



Cultivate

A Christ-Centered Way of Life

... as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted, and built up in him and established in the faith... Colossians 2:6-7

UNDERSTANDING THE NEW COVENANT

By Marius Gradwell

Introduction

Many messages we hear are a weird combination of Old Covenant Law and New Covenant grace. The result has been insecure Christians who are told to believe that God loves them but also is 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 terms of the New Covenant are plainly laid out for us in the New Testament. Perhaps the clearest passage is found in Hebrews 8.

Hebrews 8:6-13 NKJV

But now He 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.

There are many important points to be made from this passage, but we will examine four primary truths of the New Covenant:

- | We have a Mediator, Jesus Christ (v.6)
- | The New Covenant is not like the Old Covenant (v.7, 9, 13)

- | Sins are remembered no more (v.12)
- | His nature has been written in our hearts (v.10)

1. Jesus Christ, Our Mediator

Hebrews 8:6 says of Jesus, "*he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises*". The New Covenant is not a covenant between you and God. It is a covenant between Jesus Christ and God with you as the beneficiary.

The dictionary defines a mediator as "a go-between, one who mediates between two parties in order to produce peace." Jesus mediates the New Covenant. He is our mediator. He stands between God and man and brings the two together.

The first thing we must see is that man must have a mediator between himself and God. No amount of effort, no amount of fasting and prayer, no amount of law-keeping or Bible study, no amount of self-denial or self-improvement can make man sufficiently holy to stand with confidence in the presence of a perfectly holy God.

The Old Covenant: Man, without a Mediator

Under the Old Testament Law there was no mediator between God and man. On the one hand was a holy God. On the other hand, was fallen humanity. Between them stood the Law and its requirements and obligations. Under the terms of the Law, if a man observed to do all that was written, God promised that blessings would come upon him (Deuteronomy 28:1). If a man failed to do all that was written, God promised curses would come upon him (Deuteronomy 28:15). If a man was less than perfectly holy (as all men are) and had any flaws at all (as all men do) he stood condemned under the Law. The Old Testament shows us repeatedly what happens when a holy God comes in contact with a less-than holy man.

2 Samuel 6:6-7

And when they came to Nachon's threshing floor, Uzzah put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled. Then the anger of the Lord was aroused against Uzzah, and God struck him there for his error; and he died there by the ark of God.

As the Ark of the Covenant was being transported from the house of Abinadab on a new cart, Uzzah did a seemingly innocent thing: he put his hand on the ark to steady it as it was shaken by the oxen. The Bible said that the anger of the Lord was aroused against Uzzah and God struck him. The Ark of the Covenant was, in those days, the place in which God manifested Himself, between the cherubim, over the mercy seat. When Uzzah put out his hand, an ordinary, flawed human being came in contact with a holy God and the result was death for the ordinary, flawed human being. Was Uzzah especially sinful and deserving of the anger and judgment of God above everyone else there that day? No, of course not! But Uzzah came in contact with a holy God with no mediator and his death was the result.

The book of Job shows us an especially clear picture of man without a mediator. Bible scholars say that Job is perhaps the oldest book in the Bible. There is no mention in the book of Job of Moses or the Law or of Abraham or any other Bible character. Job shows us what life is like with no mediator between God and man.

Job 9:30-33

If I wash myself with snow water, and cleanse my hands with soap, yet You will plunge me into the pit, and my own clothes will abhor me. "For He is not a man, as I am, that I may answer Him, and that we should go to court together. Nor is there any mediator between us, who may lay his hand on us both.

Job has assumed that God is the cause of all his troubles. In chapter nine Job despairs of ever understanding why God behaves the way he does. He says, (paraphrasing) "Even if I were perfectly upright and clean God would still throw me down into the ditch". When Job says, "For He is not a man, as I am, that I may answer Him, and that we should go to court together", he means that because God is not a man, and they are not equals, Job cannot simply go to court and resolve their differences there, as he would if he was in conflict with his neighbor. Then Job makes this important observation, "Nor is there any mediator between us, who may lay his hand on us both." For Job, a mediator would be one who could lay his hand upon God and upon man and bring the two parties together, resolving their differences.

A Mediator Makes Peace

Ephesians 2 gives us another picture of the situation between God and man without a mediator.

Ephesians 2:11-12

Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands— that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

Paul reminds his readers that before Christ they were Gentiles and were aliens and strangers from God and his covenants. The result was that we had "no hope" and were "without God in the world." In other words, without a mediator, human beings are hopeless and helpless; alienated and separated from God, with no possibility of approach. But in the next verses Paul tells us how Jesus has remedied that situation.

Ephesians 2:13-22

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

Paul says that, though we were once far from God, and alienated from him, we now have a mediator, one who stands between and places one hand on God and another hand on man, bringing the two together: "In Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ." Notice that it is Jesus and his shed blood that has brought us near to God. It is not our own holiness, or anything at all that we have done, but purely the work of our mediator, Jesus Christ, that has brought mankind near to God. Sometimes Christians mistakenly think that it is their lives, if sufficiently holy, that brings them near to God. On the contrary, it is purely the blood of Christ that has brought us near to God. He is our mediator; he has made peace between God and man, resolving all differences.

A Mediator Makes Reconciliation

It was at the cross that Jesus made reconciliation between God and man. It was at the cross that Jesus, as a man, took upon himself the sins of the world, and so removed the barriers and resolved the differences between God and man.

Colossians 1:20-22

And by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross. And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight:

Paul says that at the cross Jesus Christ reconciled heaven and earth. He fulfilled the part of a mediator. He came before God as a man and took upon himself all the judgment and righteous anger of God that was due for the sins of mankind. By his death on the cross Jesus reconciled God with His enemies (you and I). The result (in verse 22) is that we, because of his death, are now presented to God "holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight". The words translated "above reproach" in the Greek language literally means "without even a charge or accusation against".

Because Jesus is our mediator, he stands between God and man and has produced peace between us. He is our representative before God, and as believers, God sees us "in Christ", "holy, and blameless, and above reproach" before God. This is because Jesus is holy, and blameless, and above reproach and we, as believers, are in Him.

It is important to point out that Jesus reconciled us to God, not when we repented and got saved, but when we were sinners and enemies of God.

Romans 5:10

For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

Paul says that we were reconciled to God "when we were enemies". As far as God was concerned, He was reconciled with mankind when Jesus took the sins of mankind away at the cross. All of God's anger and wrath against sin was poured out on Jesus, and Isaiah 53:11 says that God saw the travail of Jesus and was satisfied. The invitation God offers to sinners is simply to accept the reconciliation that He has already made. We who have received the reconciliation offered by God to us through Jesus Christ stand before Him secure, holy, blameless, and above reproach in his sight because we stand, not in ourselves, but in our mediator, Jesus Christ.

Jesus Represents Us Before the Father

Hebrews 9:24

For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.

When the writer to the Hebrews says that Christ "appear in the presence of God for us," he means that Jesus, as our mediator, stands as our representative in God's very presence "for us", that is, "on our behalf". He who bore our sins in his own body on the cross, now stands before God, mediating between God and man.

Hebrews 7:25

Therefore, He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

When the writer to the Hebrews says that Jesus "always lives to make intercession" for us, it does not mean that he is standing before God praying continually. An intercessor is one who takes the place of another. When Jesus went to the cross, he was our intercessor. He took our place. He was our representative. Our sins were judged "in Him". We were judged "in Him". Likewise, as he stands now before God, he is our intercessor; He stands in our place and represents us before the Father. We stand before God "in Him", free from sin, free from condemnation, free from the fear of judgment, for our sins have already been judged in Christ, on the cross. It is no wonder, then, that in chapter four the writer to the Hebrews (Hebrews 4:15-16) reminds us of our great High Priest who "can sympathize with our weaknesses", and then invites us on that basis to "come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." Because Jesus is our mediator, we now have perfect access to the Father, and the invitation to come freely to Him to receive whatever we need!

2. The Old is not like the New

Hebrews 8:7-9

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..."

Most Christians think that the New Covenant is just Old Covenant with new characters. But the truth is that they are not alike at all. In fact, in Hebrews 8:9 (which is a quotation from Jeremiah 31), God says that the New Covenant is "not according" to the former covenant. That means that they are not alike; they are not made according to the same principles, provisions, or requirements. They are totally different.

The Old and the New do not Agree

One of the most shocking realities of the New Covenant is that it is so radically different from the Old Covenant that the two covenants are incompatible with one another, they do not agree.

Luke 5:36-39

Then He spoke a parable to them: "No one puts a piece from a new garment on an old one; otherwise the new makes a tear, and also the piece that was taken out of the new does not match the old. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine will burst the wineskins and be spilled, and the wineskins will be ruined. But new wine must be put into new wineskins, and both are preserved. And no one, having drunk old wine, immediately desires new; for he says, 'The old is better.'"

In this parable Jesus talks about patching up an old garment with a new piece of cloth. He says that it is impossible because the new piece will tear the old garment and furthermore the two pieces are not compatible with one another. Then he says that it is equally impossible to put new wine into old bottles because the new wine will burst the old bottles.

In this parable Jesus is illustrating why the New Covenant is not simply a "patch/piece" on the Old Covenant. Many Christians think that is exactly the case. Someone said, "I have to keep the Old Testament Law the best I can, and if I fail anywhere, that's where Jesus comes in and covers my failures." This kind of thinking is Old Testament thinking. In the Old Testament the blood of bulls and goats was shed to cover the errors and sins of the people. In this person's mind, the blood of Jesus is no different than the blood of an animal in the Old Testament. He has tried to patch an Old Covenant tear with a New Covenant patch.

The truth is that the New Covenant is a totally new arrangement between God and man. The New Covenant is not a renewal or confirmation of the Old; it is a total replacement.

Romans 10:4

For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

Paul tells us that in order to be "married to Christ" we must be "dead to the Law" (Romans 7:4).

Two Covenants with Contrary Messages

The Old Covenant and the New Covenant are opposites and proclaim opposite messages. Deuteronomy 28:1 & 5 lays out the message of the Law: if you observe to do all that is written, you will be blessed; if you do not observe to do all that is written, you are cursed. The message of the Law is all about you and your performance. However, in his letter to the Galatians Paul quotes from Deuteronomy 28 to point out that the gospel presents a contrary message.

Galatians 3:10-14

For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them." But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for "the just shall live by faith." Yet the law is not of faith, but "the man who does them shall live by them." Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"), that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

In verse 10 of this passage Paul says that "as many as are of the works of the law are under a curse". Another translation says, "everyone who trusts in keeping the law will be cursed". The reason is found in the last half of this verse: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them." In other words, if you do not keep everything required by the law perfectly, you are cursed. Paul assumes that we understand that "there is none righteous, no not one" and that no human being (apart from Christ) has ever kept all that the law requires perfectly. Therefore, under the Law, we are all cursed.

In Galatians 3:12 Paul says that the law is not of faith. That means that they are contrary principles. In other words, if you are trusting in Jesus for your salvation, you cannot also be trusting in yourself and your ability to keep the law. If you are trusting in your ability to keep the law, then you are not trusting in Christ. It is one or the other, not a combination of both.

In verse 13 Paul explains that, though we should rightfully be under God's curse because of our failure to keep his law, "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us." So, then the message of the law is about you and your performance. The message of the gospel is about Jesus and his performance. The message of the law is ALL ABOUT YOU. The message of the gospel is ALL ABOUT CHRIST.

The Weakness of the Law

Hebrews 7:18

...there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness.

Romans 8:3-4

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.

A covenant is simply a contract between two parties. A marriage is a good example of a covenant. In a marriage the man makes certain vows and promises to uphold certain things, and the woman makes similar vows and likewise promises to uphold her part of the agreement. In a marriage the man and the woman are equals entering into an agreement on equal terms. However, in a covenant between God and man, the two parties are not equal. One party is holy, perfect, and righteous. The other party (man) is fleshly, weak, and fallible. The weakness of the Old Covenant Law was that it placed requirements upon man which he was incapable of upholding. Paul says that the law was weak "through the flesh".

God's answer was to send "his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh". Jesus did two things on earth: first, he came as a man, and upheld man's part of the Old Covenant. Before Jesus there had never been a man able to uphold the human side of the covenant of Law. Jesus upheld and fulfilled all the righteous requirements of the Law.

Matthew 5:17

Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.

If you had a bank loan to pay for your car and I came to you and said, "I am on my way to the bank. I am going there to pay off your car loan," you would not assume that I was going into the bankers' office to tear up the loan papers. I did not come to destroy the loan but to pay it off. When I paid off the last penny that you owed, the financial obligation was not destroyed but fulfilled. That contractual obligation was fulfilled and therefore you no longer had any obligation under its terms.

This is exactly the sense in which Jesus said, "I have not come to destroy the Law but to fulfill it." Jesus came to fulfill all the contractual obligations of righteousness demanded by the Law of mankind. Jesus came as a man, representing mankind, and fulfilled all the obligations, duties, and burdens of the law. Because all the law is now fulfilled by Christ, that covenant has been concluded and a new one has been made.

The Law is Obsolete

Hebrews 8:13

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.

Obsolete means "no longer in use". The Old Covenant of Law is no longer in use by God in his relationship with man. Man cannot now come to God based on the Law because that covenant has been fulfilled, completed, and put away.

The writer to the Hebrews says that, by the very use of the word "new" in describing the New Covenant, God has made the first "old", or obsolete. It is the same in everyday life. If you go to the attorney's office and make a last will and testament, once it is ratified and made legal, it will be in force when you die. However, if you get mad at your relatives and decide to make a new will, then the first one becomes obsolete. The first will is no longer valid or binding because it has been superseded by a new will.

In the same way the Old Covenant has been superseded by a New (and better) Covenant. They are not both in force at the same time. The New has taken the place of the Old. (Hebrews 7:18)

Jesus, as our mediator and representative, completely fulfilled and completed all the obligations, duties, and burdens of the Old Covenant Law. He took on himself the curse of the Law on behalf of all those who broke the Law. He earned the blessings of the Law on behalf of those who could never enter into God's blessings by their own works. Having fulfilled both the blessings and curses of the Law, he folded it up and put it away. Then in his own blood he established a New Covenant between God and man.

Matthew 26:27-28

Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins."

The terms of the New Covenant are not the same as the Old Covenant. Where the Law made men workers, Grace makes men trusters. Where the Law laid heavy burdens on men's backs, Jesus says, "come to me with your heavy burdens and I will give you rest." Under the Law God's throne was a judgment seat. Under Grace God's throne is a mercy seat. The New Covenant brought in a new heavenly administration; a new day has dawned, and God now

relates to men, not through Ten Commandments, but through faith in the shed blood of Jesus Christ.

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, 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 curses.

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; God 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 in New Covenant thinking and Old Covenant thinking is fundamental and profound.

God does not respond to us; we respond to him. Faith does not move the hand of God; the hand of God has already moved, and faith simply receives what God now offers as a gift. God does not respond to our prayers; in our prayers we simply receive whatever we ask because it is already freely offered 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 is responding to who. It is an Old Covenant Law mentality that 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 make any difference how we think and relate to God? YES!! It is the difference between entering into and enjoying your inheritance in Christ or standing on the 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 (Galatians 4:21-25). 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 is saying, "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 superfluous, and you have fallen from grace."

We must cross over in our thinking from an Old Covenant wage-based mindset to a New Covenant gift-based mindset. The only way to receive from God under the New Covenant is to see that God offers you what you need and desire as a gift, and you simply receive from him.

You may ask, "When is God going to heal me? What if a sinner asked, 'When is God going to save me?'" It is not up to God to save the sinner; it is up to the sinner to receive salvation. God does not respond to us; He has already moved - He sent Jesus to the cross - it is now up to us to respond to God to receive the gift that He offers. It is not up to God to heal the sick - it is up to the sick to receive their healing. God has stretched forth his hands offering salvation, healing, peace of mind, financial well-being, and every other blessing of heaven as a gift. How does one receive? Jesus said, "When you pray, believe you receive, and you will have" (Mark 11:24). It is that simple. But what hinders us is Old Covenant Law and wage thinking that puts us in a frame of mind whereby we look for God to respond to us, rather than simply responding to Him in faith.

3. Sins Remembered No More

We have seen that Jesus is the mediator of the New Covenant. We have seen that the New Covenant is not a continuation of the Old Covenant. It is a total replacement, requiring a fundamental shift in thinking. Now we will examine one of the fundamental provisions of the New Covenant: sins are remembered no more.

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 (even Christians) think that God's main job is to keep track of everyone's sin and wrongdoing. 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 presents a clear contrast between the way sins were dealt with in the Old Covenant and the way they have been 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.

Here we see several contrasts between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant:

Old	New
remembrance of sins made (10:3)	sins are forgotten (10:2, 8:12)
same sacrifices over and over (10:11)	one sacrifice, once for all (10:10)
priests standing, work incomplete (10:11)	Jesus sat down because the work was finished (10:12)
worshippers never made perfect (10:1)	worshippers perfected forever (10:14)

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.

Because the Old Testament sacrifices were only shadows of the real sacrifice of Jesus, yet to come, they had to be offered over and over. By contrast, sacrifice of Jesus Christ was offered "once for all". By that one sacrifice Jesus forever dealt with and took away sin. This letter to the Hebrews was originally written to warn Hebrew Christians against abandoning Christ and returning to the temple and to animal sacrifice. In this same chapter the writer warns them that if they abandon the true sacrifice of Christ and attempt to return to the former system, that "there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins " (v.26). In other words, you must either trust in the death of Christ to deal with your sins or look forward to "judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries " (v. 27), because once the true sacrifice that took away sins was made, God no longer recognises the former system of animal sacrifice.

Hebrews 10:1 says that the Old Covenant never made the worshippers "perfect". By contrast, the death of Christ has sanctified and perfected us (v. 10, 14). Perfect in this context means free from sin. We have been purged and freed from sin by the death of Christ and should have no more conscience of sins. We must choose to replace a consciousness of our sins with a consciousness of the sacrifice that took away our sins. Therefore verse 22 says we must have our hearts "sprinkled from an evil (guilty) conscience". We sprinkle our hearts with the blood of Christ by reminding ourselves that by one sacrifice He has purged our sins and sanctified us forever.

Sins purged, put away, washed, and taken away forever by Christ

Here are just a few scriptures that reveal the fact that Jesus has, by himself, 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. And he did all of that before we ever were born or had ever committed a sin. Therefore, God can say, "This is the covenant I will make...their sins and iniquities I will

remember no more." God can honestly say he remembers our sins no more because they have been so 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 no choice but to deal with mankind according to their sins. There was no mediator between God and man. 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.

I know from experience that it disturbs some Christians when they are confronted with scriptures that talk about the Law being obsolete and no longer in force. It disturbs them when confronted with scriptures that say that God is not imputing sins to mankind. 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.

What people like this fail to realise is 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 mind, 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 in their heart. A Christian has no need of 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 within believers a new spirit. It is the spirit of Christ. It is His own Spirit. He says that he will take away the old and replace it with the new. It is because of this new spiritual nature within that 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 does not have its own independent life but is alive only because it is attached to the vine. In fact, the fruit produced on the branch appears only because of the life that is in the vine. It is impossible for the branch and the vine to have a separate life; they share a life in common.

Likewise, believers share the very life and nature of Christ. We are not imitators of Christ; we are alive with his very life. Paul said, "for me to live is Christ..." (Philippians 1:21) How could he dare to make such a statement? Because Paul recognised that who he used to be had ceased to be and his only life now was the life of Christ. Paul said, "I no longer live; Christ lives in me..." (Galatians 2:20). How could he make such a statement? Because Paul recognised that he was not just a follower of Christ, but one who lived with the very life of Christ. Paul wrote to the Colossians and said, "you are dead, and your life is hidden with Christ in God" (Colossians 1:3). How could he say that of them? Because Paul recognised that all believers share in the very same life that Christ himself has.

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

Ephesians 4:23-24

And be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.

Paul is here encouraging believers to be renewed in their minds concerning who they really are. When he writes "put on the new man" he is saying "put on the new man in your thinking". Paul says that the new man (the new spiritual nature) is "after God". This phrase literally means, "like God". The born-again spirit of a believer is "like God" because believers share the very life and nature of God. Secondly, Paul says that 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 the very nature and life of Christ.

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 has made reconciliation between God and man. The New Covenant is not like the Old: it is not about you and your works; it is about Jesus and his works. Jesus himself has purged and taken away our sins. As a result, God no longer is imputing sin to mankind. Believers stand before God as though sin never existed. As believers, we are so utterly cleansed from sin that God himself can take up residence inside of 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. And 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.