



Denominational Doctrines: Which Testament?

By Keith Greer

Many people today misunderstand the Old Testament's role in matters of Biblical authority concerning religious questions and practices. Some say all we need to do to please God is keep the Ten Commandments. Others want to mix the two laws, taking what suits them and leaving the rest. The Seventh Day Adventist must go back to the old law to substantiate his Sabbath-keeping. The Jews go back to the old law because they do not accept the New Testament. Wherever the study or question of instrumental music in worship service is discussed, the Old Testament is used as the authority to justify using instruments in worship. How can we settle these arguments? There is only one way; we must go to the Bible to learn the truth concerning the subject. What saith the scriptures?

To whom was the Law of Moses given? "And Moses called all Israel, and said to them: Hear, O Israel, the statutes and judgments which I speak in your hearing today, that you may learn them and be careful to observe them. The LORD our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. The LORD did not make this covenant with our fathers, but with us, those who are here today, all of us who are alive." {Deuteronomy 5:1-3} God gave the Mosaic law to the physical nation of Israel. It was a national law, given to one nation, not to all people. No Gentile was ever subject to that law. During New Testament times, the Jews sought to bind the law of circumcision on the Gentiles who converted to Christ. What did the apostles say concerning such antics? "Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?" {Acts 15:10} This law was given to their fathers. "Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, 'You must be circumcised and keep the law' -- to whom we gave no such commandment." {Acts 15:24}

They who keep Moses' law are guilty of spiritual adultery. "Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives? For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man. Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another -- to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God." {Romans 7:1-4} The Jews had been released from the law, so they could be married to another -- Christ.

God told us to hear Christ. "And He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, 'Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, let us make here three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.' While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!'" {Matthew 17:2-5} Today, God does not speak through the prophets (Elijah) or Moses (the Old Testament lawgiver) but through Jesus Christ! He is the one to whom we must look for authority.

Christ is superior to Moses. "The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear, according to all you desired of the LORD your God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, 'Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, nor let me see this great fire anymore, lest I die.' And the LORD said to me: 'What they have spoken is good. I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him.'" {Deuteronomy 18:15-19} Peter quoted this passage during his sermon to the Jews on Pentecost (Acts 2:22,23). "For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." {John 1:17} Moses was great in his own right; he played a very important role in the Bible story -- but his time has passed, and now Christ is on center stage.

The prophets foretold a new covenant. "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah - not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more." {Jeremiah 31:31-34} The Hebrew writer quoted this passage (Hebrews 8:8-12). It shows the temporal nature of the old covenant.

They who keep the Mosaic law must keep all or none of it. "Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law." {Galatians 5:2,3} People can't have their cake and eat it too. The old law is not like a smorgasbord -- take what you like and leave what you don't care for. Many go to this law to justify instrumental music in worship, but they want to omit the animal sacrifices. Others desire to go back for the Sabbath, but do not want to enforce the penalty for breaking the Sabbath -- death. Men must choose whether they wish to live under the law of Moses or the law of Christ; they can't have it both ways!

Jesus died to put His law in force. "For where there is a testament, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is in force after men are dead, since it has no power at all while the testator lives." {Hebrews 9:16,17} People often try to avoid the teaching in this passage by saying a will and a testament are two different things. Such arguments simply use sophistry to avoid the force of the passage. Prior to His death, Jesus gave a commentary on the meaning of these statements. "For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." {Matthew 26:28} Notice he said "new covenant."

The priesthood changed. "For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law. For He of whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe,

from which no man has officiated at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord arose from Judah, of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood." {Hebrews 7:12-14} The Hebrew writer points out that Jesus Christ is our High Priest. How could this be if the Law of Moses is still in effect, since Christ came from the tribe of Judah, not Levi? Since the tribe for the priesthood changed -- so must that law.

Christ is the Mediator of a new covenant. "And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance." {Hebrews 9:15} He is now the mediator between God and man. "For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus." {1 Timothy 2:5}

The law was nailed to the cross. "Having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross." {Colossians 2:14} Some, even among us, try to escape the force of this passage by saying there were two laws -- moral and ceremonial. The ceremonial was taken away, but the moral law remained. Where are these two laws and their differences documented in the Old Law? Such arguments show they understand what the passage teaches. The law that separated the Jews from the Gentiles was broken down (Ephesians 2:14-16). Remember, that law was given only to the nation of Israel -- not to the Gentiles.

The law was designed to lead us to Christ. "Therefore, the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus." {Galatians 3:24-26} The law was temporal in nature. It was established to lead men to the One who would give them what the Law of Moses could not -- forgiveness of sins. That law taught us about the coming Christ, His message, and His work on earth.

The Old Testament law was exclusive -- the New Testament law is inclusive of all people. "And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." {Mark 16:15} "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing

them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." {Matthew 28:19} "And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." {Luke 24:47} The Old Testament message had a limited audience -- the Jews. The message of the cross has an unlimited audience -- all the world. This fact is so overwhelming, it cannot be denied. How could the number of people the Old Law reached equal the number the Law of Christ can reach? "But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second." {Hebrews 6:6,7}

We will be judged by the words of Christ -- not Moses. "He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him -- the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day. For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak. And I know that His command is everlasting life. Therefore, whatever I speak, just as the Father has told Me, so I speak." {John 12:48-50} Those who are living today will not be judged by Moses' law, but by the law of Christ. Will you or I be held accountable for offering animal sacrifices, for keeping the Sabbath, for observing Pentecost or the Feast of Tabernacles?

If we cling to the law, we have fallen from grace. "You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace." {Galatians 5:4} God's grace and remission of sins cannot be found in the old law. That law foreshadowed the blessings that would be available under the Law of Christ. When were men's sins finally remitted? When Christ died on the cross, He validated every animal sacrifice offered under the Patriarchal and Mosaic Laws.

God speaks to men today through His Son. "God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than

they." {Hebrews 1:1-4} How can men know what God expects of them? Can we find that information in the teachings of the Old Law? True, by reading the Old Law, we can learn many principles of truth, see the character of God, and observe the consequences of man's disobedience to God's laws. But to know and do what God desires of us today, we must study and apply the law of Christ.

Does this mean that the Old Testament has no purpose today? "For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." {Romans 15:4} "Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come." {1 Corinthians 10:11} Yes, we can learn from that wonderful testament, but we cannot gain salvation by adhering to it or by using the parts we like. We should not try to use it for more than God intended -- leading mankind to His Son!