

# Redemption 304: Sin and the Covenants



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## Sin and the Covenants

The main issue that will be examined in this study is how the bible defines sin. As we proceed we will investigate this foundational subject in regard to the various covenants that God has established over the course of redemptive history. We will begin early in Genesis. The first use of the term “sin” in the Bible is found in Genesis 4.

**Genesis 4:7** If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee *shall be* his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.

**Genesis 18:20** And the LORD said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because **their sin is very grievous.**

As we consider Genesis 4, we note that there is no explanation for what sin is. We must therefore ask how would Cain have had any context to know what God meant by sin? The answer to this question comes from studying the surrounding context. Though the word “sin” isn’t used before Genesis 4, it is only a few verses earlier in chapter 3 that Moses provides the account of Adam and Eve’s first sin.

**Genesis 3:15** And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. 16 **And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: 17 But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it:** for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.

**Genesis 3:1** Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, **hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?** 2 And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: 3 But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. 4 And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: 5 For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. 6 **And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat...**8 And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the

cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden. 9 And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou? 10 And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself. 11 And he said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? **Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?...** 17 And unto Adam he said, **Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed...**

The way Moses compiled and arranged these accounts is deliberate and instructive. As we study Genesis 3 and 4 together, we see that “sin” is first understood as violating a command of God (Genesis 3). And the consequence of “sin” is expulsion from fellowship with God and (eventual) physical death. (For more on these issues see our “Priesthood and the Kinsman Redeemer” study.) It is true that unlike Adam, Cain does not violate a direct verbal command from God. For instance, God does not say to Cain, “Thou shalt not kill” or even “Thou shalt not offer vegetables.” However, set against the backdrop of Adam and Eve’s violation of God’s direct command in Genesis 3, Cain would easily have at least understood God’s use of the word “sin” in Genesis 4 in basic terms as an action which is contrary to God’s will and which warrants God’s punitive judgment.

Closely related to sin is the concept of evil. Genesis 6:5 is the first mention of the term “evil” in the Bible.

**Genesis 6:5** And GOD saw that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and *that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.*

In contrast to Adam and Eve’s sin in Genesis 3 which involved the action of eating from the tree in violation of God’s commands, Genesis 6 articulates God’s disapproval of the imagination and thoughts of the heart of men, which he identifies here as evil. Genesis 6 therefore indicates that not only deeds but also thoughts can be considered wrong in God’s eyes. The New Testament provides clear support for this conclusion in passages which state that wrong belief is also condemnable.

**John 6:27** Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed. 28 **Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?** 29 **Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.**

**Matthew 5: 27** Ye have heard that it was said by them **of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery:** 28 But I say unto you, That **whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.** 29 And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that **thy whole body should be cast into hell.**

**Romans 11:20** Well; **because of unbelief they were broken off**, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear:

**Hebrews 3:12** Take heed, brethren, **lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God**...19 So we see that **they could not enter in because of unbelief**.

**Hebrews 4:6** Seeing therefore it remaineth that some must enter therein, and they to whom it was first preached **entered not in because of unbelief**:

**Hebrews 11:6** But **without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe** that he is, and *that* he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

From these passages we can see that humans should be concerned about what God considers sinful (whether in deed or in thought) because it is on the basis of such things that God accepts and blesses or rejects and punishes us.

As we proceed we will turn to the idea of how covenants relate to what God considers sinful. The first question we will ask is, "if we were Israelites living just after the Exodus or in the time of David, what would we look to in order to determine what sin is?" The answer is probably obvious. The Law of Moses defined sin for Israelites who lived at the time of the Exodus.

**Exodus 19:3** And Moses went up unto God, and the LORD called unto him out of the mountain, saying, Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel; 4 Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself. 5 Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, **and keep my covenant**, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: 6 **And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation**. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel.

**Exodus 24:3** And Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD, **and all the judgments**: and all the people answered with one voice, and said, All the words which the LORD hath said will we do. 4 **And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD**, and rose up early in the morning, and builded an altar under the hill, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel. 5 And he sent young men of the children of Israel, which offered burnt offerings, and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen unto the LORD. 6 And Moses took half of the blood, and put it in basons; and half of **the blood** he sprinkled on the altar. 7 **And he took the book of the covenant**, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the LORD hath said will we do, **and be obedient**. 8 And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold **the blood of the covenant, which the LORD hath made with you concerning all these words**.

In general terms, the Law of Moses was a covenant. Comparable to Adam and Eve in the garden, the Law of Moses contained expressed commands from God

regarding what they could and could not do. Obedience allowed the Israelites to continue to live in the land that God had promised them. Disobedience resulted in either individual death or corporate expulsion and exile, depending on the specific circumstances.

**Deuteronomy 11:22** For if ye shall diligently **keep all these commandments which I command you**, to do them, **to love the LORD your God**, to walk in all his ways, and to cleave unto him... 26 Behold, **I set before you this day a blessing and a curse; 27 A blessing, if ye obey the commandments of the LORD your God**, which I command you this day: 28 **And a curse, if ye will not obey the commandments of the LORD your God**, but turn aside out of the way which I command you this day, to go after other gods, which ye have not known.

**Deuteronomy 28:1** And it shall come to pass, **if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day**, that the LORD thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth: 2 **And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God.** 14 And thou shalt not go aside from any of the words which I command thee this day, *to* the right hand, or *to* the left, to go after other gods to serve them. 15 **But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee**, and overtake thee: 16 Cursed *shalt* thou *be*...62 ...because thou wouldest not obey the voice of the LORD thy God.

Like Genesis 6 (and the New Testament passages we also viewed earlier), the Law of Moses indicates that, not only deeds, but also beliefs could be considered sinful. It is important to note that in this sense the Law of Moses actually required belief (faith) in God and His word.

**Exodus 19: 7** And Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before their faces all these words which the LORD commanded him. 8 And all the people answered together, and said, All that the LORD hath spoken we will do. And Moses returned the words of the people unto the LORD. 9 And the LORD said unto Moses, Lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud, **that the people may hear when I speak with thee, and believe thee for ever.** And Moses told the words of the people unto the LORD.

**Deuteronomy 6:1** Now these are the commandments, the statutes, and the judgments, which the LORD your God commanded to teach you, that ye might do them in the land whither ye go to possess it: 2 **That thou mightest fear the LORD thy God, to keep all his statutes and his commandments**, which I command thee, thou, and thy son, and thy son's son, all the days of thy life; and that thy days may be prolonged. 3 **Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe to do it;** that it may be well with thee, and that ye may increase mightily, as the LORD God of thy fathers hath promised thee, in the land that floweth with milk and honey. 4 Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: 5 **And thou shalt**

**love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.**

**Numbers 14:** 6 And Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, which were of them that searched the land, rent their clothes: 7 And they spake unto all the company of the children of Israel, saying, The land, which we passed through to search it, is an exceeding good land. 8 If the LORD delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey. 9 Only **rebel not ye against the LORD**, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the LORD is with us: fear them not. 10 **But all the congregation bade stone them with stones.** And the glory of the LORD appeared in the tabernacle of the congregation before all the children of Israel. 11 And the LORD said unto Moses, **How long will this people provoke me? and how long will it be ere they believe me,** for all the signs which I have shewed among them? 12 **I will smite them** with the pestilence, and disinherit them, and will make of thee a greater nation and mightier than they.

**Deuteronomy 1:**29 Then I said unto you, Dread not, neither be afraid of them. 30 The LORD your God which goeth before you, he shall fight for you, according to all that he did for you in Egypt before your eyes; 31 And in the wilderness, where thou hast seen how that the LORD thy God bare thee, as a man doth bear his son, in all the way that ye went, until ye came into this place. 32 **Yet in this thing ye did not believe the LORD your God,** 33 Who went in the way before you, to search you out a place to pitch your tents in, in fire by night, to shew you by what way ye should go, and in a cloud by day. 34 **And the LORD heard the voice of your words, and was wroth, and sware, saying,** 35 **Surely there shall not one of these men of this evil generation see that good land, which I sware to give unto your fathers,** 36 Save Caleb the son of Jephunneh; he shall see it, and to him will I give the land that he hath trodden upon, and to his children, because he hath wholly followed the LORD.

Having considered the role of the Mosaic Covenant in defining which beliefs and actions were sinful for the people of Israel after the Exodus, we arrive at another question. What defined what was and was not sin before the Covenant of Moses? Before the time of Moses, it was the covenant of Noah and subsequently the covenant of Abraham which defined what was sinful.

**Genesis 9:** 1 **And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth.** 2 And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the air, upon all that moveth upon the earth, and upon all the fishes of the sea; into your hand are they delivered. 3 Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things. 4 **But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat.** 5 And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man; at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man. 6 **Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed:** for in the image

of God made he man. 7 **And you, be ye fruitful, and multiply; bring forth abundantly in the earth, and multiply therein.** 8 And God spake unto Noah, and to his sons with him, saying, 9 **And I, behold, I establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you;** 10 And with every living creature that is with you, of the fowl, of the cattle, and of every beast of the earth with you; from all that go out of the ark, to every beast of the earth. 11 **And I will establish my covenant with you; neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth.**

**Genesis 12:** 1 **Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country,** and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: 2 **And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing:** 3 And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

**Genesis 15:** 1 **After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram** in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward. 2 And Abram said, Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus? 3 And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir. 4 **And, behold, the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir.** 5 And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be. 6 And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness. 7 **And he said unto him, I am the LORD that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it.**

**Genesis 17:** 1 **And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram,** and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; **walk before me, and be thou perfect.** 2 **And I will make my covenant between me and thee,** and will multiply thee exceedingly. 3 And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him, saying, 4 As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations. 5 Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee. 6 And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee. 7 **And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.** 8 **And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.** 9 And God said unto Abraham, **Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations.** 10 **This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised.**

**Genesis 18:** 17 **And the LORD said,** Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do; 18 Seeing that **Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation,**

and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? 19 **For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.**

In contrast to the Mosaic Covenant but similar to God's statements to Adam in the garden of Eden, the covenant with Noah includes only a few specified commandments. Perhaps the most notable is God's instructions prohibiting murder and his outline of the responsibilities and protocols regarding the execution of consequences if a murder should be committed. All in all, the Covenant with Noah is not very detailed or extensive in regard to commandments and defining sin. Prior to Noah, the case is even more limited. The only commandment listed in the bible prior to Genesis 9 is God's command to Adam not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The conclusion that prior to Genesis 9, God had not issued specific commands to men besides what he commanded to Adam is supported by the New Testament.

**Romans 4:15** Because the law worketh wrath: for **where no law is, there is no transgression.**

**Romans 5: 13** (For **until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law.** 14 **Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression,** who is the figure of him that was to come.

In his epistle, the apostle John defines sin as the transgression of the law.

**1 John 3:4** **Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.**

John's definition of sin fits well with our understanding of Genesis 3 and the role of the Law of Moses. Both Genesis 3 and the Law of Moses involve expressed verbal commandments, which in a fundamental sense constitute the promulgation of Law. But if sin is the transgression of the Law, could men be condemned as sinners before the Law? Or more specifically, could men be condemned for sins that weren't specifically prohibited by a direct verbal command until the Law of Moses? Paul addresses this issue early in Romans.

**Romans 1:18** For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; 19 Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed *it* unto them. 20 For **the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:** 21 Because that, **when they knew God,** they glorified *him* not as God, neither were thankful; but **became vain in their imaginations,** and their foolish heart was darkened. 22 Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, 23 And **changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to**

**birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.** 24 Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: 25 Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and **worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator**, who is blessed for ever. Amen. 26 For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did **change the natural use** into that which is against nature: 27 And likewise also the men, **leaving the natural use** of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet. 28 And even as they did not like **to retain God in their knowledge**, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; 29 Being filled with **all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, 30 Backbiters, haters of God, spiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, 31 Without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: 32 Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.** 2:1 Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for **wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things.** 2 But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things. 3 And thinkest thou this, **O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same**, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God? 4 Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? 5 But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of **the righteous judgment of God; 6 Who will render to every man according to his deeds: 7 To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life: 8 But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, 9 Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil**, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile; 10 **But glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good**, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile: 11 For there is no respect of persons with God. 12 For **as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law:** and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law; 13 (For not the hearers of the law *are* just before God, but **the doers of the law shall be justified.** 14 For **when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law**, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: 15 Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and *their* thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;) 16 In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel...27 And **shall not uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfil the law**, judge thee, who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law?

According to Paul, God expected men to know what was wrong even when he had not issued particular commands about it. Knowledge of sin and the

punishment for sinners was sufficiently available from such things as the natural order of creation as well as from our reasoning functions. Reasoning is exemplified here in Romans 2 when Paul argues that men can determine what is wrong for us to do by means of comparison to our condemnation of the same actions in others. Of course, prior to the Law of Moses, mankind was also generally instructed by their knowledge of examples from earlier times, such as Adam's sin and the consequences for it as well as God's destruction of the sinful world by the Flood. These explanations by Paul correspond very well to God's statements to Cain in Genesis 4:7. As noted earlier, in Genesis 4, God did not command Cain regarding any specific action. Instead, God gave Cain a warning about sin in general and expected Cain to deduce right from wrong based on reasoning from the natural order, knowledge of his parent's experience, and Cain's own desire to avoid being put to death (Genesis 4:14). And God held Cain accountable for sin even though Cain had received no commandments directly.

At this point we have seen that the bible depicts several sources for defining sin. The first source is a covenant (and the commandments they contain). The second is the natural order. And Romans 2 also includes reasoning from our own experience and observation as a means to understand what is right and wrong.

But if, as Romans 1 indicates, sin was adequately defined by natural order, what is the purpose of covenants? Covenants provide and introduce several essential elements for redemption from sin that are not contained in what we can deduce from the natural order (or our reasoning and experience). One of the elements that covenants provide are promises, specifically promises regarding redemption.

**Romans 3:1** What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit *is there* of circumcision? 2 **Much every way:** chiefly, because that **unto them were committed the oracles of God.** 3 For what if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect?

**Romans 9:3** For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh: 4 Who are **Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises;** 5 Whose *are* the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ *came*, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen. 6 Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they *are* not all Israel, which are of Israel.

**Psalms 89: 3** I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David my servant, 4 Thy seed will I establish for ever, and build up thy throne to all generations. Selah.

**Acts 2:25** For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved: 26 Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope: 27 Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. 28 Thou hast made known to me the ways of life;

thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance. 29 Men *and* brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. 30 **Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; 31 He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption.**

**Galatians 3:** 16 Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ. 17 **And this I say, *that* the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect.** 18 For if the inheritance *be* of the law, *it is* no more of promise: but God gave *it* to Abraham by promise. 19 **Wherefore then *serveth* the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and *it was* ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator.**

**Hebrews 9:** 15 And for this cause he is the mediator of the **new testament**, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions *that were* under the first testament, they which are called **might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.**

Another value of covenants (such as the Law of Moses) is that they provide a means to remind and educate men about what is sinful, even in a more explicit and exhaustive manner than found in nature.

**Romans 7:7** **What shall we say then? *Is* the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.** 8 But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin *was* dead. 9 For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. 10 And the commandment, which *was ordained* to life, I found *to be* unto death. 11 For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew *me*. 12 **Wherefore the law *is* holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good.** 13 Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. **But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful.**

**Galatians 3:** 16 Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ. 17 And this I say, *that* the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect. 18 For if the inheritance *be* of the law, *it is* no more of promise: but God gave *it* to Abraham by promise. 19 **Wherefore then *serveth* the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and *it was* ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator.** 20 Now a mediator is not *a mediator* of one, but God is one. 21 *Is*

the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. 22 **But the scripture hath concluded all under sin**, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe. 23 **But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed.** 24 **Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.** 25 **But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.** 26 For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.

As Romans 1:21-22, 28-32 and Ephesians 4:17-19 indicate, historically a large portion of mankind has not sought to retain the knowledge of what is and isn't sinful. Instead, they choose not to be mindful and to forget, which in turn serves to alleviate their consciences when they pursue things that are not acceptable. Covenants provide a corrective action regarding this trend by preserving and declaring what God considers to be sinful as well as the consequences for such behavior.

**Romans 1:21 Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.** 22 Professing themselves to be wise, **they became fools,...**28 And even as **they did not like to retain God in their knowledge**, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, **to do those things which are not convenient;** 29 Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, 30 Backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, 31 Without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: 32 **Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.**

**Ephesians 4:17** This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye **henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind,** 18 **Having the understanding darkened**, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: 19 Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.

We have seen that covenants are the key means of declaring and preserving what God defines as sinful. But there have been multiple covenants over the course of history. And these covenants don't include the same commands or identifications of sin. Some are more extensive, others are less extensive. But differences between covenants don't just relate to their elaborate or limited declarations about sin. In some cases covenants express diametrically different commands regarding whether particular behaviors are sinful.

For instance, prior to Genesis 9:2, God only allowed men to eat vegetation. Only after the Flood did God allow men to eat animals. In this way, the covenant of Noah is less restrictive than what God allowed prior to the Flood.

**Genesis 2:16** And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, **Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat:** 17 But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.

**Genesis 3:** 17 And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed *is* the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat *of* it all the days of thy life; 18 **Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field;** 19 **In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground;** for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou *art*, and unto dust shalt thou return.

**Genesis 9:2** And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the air, upon all that moveth *upon* the earth, and upon all the fishes of the sea; into your hand are they delivered. 3 **Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things.** 4 **But flesh with the life thereof, *which is* the blood thereof, shall ye not eat.**

By contrast, God's covenant with Abraham adds a command that was not previously required in the beginning of creation or after the Flood at the time of Noah. With Abraham, men who would participate in God's covenant and receive the promised inheritance had to be circumcised. In this way, the covenant with Abraham changed the standard that was revealed in the way God established things in creation. After all, men are not born circumcised. And the change was one of greater restriction.

**Genesis 17:10** **This *is* my covenant, which ye shall keep,** between me and you and thy seed after thee; **Every man child among you shall be circumcised...** 14 **And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant.**

However, not only was circumcision added at the time of Abraham after centuries without it going all the way back to Adam, but the requirement of circumcision was removed in the New Covenant. (See Romans 2:25-3:1, 30, 1 Corinthians 7:18, Galatians 5:2-3, 6, and Colossians 3:11.) So, with this particular issue, we have an example of both increasing and decreasing restrictions of what was allowed of God's people.

Similarly, the Mosaic Covenant established greater dietary restrictions. Previously, God had allowed men to eat plants and animals. At the time of Moses, God restricted what kinds of animals they were permitted to eat. (See also Deuteronomy 12:15-22, 14:7-19.)

**Leviticus 11:2** Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, **These *are* the beasts which ye shall eat among all the beasts that *are* on the earth...**8 **Of their flesh shall ye not eat**, and their carcase shall ye not touch; they *are* unclean to you. 9 **These shall ye eat of all that *are* in the waters:** whatsoever hath fins and scales in the waters, in the seas, and in the rivers, them shall ye eat...11 They shall be even an abomination unto you; **ye shall not eat of their flesh**, but ye shall have their carcasses in abomination...13 **And these *are they which ye shall have in abomination among the fowls; they shall not be eaten*...**21 **Yet these may ye eat of every flying creeping thing that goeth upon *all four***, which have legs above their feet, to leap withal upon the earth; 22 *Even* these of them ye may eat...23 **But all *other flying creeping things, which have four feet, shall be an abomination unto you.***

However, in the New Covenant, God loosens the dietary restrictions that were previously imposed. (See also Romans 14:14.)

**Mark 7:14** And when he had called all the people *unto him*, he said unto them, Hearken unto me every one *of you*, and understand: 15 **There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him: but the things which come out of him, those are they that defile the man.** 16 If any man have ears to hear, let him hear. 17 And when he was entered into the house from the people, his disciples asked him concerning the parable. 18 **And he saith unto them, Are ye so without understanding also? Do ye not perceive, that whatsoever thing from without entereth into the man, *it* cannot defile him;** 19 **Because it entereth not into his heart, but into the belly, and goeth out into the draught, purging all meats?** 20 **And he said, That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man.** 21 For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, 22 Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: 23 All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.

These examples show us that the identification of what is sinful does change from covenant to covenant. One covenant may allow something that was previously prohibited as sinful under an earlier covenant or it may prohibit something that was previously allowed. And there are other examples of such changes. For example, the Mosaic Covenant allowed for grievances to be settled under the rule of “eye for eye, tooth for tooth.” However, in the new covenant, Jesus prohibits his followers from practicing this legal means of addressing wrongs. (For more information on this subject see our “Christianity and War” study and our addendum on 1 Corinthians 5.)

**Exodus 21:24** **Eye for eye, tooth for tooth,** hand for hand, foot for foot,

**Leviticus 24:20** Breach for breach, **eye for eye,** tooth for tooth: as he hath caused a blemish in a man, so shall it be done to him again.

**Deuteronomy 19:21** And thine eye shall not pity; but life shall go for life, **eye for eye, tooth for tooth**, hand for hand, foot for foot.

**Matthew 5:38** Ye have heard that it hath been said, **An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth:** **39 But I say unto you**, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.

Another one of the differences between covenants regarding sin relates can be seen in the new covenant's prohibitions regarding marriage, divorce, remarriage, and adultery. Here, the Law of Moses allowed divorce. But Christ cites Genesis 2, overturns Mosaic allowances, and instead prohibits divorce and remarriage under the new covenant. (For more on this subject, please see our studies on divorce and remarriage under the heading "Family Issues" in the Church Ethic section of our website.)

**Genesis 2:** 21 And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; 22 And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. 23 And Adam said, This *is* now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. 24 **Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.** 25 And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.

**Deuteronomy 24:** 1 **When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favour in his eyes**, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then **let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house.** 2 **And when she is departed out of his house, she may go and be another man's wife.** 3 And *if* the latter husband hate her, and write her a bill of divorcement, and giveth *it* in her hand, and sendeth her out of his house; or if the latter husband die, which took her *to be* his wife; 4 Her former husband, which sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after that she is defiled; for that *is* abomination before the LORD: and thou shalt not cause the land to sin, which the LORD thy God giveth thee *for* an inheritance.

**Matthew 19:3** The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, **Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? ...9 And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except *it be* for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.**

We can see that regarding dietary laws and circumcision, the new covenant allows things that the Mosaic Covenant identified as sinful. But regarding divorce and remarriage, the new covenant prohibits things as sinful that the Mosaic Covenant considered allowable. In other cases, the new covenant preserves the Mosaic requirements without change. Examples of this include prohibitions against desiring someone else's wife, loving God with all of our heart, soul, and might,

and loving our neighbor as ourselves. These are examples of prohibitions that continue the same under both the Law of Moses and the new covenant.

**Exodus 20:14 Thou shalt not commit adultery...** 17 Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, **thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife**, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that *is* thy neighbour's.

**Matthew 5: 27** Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, **Thou shalt not commit adultery:** 28 But I say unto you, That **whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.**

**Deuteronomy 6:5** And **thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.**

**Leviticus 19:18** Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but **thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself:** *I am* the LORD.

**Luke 10:25** And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do **to inherit eternal life?** 26 He said unto him, **What is written in the law?** how readest thou? 27 And he answering said, **Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself.** 28 And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: **this do, and thou shalt live.**

**Exodus 20:1** And God spake all these words, saying, 2 I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. 3 **Thou shalt have no other gods before me.** 4 **Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image**, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: 5 Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; 6 And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments. 7 **Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain;** for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain. 8 **Remember the sabbath day**, to keep it holy...12 **Honour thy father and thy mother:** that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee. 13 **Thou shalt not kill.** 14 **Thou shalt not commit adultery.** 15 **Thou shalt not steal.** 16 **Thou shalt not bear false witness** against thy neighbour. 17 **Thou shalt not covet** thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's.

Below is a listing of the passages which attest that the new covenant maintains the prohibitions contained in nine of the ten commandments of the Law of Moses. (More information on this subject can be found in our "Liberty in Christ" study.)

(1 & 2, *Idolatry Forbidden*)

**Acts 15:5-6, 19-20, 23,29 and 21:25, 1 Corinthians 10:7,14, Ephesians 5:5**

(3, *Blaspheming Jesus Forbidden*)

**James 2:7**

(5, *Obeying Parents Upheld*)

**Ephesians 6:1-3**

(6, *Killing Forbidden*)

**Matthew 5:21-22, Romans 13:9-10**

(7 & 10, *Fornication, Adultery, and Coveting Forbidden*)

**1 Corinthians 5:10-11 and 6:9, Galatians 5:19, 2 Peter 2:4**

(8, *Stealing Forbidden*)

**Ephesians 4:28**

(9, *Lying Condemned*)

**Revelation 21:8 and 22:15**

There are also differences between the new covenant and what God established at creation with regard to sin. This can be seen in the New Testament discussion of marriage and having children. At creation, God's intent is seen in his command for mankind to be fruitful and multiply.

**Genesis 1:27** So God created man in his *own* image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. 28 And God blessed them, **and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply**, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

**Genesis 2:** 21 And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; 22 And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. 23 And Adam said, This *is* now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. 24 **Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.** 25 And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.

However, in the new covenant Jesus indicates that it's better for a man to remain single and avoid being married and having children. Of course, marriage and procreation are certainly permissible in the new covenant. But as Paul explains they can distract us from a single-minded pursuit of God (1 Corinthians 7).

**Matthew 19:3** The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? 4 **And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made *them* at the beginning made them male and female,** 5 **And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?** 6 **Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.** 7 They say unto

him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? 8 He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. 9 And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except *it be* for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery. 10 **His disciples say unto him, If the case of the man be so with *his* wife, it is not good to marry.** 11 **But he said unto them, All *men* cannot receive this saying, save *they* to whom it is given.** 12 For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from *their* mother's womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. **He that is able to receive *it*, let him receive *it*.**

Earlier we mentioned the difference between the new covenant and the covenant with Abraham regarding the issue of circumcision. In that case, the new covenant discontinued God's previous requirement set forth in the covenant with Abraham. However, in other ways, the new covenant restores aspects of the covenant with Abraham. In Romans 3-4, Paul argues that God's acceptance under the new covenant was a return to the standard exhibited regarding Abraham and was no longer based upon the work required by the Law of Moses. In this sense, the new covenant restores an aspect of the covenant with Abraham that had previously been superseded.

**Romans 3:28 Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.** 29 *Is he* the God of the Jews only? *is he* not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also: 30 **Seeing *it is* one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith.** 31 **Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law.** 4:1 **What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found?** 2 For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath *whereof* to glory; but not before God. 3 For what saith the scripture? **Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.** 4 Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. 5 But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. 6 Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, 7 *Saying*, Blessed *are* they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. 8 Blessed *is* the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin. 9 ***Cometh* this blessedness then upon the circumcision *only*, or upon the uncircumcision also? for we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness.** 10 **How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision.** 11 And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which *he had yet* being uncircumcised: **that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also:** 12 And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which *he had* being *yet* uncircumcised. 13 **For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world,**

**was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.** 14 **For if they which are of the law *be* heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect.** ...20 He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; 21 **And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.** 22 **And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness.** 23 **Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him;** 24 **But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead;** 25 Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.

**Galatians 3:17** **And this I say, *that* the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect.** 18 For if the inheritance *be* of the law, *it is* no more of promise: but **God gave *it* to Abraham by promise.** 19 **Wherefore then *serveth* the law?** It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; *and it was* ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator. 20 Now a mediator is not *a mediator* of one, but God is one. 21 *Is* the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. 22 But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, **that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe...**29 **And if ye *be* Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.**

**Galatians 5:2** Behold, **I Paul say unto you, that if ye *be* circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing.** 3 For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. 4 **Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law;** ye are fallen from grace. 5 **For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith.** 6 **For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.**

Our investigation of sin and covenants has shown that what is considered sinful has changed over time under different covenants. How then do we determine what is sinful or not for Christians? The answer to this question comes by recognizing that whatever covenant was presently in effect always was the ruling authority on what was sinful for those who lived during the time of that covenant. Israelites after the Exodus could not opt to go by the covenant of Noah. They had to obey the commands and requirements of the Mosaic Covenant. Likewise, it is the new covenant that defines what is sinful for God's people today. What the New Testament defines as sinful remains as our ruling authority today. It has not changed.

**Hebrews 13:7** **Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God:** whose faith follow, considering the end of *their* conversation. 8 **Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.** 9 **Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines.** For *it is* a good

thing that the heart be established with grace; not with meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein.

On this point, it is also important to note that the new covenant is the last covenant. It will not be superseded or altered. However, there are aspects of the new covenant that are temporary injunctions and there are also requirements that will only be implemented at Christ's return. For instance, Zechariah explains that participation in the feast of tabernacles will be required during the millennial reign of Christ. This is in contrast with New Testament passages which indicate that the Mosaic feast days are not presently required. (In fact, it is not possible to keep many of the Mosaic requirements for feast days without a Temple. For more on requirements related to feast days and the New Testament see our "Liberty in Christ" study.)

**Zechariah 14:9** And the LORD shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one LORD, and his name one... **16** And it shall come to pass, *that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles.* **17** And it shall be, *that whoso will not come up of all the families of the earth unto Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, even upon them shall be no rain.* **18** And if the family of Egypt go not up, and come not, that *have no rain*; there shall be the plague, wherewith the LORD will smite the heathen that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles. **19** This shall be the punishment of Egypt, and the punishment of all nations that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles.

Likewise, violence and participation in government and military service are currently prohibited. This is due to the fact that Christ's government is not currently on earth for Christians to participate in. But when Christ returns to establish his kingdom on earth, Christians will be involved in all of these aspects of civil government. (For more on this subject, please see our "Christianity and War" study.) Similarly, currently God allows us to marry and have children because we are still mortal, but in the resurrection when God makes the saints immortal such things will not be permissible any longer. (For example, compare Luke 20:35-36 with 1 Corinthians 7:1-10, 36-38 and 1 Timothy 4:1-3.)

Moreover, the bible provides some indication that during the millennium the allowance for men to kill and eat animal meat may also be rescinded. (See Isaiah 11:6-9, 65:25.)

Consequently, the new covenant governs at least two distinct periods of history, one before Christ's return and one after. This factor itself is necessitated by the permanence of the new covenant. Since it will not pass away, it would necessarily govern both of the very different historical periods that would follow after Christ's first advent. In that sense, the new covenant's permanence necessitates that it must contain a certain set of differing prohibitions and allowances based on the differing historical circumstances that distinguish the two periods, which it governs. However, it is equally clear that these differing prohibitions last as long

as the respective period to which they pertain. Or, in other words, there will be no changes regarding what is allowed and prohibited by the new covenant until Christ's returns and begins his earthly reign. It should also be noted that the change in political circumstances at Christ's return have no bearing on the vast majority of the new covenant's commands regarding sin. Prohibitions against idolatry, thievery, lying, adultery, and even divorce and remarriage will continue to be even more important during the millennium, particularly to the extent to which the millennium is a restoration of creation as God made it from the beginning.

But, if what is sin can change in different covenants, does God's own morality change? Is God's designation of sin arbitrary rather than based on absolute necessity? To the contrary, God's eternal moral requirements are expressed in the New Covenant.

We have learned that the amount of detailed moral instructions in the Covenants of Noah and Abraham were brief and very few. According to the New Testament, one of the main reasons the Law of Moses was added was to make exceedingly known what was sinful. This tells us that the promulgation of God's standards before Moses in previous covenants was incomplete. For example, the natural created order was not explicit, exhaustive, or immediate enough. Likewise, the natural created order lacked conditional promises through which redemption could be provided.

But were the natural order and previous covenants incorrect in their portrayal of God's moral requirements? No. These covenants served a particular purpose suited to particular historic circumstances as God's redemptive plan unfolded. Previous covenants were preparatory.

On the other hand, if God's standards never change, how do we explain why such things as dietary laws, circumcision, and sacrifices are not required under all covenants? If the new covenant does not include such things, why did previous covenants include these things? These things were symbolic and instructive, preparing men for the standards that would be contained in the new covenant.

Acts 10 supports this conclusion by indicating that the dietary restrictions of the Mosaic Covenant symbolized the idea of not associating with certain people.

**Acts 10:1 There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band, 2 A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway...9 On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour: 10 And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance, 11 And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth: 12 Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. 13 And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat. 14 But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have**

never eaten any thing that is common or unclean. 15 And the voice *spake* unto him again the second time, **What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common...** 19 While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee. 20 Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them... 25 And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped *him*. 26 But **Peter** took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man. 27 And as he talked with him, he went in, and found many that were come together. 28 And he **said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean...** 44 While Peter yet spake these words, **the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.** 45 And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that **on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost.**

Similarly, Romans explains that circumcision was instructive and symbolic as well.

**Romans 2:** 26 Therefore if **the uncircumcision** keep the righteousness of the law, **shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision?** 27 And shall not uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfil the law, judge thee, who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law? 28 For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; **neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh:** 29 But he *is* a Jew, which is one inwardly; **and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter;** whose praise *is* not of men, but of God... 4:11 And he received **the sign of circumcision,** a seal of the righteousness of the faith which *he had yet* being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also.

Mosaic sacrifices prefigured and instructed us regarding Christ's atoning work (and secondarily regarding Christian service).

**Hebrews 9:6** Now when these things were thus ordained, the priests went always into the first tabernacle, accomplishing the service *of God*. 7 But into the second *went* **the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people:** 8 **The Holy Ghost this signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest,** while as the first tabernacle was yet standing: 9 **Which was a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices,** that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience; 10 **Which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation.** 11 **But Christ being come an high priest** of good things to come, by a **greater and more perfect tabernacle,** not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; 12 **Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.**

**Hebrews 10:1** For the law having a shadow of good things to come, *and* not the very image of the things, can never **with those sacrifices which they offered year by year** continually make the comers thereunto perfect.

In some sense, certain ordinances in previous covenants cloaked particular parts of God's plan and standards in enigmatic and foreshadowing instruction rather than stating them plainly as the new covenant does. This is demonstrable regarding Old Testament passages referring to the incarnation, death and resurrection of the Word of God as the Messiah, which was often shrouded in enigmatic language. (See, for example, Paul's use of the term "mystery" with regard to the saving work of Christ in 1 Corinthians 2:7-8, Ephesians 3:1-11, Colossians 1:21-27.)

But, if the definition of sin has changed at different periods under different covenants, what is the basis for God's acceptance or condemnation of men from those different periods, particular periods before the new covenant and its definition of sin were put into effect? Are people from different time periods accepted or rejected based on different standards?

Thankfully, the bible provides an answer. Although men were required to be faithful to the covenants they were under in their own day, ultimately, their eternal salvation is dependent upon Jesus Christ and the new covenant. But to understand how this works, we will need to examine several individual biblical facts.

We will start by considering the Gentiles who lived before the time of Christ.

**Ephesians 2:11** Wherefore remember, that ye *being in time past* **Gentiles** in the flesh, who are called **Uncircumcision** by that which is called the **Circumcision** in the flesh made by hands; **12 That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise**, having no hope, and without God in the world: **13 But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. 14 For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us;** **15** Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, *even the law of commandments contained in ordinances;* for **to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace;** **16 And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby:** **17** And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. **18** For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. **19 Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God;** **20** And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, **Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone;** **21 In whom all** the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: **22** In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit...**3:14** For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, **15 Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named.**

According to Ephesians 2, Gentiles from before the time of Christ were apart from the covenant and the promises. However, through Christ this separation has been eliminated and Gentiles are fellow partakers along with the Jewish people. But it raises the question of whether or not God accepted any Gentiles before Christ. And if so, by what standard were they accepted or rejected? Romans addresses some of these issues and explains the basis for how God accepted Gentiles who lived before Christ.

**Romans 2:26** Therefore if the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision? **27** And shall not uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfil the law, judge thee, who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law?

**Romans 3:30** Seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith. **31** Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law. **4:1** What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found?...**9** Cometh this blessedness then upon the circumcision only, or upon the uncircumcision also? for we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness. **10** How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? **Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision.** **11** And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also:

According to Paul, the acceptance of these Gentiles required their faithfulness regarding what had been revealed and made known in the centuries leading up to their own time through sources such as the created order (and also experiential reasoning according to Romans 2). (For more information on this, see our study on “Gentiles in the Law” in the Redemption section of this website.) In Romans, Paul compares the situation of these Gentiles to Abraham. Paul starts by noting that Abraham was counted as faithful and righteous on the basis of his faith not only long before the Law of Moses but also before Abraham received the command regarding circumcision. In part, Paul’s point is that like Abraham, for those who believe what God has already revealed, God regards them by anticipation as though they will also be faithful to future revelations. In the case of Abraham, the righteousness that God reckoned to Abraham for believing God’s previous words was fulfilled later when he received the new revelation of circumcision and obeyed it. In the same way, those Gentiles who were faithful to God’s previous revelations to them are counted as righteous even before the new covenant was revealed.

However, scripture is clear that even figures such as Abraham who lived long before the coming of Christ Jesus are saved through the work of Jesus Christ as can be seen in Galatians below.

**Galatians 3:6** Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. **7 Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.** **8 And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith,** preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. **9 So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham...****28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.** **29 And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.**

But whether before, during, or after the Law of Moses, without belief in God's words it is impossible to please God and those who doubt are cut off from God's inheritance, even those who were formerly heirs and members of the covenant.

**Hebrews 11:6** But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

For instance, in Romans 9 Paul describes how God cut off those Israelites who did not believe God's word.

**Romans 9:3** For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh: **4 Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises;** **5 Whose are the fathers,** and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ *came*, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen. **6 Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: 7 Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children:** but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. **8 That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed...****Romans 11:16 For if the firstfruit be holy, the lump is also holy: and if the root be holy, so are the branches.** **17 And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree;** **18 Boast not against the branches.** But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee. **19 Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in.** **20 Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith.** Be not highminded, but fear: **21 For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee.** **22 Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off.** **23 And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graff them in again.** **24 For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?** **25 For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the**

Gentiles be come in. 26 And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: 27 For this *is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins.* 28 As concerning the gospel, *they are* enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, *they are beloved for the fathers' sakes.*

Three items are worth highlighting at this point.

First, it is important also to stress that passages like Romans 9 and 11:28 (as well as Ephesians 2:12) indicate that Gentiles are not saved apart from God's covenant with Israel. Even as the New Testament also attests that it is through Abraham that all nations are blessed. Gentile dependence on Abraham and Israel for salvation is understood ultimately as dependence on Christ who is the seed of Abraham and Israel and the rightful heir of the covenants made with them. Through faith in Christ, Gentiles are made fellow partakers in that covenant with Israel and are counted as Abraham's seed (Galatians 3). Likewise, Romans 11:28 and Ephesians 2:19 indicate that the salvation that is available now to the Gentiles is the same as that which was available to saints during the Mosaic period and before (Abraham). (See also Matthew 8:8-12 and Hebrews 11:1-40, 2:1-2). And passages like Romans 4:2, Galatians 3:6-8, James 2:23, and Hebrews 11:8, 17 also support this conclusion when they uphold Abraham (who came before the Mosaic Covenant) as the chief example of salvation through faith (even before his circumcision).

Second, it must be noted that the bulk of the passages mentioned in the paragraph above pertain to Gentiles from the time of Christ forward, not Gentiles prior to the time of Christ or even Israelites living under different covenants prior to the new covenant. However, analogies to Abraham who lived before Christ as well as Paul's comments in Romans 1-2 substantiate that even Gentiles before Christ were accepted by God based on their belief in those things revealed by God in their own day and earlier. Moreover, 1 Peter 3:19 and 4:6 also make references to persons that were accepted by God but lived before the Mosaic Covenant in the days of Noah. Moreover, passages like Hebrews 11:1-8, 40 specifically include saints prior to Abraham which also exemplify this kind of faith and who should not "be made perfect without us." Of course, Colossians 1:28 uses "teleios" (5046) the same Greek word for perfect that is used in Hebrews 11:40 and declares that we are made perfect in Christ. Hebrews 13:20-21 says similarly. Consequently, the ancient Gentile and Jewish figures who lived before Christ are all redeemed by Christ.

So, we can see that even though various covenants have defined sin in somewhat different ways regarding prohibitions and allowances, when it comes to salvation God's acceptance is based on the new covenant through faith in Jesus Christ. This scriptural attestation that people before Christ are saved on the basis of having faith in Christ (just as we are now) invites another important question. How do men from other eras have faith in Jesus?

Though it isn't necessary to claim that persons prior to Christ understood or had faith in the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ, the bible does identify that people prior to Christ could be counted as having the same essential faith in Christ by which Jews and Gentiles can be saved in the new covenant. First, we have already discussed Romans 2:26-29 which states that Gentiles from before and after the Mosaic Covenant could be faithful to God's teachings as revealed in the created order (and as understood through reason and experience). Here it is important to note that throughout the Old Testament it is the Person of the pre-incarnate Word that frequently delivered God's teachings to men and communes with them. (For more on this see our Trinity and History of Judaism studies.) And it was by the Person of the Word of God that the universe was made. In this very real sense, when Jews and Gentiles of ages past received God's revelations or even adhered to the standards revealed by God in the created order, were believing and following the Person of the Word of God who later became incarnate at which time he received the name Jesus Christ. In short, although He did not yet have the name Jesus Christ, Old Testament saints just as much believed and followed the Person of the Word just as Christians in the New Testament did.

Second, the belief that God would deliver on his promise that faithful men would inherit the earth (land) is identified as key to what both testaments identify as saving faith. (See Romans 4:13, Galatians 3:8, 16, 29 with Genesis 12:7, and Hebrews 3:18-4:2). This promise is identified in the New Testament as an essential component of the gospel. Moreover, the New Testament attests that this concept was known by, taught to, and believed by people who lived before the Mosaic Covenant. In fact, the New Testament even uses the Greek words for "gospel" to describe what was believed by these saints from the Old Testament. (Galatians 3:8, Hebrews 4:2, 1 Peter 3:19, 4:6). Likewise, according to Romans 1:16-20, 32, it was known from creation that the righteous would inherit the earth while sinners would be put to death. (It is possible that such truths were made known or at least reinforced by the expulsion of Adam and Cain from God's presence or by the Flood at which time only Noah and his family were left to inherit the earth while the wicked were destroyed.) And even before the Law of Moses and the coming of Jesus Christ and the new covenant, the example of Abraham also demonstrates that God previously revealed that those who believed His Word and followed His ways would inherit the earth.

Third, 1 Peter 3:19 and 4:6 indicate that between his death and resurrection Christ entered into the place of the dead within the earth (Sheol) and preached to them who were held there even from before the Flood. This is another way in which people from prior periods could have belief in Christ. This opportunity works well with the general presumption in the Bible that people who have already believed God's previous revelations will tend to believe the next revelation of God's Word. (See John 10:3-5, 13-16, 27-28, Luke 16:10, Matthew 13:10-18, Acts 10:1-6, 30-33, and Acts 18:24-26.) Moreover, 1 Peter 3-4 provides corroboration for the basic notion that men who had been faithful and repentant during previous covenants were given the opportunity to hear the full revelation from Christ when

he descended into Sheol and were counted worthy of salvation for accepting and believing as he preached to them.

Another important issue that we should discuss in this study of the definition of sin regards the number of sins. It is not uncommon today for Christians to believe that there is an inordinate amount of sins that we don't even know are sins that we commit daily without ever knowing. However, scripture does not support such an idea. To the contrary even the Mosaic Covenant, which is the most expansive and most explicit listing of sin, is commonly understood only to contain some 600 commandments. (For more information see our study entitled, "Liberty in Christ: Extended Introduction.") While large, such a number is identifiable and its exhaustive nature suggests that it is intended to be all-inclusive without leaving out some theoretical, even larger number of yet unspecified sins. And yet, Jesus' remarks to the rich, young ruler in Matthew 19 indicate that it was possible to keep the Mosaic commands. Notice that Jesus does not express the idea that there are innumerable sins but rather only a finite set defined by the current covenant. These facts make it difficult to accept that God counts us as unrighteous on the basis of sinful behaviors and thoughts that he has never identified or given us commands regarding.

(The new covenant was not inaugurated at Jesus' birth but its inauguration culminated at the events of the Last Supper, his death, and his resurrection. Consequently, the Law of Moses was still in effect at the time of the events of Matthew 19.)

**Matthew 19:16** And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? **17** And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? *there is none good but one, that is, God:* but **if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.** **18** He saith unto him, Which? **Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, 19 Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.** **20** The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet? **21** Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go *and* sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come *and* follow me.

A related question concerns whether it is possible or expected for us to stop sinning. Several New Testament texts do indicate that, even though there is room for repentance and forgiveness if we do sin, we are nonetheless expected to stop sinning.

**Matthew 5:48** Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

**1 John 3: 8** He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy

the works of the devil. 9 **Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin;** for his seed remaineth in him: and **he cannot sin, because he is born of God.**

**Hebrews 10:26 For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins,** 27 But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.

**Romans 6:1 What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin,** that grace may abound? 2 **God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?**

**2 Timothy 2:** 19 Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, **The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.** 20 But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour. 21 **If a man therefore purge himself from these,** he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, *and* prepared unto every good work. 22 **Flee also youthful lusts:** but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

**Romans 8:** 13 **For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die:** but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.

**Galatians 5:** 16 *This* I say then, **Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.** 17 For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. 18 But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law. 19 **Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are *these*;** Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, 20 Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, 21 Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: **of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.**

Our “Forgiving and Forgiveness” study discusses New Testament passages which teach that repentance is required for salvation. Repentance inherently involves a choice to turn away from our sin. The New Testament expects those who come to Christ to make a decision and take the necessary efforts to turn from sin. And yet despite these expectations, the New Testament does recognize that until we fully mature in Christ, Christians may continue to sin from time to time. Even Paul did not consider himself to have yet attained perfection (which can also mean “maturity”).

**Matthew 18:15** Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. 16 But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two

**more**, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. 17 **And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.** 18 Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. 19 Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. 20 For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them. 21 **Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?** 22 **Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.**

**James 5:16 Confess your faults one to another**, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

**1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**

**Philippians 3:12 Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect (5048): but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.**

Below are the definitions of the related Greek words used by Paul in Philippians 3:12. The lexical entries establish that these terms can relate to maturity. They are applied here and elsewhere in the New Testament to refer to our growth towards the full measure of Christ (Ephesians 4:13).

#### **5046 teleios**

from 5056; TDNT-8:67,1161; **adjective**

AV-perfect 17, man 1, of full age 1; 19

- 1) brought to its end, finished
- 2) wanting nothing necessary to completeness
- 3) perfect
- 4) that which is perfect
- 4a) consummate human integrity and virtue
- 4b) of men
- 4b1) full grown, adult, of full age, mature

#### **5048 teleioo**

from 5046; TDNT-8:79,1161; **verb**

AV-make perfect 12, perfect 4, finish 4, fulfil 2, be perfect 1, consecrate 1; 24

- 1) to make perfect, complete
- 1a) to carry through completely, to accomplish, finish, bring to an end
- 2) to complete (perfect)
- 2a) add what is yet wanting in order to render a thing full
- 2b) to be found perfect
- 3) to bring to the end (goal) proposed

- 4) to accomplish
- 4a) bring to a close or fulfilment by event
- 4a1) of the prophecies of the scriptures

**5047 teleiotes**

from 5046; TDNT-8:78,1161; **noun** f  
 AV-perfectness 1, perfection 1; 2  
 1) perfection  
 1a) the state of the more intelligent  
 1b) moral and spiritual perfection

**5050 teleiosis**

from 5048; TDNT-8:84,1161; **noun** f  
 AV-performance 1, perfection 1; 2  
 1) a completing, a perfecting  
 1a) fulfilment, accomplishment  
 1b) the event which verifies the promise  
 1c) consummation, perfection

The series of related terms above refers to being brought to maturity or adulthood, full grown, made complete, the state of moral completeness, or the act of making complete. Their usage in the New Testament informs us that it is possible to stop sinning, but that this is a process. Christians are obligated to turn from sin. Christians are to hold each other accountable for sin. Christians are to have mercy toward those who acknowledge their sin and reinvest themselves to turn from it. But, sin in one's life should diminish over time.

*Study Conclusions*

1. Sin is a violation of God's righteous standard.
2. God's righteous standards were revealed first in the natural order and then also in covenants.
3. What God condemns as sin can change over time. The standard in each covenant is provisional for a particular period of time and preparatory for future periods ultimately governed by the new covenant. As a rule, the current covenant always supersedes the previous standard. One cannot insist on applying the previous standard once God has enacted a new covenant.
4. The New Testament is the ultimate reflection of God's standards for accepting or rejecting men. All previous standards/covenants were but reflections of the standard revealed in the new covenant. The new covenant supersedes the Law of Moses but also includes/continues some (although not all) of its commands. And the new covenant entails God's standards as originally partially reflected in the natural created order. There will be not additional covenants. The new covenant is permanent. Yet not all of the components of the new covenant are enforced yet in

the present age before the return of Christ to rule the earth. For instance, death has not been stopped. There is no present restriction against eating meat. Participation in Jewish festival days in Jerusalem is not currently required for believers or even unbelieving nations. Such things will be fulfilled in the kingdom. Consequently, there will be some changes at the time of the kingdom as God's standard (already revealed) are implemented fully on earth. But these changes are expected because they have already been revealed in the Old and New Testaments and exist (by anticipation) as part of the new covenant. So, except for specific details (such as the exact timing of Christ's return), the Old and New Testament's have already revealed God's plan concerning the future kingdom. There will be no further revelations changing or altering the picture and arrangement laid out in the Old and New Testaments.

While these conclusions imply that for certain durations of history God agreed to give men a temporary measure of acceptance based on lesser criteria than His ultimate standard, two things must be realized. First, even under the new covenant, which is the ultimate revelation of God's unchanging standards, God has graciously agreed to accept men who have fallen short of His perfect standard. We've all sinned. Therefore, a sound understanding does not need to assert that God only accepts men based on His ideal moral standards. All men are ultimately accepted based on believing the Person of the Word/Jesus Christ (or are rejected for a lack thereof). This includes people from before the Flood (before the Covenant with Noah), Old Testament saints from after the Flood but before the Mosaic Covenant, and even Gentiles after the time when the Mosaic Covenant was initiated with Israel.

When it comes to eternal matters, all men are ultimately accepted or condemned by the same standard and measure of grace as revealed in the new covenant in Christ Jesus. The new covenant expects Christians to turn from sin when we first come to Christ. Even though there is opportunity for mercy and forgiveness if we sin, we are not permitted to continue in sin. The provisions for confession and forgiveness are intended to facilitate the cessation of sin in order to bring all the church to maturity, not as a license for ongoing sin.