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Jason Henderson  
Market Street Fellowship

## Old vs. New Covenant pt. 2

Last week we took a break from our study of the book of Ephesians in order to talk more specifically about the Old vs. the New Covenant. I'd like to continue looking at that this week in hopes that we will see more of the enormity of the contrast between these two relationships with God.

If you'll recall, I first tried to describe what a covenant is. A covenant is an understanding or agreement by which two come into some sort of relationship. In other words, a covenant is the nature of a relationship. The way two people relate. How a relationship functions. And then we looked at the fact that God brought us, in the Person of Christ, from the Old Covenant, the old relationship, to the New Covenant – an entirely different and new kind of relationship with humans. It's not new just because it's more recent. It's new in quality, new in its kind, new in nature and character.

And the majority of last week was spent both trying to describe how the two covenants differ and the all-important fact that God is no longer relating to people according to an old covenant relationship, even though you and I continue to try to relate to him in that way.

And when I say that we try to relate to God according to the Old Covenant, I don't mean that we sacrifice bulls and build temples stay away from pork and catfish. I simply mean that we see our relationship with God according to an Old Covenant mentality. What is an Old Covenant mentality? An Old Covenant mentality is when we fail to understand what it means to be related to God in and by His Son, and therefore try to relate to Him in a multitude of ways that made some sense in the Old Covenant, but makes no sense in the new. An Old Covenant mentality is when God is trying to relate to us in spirit and truth, and we are trying to relate to him in the flesh.

That's a big deal. That's a really big deal because, as I said last week, not only are we not relating to God according to the relationship that we have, but we're also trying to associate according to a fictitious relationship that simply doesn't exist.

And there are literally hundreds of ways that we do this. There are hundreds of ways that we try to drag the old into the new, even though the old was never more than a shadow. The Old Covenant was comprised of shadows of Christ in the natural realm that now are intrinsically meaningless because the substance has come. And the fact is that those shadows were **never** inherently meaningful, but only bore testimony of that which was. Their meaning was always in what they pointed to and gave testimony of. And the problem that we have is that these shadows have not yet become meaningless to us because we don't know as we are known. We don't have God's understanding of our relationship with Him.

So, maybe you're sitting there thinking..."I wonder if there is a shadow or two that I am holding on to". I'd like to suggest that you change that question. The question should never be "if". The question must always be "where" or "in what way" am I holding on to what God has put away. You see, I'm not sitting up here speaking hypothetically about a possible scenario happening with a few individuals. I'm here declaring the unfortunate necessary condition of the natural mind, even after the soul is born again. I promise you, it is never a matter of "if". The journey of transformation begins when we realize it is always a "how". We are coming from darkness to light, death to life. Even though you start at new birth with the fullness of the life of Christ residing in your soul, you also start with a mind that is by nature enmity with God. It's not only that you struggle with darkness, you are the darkness that you struggle with.

**Eph 5:8** For you were once darkness, but now *you are* light in the Lord. Walk as children of light

God is not trying to change your mind, or fix your thoughts. God doesn't really ever just change your view of something, He replaces your view with His. Every true encounter with the Spirit of Truth is also an experience of what you might call displacement. He cannot show you the truth, without also showing you that you are the lie. I don't mean that you are a liar. It's not that your trying to deceive or be deceived. It's just that your thoughts, your view, the darkness of the natural mind is the very darkness that he is trying to replace with His light. Notice how Paul says this very thing in 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians chapter 4. He says that God who commanded light to shine out of natural darkness, is now shining in the darkness of the heart with the light of Life.

**2Co 4:6** For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to *give* the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

And the reason I bring that up is because coming from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant isn't a simple, smooth transition. It is a collision of minds. It's a collision of natures. Light meets darkness. It is really starting over in your comprehension of reality. It is very much like coming from darkness to light, from infancy to adulthood. When we come from the Old Covenant to the New, we are quite literally born again, born from above. And so a whole new set of rules apply. In fact, a whole new life applies..."not I, but Christ".

We don't often look at it like this, but you know no more about spiritual life when you are born of the spirit, then you knew about natural life when you were born from your mother.

If it took you years and years to learn what it meant to live in the flesh, to understand that realm, and to relate according to the flesh...do we think that, after being born of Spirit, that we will suddenly know what it means to live in the spirit, walk in the spirit, relate in the spirit? Well, too often we don't even think of that...because we automatically try to bring flesh-living, flesh-works, flesh-relationships, flesh-everything into a new life where we are told "the flesh profits nothing". Can you hear that? We act like the same rules apply. But what you've learned of the first will not help you in the second. It is not the nature of the realm or relationship that you have with God. As Jesus says, it truly profits you nothing.

The Old Covenant was the outward and natural relationship with God that testified to the inward and spiritual. And though we may have let go of the specific ceremonies and commands of that covenant, we have not let go of the realm, the works, or the relationship. I know that we don't bring a turtledove to church on Sundays for a sacrifice. I know that we don't offer a lot of wave offerings in our small groups. **But we do hold on to the realm and the kind of relationship that the first man had with God.** That is what I mean when I say we have an Old Covenant mentality.

I mentioned last week that in coming from the Old Covenant to the New, we've come from what was natural (meaning material, earthy, created, physical, tangible) and external (meaning exterior to the soul of man) to what is now spiritual and internal. And though I realize that God saw the heart even in the Old Covenant, and people could indeed walk by faith, still the nature of what God was requiring from Israel was that they walk in His way, keep His commandments, obey the outward testimony that He had established in the Law. Yes he wanted them to love Him, but they were to demonstrate that by keeping His covenant, circumcising their sons, abstaining from unclean animals, observing the feasts. They had to walk with Him according to the relationship that He had established.

And though that relationship required faith, the understanding and agreement by which God entered into relationship with man was one that was natural. You had to do this, and not that. Eat this and not that. Sacrifice this and not that, at this time and not that time. Wear this, and never that. Go here and never there. Say this, but don't say that or you'll be cut off from God. Read from this book, go to this building, pay ten percent to this priest, say these words to God, act like this, offer these prayers, live by these rules...and wait for the Messiah. Hold on, you say...that sounds like Christianity! I know...that is exactly the problem.

These are Old Covenant institutions, every one of them natural and external, and everyone of them commanded by God because of their testimony of what is now spiritual life in Christ. For a time these were things that humans did in order to establish a testimony of Christ and in-so-doing demonstrate mans impotency in keeping the Law. Now these are things that Christ fulfills in us as we walk, no longer according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. We simply don't understand this...and that is just the beginning of our misunderstanding.

We wouldn't admit it (because we're unaware of it), but we actually WANT it to be external and natural because not only does that make sense to us and give us something we can do, but because it also allows us to hold on to our lives and attempt to make them acceptable to God.

You see, we read the story of the Exodus from Egypt and we don't see Christ. We don't see the One of whom God is testifying and the One in Whom we know salvation. But we do understand big bad-guys in Egypt. We can understand groaning under hard conditions, and we can relate to the cry of the human heart to be delivered from difficult situations. And so the natural mind has a carnival with these stories. On the one hand you have Veggie Tales telling you that this story is trying to teach us that the bad-guys are big, but God's bigger...and fortunately He's on your side. On the other hand you have Bono telling you that God's ultimate intention is liberating people under oppressive social structures. I'm sure by mentioning both Veggie Tales and Bono, I have thoroughly offended nearly everyone here. Just for the record, I like Veggie Tales and Bono is nice singer. My kids watch

Larry and Bob, and I may have a few U2 songs on my IPOD. I'm just trying to make a point.

The story of the Exodus is about deliverance from death through the death of God's Son. That story is about a bloody door that offers you freedom. Not freedom to be yourself, but freedom from yourself. That story, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10, is about baptism into the sea, and into the cloud of God's presence, and drinking from a spiritual Rock that followed them. But the natural mind says "who knows what Paul was talking about there in His interpretation of that story. I can understand deliverance from bad guys and bad jobs and bad days...and that's what I need God for. Who knows about deliverance from the nature of sin and death that works in my members. That seems like a lesser deliverance. It's not high up on my list of felt needs."

But if we had any idea that our deliverance is infinitely greater than theirs, that our liberation was so much bigger, that our blood door granted access eternally into the dwelling place of God...we would then understand why these stories were recorded. The natural and the external has become spiritual and internal in the person of Christ. Egypt doesn't represent your bad hair day. It represents slavery to sin and death. The Red Sea doesn't represent God's secret trap door out of your situation. It is the reality that those who had died in the lamb could now pass through death. And those who had not died in the lamb could never follow.

We read the stories and we want to drag the shadows over into Christ and keep them natural, keep them external, keep them for our fleshly gain. Listen, I'm not saying that God cannot fix situations. God can do whatever He wants. He healed a lot of people and fixed a lot of situations for Peter and Paul. Then again, he didn't fix them for Paul or Steven. But I'm simply saying that this story isn't about God's desire to fix the natural realm. It is about God's eternal plan and provision in Jesus Christ.

Is that what we teach in church? Is that what we teach in children's church? Do we take these natural and external stories and show them to be spiritual realities in Christ? Or do we just drag these stories from B.C. into A.D, keep them natural, and teach kids that God can make your life smooth, safe, and blessed if you just listen to what he commands.

We do that with everything of the Old Covenant. We read the stories of the Old Covenant priesthood. We can understand humans wearing fancy clothes and standing in front of others acting Holy. We want to be those humans. We want to revere those humans. And so we hold on to that shadow...drag it into the New Covenant, and suddenly we have this thing called "clergy". We have clergy and laity. Professional Christians, and parishioners. And, in keeping with the fashion of the high priest of old, professional Christians need to dress the part. Whether its robes or hats or suits...we better dress up like those guys in the Old Testament, or it won't show reverence to God. After all, you're in the house of the Lord!

Do we actually think that God dressed the priests in that way because he liked one fashion better than another? One outfit more than another? Of course we do. God says "wear white Aaron, its my favorite color." "Put on that hat...I love that hat" But every thing that High Priest was to wear, from the turban to the sandals was a picture of Christ our high priest bringing a people in Himself into the house of God. It wasn't a fashion statement, it was a spiritual statement. It wasn't about clothing,

unless you understand the reality of being fully clothed in Christ. It was, like everything else, a picture of the one we come to see in Revelation chapter 1 fully clothed in glory.

We read the story of David and Goliath, and drag that over into the New Covenant as a picture of the Christian's ability to overcome adversity, when it is a picture of Christ's victory over the uncircumcision of the flesh. We read of Solomon's kingdom and we quickly apply it to our business, our ministry, our role in government... something we're doing in the natural, when it paints a spiritual picture of Christ, the king of kings reigning on His throne, the human heart, putting all of His enemies under his feet.

If you don't believe that this war and this kingdom are not in the flesh, just look at the language of 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians chapter 10 where Paul says that though we live in flesh bodies, our war is not in that realm. On the contrary the weapons that we use are not like David's, not like Solomon's, they are mighty **in God** for the pulling down of strongholds. Not strongholds of cities, but strongholds of the mind. Not casting down Canaanite rulers and Philistine princes, but casting down arguments. Not taking down the high places with their Ashtoreth poles and images to Baal, but taking down high things that exalt themselves against the knowledge of God. Not bringing Amorites and Jebusites into captivity, but bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. It should be so clear what Paul is doing here. He is taking outward, natural pictures...and showing them to be inward, spiritual realities of relationship with God in Christ.

I know that somebody will hear my teaching these things and say "I don't like the way this Jason guy 'spiritualizes' everything. It's like he's trying to find something spiritual in every Old Testament story. You can't spiritualize this story of David and Saul, of Isaac and Ishmael." Umm... Why in the world do you think it was written? Do we really think that it was written as a life lesson in the natural realm? Hello? Do we really think that we're supposed to read those stories and learn practical lessons and make practical applications to our natural life? – a life that God condemned and put away in the cross. Of course we do.

Sure, we read the story of the flood of Noah and the moral of the story is...listen to God or you'll be treading water. We read the story of Saul and David and the moral of the story is...don't speak against God's anointed and eventually you'll be king. We read the story of Balaam and the donkey and the moral of the story is...if your donkey ever starts talking, be sure to listen to it. What about Elijah and Elisha? Make sure to be bold and ask for the double portion, cause you never know...He might say yes. What about David and Bathsheba...don't...well...you know. Whatever. I know I'm making it sound goofy, but that is what we do. We completely miss the picture that God is painting of salvation in His Son. We squeeze some lesson or moral or application out of a story, and apply it to our natural lives. In other words, we hold on to the natural, the external, the flesh. We try to relate to God according to covenant, a relationship, that He does not have.

**What I'm trying to say is this. Everything that God did in the natural, in Israel, is not something He's not trying to do again in the earth, it's something God is now trying to do in you.** I'm not saying that God is no longer doing those things, I'm simply saying that now that Christ has come, bringing water out of a rock should kind of pale in comparison to bringing streams of living water out of your inner most being. It's not that he's changed his plan, it's that He has

realized His plan, carried out His plan, and is now making it spiritual and eternal in the soul of His redeemed in the reality of the New Covenant.

We have come to a new kind of relationship with God wherein all that God ever spoke of in the earth has become reality in the heavens. And when I say heavens, most of you already know that I don't mean the spiritual Cedar Point in the sky. I mean the spiritual realm of Life in Christ Jesus where you are seated right now, and where you will always be. This relationship with God in Christ has fulfilled the times of testimony by ushering in the administration of the Spirit. The Law of Moses has given way to the Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus. The Letter has brought us to Life. And now we must learn what it means to be in a New Covenant relationship with God.

I've said this before, but I cannot say it enough – the Spirit of God must teach you this relationship. The Spirit of truth must make it real. I can describe it. I can try to explain it with words. I can say it is a relationship with the Life of God in the soul of man. A can say it is a relationship where we are no longer trying to act in ways that look like God, but rather allowing the Life of God to conform us to Himself. A relationship where we are conformed to His death and come to abide in His life. But these are just words. True words, but not real words until the Lord makes them real.

I can read you verses from the New Testament. I can read you stories from the old. But I cannot show you the New Covenant because it is your union with the Son of God and must appear when the Light of Life shines in your heart. And when it does, the Old is put away. Until then, you're not even sure where the veil remains. As 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 3 says, at the reading of Moses, the veil still remains on our hearts because it is taken away in Christ.

But when we behold Him of Whom the entire Old Covenant testified, and realize that we've come from the letter to the Spirit, from Law to Life, then we are free. We are liberated from the hopelessness of relating to God in flesh into the peace and joy of relating to God in His Son. And things begin to break away from our heart. What begins to break away from our heart? The Old Covenant mentality. It ceases to be found in you because you are found in Him. Everything that is not found in Christ will no longer be found in you as Christ your life is revealed. That is an unstoppable fact. Everything that is not found in Christ cannot be found in you to the measure that you know the truth. You will know the Truth and you will be free.

Free from what? Free, for instance, of believing that God's goal for our lives has to do with what we do, rather than what we are. God is not trying to get you to do something, but rather to grow you up to be something so that all you do is a reflection of what you are. I know that rubs our carnal mind the wrong way, but it is true. It is something you see in the light of His life. The will of God has far less to do with what is done as it has to do with who's doing it. God's will is not realized in things getting accomplished, but in a Son who is known, formed, expressed, and exalted in the soul.

Free from what else? Free from thinking that God is still relating to us according to time. We say things and believe things like "God is about to do this". "We are entering into a new spiritual season". "A greater grace is coming". I heard somebody say recently "If I hear one more thing about what God is **about** to do, I'm going to throw up". We should all throw up with her, because God isn't dealing out

dispensations and activities according to time. He has established all things in Christ, and all things of Christ are now for those who access grace by faith. Truth makes us free from living a life of waiting for something that you already have.

Truth sets you free from feeling condemned by God for failing Him in the flesh, as though we expect it to produce something good. It will never produce anything pleasing to God. There is no point in condemning yourself for what God has already condemned and put away. God has displayed the futility of the flesh, shown it to be weak and powerless, crucified it with His Son, and given you His Spirit. But rather than seeking to learn to walk by His Spirit, we still condemn ourselves for the shortcomings of the flesh. The truth of the New Covenant sets you free from this bondage.

We could go on and on with specific scenarios where the revealing of the New Covenant becomes your freedom from the Old. But rather than continuing to talk about it in words, let's set our heart to ask God to reveal His Son – who is the Word of this Covenant. Amen.