

For people who are pretty-much against God, and want to treat Him as if he doesn't exist, one of the most common arguments that they regurgitate, is that the God of the Old Testament, is so different from the God of the New Testament...

Now, whenever anybody says something like that, I realise, "This person – they don't know God at all." And they certainly don't understand the Old Testament very well (**or** the New Testament, for that matter)... Because, when you **seriously** study the Old Testament, the love that God has for His people, and His plan of salvation in Christ, – it's there (all the way through), and at times, it's quite prominent.

The God of the Old Testament is exactly the same, as the God of the New Testament. God is unchangeable. And the **whole** Bible, is the story of God's continuing love and restoration of His people.

Now, in Christian circles, at times, we talk in terms of Old Covenant Vs. New Covenant. And you may have heard that terminology, but never had anyone explain what it's about:

A covenant, is like a contract (treaty; agreement; alliance), but because it's a contract with God, we know God's not going to go back on His word – it's an unbreakable contract.

And God has made a **number** of covenants with His people:

1.

The first covenant we find, in Genesis 6 – a covenant, that God made with Noah.

God would save Noah and his family, and the animals. The flood was going to be a time of God's partial judgment (because of the greatness of sin). But God's covenant, was that He would never again destroy the whole earth by flood... Oh yes, there would still be floods (we've seen it this week, [Hawkesbury / Nepean]) But never again would **all** flesh be destroyed through flood...

And every time we see a rainbow (they're beautiful aren't they), this is God's sign/reminder to us, of his covenant... Every time we see a rainbow, we are reminded, that never again, will God destroy the world, through flood... Until the end of time, the seasons will remain, and planting and harvest will remain...

2.

The second covenant, is the covenant God made with Abraham.

God would bless Abraham in 2 ways:

- Abraham would become father of a great nation; and
- through Abraham, all the peoples of the earth would be blessed.

And all Abraham had to do, was believe God, and follow God. At times, he wasn't so good at that, and he tried to take matters into his own hands.

He was 86 years old, and God had promised that he'd become a great nation, but he hadn't even had his first child by then,

and so he fathered a child with Hagar (instead of Sarah his wife)... But that wasn't God's plan... And he was 100 years old (Sarah 90) before Isaac was born...

(I don't want to be getting up to a crying baby in the middle of the night when I'm 100)...

But the Covenant with Abraham, is what Paul's talking about in today's reading – that all nations would be blessed through Abraham...

3.

The third covenant, was the covenant God made with Moses:

And this is the covenant, where God had rescued his people from captivity in Egypt, and he was going to give them safety and prosperity in the promised land... But in order to be God's "treasured possession," God's "Kingdom of priests", and His "holy nation", the requirements of Israel, were to keep the commandments of God – to keep God's Covenantal Law...

As a nation, there were blessings for them, **if** they kept God's commandments; and there were curses, if they did **not** keep His commandments...

Not only this, the Covenant of Moses (Mosaic covenant), but it also provided a pattern for sacrificial worship, and a way of atoning for the sins of the People of God... Alright, so if they sinned, that wasn't the end of them. They could atone for their sins with particular sacrifices and prayers and whatnot...

And in Galatians, where Paul is talking about the “Works of the Law”, in a large part, he’s talking about the Covenantal Law of Moses.

4.

The fourth covenant, was the covenant God made with David.

Through the line of David, a king would arise, and all nations would be blessed through that King.

5.

And the fifth covenant, is what’s known as the New Covenant, which is basically what all of the other covenants looked forward to – the coming of Jesus Christ, and Him dying to save us from our sins. And rising to life again, to give us eternal life.

And all who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and submit to Him (as their Lord), shall receive eternal life.

But the New Covenant, isn’t just about getting the prize at the end... (and this is why it’s so good & so different)

We talked last week about how we have a treasure in jars of clay. Our bodies – let’s face it, they’re fragile, weak things,,, and for some of us, our bodies are not at all glorious, but we carry a treasure – Jesus Christ lives in our hearts.

The New Covenant is, when we give ourselves to Him, He fills us with His Spirit. He gives us Love; strength; hope; joy... And none of these things flow from ourselves – it's simply because we're connected with God.

And so, the New Covenant's pretty sweet isn't it.... You know, if we were still living by the Old Covenant, the best location for having church here in St George, would be out at the old roo works. And our worship would be conducted on the killing room floor, and we'd be relying on the blood of bulls; goats; rams; doves, to cleanse us from our sin...

But Jesus Christ became the once and for all sacrifice, to atone for our sins...

The New Covenant's the way to go... And there's no point trying to go back to the Old Covenant, because that was a temporary measure, put in place, to keep things in order until the New Covenant. And so in Hebrews 8, Paul talks about how the Old Covenant is becoming obsolete.

It hasn't reached **total** obsolescence yet – The Covenantal Law still has a function. But it is becoming obsolete...

I just recently had to buy another new computer. The old one was working fine.

- *Hard drive worked;*
- *Central Processing Unit;*
- *Screen;*
- *Mouse & Keyboard;*

- *RAM all functioning perfectly...*

And because it was a 'high end' computer at the time I bought it, it still had enough get-up-and-go to do most things I needed it to do...

The problem was, I couldn't have it working with our other computer, and automatically updating anymore.

- *It was so old, the software on it, couldn't communicate with the modern software on the other computer; and*
- *I couldn't instal new software on it, because the operating system was so old, the new software wouldn't run on it.; and*
- *I couldn't instal a later Operating System, because the computer itself was too old to function with the new 64 bit operating systems...*

Now some of you have no idea what I just said – it sounded like blah; blah; blah... And that's probably because an old ex-farmer just tried to explain computer stuff...

But a very few of you, will understand exactly what I just said...

The old computer still worked in a sort-of-a-fashion, but the new has left it behind, and the old, is now redundant – it doesn't function...

It's like, who uses a fax machine anymore????

(and for the young people, you'll probably see a fax machine in a museum – it was a means of tediously transmitting a

person's messy hand-writing from my office to your office [over the telephone])...

But what I'm getting at, is now that the New Covenant has been made possible by the blood of Jesus, the old Covenant doesn't save us – it don't work... It's becoming obsolete, and will one day reach complete obsolescence...

And what Paul's telling us here, is that the New Covenant in Christ, is what the Covenant of Abraham was all about... And the Covenant of Moses (which brought the Law), didn't cancel the Covenant of Abraham... God had promised, that in Abraham (and his 'seed' – 'offspring'), all nations would be blessed...

Who was the seed/offspring of Abraham? Would it surprise you to know that Jesus is a direct descendant of Abraham, and it's through Jesus, that all nations are blessed.

God made this promise to Abraham, (Paul calculates that it was 430 years [I haven't added it up myself]), but it was centuries before the Covenantal Law was given to Moses...

And the point that Paul is making, is the Law that Moses got (that the Jews were now trying to make the Gentile Christians live by) – the Covenantal Law of Moses, didn't cancel out the promise that God had made to Abraham (that God would bless all nations through him)... And the way that Paul's using this word "Promise", he's almost giving it connotations of 'grace'.

Alright, so in this letter to the Galatians, Paul's hammering the Judaisers (these are the blokes who are trying to make the Gentile Christians keep all the Jewish Religious Law). And Paul's saying "I won't accept these religious laws you're trying to push upon them – we don't need the Old Covenantal Laws any more... Because the New Covenant is so much better,,,, - Grace through faith in Christ Jesus.

But if the New Covenant is so good, what was the purpose of the Old Covenant in the first place?

V¹⁹ **Why then the law?** and his answer: **It was added because of transgressions** (sinful wrongdoings)

I'm going to share 4 purposes of the Old Covenantal Law:

1.

God's Law, made sin a conscious act...

I'm pretty sure we've all heard the saying, "*Ignorance of the Law is no excuse*"... Is that true???

Well, in QLD it's true.

The QLD Criminal Code Act 1899.

Section 22 (1) Ignorance of the law does not afford any excuse for an act or omission which would otherwise constitute an offence.....

There you go – “Ignorance” is no excuse... But when it comes to God and the way we live our lives, and what constitutes sin against God, generally we humans are pretty quick to claim “But I didn’t know I was sinning.”...

Is that a defence???

Many people who argue against God, are very quick to argue: “But what about those who don’t know? Can God be just if He judges people against a standard that they’re ignorant of???”

Well in Romans 1 we have an answer to that – Basically God is just, and He’ll only judge us against what we **do** know. But the problem is “Even if we are judged by what we do know, we’re still guilty.” Have you ever done something (anything) that you knew was wrong??? Well that’s sin. It’s sin that needs to be dealt with...

But God’s not trying to trick us – He’s not trying to ‘entrap us’, to catch us doing the wrong thing. And that’s why God gave the Old Covenantal Law – to help us to know and identify what sin is.ⁱ

It makes us aware of sin.

But the thing is, when I become aware of sin, and aware that I am a sinful, sinful person, that’s burdensome isn’t it. When I realise that I’m a sinner, it’s like “Help me. I don’t want to be that person.”

And so we come to the 2nd purpose of the Law:

2.

The Law, imprisoned everything under sin...

Some people get really cranky – you Christians talk about sin too much. Well yes, we do talk about sin – we talk about it exponentially more than most people would. Do you know why? It's because people of the world don't want to be reminded of their sin. And so of course they never talk about it...

Although it's interesting to be watching what's going on in Canberra unfold at the moment, with all sorts of self-righteous indignation over immorality happening in the hallowed halls of Canberra. And this is one of the rare times that people of the world are indignant over sin... But of course, they're only indignant about the sins of other people.

And the sad thing is, most of it is about Political one-upmanship, and political point-scoring... And we see it on both sides of politics.

The word “Gospel” means “good news”. And the reason that the Gospel is such good news, is because Jesus sets us free from our sin. And if we don't have an awareness of how much:

- we are imprisoned by sin; and
- how soul-destroying sin is; and
- how (until we are set free by Christ), we are all under the curse of sin...

Until I come to the realisation (as Paul did),

- that I'm the worst of sinners
- I'm a dirty-rotten scoundrel;
- Sin makes me to be a vile stench in God's nostrils; and
- it's my fault – it's not anybody else's

Until I understand this, I won't know how good the Good News really is.

The Law can't save me from sin, but it does let me know that I need a Saviour.

V²² But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

3.

The Purpose of the Law, was to be a Guardian until Christ came.

And I really like this analogy. We generally think of a guardian as someone who watches out for the best interests of a child, until they're old enough to make their own way. But the sense of 'guardianship' as it's written here, it's also about "instruction". The Greek word is παιδαγωγός (paidagōgos)

Now, any of the teachers among us (who studied Education), should be very familiar with the English word "*pedagogy*":
The method and practice of teaching....

Anyway, a guardian

- watches over the child to help keep them safe;
- instructs the child;

- helps a child to know right from wrong;
- disciplines a child when they do wrong;
- And makes the child ready to live well, without the guardian constantly having to correct them.

And the Law did all of these things.

You know as well as I do, that if everybody did whatever they felt like, society would be a complete shemozzle. Our society needs Laws to keep itself in order. And guess where the basics of our Western society Laws came from – God’s Law...

But for the Law to be a Guardian, it’s looking forward to a time when we would no longer need that guardian. If not, the Law wouldn’t be called a “guardian” – it would be called a “policeman”... But the Old Testament Covenantal Law, would only ever be a guardian, because it looked forward to the time when Christ would come, and the New Covenant.

The Prophet Jeremiah prophesied this:

Jeremiah 31:33 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares YHWH: 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. ³⁴ And no longer shall each one teach his neighbour and each his brother, saying, 'Know YHWH,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares YHWH. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

Now that Christ has come, under the New Covenant, disciples of Jesus – well, The Law isn't our guardian anymore. The Holy Spirit lives inside of us. He quickens our consciences; We talked about this last week – the old Michael's dead. Christ now lives in me...

And if Christ is truly living in us, we will live by the Spirit, and live righteously, because that's the way of Christ.

4.

The Law provided a Means of atonement.

Knowing the Law isn't enough – it never was... What a dreadful predicament it would be, if the people of Israel were given the Law, and so they could know that they'd sinned against God,, But what then – they're stuck...

Well, God (in His mercy), provided even within the Law, a means of atonement. And there were various ceremonies and sacrifices for the forgiveness of sin. And the big one, was the 'Day of Atonement', where once a year, the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies (where God was).

- He'd sacrifice a bull for his own sins;
- Sacrifice a ram for a burnt offering;
- Sacrifice a male goat for the sins of the rest of Israel;
- a second male goat, the High Priest would lay both his hands on its head, and confess all the iniquities of the people of Israel (all their sin / everything they'd done wrong), and then that goat would be released out into the wilderness...

BTW, that's why we have our saying "scapegoat" – we've done the wrong thing, but the scapegoat takes the blame, and our sins are atoned for...

But even this, is looking forward to the true means of atonement. The blood of bulls and goats don't take away our sins – it's the blood of Jesus. And all of the sacrifices for the forgiveness of sins, was looking forward to when Jesus would make the once and for all sacrifice...

And I want you to hear today: God doesn't want anyone here, and anyone listening to the recordings of this – God doesn't want you to be trapped under the burden of sin... The Lord Jesus Christ is the atoning sacrifice. And through the blood of Jesus, and faith in Him, your sins are atoned for, and you can be set totally free.

So, that was the purpose of the Law:

- It made sin a conscious act, so we know when we're sinning;
- It imprisoned us under sin, so we could know that we need a saviour, because until I know I need a saviour, I won't understand how good the Good News of Jesus Christ truly is;
- The Law was a guardian – training us in the way of righteousness, and keeping some semblance of order in

society;

- And it provided a means of atonement...

But all of this, leaves us with a logical question:

If God's plan, was to save the world through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and that by the Grace of God, we would be saved by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ,,, If that was God's plan, why didn't Jesus come into the world at the time of Abraham, and die for our sins???? Why bring in the Old Covenant at all??? Or, why not come at the time of Adam???? Why didn't Jesus come into the world and die for our sins, right at the beginning????

And the reason I came to, is because if that had happened, we would never have:

- gotten a picture of the perniciousness of sin...
- how much it wheedles its way into our life, and therefore how much we need a saviour;
- We wouldn't understand how much it cuts us off from God; and
- how devastating it is to be cut off from God
- How much sin keeps us from holiness
- We wouldn't understand the Love of God

We needed the Law, so that we'd know how much we need Jesus...

The pride of man, looks at The Old Covenantal Law and goes aaagh...

But when we drop our pride, The Law reveals to us how we are before God... And in the Light of the Gospel, we know we need Jesus...

Let's pray:

Heavenly Father,

we want to thank You for Your Law.

Your Word tells us that the Righteous Love Your Law;

It is good;

It is wonderful;

But Lord, we thank You that it guides us to Christ.

And we thank You for the forgiveness that we have in His Name.

God, Forgive us of our sins;

Wash us clean with the Blood of Jesus.

Holy Spirit, fill us with Your presence;

And help us to live within Your New Covenant;

Where it's no longer I who live;

But Christ who lives in me.

In Jesus' Name,

Amen.

ⁱ Romans 3:20 (ESV) ²⁰ For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.