

Newsletter September 2012

In Chapters 11.1 of Book II *Christian Living, Practice, and the Church*, we discuss various doctrines concerning the Church, including her invisible and visible attributes. In Chapter 11.3, we discuss the temporal church as a political adjunct of the Visible Church. These three aspects of the Church were also discussed in the May 2012 Newsletter, which may be reread as a prelude to the following discussion. It will be noted that that we skipped over Chapter 11.2 in the May newsletter. The following text is made up of edited excerpts taken from that chapter in which we discuss major differences between Covenantal and Dispensational systems of Scriptural interpretation and in doing so discover how those differences tend to confound a singular definition of the Church.

Covenantalists commonly use the word "church" for the old as well as the New Covenant body of believers while staunch dispensationalists make a sharp distinction between Israel and the Church. From the Greek, we find that the word for "church" and "congregation" or "assembly" is actually derived from the same word. That word is *ekklēsia*, but the English word "church" actually comes from another Greek word *kuriakos* from which came the transliterated word, "kurk," or "church." Those two Greek words when put together signify "a called out assembly belonging to God." Therefore, the believing congregation or assembly, who existed within the nation of Israel, could easily be associated with the New Covenant assembly or "church." It can be basically stated that covenantalists see Israel of the Old Testament as the Old Covenant Church that flowed through into the New Covenant Church — making no great distinction between the two as a people or belief system. Conversely, the dispensationalist sees the two as distinct and separate bodies of believers to which God administered quite differently.

Although certainly not identical in every aspect, we can easily view Israel under the Old Covenant as a type, a picture, or a representation of the New Covenant Church that was to come. The Apostle Peter referred to the New Covenant Church as a "holy nation" in his writings (1Pe. 2:9), a term that reinforces this concept of national Israel as a type. There is a believing elect (the Visible Church) within the temporal church today just as there was an elect remnant of true believers within the Old Testament nation of Israel. Israel had a singular priestly tribe, the Levites, whereas the Visible Church, located within the temporal church, constitutes a "royal priesthood" consisting of all its elect believers. (Compare the text of Ex.19:6 with 1Pe.2:9). However, Israel had national boundaries whereas the temporal church, when taken as a whole, transcends all national boundaries. The believing remnant of Israel was of ethnic origin being composed of Hebrews whereas the Visible Church has no ethnic distinction.

When Jesus offered the Kingdom of Heaven to Israel through his proclamation of kingdom law (cf. Matthew Chapter 5 thru 7), it was openly rejected by Israel as a nation. However, the believing remnant, which had always been present in that nation, did accept Jesus as their King and Messiah. That small believing remnant of Israel can be referred to as the "true Israel" (cf. Ro. 9:6), which can also be seen as the Old Covenant church or assembly. This distinction between the believing elect and Israel as a nation is very important, since it is only that small remnant that made up the New Covenant Church in the very beginning with very few or no Gentiles among their number. It is crucial to recognize that the nation of Israel did not become the Visible Church; only the believing remnant made the transition to the Visible Church as they accepted Jesus as their Messiah. Moreover, Israel as a political nation fully rejected Jesus, and for that reason it cannot be equated

directly with the temporal church, which outwardly professes to worship and follow Jesus (notwithstanding its many imperfections).

Most of the people of the nation of Israel that had rejected Christ continued on in a modified form of Judaism that denied their own Messiah, and that form we find today is vastly dissimilar from Christianity, which it strongly opposes. It is even different from old covenant Judaism since there is no more sacrificial system to follow and no Temple in Jerusalem in which to conduct those services. When the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed, Judaism having lost the means to observe the ceremonial law transitioned into a Pharisaic model of the synagogue, which had been prevalent during the Babylonian captivity, and eventually over time changed into the rabbinical Judaism of the Talmud that we find today.

The Old Covenant culminating in the blood of Christ is the completed foundation upon which the new rests. Nevertheless, Christianity is not reformed Judaism; it is based upon an entirely new covenant requiring a completely new order or dispensation. As Jesus said, one does not attempt to patch up a very old garment lest the worn cloth renders the garment useless due to its weakness and the patch falls away to no avail. Christianity is not a patch sewed onto old Judaism. Likewise, one does not put new wine in old wineskins lest when the new wine is mature it will burst the old skins thus destroying that which is new and mutilating the purpose of that which was old (cf. Mt.9:16,17; Mk.2:21,22; Lu.5:36,37).

Therefore, we find that the New Testament Covenant is unique when compared with the series of Old Testament covenants that had preceded it. Whereas a thread of continuity existed between the covenants of the Old Testament as each amplified the previous covenant from Abel on, we find a drastic disruption in that continuity with respect to the new and final covenant now that the promised Messiah had finally come to establish it in his own blood (cf. He.11:4; 12:24). As the author of Hebrews said, this new covenant is a “better covenant” based upon “better promises” (He.8:6). “In that he saith, a new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away” (He.8:13). Notice that he does not say that the old should be built upon, renovated, or improved, in some way, but that it will “vanish away.” His words were fulfilled in A.D. 70 as any practice of the ceremonial law by the Jews came to an abrupt end with the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple by the Roman army.

God chose Paul of Tarsus to take the universal Gospel to the Gentiles (cf. Ac.13:47). As time passed, more and more Gentiles came into the New Covenant Church such that the Visible Church today has only a very small number of “true Israel” believers within its congregation. Over time, they became indistinguishable from other believers inasmuch as a Hebrew Christian is a Christian in every sense — necessarily leaving behind all Jewish traditions in order to embrace Christ. Eventually, the temporal church re-defined itself as a strictly Gentile construct, particularly so as it became more formalized in the Roman church era (See Section 17 of Book III, *Pentecost to the Eternal Ages*).

In Paul’s day, only a small remnant of Israel was saved as they accepted Jesus, and the others were cast aside. However, Paul asks, “I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their [stumble] salvation is come to the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy” (Ro.11:11). Why would the Jew be jealous of the Gentile? Primarily because Christians enjoy the blessings of the long-awaited Messiah that the Jews cannot embrace: Israel is blinded for our sake! Although the Jew may be in a state of bitter envy, that same envy may also draw some of them to accept Christ. “Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much

more their fullness” (Ro.11:12)? Rather, as did Paul, we should see that “if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead” (Ro.11:15)?

All, both believing Jew and Gentile, are saved by God’s grace alone. “Even so, have these also now not believed, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy. For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all” (Ro.11:31,32). In as much then as even the godless Gentiles have received mercy because of the Jews unbelief, God can now have mercy on both Jew and Gentile without distinction. Salvation for the Jew in this age of grace is to be found in Jesus their Messiah who fulfilled the purpose of the Old Testament ceremonies thus opening the door to the New Covenant of grace. By that wondrous grace, God can now reconcile all to Himself. Therefore, it is not merely the Gentile that falls under the covenant of grace, but the Jew as well, if they will accept it.

Just as when a godless Gentile accepts Christ as their savior and they become a new creature in Christ Jesus such that they put their past behind them (2Co.5:17), so it is that when a rebellious Jew accepts Christ as his Messiah and savior he also becomes a new creature of the same order. The “middle wall of partition” no longer separates the Jew and Gentile inasmuch as they are made one in Christ Jesus (Ep.2:14). Therefore, the often-used term “Christian Jew” is an oxymoron inasmuch as it is impossible to continue in the traditions of rabbinical pharisaic Judaism, which denies Christ, and simultaneously profess to be a Christian without holding up Christ to ridicule (cf. He.6:4–6). A truly converted Jew cannot continue to worship in a Synagogue on Saturday and worship Jesus Christ on Sunday lest he symbolically crucify Jesus afresh each time he does so.

One would wonder then why so many professing Gentile believers in the church today attempt to continue in those things with which early Hebrew believers were admonished to be forever done away. The ceremonial law was but a symbolic precursor to the wondrous reality and liberty that we now have in Jesus Christ by God’s grace apart from faulty works of the law that inevitably condemned us. Nevertheless, human nature is such that old ways steeped in long-standing tradition are hard to put away when their purpose has ended (cf. Lu.5:39). We often find many professing Christians today mistakenly attempting to live in the old “wineskins” of Judaism while wearing the patched up rags of various traditions that are associated with it. That is particularly true regarding various ritual practices of Judaism that the temporal church has altered somewhat and then retained over the centuries in an attempt to spice up the profound simplicity of the Christian faith (cf. Jn.3:16). This ancient formalism is often utilized as a mystical means to entrap the unwary into accepting baseless Churchianity, in which the temporal church with its traditions and rules are worshiped rather than Jesus Christ. (See Book II, Section 13, *Churchianity*).

Therefore, let us move on from all the ancient traditions of Judaism that were a necessary restraint for those living under the law, and onward into the wondrous joy and liberty that we have now found in Jesus Christ under the new covenant of grace written in his blood. Let us not willingly place ourselves again under the bondage of useless works in an impossible attempt to earn or deserve our own salvation. Our Savior has forever broken and cast away our chains of sin on the cross that we may now freely live in Him eternally, apart from all forms of tradition and the law that once only served to condemn us in our sins. “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death” (Ro. 8:2) .

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