

Are We Preaching “Another” Gospel: A 31-Day Journey toward Rediscovering the Gospel of the Grace of God

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Day 10

THE BEGINNING AND THE END

It is foundational to our understanding of whether or not we are teaching “another” gospel to discern where the Old Covenant begins and ends and where the New Covenant is inaugurated. Most ministers would be able to give the correct answers, but there are common misunderstandings about this topic among many believers today. Some think the Old Covenant began in Genesis, and vary on when they believe the New Covenant began. Some say it began at His birth; others say at His baptism or when He turned water into wine.

Part of our confusion arises from the traditional way in which Bibles are published. Immediately before the book of Genesis, we find a page that reads, OLD TESTAMENT.¹ I’m sure it’s not purposefully deceptive, but it gives the wrong impression about the Biblical timeline. We know that the Old Covenant did not begin until Moses was given the law. Prior to that time, the Old Covenant did not exist.

It’s interesting to note that before the giving of the Old Covenant, even though death reigned because of Adam’s sin, there was an amazing lack of punishment for sin.

Romans 5:12-14

*Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned—¹³ (For until the law sin was in the world, **but sin is not imputed when there is no law.** ¹⁴ Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come.*

Cain, even though he killed his brother, did not receive the consequence he would have received under the law—death. Instead, God put a mark on Cain that was meant to *protect* him against receiving retribution from others for what he’d done (Gen. 4:15). Think about that, God protected the first murderer!

¹ Testament = Covenant

Before the flood, “the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually,” (Gen. 6:5). For hundreds of years, this went on with few consequences. To curb this trend, the lengthy lifetime mankind enjoyed was shortened from multiple hundreds of years to only 120 years. However, man’s behavior continued to deteriorate, and God repented of having made him.² Man was hopelessly evil, and yet, “Noah found *grace* in the eyes of the Lord.”

Noah believed God and built the ark, but his behavior, while certainly not as debased as those who lived around him, was not always pristine. After this amazing experience of hearing God’s voice in so much detail that he was able to build an ark capable of carrying hundreds of animals and surviving a storm worse than any in history, after having been a “preacher of righteousness”, after living through the destruction of almost all of mankind and yet being saved, and receiving the promise that God would no longer flood the earth, we find that this grace was unmerited after all. He planted a vineyard, made wine, got drunk, and uncovered himself in his tent. Was Noah punished or even rebuked for his behavior? No; rather, his sons were commended for covering his nakedness instead of exposing it, and Canaan, the son of Ham who revealed Noah’s shameful behavior, was cursed.

Let us also consider Abraham, who was told to leave his family behind and relocate to Canaan, but instead he allowed his nephew, Lot, to travel with him (Gen. 12). Although having Lot under his care turned out to be a nuisance for Abraham, God did not rebuke him for his disobedience nor retract his choice to make of Abraham a nation. Abraham also married his half-sister, which the law, when it came, would forbid (Lev. 18:9), yet God chose to bring Isaac from their union. Abraham went along with his wife’s idea to sleep with her mistress to bring about God’s promises, yet even the fruit of this union with Hagar, this “mistake”, was given a blessing by God (Gen. 17:20).

We know, too, that Abraham misrepresented (lied) to Pharaoh and King Abimelech about his relationship with Sarah to save his own life and allowed her to be taken into a harem!³

Was Abraham reprimanded by God for any of this? No. In fact, those who took Sarah were the ones whom God rebuked and cursed, even though they had acted on false information. Abimelech was even told to have Abraham pray for him so the curses on them would be removed. Did Abraham suffer any consequence as a result of his deception and betrayal? No. Astonishingly, Abraham received from the ones he’d deceived an

² Some speculate that fallen angels had joined themselves physically with women on the earth (Gen. 6:1-4), and if God had not destroyed them all, there would have been no pure human left to bear the Messiah “when the fullness of time had come”.

³ Gen. 12, 20

abundance of their riches instead.

I say all of this to point out that, first of all, the Old Testament does not begin in Genesis, and that before the giving of the law, God dealt with those He called with an amazing amount of mercy and grace. Even the three months after Israel was delivered from Egypt, the people enjoyed much grace. Consider that before the Covenant came, their grumblings were met with undeserved provision (Ex. 16-17). After the giving of the Law, their complaints were met with judgment (Num. 11, 14, 16).

We have a similar and slightly more complicated confusion with the page in our Bibles entitled, "NEW TESTAMENT", for clearly the New Testament did not begin at Jesus' birth, but at His death.

Hebrews 9:16-17

*For where there is a testament, there must also of necessity be the **death of the testator**.¹⁷ For a testament is in force after men are dead, since **it has no power at all while the testator lives**.*

Jesus was born under that law, and His ministry and teachings were primarily to those under the law. While He was on earth, the Old Covenant was still in place. Not until Jesus became a sin offering for mankind did the New Covenant begin. When the New began, the Old was nullified.

Galatians 4:4-5

*But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, **born under the law**,⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.*

Why is this significant? It is important because it helps us rightly divide (accurately handle) the Scripture, which is *all* given by inspiration of God, and it is especially helpful when considering the significance of the words of Christ.

Here is an excellent example my husband recently pointed out to me.

Luke 10:25-28

*And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do **to inherit eternal life**?"*

²⁶ *He said to him, "**What is written in the law**? What is your reading of it?"*

²⁷ *So he answered and said, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,' and 'your neighbor as yourself.'"*

²⁸ *And He said to him, "You have answered rightly; **do this and you will live**."*

I discuss this topic more thoroughly in Days 23 and 24, but let me ask you this. If someone were to ask us today **how to inherit eternal life**, is this the answer we would give? Love God completely and love others? Of course, not! Hopefully, we would tell someone who wants to be born again to believe in the resurrection of Jesus and confess Him as the Lord God. So, how do we understand these words of Jesus that seem to contradict Romans 10:9-10? In context, of course. Jesus is talking to someone who is still under the Old Covenant. The question was specifically about *what is written in the law*. These two verses encapsulate the law and prophets. It was right for Jesus to tell this man to “do this and live” because the man was still under the law.⁴

This is not to say that the words of Jesus are irrelevant for New Covenant believers today, as some have hinted, but that we need to recognize that some of what Jesus taught was meant to prepare the Jews for the kingdom of God and doesn't apply to us directly. Other things He taught are universally true in either covenant. Many things He said could not be understood even by His own disciples until *after* He was crucified and had risen from the dead. Part of what He taught has little or nothing to do with us, especially when it concerned fulfilling the rituals of the Jewish law. Just as with any scripture, when considering the words spoken by Jesus, we must always keep in mind that when He walked on the earth, the Old Covenant was still in place, that Jesus was announcing the upcoming kingdom of God to the Jews, and that the New Covenant was yet to come. On this side of the cross, the kingdom of God has come.

Nor should we disregard what we call “The Old Testament,” for there is much to learn from these writers. Yet it is imperative we view all of these passages in their context since not all of them directly speak to us, but many were written to a specific people for a particular purpose. Of course, the most beautiful thing we can observe when we read Genesis through Malachi are the many passages which pointed to Jesus and the New Covenant.

Luke 5:39

You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me.

The Scribes and Pharisees knew the Scriptures, but they failed to see that Jesus was revealed in them.

Nor should we disregard the gospels though they occurred mostly while

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The law was this man's tutor to bring him to Christ. It was right for Jesus to point to the law. He knew it would bring the man to faith in Jesus. Then after faith came, he would no longer be under the tutelage of the law (Gal. 3:23-24).

the Old Covenant was in place. One of the most glorious beauties we can behold within the gospels is an amazing understanding of God the Father. Consider this revelation that Jesus spoke to Phillip.

John 14:7-11

“If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him.”

⁸ Philip said to Him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us.”

⁹ Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? ¹⁰ Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works. ¹¹ Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves.

Jesus was saying that to see Him was to see the Father. Paul makes this crystal clear in Colossians 1:15-20.

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

¹⁶ For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. ¹⁷ And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. ¹⁸ And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. ¹⁹ For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, ²⁰ and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.

When we read the gospels, we not only learn from His words, but we get a glorious view of God the Father. Many Christians today have such a lovely view of Jesus, but then an entirely different view of our Father. Yet, Jesus is the visible image of the invisible God. God sent His Son, not only to die for us, but so that we could “see” the Father. I believe this is the most wonderful thing we can take away from the gospels: to see the Father for who He is as He reveals Himself through the Son. We can see how He loves, what angers Him, what touches His heart, how He has compassion on sinners, and how He loves us so very much that He gave His only Son to die to save us. When we see Jesus in the Gospels, we see the Father.

It is only when we discover the dividing line between the Old and New

Covenants that we are able to perceive the significance of the teachings of Christ and put them in their proper context. We must not assume that what Jesus spoke to an individual Jew applies directly to born-again believers, but rather perceive the context and thus better appreciate and understand what is being said.

There is a clear dividing line between the Old and the New, and that line was drawn with His blood.