

Two Phrases to be Reckoned With

In various works, written and spoken, I have set out the biblical arguments for the all-important covenant-discontinuity brought about by Christ when he fulfilled the old covenant and rendered it obsolete, bringing in the new to supersede it. Two biblical phrases encapsulate some of the most glorious aspects of this watershed of the ages. All I want to do in this very short article is list some of the ways Scripture uses these two phrases, to let them speak for themselves. My aforesaid works contain my justifying arguments for the many implications of these passages.

Phrase 1: ‘but now’

I restrict my selection to Paul’s letter to the Romans.

By works of the law no human being will be justified in [God’s] sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. ***But now*** the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it – the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe (Rom. 3:20-22).

When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. ***But now*** that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life (Rom. 6:20-22).

While we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. ***But now*** we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code (Rom. 7:5-6).

There is therefore ***now*** no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he

condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit (Rom. 8:1-4).

Just as you were at one time disobedient to God **but now** have received mercy because of their [that is, Israel's] disobedience, so they too have **now** been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may **now** receive mercy. For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all (Rom. 11:30-32).

Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages **but has now** been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen (Rom. 16:25-27).

See also John 15:22,24; Acts 17:30; 1 Cor. 15:20; Gal. 4:9; Eph. 2:12-13; 5:8; Col. 1:26; Heb. 8:6; 9:26; 12:26; 1 Pet. 2:10.

It is the *eschatological*¹ 'but now' which is at the root of the apostle's argument throughout Romans and elsewhere. Paul speaks of the age from Adam to Moses – before the law; then the age of Moses – the reign of the law; and then the age of Christ by his Spirit – after the law, the reign of grace. Once again, it is this towering view of salvation history, and, in particular, the contrast between the age of the law, and the age after the law, which is vital. Paul is here clearly contrasting the realms of law and grace, the realms of the old age and the new, both in history *and* in the believer's personal experience. Above all, the latter – but securely based on the former. Without the historical, eschatological 'but now', there would be no personal 'but now'. And without the personal 'but now', there is no salvation.

Three testimonies:

¹ I am using 'eschatological' to speak of the way God deals with men through changing history; supremely, the end of the old covenant, the inauguration of the new leading to the eternal kingdom. See my *Redemption History Through Covenants*.

D.Martyn Lloyd-Jones aptly entitled his opening chapter on Romans 3:21-22: ‘The Great Turning Point – “But Now”’. As he said, it is these two words, ‘but now’, which are vital. ‘What then is their meaning and import?’ He answered his question:

They do two main things. First and foremost they provide us with a contrast... to all the old law position, to our being under the law in any shape or form. But in addition to that, of course, the ‘but now’ brings in the time factor... What [Paul] is saying is, ‘NOW’ this thing that has happened [Christ has come, and so on] has changed everything.

Having rightly stressed the continuity between the law and the gospel – ‘the law and the prophets witnessed to’ the gospel – Lloyd-Jones then spoke of:

What the position was under the law... but it is no longer like that. Something new has happened – ‘now’. The great turning point in all history had just taken place: that was the coming of the Son of God into the world. So that we are living in a new age – the ‘now’. It is no longer the old, it is the new age. It has arrived... This is a most important word to watch, therefore, as you read the New Testament; there is a contrast between what once was and what is now.²

As Douglas J.Moo put it:

‘But now’ marks the shift in Paul’s focus from the old era of sin’s domination to the new era of salvation. This contrast between two eras in salvation history is one of Paul’s most basic theological conceptions... Romans 1:18 – 3:20 has sketched the spiritual state of those who belong to the old era: justly condemned, helpless in the power of sin, powerless to escape God’s wrath. ‘But now’ God has intervened to inaugurate a new era, and all who respond in faith – not only after the cross, but, as Romans 4 will show, before it also – will be transferred into it from the old era. No wonder Lloyd-Jones can exclaim: ‘There

² D.Martyn Lloyd-Jones: *Romans: An Exposition of Chapters 3:20 – 4:25. Atonement and Justification*, The Banner of Truth Trust, London, 1971, pp23,28-29,34-38,40.

are no more wonderful words in the whole of Scripture than just these two words “But now”.³

Thomas R.Schreiner:

In... Luke and Acts... the law should be interpreted in light of salvation history. Now that the new covenant has arrived in Jesus Christ, the law no longer occupies centre stage. The law must be interpreted in light of Jesus Christ and his coming. It was the will of God to keep the law during the old era of salvation history, but the law... is no longer normative now that Christ has come.⁴

Phrase 2: ‘just as’

The great motive for the believer’s progressive sanctification is not, as John Calvin taught, and so many believe, the whip of the Mosaic law, the so-called moral law – which, naturally, must produce a sense of fear. No! Far from it! The believer has to obey Christ’s law, and is enabled to walk in the Spirit ‘just as’ or ‘even as’ Christ walked.

We were buried therefore with [Christ] by baptism into death, in order that, ***just as Christ*** was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:4).

Welcome one another ***as Christ*** has welcomed you, for the glory of God (Rom. 15:7).

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, ***as God in Christ*** forgave you. Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, ***as Christ*** loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God (Eph. 4:32 – 5:2).

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Saviour. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to

³ Douglas J.Moo: *The Epistle to the Romans*, William B.Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 1996, p221.

⁴ Thomas R.Schreiner: *40 Questions About Christians and Biblical Law*, Kregel, Grand Rapids, 2010, p179.

their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, *as Christ* loved the church and gave himself up for her (Eph. 5:22-25).

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; *as the Lord* has forgiven you, so you also must forgive (Col. 3:12-13).

Since [or *As*] therefore *Christ* suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin (1 Pet. 4:1).

Closing questions

Does your view of the relationship between the old and new covenants take full account of all the truth which lies behind these two vital scriptural phrases?

Let me put it another way: Are you gripped by the glorious eschatological truth in these phrases, or are you confined by the statements issued by men nearly 400 years ago who produced a Confession in accordance with their pre-supposed theological system?

Or do you never even bother with these two phrases?