

Kingdom and Covenant in the New Testament

LESSON
THREE

The New Covenant Discussion Forum



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Kingdom and Covenant in the New Testament

Lesson Three: The New Covenant

Discussion Forum

With

Dr. Steve Blakemore	Rev. Jim Maples	Dr. Douglas Stuart
Dr. Robert B. Chisholm, Jr.	Dr. Sean McDonough	Dr. K. Erik Thoennes
Rev. Michael J. Glodo	Dr. Tom Petter	Dr. Simon Vibert
Dr. Dennis E. Johnson	Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr.	Dr. Peter Walker
Dr. Craig S. Keener	Dr. Eckhard J. Schnabel	Dr. Stephen J. Wellum
Dr. Dan Lacich	Dr. Glen G. Scorgie	
Dr. Robert G. Lister	Dr. Mark L. Strauss	

Question 1:

What role did covenants have in the Old Testament?

Dr. Tom Petter

Well, the question of covenants in the Old Testament is, it's so fundamental to understanding the narrative of the Old Testament, a compelling story of what... That *is* the Old Testament. And when you talk about the covenants, you have to talk about the covenant representatives, you have to talk about the covenant mediators, the tribal figures that tower above other people... There's a lots of people in the Old Testament, lots of great stories, but you have some of these people that we have in the story, very early from Adam, and Noah, and of course Abraham, and then Moses, and then David... And the primary covenant that governs the life of ancient Israel in the Old Testament is the covenant made at Sinai with Moses, the covenant of Sinai. Sometimes people call it covenant of Moses, Mosaic covenant. And that's a set of rules and regulations that govern the life of Israel... If you obey, then you will be blessed in the land, if you disobey, then you'll be cursed. And of course, then the life of Israel under this covenant administration is a series of evaluations. Do they obey the covenant or do they disobey the covenant? And guess who are the people who give the test, the exams? The prophets, because they're the covenant enforcers. And the tragedy, too, is that the kings in the line of David, they're supposed to enforce the covenant obedience and no disloyalty to Yahweh, but they themselves fail. And so, the end of Israelite history is basically a miserable failure of upholding the covenant. But then there is hope because in this catalogue of failure, failing to obey the covenant, the Mosaic covenant, the covenant in Sinai, God promises something to David, the one king who starts the dynasty of the covenant enforcers, the kings of Judah, and he makes a promise just like to Abraham and he says, I promise that your dynasty will endure forever. Yes, I will discipline my kings under covenantal law, the law at Sinai, but regardless of the discipline, I will make sure that there's always a king on the throne. And of course, that's the promise just like to Abraham, God will see to it that there's a lineage. And of course, this is the launching pad; this prepares us for the promised son of David. That's why the New Testament

writers nail it; Romans 1, who is Jesus? He is the son of David, right? The genealogies of Mark and... I mean of Luke and Matthew, he is the Davidic king.

Question 2:

How is the kingdom of God rooted in the theology of the Old Testament?

Dr. Glen G. Scorgie

One of the questions that we might have is, is the New Testament where this vision of the kingdom of God first invented? It's certainly the place where it becomes more central and explicit, but we find the roots of the kingdom, or the reign of God, very pervasive in the Old Testament, in the old covenant as well. And just to give a couple of examples, we find in the Old Testament a great and growing interest in the condition of the human heart of God's covenant people. One of the great sadnesses and regrets of many prophets was how people could honor God with their lips but have their hearts far from him. So, even in the Old Testament, there was a growing sensitivity to the inwardness of the reign of God, the need to have hearts that had renounced and relinquished their egocentrism and their defiance in order to make their hearts a hospitable place for the reign of God. And so, that intimacy, the inner dynamic of the kingdom of God is already present in the great *Shema*, to "love the Lord your God with all your heart and mind and strength." This is an anchoring text for the Old Testament, and it's absolutely central to what the kingdom is all about and where it begins. And then to have that inward reality expressed outwardly in structures of society that resonate with the heart of God, here we find the prophets, the major and the minor, speaking in a wonderfully consistent harmony about how that which is inward is to be outwardly manifested in how we do life together. This is the kingdom in the covenant of the people of God.

Question 3:

What does Scripture reveal about the organic development of God's kingdom?

Dr. Robert G. Lister

As we read the Scriptures with a view to determining the major eras that make up redemptive history, or the major epochs that make up redemptive history, what we're looking for are major transitions in the economy of redemption, major transitions in the development of redemptive history, or the way God is working in the world, or with a people at that particular time. At the broadest level, I tend to think of five subdivisions that are pretty easy to keep in mind. And we could obviously subdivide these, but I tend to think of five, being, first God, then creation, then the Fall, then redemption, then the new creation. Now when I say "God" as an era or epoch of redemptive history, what I mean by that is that there is a time in which only God exists and there's no created thing that God is relating to. And who God is in eternity past is who he demonstrates himself to be once there is a creation. So we're not starting, sort of, *carte blanche* in the moment of

creation. Prior to creation, there's an eternal relationship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit that is as splendid as any relationship can ever be. And so we don't want to ignore the fact that God has a prior existence to creation, or somehow view God as dependent for his existence on the creation. So there's God. Then there's what God is doing in the moment of creation. What is he designing? What is he weaving into the world? What is his purpose for making image-bearers, and how does he intend to relate to them? Very quickly, in the development of the narrative of the book of Genesis, we find that after the creation comes the Fall, and so what God has designed now begins to be corrupted by his creature's sin, and there are detrimental effects brought about by the rebellion of the creature that bring corrupting effects to what God has made. And so what does that look like? How does that affect God's original design? And yet, very quickly in the aftermath of the Fall, God also announces a plan of redemption that certainly has different administrations within it, but it begins as soon as God's pronouncing the curse on the man, woman and serpent; he's announcing a plan of redemption as well. So, God's going to redeem and restore what has been corrupted by sin. And that redemptive category is obviously the largest one, and you could subdivide that into old covenant and new covenant administrations. You could subdivide that into Mosaic administrations, administrations of the monarchy in the time of Israel. You could certainly get more refined. But then, on the other side of the fulfillment of God's redemptive aims is the new heavens and the new earth and the restoration of things to what they were originally supposed to be. So, if you think in terms of those five categories, you've kind of got the broadest transitional moments in Scripture which you could obviously subdivide from there.

Dr. Dennis E. Johnson

Scripture gives us clear clues as to the major eras or epochs of redemptive history. The first one we can see as we open any English Bible, we see two main divisions, Old Testament and New Testament. . . Old Testament and New Testament are really reflective of the biblical language of old covenant and new covenant language that Paul uses in 2 Corinthians. But of course new covenant language goes back much earlier to the prophecy of Jeremiah, where God promises a new covenant not like the covenant made at Sinai, but one in which God will forgive all his people's sins and he will write his law into their hearts. So there we have a basic breakdown of two epochs of redemption: Old covenant, the period of promise, the period of, as Hebrews says, the period of anticipation and shadow, and the new covenant, the period of fulfillment established by Christ and his death and resurrection. Now, if we look back at the period that we think of as the period of promise or shadow, certainly the law of Moses marks a clear point in that the law is given, now written Scripture is given for the first time to Israel in the five books of Moses, and the Law governs Israel's life. But we do see references in Genesis to the earlier history, the history of the patriarchs in which there were key covenants that God made with his people. We have the implicit covenant; Hosea 6 calls it a covenant with Adam. It's not labeled as such in Genesis 1 and 2, but it's a covenant that God makes with Adam and Eve. Adam is a covenant head of the human race with obligations, with consequences, a commitment that God makes that if Adam and Eve obey, if Adam sustains the test of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, there will be eternal life and blessing. Adam does not, as we know, and so we are plunged then into a new period,

a period that begins with a promise, in a sense. It's judgment on the serpent, on Satan, but it's a promise implicitly to us that a seed of the woman will come to crush the head of Satan — the beginning of what theologians call the covenant of grace that's then worked its way out in the various epochs of revelation and redemption. Abraham, a key figure as God makes a covenant commitment to Abraham to grant him a land, but even more, to grant him a seed, a line of descendants, and to be a blessing to all the nations. Christ is that ultimate descendant. And in Christ, all the nations become Abraham's descendants by faith in Christ. So those covenants are key markers. We've looked at the covenant with Adam before the Fall, a covenant in a sense with Adam and all humanity after the Fall. Abraham. Noah before Abraham, a covenant in which God promises to sustain the world as he works out his redemptive plan; the covenant made with Israel through Moses; and then of course there is the covenant that God makes with David. And we find more clarity now, more focus, that the seed of the woman who will be the seed of Abraham, who is the seed of Israel, in fact, even in Moses' day and before we learn from Judah, now he's to come from the line of David. And then we have the fulfillment in the new covenant. And the fullness of things that were shown in types and shadows in the Old Testament, now the reality comes in the person of Christ.

Dr. Robert B. Chisholm, Jr.

People have a lot of different opinions about how many major eras or epochs there are in biblical history, redemptive history. And so there's a lot of debate on that. But it seems to me that we can at least recognize three or four. And it seems as if with each new era, God does something *new*, perhaps creative. Of course, Genesis 1 tells us that he created the world, so that began an era in human history, and there was a need for redemption pretty quickly because the first couple sinned against God and were expelled from the garden, and then the rest of the biblical story is about how God reclaims humanity and creates the ideal that he had all along for humanity. We certainly had the beginning of a new era when God delivers Israel from Egypt, takes them to Sinai. In fact, there are places in the Old Testament where that is viewed as a new creative event. Isaiah 40 through 55, if you read through that section, you'll see a close association between Exodus and creation. And so there's a sense in which God created Israel when he brought them out of Egypt and gave them a constitution, as it were — the law — at Sinai. And certainly when you come to the New Testament and you see that God establishes the church, something new happens there. The new covenant community is created with the outpouring of the Spirit. And Peter recognizes that this is the fulfillment in part or in whole of what Joel prophesied, where God would pour out his Spirit on his people. Christians will disagree about what the future holds and is there going to be a new era. I am a dispensationalist, premillennialist, so I happen to believe that there will be an earthly kingdom. Others may not agree with that, but certainly something new and exciting is going to be happening in the future, and we'll probably disagree a little bit on that, but we can all look forward to it.

Question 4:**How does Jesus continue David's royal dynasty as God the Father's vassal king?****Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr.**

Normally when we think about the kingship of Christ, we think of that as something very exalted, high, up there because Jesus is now at the right hand of God the Father, and he is the King. But we must remember that Jesus was exalted in his kingship in his human nature. That's to say, in his divine nature, Jesus was always the King; he was always ruling as the sovereign over all things. But Jesus was given authority in heaven and earth in his *human nature*. And Jesus is the Son of David, and therefore the one who represents the nation of Israel and the people of God. And the Son of David, like David himself, was a vassal king. He was a servant of the greater King, God the Father in heaven.

Dr. Simon Vibert

The language of vassal king as opposed to suzerain king speaks about delegated authority, and Jesus, as great David's greatest Son, was of that line of kingship. And even as David had his authority as king delegated from the Father, so too Jesus did as well. God being the one with all authority. In fact, he is the one of whom Jesus says, "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me," and therefore sends his disciples in the Father's name to make disciples of all nations.

Dr. Craig S. Keener

Throughout the Gospel of Matthew, we find Jesus preaching the kingdom of heaven, the reign of God; it was another Jewish way of saying the reign of God. And yet, Jesus is demonstrating his authority or his reign on earth in various ways: healing the sick, driving out demons, stilling storms, and so forth. And at one point, he says, "that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins," alluding back to Daniel 7 where the Son of Man will have great authority. But when you come to the climax of Matthew's gospel at the very end, Jesus then says, after he's been raised and he's about to ascend into heaven, Jesus says, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. And so, the difference is that now that Jesus has risen, he's the ruler of the cosmos. One text that he cited is in Psalm 110:1 where, "The Lord said to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet'" where Jesus is now at the right hand of the Father and he's reigning, and he says that that will continue until all of his enemies are put under his feet.

Question 5:**Does the author of Hebrews consider the new covenant to be a covenant renewal or something completely new?****Dr. Peter Walker**

There's always quite a bit of controversy as one looks at the Bible to discover, is it one big covenant or is it divided up into two halves, or perhaps even more covenants? And,

especially this language of the new covenant, which we find first used in Jeremiah, picked up in Matthew's gospel when Jesus talks about "the blood of the new covenant," and also especially here in Hebrews 8, when it talks about the new covenant. Is that a *brand new* covenant, such that everything that happens in the New Testament is something which is completely new, fresh, and in one sense in opposition to the Old? Or is it a *renewal* of the original covenant? I think it holds the Bible much more closely together if we see it as the renewal of the original covenant. And what's that original covenant with Abraham and God's people? It is that God is going to remove sin from his people and from his creation. And therefore, Jesus comes not to do something entirely new, but to fulfill the original purpose of the covenant. He does that when he dies on the cross; his blood is the blood of the new covenant. And then the writer of Hebrews is showing the benefits of that renewed covenant. Yes, it does mean certain things from the old are to be removed. And he says that in Hebrews 8, that aspects of the old covenant are close to destruction, he says, but the deep underlying theme is one of unity and continuity, a renewal of the covenant.

Dr. Mark L. Strauss

Hebrews 8 talks about the establishment of the new covenant, and this is not a brand new covenant. This covenant was promised in the Old Testament. In fact, he quotes from Jeremiah 31, the promise of a new covenant. God made a covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai, but he promises that one day — Israel had broken that covenant — and one day God would reestablish a new covenant, and that new covenant wouldn't have the law written on tablets of stone. It would have the law written on our hearts. It would not provide just temporary forgiveness of sins, it would provide eternal forgiveness of sins. You wouldn't need a mediator, to go through the priest. You would know God. All of God's people would know God through the Messiah, through Jesus Christ. So, the promise of the new covenant in Jeremiah 31 has come to fulfillment, and that's what the author is arguing. And with that promise and fulfillment, God's salvation is now not just for Israel but is going forth to all nations everywhere. So all along, the author says this is what God had intended, this is the fulfillment of the promises. He tells the audience, "Don't go back. Don't go back to your old way. Don't go back to the shadow. Don't go back to the promise, because the fulfillment has arrived. We are under the new covenant, not the old Mosaic covenant."

Dr. Dan Lacich

When we look at Hebrews 8 and we see the idea of a covenant and a new covenant, it really is a good question, is it a new one or is it just sort of reformatting the old one? There's a sense in which the answer is both. But ultimately, it is a *new* covenant. It builds on the previous covenant, and that's why it has a sense of being renewed or reformatted. But it's new on a number of levels. It's new because it has a different group of people who are being addressed in that covenant. You move from just the people of Israel to all who would have faith in Christ, so you have a different participant there. The mediator of that covenant is now specifically Christ, which changes it. And even the requirements of the covenant change. Certainly faith was what gained salvation even for the Old Testament saints, but the requirements of the covenant, because they were so nationalistic for Israel as a people, were different for the requirements of us as God's people who are

scattered throughout the world and throughout his kingdom. So, it is a new covenant, but it is *built* on the previous covenant with similarities, but a new and improved version, if you will.

Question 6:

Can we say that those in the church that reject Christ have received saving grace?

Dr. Dennis E. Johnson

The warnings against apostasy in Hebrews, especially in chapters 6 and 10, are sobering, they're troubling because the author, especially in chapter 6, says if someone has participated in the life of the new covenant community and heard the good word of God, seen the Holy Spirit at work and then turns away, that turning away for that individual is not something that is going to be reversed. It's a very sobering thing. I think we need to realize that the author here is writing to a congregation. He's not presuming to read the hearts of every individual who will hear this sermon read aloud. He's not presuming to peek into the Lamb's Book of Life. So, he's really talking to people who profess faith in Christ, but he knows that the new covenant church, like the old covenant church in the wilderness, as he says in chapters 3 and 4, from Psalm 95, is a mixture of people who genuinely trust in Christ. For *those* people, he will say so clearly in chapter 7, that Christ is able to save to the uttermost those who approach God through him. But others who may be professing faith in Christ but don't have a genuine saving faith, and he says, for them, the very fact of their being associated with the church and then turning away means a more severe judgment. So, it is a warning. It's not to cause us to be living in constant fear, but it is to call us to love one another with a proactive love, to hold onto one another, to encourage and exhort one another lest there be someone who is weak and falls away. Ultimately, our calling is to encourage one another and to hold fast, knowing that God holds fast to his own people, and he uses us to make that perseverance take place in the lives of his people.

Dr. Simon Vibert

The warnings against apostasy in Hebrews are, they're stark and they're quite scary for us to read. Let me remind you of what it says here at the beginning of chapter 6, verse 4:

It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance (Hebrews 6:4-4).

And we read those words and, quite understandably, we quake. We're fearful because we don't want to fall away and we worry, is there a possibility that we might. And the first thing to say is that I think we're right to hear those warnings. The writer has written them because he is deeply anxious that those who have tasted some of the goodness of God might fall away. And the pressures upon those Hebrew Christians was intense and some

of them *did* fall away. But at the same time, the warnings are given because the writer believes that, if you've truly appreciated all that Christ has done for you in these last days, you will endure to the end. And he's given you all the sustenance, both in terms of the Holy Spirit to help and also this cloud of faithful witnesses, of those who have endured to the end, who help motivate us and keep us going.

Dr. Craig S. Keener

There are a number of warnings against apostasy in Hebrews... Now, a couple of questions arise: One is, why does the writer of Hebrews keep addressing this, even though he says in chapter 6, "I'm persuaded better things of you." But with each of these, there are exhortations attached. He's saying, don't become like this, but rather, persevere. He calls them to persevere in a number of ways. He uses all of the example in Hebrew chapter 11 and then comes to the ultimate example of the faith in Hebrews 12, Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, and says, "You haven't even yet resisted to the shedding of your blood." So, he uses these to call people to persevere. Another question, though, is the theological question of how we take this. And it's taken different ways by different schools of theology. For example, a Calvinist who would say, "Well, the elect, those who will be saved, will persevere. And so, if they don't persevere, they were never a part of God's elect." The Arminian would say, "Well, these people experienced salvation but they fell away, they lost it." And I think one is speaking from the standpoint of God, and one is speaking from the standpoint of human experience. And I think we have texts that address both kinds of perspectives; I think they're both in Scripture. But I think it's a warning to those who hold kind of a cheap version of like, "Well, I prayed a prayer fifty years ago and, you know, I live however I want to, but now it's my ticket to heaven." That's *not* what Scripture teaches. Scripture teaches that we need to persevere.

Question 7:

How does Scripture describe God's benevolence to believers and unbelievers alike?

Rev. Michael J. Glodo

Scripture describes God's benevolence both within the covenant community and outside. Within the covenant community, there are believers and unbelievers; it's assumed from the very beginning, at the Old Testament all the way through the New. There are people who profess faith who are genuinely Christians, who are generally born again, and there are those people who profess faith who, in the end, appear not to be. But it's important to recognize that within the covenant community, God blesses all, regenerate and unregenerate... Often the benevolence of God within the covenant community is the means by which the unbeliever comes to faith. For example, in the covenant community you have a priority on common relationships, on providing for people in need. The church is a society which is different than the world outside, where it's a safe place, where people value the things that God values, and the unbeliever can benefit from those things just as a believer can. And, it's good to remember, those are often the means by which people come to true saving faith. Outside the church, we can speak of what theologians call "common grace," which is the rain that falls on the just and the unjust.

All people alike experience beauty and goodness in creation, although, as we learn from Romans 1, that the blessings on those who never turn to God in thanks actually accrue to their debt, rather than to their benefit. But God's kindness within the covenant community assumes that there are people who will be, for lack of a better expression, "tares among the wheat," and we don't know until the final harvest who is truly to be gathered in.

Dr. Stephen J. Wellum

Scripture speaks of God's love and care and benevolence to believer and also unbeliever alike. Now, the way God loves and shows his care towards each is different. To the believer, all of God's promises, all of God's grace, all of his mercy and love is given to us in Christ Jesus so that all of his promises are "yes and amen." We have his Spirit. We have the gift of adoptions, our justification. You think of all of the outworking of salvation, all of that is God's love, grace and benevolence towards us as his people. Romans 8 is really important here, that even in the midst of suffering and difficulties as we await the coming of the Lord Jesus, that nothing separates us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, that all of God's promises are sure, that we are more than conquerors as we await the coming of the Lord Jesus, that we are heirs together with him as we await all of that still to come. Now, what about unbelievers? Well, unbelievers also experience something of God's benevolence and God's love. Now, they're not experiencing it in the way of salvation. We do call unbelievers to salvation, to repent and believe the gospel. But if they remain unbelievers, they do still experience God's, what we call, his "common grace," his grace that comes in sustaining the universe. It goes all the way back to the Noahic covenant where God has promised that, until the end, seedtime and harvest, summer and winter will continue, that the giving of food, the giving of rain, the giving of care to them is displayed abundantly, in preserving some of the structures of God's creation and family and in government and in order, I mean, all of this shows God's care towards both believer and unbeliever alike. And so all of this speaks of God's love for, certainly, his people, his children, but also even unbelievers as he cares for them, calls out to them as the church ministers to them, and we see this abundantly through redemptive history as we await the coming of the end. So, all of those are ways that God's love and care is displayed to both believer and unbeliever alike.

Dr. Dan Laci

Scripture clearly gives us an understanding that God blesses his people, but that's not an exclusive blessing; it's not for us alone. There is very strong biblical teaching in both Testaments that God pours out his blessing on the just and unjust alike. Jesus makes it clear, the rain falls on both. Good things happen to bad people; bad things happen to good people, and vice versa; that all comes into the mix. And it's because God's grace over all creation is going to impact people even if they aren't following him and don't even believe that he's there. Paul says that it's his kindness that leads us to repentance, and so I think one of the ways that God wants to bring people to him is by pouring his grace out on them even when they don't believe in him. And even as followers of Christ, we are told to bless those folks; we're told to be an instrument in God's hands, to love our neighbor, to love our enemy, to serve them. And even back into the Old Testament as Jeremiah tells the exiles in Babylon that they should work for the welfare of the city

where they're held captive, because as the whole city is blessed, even as their captors are blessed, they will be blessed.

Dr. Glen G. Scorgie

One of the things we need to understand about the heart of God is that he loves the whole world; "For God so loved the world..." It is important to acknowledge that those who are united with Christ and are adopted as his children enjoy a special love relationship with their heavenly Father. And at the same time, though, there's room in this extravagantly generous heart of God for a passionate love for all his creatures, longing for his children to return to him. And so, even in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus makes it very clear that we are to love our enemies and not just the insiders close to us, because this is how God is, that he has a care and concern even for those who are adversarial to him. And that is illustrated, Jesus taught, in the way that the sun rises and brings warmth and nourishment to unbelievers and believers alike. And he provides rain for crops to grow for people who do not know him through his Son. And so, these are just illustrations of the magnanimousness of the heart of God. Sometimes we summarize that in the language of common grace, but the heart of God is much bigger than the petty distinctions we sometimes make between, "like this group, hate this group," insiders and outsiders. The heart of God is passionately committed to all those he has brought into this world and given life.

Question 8:

In what ways did the Old Testament require inward devotion to God as well as outward obedience?

Dr. Dan Lacich

When we look at the Old Testament, I think, often, we get a misconception that it's only concerned about what we do, about the external activity, but it really is also about the heart. Jesus is quoted as saying that we should love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength. Well, that's not just a New Testament passage; he's taken that right out of the Old Testament. So, there is this concern that who we are in the inside matches who we are on the outside. Jeremiah speaks about the heart being deceitful and wicked, and so we need to be guarding our heart; we need to understand that the heart impacts things. Ezekiel promises that we'll be given a new heart, you know, a heart of flesh instead of a heart of stone. And throughout the Old Testament we have this kind of language that tells us that God cares about what is happening inside of us as much as what's happening on the outside. And it's a matter of integrity, that who we are in here should match who we are on the outside.

Rev. Michael J. Glodo

Some people might read the Old Testament, with all its formal requirements for worship and holiness, and wonder, how does this outward obedience relate to inner obedience? And they might even mistakenly think that the New Testament calls for inner obedience while the Old Testament only called for outward. But within the Old Testament itself, it says it's not about the outward obedience only. In Deuteronomy 10, Moses gave a speech

to the second-generation saying, “Don’t be like the first, but circumcise the foreskin of your hearts,” meaning that the sign of the covenant wasn’t simply to represent something external but something internal, to the heart. In 1 Samuel 15, Saul is confronted by the prophet Samuel who says, “Has the Lord as much delight in sacrifice as he has in obeying the voice of the Lord?” So, even though Saul had offered sacrifices, he hadn’t given inner obedience. Psalm 51 says the sacrifices of God are a broken and contrite heart. So, all the external ritual of the Old Testament was never intended by God to be seen as external only but pointing toward inward obedience.

Dr. Douglas Stuart

It’s easy to think that in New Testament times we get so much about really understanding God internally and the Holy Spirit in us and an internal devotion to God, and in Old Testament times they just did rituals and didn’t really have too much to think about or pay attention to inwardly. It’s just going through the motions, offering the sacrifices and so on. That’s really a misunderstanding. The Old Testament wants us, and wanted the people of Israel in the first place, to appreciate that following God is an outward *and* an inward thing. So, first of all, the Israelites had to show their faith by the elaborate requirements of worship that were placed upon them. It wasn’t easy three times a year for families to travel from their homes, sometimes hundreds of miles, to go to one central place, which for most of that period was Jerusalem, and encamp there somewhere out off in the outdoors and to spend time there for the festivals. They had to do that three times a year for Passover, and for Pentecost, and also for the Feast of Tabernacles. That takes a lot of devotion. That takes a resolve. That takes arranging for things back on the farm to be taken care of. It takes a resolve to commit a lot of days out of one’s year. And when they got there, or whenever anybody was worshiping, they had to spend a lot of time learning Scripture. The text tells us that the priests taught Scripture by the hour in those temples, and people sat there and listened. Furthermore, after they made the offering, they would eat the sacrificial meal, which represented their relationship to God. A meal is an indication in a lot of cultures of friendship — we eat together, we must know each other, we must like each other, we must somehow be connected — otherwise you wouldn’t sit down and have a meal with somebody. So sitting down to have a meal with God at God’s house, Wow! That’s a recognition inwardly that you belong to him, that he really is your Father and your Savior and the one who is your Lord. Likewise, the psalms show us lots of inward devotion. The psalms are *sometimes* about sacrifices or worship practices, but an awful lot is about, how do you love God? Do you care about him? Can you trust him? There are seventy psalms devoted to nothing other than having the awareness internally to know that, no matter how much you are suffering, God will be faithful. We call those lament psalms. And there are psalms of thanksgiving when God has been merciful. You’re praying to him and you’re saying, “You did this for me. *I know it*. I know it in my being that I can trust you.” Then there are the trust psalms themselves. There are the law psalms, the Torah psalms, that indicate how it is that we know God internally, how he is a part of our lives... the Holy Spirit was there, and people internally still were supposed to sink themselves into God’s goodness, his truth, his love, and obedience to him and his purposes for their lives.

Dr. Sean McDonough

Yeah, there's sometimes the assumption that the Old Testament is really just concerned with outward obedience, and then Jesus comes along and gives a whole new operating principle based on what's going on in your heart. But that's really a caricature, I think. Probably the easiest way to demonstrate that is just by looking in the Psalter: "clean hands and a pure heart." God was always concerned about the state of one's inward disposition towards his law. Look at Psalm 119. The psalmist loves the law of God. He doesn't just see it as this nettlesome burden that he just can't wait until the Messiah comes and takes it away. He really wants to do what God wants him to. And to the extent that we see the Holy Spirit active during the Old Testament era, surely that would involve concern on God's part for what your heart was leaning towards, not simply whether you were checking off all the correct boxes.

Question 9:**Why did Jesus have to remain loyal to God the Father and obey the Law during his earthly life?****Dr. K. Erik Thoennes**

The Bible says that the law is a schoolmaster that points us to Christ, that brings us to him, prepares us for him. The law is given, and it's a reflection of God's character, but we fail to keep the Law. And so when Jesus comes he shows us perfect humanity fulfilling its intended purpose, which is relationship with God typified with faithfulness to God's commands. So Jesus comes, showing us true humanity in the way it's supposed to be, but also fulfilling that law for us. Jesus fulfills the Law in his continual faithfulness, in his to covenant keeping, law-abiding behavior, so that he becomes our righteousness. The Bible says that God is both just *and* the justifier. And so he comes with his law, and then he comes with his Son keeping the law for us. So he both is the just one, and the one who justifies us in Christ.

Rev. Jim Maples

It was necessary for Jesus to be sinless because Christ worked to carry out his messianic task as Messiah, as Savior, as the last Adam and to effect the salvation of those he came to save directly depended upon his personal obedience to God's law. We speak of Christ's active obedience, that is, all the things that Christ did to observe the law of God and to keep it perfectly. If Christ had not been sinless, his human nature would have been damaged, just as ours is. He would have been unable to make atonement for his own self, much less anyone else. And if — playing off that — if Christ had only suffered the penalty for our sin, we would have been in the same state that we were as Adam before the Fall. We still would not have had any holiness, righteousness, obedience to the law. So Christ's perfect obedience, which — this double amputation that took place at the cross — our sins were imputed to Christ, but his righteousness, his obedience, his holiness, was credited to our account. So it was very important that Christ be sinless, and his perfect obedience actually merits for his elect their adoption as the sons of God and eternal life.

Question 10:**Why does God require loyalty to Christ as he is revealed in the New Testament?****Dr. Eckhard J. Schnabel**

Christians are called Christians because they believe Jesus is the Messiah. That's what the word means. The Greek word *Christos* is a transliteration... or the word Christian or Christ is a transliteration of *Christos*, which in Hebrew would mean Messiah. So, "Christians" really means "Messiah people." And it means our loyalty is to Jesus. At the same time, we know about Jesus only through the New Testament, through the Bible, and therefore conservative Christians, evangelicals, have often been accused of worshiping the Bible, being loyal to the Bible. There's even a technical term that was invented to bash us, which would be "bibliolatry," that this is what fundamentalists do, they worship the Bible. And one obviously always needs to be careful that there are not developments starting that might be problematic. But I don't know whether any Christian ever actually worshiped the Bible as a book. We treat the Bible with utmost respect. My grandfather, who worked for a publishing company, never would put a book on top of a Bible. He would never stack... He would stack books, but the Bible would have to be the top book. There was an expression, "Not of his worship of the Bible but of his respect." Of course, as Christians, our basic loyalty is to God and to Jesus Christ our Savior, and that always needs to be clear. At the same time, we learn from God, we learn about God only through the Bible and through Jesus, and therefore we are indeed loyal to the Bible as well. We want to defend it, but more importantly, we want to understand it; we read it and there is no contradiction, really, between being loyal to God and Jesus and being loyal to Scriptures, because one entails the other. Without the Scriptures, we wouldn't know anything reliable about God and nothing about Jesus, and therefore our primary loyalty is to God and to Jesus. But that means we are loyal to Scripture as well.

Dr. K Erik Thoennes

Jesus placed such a strong emphasis on faithfulness to God. He did this because faithfulness is an expression of trust. It's an expression of realizing God really does deserve our faithfulness, our trust, our obedience, our devotion, above all else. When you disobey doctor's orders, you're not just saying something about the orders; you're saying something about the doctor. And when you disobey God, you're not just saying something about his commands that you're disregarding, you're saying something about the God who gave those commands. And so faithfulness is an expression of trust. It's an expression of seeing God for who he is, and then of course, doing what he says. And so when Jesus comes, he submits to the will of the Father as the Son, but he also displays for us what our lives as human beings should look like, obeying God, being faithful to him. Jesus becomes the faithful one, the one who we put our faith in because he always expressed faithfulness to God by obeying God. So, faithfulness to God is an expression of obedience, it's an expression of daily devotion and trust in who he is. Paul, in Romans, talks about the Christian life in his apostolic ministry as one that should lead to the "obedience of faith." It's a beautiful expression, which in some ways summarizes the Christian life. We see God for who he is, we put our faith in him, and that naturally leads to obedience. We obey the God that we trust.

Question 11:**Do unsaved people benefit from involvement in the church?****Dr. Simon Vibert**

Unsaved people in the church receive a lot of benefit from being members of the visible church of Christ on earth — the social function, the benefits of knowing people, and all that kind of thing. But that can actually work against them, of course, if they don't come to a saving knowledge of Christ for themselves. And therefore, the sort of, the distinction that is made between the visible and the invisible church becomes all important, that God knows those who are his, which is a narrower group of people than those who may attend week by week in a corporate worship experience.

Dr. K. Erik Thoennes

Well Jesus tells us that in the church there will always be tares among the wheat, unbelievers present with believers. We can't always tell those apart, but we can assume that if someone's an unbeliever functioning in the context of the church, they will experience the common grace of God in powerful ways and hopefully those common ways of seeing God will lead to saving grace in their lives.

Dr. Steve Blakemore

When you think about the life of the church as the people who are the people of the gospel, you could say, the people who live in the life of God in Christ, those who have heard the gospel, listened to the gospel, responded to the gospel, we have a context for thinking about the relationship of those who are unsaved in the life of the church, but participating. And the way we should think about that in terms of what it benefits them is this: It truly places them by God's providence in the context in which they *can* hear the gospel, in which they *may* see the gospel lived, in which they may encounter what Jesus Christ alive in the fellowship of a group of people looks like. And therefore, in the sovereignty of God, perhaps that is his mechanism to bring someone before they are saved into the life of the church so that they can respond to the gospel. So that is one way that a person who is unsaved benefits by being involved in the life of the church. But I think there are other ways that an unsaved person, whether or not he or she responds to the gospel, benefits at least in this life by being involved in the life of the church and it is in this regard: If a church is truly living the love of Jesus Christ, if a person, if a church is truly teaching what it means to be alive in Christ, then in some way, those teachings themselves begin to inform some of the values that an unsaved person has. So, it could end up having a great impact on the way that person treats his or her children, or the way that person relates to her husband or her friends. So, in the long run, it is a tragedy that a person who sat in the hearing of the gospel did not respond to gospel, it's a great sadness, but by the same token there are even some benefits to the gospel being heard in a person's life that are not ultimate benefit, but in this life do provide an improvement for their lives.

Question 12:**What blessings will God's people receive after final judgment?****Dr. Stephen J. Wellum**

When we think of the end of history, we know that Christ will return; there will be a final judgment that will involve both believer and unbeliever. We will stand before the judgment seat of Christ. Unfortunately, unbelievers will be seen to be judged eternally in terms of final judgment. For the believer, though, there will now be the receiving of all of the inheritance and promises that are given to us in Christ. The Bible lays these out in very specific terms. We will live in a new heavens and new earth. You think of the end of Revelation 21 and 22 where we now will live in a renovated universe, we will dwell in the presence of God, and that seems to be given in and through the glorified Lord Jesus Christ. We'll be able to commune with him in and through him and his human nature as we will touch him and see him. We will know God in an undiminished way. We will receive all of our inheritance, which is tied to, I think, that new creation and all the benefits of our adoption, our justification, our salvation are ours. This will be for eternity as we then, and we don't even know that will transpire, but it seems that we will explore the wonders of that new creation, that we will carry out our role as image-bearers, bringing all things unto God's glory. And our inheritance, our future is rich; it's glorious. We have hints of it in Scripture, but it'll be far beyond what we can even imagine. But ultimately for us, after the final judgment, all of our inheritance promises, our privileges as sons and daughters of the King will be ours, and we will receive them in fullness.

Dr. Dan Lacich

When we talk about final judgment and the blessings that believers will receive, I think we have a real hole in our theology. There's a lot that's missing there. Most people think, well, heaven, I'll live eternally and it will be wonderful and blissful and that everyone will pretty much be equal. But when we look at the teachings of Jesus and in the letters in the New Testament, one of the things that we find is that there's going to be different levels of blessing for different people based on how they lived their life after coming to faith in Christ. How we live our life doesn't gain us salvation, but once you're saved, how you live your life will determine what your blessing is in heaven, if you will. You know, James makes the point that those who teach will be judged more strictly. Well, what does that mean? Well, it means that their reward will be judged on a harder standard because a teacher is expected to live by a higher standard, and so if they don't live by that standard, the reward won't be as great as it may be for somebody who wasn't a teacher but did their best, you know, following Christ. The picture I think of oftentimes is salvation is what gets you in the stadium. Some people are going to have front row seats. They're going to be right up there up front. You know, James and John asked Jesus, "Can we be on your right- and left-hand side?" And he said, "Well, that's yet to be determined." So, clearly there's some blessing right up next to Jesus. There'll be some other folks, probably a whole lot of preachers and teachers, like myself, who will be way up in the cheap seats and just be happy to be in the stadium, to be in heaven. But it will be determined based on what we've done with what God has given us. One of the images Scripture gives us is that we each receive a crown. I think some crowns are going to be bigger than others because of how people lived. But even in that, the crown is something

we just turn right around and give back to Jesus as an honor to him. But I think the one blessing that most speaks to me is that, as a follower of Christ, when you get there, to hear the words of Jesus and be embraced by him when he says, “Well done, good and faithful servant,” there’ll be nothing greater than being in his presence in that way.

Dr. Sean McDonough

So, when we’re thinking about what blessings the righteous will receive after final judgment, they are, of course, many. The first one is a gift of a resurrected body and a new heavens and new earth. This is pretty important because plenty of Christians even imagine that the ultimate goal of all things is for your invisible soul to die and go to heaven with God. Now, that may in fact, and I believe does happen after you die, but the fullness of God’s blessing is resurrected, re-embodied life, at a sort of “2.0 level,” a much more intense level in a purified and beautified earth. But it’s not simply a matter of having a better physical situation. I think the theologians down the centuries have recognized the greatest blessing is the glory of God poured out, filling the earth as the waters cover the sea, as the prophets say, that this glorious expression of God, this union with him is really the ultimate blessing of the eschaton.

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