

Why A New Covenant?

Christians believe that the Old Testament Law given to Moses is no longer binding on us. Why?

God created this universe and everything in it. He has a plan which we can read about in the Bible, His word. After mankind fell in the Garden of Eden God instituted his plan, but He is not a time bound limited creature like us. He has slowly and carefully managed events to lead to our redemption and restoration to fellowship with Him. He started by picking Abraham to father a nation of people who were to become a kingdom of priests to Him. They went down to Egypt and over 400 years grew to be a great multitude. God delivered them from Egyptian oppression and slavery and led them through the Red Sea and the desert. These people had been slaves for 400 years, they didn't know how to govern themselves, how to get along with God, how to live in freedom. They needed a law which they could follow. God made a covenant with them for them to be a kingdom of priests and gave them instructions on how. This covenant is what we call the Law of Moses.

The writer of Hebrews says that the first covenant had faults. A second one with better promises was needed. You might say that the first covenant was like elementary school which establishes the thought patterns and concepts on which advanced training can be built.

Hebrews 8:6-8 But now he has obtained a more excellent ministry, by so much as he is also the mediator of a better covenant, which on better promises has been given as law. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second.

Even when he was giving Moses the Law of Moses, God had plans for a better law and how He was going to do it. Here he tells Moses of a new prophet which God would raise up for them. This new prophet was Jesus Christ.

Deuteronomy 18:18-19 I will raise them up a prophet from among their brothers, like you; and I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I shall command him. It shall happen, that whoever will not listen to my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him.'

The prophet Jeremiah says that the Jews broke the first covenant, so God made a better one, a new covenant in place of the one they had broken..

Jeremiah 31:31-32 Behold, the days come, says the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not

according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they broke, - - -

Instead of having to abide by the complex system of sacrifices where the priests dealt with God for the people and the people themselves couldn't approach God, Christians (spiritual Israel) can all know the Lord. Each of us can have a relationship with the Living God. When we become Christians, the Holy Spirit, a part of God will come and dwell in our hearts and God will forgive our iniquity and blot out the remembrance of our sin.

Jeremiah 31:33-34 But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law in their inward parts, and in their heart will I write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people: and they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD; for they shall all know me, from their least to their greatest, says the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin will I remember no more.

By his life of humble obedience to God and by sacrificing himself on the cross to pay for our sins, Christ became the mediator of the new and better covenant which provides remission of sins.

Matthew 26:26-28 As they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks for it, and broke it. He gave to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." He took the cup, gave thanks, and gave to them, saying, "All of you drink it, for this is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the remission of sins."

By the time of Christ the Jewish religion had evolved into a set of complicated rules taught by men. They had added a massive amount of their rules, interpretations and traditions to the Law of Moses, which itself is fairly complicated (see the books of Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers in the Old Testament). Christ condemned the scribes and the Pharisees for hypocrisy saying that their worship was in vain. No wonder they didn't like him, but he was right. Sometimes truth hurts.

Matthew 15:7-9 You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying, These people draw near to me with their mouth, and honor me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. And in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrine rules made by men.

In Colossians Paul speaks of the "handwriting of ordinances" referring to the many rules and traditions that the Jews had added to the Law of Moses. They were replaced, "nailed to the cross".

Colossians 2:13-14 You were dead through your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh. He made you alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, wiping out the handwriting in ordinances which was against us; and he has taken it out of the way, nailing it to the cross;

Christ did not come to destroy the Old Testament Law, he came to fulfill it. He was the first human to actually follow the Law of Moses perfectly, but he did not follow the extra rules and traditions the Pharisees had added to it. That's one reason why they hated him and got him put to death by the Romans.

Matthew 5:17 Don't think that I came to destroy the law or the prophets. I didn't come to destroy, but to fulfill.

We don't have to offer burnt offerings and sacrifices, go to Jerusalem several times a year and many other sometimes difficult things the Jews had to do under the Law of Moses. But we still need to keep the spirit of the Ten Commandments. There were many other commandments in the Law of Moses concerning sacrifices, feasts, civil law, etc., but these ten are the main ones.

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

The first four concern how we relate to God and His Law.

You shall have no other gods before me.

You shall not make idols or worship other Gods.

You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.

Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy,

The last six concern how we relate to other people.

Honor your father and your mother.

You shall not murder.

Neither shall you commit adultery.

Neither shall you steal.

Neither shall you give false witness.

**Neither shall you covet your neighbor's wife;
neither shall you desire your neighbor's house,
his field, or his male servant, or his female servant,
his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's.**

Above excerpted from Deuteronomy 5:6-21

The Ten Commandments make good sense for us to follow too. They relate to what we do physically, but Christ is worried about what we are spiritually. Christ doesn't just want us to keep a set of rules, he wants our hearts to be pure and our spirits to be clean. If Christ's spirit is dwelling in us we will keep all of them except for the one on keeping the Sabbath, we are excused from that one, we will see why subsequently.

When some early Christian teachers said that Gentiles who converted to Christianity had to keep the Law of Moses too, here is what the leaders of the early church said.

Acts 15:28-30 For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay no greater burden on you than these necessary things: that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality, from which if you keep yourselves, it will be well with you. Farewell.

This quotation shows that Christians don't have to observe the Sabbaths, the holy feast days and the other parts of the Jewish Law. The sacrifices, burnt offerings and the requirement to observe the Sabbath have been removed from us. We do not have to observe special holy days. For those who still want to observe the Sabbath, consider what the Apostle Paul wrote to the Galatians.

Galatians 4:9-11 But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, why do you turn back again to the weak and miserable elemental principles, to which you desire to be in bondage all over again? You observe days, months, seasons, and years. I am afraid for you, that I might have wasted my labor for you.

God's commands are for our own good. We do not have to observe the Sabbath, but it is a good idea to have a day off from work to rest our bodies. In one of the engineering classes I took, they had studied the effects of prolonged intervals of work. It turns out that if you want people to be really efficient, you need to give them a break now and then during the day and take off a day now and then. It is logical to think that the designer of our bodies knew that we needed an occasional break, that's one of the reasons for the Sabbath, it was for our good. Christians are not bound to keep the Law of Moses, but it is a good idea to keep

the Ten Commandments, even taking a day off from work each week and using it to rest and to worship God.

The new covenant is a covenant of faith and spirit, not a legalistic keeping of all the rules. We are not justified by our works, but by faith in Jesus Christ.

Galatians 2:16 yet knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, even we believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the law, because no flesh will be justified by the works of the law.

Here Paul says clearly that we are not bound by the Old Testament Scriptures. They were a tutor to bring us to Christ.

Galatians 3:22-25 But the Scriptures imprisoned all things under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, confined for the faith which should afterwards be revealed. So that the law has become our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.

Here Paul uses circumcision to characterize those who insist that we must follow the Old Testament Scripture rule's. As a result they are alienated from Christ. What we are to follow is faith in Christ and the unselfish spiritual love, which Christ commands in many places.

Galatians 5:4 You are alienated from Christ, you who desire to be justified by the law. You have fallen away from grace. For we, through the Spirit, by faith wait for the hope of righteousness. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision amounts to anything, nor uncircumcision, but faith working through love.

So to sum up this section, we are saved by faith in Jesus Christ, not by keeping a set of man made rules. We now have an new and eternal covenant with God thanks to our Lord Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 13:20-21 Now may the God of peace, who brought again from the dead the great shepherd of the sheep with the blood of an eternal covenant, our Lord Jesus, make you complete in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

New Priesthood

Another part of the old covenant was the Levitical priesthood. Moses and Aaron were of the tribe of Levi. The priests stood between the people and God, they dealt with God for the people. God is holy and cannot tolerate evil. So that the people wouldn't have to come into contact with God, God had Moses anoint his brother Aaron and Aaron's son's as priests. In Malachi God describes what a Levitical priest was to do, besides the various sacrifices they were to offer.

Malachi 2:5-7 My covenant was with him of life and peace; and I gave them to him that he might be reverent toward me; and he was reverent toward me, and stood in awe of my name. The law of truth was in his mouth, and unrighteousness was not found in his lips. He walked with me in peace and uprightness, and turned many away from iniquity. For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth; for he is the messenger of the LORD of Armies.

One reason why the new covenant is better than the old is that Christians don't have to go to a priest to pray directly to God, we are the priests and now Christ is our high priest. Just as the blood of the sacrifices enabled the Jewish priests to approach God, the blood of Christ's sacrifice enables us to approach God and because of His great mercy and grace. He can keep from destroying us even when we are not as reverent as we should be.

Hebrews 9:14-15 how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? For this reason he is the mediator of a new covenant, ---

God wanted the Jews to be a nation of priests, a holy nation. But they failed to keep the covenant.

Exodus 19:3-6 Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him out of the mountain, saying, 'This is what you shall tell the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel: You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice, and keep my covenant, then you shall be my own possession from among all peoples; for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation. These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel.'

Christ came and gave his blood to wash us clean so that we can be a kingdom of priests. Here is what the Apostles John and Peter said about this.

Revelation 1:4-6 John, to the seven assemblies that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, from God, who is and who was and who is to come; and from the seven Spirits who are before his throne; and from Jesus Christ,

the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us, and washed us from our sins by his blood; and he made us to be a Kingdom, priests to his God and Father; to him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

1 Peter 2:9-10 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

In order to be priests and to be able to approach God, Christians need to be holy. For more details on how to be holy, please read the FAQ "Can I Be Holy?".

1 Peter 1:15-16 but just as he who called you is holy, you yourselves also be holy in all of your behavior; because it is written, 'You shall be holy; for I am holy.'

Our bodies are now temples of God, his Holy Spirit dwells in us.

1 Corinthians 3:16-17 Don't you know that you are a temple of God, and that God's Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him; for God's temple is holy, which you are.

The burnt offerings of the Old Testament are no longer required. We are the sacrifices. Just as Christ sacrificed his body for us, we are to offer our bodies and our lives as living sacrifices to God.

Romans 12:1-2 Therefore I urge you, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service. Don't be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what is the good, well-pleasing, and perfect will of God.

Because of Christ's willing sacrifice we Christians have a new high priest, Jesus, to whom we may flee for grace, mercy and help.

Hebrews 4:14-16 Having then a great high priest, who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold tightly to our confession. For we don't have a high priest who can't be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but one who has been in all points tempted like we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore draw near with boldness to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy, and may find grace for help in time of need.

We are to try to be holy, God's spirit dwells in us. Does that mean that we will never sin. No, we are still human. We will slip and fall, we will sin, but when we sin if we repent and confess our sin, Jesus is faithful and just and will cleanse us from our sin. In the Greek, the verb tense for cleanse is the tense for an ongoing action, He keeps on cleansing us as long as we keep on repenting and confessing.

1 John 1:7-9 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us the sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

So the good news of the gospel is that Christ's shed blood purchased forgiveness of sins for us and instituted an eternal covenant between us and God. This is the New Covenant about which we have been speaking.

Hebrews 13:20-21 Now may the God of peace, who brought again from the dead the great shepherd of the sheep with the blood of an eternal covenant, our Lord Jesus, make you complete in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever,

Amen.

Make God your choice!