**BIBLE TALK Radio Broadcast**

**On KTTR (99.7 FM) Every Sunday at 8:30 a.m.**

**Rolla, Missouri**

**10/23/2022**

**The Importance of Distinguishing Between the Old and New Covenants**

The Bible makes reference to the Old Testament and the New Testament, the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. The Bible mentions the Law of Moses and the Law of Christ. What is the difference between the two? If we do not understand the distinction between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant, between the Law of Moses and the Law of Christ, then we will not be able to ascertain the will of God for our lives today. It is of utmost importance for us to know the difference between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant.

Because many people do not understand the difference between these two covenants you will hear them make statements like what Susan Schneider of Trinity Lutheran Church in Madison, Wisconsin, said to her congregants. She said, “Yes, it’s true that the Bible says some nasty things about homosexuality. It’s also true that the Bible has passages that prohibit men from cutting their hair, and that forbid anyone from wearing mixed fiber clothing, or planting two different kinds of seed in their fields, or eating shellfish. The Bible also commands slaves to obey their masters, parents to stone unruly children, and upholds as heroes of the faith men with multiple wives and concubines.” (From New York Times, “Unions That Divide: Churches Split Over Gay Marriage” by Laurie Goodstein, Published: May 13, 2012) In other words, since the Bible contains laws that we no longer abide by, we can then disregard what the Bible says about homosexuality. The question is, why do we no longer observe those laws that have to do with prohibiting men from cutting their hair, or wearing mixed fiber clothing, or requiring the stoning of unruly children? Why don’t we as Christians observe those laws today? We don’t observe these laws because they are part of a law, the Law of Moses, that was taken out of the way, nailed to the cross of Christ. A failure to understand the distinction between these laws leads people to make arguments like that of Susan Schneider.

Sometimes in my discussions with people concerning why I believe it is unscriptural to use mechanical instruments of music in worship to God, they will respond by saying, “But David used mechanical instruments of music in worship, and the Bible even says, ‘Praise Him with the lute and harp!...Praise Him with stringed instruments and flutes!’ (Psalm 150:3-4)” But the question is, under what Covenant and under what law did God enjoin the use of these instruments of music in worship to Him? Well, it was under the Old Covenant, the Law of Moses that these instructions were given. These instructions concerning mechanical instruments of music in worship are not given in the New Testament to the Lord’s church. A failure to understand the distinction between the two Covenants and the laws of these Covenants has caused a great deal of confusion in the religious world. But the Lord has made it clear in His word that there is a distinction between the Old and New Covenants, between the Law of Moses and the Law of Christ. And I want to look at what the Bible says about this distinction and show that the Old Covenant vanished away, the Law of that Covenant, which is the Law of Moses, was taken out of the way, nailed to the cross, and that now we are under a New Covenant, the Law of Christ.

First of all, even in the Old Testament, God promised that He would one day give a new covenant to His people, a covenant that would be different from the one given to the Israelites at Mount Sinai. Look with me in Jeremiah 31:31-32, *“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 that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD.”* Now, God did make a covenant with the children of Israel when He led them out of the land of Egypt. That was the covenant He made with them at Mt. Sinai. And God gave them the law of that covenant which included the Ten Commandments. It was the Law of Moses. Exodus 34:27-28 says, *“Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Write these words, for according to the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel.’ So he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he neither ate bread nor drank water. And He wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments.”* But according to Jeremiah in his prophecy there would come a time when God would make a new covenant with them, and this new covenant would not be according to the covenant He made with them at Mt. Sinai. It would be a different covenant. This prophecy of Jeremiah was fulfilled when Jesus came. When Jesus came and died on the cross He dedicated a New Covenant. His blood is called the blood of the New Covenant in Matthew 26:28. Jesus dedicated the New Covenant by the shedding of His blood. What happened to the covenant that God made with Israel at Mt. Sinai, the Ten Commandments? The Hebrew writer said that God has made that covenant old or obsolete. After quoting the prophecy of Jeremiah that God would make a “new covenant,” the Hebrew writer then says in 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.”* And that is what happened to that covenant and to the words of that covenant. They vanished away. And this is the reason we call that covenant the “old covenant.” It is because there is now a New Covenant that has been dedicated by the blood of Christ. The Old Covenant is no longer in force.

And the law of that old covenant, which is the Law of Moses, was taken out of the way when Jesus died on the cross. Look with me in Col. 2:14-17, *“having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it. So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.”* The “handwriting of requirements” in this passage is referring to the law of Moses given to the children of Israel. “Handwriting” indicates it was a written document. And it was a document of requirements or ordinances or decrees. This was true of the Law of Moses. Verse 16 lists some of the laws, such as laws regarding festivals, the new moon, and Sabbaths, which were part of the Law of Moses. And so I know Paul is talking about the Law of Moses in this passage when he says it was taken out of the way, nailed to the cross. This law is described here as being against us, contrary to us. It was against us because it could not save us from our sins. It could only bring guilt and condemnation. Unlike the ministration of grace, wherein Christ provides forgiveness and liberty through His sacrifice, the law of Moses was a “ministration of death,” as Paul says in 2 Cor. 3:7. And Paul says that Jesus has wiped it out. He says that Jesus has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Jesus’ death on the cross was the means by which the law of Moses was taken out of the way. In effect, Christ erased the law of Moses as far as its authority is concerned. The Law of Moses is no longer binding.

Since we are not under the Law of Moses that does not mean we are not under any law. As we mentioned earlier, Jesus, by His blood, dedicated a New Covenant, a New Testament. This New Testament came into effect after the death of Jesus. Hebrews 9:16-17, *“For where there is a testament, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is in force after men are dead, since it has no power at all while the testator lives.”*  Jesus is the testator of the New Testament. By means of His death this New Testament came into effect. We are now under a new law, the law of Christ, the New Testament. Hebrews 7:12 says there was a change of the law. In Hebrews chapter 7 the Hebrew writer is proving that there was a change in priesthood when Jesus came. You see, under the Law of Moses the Levitical priesthood was in force. But it was prophesied that the Christ who would come would be a priest after the order of Melchizedek (Psalm 110:4). Now that Jesus has come and is a priest after the order of Melchizedek, there has then been a change in the priesthood. Since there is a change in the priesthood, there is of necessity a change in the law. Look at Hebrews 7:11-12, *“Therefore, if perfection were through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need was there that another priest should rise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be called according to the order of Aaron? For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law.”* The Law of Moses is now no longer in force. We are under the law of Christ. Paul said in 1 Cor. 9:21 that he was not without law toward God, *“but under law toward Christ.”*  Christ has all authority in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18). Hebrews 1:1-2 says, *“God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son…”* And so God now speaks to us through His Son Jesus Christ. There is now the law of Christ. Galatians 6:2, *“Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”* It is called “the law of liberty” in James 2:12 – *“So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty.”* Now it is not called the “law of liberty” because we are liberated from law, but that the law provides liberty, liberty from the bondage of sin. It is the law of Christ. We are not under the Law of Moses, but we are under law, the law of Christ.

Therefore, we do not go to the Old Testament to find God’s will for Christians today. That is the reason we do not offer animal sacrifices, or burn incense in our worship to God. That is the reason we do not use mechanical instruments of music in our worship to God. Those practices were a part of a covenant that we are not under. Those practices were a part of a law that was taken out of the way, nailed to the cross.

And when people charge us of being inconsistent when we teach that homosexuality is sinful, but do not observe those laws that prohibit the eating of certain meats, or prohibit men from cutting their hair, and that forbid anyone from wearing mixed fiber clothing, etc. we say, they have failed to see the biblical distinction between the Law of Moses and the law of Christ. The law of Christ includes the prohibition to the practice of homosexuality (1 Cor. 6:9-10), but it does not prohibit the eating of certain meats, or the wearing of mixed fiber clothing. Those laws were a part of the Law of Moses that was taken out of the way. We can see then the importance of understanding the distinction between the Law of Christ and the Law of Moses, and understand that one is binding and the other is not.

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You may email it in: Our email address is sjchurch@sjchurchofchrist.com.com.

You may call it in: Our phone number is 573-265-8628. If no one is there to answer, just leave your question on the answering machine, or leave your name and telephone number and we will get back with you.

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