

All Elaborated: New

It was during that last old-covenant Passover in the upper room that Christ gave his disciples a *new* commandment and had spoken of a *new* covenant:

A new (*kainos*) commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another (John 13:34).

This cup that is poured out for you is the new (*kainos*) covenant in my blood (Luke 22:20).

Newness was the issue; newness remains the issue; we are talking about a new covenant with an overarching new commandment within a new law. Yes, all this is new in the sense of being new in time, recently made – Jesus was saying that, then and there, he was issuing his new commandment, that the new covenant was actually being set up in the presence of his disciples in that upper room at that very time – fresh off the press, as it were. Yes, indeed! It was all spanking new! Fresh!

But 'freshness' does not exhaust Christ's use of 'new'.

The new covenant and its law are new in the sense of being very, very different to the old. The new covenant is not the old rehashed. It is not the old tweaked. The new covenant is something radically new, something unknown before.¹ New, new, new... This cannot be over-stressed. It certainly can be under-played; it often is!²

¹ It had been foretold in prophecy, with the newness of the coming new-covenant being stressed; as God through Jeremiah put it, the new covenant would be 'not like the [Mosaic] covenant' (Jer. 31:31-32).

² Witness the miserable amount of space and weight Louis Berkhof gave to the new covenant in his *Systematic Theology*, The Banner of Truth Trust, London, 1959 (see my *Christ*).

Newness! This was a central part of the argument used by the writer of Hebrews; he was explicit. Indeed, he took the point further. The new covenant is not only new: it is superior to anything seen before! This was his point in writing to converted Jews who were in danger of defecting from Christ. ‘Why will you go back to the old, the inferior covenant?’, he was demanding of them; ‘the new is better, better by far, superior; the old is obsolete!’ In the upper room, Christ had used the word *kainos*, new, ‘the new covenant’. As the writer of Hebrews explained, Christ rendered the old covenant obsolete by fulfilling it, and thus establishing the new covenant – or, as the writer called it, ‘a better covenant’:

Now if perfection had been attainable through the levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law) [that is, as the context makes clear, the Mosaic covenant, the old covenant], what further need would there have been for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek, rather than one named after the order of Aaron? For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well... For on the one hand, a former commandment is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness (for the [Mosaic, the old-covenant] law made nothing perfect); but on the other hand, a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God. And it was not without an oath. For those who formerly became priests were made such without an oath, but this one was made a priest with an oath by the one who said to him: ‘The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: “You are a priest forever”’. This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant (Heb. 7:11-22).

Clearly, the old system – the Mosaic covenant and its law, all squarely based on the levitical priesthood, ‘for under it the people received the law’ – ‘because of its weakness and uselessness’, and its having been fulfilled by Christ, has been set aside to make way for a new and better system and its law, based on a better priesthood, a new system that can and does the job that the old covenant never could. What ‘new’ or ‘better’ ‘system’ is this? What else can it be but the new covenant, the law of Christ, with Christ’s priesthood, ‘after

the order of Melchizedek, rather than one named after the order of Aaron', leading to the priesthood of all believers?³ Who accomplished this glorious change? The Father through Christ! As Paul put it: 'God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son...' (Rom. 8:3), God has brought about nothing less than his own glory in the full and everlasting redemption of all the elect, both Jew and Gentile, making each and every one of them – individually – a priest – and corporately into a kingdom of priests (Rev. 5:10), transforming each of them into the image of Christ, and doing so by his Spirit:

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 [Mosaic] 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. 8:3-4).

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:17-18).

Any reader who, flying in face of the obvious context, is tempted to reach for the Reformed escape-route, and try to limit all this to justification should read – and read aloud, in more than one version – the entire passages from Romans 5:1 to Romans 8:39 and 2 Corinthians in its entirety.⁴

As the writer of Hebrews went on to explain, it had all been promised by Jeremiah:

Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new (*kainos*) covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I

³ See my *The Priesthood*.

⁴ For my detailed arguments, see my *Christ, False*.

made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. For they did not continue in my covenant, and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall not teach, each one his neighbour and each one his brother, saying: 'Know the Lord', for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more (Heb. 8:7-12).

The writer pressed on to bring out the point he was determined to drive home:

In speaking of a new (*kainos*) covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away...

[Christ] is the mediator of a new (*kainos*) covenant...

We have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new (*prosphatos*)⁵ and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh...

Jesus, the mediator of a new (*neos*) covenant (Heb. 8:13; 9:15; 10:19-20; 12:24).

I have not finished taking extracts from the writer of Hebrews, but having established his use of 'new', I turn to other writers, and their use of the vital word and – more important – its vital concept.

Take Paul:

Far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a *new* (*kainos*) creation. And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God (Gal. 6:14-16).

⁵ *prosphatos*, recently or very lately made, new.

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If anyone is in Christ, he is a *new (kainos)* creation. The old has passed away; behold, the *new (kainos)* has come (2 Cor. 5:17).

Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one *new (kainos)* man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility (Eph. 2:12-16).

Put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and... be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and... put on the *new (kainos)* self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness (Eph. 4:22-24).

And John:

A *new (kainos)* commandment... I am writing to you, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining (1 John 2:8).

So much for this glance at ‘new’. As only to be expected, the post-Pentecost Scriptures are full of ‘newness’: a new people, under a new covenant with its new law, in a new age. And, I stress once again, not only new in time, but new – essentially, and entirely, new – in character. That’s the covenant which has been in force since Pentecost, and remains the covenant for believers today. This is what Christ was setting up in the upper room.

Let me close this chapter with an extract from my *Christ Is All*:

As evidence that the concept of the new covenant really does pervade the New Testament, think of all the *new* things found in Christ: *new* cloth (Matt. 9:16; Mark 2:21; Luke

5:36); *new* wine (Matt. 9:17; Mark 2:22; Luke 5:38; compare Acts 2:13 and Eph. 5:18); *new* doctrine (Acts 17:19); a *new* lump (1 Cor. 5:7); a *new* covenant (Matt. 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25, 2 Cor. 3:6; Heb. 8:8,13; 9:15; 12:24) or *new* testament (Heb. 9:15, AV); the believer is a *new* creation (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15), a *newborn* babe (1 Pet. 2:2), a *new* man (Eph. 2:15; 4:24; Col. 3:10); he comes to God in a *new* and living way (Heb. 10:20), keeping a *new* commandment (John 13:34; 1 John 2:8) in *newness* of life (Rom. 6:4) and *newness* of heart and spirit or Spirit (Ezek. 11:19; 36:26; Rom. 7:6), having a *new* name (Isa. 62:2; Rev. 2:17; 3:12), singing a *new* song (Rev. 5:9; 14:3); Christ has now made all things *new* (2 Cor. 5:17; Rev. 21:5), and will do so especially in eternity, where the saints will dwell in the *new* heavens and the *new* earth in the *new* Jerusalem (2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 3:12; 21:1-2,5).

Think of all the *old* things put away by Christ: the *old* covenant has been abolished (Heb. 8:13), *old* things are gone (2 Cor. 5:17); for the believer, the *old* man has gone (Rom. 6:6) with his *old* sins (2 Pet. 1:9); the believer no longer lives in the *old* way (Eph. 4:22-23; Col. 3:9), serving God with the *old* leaven (1 Cor. 5:7-8). The *old* cloth and *old* wine have had their day (Matt. 9:16-17; Mark 2:21-22; Luke 5:36-38).⁶

Again, think of all which is conjured up by the lovely word *former*; the believer can talk about the passing away of *former* things including his *former* conduct or way of life (Eph. 4:22), his *former* lusts (1 Pet. 1:14); indeed, he looks forward to the time when all the *former* things (Rev. 21:4) will be done away with. Unbelievers have no *former* – and therefore no *new* – experience. Such belongs entirely and only to those who are in the *new* covenant, to those who

⁶ Luke 5:39 seems to contradict the point – old wine tastes better than new. But there are two comparisons running alongside each other. The one I am speaking of is not to do with taste. It is to do with power. If new wine is put in old wineskins, the lively production of gas will burst the old, dried-up leather. New, lively, freshly-made, effervescent wine needs new wineskins to cope with the release of explosive energy. The power, the energy of the new covenant cannot be contained within the obsolete old covenant, with its old law. That is what Christ was saying.

have been taken out of the *former* covenant. Similarly with *no longer* (Isa. 62:4).

And this concept of the change of covenant is not only found in the ‘accident’ of words, but the very doctrine of the gospel is based upon it. More, it *is* the gospel. Let me explain. Every human being is a sinner, since every human being is born a sinner (Job 14:4; Ps. 51:5; Rom. 3:23), born a creature ‘of the flesh’ (John 3:6), ‘a natural man’ with ‘a natural mind’ who cannot understand, appreciate, receive or inherit spiritual things, ‘the things of the Spirit of God’ (1 Cor. 2:14; 15:50). Consequently, every human being, if he is to ‘see the kingdom of God’, let alone ‘enter’ it (John 3:3,5), must be ‘born again... born of the Spirit’ (John 3:3,5,7), ‘born... of God’ (John 1:13), ‘born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God’ (1 Pet. 1:23). And once a sinner has been born again – regenerated – [and been brought in repentance to faith in Christ,] he has been ‘delivered... from the power of darkness and conveyed... [translated, AV] into the kingdom of [Christ]’ (Col. 1:13). Every child of God was born, naturally, of the flesh, and was flesh, but has become a spiritual man by the work of God the Holy Spirit within him. This is nothing less than being brought into the new covenant. My point is that even though the words ‘new covenant’ might not be mentioned in a particular passage, the New Testament is constantly appealing to believers to live out what they are in that new covenant; namely, not to live as fleshly or carnal, but to live as spiritual, as children of God (Rom. 6:11-23; 7:1-25; 8:1ff; 1 Cor. 3:1-3; Gal. 5:13-26; 1 Pet. 1:14; 2:1-3). Other phrases are used to convey the same. Take Ephesians 4:17-32; 5:1 – 6:9, for example.⁷

As the Spirit has explained, what a wealth of truth is contained in Christ’s use of ‘new’ in the upper room!

⁷ My *Christ* pp230-231.