

THE NEW COVENANT IN 2 CORINTHIANS 3

Clearly, the New Covenant has application to the Church. Paul, in addressing the Corinthians (a largely Gentile Church, in terms of background), says that his ministry among them was a NEW COVENANT ministry.

2 Corinthians 3:5–6 (NKJV)

5 Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God,

6 who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

Paul, in giving instructions to the Corinthian Church regarding communion in 1 Cor. 11:25, quoted the Lord as saying, *“This cup is the new covenant in my blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.”*

Clearly, the Church partakes of the spiritual benefits of the New Covenant on the basis of Christ’s shed blood.

In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul contrasts the Old Covenant with that of the New Covenant.

Contrasting the Old & the New Covenants – 2 Cor. 3

The letter that kills versus the Spirit Who gives life – 2 Cor. 3:6

A ministry of condemnation versus a ministry of righteousness – 2 Cor. 3:9

What is passing away versus what remains – 2 Cor. 3:11

The Superior Glory of the New Covenant – 2 Cor. 3

“More glorious” – 2 Cor. 3:8

“Exceeds much more in glory” – 2 Cor. 3:9

“Glory that excels” – 2 Cor. 3:10

“What remains is much more glorious” – 2 Cor. 3:11

In 2 Corinthians, Paul highlights the great glory of the New Covenant which is that it is UNIQUELY a ministry of the Spirit. The Jews previously related to God through the Law, but now believers relate to God through the ministry of the Spirit.

The New Covenant – A Ministry of the Spirit

“an epistle... written...by the Spirit of the living God” – 2 Cor. 3:3

“...of the Spirit...the Spirit gives life.” – 2 Cor. 3:6

“the ministry of the Spirit” – 2 Cor. 3:8

“transformed...by the Spirit of the Lord.” – 2 Cor. 3:18

The Holy Spirit is mentioned about 80 times in the Old Testament and about half of those times He is referenced in conjunction with His New Covenant ministries.

Distinctive of the Spirit’s New Covenant ministry is an INTIMACY with God that is unparalleled by anything experienced by the Old Testament saints. This is what we might call “*the Abba dynamic*”. The Old Testament believers never recognized God in such an intimate way as “Abba”, meaning “*Papa*” or “*Daddy*” (cf. Rom. 8:15, Gal. 4:5-7). It is the Spirit Himself Who presses home to our hearts this reality.

Romans 8:15–16 (NKJV)

15 For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, “Abba, Father.”

16 The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,

“There is perhaps no single New Testament revelation that more succinctly or delightfully communicates the distinctive blessedness of New Covenant standing than the *Abba dynamic*.” – **Douglas Bookman**

The New Testament should be viewed as an instruction manual on how we, as believers, should live under the New Covenant as we are led by the Spirit (cf. Gal. 5:16). **What defines the New Covenant above all else is the ministry of the Spirit!** To partake in the New Covenant is to uniquely partake in the Spirit’s ministry.

The cross of Christ ratified the New Covenant – allowing it to be implemented. Christ, by reason of His cross, is now “Mediator of the new covenant” (cf. Heb. 9:15).

However, the New Covenant was not inaugurated until the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. That was the day when Christ sent the Holy Spirit and the Church began. This was when the New Covenant ministry of the Spirit was initially inaugurated. This was when God’s New Covenant program began in earnest. It started with the Church but will be completed with Israel.

Keep in mind that while the Church participates in the New Covenant, it will not be completely fulfilled in all its aspects until Israel is in right relationship with God through her Messiah at the Second Coming.

While the Church right now through the Spirit participates in the spiritual blessings of the covenant, the final fulfillment of all the physical and spiritual New Covenant promises will only be fulfilled in relationship to Israel.

In other words, the Church participates in the spiritual blessings of the New Covenant, but the Church does not fulfill the physical land promises, etc. The Church is “*grafted in*” (cf. Rom. 11) and partakes of the blessing aspect of the Abrahamic Covenant, which is then further amplified in the New Covenant. However, the Church does not replace what God intends to be fulfilled in relationship to Israel. The full-orbed New Covenant promises ultimately apply fully and completely to Israel alone.

However, the Church really does right now participate in the spiritual blessings of the New Covenant, which are administered by the Spirit.

The Church – Participants in the New Covenant

Gen. 12:3 ...in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

John 4:22 ...salvation is of the Jews.

Lk. 20:22, 1 Cor. 11:25... This cup is the new covenant in My blood...

Rom. 11:17 ...were grafted in...became a partaker...

Eph. 1:3 ...blessed us with every spiritual blessing...in Christ,

The outpouring of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost is the essence and embodiment of the New Covenant. It is the ministry of the Spirit that most clearly distinguishes the New Covenant from the Old Covenant.

Whereas the Law had an EXTERNAL administrative emphasis, the Spirit now has an INTERNAL administrative emphasis. The Law was the essence of the Old Covenant, while the Spirit is the essence of the New Covenant.

Speaking in tongues on the Day of Pentecost indicated that God was judging the Jews and temporarily setting them aside (cf. 1 Cor. 14:20-22). God, by His Spirit, was now doing something NEW in relationship to people of all languages. The scope of God’s New Covenant Spirit ministry would now be international in scope.

Peter understood it in this way, because when the Gentiles believed and had the same experience of tongues in Acts 10 he said, “*If God gave them*

the same gift as He gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?" (cf. Acts 11:17). Thus, God was bearing witness that Gentiles were now also to be accepted as having entered into God's New Covenant blessings of salvation (cf. Acts 11:15-18). The Gentiles were now on an equal footing, sharing equally in the Holy Spirit and in the spiritual blessings of the New Covenant (cf. 1 Cor. 12:13).

In Acts 19, we find that Paul had a test question for disciples he came in contact with, to determine whether they were Old Covenant saints or whether they were New Covenant saints. The question, as found in Acts 19:1 was this: *"Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?"* And on that occasion they said, *"We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit."* So, he told them about Christ; and when they believed on the Lord, they also received the Holy Spirit with the sign gift of tongues.

The point is that what distinctively defines the New Covenant is the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The sign gifts were temporary and transitional.

In fact, the whole book of Acts in giving a history of the early church is transitional in nature. The norm for the Church Age is what we find in the New Testament epistles. And according to Romans 8:9 that norm is that all believers receive the Holy Spirit the moment they believe.

Romans 8:9 (NKJV)

9 But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.

It is the reality of the SPIRIT that is the defining reality for all believers who are now in a NEW COVENANT relationship with God.