

SEMINAR 01 – COVENANT CONFUSION

RIGHTLY DIVIDING THE NEW COVENANT

1. A Tradition of New Covenant Confusion

- a. There is a history of New Covenant confusion in the church. For centuries debate over...
 - i. Sabbath, Lord's Supper, baptism, apostolic authority, Acts/Hebrews/Revelation, Gospel: faith/works, law & grace, assurance (eternal security), priesthood/tithes, holydays, intervention (prayer/healing/miracles), kingdom/eschatology.
- b. How can we better understand the Bible? Resolve church confusion and contradictions?
 - i. Covenantalist says, "It is all of grace, it all speaks of Christ/church" (not literal)
 - ii. Dispensationalist says, "Rightly divide the word of truth! 2 Tim 2:15!" (literal)
- c. So, we divide OT Israel from church, kingdom earth from heaven, law from grace
 - i. But these confusions are not OT/NT issues, they are raised in the NT itself.
 - ii. At the root, it all stems from our relationship with the New Covenant
 - iii. No one asks are we under the New Covenant? Is it ours? *"It's Jesus, right?"*
- d. There is much confusion of doctrine, but perhaps none as central as this one.

2. Evidence of New Covenant Confusion

- a. Exhibit A: Books vs Doctrine - Title page Matt 1:1. NT is thought to describe the books.
 - i. The page gives a doctrinal handicap from the beginning – table of contents.
 - ii. This page wrongly communicates that everything after it is New Testament.
 - iii. Nowhere in Scripture is "new testament" used to refer to books of the Bible.
 - iv. Our study concerns the doctrine, prophecy, promises of God's covenant.
- b. Ex B: Defining words – Testament v. Covenant. Are they different? Why?
 - i. Should 'testament' be removed from the text, or recognized as different?
 - ii. The existence of the clamor testifies to the confusion.
 - iii. *"testament and covenant are different"* doesn't solve it, creates more confusion
 1. Old dispies also invented two new covenants with little justification.
 2. Every place 'testament' is used, the context includes Israel, temple, law.
- c. Ex C: Our purpose - Kingdom and the Cross. Which gospel is ours?
 - i. What is the most important message we can preach today – kingdom or cross?
 - ii. Our relationship to the kingdom and the cross is an ongoing dispute.
 - iii. Are we in the kingdom, or do we preach the kingdom come?
 - iv. Do we need to trust the cross of Christ, or Christ the king?
 - v. Does our relationship to God require a covenant, or are we complete in Christ?
 - vi. Does the cross remove the law, end of the law, make it doable?
 - vii. Do we bear the cross or believe the cross? Do we wait for or build the Kingdom?
 - viii. This is no trivial matter concerning the message and mission of the church.
- d. Exhibit D – Have you heard? "new covenant" (4x, 6x testament, but also title pages)
 - i. Do you know what it is? *"Isn't it just Jesus, Spirit, faith, grace, salvation?"*
 - ii. Mystery 17x Paul alone, Dispensation 4x, fellowship 5x, new creature/man 6x, body (of Christ) 10x – these terms show up 4-5x more than "new covenant"
 - iii. Old dispies were more Pauline. Understand Paul more, it gets clear. 2Tim 2:7
 - iv. Both covenant/dispies now think we're under the NC, Hebrews, kingdom come.
- e. The church has a problem with New Covenant Confusion.

3. We Need to Rightly Divide the New Covenant

- a. What's the solution? Mid-Acts Pauline right division is rightly dividing the new covenant.
 - i. Get Paul right, and you resolve the new covenant problem.
 - ii. Get Paul wrong, and you struggle with graft, remnant, Lord's Supper, Hebrews.
- b. God wants us to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery – Eph 3:9
 - i. Why don't more see it? The New Covenant gets in the way.
 - ii. Students of Paul/mystery must a) know what it is, and b) what it is not (NC)
 - iii. Else you will be seated in the New Covenant under a New Testament umbrella with the door wide open to the same failures to rightly divide for centuries
- c. Pentecostalism, covenant theology, preterism, postmill, ammill is a failure to rightly divide – but is more accurately a failure to rightly divide the new covenant from Paul.

"The word "Testament", as a translation of the Greek word *diatheke* (which means *covenant*), has been nothing less than a great calamity; for, by its use, truth has been effectually veiled all through the centuries; causing a wrong turning to be taken as to the purpose and character of this present Dispensation, by which the errors of tradition have usurped the place of important truth."

- EW Bullinger

"Between a testament and a promise there is this difference: a testament is made by someone who is about to die: a promise, however, is made by someone who expects to continue living.... Since God in the Scriptures again and again calls his promise a testament he means to announce thereby that he will die;.... A testament is nothing but the last will of one who is dying, telling how his heirs are to live with and dispose of his properties after his death.... The testator is Christ, who is about to die."

- Martin Luther

"Neither the first covenant, at all, or ever, nor the new covenant, as yet to be made with Israel and Judah, relates to Christians. Believers today must avoid the bondage of the first; and the false hopes aroused by misapplication of the promises of the second."

- William Newell

"The first covenant was made with Israel; the second must be so likewise, according to the prophecy of Jeremiah"

"The new covenant will be established formally with Israel in the millennium."

- John Nelson Darby