The Sabbath Question: The Nature of the Old Covenant
Selected Scriptures
90-223

We're discussing the issue of the seventh day. It starts in Genesis chapter 2 and verse 1 where it says, "After creation, the Lord rested on the seventh day," and we've already addressed that. You need only to remember that the seventh day in Genesis 2 applied only to God. By the way, I heard a well known preacher on television today say that the universe could be 15 billion years old. It's not what it says in Genesis. I continue to be amazed at that.

But God in six days created the universe as it exists now, and then He rested, and that really meant that He ceased to do His work, becauseGod was all done. And He delighted in what He had done, because He looked at it all, and it was very good, and it brought Him great delight.

There is no mention of a Sabbath day. The word Sabbath does not appear in Genesis 2, and there was no institution of a Sabbath day there. There was no command from the seventh day of God's rest attached to man's conduct at all. Man was living in sinless bliss at that point, Adam and Even in the garden, and there was nothing from which to rest. They were at perfect rest by virtue of the fact there was no sin in the world. And so it was just a seventh day in which God, finishing His creation, took great delight in it.

Then the next time we run into the seventh day, we're in the Book of Exodus, and we begin to see the people of God, Israel, observing the seventh day as a special day of rest, and in the 19thand 20thchapters of Exodus, we get more specific as we move toward the Ten Commandments. In the 20thchapter of Exodus, God makes it a law, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy."

That's the first time you have instituted what we call the Sabbath. It is a part of the Old Covenant. It was right in the middle of the Ten Commandments, but it was a feature of the Old Covenant. It was symbolic. It identified a very special day in which the Jews were to do no work, take a break from the normal routine. They were not to carry burdens here and there, as you would do in the normal course of work, weren't to cook anything, weren't to leave their homes. They were to use that day to contemplate God and to contemplate the Ten Commandments, and mostly to contemplate how they had violated them. So it was really a day of introspection, a day of penitence.

Now, the seventh day is also a wonderful day, and I think this is what you can take out of Genesis to remember that God created the universe in six days, and we pointed that up in our first message. So whenever the seventh day came along, two things could happen. The people would remember that this was the day that God rested, and they would remember therefore that God had created the entire universe in six days, and they would glorify God for such a majestic creation done in six days.

So it was a day in which you did honor God, but when the law came down, the Mosaic law, and

called upon them to keep the day holy and drew their attention to their violations of the commandments of God, it then became a day not only to praise God for the beauty of His creation, but also to take a good look at your life as measured against the law of God and do some hard examination and repent of your sins. So it became a day of penitence.

It was right at the heart of the Mosaic law, and if you observed that day, and if you did what the law required on that day, and you didn't do your normal work, and you didn't break the standards that God had established, but you took a look at your own life and measured against the law of God, you would honor God in so doing, and you would be keeping that day holy or set apart or separate from the rest of the days.

Now, when you come to the New Testament, the question is is the Sabbath law still in place, and that's where we are now. We've looked at Genesis. We've looked at the Mosaic law in the Old Testament. Now it's time to look at the New Testament and the New Covenant, and we want to ask the question at this point, "Are we under Sabbath obligation in the church?" There are some people who think we are.

There are today a group of people, somewhat prominently known in the Christian world, called Seventh Day Adventists. There are other groups beside them, but they seem to be the most notable of those who would call themselves Christians and would say they're living under New Covenant terms but are under Old Covenant Sabbath obligation. They are famous, obviously, for meeting on Saturday, and they believe that part and parcel of their obligation before God. Some of them would believe it's a saving obligation. They must keep that Sabbath day, and so they meet on Saturday.

There are other seventh day groups, Seventh Day Baptists and some other smaller groups who meet on the seventh day. And that poses the question of whether or not we in the New Covenant are under Sabbath obligation, and it's a very important question to answer, because many people ask it. And it's even important as a corollary question to ask the question, "Is the first day of the week the Lord's day on which we meet our Sabbath? And what connection does it have to the Sabbath? And is it obligatory to us in the same way that the old Sabbath was? And do the standards of the old Sabbath transition to the first day of the week and the Lord's day?" All those questions are important for us.

Now, there are three categories we have to move into, categories of biblical thought, to answer the question. In order to answer the question as to how the Sabbath connects to the church or how the Sabbath connects to the New Covenant, we have to look at three things. One, the character of the New Covenant. We have to understand what the New Covenant is. Number two, we have to look at Jesus' treatment of the Sabbath. That's very important.

What did Jesus do with the Sabbath? How did Jesus treat the Sabbath? He's right there in the transition between the old and the new, and He's establishing, of course, His kingdom, and He establishes the New Covenant by His blood. So it's important to look at the character of the New Covenant, and secondly to look at how Jesus treated the Sabbath, and thirdly, the New Testament teaching for the church on the Sabbath. Those three categories really do sum up the argument, and I would like to think I can get through them tonight, but I really can't. So we're gonna take our time, because when we're done with this, we're gonna have, I think, a very helpful series for us to understand on the seventh day.

Open your Bible, if you will, to Hebrews chapter 11. This is a good place to start. We could start a number of places, but I've come down on Hebrews chapter 11, because I think it gives us lunch, and then we're immediately going to go to another text and be there a while. Hebrews chapter 11 is the hall of fame, the Bible's hall of fame. It's actually the Old Testament hall of fame. Everybody mentioned in Hebrews 11 is an Old Testament saint. It starts out in verse 4 with Abel and then verse 5 with Enoch, and then verse 7 with Noah, and then verse 8 with Abraham, then verse 11 with Sarah, the long passage on Abraham and Sarah. You finally get to Isaac in verse 20 and then Jacob in verse 21 and Joseph in verse 22, and that takes us through Genesis.

And then we come into Exodus, looking at the Old Testament in terms of characters, and we come to Moses, who is, of course, the leading character in Exodus. Then you come further on into Old Testament history down to another individual introduced in verse 31, Rahab the harlot, and now we're out of Egypt, and we're headed into the Promised Land and running into Rahab. And then as the life of Israel in the Promised Land unfolds, we hear stories about Gideon, Barak, verse 32, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, the Prophets.

And it goes on to describe things that were characteristic of the lives of Old Testament saints. "They conquered kingdoms and performed acts of righteousness," verse 33, "and obtained promises and shut the mouths of lions," which would be Daniel, "and quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put armies to flight, and had women receive back their dead by resurrection.

"Others were tortured, not accepting their release in order that they might obtain a better resurrection. Others experienced mockings and scourgings and chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, sawn in half." Tradition tells us that's what happened to Isaiah, for example. "They were tempted, put to death with the sword, went about in sheep skins, goat skins, and they would wrap them in sheep skins and then thrown them to ravenous animals who would tear them apart, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated, wandering," verse 38, "in deserts, mountains, caves, holes in the ground."

That's quite a list, quite a description of Old Testament heroes. That's exactly what it is. These are all people who lived by faith, and all the way through it says "by faith," verse 3, verse 4, "by faith," verse 5, "by faith," 7, "by faith," 8, "by faith," 11, "by faith," 17, "by faith," 20, "by faith," 21, "by faith," 22, 23, 31, and so it goes. They're all illustrations of people who lived by faith, people who trusted God. They are examples of people who lived by faith. They were great heroes, wonderful people.

But then you come to verse 39, and it's really quite an amazing statement. "And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised." What? They didn't receive what was promised. No matter how loyal they were, no matter how obedient to the Old covenant, no matter how righteous, no matter how faithful to God, no matter how worthy, no matter how devout, there was something in their lives that was not there. It was missing. There was some promise of something to come that they didn't experience.

Verse 40 tells us, "because God had provided something." What's the next word? Better. Better than what? Better than the old economy. Better than the Old Covenant. Something better for us, so that apart from that better thing, which has been for us who have lived since the cross, they should not be

made perfect. That something better, friends, is the New Covenant. Now they had heard about this New Covenant. Jeremiah 31 had talked about the New Covenant. There are some other allusions to it in the Old Testament, but they had never experienced the New Covenant, because the New Covenant had not been ratified yet, because Jesus had not come and had not died, and therefore, the New Covenant had not yet occurred.

You say, "Well, how were they saved?" They were saved, because God applied the terms of the New Covenant to them, even though it had not yet happened. But the something better is the New Covenant. Salvation was based for them and for us and for everybody on what Jesus Christ would do to establish the New Covenant in His blood on the cross. They were not saved. Now mark this, please. They were not saved by keeping the Old Testament law. They couldn't do it. They were cursed by trying to keep the Old Testament law. They were saved by realizing they couldn't do that and pleading for God to be merciful. And God was merciful and did forgive them, because Jesus would bear their sins on the cross in the New Covenant.

It was the New Covenant. It was the death of Christ ratifying the New Covenant applied to them retroactively. They were not complete without the New Covenant, but they were not second-rate believers. Otherwise, how can you have a whole chapter full of them as models for faith? And if you come to chapter 12, we have this great crowd of witnesses surrounding us. And what do they witness to? They witness to the benefit of a life of faith. They witness to the power of a life of faith. They show us what it is to live by faith. And they're literally witnesses to us of the value of a life of faith. They're not second class. They're examples to us. But they were not made perfect by the Old Covenant. There's nothing in the Old Covenant that can save.

The Abrahamic Covenant given to Abraham promised blessing, but that blessing couldn't come unless people were saved. The Davidic Covenant promised, you will remember, to David that he would have a son, a greater son than Solomon, a son who would be the Messiah, whose throne would be forever and ever, who would establish a kingdom in Israel that would spread across the entire earth. That had promise of blessing, too. The Abrahamic Covenant was a covenant of blessing. The Davidic Covenant was a covenant of blessing. But in order to receive the benefits of either of those covenants, there had to be salvation, so that's why the Old Testament promised a New Covenant, a New Covenant that would change the heart, a New Covenant that would cleanse and wash and purge and purify.

And without that New Covenant, nobody was made perfect. Nobody was saved by anything in the Abrahamic Covenant. Nobody was saved by anything in the Davidic Covenant. Nobody was saved by anything in the Mosaic Covenant. All the Mosaic Covenant did was damn you and condemn you, because if you violated it one time, you were cursed. These people become models of faith, models of living a life of faith before God because they were saved by something that hadn't yet happened. They could never have been perfected apart from the better thing, and the better thing is the New Covenant, and it's only the New Covenant that saves.

To further understand this, let's go to 2 Corinthians, chapter 3. And I know that's somewhat review, but that's important to establish. As you come to 2 Corinthians, and this is a chapter which is like going in deep into the forest. You can stay in a long time. We'll try to resist that, but in 2 Corinthians chapter 3, you have a comparison being made by the Apostle Paul, and the comparison here being made is between the New Covenant in Christ and the Mosaic Covenant, and that is the comparison. The chapter starts out telling us in verse 3 that the Corinthian believers, and that can include all

believers, as well, "are like a letter of Christ cared for us, written not with ink, but with the spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone, but on the tablets of human hearts." And there is an allusion there to the distinctiveness between God's work in the heart and God's work in writing the law on stone.

And down in verse 6, he starts to really unfold the superiority of the better thing. Now remember, Hebrews 11:39 said there was something better, and what is better is the New Covenant. Verse 6, Paul says he's servant along with other apostles and believers, servants of a New Covenant, a New Covenant. It's not a covenant of the letter. That is, it's not something written. It's not something just written down with letters. Rather, it's of the spirit. It isn't something outside of us, then. It's something inside of us. It's not something God tries to put for us and demands that we obey. It's something that God does in us to change us, to bring us into obedience. It's not the letter. It's the spirit.

And making that brief distinction, he then launches into a discussion of the difference between the New Covenant and the Mosaic Covenant. The Mosaic Covenant here is the letter. It's a written covenant, written in tables of stone and then written down by Moses, as we remember from the Penatuch. But the first thing that makes the New Covenant superior is the New Covenant gives life. Look at verse 6. The letter does what? It kills. But the spirit, which is synonymous with the New Covenant, gives life.

Now the Old Testament law was, frankly, deadly. It was really deadly. The Mosaic law was a killer. It was a killer for a number of ways, in a number of ways. First of all, it was a joy killer. The law passed the sentence of sin on everybody. I mean, it passed the sentence of guilt on everybody. When you held your life up against the law of God, you were supposed to love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and your neighbor as yourself. You were supposed to keep the Ten Commandments all the time. You were supposed to keep the multiplied prescriptions that flow out of the Ten Commandments that are all through the Penatuch. You were supposed to keep those to the letter, and if you violated any of them, you basically were cursed, and you forfeited blessing and brought upon yourself cursing from God.

Now here you are. You're a sinner, and this is the law, and if you break this law, you're gonna be cursed, and you're gonna be punished by God. This is a very, very guilt-producing law, and it brings tremendous frustration, because you can't keep it. It produces grief. It produces this incessant ongoing failure without relief, a kind of living death. It kills your peace. It kills your contentment. It kills your joy. It kills your sense of fulfillment. And that is the yoke that Jesus talked about.

It's this terrible burden of trying to qualify with God for heaven by law-keeping, never being able to do that. You literally are under the massive weight of sadness and grief, the loss of peace, the loss of joy, an emptiness, an inability to achieve anything that could produce in your heart a sense of fulfillment. That's why Paul in Romans 7 says, "When I came in contact with the law of God, I died." He doesn't mean he physically died. He just meant he died inside. He just...he realized that there was just no way out. There was no hope. Just killed him in terms of his self-respect and his joy and his peace and his contentment.

Worse than that, there's a second way in which the law which is described here as the letter kills. It not only kills in a living death, it kills in a dying death, also. We remember Galatians 3, as well as Romans 3, says that if you break the law, you die, and that death means a spiritual death, being cut off from the life of God, and an eternal death, suffering forever, punishment in hell. You can't keep the law, so it's totally frustrating in this life and provides for you some sort of a living death. You can't

keep the law. Not only does it give you a living death here and now, but it gives you a living death then and there in the eternity to come. It is a killer every way you look at it.

And, of course, the Jews, struggling against this slashing of the law against them, eventually came to misunderstand the law and misinterpret the law and think that somehow they could outweigh the bad by the good, and so they came up with this idea that if you've got more good than you've got bad, you know, you can kind of qualify to get in. And they, according to Romans 9, they misunderstood the righteousness of God. They lowered God's standards, thought they were more righteous than they were, so they brought God down to the level that they thought maybe they could reach. Then they elevated themselves to that level and thought they were fine. They went about to establish their own righteousness after they dropped God's righteousness down to where it was attainable.

And so what they were then living with was a distortion of the true intention of the law, which was another way they were dead. They were killed at that point. So they were killed first of all emotionally by the relentless slaughter that the law brought against them and took away their peace and joy. They were emotionally killed in this life. They were eternally killed by the curse of God, which they would bear forever. And they were intellectually killed, because they had concocted a wrong idea of the law. They had distorted its intention, and therefore they were functioning without the right knowledge. So every way you could cut it, they had died, intellectually, emotionally and spiritually.

The law was a killer, but the Spirit or the New Covenant is life. All the Old Covenant did was expose sin. It just showed you you were a sinner. It just...God's standard was perfect. Nothing wrong with the law. It's "holy, just, and good," Paul says. But when you looked at your own life against the law, all it did was kill you. It just slaughtered you, and so here you are in that condition. What do you do?

Well, a true penitent under the death sentence of the law, intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually, cried out to God, and he was forgiven because of penitence and faith, God applying the death of Christ, which hadn't yet happened, the New Covenant back to them, even though it hadn't occurred. And it was the New Covenant that gave them life. Why? Because in Jesus on the cross, all of their sins were paid for, right? And that's why God no longer held them under the sentence of death. Jesus bore the sentence of death, paid for their sins. They were forgiven and given eternal life. Only the New Covenant gives life. The Old Covenant is a killer.

Secondly, Paul wants us to understand that the New Covenant not only gives life, but it provides righteousness. In verse 7, he calls the Old Covenant the ministry of death. It's a good name for it. It's the ministry of death in letters engraved on stones, and we know we're talking about the Decalogue, the Ten Commandments, which is the summary of the Mosaic or Sinaitic Covenant. He says, "this is a ministry of death. It did have some glory if it came with glory. Obviously, it had some glory, because, of course, it was the will of God. It does reflect God's righteousness. It is a glorious law. It is holy, just, and good."

There is nothing wrong with it at all in itself. All it does is show what's wrong with us. But if it came with glory, so much glory that the sons of Israel couldn't look intently at the face of Moses because of the Glory of his face, if it came with glory, at which glory, the glory of the God of the Old Testament, you remember, shining on the face of Moses in the book of Exodus? Then, if that's true of the old, how about the new?

Verse 8, "How shall the ministry of the spirit," which is a term designating the New Covenant, "fail to be even more with glory?" If the Old Covenant is a killer, and it has glory, but the New Covenant gives life, and it has glory, how much more glory? How much more glory? Verse 9 sums it up. "If the ministry of condemnation has glory, much more does the ministry of righteousness abound in glory." And that's the great truth that the New Covenant provides, righteousness, and I said that to you this morning.

What happens in the New Covenant is Jesus takes the penalty for your sin and gives you His righteous life. That's the righteousness provided in the New Covenant, and that's exactly what happened to the Old Testament saints. If they came penitent, they pleaded for God, believing in Him, trusting in God as their only hope, as their only Savior. "God save me. I can turn to no one. You must forgive me. You alone must forgive me. I cast myself on your mercy and your forgiveness." And they did that, and God would forgive them. Their sins were then borne on the cross by Christ, and the perfect righteous life of Christ was imputed to their account. And God looked at them as if they lived that perfectly righteous life which Christ himself had not yet lived in time, but which God was fully able to apply even before Christ came.

The wonder of wonders is that the New Covenant provides what the Old Covenant couldn't. The Old Covenant couldn't provide life, and it couldn't provide righteousness. All it could provide was death and condemnation. It is called in verse 9 "the ministry of condemnation." And further, I might add, the New Covenant is permanent. The New Covenant gives life, the New Covenant provides righteousness, and thirdly, the New Covenant is permanent...permanent.

You notice at the end of verse 7, it reminds us of that incident with Moses when he saw the glory of God, and he came down the mountain. You remember? In Exodus 33. And it says that "the face of Moses had glory, but it was fading glory...it was fading glory." That is also repeated in verse 10, "For indeed, what had glory in this case has no glory on account of the glory that surpasses it, for if that which fades away was with glory, much more that which remains is in glory." Just an interesting kind of analogy here.

Moses goes up. He sees God in Exodus 33. He sees the glory of God. He's tucked back in a rock. You can read that account. The glory of God passes by, and it gets on his face. It's the glory of God sort of radiates off his face. He goes down the mountain, and he's gonna talk to the people of Israel who are down there waiting for him to come back with the law of God. He comes down, and he has seen God, and here he is with a shining face, but he puts a veil over his face. You remember this story.

He puts a veil over his face, as referred to also in verse 13 here, because the glory is fading, and he doesn't want the people to see the glory fading. But it's a fading glory. That is to say it's a glory that passes away. The Mosaic economy had its moment in time. It had its place, but it was a fading glory. It was glory. It was glory, because it reflected the will of God, but it had no saving power. There was nothing in the law that could save you. The law gave you no help. The law gave you no space. It gave you no grace. It gave you no mercy. And so it couldn't save at all, and God has a saving purpose. Its purpose then came and was fulfilled, but its place was a fading place. It faded from Moses' face, which is sort of a metaphor of its impermanence.

It had glory, verse 10, "but it doesn't have glory to compare," end of verse 10, "with the glory that surpasses it." That's the glory of the New Covenant. "That which fades," verse 11, meaning the Old

Covenant, "did have its glory, but much more the New Covenant, which remains," and that's the permanence of it. It's permanent. You say, "What do you mean, permanent? It's always been in place." And this is amazing to think about.

Do you know that the New Covenant's validity and the New Covenant's application was made to anybody in all of redemptive history, all of human history who ever believed? They were all saved by the application of the New Covenant. Nobody was saved by terms of the Abrahamic Covenant, Davidic Covenant, priestly covenant, Noahic Covenant, Mosaic Covenant. The only one way people could be saved was on the basis of the New Covenant. That is all their sins had to be borne by Jesus on the cross, whether they lived before the cross or afterwards. It's the permanent one. Its glory is permanent. It's the only covenant that saves. In the sense that it's permanent, it's not only stretched throughout all of time, everybody being redeemed by the application of the New Covenant, but it's stretched into all eternity because, on the basis of the New Covenant, we have eternal life.

The Jews like to say, "Well, Christianity's the late deal. Christianity's the new thing. We've got the Old Covenant. We've got the original. You've got sort of a heretical, quasi-Jewish Gentile hybrid." No. The application of the New Covenant goes all the way back to the time of the fall. Anybody who was ever saved was saved by the application of the New Covenant, and all of heaven will be occupied forever by those to whom the New Covenant has been applied. So the New Covenant gives life, provides righteousness, and is permanent.

Fourthly, the New Covenant brings hope. Verse 12, "Having therefore such a hope, we use great boldness in our speech." What does he mean by that? Openness, frankness, courage. Now that wasn't like Moses. Moses put a veil on his face and kind of withdrew, concerned about the fading glory. And people under the Old Covenant, I mean, you could just imagine that there was a hopelessness. I mean, "I hope I'm gonna make it...I hope I'm gonna make it. You know I'm trying to overload the right side of the scale with good stuff and, you know, make sure the balance is on that side. I'm trying to keep the ceremonies. You know, I'm trying the best I can. I hope I'm gonna..."

Listen, any work system has that same mentality, doesn't it? That's why Roman Catholic people believe that you can't ever know until you die whether you made it or not, because you're always, always, always in a case of trying to get there and never in a time when you can boldly and confidently say, "By the virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ's righteousness applied to my life and His death for my sin, I'm saved." You can't say that, because you're still working to get there, and that was true in Judaism.

So there was no frankness. There was no boldness in our speech, but he says we have such a hope, we use bold speech. I can stand up and say, "I'm going to heaven, and I know it." Can't you? I don't sit around worrying and worrying and fretting and fuming that, "I'm not gonna make it. I'm somehow not gonna make it. I mean, I failed. I didn't do what I ought to have done, and I don't know if I'm gonna cut it. I don't know if I'm gonna make it. That isn't the way we think, is it? We know we're gonna be there, and it's not because we've earned our way. It's because Jesus bore our sins and applied His righteousness to us. That's the purpose of God.

And so we live with hope. The New Covenant brings hope. The Old Covenant provided no hope. There was no mercy in it. There was no grace in it. It didn't give you any help. It provided no enablement. It didn't give you a path to get there. It just crashed down and crushed you in a condition of hopelessness. The New Covenant gives life, provides righteousness, is permanent, brings hope.

Number five, the New Covenant's clear. It is clear. Verses 13 and 14, "The New Covenant's not like Moses, who used to put a veil over his face that the sons of Israel might not look intently at the end of what was fading away. But their minds were hardened, for until this very day, at the reading of the Old Covenant, the same veil remains unlifted because it's removed in Christ." He makes a little transition from the veil analogy on Moses, and he says, "Speaking of veils...speaking of veils, Israel has a veil over its face even today."

You know, they keep looking at the Old Covenant...looking at the Old Covenant...looking at the Old Covenant. You can look a long time, and you can look, and you can look, and you can look, but you just can't find salvation in it. And it's full of shadows. And it's full of pictures. And it's full of symbols. And it's full of types. And it's full of mysteries, all illustrated by a veil. It's veiled. It's obscure. And the reason it's obscure is because of their hardened minds. Verse 14, "It's because of their unbelief, really. They will not believe in God and come to Him on His terms and receive forgiveness of sin by grace alone, through faith alone, so that God can apply the New Covenant to them."

They will not come on God's terms, and so consequently, their minds are hardened, and the veil remains unlifted. And even to this day, verse 15 says, "Wherever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart." And it's true today. You go to the synagogue down the street. They'll get up and read the law of Moses and totally obscure the truth about God. Right? Totally obscure salvation. The veil of unbelief obscured the meaning of the Old Covenant and the significance of the New Covenant, as well. But the New Covenant is crystal clear. If you just come and look at the New Covenant, nothing is obscure. You don't have any shadows. You don't have any types. You don't have any mysteries. You don't have any pictures. You have Christ crucified and risen, and that's reality.

So the New Covenant is superior. It gives life, provides righteousness, is permanent, brings hope, and it's clear to those who believe it. And that leads us, of course, to the great central thought in this passage. The New Covenant is centered in Christ...the New Covenant is centered in Christ. Verse 14. Look at the end of the verse. "The veil is removed in Christ." You're never gonna get the message until you come to Christ. You're never gonna see clearly until you come to Christ. The Jewish people, bless their hearts, they continue to look at the law, and they never, ever understand it. And a veil is over their face, because their minds are hardened, and their hearts are filled with unbelief, and it's all obscure. As long they will not acknowledge that salvation can only come by the grace and mercy of God through the sacrifice of Christ, they're never gonna be able to understand it.

The veil comes off in Christ. And when the veil comes off, let me tell you something. You don't necessarily want to hold this over their head. You, as a Christian, have a far greater understanding of the meaning of the Old Testament than any unconverted Jew does. Do you understand it? You understand more about the realities of Old Testament teaching than they do. You might not know Hebrew and know all of the little nuances and historical backgrounds and all of that, but you understand the purpose for the Mosaic Covenant. You understand all of that, and you understand that the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant, the promises of the Davidic Covenant, are going to come to pass only on the terms of the New Covenant. They don't understand that. They would say, obviously, the Gentiles don't understand Jews. They would say that we aren't privy to the deep things of the Old Testament.

I remember talking to a rabbi one time in Hollywood, and we were discussing something about the text in the Hebrew Old Testament. And I was a little more up on my Hebrew then than I am now. And

so I had occasion to use it a few times, and he asked me about the Old Testament, and I began to unfold an understanding of the Old Testament. At one point he stopped, and he said, "How do you, a Gentile, know this?" I said, "Not only do I know that, I know a lot more, because it's all been interpreted to me by the greatest that ever lived, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, in the New Covenant, opened up all the meaning of the Old Covenant. You won't accept the New Covenant. The veil's over your eyes with regard to the Old Covenant." This is true. Now don't all of you go marching down to the synagogue down there.

But, you know, it's a sad thing. It's not something we gloat over. It's just reality. Both Old Covenant and New Covenant, listen, are intelligible to those in Christ. Neither Old Covenant or New Covenant are intelligible to those outside Christ, because only by faith in Christ is the veil removed. Well, Christ is central to the New Covenant. You come to Christ, you receive Christ, and you understand everything.

Let's go down to verse 16. Whenever a man turns to the Lord, what happens? The veil is what? Taken away. You cannot understand the Old Covenant. You can't even understand the Old Testament if you don't believe the New. Go down to verse 18. This is quite amazing. Some of you are sitting there saying, "Well, I'm a new Christian. I don't know if I could be included in that." Yeah, you can. The first three words of verse 18, "But we all with...what kind of face?...unveiled." Hey, we all have an unveiled face. Now we don't all know everything about the Old Testament until we get into it a little bit, but we know the purpose of the law, to bring us to the point of our sin and penitence and to embrace Christ.

We have the veil off. Here we are, Christians, with all of us having come to Christ. The veil is gone, and we're looking in a glass, in this case probably a clear metal polished mirror with an unobstructed clear view. I mean, we're looking right at it, and we're seeing the glory of the Lord. We're seeing the glory of Christ, and when the veil comes off, and you see the glory of Christ, what happens? You become transformed into the same image, from one level of glory to the next, to the next, and that's being done by the Lord, the Holy Spirit. What a tremendous verse. I wrote a book on that one verse once, a little book on my favorite verse. That was the one I chose.

Here we are as Christians, and we understand the Old Covenant. We understand the New Covenant. The veil is off, and we're looking clearly, crystal clearly, into the face of Jesus Christ. And Christ is the revealer. And as we do that, the Holy Spirit becomes the transformer and then moves us from one level of glory to the next level of glory to the next. That's what that indicates in its almost classic Hebrew language, from glory to glory to glory to glory. We're being transformed by the Holy Spirit into the very image of Jesus Christ.

So this text is very important for us, because if you're going to understand the New Covenant, you have to understand that it is very different from the Old Covenant. It is the saving covenant. The Mosaic Covenant, Sinaitic Covenant, or as I've called it, the Old Covenant, is not a saving covenant. There is nothing in it that can save. The only thing that takes the veil away is Christ. Christ is the New Covenant, and coming to faith in Christ is coming into New Covenant relationship with God.

Now let me just summarize what we've learned, okay? The Old Covenant was written with ink. The New Covenant is written with the spirit. The Old Covenant was written on tablets of stone. The New Covenant is written on the heart. The Old Covenant was inadequate. The New Covenant has made us adequate servants. The Old Covenant is of the letter. The New Covenant is of the Spirit. The Old

Covenant kills. The New Covenant gives life. The Old Covenant is a ministry of death. The New Covenant is a ministry of the Spirit. The Old Covenant came with glory. The New Covenant abounds in glory.

The Old Covenant is a ministry of condemnation. The New Covenant is a ministry of righteousness. The Old Covenant, glory fades. The New Covenant, glory is permanent. The Old Covenant puts a veil over the face, unlifted. The New Covenant removes the veil, and the vision of Christ is crystal clear. The Old Covenant is bondage. The New Covenant is liberty. The Old Covenant is unable to change the heart. The New Covenant transforms us from one level of glory to the next by the power of the Spirit shaping us into the very image of Christ.

Now what is Paul saying here? He's essentially saying that the people with the veil over their faces are those who accept the Old Covenant, and the people with the veil off their faces are the people who accept the New Covenant. We have a New Covenant. The question is since the Sabbath, as we saw last time, is so intrinsic as a sign in the Old Covenant, how can we extricate that one thing and sort of whimsically import it into the New Covenant, which is essentially what we would do if we wanted to drag Sabbath law over?

We don't have any command that tells us we should circumcise every man who becomes a Christian. That was the other sign of the Old Covenant, circumcision. Why, then, would we extricate the very complex Sabbath law, which involved every seventh day but also involved a long list of festivals and feast days? Why would we extricate the complexities of all that Sabbath law, which was a sign, as well? It wasn't moral in itself. We leave circumcision there. There's no reason to extricate Sabbath law out of the Old Covenant and inject it into the New.

Now, if we had the time, we could go to the book of Hebrews. You might just turn back there for a moment. I'm not gonna have you look at a lot of things but just Hebrews for a moment. Hebrews was written to some Jewish Christians, okay, and they were in a kind of a tough spot. It's very unlikely they were in Jerusalem. We don't know where they were, but they were sort of in the Diaspora. They got scattered, and they're a long way from the temple. They're a long way from the holy site, which is so much a part of the fabric of their worship. And they're in a Jewish community, and they're getting a lot of pressure. They've embraced the Messiah, and of course, the Messiah was rejected by Israel, and so they get in a lot of heat. Probably they were not allowed to go to the synagogue anymore, so there were some social consequences. Jesus said he came to bring a sword into a family and divide members of the family, which is exactly what happened when one Jew in a family believed in Christ and was alienated from the family.

So these Jews who received the book of Hebrews were away from Jerusalem, away from all of that that had been so much a part of the tradition of thief lives. They were also alienated from their synagogue, which was the social center of their life, also alienated from family and maybe in many cases lost their jobs and lost their position in the community. It wasn't easy, and there was this pull to kind of go back. And so throughout the book of Hebrews there's a warning about "Don't go back...don't go back...don't go back." And the way the writer of Hebrews unfolds that warning is by a sequence of things. He says the New Covenant is a better revelation of truth. He says Jesus, the center of the New Covenant, is better than the angels who brought the Old Covenant. He says that Jesus is greater and possesses a greater glory than Moses, who is so identified with the Old Covenant.

In Hebrews 6, he says, "The New Covenant gives a far greater hope than the Old Covenant." In Hebrews 7, he says, "The New Covenant brings a greater guarantee in Christ than anything in the Old Covenant." In Hebrews 8, he says, "The New Covenant has a more excellent ministry." In chapter 8, verse 6, he says, "The New Covenant has a better mediator." In chapter 8, verse 6, he says, "The New Covenant is built on better promises." In chapter 9, he says, "The New Covenant is based on a better sacrifice." In Hebrews 11, he says, "It promises a better country. It provides a better resurrection. It gives us in every way something better."

Don't go back. Don't hold on. Let go of that. We have something far better. Now all of those considerations are to establish the reality of New Covenant identity and domination. Sabbath, if you didn't get the message last week, you need to listen to it, is inextricable from the Old Covenant. It's the dominating feature of the Old Covenant was Sabbath law, which was designed, as I told you last week, to stop everybody in their tracks, make them stop doing what they normally did, stop the normal routines of life, sit and recognize their position before God.

It wasn't just a day when they came together like we were having a church service and singing some songs and had a little fellowship. They didn't leave home. They didn't go anywhere. They didn't congregate with anybody but the family in the home, and the idea was not congregation. The idea was isolation. You can't take the Sabbath day and turn it into a day when people all get together, because if you follow Sabbath law, nobody can go there. Now you do have some festivals and feast days and all of that that were called Sabbaths, where people gathered in Jerusalem, of course. But these were days, I believe, not just for contemplation of the greatness of God, but for recognition, and not only as the seventh day would always be and has always been and is today a day to remember God created the universe in six days, but primarily to look at your life as measured against the law and see that you come short, and it was designed to produce penitence.

Remember what I said to you this morning? I mean, if you were living in Old Testament times, and you were subscribing to Old Testament law, you were confronted with your sin at every single turn. Every Sabbath that went by, you had to contemplate your position before the law of God as you sat in your home and couldn't do anything. Every time you made a sacrifice, every time a male child was born, the mother had to go after 40 days and make a sacrifice, or after 80 days if it was a female child, and make a sacrifice. Every child that was born, every male child, had to be circumcised, again, a symbol of sinfulness. Everything in that society threw your sin in your face. Why? BecauseGod wants sinners to come to the recognition of their need and cast themselves onHis mercy, and that was the whole point. And that was all in the fabric of the Old Covenant.

Now what does that today? What does that today? Jesus said this in John 14, "When the Spirit comes, He will convict the world of sin and righteousness...and what?...judgment." It is the unique work of the Holy Spirit in the New Covenant to do the work of convicting. Sure, the law of God needs to be proclaimed, needs to be preached. The law of God is the same. It's still holy, righteous and good. It can still, under the power of the Holy Spirit, slay the sinner. But there is in the New Covenant no external symbol of that. There's no theocratic kingdom at this particular point. There's no nation where there's some kind of national symbol or national event. None of that exists in the church. We have two ordinances. One is baptism, and that celebrates our deliverance from sin. And the other is communion, and that celebrates our deliverance from sin. We don't have any God-given ordinance that celebrates our sinfulness.

The Holy Spirit does the work of conviction, so the New Covenant stands alone as the superior

covenant. Exporting out of the Old Covenant the complexities of Sabbath and dropping them in the New Covenant would confound the character of the New Covenant. I just add as a footnote nowhere, any place in the entire New Testament, explanation of New Covenant life is there ever a command to keep to keep the Sabbath. Furthermore, never does the Apostle Paul or any other New Testament writer chide people for their violation of the Sabbath, and never is there any instruction whatsoever on what it means to keep the Sabbath. Wouldn't you assume that in a Gentile church, if the Sabbath day was to be adhered to under Old Covenant terms, somewhere along the line somebody would have told the Gentiles that?

It's never done. In fact, the opposite is done. Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 makes sure that you are not obligated to impose the Sabbath on the Gentiles. Nothing in the New Testament, nothing in the Epistles of the New Testament prescribe for the church any adherence to the Sabbath. So when you look at the New Covenant, it's not there. And if it was central to the New Covenant, it would have to be there. And if Christians were violating it, they would need to be told that, and let me tell you, Paul doesn't pull any punches when he finds Christians in violation of some of their Christian responsibility. Would you agree to that? His Epistles are filled with confrontations about sin.

Take 1 Corinthians, for example. I mean, he just goes one after another after another as he indicts them for their violation of what honors God repeatedly, but never does he ever discuss any kind of violation related to any Sabbath obligation. It's not there. And furthermore, with all the Gentiles being converted in the ministry of Paul, you would assume somewhere along the line that he would say to them, "Remember, guys, we know it's not what you're used to, but keep the Sabbath day holy." Never says that. It's not there, and the reason it's not there is because it's not a New Covenant symbol. It's an Old Covenant one.

Well, that takes care of the first category. As you answer the question, "Does the Sabbath come into the church, into the New Covenant?" one, you have to look at the character of the covenant, and we're gonna see more about that. The second and third categories, you have to look at how Jesus treated the Sabbath. That's fabulous, just fascinating, and it takes you into the narrative and the life of Jesus, just to give you a little hint about this. The number one conflict in the life of Jesus was his conflict, the running conflict, with Jesus and the Pharisees. And the point of that conflict was how Jesus dealt with the Sabbath. So there's plenty of information in the New Testament about it. It's exciting and dramatic to see Jesus collide with the Pharisees in Sabbath issues. That's for next time.

And the third category, "What does the New Testament teaching on the Sabbath say?" And we're gonna find that out. The Sabbath is referred to. Paul did teach on it. His teaching is crystal clear, and we'll do that next Sunday night. Boy, this is a lot like a theology class, isn't it? I hope it's clear to you. Let's pray.

Father, again, the word is so rich and thrilling to us, and we feel like we're just sort of building the wall brick by brick, the wall that constitutes a solid, solid understanding of Your truth. We thank You...thank You for the glory of the New Covenant, and we thank You that You released us from the bondage of the law and the curse of the law, because Jesus was made a curse for us. What a great truth. Galatians 3, "Cursed is everyone who breaks the law." We broke it, but Jesus was made a curse for us. You cursed Him, that You might save us. What wondrous grace is this? We thank You for it. And Lord, may we ever rejoice and praise You and thank You for the wonders of the New Covenant. Amen.

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