

“God So Loved The World” Bible Study

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16 (NIV)

Study #10: The Two Covenants

The Bible describes two opposite methods of salvation. The first is based on man’s promise and his works while the second is based on God’s promise and His works. One is salvation by works of the law while the other is salvation by grace alone. These two opposite methods of salvation are labeled in the Bible as the Old Covenant and the New Covenant.

The Old Covenant was first introduced to the Jews of the Exodus. This covenant was a contract, or an agreement, between God and the Jews. In this contract God spelled out His laws, especially the ten commandments, and the Jews agreed to keep all of them. If they failed to keep any of them it meant condemnation unto death. If they succeeded to obey all of them they would be justified unto life.

When God gave His laws to the Jews of the Exodus and entered into the Old Covenant, He knew they could not keep them because of their sinful condition. But because sin is a deceiver, the Jews were not fully aware of this problem and therefore entered into an agreement with God saying, “all that you say we will do and obey.” The Old Covenant was therefore given so that the Jews might come to the realization of their utter sinfulness and their need of a Saviour.

In this study we will examine the two Covenants and see why the Old Covenant can never save us. Our only hope of attaining eternal life is the New Covenant of salvation by grace alone.

1. How did the Jews respond when they heard the book of the covenant?

Exodus 24:7 _____

Note: The book of the covenant that was read to the people, the Jews of the Exodus, was the book of the law, the Torah, that God had given them at Mt. Sinai through Moses. When they agreed to keep these laws, they entered into what is known as the First or Old Covenant.

2. Why was it necessary for God to introduce the New Covenant?

Jeremiah 31:31, 32 _____

Note: Since the Fall, the only way man could be saved was through the plan of salvation promised by God in Christ. The reason God entered into the Old Covenant of salvation by works of the law was to convince man of his need of a Saviour.

3. What two things did God promise to do under the New Covenant?

Jeremiah 31:32-34 (i) _____

(ii) _____

Note: Putting His laws in our minds simply means He will create in us new desires that are in harmony with His laws (see Romans 7:22). Such desires are created in our minds as a result of a heartfelt appreciation for the forgiveness of sins and the hope of salvation, given to us in Christ. These desires are impressed on our minds through the indwelling Holy Spirit whom we have received through the new birth experience.

4. What phrase does Paul use for those who are under the Old Covenant?

Romans 3:19 _____

Note: To be “under the law” means to be ruled or dominated by its demands, which are, “obey and you will live, disobey and you will die.” According to Paul, all of humanity has failed to obey God’s law and, therefore, stand guilty before God.

5. What do we become conscious of through the law?

Romans 3:20 _____

Note: The law of God has no power to save sinful men. All it can do is make us conscious of the fact that we are sinners (see verse 23). This is an important step as a means to accepting God’s promise of salvation in Christ, which is the New Covenant, salvation by grace alone (see verse 24).

6. Why is our only hope of salvation through justification by faith?

Galatians 2:16 _____

7. According to Paul, what do Abraham’s two sons and their mothers represent?

Galatians 4:22-26 _____

Note: The two sons of Abraham and their mothers are excellent examples of the two covenants. Ishmael, Abraham’s son through the slave woman Hagar, represents the Old Covenant because he was born as a result of human effort. While Isaac, Abraham’s son through his wife Sarah, was born as a result of God’s promise and His direct intervention, seeing that Sarah had passed the age of child bearing (see Romans 4:18-21). Ishmael, therefore, represents salvation by works, the Old Covenant; while Isaac represents the New Covenant, salvation by grace, which is experienced through faith alone.

8. Which of Abraham’s two sons are Christians linked with, according to Paul?

Galatians 4:28 _____

Note: A true Christian is one who has realized that it is impossible to be saved by works of the law and has therefore accepted Christ as his or her Saviour. Such a person depends entirely on

God's grace offered in Jesus Christ for salvation. This is what it means to be under the New Covenant: righteousness is attained by faith in Christ rather than by the works of the law.

9. What must we give up if we are to experience salvation by grace alone?

Galatians 4:29-31 _____

Note: Salvation by works and salvation by grace are two opposite ways of salvation that cannot be reconciled. It has to be one or the other. When we by faith accept God's gift of salvation through His Son Jesus Christ, we cannot hold onto any of our own self-righteousness that we previously depended on for salvation. The gospel is not "I plus Christ" but "not I but Christ" (see Philippians 3:3-9; Galatians 2:20).

10. What happens when one tries to add law-keeping to salvation by grace?

Galatians 5:4 _____

Note: You cannot have it both ways. Realizing on the one hand that you are 100% sinful, you know that you cannot make any contribution towards your salvation. If, on the other hand, you turn around and try to add your own good works or law-keeping as a means or partial means of your salvation, you deny the gospel of salvation by grace alone. Our only hope of salvation is through righteousness by faith in Christ and nothing else (read verses 5 and 6).

11. Compared to the Old Covenant, why is the New Covenant superior?

Hebrews 8:6 _____

Note: The Old Covenant is based on our human promises, which are like ropes of sand because we are unable to keep them; the New Covenant is based on God's promises which never fail. That is why the New Covenant is a *better* covenant.

12. What reason does Paul give for the need of the New Covenant?

Hebrews 8:7 _____

13. Why was the first or Old Covenant faulty?

Hebrews 8:8, 9 _____

Note: The fault with the Old Covenant was not in the law that God gave the Jews but in the fact that they could not keep them, because of their sinful condition. This is the very purpose of the Old Covenant: to convince us that we are slaves to sin and in need of a Saviour, which the New Covenant supplies.

14. Does the New Covenant do away with the law?

Hebrews 8:10 _____

Note: Many Christians believe that the New Covenant did away with the law. But nowhere in Scripture is this taught (see Matthew 5:17-19). While the law cannot save sinners, it is still the standard for Christian living. Through the power of the indwelling Spirit, God's agape love replaces our sinful desires. This is what it means when God says, "I will put my laws in their minds." As a result, this love manifested in our lives becomes the fulfillment of the law (see Romans 13:8-10; Galatians 5:13, 14).

15. How does Paul contrast the law with himself as a sinner?

Romans 7:14 _____

Note: Before his conversion, Paul had not realized how sinful he was. He considered sin only as an act. But when the law opened his eyes to the fact that even sinful desire is sin, he realized that there was no way he could save himself by the works of the law. This is what turned this great apostle from the Old Covenant to the New. The same must be true of us. Only when the law has convinced us of how exceedingly sinful we are will we appreciate the good news of the gospel (see Romans 7:7-13).

16. When we know and believe in Jesus, what will the truth do for us?

John 8:31, 32 _____

Note: Jesus is the truth who sets us free from sin. He did not only save us sinners from the guilt and punishment of sin but also from its power and slavery. As John the Baptist introduced Him, Christ is "the lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world." Through the New Covenant promise we have a complete Saviour from sin.

17. When Jesus said "the truth will make you free," how did the Jews respond?

John 8:33 _____

18. How did Jesus reply to them?

John 8:34 _____

19. Who is the truth that sets us free?

John 8:36 _____

20. Why did the Jewish nation of Paul's day fail to obtain righteousness?

Romans 9:30-32 _____

Note: The Israelites tried to attain righteousness by the Old Covenant and failed. The Gentiles tried it by the New Covenant and they succeeded. The history of the Jews has been recorded for our benefit, that we might not repeat the same mistake.

21. What did Jesus link His blood with when He introduced the Lord's Supper?

Matthew 26:28 _____

Note: Unlike the Old Covenant, which is a contract or agreement between two parties, the New Covenant is a will or promise made by God on behalf of all humanity. Like any will it does not come into effect until death takes place. When Jesus died on the cross, God's promise became reality.

22. As a result of the cross of Christ, what does the New Covenant take away?

Romans 11:27 _____

23. What is another name for the New Covenant?

Hebrews 13:20-22 _____

Note: Just as the Old Covenant brings everlasting or eternal death to those who have failed to keep it, in the same way the New Covenant brings everlasting or eternal life to those who accept the gift of salvation in Christ. That is why Scripture sometimes refers to the New Covenant as the Everlasting or Eternal Covenant. This Everlasting Covenant is your only hope of salvation. Please do not refuse it.