

Some Annotated Comments from C.H.Spurgeon

Addressing believers, C.H.Spurgeon, preaching on Ezekiel 36:27, declared:

The Holy Spirit continues to make a man practically new by the illumination he bestows. The man is blind - the Holy Spirit touches his eye with heavenly eye-salve and he begins to see. The sinner, with the Bible in his hand, though anxious to understand it in a measure, makes a sorry muddle of its doctrines and precepts apart from the instructions of that blessed commentator - the Holy Spirit! The Bible is full of the light of God, but the heart of man is very dark. To what purpose is the Scripture opened to the understanding if the eyes of the understanding are covered with a thick film? It is the Holy Spirit who irradiates the truth of God which he has revealed broadcast over every object that lies in our path. In reading the Bible to find comfort and direction, take care to lift up your hearts to him who wrote it! As an author best understands his own books, so will the Spirit, who inspired the volume, let you at once into the secret meaning of that which the pens of inspired men have recorded. Wait upon God for instruction - his instruction is sure to lead you to holiness, for he instructs you in the evil of sin! He lets you see its heinousness, its demerit, its ingratitude and infamy. He instructs you in the beauty of holiness and shows you the example of your Master. He teaches you the law of God and writes it upon the fleshly tablets of your heart. In this way, as an Illuminator as well as a Quickener, he makes us run in the ways of God's statutes!³³

There are two points I wish to enlarge upon. *First*, note how well Spurgeon has argued that it is not the Spirit or the word; it is both. I remind you, this is so necessary to stress these days, when, alas, some (not least, some new-covenant theologians) are elevating the Spirit above the Scriptures. Spurgeon here was striking the right balance between the two, the correct interplay between them. It is not either/or. It is not one above the other. It is both.³⁴

Secondly, while Spurgeon was right to say that the Spirit 'teaches you [that is, believers] the law of God and writes it upon the fleshly tablets of your heart', he should have made it clear that in the days of the new covenant the law written on

³³ Spurgeon sermon 3519.

³⁴ See my 'Words Have Power: How The Spirit/Scripture Balance Can Be Threatened'.

The New Covenant in Ezekiel: An Introduction

the heart is the law of Christ, not the law of Moses. The law of God for Israel was the law of Moses; the law of God for the believer is the law of Christ.³⁵

Spurgeon continued:

Whatever offices the Holy Spirit sustains to God's people, the result of all these offices will be to keep the man from going back to his old ways and to cause him to walk in God's statutes, and to keep God's judgments and do them!³⁶

Excellent! As Ezekiel so graphically set out, a great mark of the child of God in the new covenant is that he, by the inward work of the Spirit, is moved to love and obey the written law of God, the law of Christ as revealed in the Scriptures (Ezek. 11:20; 36:27). It is the one who loves Christ that keeps his commandments (Matt. 28:18-10; John 12:47 - 16:33). Jesus makes it an absolute *sine qua non* that the child of God obeys Christ's law. Let me quote the relevant scriptures in John 12:47 - 16:33. First, the one overall commandment:

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another (John 13:34).

This, of course, is an envelope in which are found all the other, countless imperatives of the new covenant; that is, Christ's law. For a start, we have the series of commandments within Christ's own discourse:

You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you... If you love me, you will keep my commandments... Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me... Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me... Abide in me... If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have

³⁵ See my *Believers; Christ*; 'Thoughts on James 4:11-12'; 'Thoughts on Isaiah 33:22'.

³⁶ Spurgeon sermon 3519.

The New Covenant in Ezekiel: An Introduction

kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you... These things I command you, so that you will love one another (John 13:13-15; 14:15,21,24; 15:4,10-14,17).

And now, within this last great discourse, replete as it is with Christ's commandments gathered under the umbrella of his one 'new commandment', we meet the far-reaching promise of the gift and ministry of the Spirit to enable the apostles to complete the task of setting out Christ's law for all his people for all time, to the end of the age:

These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you... When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me... I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away... I have said these things to you that... you may remember that I told them to you... I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you (John 14:25-26; 15:26; 16:1,4,12-15).

In light of this, it is no surprise to read the apostles insisting on the right to issue commands in the name of Christ. And what else can this be but 'the law of Christ'?

It could not be clearer: it is both the believer's duty and privilege that he is under obligation to obey Christ, but has the assurance of the inward work of the Spirit to move and empower him to that obedience. Not, it goes without saying, that his progressive sanctification will ever be perfect in this

The New Covenant in Ezekiel: An Introduction

life - hence the adjective 'progressive'. While Scripture teaches that the believer is justified and positionally sanctified in Christ, immediately perfect at the point of faith by virtue of his union with Christ, it makes it equally explicit that he must live this out in a life of progressive sanctification, growing in grace and Christ-likeness. This not an option; it is essential. However, he can do this only because he has died to the law and been united to Christ, being now under new ownership, with a new Lord, and married to a new husband - Christ. The believer's progressive sanctification comes through the power of the Spirit within, the one who gives him a new heart to love and obey, with determination, the law of Christ written throughout the Scriptures. I will not argue all this here, having done so at length in several works.³⁷

In his services, Spurgeon usually included an exposition of a passage of Scripture. It is not without significance that Spurgeon chose to expound John 14:21-31 to accompany this discourse on Ezekiel 36:27. Clearly, he saw - and was driving the point home to his hearers and readers - that John 12:47 - 16:33 is the new-covenant equivalent of Ezekiel 36:27. In so doing, he was hitting the bull's eye.

Spurgeon, in another discourse, this time on Ezekiel 36:26-27, asserted:

The indwelling Spirit leads every man in whom he reigns into obedience to the ways of God. I said that the work of grace is commenced from within, but the work does not end there. Before we have considered the whole of the covenant promise we shall find that change of life is guaranteed - a change apparent in works and actions: 'You shall keep my judgments and do them'. We do not begin with works, but we go on to works. Faith first receives the blessing and then produces holy work. We will not allow the effect to take the place of the cause, but we are equally sure that the effect follows after the cause.³⁸

³⁷ See, in particular, my *Believers; Liberty Not Licence; Fivefold; Positional; Christ*.

³⁸ Spurgeon sermon 1046.

The New Covenant in Ezekiel: An Introduction

I break in. First class! Progressive sanctification is essential.³⁹ Moreover, positional sanctification and justification always leads to - must lead to - progressive sanctification. Without it - progressive sanctification - a man's profession is vain (Heb. 12:14).⁴⁰ All this, I remind you, is being properly drawn from Ezekiel's prophecy!

Spurgeon continued:

Now, observe the promise of the text before us - 'I will cause you to walk in my statutes'. The soul that possesses the Spirit becomes active. It walks. It is not passive as one carried by main force - it works because the Spirit works in it 'to will and to do of his own good pleasure'. The man who has no active godliness may fear whether he has any grace at all. If I am only a receiver and have never brought forth fruit, I may fear that I am the ground that is 'hear unto cursing', for if I were a field that the Lord has blessed I should yield him a harvest. The Spirit causes us to walk, but yet we ourselves walk. He works in us to do, but the doing is actually our own. He does not repent, and he does not believe - he has nothing to repent of, and he has nothing to believe. Neither does the Spirit perform works for us - we are led to do these ourselves. We repent and we believe, and we do good works because he causes us to do so.⁴¹

Another first class set of observations. Progressive sanctification (as in so many other cases, including the sinner's repentance and faith at conversion) is synergistic and not monergistic.⁴² Let me explain. Some who hold to monergistic sanctification claim that the believer's progressive sanctification is the work of God through the Holy Spirit alone, while others claim it is the work of the believer alone. Those who argue for synergistic sanctification argue that the human will cooperates with the Spirit. As Spurgeon asserted,

³⁹ See my 'Progressive Sanctification: A Matter of Eternal Life or Death'.

⁴⁰ See my *Fivefold; Positional*.

⁴¹ Spurgeon sermon 1046.

⁴² See my 'I Will. You Must'; 'Fruit: Promise And Duty'; 'Holiness: Duty And Promise'.

The New Covenant in Ezekiel: An Introduction

progressive sanctification is synergistic. It most certainly is. See, for instance, John 15:1-8; Philippians 2:12-13. In other words, the believer is active in his progressive sanctification, not passive.⁴³ When talking about progressive sanctification, mantras such as 'Let go, and let God' and 'Take it by faith' have no place in our understanding and promulgation of the theology of the new covenant. They are unscriptural. Spurgeon saw this clearly, and did all he could to make sure his hearers saw it too.

Spurgeon went on:

A willing walk with God is a sweet result of the Holy Spirit's indwelling. The Holy Spirit leads us to holy habits, for, mark the phrase: 'I will cause you to walk in my ways'. The figure does not represent us as taking a run now and then, or as leaping a step or two and then lying down - but as walking on and on, steadily and continuously. Here excitement may produce momentary zeal and transient morality, but habitual holiness is the fruit of the Spirit. Note, next, the delight it implies. 'I will cause you to walk in my ways' - not as a man who toils, but as one who walks at ease. The believer finds it as sweet to walk in God's ways as Isaac felt it sweet to walk in the fields at eventide. We are not slaves sweating in sore bondage, but children serving with delight! His commandments are not grievous. His yoke is easy and his burden is light.

It implies, too, holy perseverance - the words have the meaning of continuing to follow after holiness. It is a small matter to begin, but to hold out to the end is the testing point. The text promises to us a complete obedience - 'I will cause you to walk in my statutes, and you shall keep my judgments'. A Christian man is obedient to God - he minds the first table. He is just to man - he does not despise the second table.⁴⁴ Statutes and judgments are equally dear to believers. We are not willing to give a lame, one-sided obedience to God. The Holy Spirit, when he makes us devout

⁴³ Some new-covenant theologians deny the existence of progressive sanctification. In this, they are hyper-Calvinistic.

⁴⁴ The law of Christ embraces all Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16-17), including all the Mosaic law, but as read through Christ and the apostles. See my *Believers*.

The New Covenant in Ezekiel: An Introduction

God-ward, makes us honest man-ward. And the Holy Spirit also works a holy care for righteousness in the soul. 'I will cause you to keep my judgments' - that is, to have an exactness of obedience - a precision, a deliberation, a willingness to find out God's will and a care to attend to it in every jot and tittle.

A man in whom dwells the Holy Spirit is careful not to yield himself to the traditions of men but to the commands of God. He pays no attention to the statutes of the great councils of the Church, or the ordinances of popes, or the laws of priests, or the mandates of bishops. He searches out the will of the Lord, only. The knee of his conscience bows with lowly reverence before the Lord, but nowhere else. He who has bound us to his altar has loosed all other bonds, so that the traditions of men and the ordinances of priests are contemptible to us. To God, and God alone, the renewed

heart renders obedience, but that obedience he does render!

Now, to what a delightful consummation has our text conducted us. It began with a renewed heart and it ends in a purified life. It commenced with taking away the stone and giving the flesh. Now it gives us the life of Christ written out in living characters in our daily practice. Glory be to God for this! O soul, if you are a partaker of it, you will join in this thanksgiving! And if you are not renewed as yet, I beseech you do not go about to find these good things anywhere but where they are. At the foot of the cross you will find a change of heart - where fell the drops of blood from Jesus' nailed hands and feet - there is salvation! The Spirit of God will give you a right spirit, and, consequently, a pure life. Look not to your own efforts! Rake not the dunghill of your

own heart! Look ⁴⁵ the Holy Spirit through the blood of the to precious Saviour.

Spot on, once again! Scripture is clear: the believer must set his mind and heart on Christ (Col. 3:1-11; Heb. 3:1; 12:1-3, and so on), not continually pore over his works. I am not saying (nor was Spurgeon saying) that progressive sanctification is not essential, that works do not count, that the believer never checks himself against Scripture. Nevertheless, for assurance and progressive sanctification, the believer must

⁴⁵ Spurgeon sermon 1046.

The New Covenant in Ezekiel: An Introduction

not look at himself, constantly raking over his works with the law of Moses in his hand (*à la* Calvin, the Puritans, covenant theologians), incessantly grieving that he is 'a wretched man',⁴⁶ but look to Christ, listening to the witness of the Spirit. This is what Scripture teaches. Most Reformed theologians today, I admit, do not; but Scripture does.⁴⁷

Let me remind you, yet again, that we are looking at Ezekiel's prophecy of the new covenant. All this is encompassed in his prophecy!

Spurgeon continued:

Now, to close. All this glorifies God doubly. It glorifies God that a man should walk in his ways. It glorifies God, yet more, that such obedience should be the result of divine power. The outward life honours God, but the inward, spiritual, gracious work which that life produces, honours him yet more abundantly. While this glorifies God doubly, it ennoble the soul supremely. To be made holy is to receive a patent of nobility. To be made holy by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, oh, what shall we say to this? Bring here the poorest peasant - let her, if you will, be an aged woman, wrinkled and haggard with labour and with years. Let her be ignorant of all learning, but, let me know that in her there is faith in Christ and that, consequently, the Holy Spirit dwells in her, and I will reverence her above all emperors and kings, for she is above them all!

What are these crowned ones but men who, perhaps, have waded through slaughter to a throne, while she has been uplifted by the righteousness of Jesus? Their dynasty is, after all, of mushroom growth - but she is of the blood royal of the skies! She has God within her! She has Christ waiting to receive her into his bliss! Heaven's inhabitants without her could not be perfected, nor God's purpose be fulfilled! Therefore is she noblest of the noble! Judge not after the sight of the eyes, but judge after the mind of God, and let saved sinners be precious in 'your sight'!

⁴⁶ Rom. 7:14-25 does not justify such an attitude. The passage is not the norm for the believer. It certainly does not represent the believer at his most spiritual. The passage is, in fact, unique in Scripture, and fulfils a unique purpose. See my *Psalm 119*.

⁴⁷ See my *Christ; Assurance*.

The New Covenant in Ezekiel: An Introduction

Honour, also, the Holy Spirit. Speak of him with lowly awe. Never take his name in vain. Take heed lest you blaspheme it. Reverently seek his company. Rejoice in his gifts. Love him. Quench him not. Strive not against him. Bow beneath his power, and may he dwell in you and make you fit to dwell with him forever, for his name's sake. Amen.⁴⁸

Spurgeon, preaching on Jeremiah 31:33, declared:

God writes upon the hearts of his people that which is already revealed; he inscribes there nothing novel and unrevealed, but his own will which he has already given us in the book of the law.⁴⁹

I break in. This needs clarification. While Christ was revealed in the Mosaic law, he was only there in shadow, but he is revealed in the new covenant in reality, in fulfilment.

Spurgeon, yet again, went on to make the very serious point which we have already seen, one which needs stressing in these days when some new-covenant theologians are elevating the inward work of the Spirit above the outward law of Christ written in Scripture:

[The Spirit] writes upon the heart by gracious operation that which he has already written in the Bible by gracious revelation. He writes, not philosophy, nor imagination, nor superstition, nor fanaticism, nor idle fancies. If any man says to me: 'God has written such and such a thing on my heart', I reply: 'Show it to me in the Book', for if it is not according to the other Scriptures it is not a scripture of God. A fancy as to a man's being a prophet, or a prince, or an angel, may be on a man's heart, but God did not write it there, for his own declaration is: 'I will write my law in their hearts', and he speaks not of anything beyond.⁵⁰

Clearly, this issue was raging in Spurgeon's day. As it is in ours. And Spurgeon, as so often, addressed it with sane and solid counsel.

⁴⁸ Spurgeon sermon 1046.

⁴⁹ Spurgeon sermon 1687.

⁵⁰ Spurgeon sermon 1687.

The New Covenant in Ezekiel: An Introduction

Finally, Spurgeon, preaching on Ezekiel 36:27, the promise of the Spirit in the believer's heart, declared:

Clearly this is a word of grace, for the law says nothing of this kind. Turn to the law of Moses, and see if there be any word spoken therein concerning the putting of the Spirit within men to cause them to walk in God's statutes. The law proclaims the statutes; but the gospel alone promises the Spirit by which the statutes will be obeyed. The law commands and makes us know what God requires of us; but the gospel goes further, and inclines us to obey the will of the Lord, and enables us practically to walk in his ways. Under the dominion of grace the Lord works in us to will and to do of his own good pleasure.

Yes, but as before, in the new covenant the law in question is the law of Christ.

And all this, let me say yet again, is set out in principle in Ezekiel. Naturally, in accordance with Christ's promise, it fell to the apostles to expound and enlarge upon its theology, the theology of the new covenant, and they did so at length and in great detail in the post-Pentecost Scriptures.

Closing Words

As my subtitle expresses it, this booklet is only an introduction to the new covenant in Ezekiel. I have deliberately refrained from expanding it by setting out my arguments, having done so at large in many earlier titles. But I hope this little work may encourage many to explore the matter further. Those who do, under the direction of the Spirit, with the Bible (not primarily, the Confession or systematic theology) in hand, will, I am sure, find their time well spent as God opens to them the precious truth of his word. Indeed, the more they come to appreciate their position in Christ in the new covenant, the more their lives will be transformed. In this way, this booklet, I hope, will do good to many, and thus promote the glory of God.

⁵¹ Spurgeon sermon 2200.