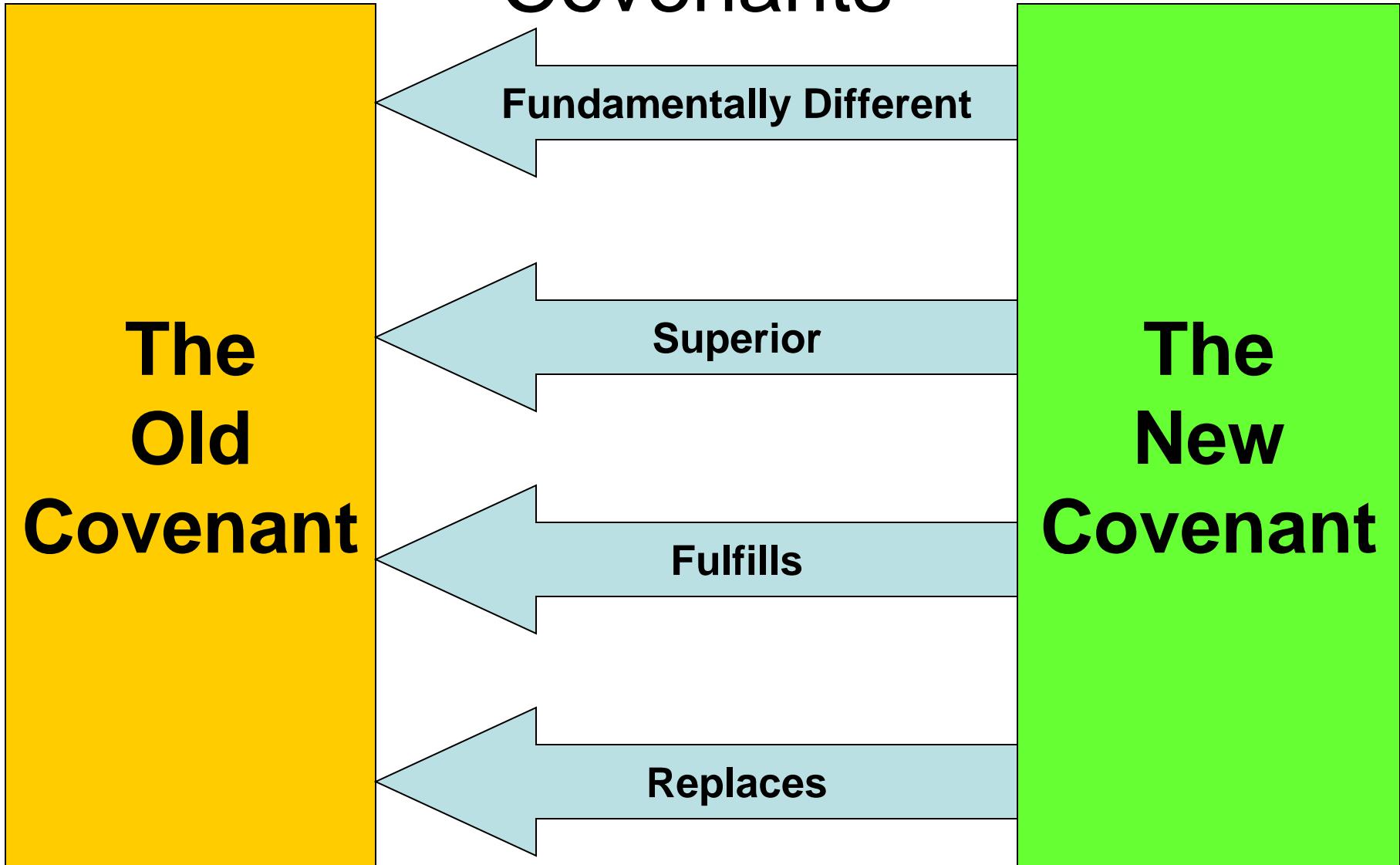


# New Covenant Theology



# A Comparison of the Old and New Covenants



# The New Covenant is Superior to the Old Covenant



**Exhibit B – 2 Corinthians 3:6-16**

# Background to Second Corinthians

- Paul had established the church at Corinth about seven years earlier (on his second missionary journey cf. Acts 18). He stayed there for about a year and a half before moving on.
- Sometime after he left, the Corinthian church was infiltrated by false teachers who were challenging both Paul's personal integrity and his authority as an apostle.
- It appears from what Paul says in this letter, that the false teachers prided themselves on having Jewish credentials (see 11:22ff).
- Paul is writing this letter as a part of a continuing effort on his part to refute the claims of the false teachers.

# The New Covenant is Superior

## ■ 2 Corinthians 3:1-5

■ *Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you, or from you? <sup>2</sup> You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all. <sup>3</sup> And you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. <sup>4</sup> Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. <sup>5</sup> Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God...*

# The New Covenant is Superior

- It appears that the false teachers had come to the Corinthians with “letters of recommendation” and questioned why Paul hadn’t provided such credentials –  
*Do we need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you, or from you?*
- Paul responds that the Corinthians themselves are his “letter” – *You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all*
- But they are a different kind of letter:
  - Not written with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God
  - Not written on tablets of stone but (literally) on “tablets of hearts of flesh”
- Notice that Paul has now transitioned:
  - From drawing a contrast between “letters of recommendation” versus the effects that Paul’s ministry had on the Corinthians
  - To the way God worked in the Old Covenant (writing on tablets of stone, i.e. the Ten Commandments) versus the way God works in the New Covenant (writing his law on hearts of flesh)

# The New Covenant is Superior

- Notice also how Paul uses the language that was used in the Old Testament to foretell the coming of the New Covenant:
  - **Jeremiah 31:31-33** – *Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers ... For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.*
  - **Ezekiel 11:19-20** – *And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God.*
  - **Ezekiel 36:26-27** – *And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.*

# The New Covenant is Superior

- This New Covenant power that is at work in the hearts of the Corinthians is what gives Paul confidence as a minister of the New Covenant:
  - *Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God* (verses 4-5)

# Exodus 34:29-35



Before examining the remainder of 2 Corinthians 3 (verses 6-16), it will be helpful if we are familiarize ourselves with the following account of Moses receiving the Old Covenant Law from God on Mount Sinai:

*When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand as he came down from the mountain, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God.<sup>30</sup> Aaron and all the people of Israel saw Moses, and behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him.<sup>31</sup> But Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses talked with them.*

# Exodus 34:29-35



*32 Afterward all the people of Israel came near, and he commanded them all that the LORD had spoken with him in Mount Sinai. 33 And when Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face. 34 Whenever Moses went in before the LORD to speak with him, he would remove the veil, until he came out. And when he came out and told the people of Israel what he was commanded, 35 the people of Israel would see the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face was shining. And Moses would put the veil over his face again, until he went in to speak with him.*

# The New Covenant is Superior

## ■ 2 Corinthians 3:6-8

■ *[God] has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.<sup>7</sup> Now if the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such glory that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses' face because of its glory, which was being brought to an end,<sup>8</sup> will not the ministry of the Spirit have even more glory?*

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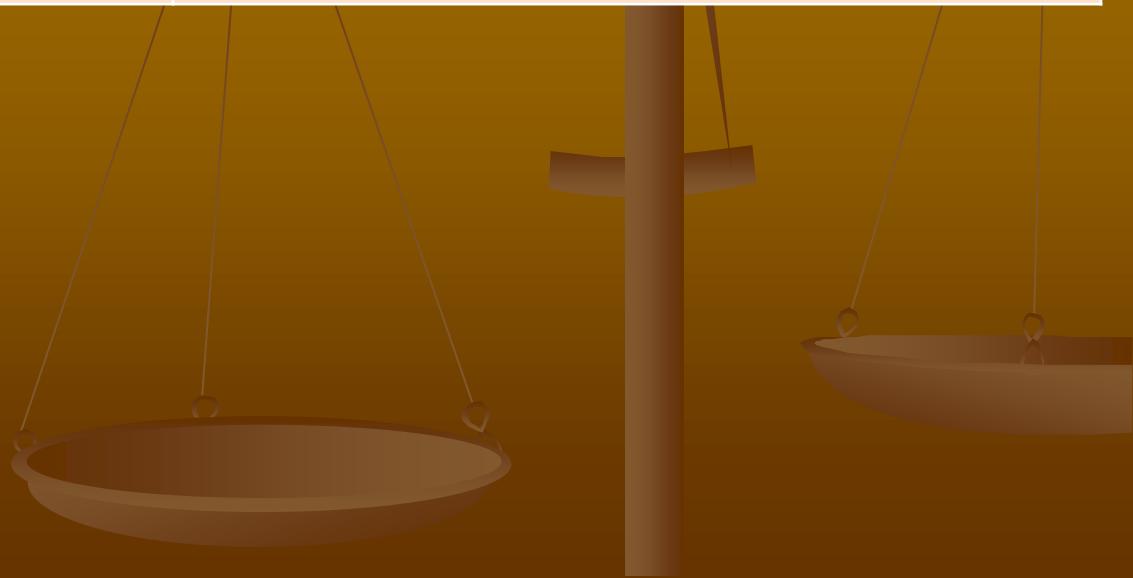
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The old covenant <b>letter kills</b> – i.e. condemns us as spiritually dead (v.6)	The new covenant <b>Spirit gives life</b> – i.e. makes us spiritually alive through regeneration (v.6 cf. v.3)



# The New Covenant is Superior

Notice the effect that the giving of the Law had on God's treatment of the people of Israel:

- *Grumbling over the manna and the quail:*
  - *Led to no punishment before Sinai (Exod 16:1-15),*
  - *But to a killing plague after Sinai (Num 11:4-8).*
- *A Sabbath violation:*
  - *Resulted in a reprimand before Sinai (Exod 16:27-30),*
  - *But in death by stoning after Sinai (Num 15:32-36).*
- *Grumbling over water:*
  - *Led to no punishment before Sinai (Exod 17:1-7),*
  - *But to a destroying fire after Sinai (Num 20:2-13).*

# Questions

- Do some of the negative terms that Paul uses in describing the Law of Moses, a Law given by God, surprise you?
- How is it that Paul can describe the Law the way that he does in the passage we looked at today (2 Corinthians 3) and yet in other places say, “So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.” (Rom 7:12)?
- Is there an inconsistency here? Explain your answer.