

Institutes of the Christian Religion by John Calvin
 (Translation by Henry Beveridge)¹
 Men's Theology Study – September 15, 2021 – 6:30 pm

Book 2 – Of the knowledge of God the Redeemer, in Christ, as first manifested to the fathers, under the law, and thereafter to us under the gospel.

Chapter 11 – The Difference Between the Two Testaments

DQ: How do the most people think about the relationship between the covenants in the Bible? Continuity or discontinuity? One covenant or several? One or two?

The Continuity of the Covenant in Chapter 10

	Old Covenant—Before Christ	New Covenant—After Christ
1.	Law and Doctrine from Creation Onward	Law and Doctrine from Creation Onward
2.	Christ is the Mediator	Christ is the Mediator
3.	Grace of Justification	Grace of Justification
4.	Sacraments Significant as Signs & Seals	Sacraments Significant as Signs & Seals
5.	Word of God Brings Life	Word of God Brings Life
6.	Includes Eternal Life	Includes Eternal Life

The Discontinuity of the Covenant in Chapter 11

	Old Covenant—Before Christ	New Covenant—After Christ
1.	Material & temporal blessings represent spiritual blessings	Direct meditation upon spiritual blessings
2.	Images & ceremonies as types of Christ	Full revelation of Christ in his incarnation
3.	The OT law is the letter that kills	The NT gospel is the Spirit that makes alive
a.	The OT law in the narrow sense condemns b/c it is the demand of law w/o the Spirit's aid in the gospel	In the new covenant the law is written upon the heart by the Spirit and is accompanied by the forgiveness of sins
b.	The OT law in the broad sense includes the gospel by borrowing from it the promises of Christ	The gospel of the new covenant has been the experience of God's children since the beginning of the world
4.	The old covenant was characterized by bondage and fear	The new covenant is characterized by freedom and trust
5.	The old covenant was limited to Israel	The new covenant is extended to all nations

¹Supplemental Material from *Analysis of the Institutes of the Christian Religion of John Calvin* by Ford Lewis Battles (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Company, 2001 Reprint) and *A Theological Guide to Calvin's Institutes* edited by David W. Hall and Peter A. Lillback (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Company, 2008).

- I. Five Points of Difference Between the Old and New Testaments (s. 1-11)
1. Old: material & temporal blessings represent spiritual blessings. New: direct meditation upon spiritual blessings (s. 1-3).
 - a. Ultimately, the difference between the covenants is a matter of “administration rather than to the substance (s. 1).” The eternal promises are the same and Christ is the foundation for both.
 - b. If there is radical discontinuity between the OT and NT, what must one do with the OT covenant promises?
 - c. Gal 4:1-7 addresses the purpose of the OT law and promises. “I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father (Gal 4:1-2).” How was the law a guardian and manager (s. 2)?
 - d. How do covenant promises have a future aspect (s. 2)?
 - e. If the temporal blessings pointed forward to eternal blessings, what then did temporal punishments point forward to (s. 3)?
 - f. Without understanding the continuity of the covenants and the temporal nature of punishment, one might fall into severe error about God. “...that the God of the OT was different from that of the New (s. 3).
 2. Old: images & ceremonies are types of Christ. New: full revelation of Christ in his incarnation (s. 4-6).
 - a. The problem addressed in Heb 7-10: “...the observances of the Mosaic Law could not be abolished without producing the total ruin of religion.” How did the author refute this error (s. 4)?
 - Ps 110:4, “The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind, ‘You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.’ [quoted in Heb 7:17]”
 - If an eternal priesthood is assigned to him, then the daily succession of priests is abolished and the institution of a new priest must prevail.
 - If the priest has been changed, then it led to a change of covenant.
 - The change in covenant was necessary because the weakness of the old: law was weak to make anything perfect, it could not render a clean conscience, and the sacrifices could not take away sin nor procure true holiness.
 - Therefore, the old priesthood was a shadow of what was to come, not the image itself, and the old office was an introduction to a better hope exhibited in the gospel.
 - b. What’s the connection between Passover and the Lord’s Supper (s. 4)?
 - c. Matt 11:13, “For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John...” The Prophets and the Law “...gave a foretaste of that wisdom which was one day to be clearly manifested, and showed it afar off (s. 5).”
 - d. Even as insightful the patriarchs and prophets were, Calvin concludes “they must also be ranked among children (s. 6).” Why? See Matt 13:16-17.
 3. Old: the law is the letter that kills. New: the gospel is the Spirit that makes alive (s. 7-8).
 - a. Jer 31:31, 32, “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers. ...my covenant that they broke.”

- *DQ: How is the new covenant new? If the new covenant is new, is it a second covenant of grace?*
- b. Calvin explains Paul's comparison between the Law and the Gospel in 2 Cor 3:5-6 (s. 7-8).

The Law	The Gospel
A doctrine of the letter (s. 7)	A doctrine of the spirit (s. 7)
Formed on tables of stone (s. 7)	Formed on tables of the heart (s. 7)
Preaches death (s. 7)	Preaches life (s. 7)
Condemnation (s. 7)	Justification (s. 7)
Made void (s. 7)	Permanent (s. 7)
Literal: b/c promulgated w/o the efficacy of the Spirit (s. 8)	Spiritual, b/c the Lord has engraved it on the heart (s. 8)
Deadly b/c it brings all humanity under a curse (s. 8)	Instrument of life b/c those freed from the curse have restored favor with God (s. 8)
Ministry of condemnation charging all Adam's sons with condemnation (s. 8)	Ministry of righteousness unfolding the mercies of God in justification (s. 8)
Sacraments as shadows (s. 8)	Sacraments exhibit the full scope of what is established forever (s. 8)

- c. How was the old covenant a weak and fragile covenant?
- 4. Old: characterized by bondage and fear. New: characterized by freedom and trust (s. 9-10).
 - a. The contrast in the NT (s. 9).
 - Rom 8:15, "For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!'"
 - Sinai and Zion in Heb 12:18-22. Hagar and Sarah in Gal 4:21-31.
 - b. While there is discontinuity, Calvin does not seem to want to press it too far (s. 10).
 - "...Augustine...remarks, that from the beginning of the world the sons of promises, the divinely regenerated, who, through faith working by love, obeyed the commandments, belonged to the NT; entertaining the hope not of carnal, earthly, temporal, but spiritual, heavenly, and eternal blessings, believing specially in a Mediator, by whom they doubted not both that the Spirit was administered to the, enabling them to do good, and pardon imparted as often as they sinned (s. 10)."
 - "...all the saints mentioned in Scripture, from the beginning of the world, as having been specially selected by God, were equally with us partakers of the blessing of eternal salvation (s. 10)."
 - What was the difference for them and us? Light of the Gospel. Weakness of the Law.
 - There was, and still is, those who falsely, "...hope for the expiation of sin from sacrifice of beast, or to seek mental purification in external washing with water, or...attempt to appease God with cold ceremonies...(s. 10)."

5. Old: covenant limited to Israel. New: covenant extended to all nations (s. 11-12).
 - a. Deut 32:8-9, "When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he divided mankind, he fixed the borders of the peoples according to the number of the sons of God. But the LORD's portion is his people, Jacob his allotted heritage."
 - b. Deut 10:14-15, "Behold, to the LORD your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it. Yet the LORD set his heart in love on your fathers and chose their offspring after them, you above all peoples, as you are this day."
 - c. In what ways was Israel favored? "...knowledge of his name, depositing his covenant..., manifesting to them the presence of his divinity, and honoring them with all privileges (s. 11)." But more than all, the communion and preaching of the Word.
 - d. *DQ: If this dividing wall has been torn down and the Gospel preached to the nations, how can there continue to be an everlasting covenant with the nation of Israel?*
 - e. Calvin's conclusion is that the superiority of the new covenant relates to the calling of the gentiles to be God's covenant people (s. 12).
 - "...for it seemed by no means in accordance with reason, that the Lord, who for so many ages had selected Israel from the rest of the nations, should suddenly, as it were, change his purpose, and abandon his choice. Prophecy, indeed, had foretold it, but they could not be so attentive to prophecies, as not to be somewhat startled by the novel spectacle thus presented to their eye (s. 12)."
 - "Those whom he had so called (i.e., gentiles b/f Christ) were very few in number, and, moreover, he in a manner adopted them into the family of Abraham, before allowing them to approach his people. But by this public call, the gentiles were not only made equal to the Jews, but seemed to be substituted into their place, as if the Jews had been dead (s. 12)."

II. Responding to Two Objections (s. 13-14)

1. Objection #1: If the gentiles are the covenant people, then God has changed.
 - a. Response: "It is unreasonable, they say, to suppose that God, who is always consistent with himself, permitted such a change as afterward to disapprove what he had once ordered and commended. I answer, that God ought not to be deemed mutable, because he adapts different forms to different ages, as he know to be expedient for each (s. 13)."
 - b. Examples: the husbandman and the father.
2. Objection #2: If God was planning to call the gentiles from very beginning, why not just call them at the very beginning without any figures or types?
 - a. Response: Dare we charge God with creating the world at the wrong time, or for using seasons, or for having day and night? "...let us not doubt that everything which God has done has been done wisely and justly, although we may be ignorant of the cause which required that it should be so done (s. 14)."
 - b. Example: a physician treating a youth and later when he is grown.