christ. That's an incredibly unfortunate thing. It's unfortunate to have a relationship with God and not know it or reap the good of it. And it's even more regrettable not only not to know the relationship that we have, but also to try to associate according to a relationship that doesn't exist.

In the natural realm, that would kind of be like having a son that doesn't have any idea who he is, and all that is his because it is mine. He has no grid for what he is to me, what I want to give him, show him, teach him...how I want to love him. But even worse than failing to recognize all of that, this son also daily thinks of himself and attempts to relate to me as my pet. Obviously, the relationship that I have with a pet and a son couldn't be more different. He chooses the one, and forfeits the other. He holds onto the one and is deprived of the other.

Well, that's not a dramatization of what we do in our relationship with God. That analogy is actually an huge understatement, a far less tragic situation than to have been given the Son of God as our Life and our Covenant with God, and still attempt

to relate to God in the flesh. Still attempt to relate to God according to a relationship that was only ever a natural testimony and shadow of the spiritual union that is now ours.

So, here's the problem. We simply do not understand the covenant that we have with God. Often times we do not even understand what a covenant is. I think that when so many of us read the Bible, it never occurs to us that the nature of mankind's relationship with God completely and utterly changed in coming from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant. We know that somewhere along the way, Jesus showed up and died on the cross. We're thankful for that. But we don't realize that through that cross came a perfect end to the kind of relationship that God had with people. Absolutely nothing remained the same in terms of God's relationship with human beings.

Contrary to so much of what we hear, Jesus didn't just show up in Israel in order to forgive transgression. Of course there is forgiveness in Him, but Christ came that the soul of man might share His life and His relationship with the Father. Everything prior to the cross in Israel was a natural and external picture of what Christ made spiritual and internal. In fact, those are good words for you to associate with each of the covenants.

When you think of Old Covenant, what should pop in your head are the terms natural (as in created, physical, material) and external (as in exterior to the human soul). Now I realize that even in the Old Covenant there were encounters with the Spirit of God, and those who by faith saw through the external and natural. But nevertheless, this is predominately what the Old Covenant was all about. It was the natural and external testimony or demonstration of what was to become spiritual and literally resident within the human soul.

You see, in the Old Covenant there was natural water bubbling up out of a physical rock. In the New Covenant, there are streams of living water bubbling up out of the heart of those who are born of the Spirit. In the Old Covenant there is a natural man, Aaron, going behind a sewn veil bringing the blood of the sacrifice. In the New Covenant there is the Christ of God taking us in Himself into the heavens, into His Father. More on all of that later. Right now I just want us to notice that the relationship with God takes on an entirely new form and function. Through the cross, what was only natural and external became spiritual and internal. And when it did, God was actually known for the first time.

In the Old Covenant, God was hidden in countless types and shadows. People, places, feasts, institutions, ceremonies, stories, judgments, wars, sacrifices. All of these spoke of the covenant we have come to. But through all of these the mystery of God's ultimate intention was veiled. Hidden. **The spiritual and internal was hidden in the natural and the external.** But in Christ, the mystery was revealed. All that was ever outwardly testified to became spiritual substance in the human soul.

So, again...the relationship changed. Everything changed. And for the first time since the creation of the world...man could know God. Prior to this covenant man did not know God. Now I know...what about the prophets and Moses and David and all the main guys and gals of the Old Testament. But still I'm going to say to you what Jesus said to all of the Jews. "No one knows the Father except the Son. No one knows the Son except the Father". Why? Because God is not known through

observing His works. God is not known by reading about Him and keeping His law. God is known only by participation in His life. All of the heroes of the Old Testament related to God through visions, dark sayings, dreams...though they prophesied, heard the voice of God, were obedient, believed the Scriptures, and even walked by faith, none of them inherited the reality of His indwelling Life. And that is how God is truly known.

Heb 11:39 And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, **did not receive the promise**

What is the promise? The life of God in the soul of man. Christ living in you. You living in and by Christ. Friends, this is how God is known. God is not known through carrying out sacrifices, dressing up like a high priest, giving an offering, or keeping the Sabbath. All of those things testified of Him who we can now know through participation in His life. If you want to know Him, if you want to worship Him, you must leave the Old and find Him in the New. You cannot put new wine in old wineskins. It simply cannot contain it. They will never mix. You have to leave the shadowland of the natural and external, and come to know Him in Spirit and in Truth.

This is exactly what Jesus says to the woman at the well. I know we've spent time on this passage before, but the Lord seems to always be drawing my heart back here. It never ceases to amaze me how the Lord simply dismisses the entire Old Covenant and Old Creation with a single sentence.

I'm tempted to read the whole chapter, but most of you are familiar with the story. If you happen not to be, Jesus comes to the city of Samaria, which is the home of what the Jews considered a misguided, heretical bunch of half-breeds. He sits down at the well and has a conversation with a Samaritan woman. For the sake of time, I'll just read the last part of the chapter.

Joh 4:19 The woman said to Him, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. **20** Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship." **21** Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. **22** You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. **23** But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. **24** God *is* Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

Here's my paraphrase of this statement: Woman, even though the God-initiated testimony of salvation is from the Jews, as well as the Messiah Himself according to the flesh...the time is coming and now is when mountains and buildings and garments and sacrifices and ceremonies have served their purpose. They have been the natural and external declaration and foretelling of what has now come to be spiritual substance. For a time, worship had something to do with conformity to the testimony. Now, true worship has only to do with conformity to My indwelling Life, in the reality of spirit and truth.

And so what Jesus is demonstrating here is that in coming to the New Covenant, we have come to an entirely different relationship with God where instead of obeying outward, natural commands, we come to truly know Him, know His heart, know His

will, because He resides in us. We who have been joined to Him have become one spirit with Him. We have died and our life is hidden with Christ in God. We have been crucified with Him, and it is no longer us who live, but Christ lives in us. **This is our covenant. This is our relationship with God.** This is not systematic theology. This is eternal spiritual relatedness to God. We have come from knowing about Him through obedience to the letter, to truly knowing Him by obedience to His death and participation in His resurrection. We have come from letter to Spirit, from Law to Life.

I believe this is what Jesus makes reference to just prior to going to the cross in John chapter 15. He mentions that he no longer will call them servants, but rather friends because He makes known to them the will of God. I see in that a transition where the relationship is changing from one where they outwardly keep a mysterious command, to one where they actually come to know the will, the mind, the heart of God. And in the context of John 15 Jesus is just explaining this relationship in words – the vine and the branches. But its not until a few days later, in the resurrection, that the disciples actually begin to comprehend the reality of this new relationship.

What changed? They were never branches abiding in a vine before. They were maybe stewards of a vineyard. Maybe servants in a vineyard. But here they are the actual branches of the Vine! What a different relationship. Romans says the Jews were stewards of the promises regarding the coming One. They were the recipients of the oracles given concerning Him. Bt never were they participants in His actual life.

Ok, so the transition from Old to New Covenant wasn't just a transition from BC to AD. It wasn't a transition from a people waiting to be forgiven, and a people now forgiven. It wasn't changing from the Laws of Moses to the Laws of Jesus. It was a complete change of relationship. Those who were once relating to God in the flesh through natural and external pictures, shadow, and dim portraits of Christ in the earth, now are actually joined to Christ and relate to God according to spiritual union. The two joined together in the Person of Jesus Christ.

This was never what the Old Covenant delivered, but always what the Old Covenant promised. Even as far back as Genesis chapter three where you see the woman created out of the man and joined to him in covenant. Or in Exodus 15:17:

Exo 15:17 You will bring them in and plant them In the mountain of Your inheritance, *In* the place, O LORD, *which* You have made For Your own dwelling, The sanctuary, O LORD, *which* Your hands have established.

And now that we have been planted in the mountain of His inheritance, now that we have come to His sanctuary, His dwelling place in Christ...the shadows and types of this in the natural realm are obsolete. God doesn't now have two kinds of relationships. The first pointed to the second until the second came. The old pointed to the new, until the new replaced it. This is what the entire book of Hebrews is about. From beginning to end, this book is about the end of the first and the inauguration of the second in the Person of Jesus Christ.

We've come from words to Word, from Moses to the greater mediator, from Aaron to the great High Priest, from the tabernacle made with hands to the eternal dwelling place of God, from Melchizedek to the eternal Christ, from Old Covenant to New Covenant, from Sinai to Zion, from earth to heaven, from the Sabbath to the Lord of

the Sabbath, natural rest to rest for the soul, animal sacrifices to the blood of the Lamb, the faith of Abraham to the faith of the Son of God. On and on we go. What is it all? It is the great transition from the first to the second. The old to the new. The shadow to the substance.

Heb 8:4 ~ priests on earth "offer gifts according to the Law; 5 who serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things.

Heb 9:7 But into the second part the high priest *went* alone once a year, not without blood, which he offered for himself and *for* the people's sins *committed* in ignorance; **8** the Holy Spirit indicating this, that the way into the Holiest of All was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was still standing. **9** It *was* symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience—**10** concerned only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation. **11** But Christ came *as* High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation.

Heb 10:1 For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of the things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near.

Heb 8:13 ~ when He said "a new covenant" He has made the first obsolete"

Heb 10:10 He takes away the first in order to establish the second.

But here's our problem. Here's what I've been getting at. The Old Covenant is a relationship in the natural according to the flesh. Do this. Stop doing that. Kill this. Don't ever kill that. Go here, don't go there. Touch this, don't touch that. Any body could understand the commands. Nobody understood why it was commanded, but it made sense to the natural mind. God wants me to do this. I can do it...at least, most of the time. God says don't do that...I suppose I can live without that. God says go here and not there...I'm sure He knows best.

What I'm attempting to say is that **the natural man doesn't have too hard of a time comprehending a natural relationship**. That's the only kind of relationship we've ever known. But when we are born again and as 1 Corinthians 6:17 says we become one spirit with Him, we have absolutely no clue what that means or how that kind of relationship works. We're glad we're forgiven. We're glad we're born again, but we have zero understanding of what a spiritual relationship even is. There's not a person in the natural world that can show you how to relate to God as one joined to His Son.

And so what do we do? Well, we do the only thing that makes sense to us. We thank God for whatever it was we think Jesus did, and we go on trying to relate to Him in the flesh. We go on asking him "can I touch this?", "can I go here?", "can I say that?" "do you want me to sing this, build that, teach this, pray that, stop this, start that, serve this, and resist that?". Somebody tell me how I'm supposed to **act** now that I'm Christian. But see, right there is already a contradiction of the covenant that you're in. A contradiction of your relationship with God. You see, you're dead. **It's the end of your act**. It's the end of you trying to live for God and the beginning of God actually being formed in you.

But the natural mind hears those words, reads the words of the New Testament, and says "now that doesn't make sense". Well, of course it doesn't make sense because:

1Co 2:14 But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned.

So rather than seeking that the Lord teach us the foolishness of spiritual reality, we try to "make sense" out of the New Testament. We try to drag spiritual reality back into the world of natural thinking and doing and serving. Oh sure, if we're going to try to get this right, we'd better make it "practical". I wish I had a dime for every time I have heard somebody tell me that preaching the cross as I do isn't very practical. And I don't fault anybody because I know that at first I thought the same way. But now I realize that whenever I hear somebody tell me to make it more practical, what they're really saying is "**can you make this more natural?**". "Can you make this a little more external and earthly so that it makes sense to me, and so I can do it in the flesh?" In other words, "would you please make what you're saying a little more Old Covenant?"

Sure, bring it back to something I can do, rather than something He is. Bring it back to something that helps my life and makes me pleasing to God. Paul, I don't know what you mean when you say my life ended at the cross, and that only Christ is pleasing to God. I'm sure I'll figure that out in heaven. What? You say I'm made alive, raised up and seated in heaven? Oh Paul, you're so heavenly minded you're no earthly good. I'll have plenty of time to ponder those mysteries after I'm done serving God and building this ministry.

The natural mind wants to hold on to what it understands. But in doing that, we have to reckon with the fact that it is holding on to something God has made obsolete. It is holding on to something that God has put away in order to establish what is spirit and truth.

And as I was reading this week in the book of 1 Samuel, I came across a tremendous picture of this very thing. Well, really there are two pictures of this right in a row. One of them we've talked about, and one of them we haven't.

The occasion is when God tells the prophet Samuel to go to king Saul and command him to utterly wipe out the wicked Amalekites. Saul disobeys and keeps the king and the best of the cattle alive. And here is the first picture of Saul trying to keep alive the "best" of what God has condemned. Here is Saul disregarding the judgment of God, a judgment that calls one seed dead and another Seed alive. And we've looked at that before and how it demonstrates the natural man's propensity to seek to save what he considers the best of what God has rejected.

But because Saul does this, God tells Samuel that the kingdom will be taken away from him and given to another man, a man after God's own heart. Saul justifies himself, and then begs and cries and pleads with Samuel to change his mind, and yet the Lord has judged. He has rejected the first – Saul. And He has chosen to anoint the second – David.

Now we're getting to the good part. Saul and Samuel each go to their own home, and the prophet Samuel prays and weeps for Saul. Sounds like a pretty spiritual thing to do, huh? He intercedes and mourns for Saul and his lost kingdom. Until something happens. This is the beginning of 1 Samuel chapter 16. Finally God interrupts Samuel and says something like "Samuel, how long will you weep and pray for what I have rejected? Now get up, fill your horn with oil, and go anoint the man I have chosen. For I have chosen a man for myself from among the sons of Jesse."

And the word "rejected" here is a very strong Hebrew word. It means to abhor, cast off, despise, disdain, become loathsome, refuse.

I don't know what you see there, but I see a perfect depiction of the heart of man. I see, as Paul describes in 2nd Corinthians chapter 3, a heart that refuses to look and accept the end of what God has put away. A heart that cries and weeps and prays to hold on to what God has rejected. I see myself, the one who holds on to and contends for something that has been made obsolete by the cross. I hold to the first, even though He has taken away the first and established the second.

And the Old Covenant pictures of this abound. Abraham cries out on behalf of the first "Oh God, if only Ishmael could live before you". Esau, the first, cries out, bless me too Father, there must be a blessing left for me. Laban says to Jacob "no take my first daughter, even though your heart is set on the second". Joseph says to Jacob "No Father, your hands are mixed up, this one is the first and that one is the second". And on and on it goes.

What is all this? It's the first and the second. It's the old and the new. It's the heart of man seeking to preserve and retain the Old Covenant because in that covenant flesh can still live, and the natural mind can still figure things out, and works of the flesh appear to be acceptable to God. It's you and I trying to hold on to a relationship with God that doesn't even exist because we have no idea what God has given us in the person of the New Covenant.

And of course the prophets were saying this from the beginning. Long before the dawning of the New Covenant in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the prophets were declaring that God really had no true pleasure in the types and shadows. He didn't really like animal blood, or linen garments, or badger skin tents, or golden boxes. They were only ever pleasing to Him in what they pointed to. These things painted an accurate but dim portrait of His Son, but they never had any intrinsic value. The Old Covenant was never what God had his heart on. It was always the Leah that God accepted in order to have His Rachel.

In Psalm 51 David prays to God after having sinned with Bathsheba. He says

Psa 51:16 For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give *it*; You do not delight in burnt offering. **17** The sacrifices of God *are* a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart— These, O God, You will not despise.

Well, we're out of time. We'll probably spend another week on this next Sunday. Amen.