

Are We Under the Old or New Covenant?

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Over the years, there have been certain individuals or groups who have criticized the teachings of The Church of God. In *response* to our teachings, some people have *indignantly* asserted, “We are *not* **under** the Old Covenant!”

In this article, we ask the question, “Are Christians, today, under the *Old* Covenant?” “Are they under the *New* Covenant?” Let’s now examine this *important* issue!

First, however, let’s briefly review the *establishment* of the Old Covenant.

At Mt. Sinai, God proposed an **agreement** (or Covenant) with the people of Israel (Ex.19:3-6). This was the “Sinai Covenant,” often now referred to as the “Old Covenant.” The *agreement* at Sinai was that **IF** the people would obey God, then they would be a “special” people to God (Ex.19: 5-6). In return for their obedience, **they would receive great PHYSICAL blessings from God** (Deut.28:1-14). (There was *no* mention of *spiritual* blessings.)

So, the *people’s* obligation in this agreement or covenant was to **obey** God (Ex.19: 5). This, they agreed to do: “All that the LORD has spoken **we will do**” (verse 8). So, the Israelites *accepted*—and entered into—an agreement (or covenant) with God.

God instructed the people to be gathered together at the foot of Mt. Sinai on the third day (verses 10-18). There, God would begin to instruct the people as to *what* they should obey. He would instruct them in the Ten Commandments (chap. 20: 1-17) and in the statutes and judgments (chap. 21-23). The Ten Commandments, along with the statutes and judgments, were all a part of the Old Covenant, and were *what* the people agreed to obey!

It’s important to understand that the Old Covenant was, symbolically, a MARRIAGE AGREEMENT. In the Old Covenant, God (Jesus Christ in His pre-human existence) **married** the nation of Israel. “...Yes, I swore an oath to you and entered into a covenant with you, and **you became Mine,**’ says the LORD God” (Ezek.16: 8). “‘Return, O backsliding children,’ says the LORD; ‘for I am **married** to you...’” (Jer. 3: 14). “‘...My covenant which they broke, though I was a **husband** to them,’ says the LORD” (Jer. 31:32).

Yet, because of their blatant and continual sinning—their continual “adultery” against their Husband—Christ eventually **divorced** the 10-tribe House of Israel, and sent them into captivity. “...for all the causes for which backsliding Israel had committed **adultery**, I had put her away and given her a certificate of **divorce**...” (Jer. 3: 8).

Although the tribe of Judah likewise sinned and became a self-righteous nation, God did **not** divorce Judah. Yet, He did eventually send the tribe of Judah into a temporary *captivity*. Jesus

Christ's *death on the cross* **completely freed Him** from His marriage to all 12 tribes (both the House of Israel and the House of Judah). Therefore, *the last remnant of the Old Covenant contract ENDED at Christ's crucifixion.*^{1,2}

So, to be clear, let's now *answer* the question of whether we are now under the *Old Covenant*. The question of whether we are under the Old Covenant, can be easily answered, in *one* word: **"No!"**

And... in fact, those who *criticize* our teaching and say that "we **aren't** under the Old Covenant," are actually making a "**straw man**" argument! It is a "straw man" argument, in light of the fact that the Church of God does not **teach** that we are *under* the Old Covenant!

Incidentally, some might wonder this: Since the Old Covenant was not *completely* abolished until Christ's crucifixion, does that mean that Jesus Christ, while on earth, preached an Old Covenant message? No! Jesus Christ came as "the Mediator of the **new** covenant"! (Hebrews 12:24). Christ is "Mediator of a **better** covenant" (Heb. 8: 6). The final book of the Old Testament records a promise of the coming of "the Messenger of the covenant" (Mal. 3:1). This is obviously speaking of the NEW Covenant, which had already been prophesied back in Jeremiah chap. 31—"Behold, the days are coming," says the LORD, "when I will make a **new** covenant..." (Jer.31:31).

Let's now consider the **New Covenant**.

Both the Old Covenant **and** the New Covenant are, symbolically, MARRIAGE-agreements! They are "marriage agreements" *between* Christ and the **Church**. In the **Old Covenant**, Christ married sinning, physical Israel—which the Bible refers to as "the **church** in the wilderness" (Acts 7: 38, *KJV*). Christ's *death* on the cross, freed Him **from** that marriage. And it enabled Him to be in a position where He could *eventually* **re**-marry.

But, *this* time, He will marry **spiritual** Israel—a cleaned up and **converted** wife, as we read in Rev. chap. 19: "Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and **His wife has made herself ready**. And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts ['righteousness' *KJV*] of the saints" (verses 7-8).

Right now, Christians are the "*affianced* bride of Christ"—not yet married—but **preparing for** that marriage. We are *beginning* to have, God's spiritual **laws** "written in our hearts and minds" **BY** the Holy Spirit—which dwells within those who *obey* God (Acts 5:32; Heb. 8:10).

Let's understand. **Those in whom God's Spirit dwells, are now living under the "terms and conditions" of the NEW Covenant!**³

However... we won't **FULLY** participate in the New Covenant, **until** we are glorified as spirit-composed beings. It will be at *that* time, that we, as righteous *immortals*—spiritual Israel—will **MARRY** Jesus Christ!

Also consider this: What **IS** the “New Covenant **agreement**”? The “New Covenant agreement” is the *agreement* that we enter into **at baptism**! Notice this quote from Dr. Roderick C. Meredith: “At the time of **baptism**, a truly converted person *enters into a genuine New Covenant relationship with God*....[that person] **makes a COVENANT with his Creator... to stop breaking God’s spiritual LAW!**Of course, we will not keep the commandments perfectly in this physical life.... [When] we fall short, we’re to repent and confess our sins to God so we can continually be cleansed and forgiven (I John 1: 9-10).”⁴

Dr. Meredith also stated this: “Today we’re called out, ahead of time, as ambassadors, as ‘first fruits,’ and we’re living **under the terms and conditions OF the New Covenant, PREPARING** to marry Christ... Yes, we’ve got to have the New Covenant **relationship** with Jesus Christ **right now!** And then, we will be in that wonderful **MARRIAGE** when Christ returns, and that **Covenant** will be **COMPLETED**.”³

In the book of Hebrews, we see a couple of proofs of the fact that the New Covenant has **not yet** been **FULLY** established. “For this *is* the **covenant** that I will make with the house of Israel **after those days**, says the LORD: **I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts...**” (Heb. 8:10). That is the *first* proof. God’s Laws are **not now** in people’s hearts and minds! In fact, *many* professing Christians believe that God’s laws have been done **away!!**

Now, continue, through verse 11, and we’ll see the *second* proof that the New Covenant has **not yet** been **FULLY** established: “...and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. **NONE of them shall teach his neighbor, and NONE his brother, saying, ‘KNOW the LORD,’ for ALL shall know Me**, from the least of them to the greatest of them.” Again, that obviously has **not yet** come to pass! “All” do **not yet** “know the LORD”... and, there are **many** today who **still say**, “Know the LORD”! (Furthermore, the majority of mankind today, don’t even *profess* to believe in Jesus Christ or God the Father.)

Again... it will be **after** Christ *returns*, when the New Covenant will come into **FULL** force and effect. It will then come into “*full* force and effect,” in **TWO** ways:

(1) At Christ’s return, the “first-fruits” will **MARRY** Christ. (Remember... both the Old and New Covenants are “**marriage-agreements**.”)

(2) The *second* way that the New Covenant will come into “*full* force and effect,” is that after Christ’s return—and the setting up of God’s Kingdom here on earth—**ALL** mankind will have a **full** chance of entering into this New Covenant—a **full** chance at salvation! (Please read the booklet *Is This the Only Day of Salvation?* That *free* booklet is found on the following website: www.TomorrowsWorld.org)

[continued below]

Additional Points:

“Just as *Moses* was the mediator of the Old Covenant made at Mt. Sinai, so *Christ* is the mediator of the New Covenant. And just as His [Christ’s] marriage with Israel at Mt. Sinai set up the *physical* kingdom of Israel, so the marriage of the Church to Christ will set up the *spiritual* Kingdom of God...

“The Gospel of the Kingdom of God [which Christ preached] contains the *terms and conditions* for entering into the New Covenant agreement with Jesus Christ... Keeping God’s spiritual law as defined in the Ten Commandments is one of the *conditions* of the New Covenant [the *other* condition being acceptance of Jesus Christ and His shed blood] ” ¹

Why did God intend to *make* a new Covenant? “For if that first *covenant* had been **faultless**, then no place would have been sought for a second” (Heb. 8:7). So, there was a *fault* with the Old Covenant agreement. Was the fault with God’s Law? No! The fault was with the *people*! Continuing in verse 8: “Because finding fault with **them** [the people]...”

The fault was **not** with God’s “holy” and “perfect” law (Ps.19:7; Rom.7:12,14). Rather, the fault was with the people—that they did not *keep* God’s law!

Yes, Christ is “Mediator of a *better* covenant, which was established on **better promises**” (Heb. 8:6). What are the *better* promises? The promise under the *Old* Covenant was that of great *physical and national blessings*... whereas the promises under the *New* Covenant are (1) the opportunity for eternal life, and (2) the promised indwelling of the Holy Spirit—which **enables** one to live by the spirit and intent of God’s spiritual Law. Therefore, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is the **essential ingredient** of the New Covenant! It *enables* one to *live by* the spirit and intent of God’s spiritual Law.

The New Covenant does **NOT** do away with God’s Law! In fact, The New Covenant *validates* God’s spiritual Laws—by putting them right into the minds and hearts of true Christians! “For this *is* the covenant that I will make with the House of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My **laws** in their mind and write them on their hearts...” (Heb. 8:10).

Yes, both the Old **and** New Covenants require God’s people to live by His spiritual **law**—the law summarized by the Ten Commandments. In fact, one of the main reasons why God *raised up* the nation Israel—and entered into a covenant, or agreement, with them—was to clearly **demonstrate** that mankind **NEEDS** the Holy Spirit dwelling within him! God *never offered* the Holy Spirit to the people of ancient Israel—*only* to the prophets and patriarchs. Without God’s Spirit in them, the Israelites could **NOT** truly live God’s way. They could **not** live by the spirit and intent of the spiritual law... and oftentimes, they did a very poor job of even obeying the *letter* of the law.

“The New Covenant in **no way** does away with, or ‘waters down,’ even the *letter* of God’s spiritual law. Rather, it empowers genuinely converted Christians, by God’s Spirit, to obey that law in the letter **and** in the spirit. It enables Jesus Christ—through the Spirit—to *live* His life in Christians.” ⁵ Jesus Christ, while on earth, lived a life of *obedience* to God’s spiritual law... and He will live that **same, obedient** life *within* us! (Heb.13:8).

References

1. “The Plain Truth About the Old and New Covenants,” Lesson 17 of *Ambassador College Bible Correspondence Course*, 1983
2. “WHY The Old and New Covenants?” Lesson 6 of *Ambassador College Bible Correspondence Course*, 1991
3. “The Truth About the Covenants,” sermon by Roderick C. Meredith, 1995
4. “A New Covenant?” Roderick C. Meredith, *The World Ahead* magazine, Feb. 1995
5. “A New Covenant?” Roderick C. Meredith, *Tomorrow’s World Magazine*, Nov. 2005

For a *more complete* discussion of the Old and New Covenants, see the article on this website entitled “The Old and New Covenants”