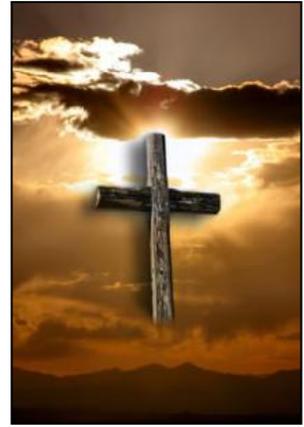


# New Covenant Salvation

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As preterists, we hear much about the "old" and the "new." We are aware that the old covenant was inferior and powerless to save, while the new is perfect and absolutely powerful to save.

We are often going back to the changing of the covenants, and we unavoidably observe their conspicuous contrast to each other. Sometimes, when we are involved in regarding the dissimilarities of the two covenants, there may be a tendency to make the contrast greater than it actually is.

We must be careful not to divide the two covenants to such an extent that we make them totally disconnected from each other. We must not say that the Old Covenant was a covenant intended to save man through obedience and that the New Covenant is a covenant of grace. God was the giver of both covenants, and His purpose for man in giving each of them was that man might trust in Him for his salvation. In practical terms, this means that we should not teach that how men came to know God under the Old Covenant was somehow different than how men come to know God today.

There are dispensationalists who teach that God was forced to go to plan "B" -the cross- after the Jews thwarted His original purpose by keeping Jesus from setting up His allegedly promised fleshly Kingdom. The dispensationalists' strict dichotomy of the two covenants forces them to teach that Christianity is a second-best, parenthetical system which is destined to fail, while the old covenant way of worship is what God intends for man in the future, and is meant to completely replace the present covenant when Jesus returns to fulfill His "original purpose."

Similarly, we who are not dispensationalists must not teach that the New Covenant was God's alternate plan "B" after His first attempt to save man (the old covenant) failed. The God Who established the old covenant is sovereign and almighty, and did not give it in the hopes that maybe, hopefully man would follow it and receive eternal life through perfect obedience to it. The purpose of the old covenant was to foreshadow the new, as the purpose of the new was to fulfill the old.

No one has been justified, that is, no one has come to know God, through obedience, and no one was ever meant to. God had imposed many rituals, ceremonies and regulations upon His people under the Law, but God nowhere taught that obedience -even perfect obedience- could result in eternal life. Instead, God intended the Law to instruct His people toward faith and to lead them through their history to Christ.

And even though the old covenant brought death and the New brought life, we should not infer from this that the old was evil. The old covenant, or the Law, was man's school master, intended by design to be incomplete in and of itself, and temporary in purpose. It heralded the way for the New Covenant and led God's chosen ones into it. It was in perfect agreement with the New Covenant, as a shadow is in perfect agreement with its object. The old things passed away, true, but not because the old covenant was bad or a failure in its purpose, but because it had served its purpose; its King had come to dwell among the people, fulfilling all the prophecies and all the laws of the old covenant with His own

Presence. Even though the old covenant was glorious, holy, just and good, it vanished because it dimmed in comparison to the brightness of the glory of the Presence of Jesus Christ --Who was the Meaning and the Fulfillment, indeed the very Heart of the old covenant.

Now since the two covenants therefore did not refute each other, but served each other, we may conclude that the New Covenant was not given to introduce a salvation, or a salvation plan, that was alien to that of the old covenant. Jesus established His Covenant with His people upon those things which were firmly rooted in the old covenant. The old covenant saints were, and we ourselves are justified in the same one Way (Jn. 14:6; Acts 4:12).

It is appropriate in light of this truth, that we examine our view of how one is saved. If we find our understanding of how we're justified presented only in the New Testament but do not see it springing forth from every part of the old-covenant writings, we should soberly re-evaluate our understanding of that way of justification. In order for the New Covenant to be valid, it must be the revelation of the old. Or as we have often heard, the old covenant was the New Covenant concealed, and the New Covenant is the old covenant revealed.

Thus, there was always one Way of justification, as there is one God, one human family and one Eternal Covenant. That salvation was predicted, foreshadowed, and proclaimed in the old testament; it was a salvation that would be fulfilled and realized at the Cross of Christ, and fully consummated at His Presence in the end of the old-covenant age in A.D. 70. That Salvation is the heart of the old and New Testament.

## **The Death of Man**

As salvation was coming to light after the cross, the first Christians were deeming the things of the old system under which they had previously lived as loss; for many of them, as unbelieving Jews, had wrongly handled the Law of Moses and had relied on it as their way of salvation (Philippians 3:4-6). In this way, they had tried to establish their own righteousness based on obedience (vs.9), but when they received salvation in Christ, they came to understand that their faith would soon bring about the complete end of the sinful old-covenant world.

Through the sinfulness of the people, the system of Judaism was increasingly revealed to be a world of legalism and death. Even though God had given the Law to lead Israel to Christ, it had been corrupted by Israel's wicked leaders, and violated by the people as a whole. By the first century A.D., Israel had become thoroughly disobedient to it. The Law, which the Jews had proudly claimed for themselves as the way of salvation, was about to prove once for all, at the end of the age, to be the witness and testimony of man's condemnation.

Israel relied on a works-/ritual-related plan of salvation, which was characterized by an abuse of such practices as circumcision, sacrifices, Sabbath-keeping, etc. In such things many of the 1st-century Jews loved to glory, and it was because of this that they hated Christ. For Christ was going to take their works-glory away from them and remove their "righteousness" and their position from among His people forever. In so doing, Christ Jesus would take the Kingdom of God away from the wicked and transform it into the eternal, spiritual Kingdom which He had promised in the prophets. For Israel and its religious leaders, the regeneration of God's Kingdom would mean the end of religious domination over the earth.

For that reason, Israel crucified the Messiah- the act which was covenantal/spiritual suicide. It was as if they had nailed God's whole worship order -covenant, law, prophets, Messiah, every aspect of His worship economy- on the cross. That transcendent crime put the holy people under God's curse, and

precipitated the sure and imminent destruction of their whole covenant-system. Their place and their nation were about to be taken away forever.

The Last-days rebellion which followed the cross, proved with finality Israel's (and mankind's) hopeless inability to ever attain unto eternal life. So surely did that wicked generation ruin their own souls and seal their own damnation by murdering the Son of God and persecuting His church, that in the years following, they broke God's Law with ever-increasing madness and depravity, even to the very end. Today the Rebellion stands in history as a monument to the transient righteousness of man!

At the same time that Israel's breaking of the Law was proving its sinfulness before God, Israel's continual sinning was manifesting the Law to be much too weak in the power needed to make their hearts righteous unto salvation. It was being revealed to all that the old covenant in all of its glory was the ministration of death through the sinfulness of man.

Man was lost. Not only was God's Law proven too weak to save, and not only was man's heart forever missing the mark and coming up short of God's Law, but in the end mankind had finally proven the sinfulness of his heart in a way which removed all doubt in the sight of God and man as to mankind's true spiritual character in his own righteousness: Man murdered his own Redeemer, the Covenant-Giver Himself, Yahweh made flesh. Through the cross then, it was revealed that mankind was, spiritually and covenantally speaking, dead. He was dead in sin. For the death of the Messiah was the death of man. By A.D. 70, man was twice dead, for he was not only judged as a breaker of the old covenant, but of the New Covenant as well, and God's fiery judgment against sin, and His fierce vengeance was meted out in the end of the age. The time for man's righteousness and glory was over. Every possibility for him to aspire toward Heaven was exhausted. There was no conceivable hope left of man ever receiving the blessing of God.

## **Saved by Grace**

God is love among those who know Him. Man was condemned through the cross and the Parousia (Coming of Christ), but it was through the cross and the Parousia that God justified His elect and demonstrated His tender mercy toward His children. He commended His love toward His church at the cross, and she was permanently established and fulfilled at His glorious Presence. When all were dead in sin and there was no one to save, God alone worked mightily and saved his chosen ones out from among the dead. He preserved them till the end and was not willing that any of them should perish. He graciously forgave them of all their sin and freely gave to them eternal life in His Kingdom, in the Covenant of His blood.

The great Work of Christ in the end of the old world established forever this truth: Sin reduces obedience to a tragically powerless aid to salvation; and the impossibility of attaining salvation through obedience makes salvation an impossibility for all men. Even the best man cannot receive eternal life through obedience to a commandment or commandments. This was the lesson which the school master, the Law, and its final consummation in A.D. 70 teach us. We cannot attain salvation through any means at all. But thanks be to God. Jesus is our Salvation.

It will always be true that man by nature is not willing to trust in the power of God alone to justify (regenerate). At best man is willing only to trust in the power of God through man's faithful obedience to God's commandment(s). But this religious philosophy was judged and sifted out of God's Kingdom in A.D. 70 at the destruction of Jesus' enemies.

So beware, dear brothers and sisters, and "touch not the unclean thing," for "a little leaven leavens the whole lump." Let us look to the example of the Last Days rebels and the judgment that came upon

them, so that we may see what the way of death really is, and avoid it at all cost. In other words, we should count everything as trash which opposes God's grace in Christ. We should view all legalistic (works- and/or ritual-oriented) concepts of justification and all self-saving religious practices as trash, or even as lower than trash. God opposes all religious institutions that impose upon people a works- or ritual-oriented mode of salvation.

What is the difference between how people came to know God in the Old Testament and how people come to know God today? Whether Adam, Abraham, David, Paul, or you and me, we were all justified by grace through faith, in the Eternal Covenant. The old and the New Covenant teach the same Salvation of God; the old looked forward to it and the New Covenant realized it, but both covenants declared the same salvation. This is why Abraham is said to be our father even though he lived before the old covenant and we live in the new. Abraham was justified --he came to know God-- by faith before he was circumcised, i.e., before he met any covenantal conditions. Abraham was justified by God freely and unconditionally, and that is how sinners of all ages are justified, for the Bible tells us that God's covenant of grace with Abraham was not for him alone, but that it is for all believers. The Bible also tells us that God's Covenant of grace with Abraham was never abolished, not even when God gave the Law to Moses at Mount Sinai (See Romans chapter 4, and Galatians chapter 3.). God's unconditional Covenant is His eternal Covenant with man. God is one and He changes not. "But to one working, the reward is not counted according to grace, but according to debt. **But to the one not working, but believing on Him justifying the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.**" (Rom. 4:4, and 5)