

BIBLE COURSE LESSON 17

THE TRUTH ABOUT THE OLD AND NEW COVENANTS

Exactly what are the Old and New Covenants? And what do these covenants have to do with Spirit-begotten Christians today?

A common belief today is that the Ten Commandments did not exist until Moses at Mt. Sinai and that they lasted only until Jesus Christ's death. According to this teaching, Jesus came to establish a New Covenant containing only grace and promises-but certainly no law.

Surprising as it may seem to many professing Christians, God's Law did not begin when God made the covenant at Mt. Sinai with ancient Israel. The law of God had been in full force and effect since before Adam!

GOD'S LAW BEFORE ADAM

To fully understand the truth about the Old and New Covenants, we need to be reminded of a very basic fact: God's law of love existed long before Adam and Eve! We learned in a previous lesson that the way of life by which the two members of the God family have always lived is the way of love. God has always loved the Word and the Word has always loved God. The two have lived in perfect harmony from eternity (John 10:30). The love they have for each other – this was of life – is the attitude motivating all that the God family does.

The love of God is out-flowing toward others. God is concerned about the welfare of all His created beings. God's love is the attitude of cooperation, serving, helping. It is the way of "give" instead of "get".

The eternal God has ordained that we all learn to love His way of love. And how is God's love defined? "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous" (1 John 5:3). But to what commandments is the apostle John referring?

When the Word was the human Jesus Christ nearly 2,000 years ago, someone asked Him a similar question. Christ answered, "You shall do no murder, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother: and, You shall love thy neighbour as thyself" (Matt. 19:18-19). Jesus obviously was talking about the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments constitute a spiritual law that is inexorable and eternal-a law that is love and the fulfilment of which is love (Rom. 13:10).

The essence of God's spiritual law is love towards God and love towards fellowman (Matt. 22:36-40). The first four of the Ten Commandments teach us how to love God. And the last six teach us how to love our fellowman. Since God's very nature is love (I John 4:16), His law reflects His nature, describing His loving character. And since God's character will never change (Mal. 3:6; Heb. 13:8), His spiritual law will never change or be done away! (Ps. 111:7-8).

RESULTS OF SIN

Why don't we have universal peace, harmony and cooperation in the world today? Because of the transgression of God's law of love! Disobedience to the Ten Commandments has produced all the discord, unhappiness, suffering and death the world has experienced since Adam!

There was peace, harmony, joy and accomplishment on earth-until the anointed cherub Lucifer rebelled against the government of God and sinned (2 Peter 2:4). A third of the angels followed him in this rebellion. Paul said sin cannot be imputed if there is no law to transgress! (Rom. 5:13). Since Lucifer and the angels sinned, there had to be a law they transgressed! That law was God's law of love. The faithful angels have continued to live by God's commandments (Ps. 103:20-21).

Much later, God created the first man and woman. He instructed them in His way. God revealed that living by His law of love would result in happiness, joy and material abundance. Thus God taught the Ten Commandments to Adam and Eve. He also revealed the results of disobeying that law.

After instructing the first man and woman in His way, God required them to make a choice. Adam, in order to receive God's Holy Spirit (symbolized by the "tree of life") and restore the government of God to earth, would have to reject Satan's way of "get" and follow God's way of "give"-the way of His law of love. At that time the former Lucifer, now Satan the devil, was there in the garden of Eden to tempt the first humans.

Adam chose to reject God. He made this fateful decision for himself and the whole world, which has descended from him. God therefore drove our first parents out of the garden of Eden and shut mankind off from access to the Holy Spirit. From then on, God would reveal the true knowledge and understanding of His spiritual law and plan only to those of His choosing (John 6:44; 1 Peter 1:10-12). Man would not have free access to God's Holy Spirit and spiritual understanding again until Christ's return to put an end to Satan's reign (Rev. 20:1-3).

During the succeeding nearly six millennial "days" of Satan's rule, those relatively few whom God has called-His "first-fruits"-have indeed received His Holy Spirit and been begotten spiritually. They have the opportunity to enter into a special covenant relationship with God!

GOD'S COVENANTS WITH MAN

God has made a number of covenants with humans. There were the covenants with the patriarchs Noah and Abraham and with King David. God also made a covenant with the ancient nation of Israel, which was later called the "Old Covenant." But the most important covenant-the "New Covenant"-is yet to be made in the future! Exactly what are the Old and New Covenants? What does the Bible say was the fault of the Old and why is the New necessary? How can we enter into a New Covenant relationship with God and when will the New Covenant be made?

Before you begin this study, be sure to get your Bible so you can turn to and read all the verses given in answer to the questions in this lesson. You will also find it very profitable to copy these verses in a notebook. This will not only enable you to easily review your studies at any time in the future, it will also help you to remember these important scriptures.

Now let's begin another fascinating study!

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A COVENANT AND A TESTAMENT

One of the most important doctrines the living Christ has revealed to His Church is that of the Old and New Covenants. Unfortunately, many carelessly confuse the word "covenant" with "testament."

A testament is not a covenant, and a covenant is not a testament. Yet common religious usage seems to confuse them. It is important, at the outset, to understand the difference.

A testament is an act or written instrument by which a person bequeaths or wills certain of his possessions to another. It usually is not a payment or reward for work or obligation performed.

But a covenant, comments Webster, is "a mutual agreement, a legal undertaking to do or to refrain from some act, a document containing the terms of agreement." In biblical usage a covenant is a contract, or agreement, by which one party promises certain rewards or payments in return for certain stipulated performance by the other party.

Let's notice now the covenant God made with one of the patriarchs.

1 . What was the covenant God made with Abraham? Gen. 12:1-7; 15:18. What were the terms or conditions Abraham had to fulfil in order that he and his descendants might receive the promises of God's covenant with him? Gen. 12:1; 17:1-9.

Comment: Notice that Abraham was to depart the land of his birth for the territory of Canaan. Another requirement Abraham had to fulfil as his part of the covenant was to walk before God and be "perfect" or upright. If Abraham would comply, then God, in turn, bound Himself to fulfil the specific promises in His covenant with Abraham.

Notice that no death had to take place to make this covenant binding, as would have been necessary if this were a testament.

2. Did God establish the same covenant with Abraham's son Isaac? Gen. 17:19. To which of Isaac's sons was the covenant later passed? Gen. 27:27-30.

Comment: God's covenant with Abraham was confirmed to Isaac and to his son Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel. Years later, because of a great famine in the land of Canaan where Israel lived, the patriarch and his family moved to Goshen in Egypt. There, his descendants grew into a large nation. Through circumstances beyond their control, they eventually became enslaved to the Egyptians. 3. Did God look down upon the captive children of Israel and remember His covenant with their forefathers? Ex. 2:23-25.

Comment: Through a series of miracles God released the children of Israel from bondage and led them out of Egypt.

GOD'S COVENANT WITH ANCIENT ISRAEL

1. Where did God lead the Israelites on their way from Egypt to the Promised Land? Ex. 19:1-2.

2. Did God propose to make a covenant with the children of Israel? Verses 3-6. What would be the peoples' part of the agreement? Verse 5. What would be God's part of the agreement? Verses 5-6.

Comment: Through Moses, God proposed a covenant with the Israelites. In it God promised to make them a great nation if they would obey Him. Notice the very large IF in this covenant agreement.

3. Did the people agree to God's condition? Verse 8.

Comment: The people glibly agreed. "All that the Lord hath spoken we will do," they promised. They were so certain of their own ability to obey God that they really affirmed they would abide by the covenant.

4. Since the Israelites expressed their desire to enter into a covenant with God, what did He inform Moses He would do on the third day? Verse 11. How does the Bible describe this awesome event? Verses 16-20.

5. Exactly what did God tell the people they had to do to obey Him-to fulfil their part of the covenant with God? Ex. 20:1-17; Deut. 5:6-21.

Comment: On the third day, amid an awesome display of lightning, thunder and thick clouds swirling over the mountain, God's powerful voice thundered in their ears the basic law of His government-the great spiritual law defining, in principle, God's way of life. This covenant made at Mt. Sinai-called the "Old Covenant" today-imposed upon the people of Israel certain terms and conditions to be performed. The people were to keep the Ten Commandments. And the reward for obedience would be to make Israel a nation "above all people." Notice that the promises were purely national and material. There was no mention of spiritual blessings.

6. Did God, with His own finger, write these commandments on tables of stone? Deut. 5:22; 4:13.

7. After God had given the Ten Commandments to the Israelites, what did He instruct Moses to set before the people? Deut. 6:1,4-7.

Comment: God revealed to Moses additional laws-various applications of the Ten Commandments in the form of civil statutes and judgments (detailed in Exodus 20:22 through chapter 23). God instructed Moses to write these statutes and judgments in a book called the "Book of the Covenant" (Ex. 24:4, 7). These additional laws thus became a part of the covenant God made with Israel.

8. Did the Israelites formally agree before God that they would obey all the laws of His covenant? Ex. 24:3,7.

9. Was the covenant then ratified, or sealed-made binding with blood? Verses 6-8.

Comment: Once a covenant is signed, sealed or ratified-confirmed-it cannot be added to (Gal. 3:15). Anything appearing "beneath the signature", so to speak, is not legally any part of the covenant. Notice the words "the covenant, which the Lord hath made with you" (Ex. 24:8). It was then already made-completed! This is very important to note, as we will see later. If the Israelites would keep the law in the letter, God would keep His part of the covenant. He would fulfil all the material promises of this material covenant (Lev. 26:3-13; Deut. 28:1-14).

A MARRIAGE COVENANT

When the Word (John 1: 1 -3), who later became the human Jesus Christ (verse 14), made the first man and woman, He established the marriage relationship (Gen. 2:21-25). Centuries later, this same divine Personage entered into a "marriage" relationship with the nation of Israel! Few understand this important fact.

1 When and how did the One who later became Jesus Christ become Israel's husband? Jeremiah. 31:31-32; Ezek.

16:8. Also notice in Exodus 19:8 and 24:7 the "I do" agreement made by the "wife" – Israel-to her "Husband," Yahweh, the LORD-the One who became Christ.

Comment: The covenant made at Mt. Sinai was typical of a marriage contract between a man and woman. It was, symbolically speaking, a "marriage" agreement between the Word (Christ) and the nation of Israel. As the LORD who dealt with Old Testament Israel, Christ-the Husband-promised to materially provide for and protect the nation or congregation of Israel. The nation, as the wife, in turn agreed to remain faithful to Him-to refrain from any adulterous or whorish relations with the pagan gods of other nations (Ex. 34:12-17). Israel, as a nation, accepted the role of a wife, to obey her Husband.

2. What were the blessings Israel's Husband would provide His wife if she would live by the laws she agreed to keep? Review Leviticus 26:3-13 and Deuteronomy 28:1-14.

Comment: Recall that in Lesson 16 we covered the great material blessings the children of Israel would receive if they obeyed God's laws. We also saw what curses would result if they disobeyed (Lev. 26:14-39; Deut. 28:15-68).

BASED ON GOD'S ETERNAL LAW

God's eternal, spiritual law existed long before Adam and Eve were created. Recall that immediately after the creation of the first human beings, God taught them His commandments. But our first parents quickly disobeyed their Creator and cut themselves and their descendants off from access to God's Holy Spirit.

The biblical record shows that God's law was known by only a special few in ancient times. Those whom the Eternal individually called to perform a special work in His service-the patriarchs and prophets of old-knew and kept God's Ten Commandments, statutes and other laws. It is important that we fully understand this fact as we proceed in our study of the Old and New Covenants in the Bible.

1. As we learned in Lesson 16, the patriarch Abraham was called by God for a special purpose. God made a covenant with Abraham and revealed to him a special understanding of His eternal, spiritual law. Are we clearly told that Abraham obeyed God's commandments and laws? Gen. 26:5. What else did he obey? Same verse.

Comment: Abraham knew about and kept the Ten Commandments. He also kept God's statutes and laws. What were these statutes and laws? These statutes are expressions of the Great Lawmaker, usually commanding or forbidding certain matters of lesser significance than the ten great commandments. Thus the statutes and other laws of God actually magnify, or reveal specific applications of, the Ten Commandments. Along with the statutes, God also gave the patriarchs His judgments for the protection of everyone's legal rights. The judgments are binding decisions based on God's previously revealed law. These decisions are used to settle similar future disputes and to render a sentence or verdict.

2. What other examples clearly illustrate that God revealed to people of Israel laws which were already in force? Ex. 16:28; 18:16.

Comment: Israel could not refuse to obey laws that did not exist! Both these instances occurred before the nation reached Mt. Sinai-before the covenant was made through Moses.

Thus the Bible shows that the commandments, statutes and judgments-all based on the principles of love toward God and love toward man-were in force prior to the establishment of God's covenant with the nation Israel!

Then why did God have to reveal His law to the children of Israel when establishing His covenant with them? Simply because the people had strayed so far from the truth by the time of Moses that God had to reveal His laws and statutes anew to the Israelites. Ancient Israel had lost much, if not most, of the knowledge of God's ways while in Egyptian bondage. Since the Ten Commandments were already in force, the only thing new about them at Mt. Sinai was the written, codified form in which God presented them to the people after stating them with His own voice. The civil statutes and judgments were also revealed to Israel to show how the Ten Commandments should be applied to the physical nation. (Recall that these civil laws were written in the "Book of the Covenant" - Ex. 24:3-4, 7).

In general, the Ten Commandments apply to individual conduct, the statutes to national or church affairs, and the judgments to legal decisions rendered according to the principles of the Ten Commandments and the statutes.

Let's notice an example of how the statutes amplify the Ten Commandments.

3. What is the First Commandment? Ex. 20:3. What statute magnifies this command, or describes one aspect of how to keep it? Ex. 23:14.

Comment: The First Commandment says, "Thou shall have no other gods before me." The statutes regarding annual festivals magnify the First Commandment-explain how, in a positive way, to ensure that one worships the one true God: "Three times [in the year] thou shall keep a feast unto me..." (Ex. 23:14). Those who obey this statute keep in special contact with the Creator God and in the knowledge of His great plan for mankind. Many additional laws-such as Exodus 22:16, 19, for example-specify in greater detail how the Seventh Commandment, "Thou shall not commit adultery," is to be applied. So not only are the statutes based on the Ten Commandments, they spell out in detail how to keep God's spiritual law as codified in the Ten Commandments.

An important point to remember in what we have just studied is this: since God's Ten Commandments, statutes and judgments existed before the covenant was made with Israel, they were not abolished in A.D. 31 at the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. The cessation of the need of a covenant now made old could not render null and void what that first covenant did not bring into force! God's Commandments are eternal! (Psalm 111:7-8).

SACRIFICIAL LAWS ADDED LATER

When God brought Israel to Mt. Sinai, He gave the Ten Commandments to them. He allowed Moses to declare to Israel the statutes and judgments because the people didn't want to hear them personally delivered by God (Exodus chapters 20-24). These statutes and judgments, as we have just seen, magnify the Ten Commandments.

But when did the physical ceremonies and sacrifices begin? When did they cease to have force and effect? And how can we distinguish them from the statutes and laws of the Old Covenant?

1 . Notice that there is only one sacrifice mentioned in the Book of the Covenant. What is it? Ex. 23:18.

Comment: God called it "MY sacrifice." The Passover was instituted in Egypt (Ex. 12:1-14), weeks before Sinai. It was repeated in the covenant made at Sinai, but it was not instituted by that covenant! (Remember, a covenant is an agreement between two parties that may involve previously existing matters.)

2. When God spoke the terms of His covenant to the Israelites after they were brought out of Egypt, did He also give instructions for a sacrificial system of laws? Jeremiah. 7:22-23.

Comment: God did not originally command sacrifices to be offered. This explains why the temporary sacrifices-instituted after the first covenant was made and ratified at Sinai-were NOT perpetuated by different symbols in the New Testament Church. Only the Passover is continued-with the different New Testament SYMBOLS of unleavened bread and wine. Why is the Passover continued today? Because it began before the covenant was made at Sinai! The very fact that Jesus substituted unleavened bread and wine for the Passover lamb only, and not for the Levitical offerings, is a PROOF that the ceremonial offerings were temporary and not binding today. But the Passover, in its New Testament form, is binding! Now notice further proof of these facts.

3. When and why did God command the Israelites to perform physical ceremonies and sacrifices? Gal. 3:19.

Comment: Paul explains that the temporary rituals and sacrifices were afterward "added because of transgressions"-because God's spiritual law was being broken by the Israelites. When God made His covenant with ancient Israel, He wrote the Ten Commandments on two tables of stone. At that time He also had Moses write His civil statutes and judgments in a book. But this book did not, at first, contain the laws of burnt offerings, sacrifices and washings. God had these added later-within a year-as a separate part of the civil statutes because the Israelites had transgressed His laws. The keeping of these ritualistic laws required much laborious work, as can be seen by the first seven chapters of Leviticus. That is why it came to be known as the "works of the law" in New Testament times (Gal. 2:16).

4. How long was this additional law to last? Gal. 3:19. Notice the words "till the seed [Christ] should come." What was the purpose of this law of "works"? Verse 24; Heb. 10:1-12.

Comment: These physical laws foreshadowed the sacrifice of Christ and were a "reminder of sin" to teach the people the need of the Messiah-the true Passover Lamb (I Corinthians. 5:7) who would pay the penalty of human transgression for all mankind (Heb. 10), at which time these sacrificial laws would cease. Notice that these temporary ritualistic laws did not define sin. They were "reminders" of sin. God's spiritual laws define sin. The laws which explain what sin is are the ones we are to keep in the spirit as well as in the letter today. The principle of voluntary offering of sacrifices existed, of course, before Moses. From the beginning Christ volunteered to offer Himself to pay for the sins of mankind (Rev. 13:8). Cain and Abel made voluntary offerings to God (Gen. 4:3-4). But in the period from Moses to Christ, the practice of giving offerings was commanded, made ritualistic and regulated in great detail. Why?

Simply because, as we learned in Lesson 16, the children of Israel were a physical, carnal people without

the Holy Spirit. They could not offer themselves in spiritual obedience to God (Deut. 29:4), so God gave them ritualistic washings to perform and had them offer animals and other physical types as substitutes. They needed to be reminded of Jesus' then-future sacrifice and of the Holy Spirit, pictured by the various washings, which cleanses us from sin.

These laws had no further use when the Lamb of God died for the sins of the world, and when the Holy Spirit became available for those God would call. But note that the ritualistic laws did not cease because they were part of the Old Covenant. They were added after the covenant or marriage agreement between Christ and Israel was ratified (Exodus 24). These laws ceased to be necessary only because the true sacrifice for sin-Christ-had been offered'

ISRAEL BREAKS THE AGREEMENT

1 . Recall that the covenant made at Sinai was a marriage agreement between ancient Israel and the member of the God family who became Jesus Christ. Did Israel break that marriage contract? Jeremiah. 3:6-7; 11: 10.

Comment: Ancient Israel became two nations-the House of Israel in the north and the House of Judah in the south. The House of Israel was not faithful to her part of the marriage agreement. The people turned from worshipping God and followed the customs of the heathen, serving their false gods. They broke their part of the marriage covenant by committing spiritual "adultery."!

2. Since God is holy, He does not "co-exist" with sin. Was He therefore forced to separate from His "wife" ? Isaiah. 59:1-2. Did Christ "divorce" the House of Israel? Jeremiah. 3:8; Isaiah. 50:1.

Comment: The relationship became so bad that the Eternal was finally forced into divorcing His own people- the ten northern tribes of the House of Israel. It was the House of Israel's grievous sins that separated her from God. God punished the nation by sending the people out of Palestine into Assyrian captivity (2 Kings 17:6-19). God did not, however, send the House of Judah permanently away-He sent them into temporary captivity to Babylon for their sins (2 Chronicles 36:14-21). Many in Judah repented, after separation from God, and returned to the land under the terms of the covenant made at Mt. Sinai. But Judah became a self-righteous nation, as illustrated by the Pharisees of Jesus' day.

The Word, the One who became Jesus Christ, had drawn up terms for a new marriage agreement. Later, the human Jesus Christ, Judah's Husband, died, and the last remnant of the marriage established at Mt. Sinai ended. His death freed Him from His marriage contract. Christ, the LORD or Yahweh of the Old Testament era - God in the flesh-had died! Now He is free to enter into a new marriage agreement with a repentant, forgiven, sin-free "spiritual Israel"-the New Testament Church, which will be born of God when Christ returns!

We'll learn more about this shortly But first, let's understand exactly why a New Covenant is necessary.

A NEW MARRIAGE COVENANT PROPOSED

1 .Did the Word promise that He would make a NEW covenants new marriage agreement with Israel and Judah even before Old Covenant Judah had gone into captivity for disobeying His law? Jeremiah. 31:31.

2 In speaking of Christ's spiritual office of High Priest today, did Paul plainly state that Christ will establish a New Covenant with His people? Heb. 8:6-8.

3. Does the reason that a New Covenant must be made lie in the fact that there was a fault with the Old Covenant? Verse 7. Was the fault with the law? Ps. 19:7; Rom. 7:12.

4. Since the fault was not with the law, which is perfect, nor with God who was able to keep His part of the covenant, who was at fault? Heb. 8:8. Notice especially the first five and last ten words. What, specifically, was that fault? Deut. 5:29.

Comment: The weakness of the Old Covenant was not in the laws, but in the people with whom it was made. Why? It was not possible for them to be faithful to the righteous conditions God prescribed in His covenant because there was no promise of receiving the Holy Spirit, which would have enabled them to obey! Since Israel did not have a God-fearing nature within them, they did not keep their part of the marriage agreement. This condition will be changed when the New Covenant is made. God, of course, knew Israel would break the covenant He made with them. He wanted to teach mankind valuable lessons through Israel's examples of flagrant disobedience!

5. Under the terms of the New Covenant, what does God propose to do? Heb. 8:9-10; Jeremiah. 31:33. By what power are those laws written? 2 Corinthians. 3:3.

Comment: Under the first marriage covenant made at Sinai, God wrote the Ten Commandments on two tables of stone. The people could see the law with their eyes, but the law was not within their hearts and minds. The law was not a part of them. But under the terms of the New Covenant, Christ has promised that He will make a marriage agreement ONLY with those who have had the principles of His law indelibly written in their hearts and minds by the Holy Spirit! The New Covenant will not be made with fleshly, carnal Israelites who can still sin-it will correct that fault. This time it will be made with Spirit-born Israelites who have been forgiven their sins and who have God's laws written in their minds and hearts so they can't sin and break the covenant. The apostle John reveals that it is only at the resurrection when we are "born again" composed of spirit-that we won't be able to sin because we will have God's holy, righteous nature-His divine character-permanently implanted in us (I John 3:9; 2 Peter 1:4). The New Covenant will not be made with Gentiles, as many people falsely assume. The covenants and the promises pertain to Israel (Rom. 9:4). So what about the Gentiles? Will they be totally left out?

6. Do Gentiles have any hope of ever being partakers of the promises God made to Abraham, as well as the promises of the New Covenant? Eph. 2:11-13, 19; Gal. 3:29; Rom. 11: 11 -25.

Comment: In Lesson 16 we learned the details of how men and women of all races, nationalities and languages on earth, through Christ, can enter into the New Covenant relationship with Him-by becoming "spiritual Israelites"! Through Christ, who died to set in motion His irrevocable will or testament, it is

possible for people of all nations to become heirs "according to the promise" God made to Abraham and eventually to enter into the New Covenant marriage.

TERMS OF THE NEW COVENANT

A prevalent teaching within professing Christianity today claims that the fault with the Old Covenant was God's law-that as the Old had law, the New abolishes the Ten Commandments and is based wholly on PROMISES. Let's understand just how false this teaching really is!

1. Is the "LORD" (Christ) the Messenger of the New Covenant? Mal. 3:1, last part. What message did Christ preach during His ministry? Mark 1:14.

Comment: Jesus Christ was prophesied to come as the Messenger of the New Covenant. And the terms of the New Covenant are part of the Gospel of the Kingdom of God He preached! Just as Moses was the mediator of the Old Covenant made at Mt. Sinai, so Christ is the mediator of the New Covenant. And just as His marriage with Israel at Mt. Sinai set up the physical kingdom of Israel, so the marriage of the Church to Christ will set up the spiritual Kingdom of God. Thus the good news of that coming marriage actually is the Gospel Jesus preached-the coming Kingdom of God!

2. Are repentance and belief in the Gospel part of the terms of the New Covenant? Mark 1: 15. Did Christ later instruct His disciples to teach the terms of the New Covenant to all the world? Matt. 28:19-20.

Comment: The Gospel of the Kingdom of God contains the terms and conditions for entering into the New Covenant agreement with Jesus Christ. And Jesus' teachings to His disciples explain the terms of the New Covenant. But exactly what are the rest of the terms we must strive to abide by to enter into the marriage covenant with Christ?

3. Is obedience to the Ten Commandments a requirement of the New Covenant? Matt. 19:17-19.

Comment: Keeping God's spiritual law as defined in the Ten Commandments is one of the conditions of the New Covenant.

4. There are those who claim Jesus came to do away with all laws of God, including the statutes and judgments which were part of the terms of the first covenant. What does Christ say about this? Matt. 5:17-20.

Comment: In the days of Jesus' ministry, the writings we now call "the Old Testament" were not called that. Those writings were then called "the Law, and the Prophets, and the Writings' " So Jesus plainly said He did not come to destroy, or do away with the laws of God contained in those Scriptures, but to "fulfil"- OBEY-them! God's Church, says Paul, is built on the very FOUNDATION of the apostles and prophets, with Jesus Christ being the chief cornerstone (Eph. 2:20). Much of the doctrine and teaching of God's New Testament Church comes from the prophets whose writings are recorded in what we call Old Testament Scriptures!

5. Was Jesus prophesied to magnify the law? Isaiah. 42:21.

Comment: Just as the Old Covenant statutes and judgments magnified the Ten Commandments, so Christ amplified the Ten Commandments in the New Covenant to include obedience to them in their spiritual intent. Notice now the full intent of the law which Spirit-begotten, "spiritual Israelites" should be striving to obey today.

6. Did Christ show it was not enough to keep God's law in the letter, but that it must now be kept in its full spiritual intent as well? Matt. 5:21-22, 27-28.

Comment: Under the terms and conditions of the New Covenant, we are to keep God's Ten Commandments in their full spiritual intent. Not only are we to refrain from committing the physical acts of adultery and murder (the letter of the law), we are also to avoid committing them in our thoughts!

7. Did Christ also magnify, or spell out the spiritual intent of, certain statutes and judgments? Verses 38-42. What is the intended purpose of keeping the laws of God according to their spiritual intent? Verse 48. ("Be ye" is more correctly translated "Become ye".)

Comment: Remember that Jesus was giving instructions, not for a civil government such as ancient Israel's but for a spiritual CHURCH. In verses 38-42, Christ quoted from the Old Covenant—from Exodus 21:24. He revealed that a true Christian should be willing, if necessary, to suffer wrong done to him (see also I Peter 2:19-20; Rom. 13:1-7). Jesus was magnifying, for the New Testament Church, the APPLICATION of the civil laws given to ancient Israel—not abolishing them, but magnifying them and making them more honourable (Isaiah. 42:21).

He raised them from narrow, national laws—given to a carnal nation to be administered according to the strict letter—to a spiritual plane regulating, ultimately, the whole of human society. Six times Jesus said: "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time ... But I say unto you..." And then He proceeded to expound the spiritual principles underlying the civil laws given to ancient Israel.

8. As we learned earlier in this lesson, the sacrificial laws of ancient Israel pointed to the supreme sacrifice of Christ. Since His sacrifice has occurred, are there any "sacrifices" to be offered today? I Peter 2:5; Rom. 12:1.

Comment: To offer animal sacrifices as reminders of sins already paid for by Jesus, who gave His life in full payment for all sins that mankind would ever commit, became needless after He died in A.D. 31. However, today Christians are to offer spiritual sacrifices. It is a spiritual principle to offer one's self in living obedience—to "sacrifice" the self—to God.

PREPARATION OF THE PROSPECTIVE BRIDE

The Old Covenant was made with a people upon their promise to obey. They disobeyed. The New

Covenant shall be made only with a Spirit-born Church-a people who, during their mortal lives, will have been begotten by God's Spirit and already PROVED their willingness to obey God! The Old was made with sinning mortals. The New will be made with righteous immortals.

It is very important that we understand!

1 .Are we plainly told in the Scriptures that Spirit-begotten Christians are to "marry" Jesus Christ? Rom. 7:4. Is the Church now engaged, or betrothed, to Christ? 2 Corinthians. 11:2. But before Christ marries His Church, what does He intend to do with her? Read Ephesians 5:22-32, noticing especially verses 26-27.

Comment: The one and only Church of God is now the affianced Bride of Christ destined to marry Christ after being made spirit at the resurrection, which will occur at His coming. Jesus Christ and the Church will be bound together in marriage for ETERNITY by the terms and conditions of the New Covenant!

But before Christ marries the Church, He intends to "cleanse" it from sin by the power of the Holy Spirit (verse

26). Finally, at the resurrection, when born of the Spirit of God, she will be truly "spotless"-free from a sinning nature, now possessing the holy, sinless nature of the God family (11 Peter 1:4; 1 John 3:9), capable of perfect obedience to Christ for eternity. It is then that Christ will MARRY His perfectly obedient Church.

2. Why is the New Covenant called a "better covenant"? Heb. 8:6. Notice especially the last four words. Is the Holy Spirit one of the better promises? Verse 10; 2 Corinthians. 3:3.

Comment: Recall that the Old Covenant was based on the birthright promise God had made to Abraham. It was made with only one nation-Israel. It promised only temporary material, earthly blessings. The Old Covenant Israelites had no promise of receiving the Holy Spirit then, which could have begun to write God's laws in their hearts and minds. But we can, as God calls and begets us with His Holy spirit!

Even though the New Covenant has not yet been made-that is, in contract language, "signed, sealed and delivered"-those whom God calls are privileged to begin having God's law written in their hearts by the Holy Spirit. They can now have the life-begetting, sin-overcoming Spirit of God to open their minds to spiritual understanding and guide them in living God's way. God's Spirit can be within to empower them to overcome Satan and do the work of God's Church!

3. How does one receive the Holy Spirit? Acts 2:38. Does he or she then become a member of the body, or Church, of Christ? I Corinthians. 12:12-13. What are Spirit-begotten Christians to do once they become a part of God's Church-the future wife of Christ? 2 Peter 3:18; Rev. 21:7; Matt. 24:13.

Comment: Having God's Spirit dwelling within us is not enough. We must use it to begin growing in the knowledge and spiritual understanding of God's Word, increasing in the attributes of God's spiritual character (Gal. 5:22-23). We must also overcome the devil's attitudes, which he broadcasts to our minds

(Eph. 2:2). And we must endure until death or the return of Christ.

These are the prior requirements for entering into the New Covenant marriage relationship with Christ at the soon-coming resurrection. It is then Abraham's spiritual seed-heirs through Christ-will inherit all the other marvelous things promised in the New Covenant-eternal life, son-ship in the Kingdom of God, ruling over the nations with Christ, and the earth as an everlasting possession.

Those God has called to enter into the New Covenant marriage with Christ at His soon return are now preparing to become the wife of Christ. Others in past ages who were called, chosen and faithful to God's way until death have already been prepared by God. They are awaiting the resurrection from the dead when they, too, will enter into the New Covenant marriage with Christ along with those who will still be alive at Christ's coming.

After His return, Christ will continue to propose the New Covenant with humans who are born during the Millennium, as well as with those who are resurrected during the Great White Throne judgment period after the Millennium. It is during the latter period when all of ancient Israel will be given their opportunity to enter into the New Covenant with Christ.

4. How is the glorious marriage of Christ, the "Lamb", described in Revelation 19:6-9? Will Christ's Church be ready to marry Him at His return? Verse 7. Will she indeed be purified and sinless then? Verse 8. Is it clearly the resurrected saints who will marry Christ? Same verse.

Comment: At the time of the first resurrection, when Christ comes in supreme power and glory, He will marry a repentant, forgiven, sin-free "spiritual Israel"-the New Testament Church born into the Kingdom of God! The New Covenant will have been made with them. The time of this wedding is very soon indeed! As John wrote, "Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb" (Rev. 19:9). Will YOU be among them?