

CHIEF MINISTRIES

January 2018

Well my friends, we once again embark on a new year, a new journey. Where will the road take us? What does God have in store for us? Well, we know He knows, but maybe He's not telling Or, maybe He is, but you're not listening! One of the best ways to stay on course is to stay in your word! That is why at the end of last month's newsletter I included, as I do every year, a Through-the-year Bible reading schedule to help you. Many have thanked us for this as it has given them an opportunity to join countless others in getting something out of various sections of the Bible. I hear a lot of pastor's come in and preach out of the New Testament only and they sometimes mention how good grace is and how bad the law was. So as Jesus said, *"therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his house what is new and what is old."* (Matthew 15:32)

We need to remember that the one and only Bible used by the first followers of Jesus is what we now call the Old Testament. This was the Word of God for them, their beloved and holy Scriptures, and they did not have any concept in any way that these scriptures were outdated, outmoded, or even "old". What was "old" was the Sinaitic covenant, which was being replaced by the new (and better) covenant, and prophesied in the Old Testament by Jeremiah (31:34). But none of Jesus's followers believed that the Hebrew Scriptures were part of an "old" and soon to be replaced book. Perish the thought. They loved every word of the sacred scriptural scrolls they had, and if you had asked them about the "Old Testament," they would have no idea what you were talking about. All they knew was that the collection of books was the word of God, the Scriptures what we now call the Old Testament.

That's why Jesus constantly pointed to the Old Testament witness, telling His fellow Jews that if they believed Moses, they would believe Him (John 5:39-47), and that's why His disciples were reminded of Old Testament versus when they watched His ministry (e.g., John 2:13-17, with reference to Psalm 69:9). And that's why, when Jesus was tempted by Satan in the wilderness, he resisted him by quoting three times from the book of Deuteronomy (Matthew 4:1-10). (When is the last time you went to Deuteronomy for spiritual nurture and renewal?) And that's why Paul wrote this about the Hebrew Scriptures: *"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work"* (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Do we believe this today: Do we practice it? Do we use the Old Testament "for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work?" Could it be that Paul who had such an incredible revelation of grace knew something that we don't? (Think of that: when Paul preached on grace, the Bible he

used was the Old Testament!) And could it be that leaders and believers will not be fully “competent, equipped for every good work” if they willfully neglect the Old Testament?

But that’s not all he said about the Hebrew Bible, called the Tanakh by Jews. According to Paul, the Old Testament was written to give us hope, helping us to persevere: *“For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of this Scriptures we might have hope” (Romans 15:4)*. Read this once more, substituting the words “the Old Testament” for “the Scriptures,” since the only Scriptures his readers had were the Old Testament Scriptures.

You might say, “I accept the fact that we can receive hope by reading the Old Testament, but all those warnings and judgments have no relevance for us today.” Are you sure about that? If you are, then you’ll have to take on Paul himself. To the Corinthians he wrote, *“For I want you to know, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, ^{v2} and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, ^{v3} and all ate the same spiritual food, ^{v4} and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. ^{v5} Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness.” (1 Corinthians 10:1-5 ESV)*

What does this have to do with New Testament believers? Paul continues: *“Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. ^{v7} Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.” ^{v8} We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. ^{v9} We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, ^{v10} nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. ^{v11} Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. ^{v12} Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. (1 Corinthians 10:6-12 ESV)*

This sounds like a serious warning to me! If not, what is Paul saying? What’s the use of him writing about how Israel sinned and how God judged His people back then if this has no application for us today? The author of Hebrews actually tells us a number of times that the consequences of our rejecting the gospel are far more severe than were the consequences of Israel’s rejecting the law. Paul is warning the church: don’t do what the Israelites did; otherwise there will be consequences.

Yes, Paul, the ultimate grace preacher, wrote these words in 1 Corinthians 10, and if this doesn’t mesh with your understanding of grace, don’t try to change Paul. Change your understanding of grace. You don’t want grace with human mixture. You want true, pure unadulterated grace.

Here’s another example from 1 Corinthians where Paul uses the Old Testament again, this time as he explains how seriously we are to take persistent, unrepentant sin within the body. Speaking about a man who was in a relationship with his father’s wife, he wrote, *When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, ^{v5} you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in*

the day of the Lord. (1 Corinthians 5:4-5 ESV). This is extreme counsel, but that's how dangerous the spreading of unchecked, unrepentant sin is.

He continues: *I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—^{v10} not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. ^{v11} But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler--not even to eat with such a one. ^{v12} For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? ^{v13} God judges those outside. "Purge the evil person from among you."* (1 Corinthians 5:9-13 ESV).

Paul ends this very strong exhortation with a question that occurs 9 times in Deuteronomy: "*So you shall purge the evil from your midst.*" (Deuteronomy 13:5; 17:7, 12; 19:19; 21:9, 21; 22:21, 22, 24). In Deuteronomy, it referred to putting to death and unrepentant, sinning Israelite; in 1 Corinthians, it refers to excommunicating and unrepentant, sinning Christian. But in both cases, the danger of sin is underscored and the prescribed treatment is extreme: death under the Mosaic covenant and excommunication (and, in some cases, even turning the person over to Satan!) under the new covenant.

This is the love of God in action, and it is part of the message of grace, which gets polluted when God's people wink at persistent flouted sin. And notice that Paul didn't have to give some disclaimer to his readers and say, "I apologize for quoting from that dastardly book of Deuteronomy - from the dreaded law!" Not at all. This was God's holy, beautiful, wonderful word, and all the writers of the New Testament quoted it as God's Word – not some lesser book about a lesser God, and not just some book (or collection of books) to be used to contrast how bad things were under the law with how good they are under grace.

In fact, often when the apostles wanted to exhort believers about how to live today, they quoted without apology from the Old Testament - or, to state this more accurately, they quoted the Old Testament Scriptures as divine words, words of truth and words of life. So, when Peter wanted to exhort his readers to be holy in all their conduct, what did he quote? He quoted Leviticus 19:2, "*You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am Holy.*" (See 1 Peter 1:14-16.)

To put this in further perspective and to give you an idea of just how much the Old Testament is intertwined in the New Testament, consider these facts: The pages of the New Testament are filled with citations of Hebrew Scriptures, with as many as 300 direct quotations from the Tanakh and several thousand allusions to the Hebrew Bible in the New Testament. In fact, some scholars claim that almost one out of every three verses in the New Testament – 2,500 out of a total of 8,000 versus - contains an Old Testament quote or general allusion, while, quite solidly, it can be demonstrated that more than ten percent of the New Testament text is made up of citation or direct allusion to the Old Testament. More than ten percent! The book of Revelation, the last book of the New Testament contains 404 verses, most of which (as many as 331 versus) are drawn from the imagery of the Hebrew Scriptures, although Revelation hardly ever directly quotes a specific verse from the Tanakh. All this indicates how deeply the Hebrew Scripture are intertwined in the New Covenant Scriptures. And I repeat: with rare exception, the Old Testament is not quoted in order to set up a contrast with the New Testament but rather to

validate, authenticate, and explicate what was taking place in the New Testament. That's why Peter, after pointing to the glory of the Transfigurations as evidence that he was not following "*cleverly devised myths*" about Jesus the Messiah, pointed back to the prophetic Scriptures of the Old Testament. It is to these Scriptures that "*you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts*" (2 Peter 1:16-19). Yes, Peter writes, we saw the Lord glorified with our own eyes, but you along with us, have the prophetic Scriptures of the Old Testament. Pay attention to these glorious words!

If you really want your theology rocked, consider this. When Paul was contrasting the righteousness of works with the righteousness of faith, he explained the former by quoting from Leviticus, and he explained the latter by quoting from Deuteronomy. (See Romans 10:5-10). Yes, he used a text in Deuteronomy, not as a contrast but as a platform for declaring the righteousness that comes by faith. In fact, he saw born-again believers in Jesus as part of the scriptural continuum begun by Abraham, who believed the Lord, and it was counted to him as righteousness (Genesis 15:6, quoted in Romans 4:3). And, when Paul declared that "*the righteous shall live by faith*" in Romans 1:17 and Galatians 3:11, he was quoting Habakkuk 2:4, which was not given as a prophecy of the new covenant but rather as the calling for God's people, beginning with Israel. That's just some of why Paul could write this in Romans 3: "*Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law*" (verse 31).

But there's more: some of the greatest revelations of God's mercy, grace and compassion are found on the pages of the Old Testament in passages like these: *The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. v9 He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever. v10 He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. v11 For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; v12 as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. v13 As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him. v14 For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust (Psalm 103:8-14 ESV)*. That's why David would proclaim: *Of David. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! v2 Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, v3 who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, v4 who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, v5 who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's (Psalm 103:1-5 ESV)*.

David experienced this revelation of God's grace and goodness under the Sinai covenant! In fact, the word of the New Testament use for "grace" (charis in Greek) is the equivalent of the Hebrew word *chen* (with a guttural "h"), and it is used frequently in the Old Testament to describe God's gracious dealings with His people. And I repeat: this was under the Sinai covenant, since it was the same God at work before the cross and after the cross. And this is the God who revealed Himself to Moses on Sinai, saying: *The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, v7 keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."* (Exodus 34:6-7 ESV)

That's why the prophet Micah, whose name is probably short for "Who is like God?" Or "Who is like Yahweh?", ended his book with these words: *they shall lick the dust like a serpent, like the crawling things of the earth; they shall come trembling out of their strongholds; they shall turn in dread to the LORD our God, and they shall be in fear of you.* ^{v18} *Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love.* ^{v19} *He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.* ^{v20} *You will show faithfulness to Jacob and steadfast love to Abraham, as you have sworn to our fathers from the days of old.* (Micah 7:17-20 ESV).

Yes, this was a revelation of God's mercy, grace and compassion given under the Sinai covenant - and there are scores of other passages that could be quoted to support this. That's why John 1:17 does not say, "For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." No, the word, "but" does not occur between these two statements. Rather, John wrote, "*For the law was given through Moses: grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.*" The first was glorious. The second was even more glorious! The first was the foundation. The second built upon it rather than tore it down.

And that's actually what Paul is teaching in 2 Corinthians 3, where he called the Sinai covenant, epitomized in the 10 Commandments written in stone, the "ministry of death" and the "ministry of condemnation" (2 Corinthians 3:7, 9). To be sure, the contrast is certainly dramatic. And it does underscore the surpassing glory of the new covenant which is one of the reasons I love the message of grace so much. But notice what he wrote: The Sinai covenant did come with glory, but that glory is totally surpassed by the glory of the new covenant in Jesus.

That covenant is with me and you. That covenant is found in His Word.

So as we go forward this year, let's think about His love, think about His goodness, think about His grace and what He's brought you through. For as high as the heaven's above so great is the measure of our Father's love. All of the answers are right there in black and white.....and red.....

Don't doubt.....don't fear.....keep pursuing!

Study to show yourself approved unto God.....a workman that need not be ashamed of the gospel.

I'm praying for you all

Chief

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Christ's

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