

John Faiz

**NEW
COVENANT
THEOLOGY**

Copyright © 2014 Legacy Centre. All rights reserved.
legacycentre@yahoo.co.nz | PO Box 4588 Palmerston North

CONTENTS

Introduction	4
Understanding the biblical covenants	6
The Old Covenant	10
God promised a New Covenant	22
The New Covenant	27
The Old Covenant has become old	47
The Sabbath in the New Covenant	55
Tithing in the New Covenant	77

INTRODUCTION

Covenant is one of the central images that helps us make sense of the biblical story. God is a covenant-making and covenant-keeping God and He has chosen to relate to creation on the basis of covenant. God has made several covenants with mankind. He made a covenant with Noah, Abraham, Israel, David and ultimately with the world through Jesus Christ.

While it is good for us to understand all of the biblical covenants, it is essential that we understand the New Covenant that God has made with believers through Jesus Christ. The New Covenant is the basis of our relationship with God and our spiritual life. When people don't understand what the New Covenant is then they often find it difficult to live in the Spirit and experience the righteousness, peace and joy that Jesus has given them. They also find it difficult to correctly understand key concepts like law and grace and can misinterpret many different passages in the Bible.

This book is designed to introduce you to the Old and New Covenants. It looks at the nature of covenant and then explains what the Old and New Covenants are. It will help

you to understand how to engage with Old Testament Scriptures and apply them to your life today and how to understand which laws God wants us to keep as believers. It also looks at the sabbath and tithing and how these two practices are relevant for us today as people under the New Covenant.

CHAPTER 1: UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLICAL COVENANTS

Covenant is not a term that we are very familiar with in Western culture. The covenant that we are most familiar with is the covenant of marriage, which is a mutual promise between two people.

The words covenant and testament mean the same thing and are different translations of the same original words. The words translated as covenant in Scripture are the Hebrew word bereth and the Greek word diatheke.

Bereth is used 284 times in the Scripture. It is almost always translated as covenant and always to refer to a binding agreement between two or more parties. Bereth is used to

refer to the covenants that God made with the day and night (Jer 33:20,25), marriage between a man and a woman (Mal 2:14), the covenant that God made with Noah (Gen 6:18, 9:9,11-13), God made with Abraham (Gen 15:15-18, 17:1-14,19, Lev 26:42, Neh 9:8, etc), Abraham made with Abimelech (Gen 21:22-32), Isaac made with Abimelech (Gen 26:28-31), Jacob made with Laban (Gen 31:44-46), God made with Israel at Sinai (Ex 19:4-5, 24:7-8, 31:16-18, 34:27-28, Lev 26:8-9,15, Deut 4:12-13, 31:25-26, etc.), Joshua made with the Jebusites (Josh 9:1-15), Joshua made between God and Israel (Josh 24:1-28), Nahash proposed to the people of Jabesh Gilead (1Sam 11:1), Jonathan made with David (1Sam 18:3, 20:8, 23:18), Abner made with David (2Sam 3:12), David made with Israel to be their king (1Chron 11:3), God made with David (2Sam 23:5, 2Chron 13:5, 21:7, Ps 89:3-4, Jer 33:21, etc.), Solomon made with Hiram (1Ki 5:12), Ahab made with Benhadad (1Kin 20:34), Jehoiada made with the captains of hundreds (2Kin 11:4, 2Chron 23:1-2), Jehoiada made with the Lord, the king and Judah (2Kin 11:17, 2Chron 23:16), the Levites and elders made with Jehoiada (2Chron 23:3-8), Josiah made with the Lord (2Kin 23:1-3, 2Chron 34:30-32), Asa and Judah made with God (2Chron 15:12), Hezekiah made with God (2Chron 29:10), Ezra led the people to make with God according to the law (Ez 10:3), Zedekiah made with all the people of Jerusalem (Jer 34:8-10), Job made with his eyes (Job 31:1), Israel make with death and hell (Is 28:15) and God promised to make in future (Is 42:6-7, Jer 31:31-33, 32:40, Eze 16:6, 37:25-26, Hos 2:16-20, Mal 3:1).

The Greek word for covenant used in Scripture is diatheke. Diatheke is used 33 times in Scripture. It is always translated as covenant or testament in the KJV and NKJV. It is used to refer to the Abrahamic Covenant (Acts 3:25, 7:8, Gal 3:17), the Mosaic Covenant (Luk 1:72, Gal 4:24, 2Co 3:14, Heb 8:9, 9:4), generally to the covenants given to Israel (Rom 9:4, Eph 2:12), and to the New Covenant (Mat 26:28, Mar 14:24, Luk 22:20, 1Co 11:25, 2Co 3:6, Rom 11:27, Gal 4:24, Heb 7:22, 8:6, 8-10, 9:15-17, 10:16, 10:29, 12:24, 13:20).

When we look at the way the word covenant is used in Scripture we see that it is an agreement between two or more parties based on mutual promises.

A covenant must be mutual and involve the consent of both parties. A promise made by one party that does not involve the consent of the other is not called a covenant or agreement but a promise. When a covenant is implied the Hebrew bereth and Greek diatheke are always used and when the concept of promise is implied the Hebrew dabar and Greek epangelia are used.

Review

Key point # 1 – the words covenant and testament mean the same thing

Key point # 2 – a covenant is an agreement between two or more parties based on mutual promises

CHAPTER 2:

THE OLD

COVENANT

When we talk about the Old and New Covenants it is important to understand exactly what they are. If we don't understand exactly what the Old and New Covenants are then we will find it difficult to interpret key passages in the Bible that talk about them.

The Old Covenant is the agreement that God made with Israel through Moses at Mt Sinai. It consisted of the law, promises, punishments and priesthood that God gave to Israel through Moses.

It is worth noting at this point that most Bibles are divided into two sections called the Old and New Testaments. While this partition can be helpful, when it comes to understanding the covenants we need to keep in mind that the Old Testament does not refer to all of the Scriptures

that were given to us before Christ. The Old Testament is an agreement that God introduced at Mt Sinai and was in place until Jesus Christ.

The Old Covenant was an agreement

We have already seen that a covenant is an agreement or mutual promise made between two or more parties. When we talk about the Old Covenant we are talking about a specific agreement between specific people.

The Old Covenant was an agreement with Israel

Exodus 19:1-8 (NKJV) In the third month after the children of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on the same day, they came to the Wilderness of Sinai. For they had departed from Rephidim, had come to the Wilderness of Sinai, and camped in the wilderness. So Israel camped there before the mountain. And Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the

mountain, saying, “Thus you shall say to 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 a special treasure to Me above all people; 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.” So Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before them all these words which the Lord commanded him. Then all the people answered together and said, “All that the Lord has spoken we will do.” So Moses brought back the words of the people to the Lord.

When we look at this passage we see that the Old Covenant was an agreement that God made with the children of Israel at Mt Sinai. We also see that the children of Israel entered into this agreement with God by accepting it.

God chose Abram. God promised to bless Abram and to make his descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky. God told Abram to leave everything and then gave him and his descendants the land of Canaan. Abraham gave birth to Isaac and Isaac to Jacob, who was renamed Israel. God led Israel into Egypt where they became slaves for 400 years. God raised up Moses to deliver His people Israel and then brought them back to their land. When God led Israel out of slavery they were a people without any rules to organise themselves. They had lived as slaves for 400 years and they

had no laws, no judicial system, no economic system and no traditions or social systems. When God gave Israel the Law He was establishing a nation.

One of the mistakes that people often make when they are reading the Old Testament Scripture is that they assume that the Old Covenant was for them. We must understand that God chose Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and made a specific agreement with the children of Israel at Mt Sinai for a specific purpose. God never made the Old Covenant with Gentiles (i.e., non-Jewish people).

The Old Covenant was mediated by Moses

John 1:17 (NKJV) For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ

The Old Covenant was an agreement that was mediated by Moses.

The idea of a mediator is a central concept when it comes to covenants in the Bible. A mediator is simply a middle-man. He is someone who talks to God on behalf of the people and in this sense he is a priest who intercedes. He is also someone who talks to the people on behalf of God and in this sense he is a prophet who speaks God's words.

Moses was the mediator of the Old Covenant and he is sometimes referred to symbolically in Scripture to represent this covenant. We see this, for example, when Jesus is questioned about marriage in Matthew 19. The Pharisees asked Jesus whether it was lawful for a man to divorce his wife. Jesus referred to God's original intention for marriage and said "what God has joined together, let not man separate". The Pharisees then challenged Jesus saying "Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?" Jesus replied by saying "Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery." When we study this passage, we see that when Jesus says "Moses permitted..." he was referring to Moses as a representative of the Old Covenant Law. Jesus obviously isn't saying that Moses himself permitted it but that God permitted it under the Old Covenant law. This is one example of where Moses is used symbolically to represent the Old Covenant.

The Old Covenant is the law given to Israel

Exodus 34:28 (NKJV) So he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he neither ate bread nor drank water. And He wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments.

Deuteronomy 9:9-15 (NKJV) When I went up into the mountain to receive the tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant which the LORD made with you, then I stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights. I neither ate bread nor drank water. Then the LORD delivered to me two tablets of stone written with the finger of God, and on them were all the words which the LORD had spoken to you on the mountain from the midst of the fire in the day of the assembly. And it came to pass, at the end of forty days and forty nights, that the LORD gave me the two tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant. "Then the LORD said to me, 'Arise, go down quickly from here, for your people whom you brought out of Egypt have acted corruptly; they have quickly turned aside from the way which I commanded them; they have made themselves a moulded image.' "Furthermore the LORD spoke to me, saying, 'I have seen this people, and indeed they are a stiff-necked people. Let Me alone, that I may destroy them and blot out their name from under heaven; and I will make of

you a nation mightier and greater than they.’ “So I turned and came down from the mountain, and the mountain burned with fire; and the two tablets of the covenant were in my two hands.

Exodus 19 and 20 give us the account of God giving the Ten Commandments and Exodus 34:28 and Deuteronomy 9:9-15 as well as other passages tell us that these Ten Commandments are the Old Covenant.

Exodus 24:3-8 (NKJV) So Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the judgments. And all the people answered with one voice and said, “All the words which the LORD has said we will do.” And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD. And he rose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars according to the twelve tribes of Israel. Then he sent young men of the children of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the LORD. And Moses took half the blood and put it in basins, and half the blood he sprinkled on the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read in the hearing of the people. And they said, “All that the LORD has said we will do, and be obedient.” And Moses took the blood, sprinkled it on the people, and said, “This is the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you according to all these words.”

Exodus 24:3-8 as well as many other passages show us that the Old Covenant includes all of the laws and commands that God gave Israel at Mt Sinai. God wrote the Ten Commandments on two tablets of stone with His own finger and then gave Moses many other commandments which he taught the people and then wrote in a book. When we study Scripture we see that both the Ten Commandments by themselves and the Ten Commandments and the Book of the Law are referred to as the Old Covenant.

When we read Exodus 19 to 24 we see that the Old Covenant included laws about worship, economics, agriculture and justice. It included general principles to govern people's relationship with God and with their neighbours and some specific details of how those principles should be applied in specific situations. All these different types of laws were mixed together in the covenant. Moses took all the words that God had spoken to him and wrote them in a book which was called the "Book of the Covenant," the "Book of the Law," the "Book of the Law of Moses," or the "Book of Moses." Moses then ratified the covenant with a ceremony involving animal sacrifice and sprinkling blood on the altar and the people. When we read on throughout the rest of Exodus and the other books of Moses we see that God continued to add commands to the covenant that had been made. These commands are part of the one covenant that God made with Israel at Mt Sinai even though they were given after the covenant was ratified.

The Old Covenant included specific promises

Deuteronomy 28:1-4 (NKJV) “Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that the LORD your God will set you high above all nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the LORD your God: “Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the country. “Blessed shall be the fruit of your body, the produce of your ground and the increase of your herds, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flocks...

Deuteronomy 28 lists a number of promises that God made to the children of Israel. God promised to bless them if they obeyed Him and to curse them if they disobeyed. These promises were written down in the Book of the Law and were part of the Old Covenant (see Joshua 8:34).

The Old Covenant included specific punishments

Exodus 21:12-25 (NKJV) “He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death. However, if he did not lie in wait, but God delivered him into his hand, then I will appoint for you a place where he may flee. “But if a man acts with premeditation against his neighbor, to kill him by treachery, you shall take him from My altar, that he may die. “And he who strikes his father or his mother shall surely be put to death. “He who kidnaps a man and sells him, or if he is found in his hand, shall surely be put to death. “And he who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death. “If men contend with each other, and one strikes the other with a stone or with his fist, and he does not die but is confined to his bed, if he rises again and walks about outside with his staff, then he who struck him shall be acquitted. He shall only pay for the loss of his time, and shall provide for him to be thoroughly healed. “And if a man beats his male or female servant with a rod, so that he dies under his hand, he shall surely be punished. Notwithstanding, if he remains alive a day or two, he shall not be punished; for he is his property. “If men fight, and hurt a woman with child, so that she gives birth prematurely, yet no harm follows, he shall surely be punished accordingly as the woman’s husband imposes on him; and he shall pay as the judges determine. But if any harm follows,

then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe...

God's covenant with the Israelites also included punishments for crimes against people and livestock and specific details about what punishments were appropriate in different situations.

The Old Covenant included the levitical priesthood

The levitical priesthood was an important aspect of the Old Covenant. Under the Old Covenant God set aside the tribe of Levi to protect the integrity of the Law and serve the people in spiritual things.

God established a whole religious system that involved things like animal sacrifices, the Ark of the Covenant, the tabernacle, rituals, feasts, etc. Later God replaced the tabernacle with the temple, which housed the Ark of the Covenant and became Israel's centre for worship.

Review

Key point # 1 – God never made the Old Covenant with Gentiles (i.e., non-Jewish people)

Key point # 2 – Moses was the mediator of the Old Covenant

Key point # 3 – the Old Covenant includes all of the laws and commands that God gave Israel at Mt Sinai, which includes the Ten Commandments and many other commandments

Key point # 4 – the Old Covenant includes specific promises and punishments

Key point # 5 – the Old Covenant includes the levitical priesthood and that system of worship

CHAPTER 3:

GOD PROMISED A

NEW COVENANT

Isaiah 55:3 (NKJV) Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you—the sure mercies of David.

Jeremiah 32:38-40 (NKJV) They shall be My people, and I will be their God; then I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me forever, for the good of them and their children after them. And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from doing them good; but I will put My fear in their hearts so that they will not depart from Me.

Ezekiel 16:60 (NKJV) "Nevertheless I will remember My covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish an everlasting covenant with you.

The prophets foretold that God would make a new and everlasting covenant that would become the new basis of God's relationship with people. When they declared that God would make a new covenant they implied that the Sinai covenant was temporary and that it was not complete for God's ultimate plan and purpose.

Isaiah 42:1-7 (NKJV) "Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles. He will not cry out, nor raise His voice, nor cause His voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench; He will bring forth justice for truth. He will not fail nor be discouraged, till He has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands shall wait for His law." Thus says God the LORD, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread forth the earth and that which comes from it, who gives breath to the people on it, and spirit to those who walk on it: "I, the LORD, have called You in righteousness, and will hold Your hand; I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people, as a light to the Gentiles, to open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the prison, those who sit in darkness from the prison house.

Jeremiah 31:31-34 (NKJV) “Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when 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 lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. 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 minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”

Ezekiel 36:25-27 (NKJV) "Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.

The Old Covenant prophets foretold that God would make a New Covenant and they explained the nature of this promised covenant.

Isaiah foretold that God would send a special servant who would establish justice for all people. Isaiah also explained that this Messiah would be the New Covenant.

Matthew 12:17-21 tells us that Jesus fulfilled Isaiah 42:1-4. One of the important things that these Scriptures tell us is that Jesus Christ is the New Covenant.

Jeremiah foretold that God would make a New Covenant with the Israelites that would be different from the one that He made with them at Mt Sinai. Jeremiah prophesied that this covenant would consist of three things. It would consist of God's laws put in people's minds and written on their hearts, a personal knowledge or relationship with God and the forgiveness of sins.

Ezekiel foretold that God would do a new work in His people. While Ezekiel doesn't specifically use the word covenant in this passage, he describes the nature of the New Covenant. Ezekiel foretells a time when God will cleanse His people from all their filthiness and idols, give them a new heart and a new spirit, and cause them to walk in His ways. Ezekiel's prophecy is very similar to Jeremiah's prophecy, that God will do an inward work of grace in people's minds and hearts that would cause them to love Him wholeheartedly and obey His commandments.

Review

Key point # 1 – Jesus Christ is the New Covenant

Key point # 2 – the New Covenant is God's laws put in people's minds and written on their hearts, a personal knowledge or relationship with God and the forgiveness of sins

CHAPTER 4:

THE NEW

COVENANT

The New Covenant is the agreement that God makes with believers through Jesus Christ. The New Covenant is God changing our minds and hearts in such a way that we love what He loves and hates what He hates, a personal knowledge or relationship with God and the forgiveness of sins. It includes a new law, better promises, a more severe punishment and a new priesthood.

Jesus is the mediator of the New Covenant

Hebrews 8:6-13 (NKJV) But now He [Jesus] has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises.

Hebrews 8:6 says that Jesus has obtained a better ministry than Moses because He is the mediator of a better covenant that is based on better promises. When we studied Exodus we saw that Moses was the mediator of the Old Covenant. Moses listened to God and gave the people the law, he interceded for the people when they broke God's commands and he told God what the people had said and spoke to God on their behalf. Jesus Christ is the mediator of the New Covenant. Jesus has pacified God's wrath by offering His own blood on the cross, He teaches us the truth, He gives us the Holy Spirit, He intercedes for people night and day and He is the only means by which we can approach God the Father.

The New Covenant is based on Jesus' teachings

Moses listened to God and gave the Israelites the commandments of the Old Covenant. Moses told the Israelites that "the LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren" (Deut 18:15). Acts 3:22 and 7:37 tells us that this prophet is Jesus Christ. Jesus gave us the commandments of the New Covenant.

The Sermon on the Mount

Matthew 5-7 records Jesus' longest teaching in the Bible and is commonly referred to as the Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon on the Mount is a key passage for understanding Jesus and the Law.

Matthew 5:17-18 (NKJV) "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.

Jesus said that He had not come to destroy the Law or the Prophets but rather to fulfil them. The Law refers to the books of Moses and the Prophets refers to the other books that make up the Old Covenant Scriptures. The word fulfil used in Matthew 5:17 is the Greek word pleroō. Pleroō is used in Scripture 94 times in a number of different contexts. When we look at this word in each of these contexts we see that it means to fulfil in the sense of complete. When Jesus said that He hadn't come to destroy the Law or the Prophets what He was saying is that He was not against them but that He was for them. When Jesus said that He had come to fulfil the Law and the Prophets what He was saying is that the purpose of His life and work was to bring these things to their intended completion.

Matthew 5:17-18 is sometimes misunderstood to mean that Jesus was saying that we should keep the Old Covenant Law or Ten Commandments today. When we look at what Jesus said next and what He taught in the Gospels it is obvious that Jesus wasn't saying this. Jesus taught many things that were different to the Old Testament Law. When we look at Jesus' teachings in the rest of this passage and through the Gospels we see that Jesus taught things that were different to the Old Covenant Law. What Jesus is saying here is that He is not against the Law and Prophets but rather that His life and ministry perfectly completed them. Jesus perfectly fulfilled all the prophetic commands, types and shadows of the Old Covenant and brought grace and truth.

It is also important to understand that while some of the specific laws of the Old Covenant are still valid many of them were set aside when Jesus came and fulfilled them by

His life, death and resurrection. Jesus' statement in Matthew 5:17 that He did not come to destroy the Law or the Prophets does not validate any specific Old Covenant law because it does not in itself tell us which specific laws are still valid and which ones have been changed or set aside.

When we consider Old Covenant laws of sacrifice, for example, we see that they have been set aside because Jesus has fulfilled them. Jesus did not come for the purpose of destroying those laws, but for fulfilling their true and prophetic meaning. When Jesus fulfilled their meaning He made it unnecessary for Christians to keep these laws. These laws are unnecessary because they have served their purpose by pointing people to Jesus. Jesus is the reality to which they could only point. Now that Jesus has come they are no longer required. In saying this, because they point to Jesus Christ and show how God interacted with a group of people at one time and place, the Old Covenant laws continue to give us insights into God's will. Even the laws of sacrifice are "useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Tim 3:16).

Matthew 5:19 (NKJV) Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus went on to explain the importance of obedience to His commandments. When Jesus uses the term “these commandments” He is not talking about the commandment that God gave to Adam not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil or the commandment to Noah to build a boat or the Ten Commandments that God gave to the children of Israel under the Old Covenant; Jesus is referring to the commandments that He is giving them in this sermon.

Matthew 5:20 (NKJV) For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus goes on to warn His disciples that unless they live by a higher moral standard than the Scribes and Pharisees that they will not inherit God’s kingdom. This statement would have shocked His listeners. The scribes studied and taught God’s law and were commonly regarded as the wisest people. The Pharisees were a sect among the Jews that were distinguished by their strictness and zeal for God’s law and they were commonly esteemed as the holiest people. Jesus told the people that they must live at a standard of morality that is higher than both the wisest and holiest people they knew to enter God’s kingdom.

Matthew 5:21-26 (NKJV) "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'YOU SHALL NOT MURDER, and

whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.' But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire. Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny.

Jesus goes on in this passage to give six comparisons. Jesus is comparing His teaching with the teaching that His listeners would have heard in the synagogue. When we stand back and look at this passage we see that Jesus is doing far more than giving the true interpretation of the Old Covenant law or merely lifting the standard of righteousness under the New Covenant. What Jesus was doing here was exerting His authority as the mediator and lawgiver of a New Covenant. When Jesus said "Moses said... but I say..." He was bringing in a new law.

Let's take the first comparison as an example. Jesus said "You have heard that it was said to those of old, "YOU SHALL NOT MURDER'... but I tell you...." Jesus was quoting what Moses had said under the Old Covenant and saying

something different to the Old Covenant. One of the Ten Commandments is “Thou shall not murder” but under the New Covenant God applies this law to the heart and warns us against being angry with our brother. Jesus then told them that if they broke the Old Covenant law that they would be judged by a human council which had the power to put people to death but if people broke His words they would be judged by God who had the power to punish them in hell. When we look at this comparison we see a number of things. We see that Jesus’ commands are both consistent with and different to the Old Covenant commands¹. We see that Jesus’ commands emphasis inward holiness. We also see that Jesus’ commands emphasis eternal rather than worldly consequences.

Matthew 7:21-29 (NKJV) "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done

¹ When I say that Jesus’ commands are consistent with and different to the Old Covenant law what I am saying is that they are not against the Law but they are different to the Law. When Jesus warned people about being angry with one another this wasn't against the commandment not to murder. It was different to this commandment but it was consistent with it. It was different but it was heading in the same direction. Likewise animal sacrifices and the sacrifice of Christ are not against one another. Jesus’ death on the Cross replaced and superseded animal sacrifices. Jesus’ blood is not against animal sacrifices, it is the fulfilment of it.

many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!' "Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. "But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall." And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.

Jesus finished the Sermon on the Mount by emphasizing the importance of putting His words into practice. Jesus said that many people will come to Him on Judgment Day and expect to be received into God's kingdom because they called Him Lord and did supernatural works but they will be eternally rejected because they still practiced lawlessness. The word lawlessness here is the word anomia which literally means without law. What Jesus is saying is that people will be rejected because they called Him Lord but were not truly submitted to His lordship in their hearts and lives. Jesus then explained that we are wise if we hear His words and put them into practice. One of the things that Jesus was saying here is that His words are foundational.

He is saying that He is the greatest authority and that His words are the basis by which people will be judged.

Jesus' new law of love

Matthew 22:36-40 (NKJV) "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" Jesus said to him, 'YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."

John 13:34-35 (NKJV) "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

Romans 13:9-10 (NKJV) For the commandments, "YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY," "YOU SHALL NOT MURDER," "YOU SHALL NOT STEAL," "YOU SHALL NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS," "YOU SHALL NOT COVET," and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR

AS YOURSELF." Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

1 Corinthians 13:13 (NKJV) And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

Galatians 5:6 (NKJV) For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.

Galatians 5:14 (NKJV) For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF."

1 John 3:23 (NKJV) And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment.

Jesus' commandments can be summarised in the single command to love one another.

Jesus taught us that our first responsibility is to love God and to put Him first in our lives and that our second responsibility is to love our neighbours even as we love ourselves. If we do this then we will do nothing wrong. We will be acceptable to God and approved by men.

God's command to love Him with everything and to love our neighbour as ourselves is both strict and freeing. It is strict in that it is a perfect standard of inward holiness. It is also freeing in that it gives us freedom of choice and expression about a whole lot of things that don't matter.

The New Covenant is based on better promises

Hebrews 8:6-12 (NKJV) But now He [Jesus] has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. Because finding fault with them, He says: "BEHOLD, THE DAYS ARE COMING, SAYS THE LORD, WHEN 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 WHEN I TOOK THEM BY THE HAND TO LEAD THEM OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT; BECAUSE THEY DID NOT CONTINUE IN MY COVENANT, AND I DISREGARDED THEM, SAYS THE LORD. 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; 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. FOR I WILL BE MERCIFUL TO THEIR UNRIGHTEOUSNESS, AND THEIR SINS AND THEIR LAWLESS DEEDS I WILL REMEMBER NO MORE." In that He says, "A NEW COVENANT," He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.

The writer of Hebrews quotes from Jeremiah 31 to explain why God established a New Covenant, what it is and how it has made the first one old and obsolete.

Hebrews 8:7-8 explains that the reason God removed the first covenant was because He found fault with the covenant and with the people. God found fault with the first covenant because it failed to fulfil its purpose and make the people holy. The first covenant was by nature law which by itself is powerless to change people's lives. God also found fault with the people because they consistently broke His covenant.

Hebrews 8:6 says that the New Covenant is established on better promises. God made specific promises under the Old Covenant and He made specific promises under the New Covenant.

God promises to put His laws in our minds and write them on our hearts in the New Covenant. Under the Old Covenant God issued specific commands that were to be fully obeyed. Under the New Covenant God actually does a

work in our hearts by grace whereby we want to do what He wants. God circumcises our hearts. He changes us and makes us love what He loves and hate what He hates.

It is worth noting at this point that the New Covenant is not written down in a book. While we often refer to the Scriptures that were given to us after Christ as the New Testament the reality is that the New Testament is not written down in a book. The promise or the Gospel is written down but reality of this promise, the New Testament itself, is written by the Spirit in our hearts.

God forgives our sins in the New Covenant. Jesus, on the night before He was crucified, shared the Passover meal in a different way with His disciples. Jesus didn't kill a lamb, apply its blood to the doorposts, or roast its meat and eat it with unleavened bread and bitter spices. Jesus gave His disciples bread that represented His body and wine that represented His blood. Jesus said "For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matt 26:28, NKJV). Jesus promises us remission or cancelation of our sins under the New Covenant.

God promises to reveal Himself to us personally by the Holy Spirit in the New Covenant. Under the Old Covenant the Holy Spirit was only given to certain anointed people but under the New Covenant God has poured out His Spirit on every believer. The Holy Spirit is often referred to in Scripture as "the" promise (see Luke 24:49, Acts 1:4, 2:33, 39, etc). Jesus has not left us to be orphans but has given us the Holy Spirit to abide in us forever.

The New Covenant is based on more severe punishments

John 8:3-11 (NKJV) Then the scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman caught in adultery. And when they had set her in the midst, they said to Him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?" This they said, testing Him, that they might have something of which to accuse Him. But Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground with His finger, as though He did not hear. So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and said to them, "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first." And again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. Then those who heard it, being convicted by their conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest even to the last. And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, "Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more."

The Pharisees catch a woman in the act of adultery and drag her to Jesus. They challenge Jesus, saying "Now Moses,

in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?" Jesus writes something in the ground with His finger. He then stands up and says "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first." Everyone in the crowd leaves starting with the oldest down. Jesus turns to the woman and asks her where all the people who were accusing her had gone. He then says "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more."

The Pharisees were wrong in this story because they were living under an obsolete covenant. The woman was an adulteress and the Old Covenant required her to be stoned to death. The same God who said that this woman should be stoned under the Old Covenant was now standing here saying something different. The same Jesus who said "Stone the adulteress" under the Old was saying "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more" under the New. The Pharisees were being zealous for God and zealous for God's law. The Pharisees' problem was that God was doing a new thing and they couldn't perceive it. God had introduced a shift from the Old Covenant that emphasised justice and was based on immediate punishments to a New Covenant that emphasised grace was based on suspended and eternal judgment and they couldn't see it.

Hebrews 10:26-31 (NKJV) For if we sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two

or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY," says the Lord. And again, "THE LORD WILL JUDGE HIS PEOPLE." It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

God has established a far greater punishment for violating the New Covenant. When people broke the Old Covenant Law then they were to be stoned. If people violate or reject the New Covenant then they will be punished in hell for eternity. Under the New Covenant God gives people so much time and opportunity to repent because the consequence for rejecting Jesus is so much more severe.

The New Covenant has a new priesthood

Hebrews 7:11-19 (NKJV) Therefore, if perfection were through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need was there that another priest should rise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be called according to the

order of Aaron? For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law. For He of whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no man has officiated at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord arose from Judah, of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood. And it is yet far more evident if, in the likeness of Melchizedek, there arises another priest who has come, not according to the law of a fleshly commandment, but according to the power of an endless life. For He testifies: "YOU ARE A PRIEST FOREVER ACCORDING TO THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK." For on the one hand there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness, for the law made nothing perfect; on the other hand, there is the bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God.

Hebrews talks about the Old and New Covenant priesthods. God established a priesthood under the Old Covenant which was called the levitical priesthood because it was made up from Aaron's sons and the tribe of Levi. When God introduced the New Covenant He established the new priesthood after the order of Melchizedek. Jesus Christ is the great high priest of this priesthood and believers are all priests who live to serve God and people in spiritual things.

Jesus as our High Priest is a beautiful picture of reconciliation. Jesus has gone to the Father who was offended by our sins and appeased His anger by His own

blood and He has reached out to sinners to implore them to turn to God in repentance by His own blood. Jesus has stood in the gap between an offended God and a guilty humanity and brought peace.

Review

Key point # 1 – the New Covenant is the agreement that God makes with believers through Jesus Christ

Key point # 2 – the New Covenant includes a new law

Key point # 3 – Jesus is not against the Old Covenant he is the prophetic fulfilment of it

Key point # 4 – Jesus' commands are both consistent with and different to the Old Covenant law

Key point # 5 – Jesus' commandments can be summarised in the single command to love one another

Key point # 6 – the New Covenant includes better promises, namely a new heart, forgiveness of sin and a personal revelation of God

Key point # 7 – the New Covenant includes a far greater punishment for breaking it. When people broke the Ten Commandments they were to be stoned. If people violate or reject the New Covenant they will be punished in hell for eternity

Key point # 8 - The New Covenant has a new priesthood

CHAPTER 5: THE OLD COVENANT HAS BECOME OLD

Hebrews 8:13 (NKJV) In that He says, "A NEW COVENANT," He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.

Hebrews 8:13 tells us that when God established the New Covenant He made the first one obsolete. The word obsolete used in this passage is the Greek word *palaiōō*, which means old or out dated. What Scripture is saying here is that the very fact that the first covenant is called

“old” implies that it has been set aside and is no longer binding for the church.

While there are many similarities between the two covenants, we must understand that the new covenant is the basis of our relationship with God and that we do not live under the Old Covenant laws, promises, punishments or priesthood. Hebrews 8:13 explains why Christians are not required to keep God’s laws that were part of the Old Covenant but are not part of the New Covenant.

The laws that we keep today as Christians may be in the Old Covenant but, if so, we keep them not because they are in the Old Covenant but because they are also in the New. If all we know about a law is that it is in the Old Covenant that in itself does not tell us whether it is still in force because many Old Covenant laws are obsolete. We must evaluate the Law by the New Covenant. This shows that the Old Covenant has no legal authority of its own.

The Old Covenant stands or falls as a unit and the fact that some of the laws are obsolete tells us that the entire covenant is obsolete. The Old Covenant has no authority for Christians today. It was a specific agreement between God and the Israelites and the New Covenant has made it obsolete.

It is important to note that although the Old Covenant writings are not a legal authority, they are still authoritative as a revelation of how God dealt with His people in that specific time and culture and have prophetic implications for the church. They continue to give us insights into our unchanging God and His will.

Legalism

Galatians 5:1-9 (NKJV) Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love. You ran well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? This persuasion does not come from Him who calls you. A little leaven leavens the whole lump.

Paul wrote the letter to the Galatians to address the destructive influence of legalism.

A group of Pharisees who had converted to Christianity started teaching the Christians in Galatia that they needed to be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses. Paul wrote to the Galatians to warn them about the danger of this teaching. Paul charged the believers to stand fast in the liberty that Jesus Christ had brought them into and warned them about coming back under the Old Covenant. Paul said that if they started trying to please God by keeping the Old

Covenant laws then they were rejecting Jesus and what He had done for them on the Cross through the Holy Spirit. Paul warned them against coming back under obsolete Old Covenant laws saying that if they came under one aspect of the Old Covenant then they were bound to keep all of it.

Acts 15:1-11 (NKJV) And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question. So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria, describing the conversion of the Gentiles; and they caused great joy to all the brethren. And when they had come to Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders; and they reported all things that God had done with them. But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses." Now the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter. And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up and said to them: "Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just

as He did to us, and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they."

The apostles and elders address the same issue in Acts 15. A group of Pharisees had started to teach people that now they had come to Christ they should be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses. The apostles and elders met together to discuss this matter and referred to this as testing God and putting a heavy yoke on the necks of the disciples. They rejected this teaching and asserted that we are saved by grace through faith.

When people don't understand exactly what the Old and New Covenants are they run into all sorts of problems. When people don't understand the covenants then they never really appreciate what Jesus has done for us and as a result they find it difficult to live in the reality of the Cross and the Holy Spirit. The Old Covenant was glorious but the New Covenant is much more glorious. Under the Old God anointed certain people with His Spirit but under the New God has poured out His Spirit on all believers so that we all know God from the least to the greatest. Under the Old God established animal sacrifices as an annual reminder of sins but under the New God has wiped out our sins through the blood of His very own Son. Under the Old God commanded obedience but under the New God changes us

so that we love Him with all our hearts and souls and want to please Him. The Old could communicate what was right and wrong but it was powerless to change us. The New is one of grace and transforms us from the inside out.

When people don't understand the covenants then they struggle to understand which laws God wants them to keep and which ones He doesn't. These people tend to adopt a random pick and mix. We can't just read the Bible as if everything was written to us. The Bible was written for us but it wasn't written to us. God told Noah to build a boat but this doesn't mean that He wants everyone to build boats. At the same time this story is still very much relevant for us and we can learn a lot about God's nature and will, His plan of salvation and end time events through this story. When we understand that the Old Covenant was given to Israel we understand that the law and the promises that were part of this covenant were never given to us. This doesn't take away from their value and make them irrelevant. It simply situates them within the biblical story so that we can draw timeless truths from them that can help us follow Jesus today.

When we understand how the covenants work it becomes easy to discern which commands God wants us to keep. When Jesus was transfigured on the mountain Moses and Elijah came down and stood with Him. God audibly spoke from heaven and said "This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!" Moses represented the law and Elijah the prophets. The Law and the Prophets spoke about Jesus and now God has said that we should listen to His Son. If we want to know how God wants us to live as New Covenant believers we

simply need to come back to what Jesus said and the apostles echoed. If Jesus or the apostles taught it then we should do it, if they said not to do it then we shouldn't do it and if they said nothing about it at all then it is a matter of personal conviction.

When God established a New Covenant He made the first one obsolete. The very fact that the Old Covenant is called old tells us that it has been replaced by another one. When we understand what the Old and New Covenants are and some of the key differences between them then we will find it much easier to stand in the reality of the New. One of the ways that the devil will try and attack us as believers is by trying to bring us back under the Old Covenant. He will try and get us out of faith and love and into works and fear. He will try and take us away from humility and relationship and bring us into self-effort and self-righteousness. He will try and distract us from the simplicity that is in Christ through adding to Jesus' teachings. When we understand the New through experience and sound doctrine then we are equipped to stand.

Review

Key point # 1 – when God established a New Covenant the first one became obsolete

Key point # 2 – the laws that we keep today as Christians may be in the Old Covenant but, if so, we keep them not because they are in the Old Covenant but because they are also in the New

Key point # 3 – If Jesus or the apostles teach something then we should do it, if they said not to do it then we shouldn't do it and if they said nothing about it at all then it is a matter of personal conviction

Key point # 4 – we need to watch out for the destructive influence of legalism and the spirit that wants to rob us of the life, power and freedom of the new covenant

Key point # 5 – legalism produces self-reliance, self-effort, self-righteousness and ultimately spiritual death

CHAPTER 6: THE SABBATH IN THE NEW COVENANT

God created the heavens and the earth in six days and rested on the seventh day. God blessed the seventh day and made it holy. Years later when God gave the law to Israel He commanded them to keep the sabbath day holy by resting from all their work. God said that it was to be a sign that they were His chosen people. When Jesus came on the scene He seemed to break all the rules. Jesus said very little about the sabbath. Jesus proclaimed that He was Lord of the Sabbath, healed people on the sabbath and when he was questioned about why He didn't rest on the sabbath He told people that both He and His Father were always working. Years later Paul wrote to the church telling them

that the Old Covenant sabbath was something that foreshadowed something powerful in Christ.

Scripture teaches us that the sabbath is a prophetic picture of something we have in Christ. This chapter will look at the development of the sabbath throughout the biblical story from creation, to the law, to Christ and the early church. It will help you understand what the sabbath is all about and help you live in the freedom and power of the New Covenant.

Creation

Genesis 2:1-3 (NKJV) Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished. And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.

God created the heavens and the earth in six days and then rested. God blessed the seventh day and made it holy because He had ceased working.

The word rest used in this passage is the Hebrew word shabath, which is the root word for shabbath, which is translated as sabbath. The word shabath is used 74 times

in Scripture and simply means to cease. When Genesis says that God rested on the seventh day it is saying that God ceased working.

The law

Exodus 20:8-11 (NKJV) "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it.

The LORD made a covenant with the Israelites at Mt Sinai. The Ten Commandments were part of this covenant and the fourth commandment was to remember the sabbath day. God told Israel that they were to remember the sabbath and keep it holy by abstaining from work.

Exodus 31:12-17 (NKJV) And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak also to the children of Israel, saying: 'Surely My sabbaths you shall keep, for it is a sign

between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you. You shall keep the sabbath, therefore, for it is holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whoever does any work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people. Work shall be done for six days, but the seventh is the sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on the sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death. Therefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever; for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed.' "

The LORD restated the fourth commandment to keep the sabbath in Exodus 31. God reminded Israel that they were not to desecrate the sabbath by working on it. They were to abstain from all work.

God also imposed the death penalty for breaking the sabbath in Exodus 31. Anyone who broke the sabbath by working on it was to be cut off from amongst God's people and put to death.

God told the Israelites that they were to keep the sabbath as a sign. He told them that the sabbath is a perpetual or everlasting covenant².

Jesus and the sabbath

Jesus and the apostles were relatively silent about the sabbath and neither of them ever instructed people to keep the sabbath.

Jesus silence on the sabbath is significant. In earlier chapters we learnt that Jesus mediated a New Covenant. We learnt that the New Covenant has a new law called the Law of Christ which consists of Jesus' commandments. We learnt that the Law of Christ can be summarised in the single word love and that it involves loving God with all our

² When we study how God uses this word everlasting in other contexts and put everything Scripture teaches us about the covenants and the sabbath together it is clear that God isn't saying that Israel was to keep the sabbath in the Old Covenant sense eternally but that they were to keep the true meaning or reality of the sabbath eternally. We can easily see that the word eternal here doesn't necessarily mean that it was to be kept in its physical sense when we compare the sabbath with circumcision. Genesis 17:13 tells us that God told Abraham and his descendants to keep circumcision as an everlasting covenant, yet when we put this together with many other New Covenant Scriptures we see that it is not outward, physical circumcision that is eternal but the inward, spiritual reality that is eternal.

hearts, souls, minds and strength and loving our neighbours as we love ourselves. We also learnt that Jesus affirmed some things from the Law of Moses and changed other things. Jesus' silence on the sabbath is significant because it tells that it is not something God expects us to keep in its outward form but that it is in fact a prophetic picture of a New Covenant reality.

Another thing we notice when we look at Jesus and the sabbath in the Gospels is that He was constantly challenged about working on the sabbath by religious hypocrites. Jesus was criticised by the religious leaders for hanging out with sinners, working on the sabbath and for claiming to be God the Son. One of the times we see Jesus criticised for unlawful activity on the sabbath was in Matthew 12:1-8 and it's parallel accounts in Mark 2:23-27 and Luke 6:1-5.

Matthew 12:1-8 (NKJV) At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. And His disciples were hungry, and began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to Him, "Look, Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath!" But He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God and ate the showbread which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless? Yet I say to you that in this place there is One greater than the temple. But if you had

known what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

When we look at this account we see that Jesus responds to the Pharisees' accusations by addressing their religious hypocrisy. Jesus exposes the way that they had reduced relationship with God to rules and missed God's heart and will and then makes the statement that the Son of Man is Lord of the sabbath. When Jesus says that He is Lord of the sabbath He is doing two things. Jesus is identifying that the root of their problem was that they had no idea who He is. If they had of known who was amongst them they would have allowed Him to teach them rather than trying to pull Him up for breaking the law and becoming offended with Him. Jesus is also saying that as the Lord of the sabbath He has the right to do whatever He wants with it.

John 5:1-18 (NKJV) After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew, Bethesda, having five porches. In these lay a great multitude of sick people, blind, lame, paralyzed, waiting for the moving of the water. For an angel went down at a certain time into the pool and stirred up the water; then whoever stepped in first, after the stirring of the water, was made well of whatever disease he had. Now a certain man was there who had an infirmity thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there, and

knew that he already had been in that condition a long time, He said to him, "Do you want to be made well?" The sick man answered Him, "Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; but while I am coming, another steps down before me." Jesus said to him, "Rise, take up your bed and walk." And immediately the man was made well, took up his bed, and walked. And that day was the Sabbath. The Jews therefore said to him who was cured, "It is the Sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your bed." He answered them, "He who made me well said to me, 'Take up your bed and walk.' "Then they asked him, "Who is the Man who said to you, 'Take up your bed and walk'?" But the one who was healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, a multitude being in that place. Afterward Jesus found him in the temple, and said to him, "See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you." The man departed and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. For this reason the Jews persecuted Jesus, and sought to kill Him, because He had done these things on the Sabbath. But Jesus answered them, "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working." Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God.

Jesus broke the outward sabbath by working on it and explained His actions by saying that His Father was always working and therefore He was always working.

Under the Old Covenant, God told Israel to cease from all work on the sabbath. Now we see Jesus saying that He never stops working. Whichever way we look at it Jesus is saying something different to the Law. Jesus could have told the Jews that He was keeping the sabbath as God originally intended it to be kept under the Law but He didn't. Jesus said something that was different to the Law because God was doing a new thing.

The New Covenant

Colossians 2:16-17 (NKJV) So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.

Colossians 2 says that sabbaths³ are a shadow of a reality that we have in Christ.

³ It is worth noting that the word sabbaths is plural in this passage indicating that it refers to all of the sabbaths that God ordained under the Old Covenant. Leviticus 23 records the feasts that God commanded the Israelites to observe throughout their generations. When we read through this chapter we see that God affirms the seventh day Sabbath

We must understand the whole idea of types and shadows to understand what Colossians 2 is talking about here. The idea of shadows is easy to understand. In a natural sense an object casts a shadow. The object is the substance or the real thing and the shadow is an imperfect and faint representation of the object. When Scripture talks about shadows it is talking about something that prophetically represents the real thing.

Scripture tells us that God introduced many types and shadows before Christ came to reveal who He is and what He would do. Hebrews 9:9-10 tells us that God temporarily imposed these symbolic things until Jesus came and brought us into their spiritual reality.

When Colossians 2 says that the sabbath is a shadow of something in Christ what it is saying is that the sabbath dimly revealed something that Jesus would bring us into and now that Jesus has come it has become obsolete.

Romans 4:5 (NKJV) But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness

and then introduces a number of other Sabbaths that were part of these sacred assemblies. We see that God established days where the Israelites were to cease from their work and perform other rituals or symbolic duties and called these days Sabbaths. One of the things that this tells us is that there is the seventh day Sabbath and that there are also other Sabbaths that were part of the feasts that God gave Israel.

Romans 4:5 tells us that we must cease from work and believe to become righteous.

Scripture talks about dead works and good works. Dead works are the works of the flesh. They are works that come out of self-effort, self-reliance and self-righteousness. They are works that are produced by pride and unacceptable to God. We must give up these things to enter into true faith. When we cease working and enter into faith then we live in the abundance of the Holy Spirit and God's grace. We become one with Christ in spirit and Jesus begins to work through our lives and produce good works. This is the rest of faith and the spiritual reality of the sabbath that Colossians is talking about.

Hebrews 4:1-11 (NKJV) Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it. For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it. For we who have believed do enter that rest, as He has said: "SO I SWORE IN MY WRATH, 'THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST,' " although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. For He has spoken in a certain place of the seventh day in this way: "AND GOD RESTED ON THE SEVENTH DAY FROM ALL HIS WORKS"; and again in this place: "THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST." Since therefore it remains that some must enter it, and those to whom it was first preached did not enter because of disobedience, again He designates a certain day, saying

in David, "TODAY," after such a long time, as it has been said: "TODAY, IF YOU WILL HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS." For if Joshua had given them rest, then He would not afterward have spoken of another day. There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His. Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience.

Hebrews 4 talks about the promise of entering God's rest through faith and the consequence of falling short of this rest.

The writer of Hebrews tells us that God has foreshadowed the promise of rest in creation, in Joshua and in David. It tells us that the seventh day of creation where God ceased from His work was a prophetic picture of God's rest that we enter into through faith. It also tells us that Joshua entering into the Promised Land was a prophetic picture of entering into God's rest through faith.

The writer of Hebrews also gives us a stern warning about falling short of this sabbath rest. It tells us that we enter through faith and that we can fall short of it through disobedience.

Romans 8:1-8 (NKJV) There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the

Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

People who are in the flesh cannot please God. When people are in the flesh then everything that they do is tainted by human pride and selfishness. Jesus said that the flesh gives birth to flesh. When people are in the flesh then they can't produce spiritual life. Their works are carnal and their offering is unacceptable.

Galatians 5:19-23 (NKJV) Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand,

just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

Paul talks about the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit. We see a stark contrast between life in the flesh and life in the Spirit in this passage. We see works contrasted with fruit. The flesh produces works while the Spirit produces fruit. When people are in the flesh they are working out of their own natural resource. When people are in the Spirit then they have ceased from their own works and the Spirit is producing good fruit in their lives. We see the difference between the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit. Works of the flesh are corrupt and evil in nature while the fruit of the Spirit is godly and holy in nature. We also see that those people who live in the flesh and produce the works of the flesh will not inherit God's kingdom. Just as those who desecrated the sabbath by working on it were cut off from God's people and put to death under the Old Covenant, so too those who live in the flesh and produce the works of the flesh will be damned under the New Covenant. In this way both the glory and the seriousness of the sabbath are elevated under the New Covenant.

God gave Israel circumcision⁴ and the sabbath as signs that they were in covenant with Him. A sign is something that identified that a person was in covenant. A wedding ring is a modern day equivalent of this concept. When we see a man or a woman wearing a wedding ring it is a sign that they are in covenant. In the same way circumcision and the sabbath were signs that a person was in covenant with God.

The realities that circumcision and the sabbath foreshadowed are both signs that people are in covenant with God through Jesus Christ. Just as outward, physical circumcision and sabbath keeping showed that someone was in covenant with the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob so too the inward, spiritual realities of these things are the signs of true believers.

Special days

When we understand the reality of the sabbath then which day we gather on becomes irrelevant.

⁴ Circumcision is another prophetic picture of a New Covenant reality. Under the old order circumcision involved the removal of the fleshly foreskin from the penis. Under the New Covenant circumcision is inward and involves the removal of selfish desires from the heart by the Spirit. Now that the reality has come physical circumcision means nothing.

When we look at the early church history we see that in some places the church chose to gather on the seventh day and the first day, others chose to gather on the first day and still others chose to gather on the eighth day⁵.

Romans 14:1-6 (NKJV) Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things. For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables. Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him. Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand. One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks.

Paul spoke into the issue of special days and other similar issues in Romans 14.

⁵ See Wikipedia's "The Lord's Day" for a balanced overview of which days the early church met on and why they did this

Romans 14 teaches us that some things are personal. Some things are black and white (e.g., Jesus is Lord and Saviour, repentance, faith, etc) and other things are personal (e.g., preferences about food, sacred days, etc). We need to be strong on the things that are black and white and open minded about the things that are personal.

One of the things that we see Paul doing in this passage is defining weak people as people who are narrow minded in certain areas. Weak people, he says, eat only vegetables because they believe it is wrong to eat meat. Strong people, he says, are people who know that God is not concerned about eating or drinking and don't live under unnecessary restrictions.

Paul goes on to say that weak people must not judge the strong. One of the dangers of being narrow minded about certain things is that we can make unrighteous judgments. If we think something is wrong when really it's not wrong (i.e., it's personal) then we can think other people are doing things that are wrong when really they are not. We must be careful here because if our judgment is unrighteous then we bring our own lives under judgment, which will create resistance in our relationship with God, who resists the proud.

Paul then goes on to say that strong people must not look down on the weak. Paul defines strong people in this passage as people who know that they are free to eat anything and "regard every day alike". Paul says that the strong must not despise (i.e., look down on) the weak.

We can walk together without doing everything the same. We can have unity in diversity but for this to happen we must be committed to not judging one another or despising one another when it comes to our respective stands on which day or days to gather together on as a church family.

Galatians 4:9-11 (NKJV) But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage? You observe days and months and seasons and years. I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain.

Paul wrote the letter to the Galatians to address the destructive influence of legalism. A group of Pharisees who had converted to Christianity started teaching the Christians in Galatia that they needed to be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses. Paul wrote to the Galatians to warn them about the danger of this teaching. Paul charged the believers to stand fast in the liberty that Jesus Christ had brought them into under the New Covenant and warned them about coming back under the Old Covenant. Paul said that if they started trying to please God by keeping the Old Covenant laws then they were rejecting Jesus and what He had done for them on the Cross and by giving them the Spirit. Paul warned them against coming back under obsolete Old Covenant laws saying that if they came under one aspect of the Old Covenant then they were bound to keep all of it.

In Galatians 4:9-11 we see that Paul rebukes the Galatians for observing days and months and seasons and years. Paul is correcting them for believing that Jesus wanted them to keep these obsolete Old Covenant practices and returning to them. Paul warns them sternly and charges them to stand fast in the freedom that Christ has brought them into so that they do not subtly become enslaved by a yoke of bondage.

Concluding remarks about the sabbath

God doesn't want us to get sidetracked by sacred days, weeks or months. God is not interested in which day we set aside to meet together as a church family. God is interested in whether we have entered into the promise of His rest through faith in Jesus Christ.

The physical sabbath foreshadowed a powerful spiritual reality and now that this reality has come it has become an obsolete tradition. Although physical rest has some value for our physical bodies the truth of the sabbath is much greater than this. The sabbath was never about taking a breather. It was about keeping the day holy by ceasing from work.

The sabbath is about ceasing from the works of the flesh and living out of God's grace and power in our lives. Nothing we do in the flesh pleases God and those who live in the flesh will not inherit God's kingdom. We must learn to abide in the place of faith and live out of God's supernatural and abundant resource. When we are in the Spirit then we will know God's heart and His will and we will do those things that please Him. When we are in the Spirit we are empowered by God to live a life of supernatural purity and power.

Review

Key point # 1 – God blessed the seventh day and made it holy because He had ceased working

Key point # 2 – God told Israel to keep the sabbath holy by abstaining from work on that day

Key point # 3 – anyone who broke the sabbath by working on it was to be cut off from amongst God's people and put to death

Key point # 4 – Jesus' silence on the sabbath is significant because it tells that it is not something God expects us to keep in its outward form but that it is in fact a prophetic picture of a New Covenant reality

Key point # 5 – Jesus broke the outward sabbath by working on it and explained His actions by saying that His Father was always working and therefore He was always working

Key point # 6 – the sabbath is a shadow of a reality that is found in Christ

Key point # 7 – the true sabbath is about ceasing our work and entering into God's rest through faith

Key point # 8 – anyone who violates the reality of the sabbath will die

Key point # 9 – life in the Spirit and the fruit of the Spirit is the sign that a person is in covenant with God through Jesus Christ

Key point # 10 – we should not argue about disputable matters, including whether or not certain days are sacred and which days we should gather on as a church family

Key point # 11 – we need to watch out for the destructive influence of legalism and the spirit that wants to rob us of the life, power and freedom of the New Covenant

CHAPTER 7:

TITHING IN THE

NEW COVENANT

The word tithe literally means ten percent and refers to giving ten percent of our increase to those who serve us as priests in spiritual things.

Tithing is mentioned twelve times throughout the biblical story. Abraham gives Melchizedek a tithe of everything he had after he blessed him (Gen 14:18-20). Jacob vowed to give God a tithe of everything that he would receive after he had a dream at Bethel (Gen 28:16-22). God told Israelites that the first tenth belonged to Him and to honour Him by tithing (Lev 27:30). God commands the people to give the tithe to the Levites in return for their work as priests in His house (Num 18:20-31). God repeats the command to tithe and gives further details on the administration of the tithe and clarified that the tithe was for the Levites who served them in spiritual things and also for the strangers, the

fatherless, and the widows (Deut 14:22-29, 26:12-15). Hezekiah reforms the nation and calls them back to God, starting with rebuilding and restoring God's house and calling the people to tithing to provide for those who worked in the house (2 Chron 31:2-10,20-21). Nehemiah leads the people to rebuild the walls around Jerusalem and Ezra begins to teach the law and the people hear God's will, covenant themselves to the Lord, focus their efforts on restoring God's house and begin tithing and giving free will offerings to support the Levites who minister in the house (Neh 10:32-39). God raises up Amos to speak into the hypocrisy in Israel and challenge the people who are tithing, singing and gathering but neglecting love, mercy and justice (Amos 4:4-5). Malachi rebukes the people for robbing God by withholding their tithes and offerings and tells the people to test God in tithing and see if He will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out blessing (Mal 3:7-12). Jesus rebukes Pharisees for carefully tithing but neglecting the weightier matters of the law and tells them that they should focus on things like love, mercy, justice and faith while not neglecting the others things (Matt 23:23, Luk 11:42). The final mention of tithing is in Hebrews 7 where it refers to how Abraham tithed to Melchizedek to show that there was a priesthood that was both before the Law and superior to the levitical priesthood (Heb 7:1-24).

Jesus on tithing

When God established the New Covenant He made the first covenant obsolete (Heb 8:13). This means that the entire set of laws, promises, punishment and priesthood that God gave to Israel through Moses has become obsolete. If we want to know which commands God wants us to keep today we only need to look at what Jesus and the apostles taught. When we look at what Jesus and the apostles taught we see that they affirmed some things, ignored some things and changed others things under the New Covenant.

When we look at what Jesus and the apostles taught under the New Testament we see that they ignored many things that were part of the Old Covenant. If Jesus and the apostles never taught people to keep a command that was part of the Old Covenant then it is not something that He requires all of His people to keep today. Paul refers to these things as “disputable matters” in Romans 14 and explains that they are personal things that we are to keep to ourselves and work out between ourselves and the Lord personally.

The first thing that we should do when considering tithing within the New Covenant is to look at what Jesus and the apostles taught in the Gospels and the New Testament scriptures. With the exception of Hebrews 7, which is more about the change of priesthood than it is about tithing, Matthew 23 and Luke 11 are the only places where either Jesus or the apostles mention tithing (both of these passages are synoptic records of the same event).

Matthew 23:23 (NLT) “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.”

Luke 11:42 (NKJV) “But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass by justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.”

What was the context?

Jesus rebukes the Pharisees for their hypocrisy and blindness in Matthew 23:1-39 and Luke 11:37-52. Jesus rebukes them for not practicing what they preach, making it hard for people to enter God's kingdom, doing things for show, thinking they are more important than others, being ignorant about God's will and looking good outwardly but being corrupt inwardly.

What was Jesus saying there and then?

Jesus was rebuking the Pharisees for being careful to do the lesser things like tithing but overlooking the most important things like love, justice, mercy and faith.

What was Jesus' point?

Jesus was exposing the Pharisees' hypocrisy. Jesus was saying that the fact that they overlooked the most important things and were so careful to do the lesser things showed that their heart wasn't right before God. He was saying that if their hearts were right then they would instinctively do the first things first and not neglect the lesser things.

Jesus wasn't talking about tithing as such in this passage. He wasn't giving a teaching on tithing. He was using tithing as an example of a lesser thing that these Pharisees were meticulous about. It is important to understand this because if we focus on tithing in this passage then we can miss the point. It's not actually a passage about tithing it's a passage about hypocrisy. Jesus is saying that if our hearts are right then we will do the first and most important things first and we will not neglect the lesser things. If we are

neglecting the things that are the most important to God then it shows that we have become religious hypocrites and lost touch with God's heart.

What does this mean for us here and now?

Jesus' rebuke is in the Bible because it has prophetic application. It is useful to teach, rebuke, correct and train us in righteousness so that we can be totally equipped for every good work.

Matthew 23 and Luke 11 help us to examine where our hearts are at. They teach us that if we are strict about things like attending meetings, giving thanks before meals, doing good works that everyone can see, etc. but we are loose about things like knowing God personally, the way we talk about one another, genuine concern for the lost, etc. then we have become religious hypocrites. They also teach us that we should focus on the most important things while still being careful to do the lesser things and that both the big and little things say something about where our hearts are at.

Was Jesus saying that the Pharisees should tithe?

One of the most important questions that we have to answer when we are interpreting these passages, at least when it comes to whether tithing is part of the New Covenant, is whether Jesus told the Pharisees that they should tithe. If Jesus said “You should tithe” then this has implications for us today. If Jesus affirmed tithing then it is something that God wants believers to do today but if He didn’t then tithing is not something God requires every believer to do today and tithing is at most an Old Testament pattern.

Jesus makes the statement “These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone” in both Matthew 23:23 and Luke 11:42. This passage is translated differently in different translations and the differences have significant implications. The KJV translates this passage as “these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone”. The NKJV translates it as “These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.” The NIV translates it as “You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone.” The NLT translates it as “You should tithe, yes, but do not neglect the more important things.” While all of these have similar meanings, there are some differences that become important, especially as it relates to our question about whether Jesus is affirming tithing in this passage.

Jesus statement is the Greek phrase "tauta die poieō kakeinos mē aphiēme". When we break this down we see that tauta means these, die refers to things that are necessary or binding, poieō means to do, kakeinos means likewise or other, me is a negative particle and aphiēme means neglect, omit or leave. When we look at this phrase literally we see that the KJV, NKJV and NIV are literal translations of this passage. Jesus is saying that it is binding and necessary to do these things and that we should not neglect the other things.

The important question then becomes what the "other things" refer to here. Do the "other things" refer to tithing or to the lesser matters of the law? If the "other things" refer to tithing then Jesus is essentially affirming tithing but if the "other things" is referring to the lesser matters of the law then Jesus isn't affirming tithing but affirming complete obedience, first to the most important aspects of God's will and also to the less important things.

When we test both possible interpretations against what Jesus and the apostles teach throughout the Gospels and the New Testament Scriptures it is unlikely that Jesus is affirming tithing. Firstly, Jesus isn't teaching about tithing in this passage but about religious hypocrisy. Secondly, Jesus doesn't say anything about whether we should tithe in the Gospels. Thirdly, Acts doesn't give us any evidence that the early church tithed. Finally, the apostles are silent when it comes to tithing even in their letters to the church when they talk about giving to the church and our responsibility to financially support those God has called out of regular employment to serve us in spiritual things.

Old Testament stories and teachings about tithing have prophetic significance

While tithing is not a New Covenant command all of the Old Testament laws, including tithing, have some prophetic significance for us today.

When Abraham gave Melchizedek a tenth of everything that he had God was showing us the principle of giving financially to those who serve us spiritually. We see this truth affirmed throughout the New Testament scriptures.

When God told the Israelites to set apart the first tenth God was showing us the principle of first fruits, of putting God first in our finances and giving our first and our best to God's work. We see this truth throughout the Gospels and letters.

When God told the Israelites to bring their tithe to the storehouse to provide for the Levites, the stranger and the poor He was showing us the importance of giving to the church so that the church can support their staff, reach the lost and care for the poor. While Jesus and the apostles never prescribed a set amount that we are to give to the church, they did affirm the importance of giving to the church that we are part of and taking financial responsibility for God's work.

New Covenant giving

Numbers 18:20-21 (NIV) The LORD said to Aaron, "You will have no inheritance in their land, nor will you have any share among them; I am your share and your inheritance among the Israelites. "I give to the Levites all the tithes in Israel as their inheritance in return for the work they do while serving at the Tent of Meeting."

Deuteronomy 14:22-29 (NIV) Be sure to set aside a tenth of all that your fields produce each year. Eat the tithe of your grain, new wine and oil, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks in the presence of the LORD your God at the place he will choose as a dwelling for his Name, so that you may learn to revere the LORD your God always. But if that place is too distant and you have been blessed by the LORD your God and cannot carry your tithe (because the place where the LORD will choose to put his Name is so far away), then exchange your tithe for silver, and take the silver with you and go to the place the LORD your God will choose. Use the silver to buy whatever you like: cattle, sheep, wine or other fermented drink, or anything you wish. Then you and your household shall eat there in the presence of the LORD your God and rejoice. And do not neglect the Levites living in your towns, for they have no allotment or inheritance of their own. At the end of every three years, bring all the tithes of that year's produce and store it in your towns, so that the Levites (who have no

allotment or inheritance of their own) and the aliens, the fatherless and the widows who live in your towns may come and eat and be satisfied, and so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.

Deuteronomy 26:12-15 (NIV) When you have finished setting aside a tenth of all your produce in the third year, the year of the tithe, you shall give it to the Levite, the alien, the fatherless and the widow, so that they may eat in your towns and be satisfied. Then say to the LORD your God: "I have removed from my house the sacred portion and have given it to the Levite, the alien, the fatherless and the widow, according to all you commanded. I have not turned aside from your commands nor have I forgotten any of them. I have not eaten any of the sacred portion while I was in mourning, nor have I removed any of it while I was unclean, nor have I offered any of it to the dead. I have obeyed the LORD my God; I have done everything you commanded me. Look down from heaven, your holy dwelling place, and bless your people Israel and the land you have given us as you promised on oath to our forefathers, a land flowing with milk and honey."

While Jesus and the apostles never taught that people should give ten percent to the church under the New Covenant they affirmed the purposes behind tithing.

When we look at the Law we see three purposes of the tithe. We see that the primary purpose of the tithe was to support the Levites, those people God had called out of regular employment to serve the people in spiritual things. We also see that the tithe was used to care for strangers and for the poor.

When we bring these truths across into the New Covenant we see the same three purposes for church giving.

Old Testament	New Testament
Levites	Church workers
Strangers	Lost
Fatherless and widows	Poor

We will look at what Jesus and the apostles taught about each of these three areas in this chapter.

Church workers

1 Corinthians 9:7-14 (NIV) Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its grapes? Who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk? Do I say this merely from a human point of view? Doesn't the Law say the same thing? For it is written in the Law of Moses: "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain." Is it about oxen that God is concerned? Surely he says this for us, doesn't he? Yes, this was written for us, because when the plowman plows and the thresher threshes, they ought to do so in the hope of sharing in the harvest. If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you? If others have this right of support from you, shouldn't we have it all the more? But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ. Don't you know that those who work in the temple get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar? In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel.

Scripture teaches us that it is important to give to the church to support those people that God has called out of regular employment to serve us in spiritual things (i.e., our pastors and paid church staff). While we are all priests

under the New Covenant, God has called certain people to leave regular employment to serve the church in spiritual things and He has ordained that these people should receive their living from the church.

Paul teaches the church about their responsibility to provide for their leaders financially in 1 Corinthians 9. Paul draws on the Law to show them how it is right for the church to provide for those God has called out of regular employment to serve them in spiritual things. Paul teaches them that if their leaders serve them in spiritual things then they should serve their leaders in natural things. He teaches them that just as the Levites were provided for from the temple so too our spiritual leaders should be provided for through the church and that our spiritual leaders' work is the church and therefore it is right for them to be paid from the church.

1 Timothy 5:17-18 (NIV) The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, "Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain," and "The worker deserves his wages."

Paul uses the Law again in this passage to teach the church that it is right for us to provide for those who serve us in spiritual things and watch over our souls. Paul says that the elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of "double honour." This word "honour" used in this

passage is the word “timē,” which refers to value, a price paid or esteem and honour and when we look at the context of this verse we see that it is an obvious reference to wages.

Paul teaches us that we honour our leaders when we give financially to the church to provide for their needs and likewise it is true that we dishonour God and our leaders if we withhold our giving from the church.

Mark 6:1-6 (NIV) Jesus left there and went to his hometown, accompanied by his disciples. When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed. "Where did this man get these things?" they asked. "What's this wisdom that has been given him, that he even does miracles! Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him. Jesus said to them, "Only in his hometown, among his relatives and in his own house is a prophet without honor." He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. And he was amazed at their lack of faith.

When we connect giving to the church to provide for our spiritual leaders with honour it brings us into a powerful spiritual reality. Honour unlocks God's favour and blessing over our lives and enables us to receive. When we honour someone we place weight on them. When we honour our

spiritual leaders we place weight on them and their words, which enables God's word that comes through their ministry to have an effect in our lives. Jesus couldn't do any mighty miracles in His hometown because the people treated Him as common. They didn't place weight on Him and this hindered their faith. When we honour our pastors in our hearts and give to them financially then we are placing weight on them and opening ourselves up to receive from their ministry.

One of the ways that we can keep our hearts open to receive from those God has sent to us is by sowing into their ministry financially.

If the devil can stop the church from giving financially to their pastors then he will hinder pastors from being financially released to focus on the word and prayer and stop the people from receiving from their ministry.

The Lost

Matthew 28:18-20 (NIV) Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

God's strategy to disciple the nations is to plant local churches that make strong disciples. When the Holy Spirit sent Paul and Barnabas out He sent them out to preach the gospel and then plant local churches.

We can't over spiritualise the work of building strong local churches. We need to break through spiritually through prayer and fasting but we also need to break through financially through applying God's word to our lives and giving. God provides for His work through the generosity of His people and if His work is going to advance it requires all of us to give.

We must understand that there is a battle going on for finances. The devil wants to keep the church poor and to rob us from the resources that we need to fulfil the Great Commission. We need to understand this fight and how finances work in God's kingdom so that we can help lead a financial release.

The poor

Luke 12:33 (NIV) Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys.

Jesus teaches us to sell our possessions and give to the poor. Jesus' teaching on money and material possessions is difficult for many people to accept today, especially for rich people who are used to living in excess and luxury.

We need to understand Jesus' heart behind this command to sell our possessions and give to the poor. If we don't understand God's heart behind this instruction then we will tend to see it as unrealistic and dismiss it as something that applied only to those disciples back then and a select group of people who are called to live like this today or we will reduce it to a rigid and legalistic rule.

1 John 3:16-18 (NIV) This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.

John explains what Jesus was talking about in Luke 12:33 and gives us insight into God's heart behind this command to sell our possessions and give to the poor.

Jesus taught us that the first and greatest commandment was to love God with everything and that the second commandment was to love our neighbour as ourselves. Jesus taught us that everything that has to do with the way we should live is based on these two commandments. John picks up on this and says that if we really love our

neighbour as we love ourselves then we will be as concerned for them as we are for ourselves. He explains that if we have this kind of selfless love in us then we will not live in excess and luxury while our neighbours are struggling with the basics of life. We will give and share what we have.

1 John 3:16-16 challenges our materialistic culture. It also blows a hole in the prosperity gospel that teaches us that God wants us to have bigger and better things so that we can live in greater comfort and excess while people are going to hell and dying of starvation.

If we are buying things that we don't need when there are people who have never heard the Gospel, people are going without the basics of life, women and children are being sold into sexual slavery and little children are being abandoned by their parents then we can't honestly say that we love God or our neighbours as we love ourselves.

Acts 2:44-47 (NIV) All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Acts 4:34-35 (NIV) There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or

houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.

When we read about the early church in Acts we see that they took Jesus' command to sell their possessions and give to the poor literally. We see that they gave the money to the church leaders to care for the poor and needy among them. They shared everything that they had and no one claimed that anything was their own.

When we look at the early Christians we see that it is radically different to the way that many Christians live today. Today many Christians are accumulating more and more possessions and living in comfort and luxury. Today many Western Christians are moving in the exact opposite direction to the early church!

Paul's directions about giving to the poor complement the other New Testament teachings on our responsibility to the poor. God's heart is towards the poor and broken and as a church we have a responsibility to provide for those within the global church who have legitimate financial needs and a heart to be a blessing to those who are suffering outside the church. When we take God's heart for equality within the body seriously and the command to love our neighbours as we love ourselves then we align ourselves with God's will and unlock His blessing over our lives and church.

Love is a much higher standard than tithing

When we consider Jesus and the apostle's teaching on giving we see that they teach a much higher standard than tithing. Under the Law God required the people to give 10% of their income to the temple but under the New Covenant God requires us to love God with all our finances and to love our neighbours as ourselves with our finances. This demands a selfless life. If we genuinely love our neighbours as we love ourselves then we will willingly deny ourselves the excess and comfort that our income may afford us so that we can give to the church to provide for our spiritual leaders and resource the church to reach the lost and care for the poor.

When we look at the church in the West today it is obvious that we don't operate according to New Covenant financial principles. God doesn't want us to become critical of the church but to take the truths of the New Covenant and apply them to our own lives. When we do this we will dethrone the god of money and unlock God's blessing and financial provision over our lives and church.

Review

Key point # 1 – the word tithe literally means ten percent and refers to giving ten percent of our increase to those who serve us as priests in spiritual things

Key point # 2 – a command in the Bible only directly applies to us as believers today if Jesus and the apostles taught us to do it in the New Testament Scripture

Key point # 3 – neither Jesus nor the apostles taught Christians to give ten percent to the church

Key point # 4 - Old Testament stories and teachings about tithing have prophetic significance

Key point # 5 – tithing teaches us about the importance of giving to the church to support those people who serve us in spiritual things

Key point # 6 – tithing teaches us about the importance of giving to the church to reach the lost and make disciples

Key point # 7 – tithing teaches us about the importance of giving to the church to care for the poor

Key point # 8 – if we genuinely love God and one another then we will live a selfless life where we avoid excess and self-indulgence and share everything we have