

2. Correctly Handling the Word of Truth in the 21st Century

Paul admonished Timothy in 1 Tim 2:15:

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

The teaching of Christ specifically requires us to understand the difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament, the Law of Moses and the Law of Christ, and the Patriarchal, Jewish and Christian dispensations. The true church and true Christians correctly handle the word of truth, understanding the relationship between the Old Testament law of Moses and the New Testament law of the spirit and life. Paul explained in 2 Cor 3:2-11:

2 You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everybody. 3 You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

4 Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God. 5 Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. 6 He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant- — not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

7 Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, fading though it was, 8 will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? 9 If the ministry that condemns men is glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness! 10 For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory. 11 And if what was fading away came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts!

Few religious groups of the 21st century make this distinction of rightly handling the word of God, understanding that competency comes from God and not from mankind's wisdom, wit, and knowledge. However, Christ and the apostles did God's word in his son, only, is the glory that lasts.

God Speaks through His Son

God made clear that we should hear Christ. On the Mount of Transfiguration in Matt 17:5, He said: "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!" The writer of Hebrews told us how to correctly handle the relationship between the Old and New Testaments: "God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, has at the end of these days spoken unto us in His Son (Heb. 1:1)." Few religious groups of the 21st century make the distinction that God speaks through his son and not through the Old Testament prophets.

A New Covenant Was to Replace the Old Covenant

The Old Testament taught that a new covenant would replace the old. The Lord God spoke through Jeremiah in Jer 31:31-32:

31 "The time is coming," declares the LORD,
"when I will make a new covenant

with the house of Israel
and with the house of Judah.

32 It will not be like the covenant
I made with their forefathers
when I took them by the hand
to lead them out of Egypt.

The writer of Hebrews in the New Testament endorses this principle that the New Testament should replace the Old Testament by quoting Jeremiah in Heb 8:8. The writer concluded in Heb 8:13, "By calling this covenant 'new,' he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear." Few religious groups of the 21st century recognize that the Old Testament said that the New Testament would take its place.

Christ Taught the Proper Relationship between the Two Testaments

Jesus himself taught the proper relationship between the Old and New Testaments. At the beginning of his preaching in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught in Matt 5:17: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them."

At the end of his time on earth he said in Luke 24:44: "He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."

At his death, John records in John 19:28, "Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty."

In addition, a little later, he said in John 19:30, "30 When he had received the drink, Jesus said, 'It is finished.' With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit."

According to Matt 27:50-51, at this very time, "50 And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. 51 At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom."

Few religious groups of the 21st century teach that Jesus taught that he would fulfill the Old Testament Law and the prophets. Instead, they turn to the Old Testament to find authority for their practices; such as, instrumental music, infant baptism, incense, relics, polygamy, divorce and remarriage for reasons other than sexual immorality, and various speculative teachings in support of their millennium theories.

The Apostles Taught That the Old Testament Ended at the Death of Christ

The apostle Paul confirms the changes that occurred at the death of Christ. Speaking of the Jews and Gentiles, he said in Eph 2:14-16:

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, 15 by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, 16 and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.

Of the Old Testament law, Paul added the following in Col 2:13-14, "He forgave us all our sins, 14 having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that

stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.” Paul and the other apostles and prophets considered themselves to be ministers of a New Covenant in 2 Cor 3:6, “He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant- — not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”

The summation of the law was Christ and his church, with the New Testament firmly in place. Gal 3:24-25 teaches that we are no longer under the law:

So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. 25 Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.

Further, Rom 10:3 teaches, “Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.” Many modern religions do not see the law as fulfilled in Christ; and therefore, they justify many religious acts from passages in the Old Testament.

Conclusion

The New Testament church in the 21st century will correctly handle the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Appropriately, the true church follows the New Testament in all matters of faith and practice. As Peter wrote in 1 Peter 4:11, “If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. In 1 John 4:1, John warned us to test everything to avoid false teaching, “Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.” Paul warned us in the same way in 1 Thess 5:19-21, “19 Do not put out the Spirit's fire; 20 do not treat prophecies with contempt. 21 Test everything. Hold on to the good.” The New Testament teaching of the 1st century can only survive if we test the false teaching of the 21st century against the word of God.

Just as we must follow the very words of God we must also follow the interpretations of God given to those words. Peter explained in 2 Peter 1:20-21:

Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. 21 For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

Study Questions from the Scriptures

1. 1 Tim 2:15: To whom are we to best present ourselves? How should we handle the word of truth?
2. 2 Cor 3:2-11: From where is the *letter Christ written by the Spirit of the living God*? From where does our competency come? What is the difference in the letter and the Spirit? What ministry is more glorious than Moses' engraved letters on stone?
3. Matt 17:5: Whom does God want us to hear?
4. Heb. 1:1: Through whom has God spoken to us?
5. Jer 31:31-32: What did God forecast that he would make? What will the new covenant not be like?
6. Heb 8:8: What is the effect of quoting Jeremiah in this passage?
7. Heb 8:13: When God called the covenant of Christ new, what happened to the first covenant?
8. Matt 5:17: What did Christ come to do as regards the Law and the Prophets?
9. Luke 24:44: Where was everything fulfilled in Christ written?

10. John 19:28: What did Jesus know was going to be fulfilled in his death?
11. John 19:30: What did he say just before dying?
12. Matt 27:50-51: At the point of Christ's death, what happened to the temple veil?
13. Eph 2:14-16: What did Christ abolish? Who did God reconcile in the body of Christ? Through what did he reconcile them?
14. Col 2:13-14: Who forgave us our sins? What did he cancel? What did he nail to the cross?,
15. 2 Cor 3:6: Of what are we ministers? What kills? What gives life?
16. Gal 3:24-25: What no longer supervises us?
17. Rom 10:3: What is the end of the law?
18. 1 Peter 4:11: Whose words are we to speak?
19. 1 John 4:1: Who are we to test? Who has gone out into the world?
20. 1 Thess 5:19-21: What are we not to treat with contempt? What are we to test? We are to hold on to what?
21. 2 Peter 1:20-21: What is the origin of Scripture? What is the origin of the interpretation of Scripture?