

The New vs the Old (2nd)

(Though the Protestants believe the New Testament is an extension of the Old, a study of the book of Hebrews clearly shows that otherwise. Scriptures speaks plainly of a “first” and “second” covenant. The Scriptures equally sets forth an “old” and “new” covenant, and that the “second” covenant is established on “better promises” and does not “vanish away” as the “old.”)

In our last podcast we began discussing the subject of the covenant regarding some differences between reformed theology and Baptist theology. We showed the distinction between the Old and New Testaments as found in the book of Hebrews. We saw that the New Testament economy is better than that of the Old and that the covenant of the New is superior to that of the Old. In short, there are two distinct covenants and the New Testament is not like that of the Old Testament. Hebrews 8:7-9 says, “For if that first *covenant* had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith 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 continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord.” Notice that the Scriptures declare here of a “first” and “second” covenant. Then it speaks of a “new” covenant that is “not according to the” “first covenant.” In other words, there are two distinct covenants. The reformers, however, maintain that this “second” covenant is somehow an extension of the “first” covenant.

John Calvin, when writing against “some madmen of the sect of the Anabaptists,” in Book II, Chapter X of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* gave the following:

“Let us guard pious minds against this pestilential error, while we at the same time remove all the difficulties which are wont to start up when mention is made of the difference between the Old and the New Testaments. By the way also, let us consider what resemblance and what difference there is between the covenant which the Lord made with the Israelites before the advent of Christ, and that which he has made with us, now that Christ is manifested.

“2. It is possible, indeed, to explain both in one word. The covenant made with all the fathers in so far differing from ours in reality and substance, that it is altogether one and the same: still the administration differs.” (Vol. 1, pp. 369-370 of mine.)

Calvin also alludes to this commenting on Hebrews 8:7, “Though the crime of violating the covenant was justly imputed to the people, who had through their own perfidy departed from God, yet the weakness of the covenant is also pointed out, because it was not written in their hearts. Then, to render it perfect and valid, God declares that it needed an amendment.”

Allow me to say at this point that Calvin does have many good things to say about the similarities and differences between the Old and the New Testaments. Calvin was a brilliant man and much can be gained from reading him, but it must be remembered that his views (as with all the reformers) concerning baptism, the Lord’s Supper, church doctrine, the relationship between the church and civil government, and many other things are influenced by his understanding of the covenant. As we can see in the book of Hebrews regarding the covenants, there are the “old” and “new,” the “first” and the “second.” Equally, Hebrews 8:6 says that Christ “is the mediator of a better covenant.” Note, a “better covenant” “established upon better promises.” The Scriptures did not say or indicate that they were one and the same or that the New is an extension of the Old.

Regarding Hebrews 8:6 and 7, note the following excerpts from the Baptist John Gill:

... the covenant of grace, as administered under the Gospel dispensation; which is not only better than the covenant of works, that being conditional, this absolute; that stood on the foot of works, this on the foot of grace, and is established in Christ; that being broken and made void, this continues; and not only better than the covenant of the Levitical priesthood, which was but a typical one, and is now ceased, but also than the covenant of grace, as administered under the legal dispensation;

... the covenant of grace unveiled in the Gospel dispensation, called the better testament, the better covenant, and the new covenant; in order to, introduce which, the first was removed, that this might succeed it; just as because there was no perfection by the Levitical priesthood, it became necessary that another priest should arise, of another order.”

Noticed that Gill asserted that the first covenant was “made void ... and is now ceased,” and that “the first was removed.” In other words, he did not indicate that the second covenant was an extension of the first. And when commenting on the new covenant in verse eight he says, “but it is so called in distinction from the former administration of it, which is waxen old, and vanished away; and with respect to the order of succession, it taking place upon the former being removed; and on account of the time of its more clear revelation and establishment being in the last days; and because of its mode of administration, which is different from the former, in a new way, and by the use of new ordinances; and because it is always new, its vigour and efficacy are perpetual; it will never be antiquated, or give place to another; and it provides for, and promises new things, a new heart, a new spirit, etc. to which may be added, that it is a famous, excellent covenant, there is none like it.” Notice that he stated that the former covenant waxed old and “vanished away,” and that the second “is different from the former, in a new way, and by the use of new ordinances.”

Allow me to pause here for just a moment and draw your attention to the phrase of Gill—“by the use of new ordinances.” This is important in that New Testament baptism is not an extension of Old Testament circumcision and the Lord’s Supper is not an extension of the Old Testament Passover. We will discuss these doctrines more in the future, but I wanted to introduce to the listener this foundational principle for consideration at this time.

Again, I say that much, much more could be said regarding this topic. Equally, many books have been written in defense of each position. It is not our purpose (at least not at this time) to provide an in-depth study of this subject, but to give broad guidelines of the differences. I trust this is helpful to the audience who may not have thought of these things before.