

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Inside-Out: Old Covenant Versus New Covenant

by Dan Trygg

“Behold, the days are coming, declares Yahweh, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, ³² not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares Yahweh. ³³ But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares Yahweh: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”
Jeremiah 31:31-33

“But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises. ⁷ For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second... ¹³ When He said, ‘A new covenant,’ He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear.”
Hebrews 8:6,7,13

“You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all people; ³ being made evident that you are a letter of Christ, cared for by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. ⁴ Such confidence we have through Christ toward God. ⁵ Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, ⁶ who also made us adequate (able, capable, empowered) as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”
2 Corinthians 3:2-6

Today, I am introducing a new study, a comparison of the dynamics of the Old Covenant versus the New Covenant, as described in the scriptures. There are a number of word pictures that illustrate this: bad tree versus good tree; old person versus new person; old creation versus new creation; external versus internal; the “do not’s” versus the “do’s”; the suppression of sin versus the expression of the Spirit; conforming versus transforming; a natural life versus a supernatural life; a natural mind versus a spiritual mind; works of the flesh versus the fruit of the Spirit; self-fulfillment strategies versus embracing the cross and the resurrection; death to the flesh and life in the Spirit; and, living from emptiness versus living from fullness. Each couplet expresses totally different ways of living, ...basically, either an outside-in, or an inside-out kind of approach, living by self-ability versus living by the ability of the Spirit of God working in one’s life. I hope that, as we travel through these word pictures together, our perceptions and our approach to our lives will change, and we will be able to more effectively walk in the power of our salvation.

Our first word picture couplet has to do with the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. These describe two very different arrangements that God established between Himself and His people. They were established for different reasons, focused on different things, had different approaches, and vastly different outcomes. There was an historical aspect to their purpose and benefits, and at the appropriate time the Old was to give place to the New. Unfortunately, many people do not understand these differences, and often try to relate to God in a way that is not applicable or beneficial. As a result, they experience failure, defeat, and frustration, because they are trying to do something that was never intended for them. They are attempting to live in a manner that was never designed to give freedom or victory, and they are unaware of, or ignoring, the dynamics and approach that are now applicable to us in Christ.

What is a “covenant”? Basically, it is an agreement or contract between two or more parties. It delineates the relationship and responsibilities of the parties involved. There are a number of covenants between people and God mentioned in the scriptures. There was the covenant with humankind in the Garden of Eden, before the fall (Gen. 2:8-17). There was the covenant with Noah and all flesh (Gen. 6:18; 9: 9-17), where God promised to never again destroy the earth by a flood. There was the covenant with Abram (Gen. 12:1-3; 15:5-21), the covenant with Phineas (Num. 25:11,12); the covenant with David (2 Sam. 7:12-16; 23:5); the Levitical priests (Jer. 33:20,21). In the Bible, the “Old Covenant” refers to covenant that God made with the people of Israel, and others who had joined with them, at Mount Sinai (Ex. 19,20; Jer. 11:1-10). The appearance of God on Mount Sinai, and the giving of the ten commandments, and the following laws and ordinances, were the establishing of this covenant and the description of the terms involved, along with the promised blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience of those terms. Exodus 19 through Leviticus 26 describes this covenant, and it is restated in the book of Deuteronomy.

Of these seven covenants, five of them were unconditional. God unilaterally promised to do something for those with whom He made these covenants, without any requirement from them at all. These promises were made out of His grace, often as a reward for the commitment of faith on the part of those involved. Two of the covenants, however, were conditional in nature. The Adamic Covenant, and the Sinaitic Covenant were both dependent upon the obedience of the people involved. When Yahweh sent Moses to deliver the Israelites from Egypt, He made a point to mention that He remembered the covenant with Abraham, and that He was going to reveal to the nation that He was the “I AM”, the consistent One, Yahweh, the covenant-keeping God (Ex. 3:6,14-17; 6:1-8). The “Old

Covenant”, the covenant Yahweh made with the Israelites at Sinai, was based upon a well-known treaty form, used by a king and his vassal people. As such, even though it was initiated by grace and good will, its terms were conditioned by the response and faithfulness of the people. **If they kept the terms of the covenant, they would enjoy its benefits, ...if they did not, they would experience the negative repercussions spelled out in the covenant document, ...the curses expressed in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 27-28.** The remainder of the history of Israel, recorded in the old testament of our Bibles, is a description of the utter disaster of the nation, and its inability to keep the covenant.

At the core of both the Old Covenant and the New Covenant is God’s desire to obtain for Himself a people who were dedicated to Him, ...a holy people, a people who would serve Him and would proclaim His virtues to the nations around them (Ex. 19:5,6; 1 Pet. 2:9). God is a holy Being, ...a Person who is totally pure, righteous and good, ...One who cannot tolerate sin (Psa. 5:4). One of the conundrums of the Exodus was that the people wanted this Holy God to travel with them, ...but His holiness would motivate Him to strike out against the impurity of their sin. **The building of the Tabernacle was designed to create a series of buffer zones, so that this Holy God could abide among His people. Access to God’s Presence was strictly and strongly denied.** This is an important lesson that we tend to overlook. **We tend to disregard or minimize God’s holiness, because we don’t seem to have to deal with this in the same way as they did. This is because we are beneficiaries of the New Covenant. Our sin has been paid for and removed by the sacrifice of Christ in our place.** The sacrificial system of the OT Tabernacle and Temple were shadows and types of the spiritual realities that God dealt with through Jesus Christ. Sin was temporarily covered by animal sacrifices under the Old Covenant, but these sacrifices were not adequate to fully pay for them, or remove them. That would only become possible when Jesus, the Son of God, offered Himself in payment for our sin (Rom. 3:21-26; Heb. 7:1-10:22). **In Christ, access to God’s Presence has been opened up to us, and in fact, we are invited to come to Him!**

There is another aspect to this difference between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. Under the Old Covenant, the message was that the person who kept God’s commandments would become holy (Num. 15:39-41), and through keeping them a persons would receive life (Lev. 18:5). What did God require of them, but to revere Him, to walk in His ways, to love Him, and to serve Him with all their heart and soul (Deut. 10:12,13). On the surface, this did not seem unreasonable, nor too difficult (Deut. 30:8-16). This seemed to be an “outside-in” approach, ...that their behavior would change their hearts. The reality, however, ...**the flaw that was revealed by this covenant offer..., was that their hearts were defective.** Even Moses recognized this. In spite of all that the Israelites had seen and experienced of God’s power and miraculous works, “Yet to this day Yahweh has not given you a heart to know, nor eyes to see, nor ears to hear” (Deut. 29:4-5). **They did not just need to intellectually know what God wanted, they needed a change of heart** to see how that was applicable to their daily life, and the desire to *want to* do His will.

Interestingly, this very language was used by Jeremiah to describe what God would do when He would later restore His people from the disastrous consequences of their disobedience. “I will give them a heart to know Me, for I am Yahweh; and they will be My people, and I will be their God, for they will return to Me with their whole heart” (Jer. 24:7). Then, just a few chapters later, **Jeremiah prophesied about a New Covenant,** “Behold, days are coming,” declares Yahweh, ‘when I will make a New Covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, ³² not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,’ declares Yahweh. ³³ ‘But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,’ declares Yahweh, ‘**I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people**’” (Jer. 31:31-33). **Ezekiel also spoke of this coming covenant. He said that God would give them a new heart, and new Spirit, in order that they could and would walk in His commandments (Ezk. 11:19,20; 36:26,27).** The essence of the New Covenant is to receive a new heart and a new Spirit, ...a heart that already has God’s law written upon it. **The heart is described as the “wellspring of life” (Prov. 4:23). If the heart is pure, what comes from it will be pure.**

The writer to the Hebrews picked up on Jeremiah’s prophecy to point out how Jesus had come to establish this New Covenant. He pointed out that **it was always God’s intent to get to the heart, ...the root problem behind sin.** In order for that to take place, it was necessary for Jesus to come as *both* the mediating high priest, *and* the once-for-all sacrifice that would bring all the shadows and types spoken of in the OT scriptures to completion. **He would remove sin, sanctify us once-for-all, and He would also complete us by virtue of His offering, ...opening the way for this New Covenant to come into being in our lives. It is through the power of the New Covenant that we can live out the will of God.**

Finally, in 2 Corinthians 3, Paul explained how **God has made us adequate, or able, to be servants of this New Covenant.** This is because **the Spirit has written God’s message upon our hearts, and He empowers us by His life to walk out what He has placed within us.**

Note the radical difference in focus. The Old Covenant was external, written upon stone tablets. The New Covenant is internal, written upon our hearts by the Holy Spirit. We are led *from within*, not from without.