

# THE BIBLE STORYLINE and your part in it... (Part 4)

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## THE NEW COVENANT

### INTRODUCTION

Many sermons mix and confuse Old Covenant Law with New Covenant Grace, creating a conflicting belief system in many Christians. This has resulted in insecure Christians who are told that God loves them but is also liable to punish them because of their sins. Once a Christian understands his New Covenant relationship with God the Father through Jesus Christ, his security can never be taken away!

The covenants are the backbone of the Bible's storyline. The Bible isn't a random collection of laws, moral principles, and stories. It is the story of redemption and how God restores humanity to its divine calling. The story unfolds and advances through the covenants God made with his people.

Understanding the covenants is crucial for grasping the Bible's narrative. Without this understanding, the story won't fit together, and the Bible will remain a puzzle.

As we explore the various covenants and their interweaving to form the Bible's overarching narrative, it's crucial to view them through the lens of the Christ event – from the virgin birth to the outpouring of the Spirit. This interpretive framework, centred on Jesus, is the key to understanding all Scripture. While knowledge of history, culture, language, and geography is important, Jesus should always be our primary focus. His sinless life, substitutionary death, triumphant resurrection, ascension to the right hand of God the Father, and the subsequent outpouring of the Spirit form the core of our faith. All other elements of Scripture find their place in relation to these, which we refer to as the New Covenant or the Gospel.

The Gospel is meant to be straightforward and clear, even for children to understand. Our Bibles are tools to aid us, not to confuse us. By making the Gospel clear and central, we can simplify and clarify matters, making sound doctrine accessible to all.

### DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN THE COVENANTS

The Bible is an account of **seven covenants**. **Five** of these seven covenants are **covenants of grace**. These are unilateral actions of God – agreements or contracts established by Him through which unmerited favour is extended to all the covenant beneficiaries. The beneficiaries are qualified to receive favour thanks to the shed blood of a substitutionary sacrifice. The result is a **do-good-get-good, do-bad-get-good arrangement, all by grace and through faith**. The five covenants of grace are the Adamic, the Noahic, the Abrahamic, the Davidic and the Christ/New Covenants.

The first four of the five were shadows before the yet-to-be-revealed substance of the once-for-all New Covenant that was to come. Imagine the cross standing tall on the timeline of history and casting its shadow back through time. The first four grace covenants were its shadows before and functioned as promissory notes, borrowing off its power. They have been fully and finally fulfilled in Christ.

The other **two covenants** were entirely different categories of covenant. They were not unilateral actions of God but required the accompanying commitment of their beneficiaries.

They were **covenants of works: do-good-get-good or do-bad-get-bad arrangements**. The first was in Eden before the fall, and the second was the Sinai, Mosaic, Old Covenant, or Law.

Covenants of works are the antithesis of covenants of grace.

Although the Law is God-given and good, legislating His perfection, it is powerless to save. It accuses and disqualifies, revealing the need for salvation but offering no help. It blinds those whom it does not demolish. The law increasingly hardens the unbelieving heart that is veiled by prideful self-righteousness. The veneer deflecting guilt and condemnation thickens as the law is read, and the darkened heart grows even darker. Either way, the Law ministers only death, not life. To add insult to injury, the Law inflames sin. It empowers sin rather than preventing it. Sin consciousness is a vicious self-perpetuating treadmill, a destructive quicksand that sucks you in even more as you struggle to escape its grasp; it is the driving force of the law of sin and death.

Both covenants of works (Eden and Old) have also been rendered fully and finally obsolete in Christ. He has fulfilled their requirements on our behalf, once and for all, in death and life. That which was unable to save, rendered weak and useless by our weakness, has been rendered obsolete by Him and **replaced by a new and better covenant – the New Covenant in Christ Jesus**.

**Romans 8:1-11** *ESV* *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not 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 set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.*

Although Christians are no longer under the law, the law remains a vital tool in their toolbox. That is so because the law preserves.

**Galatians 3:23-26** *NLT* *Before the way of faith in Christ was available to us, we were placed under guard by the law. We were kept in protective custody, so to speak, until the way of faith was revealed. Let me put it another way. The law was our guardian until Christ came; it protected us until we could be made right with God through faith. **And now that the way of faith has come, we no longer need the law as our guardian. For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus.***

It preserved Israel from Moses to Christ, providing guardianship until the coming of Christ. Empires rose and fell, but the remnant of Israel remained steadfast through it all. This preservation is still evident in that nation two millennia later.

Law serves the searching sinner like it serves Israel of old. This terrible taskmaster is also a schoolmaster pointing the way to the Saviour. Wherever self-government breaks down, law preserves against the damage lawlessness brings. That is why we advocate for the rule of law in our nations, churches and families.

Much of the Bible – mid-Exodus through the Gospels – unfolds in the context of the Old Covenant. It is essential to understand that the Old Covenant has been rendered obsolete, and these imperatives do not apply to those who are in Christ. We have a superior covenant, with a superior High Priest, established through a better sacrifice and based on better promises. The Bible is an account of **seven covenants, but only one applies** (to us).

**Hebrews 8:1-13** ESV *Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, a minister in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man. For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices; thus it is necessary for this priest also to have something to offer. Now if he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all, since there are priests who offer gifts according to the law. They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, "See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain." But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second. For he finds fault with them when he says: "Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. For they did not continue in my covenant, and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: **I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.**" In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.*

Equally important to grasp is that even under the covenants of works, those saved were saved by grace alone and through faith alone. Adam and Eve deserved to die, but an animal died instead, donating its blood to cover their sin and its hide to cover their shame. Many an Israelite deserved to die under the Law, but the blood of bulls and goats covered over their sin, allowing them to live another day. In other words, the shadows of the cross are all over the Old Testament, in covenants of grace and covenants of works, for **salvation has only ever been by grace alone, through faith alone, because of Christ alone.**

Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. The preceding sacrifices all pointed to Him.

**John 1:29-34** ESV *The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.' I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel." And John bore witness: "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God."*

## **THINKING THROUGH SIN AND SALVATION**

Sin, in all its forms, is bad. It is always destructive to the one sinning and to others sinned against. God is not mocked, and we all reap what we sow. This is a cosmic (universal) law embedded in creation by the Creator, who is holy and just. Submission to the flesh, devil, or world's system always and only brings death.

**Galatians 6:7-8** ESV *Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.*

Sin is presented differently, per the metaphor of salvation. Under the law, sin is transgression. The unredeemed sinner is enslaved; the defeated sinner is defeated. In reconciliation, sin is separation; in true worship, sin is self-centeredness. We were created as image bearers, and sin always distorts the image we bear by missing the mark, crossing the line, being bent out of

shape, falling short, indebted, enslaved or self-absorbed. But no matter how sin presents, at its core is **unbelief**.

**Faith**, on the other hand, **trusts God's character, trusts God's Word, and trusts God's work**. Faith embraces His promises and lives by grace. This truth is the great doctrinal gift of the Reformation – by grace alone, through faith alone, because of Christ alone.

The glorious news of the Gospel is that Jesus fully and finally dealt with our sins through the atonement. The Scriptures are emphatic about this. **Jesus, the Lamb of God, came to save us from our sins**, and He did!

It is, therefore, a misbelief to say that "God loves the sinner but hates his sin". That thinking is the fruit of a confused Gospel and leaves Christians thinking that they are unclean, disqualified, unlovable, unacceptable sinners rather than righteous, qualified, beloved and accepted saints. The truth is that God loves the sinner and has dealt with sin and that He loves both sinner and saint unconditionally and does so immutably, unequivocally, and emphatically, having lovingly met every condition that perfect justice, righteousness, and holiness could ever require.

**The Gospel is, therefore, not sin-conscious but righteousness-conscious**, and so should we be. Since the cross, humanity is not punished for sin but by sin. **The great love of God has been expressed in the action of the atonement, through which God not only saved us from our sins but did so right where we were in our sins.** The Gospel is not a license to sin. On the contrary, it strips the believer of every excuse for sin without accusing or condemning at any point or undermining unconditional love and acceptance. Polluting and diluting the New Covenant with bits of law (pursuit of self-righteousness) reduces Christianity to dos and don'ts, right and wrong, whereas the real issues are life and death. Only grace can enable the Perfections of God to manifest in the clay jars of our humanity as its generosity lifts us beyond even the limited potential of sinless Adam and into the true sonship that is in the far superior Last Adam, Jesus Christ.

**Discipleship in the context of the New Covenant is a matter of perpetual repentance (mind-change), coming into agreement with God in all things.** It is a turning away from dead works – the deeds of independent unbelief and self-effort – and the obedience of faith in walking in the good works prepared in advance by the Lord. The nurture of faith-filled, Spirit-led self-governance results in a life established in grace.

## **SINS REMEMBERED NO MORE**

Jesus is the mediator of the New Covenant, which is not a continuation of the Old Covenant but a total replacement that requires a fundamental shift in thinking. One of the fundamental provisions of the New Covenant is that sins are no longer remembered.

**Hebrews 8:12** *For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.*

Most people think God's main job is keeping track of everyone's sins and wrongdoings. But that is Old Covenant thinking. The New Covenant reveals that sins have been dealt with forever, and now God says, "I will remember them no more." Hebrews 10 clearly contrasts how sins were dealt with in the Old Covenant and how they were finally eliminated in the New Covenant.

**Hebrews 10:1-14** *For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshipers, once purified, would have had no more consciousness of sins. But in those sacrifices, there is a reminder of sins every year. For **it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins**. Therefore, when He came into the world, He said: "Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me. In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure. Then I said, 'Behold, I have come—in the volume of the book it is written of Me—to do Your*

will, O God." Previously saying, "Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and offerings for sin You did not desire, nor had pleasure in them" (which are offered according to the law), then He said, "Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God." He takes away the first that He may establish the second. By that will we have been **sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all**. And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. For **by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified**.

Verse one of this passage sets the stage for what follows: "The law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things..." The Old Covenant was only a foreshadowing of the reality to come. The blood of the sacrificial animals never took away sins. Verse 4 says that it is impossible. But the blood of Jesus, by contrast, has taken away sins.

## **SINS PURGED, PUT AWAY, WASHED, AND TAKEN AWAY FOREVER BY CHRIST**

Here are a few scriptures that reveal that Jesus has eliminated sin from our relationship with the Father.

**Hebrews 1:3** ...when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.

**Hebrews 9:26** ... but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

**Revelation 1:5** ...Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood,

**John 1:29** The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

These verses reveal the remarkable fact that **Jesus, by himself** (without our help or participation), **purged** our sins, **put away** our sins, **washed us** from our sins, and **took away our sins**. God remembers our sins no more because they have been thoroughly dealt with, purged, taken away and put away by the all-sufficient death of Christ.

Under the Old Covenant, sins were never taken away or purged. Therefore, God had to deal with humanity according to their sins. There was no sacrifice sufficient to take away sins. It was "impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins". But now, because Jesus has "by himself purged our sins". God can say, "I remember them no more". We should agree with God and say, "I don't remember them either!"

## **A NEW NATURE**

**Hebrews 8:10** 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.

Some are concerned and even disturbed when confronted with scriptures about the Law being obsolete and no longer in force. It disturbs them when faced with scriptures that say that God is not imputing sins to humanity. It is disturbing because, as they see it, without the Ten Commandments and the threat of God's judgment hanging over their heads, Christians will turn into lawless reprobates.

We need to realise that God has not simply done away with sin and the Law and stopped there. **He has replaced the external law with an internal law. He has replaced laws designed to point out and restrain sin with a nature that has no desire to sin.** Hebrews 8:10 says it this way: "I will put my laws into their minds, and write them in their hearts..."

This is one of the provisions of the New Covenant. When a person receives Christ, God writes his laws in their mind and heart. A Christian does not need an external law because he now has an internal nature that needs no law to restrain it. Here is how Ezekiel expresses this same thought:

**Ezekiel 36:26-27** *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.*

God has placed a new spirit within believers. It is the spirit of Christ, His own Spirit. He says that he will take away the old and replace it with the new. Because of this new spiritual nature within, a Christian can walk in a way that is pleasing to the Lord.

## **A COMMON LIFE**

Jesus compared the Christian life to a vine and branches. A believer is as much a part of Christ as a branch is a part of a vine.

**John 15:5** *I am the vine; you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.*

**A branch shares the same life that is in the vine.** A branch has no independent life but is alive only because it is attached to the vine. The fruit produced on the branch appears only because of the life in the vine. The branch and the vine can't have a separate life; they share a life in common. Likewise, believers share the very life and nature of Christ. We are alive with his very life.

**Galatians 2:19-21** NLT *For when I tried to keep the law, it condemned me. So I died to the law—I stopped trying to meet all its requirements—so that I might live for God. My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not treat the grace of God as meaningless. For if keeping the law could make us right with God, then there was no need for Christ to die.*

**2 Corinthians 5:17** ESV *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.*

When a person receives Christ, he is not simply a forgiven sinner but a **new creation recreated by God in spiritual union with Christ**. The old nature is gone, replaced by a new nature.

**Ephesians 4:20-24** NLT *But that isn't what you learned about Christ. Since you have heard about Jesus and have learned the truth that comes from him, throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception. Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. Put on your new nature, created to be like God—truly righteous and holy.*

Paul is here encouraging believers to be renewed in their minds concerning who they really are. He says **the new man is "created in righteousness and true holiness"**. Righteousness and holiness are not attributes that arise over time through struggle, work, and self-sacrifice. They are the attributes of every born-again believer because they are the attributes of Christ, and the believer shares Christ's very nature and life.

## **A LAW-MENTALITY VS A GRACE-MENTALITY**

The New Covenant requires a fundamental shift in thinking. Christians cannot relate to God in the same way people under the Old Covenant related to God. **The difference can be seen by comparing a wage with a gift.**

**Romans 4:4-5** *Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness.*

**Romans 6:23** *For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

**Romans 11:6** *And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work.*

In these passages, Paul contrasts grace with work and gift with wage. The difference between a gift and a wage is a fundamental one. It can be defined this way: when you work, your employer responds with your wage. When a gift is given, the one receiving responds. It is a question of who moves first and who responds.

Under the Law, man was told, "If you do, you will live" (Leviticus 18:5). The law was based on wages. Man worked, and God responded. If man did what God required, then God responded with blessings. If man did not do what God required, God responded with consequences.

### **UNDER THE NEW COVENANT, GOD GIVES, AND MAN RESPONDS**

**John 3:16** *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*

When God gave Jesus, He was not responding to man; He moved first on His own initiative. That is what grace is: God moving on His own initiative. Under the New Covenant, eternal life is a gift. Salvation is a gift. Healing is a gift. Under the New Covenant, God has already moved, and now it is up to man to respond in faith and receive from God.

The difference between the New Covenant and the Old Covenant is fundamental and profound. God does not respond to us; we respond to him. Faith does not move God's hand; God's hand has already moved, and faith receives what God now offers as a gift. God does not respond to our prayers; in our prayers, we receive whatever we ask because it is already freely provided by God because of Jesus.

**Mark 11:24** *Therefore, I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them.*

The difference between Old Covenant thinking and New Covenant thinking centres around who responds to whom. An Old Covenant Law mentality seeks to motivate God to move on our behalf. A New Covenant mentality sees that God has already moved on our behalf, and we now respond to what He has already done by faith in Him.

**Does it matter how we think and relate to God? YES!! It is the difference between entering into and enjoying your inheritance in Christ or standing outside wishing things would change.**

Whenever we fall into Old Covenant thinking, we fall from grace; whenever we find ourselves trying to earn God's approval or blessings by Bible reading, church attendance, fasting, prayer, tithing, or any other good work, we have abandoned the grace economy and tried to relate to God through an antiquated, obsolete Law economy.

**Galatians 5:1-4** *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.*

The "yoke of bondage" Paul mentions in verse one is the Law. Look at the Law as a "wage mindset" that says, "I work, and God responds", or "I pray, and God responds", or "I fast and God responds", or "I pay my tithes, and God responds". All those statements are Law-statements. If

you are expecting a wage, then you can't receive grace. Paul says, "Don't be entangled again with a way of thinking that expects God to respond to you because of your work or law-keeping. If you do, Christ is not needed, and you have fallen from grace."

We must shift our thinking from an Old Covenant wage-based mindset to a New Covenant gift-based mindset. **Under the New Covenant, the only way to receive from God is to see that God offers you what you need and desire as a gift, and you receive from him.**

## **CONCLUSION**

Jesus has fulfilled the Old Covenant of Law and established a New Covenant of Grace. He is the mediator of that covenant. He stands between God and man and brings the two together because his death and resurrection have reconciled God and man. The New Covenant is not like the Old: it is not about you and your works but about Jesus and his works. Jesus himself has purged and taken away our sins. As a result, God no longer imputes sin on humanity. Believers stand before God as though sin never existed. As believers, we are so utterly cleansed from sin that God himself can reside inside us. As Jesus purged the temple in the gospels, so has he purged our temples (our bodies) at the cross. He has made us holy, blameless, and above reproach in the sight of God. **God has placed his own Spirit and Nature inside of us and now dwells, lives, and walks in us because of the work of Jesus Christ.**