Relationships between Old and New Testament

A Few Thoughts on Links between the Testaments

The book of Acts is an important link between Old and New Testament, which later one is built upon the first. Acts introduces a new “system,” connected with God’s grace, yet in many ways and on many occasions, it demonstrates how the New could not be there without the Old. “Every scripture is divinely inspired, and profitable for teaching, for conviction, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be complete, fully fitted to every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16). Closely related to the matters we discussed previously about law and grace, is the need of understanding the relationship and authority of both the Old and the New Testament.

Scripture is its own Interpreter, Authority and Guide

When we read the Bible on a consistent basis, we discover its principles and its literal, spiritual and prophetic meanings. We also learn to understand the importance of context and of biblical “golden rules.” Moreover, God’s Word is for faith to act on, in obedience and confidence, according to James’ appeal, “Be ye doers of the Word” (Jas. 1:22).

The Need for the Right Balance

When we look at the spiritual meaning of Scripture, taking e.g. a passage like the law on defilement in Numbers 19, we must remember first, that we are not under the Law of Moses, but under grace. However, we have a problem when some say, “Association with evil does not defile, because we are not under the Mosaic Law.” This would be so if, for example, we concluded from Numbers 19 that eating with an unbeliever (even one’s own unbelieving grown-up child) would automatically defile us. In such a case, we would be using the Mosaic Law wrongly by applying it literally to the day of grace. However, to say, “We are in fellowship with all those who are in fellowship with God,” without further qualification, negates the important biblical NT principles teaching the exercise of

1 Some of these rules are:

1. 

   *Literal* does not set aside the *spiritual* and *prophetic* meaning of Scripture. Unless the context clearly shows otherwise, we take the literal meaning first, on which the others build: “Take what you read, believe it and you have what you read” and, “A text taken out of context is a pretext.”

2. 

   Do not use a “forced” or unnatural interpretation, as is done for example in replacement theology, saying that “Israel = the Church,” caused by the mere allegorical approach of Origenes.

3. 

   The *law of first mention* is a helpful tool to learn the significance of biblical principles and concepts that can be traced throughout Scripture, for instance: sacrifice, love, Babel, and so on.

4. 

   Distinguish *God’s counsel and purpose*, on the one hand, from *God’s ways*, on the other.

5. 

   Understand the *progressive* nature of God’s revelation.

6. 

   Distinguish between the one, right, biblical *interpretation* and a great variety of *applications*. 

1
great care as to our associations, illustrated in many OT passages. Furthermore, some only see the truth of the “body of Christ,” but neglect the truth of the “house of God.” Others over-emphasize “house” truth to the expense of “body” truth, as some overemphasize “truth” at the expense of “grace.” Separation from evil\(^2\) is still God’s principle for practical unity. Let us take a stand according to the truth and at the same time because of love for the Lord as well as for our fellow-believers. How we need God’s help for this divine balance, to follow the Master’s footsteps, as Paul and Timothy did!

**An Example of a Difference between the Testaments**

“If any brother have an unbelieving wife, and she consent to dwell with him, let him not leave her” (1 Cor. 7:12). Ezra 9 and 10 clearly show the contrast between Ezra’s time (under the Mosaic Law) and the period of grace in which we live. This is not to say that now a believer should marry an unbeliever, but it means that if a couple married as unbelievers and one of them is saved afterwards, the other partner should stay in this marriage relationship. But in Ezra’s day, this was not the case, for Israel as God’s people had *wilfully* married foreign women, who then had to be sent away. While respecting this difference, we can still draw many practical lessons from the Old Testament. Generally speaking, the New provides us with doctrine, principles and guidelines, whereas the Old supplies us object lessons – illustrations in events, persons, laws and sacrifices – to help us put those New Testament principles into practice. Divine principles do not change, unless God changes them. All this is part of rightly dividing the Word.

**“Foreign Women” – Some Practical Lessons for Today**

If we understand that the “foreign women” (Ezra 9-10) illustrate *influences* that we wrongly allow ourselves to be exposed to and adopt (traditionalism, sectarianism, human philosophies, ritualism, liberalism, mysticism, etc.), then the lessons in the two chapters become a real help, as God intends they should (1 Cor. 10:1-13; Rom. 15:4; 2 Tim. 3:16). Reading them, we learn to humble ourselves as to wrong influences we allowed or adopted in our lives as Christians. Consequently, we judge ourselves, after which we get rid of those influences with the Lord’s help. In this way, a passage such as Ezra 9-10 becomes useful, clearly linked with the New Testament (see 2 Pet. 1:20-21). Being under grace, we do not read the Old Testament to put ourselves under the Law, but for our encouragement and exhortation, through its many illustrations and object lessons (Rom. 15:4). The manner in which the Lord Jesus interpreted it, for example in Luke 24, showing how the three parts of the OT related to Himself (vv.27, 44), may encourage us to follow His method, in order to discover how relevant its meaning is for us.

**A Right Appreciation of the Old Testament**

“Now all these things happened to them as types, and have been written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages are come. So let him that thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:11-12). A passage like this helps us understand that the Old Testament is an important part of the Bible, which we should not neglect or underestimate. However, we should not use the Old Testament, or any Scripture for that

---

2 According to Scripture, this separation is from known and non-judged moral and doctrinal evil, as well as from obvious association with it, including clear refusal to judge this kind of relationship.
matter, to compel fellow-believers by imposing or enforcing rules. Being under grace, we are drawn to the Lord: to learn from Him and to obey Him (Mt. 11:28-30; 10:24-25a; Jn. 14:21, 23). And so we may encourage others to do the same. The Old Testament speaks in many different ways of Him, the Beloved. Thus drawn to our God, this world becomes a wilderness for us. In order to live for His glory, we need to learn similar lessons as Israel did, communicated to us in the many Old Testament accounts of their experiences.

**Applications – Use or Abuse**

Having a desire to please Christ at all costs, as Paul desired to do (2 Cor. 5:9; Eph. 5:10), we should be eager to apply spiritual principles that we learn from the Old Testament’s object lessons, even if they come from a chapter that might seem obscure. However, we need godly balance. We must distinguish between legalism and obedience. Legalism is imposing man-made rules or even demands of the Mosaic Law on others (keeping certain rules for oneself is not legalism, although this is not necessarily the same as obedience to God’s Word). Let us not put the label “legalism” on something the Lord wants us to do, to get “around” it. But if we have acted unfaithfully, we should confess this, without trying to make excuses. Unfortunately, in the name of Christian liberty, much abuse is made of “liberty,” some even condemning others for alleged legalism when they seek to be obedient. In the name of Christian liberty, many are going along “with the crowd,” thinking it is the right thing to do. Let us walk a path of submission and obedience to our Lord! Sadly, New Testament principles are sometimes abused by neglecting to see their link with the whole truth of God and with Christ who is the truth (Jn. 14:6), but wrong practice should never be used as an excuse to set those principles aside. Similarly, if Old Testament types and figures have been abused to make them say things they are not saying, or to use them to impose man made rules, such wrong practice does not set aside the principle that the Old Testament has been written for our instruction and edification.

**The Significance of the Old Testament for Today’s Believers**

“Until Christ shall have been formed in you” (Gal. 4:19). Paul strongly desired that Christ might be formed in the believers (cf. Col. 1:28). From the way Paul writes, I conclude he is saying that if the Galatians had been spiritual, they would have come up with an interpretation of Genesis 21 (the story of Sara and Hagar) that was similar or equal to Paul’s analysis. This portion, therefore, is an encouragement for us to look at the Old Testament to find the spiritual meaning for today – with godly care, and without speculating or forcing. Another encouraging example is the way the Lord opened the door for Ezra to return from Persia to Jerusalem (Ezra 7) and the parallel we can draw from this with what the Lord says to the assembly at Philadelphia (Rev. 3:8).

**Examples of OT Types, Matters or Events – Their NT Use**

Many intimate relationships exist between the Old and the New Testament, as the following Scriptures show:

1. Christ quoting from Moses’ writings, the prophets and the Psalms, in order to demonstrate that He needed to suffer and be raised from among the dead (Lk. 24:27, 45-46).

2. In John 5:46-47, our Lord placed Moses’ writings, as the inspired and written Word
of God, even above His own spoken words.

3. Romans 15:4 shows the principle that the Old Testament writings have been written for our instruction, that through endurance and encouragement we might have hope.

4. In 1 Corinthians 9:8-10 Paul applies to himself an Old Testament regulation with regard to threshing oxen!

5. 1 Corinthians 10:1-13 reviews Israel’s history, even saying that their history happened and was written for our admonition to teach us about God’s faithfulness.

6. In Paul’s desire that Christ might be formed in the believers, he instructed them from Genesis (Gal. 4:19-31).

7. Hebrews 7-9 and 10:1-22 provide excellent teaching by using contrasts and parallels between the Old and New Testaments.


**Moral Lessons from the Law of Moses**

“Do you not listen to the law?” (Gal. 4:21). Paul rebuked the Galatians because they had not learned the moral lessons the Law teaches to believers today who, although not under it, still can benefit from drawing spiritual instructions from it. At least two dangers exist in our days, just as there is a tendency in most things to go wrong in one of two opposite directions. On the one hand, we may refuse to listen to the object lessons of the Old Testament, by saying that they are not found in the New or not confirmed by it. On the other hand, we may go beyond New Testament teaching and deduce authoritative doctrine from the Old Testament types or object lessons (for instance by making a rule to worship the Holy Spirit, based on the singing to the well in Numbers 21:16-18). Such wrong use of Old Testament scripture and of New Testament principles, is an *abuse* and should to be rejected. The types help us to put New Testament doctrine into practice – in that sense they teach (2 Tim. 3:16) – but they are not themselves the New Testament doctrine.

**Distinction between Position and Condition**

Furthermore, we need to distinguish between our *standing*, the New Testament position, and *state*, our actual condition. The New Testament establishes the believer’s position and then speaks about the condition that flows from it. It is *objective*, although not exclusively, providing teaching concerning what we are in Christ, as presented for instance in Ephesians 2-3, whereas the Old Testament, among other things, gives *subjective* help on how to realize the New Testament position in practice.

**The Church and the Old Testament**

“And He said to them: For this reason every scribe discipled to the kingdom of the heavens is like a man that is a householder who brings out of his treasures things new and old” (Mt. 13:52). We have no direct authoritative teaching in the Old Testament concerning the Church, because such instruction could only be given after Christ’s coming (His incarnation, His perfect walk, His accomplished work at the cross, His death, resurrection and exaltation). Anticipating that He would indeed lay its foundation,
the Lord announced the future building of His Assembly (Mt. 16:18). As recorded in Acts 2, Christ actually began this building through the Holy Spirit, and He will complete it at the Rapture. This does not set aside that much concerning Christ and the Assembly (Church) can be found in the Old Testament typology. For example, several Old Testament married couples provide illustrations of truths only expounded in the New Testament. Thus, with the light of the New Testament, we can see things in the Old Testament, which the Old Testament believers themselves were not able to see. In addition to this, the New Testament confirms that those Old Testament believers will not reach perfection before we do (Heb. 11:40).

A Lock and a Key

We could compare the Old Testament to a special lock that is closed and that no one is able to open. Using the New Testament properly, as intended by God, we will be able to use it as a key to unlock the secrets of the Old, provided we are in the right spiritual condition. Moreover, this picture of lock and key highlights the intimate connection between both Testaments. This truth is shown in many passages of Scripture, like in the verse quoted above from Matthew 13:52. Let us, therefore, make good use of both Testaments, always keeping things in proper biblical perspective, to the praise of His name (Eph. 1:3).

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ” (Eph. 1:3).