The Book of 2 Corinthians
2 Corinthians 3:6

Session 25: Able Ministers of the New Testament, part 1

Today we are studying 2 Corinthians 3:6. That verse is actually the last third of a single sentence, therefore let's back up and read the whole sentence.

> 2 Corinthians 3:4 And such trust have we through Christ to God-ward: [5] Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency *is* of God; [6] **Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament;** not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.

In 2 Corinthians 3:4-6, Paul is answering the objection that his edification ministry is unorthodox or heretical, and he answers this by two means: 1) by demonstrating what God has done through Christ to accomplish the edification of the saints, and 2) by talking about where his ministry comes from and on what it is based.

The part we are looking at is actually in verse 6, where Paul says that God "hath made us able ministers of the new testament." When Paul talks about the New Testament, he is not referring to the 27 books of Matthew to Revelation. I know that after Malachi, and the blank pages, there is a title page in your Bible that says, the New Testament, but that designation is not inspired.

In the same way, when the Bible says "old testament," it is not referring to the 39 books of Genesis to Malachi. The Old Testament is a reference to the Law of Moses, which was given to the nation of Israel at Mt. Sinai, after they came out of Egypt.

We could also call this the Mosaic Covenant, which was a conditional covenant between God and Israel. If they kept the Law, they would get physical blessings, and if they walked contrary to God's law, they would incur physical judgments, or curses.

> Hebrews 9:18 Whereupon neither the first *testament* was dedicated without blood. [19] For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats, with

> water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book, and all the people, [20] Saying, **This *is* the blood of the testament which God hath enjoined unto you**. [21] Moreover he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle, and all the vessels of the ministry.

Just as God established a testament in time past with the nation of Israel, God also made a promise that at a specific time in the future, He will establish a new testament whereby God will deal with Israel under grace.

The Greek word, which is translated "testament" in our English Bible, is the same word that is also translated "covenant." A testament and a covenant are two different things, and it is important to know the difference. A testament is a written arrangement of things after a person is dead. A covenant is an agreement or contract made between persons who are living. Sometimes, when the Bible uses one of these words instead of the other, the choice is meant as a distinction. For example, in our verse in 2 Corinthians 3:6, Paul's choice of "testament" instead of "covenant" is on purpose. In other words, Paul would never say he is an able minister of the new covenant. You will see why as we progress through our study.

Even so, sometimes these terms can overlap. What I mean is that sometimes the Bible uses these two terms interchangeably. Let me show you an example.

We just looked at Hebrews 9:20 where it is recounting what Moses did to establish the first testament. But when we go back to Exodus 24 and see the original account, it does not say "testament," it says "covenant."

> Exodus 24:7 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.

Let me give another example: In Hebrews 9, speaking of Jesus, it says that He is the mediator of the new testament.

> 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.

Then, in chapter 12, it says that He is the mediator of the new covenant.

> Hebrews 12:24 And to **Jesus the mediator of the new covenant,** and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than *that of* Abel.

The old testament can be referred to as the Mosaic Covenant. The new testament can be referred to as the New Covenant. Not every covenant was a testament. There are only two testaments, but God made many covenants with Israel, such as the Abrahamic Covenant and the Davidic Covenant. Both testaments are connected to a covenant.

So, while there is a difference between a testament and a covenant, sometimes the choice of word points to the distinction, and other times, these words can be used interchangeably.

When we address the issue of the new covenant, it is important to know that God made that covenant specifically with the nation of Israel.

> Hebrews 8:8 For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when **I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah**:

It was not made with Gentiles, nor was it made with the body of Christ. God has always dealt with Israel by covenants, but He has never dealt with the body of Christ by a covenant of any kind.

Here is my point: As members of the body of Christ (BoC), living in the dispensation of grace (DoG), we are not under the New Covenant and neither are we part of the New Testament.

When it comes to the new testament, there are two extreme positions. One extreme is peculiar to dispensationalists, and it says that we are in no way related to the new testament; that there is no connection at all. This is known as the Acts 28 position. In other words, they believe that the dispensation we are presently living in did not begin until after the events of Acts 28.

Why? Because they are trying to avoid any connection between what God is doing with the BoC and what He will do with Israel under the New Testament. In order to do that, they teach that after God interrupted His prophetic program with Israel, He instituted two dispensations. The first one runs from Paul's conversion to his imprisonment at Rome, and the second one runs from his imprisonment all the way to the Blessed Hope. They must also say that Paul received two commissions. They will also say that Paul preached one gospel following his conversion, but he preached a different gospel after Acts 28. And lastly, they teach that the people saved in the first dispensation comprised one body of believers to whom were written the books of Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians. and those who were saved after Paul went to prison comprise a different body of believers.

That means that for us who are living today, in the year 2026, the only books that pertain to us are Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus and Philemon. By inserting an extra dispensation, they can eliminate any connection between the Mystery and the new testament. So that is one extreme.

The other extreme is that of New Testament Reformed or Covenant theology. This position believes that the Mystery is part of the New Testament. They believe there is only one church in the whole Bible; and everybody is that church, and everybody is Israel. Their reasoning is that the body of Christ is Israel, and since we are Israel, and the new testament was given to Israel, then the church today is under the New Testament. That is what Reformed theology would teach. That is the other extreme.

There is one more position that is kind of in the middle. It says that while the body of Christ is not Israel and that God has not made any covenant with us (which are correct), they believe that God has placed the church under the New Testament. As you can see, they would emphasize the fact that a testament and a covenant are always two different things.

The Mid-Acts Pauline Position (MAPP) says that the NT and the New Covenant are both with Israel alone. We are not under the NT, and we will demonstrate why this is so in this study.

So, let's recall the context of what is going on here: Paul has been charged with being unorthodox in his teaching/edification ministry. And up to this time, someone could have come up to Paul and asked him to show them from the scriptures where he was getting his teaching about the Mystery. What scriptures would Paul turn to? None. Why? Because the Mystery had not been revealed before it was revealed to Paul. That is why Paul says the things he is teaching are unsearchable.

> Ephesians 3:8 Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the **unsearchable** riches of Christ;

But what Paul can do is refer to scriptures that present parallel concepts from Israel's prophetic program, that demonstrate that while the Mystery itself was kept secret and not previously revealed, the general concepts within it are not beyond reason of what God is understood to have done with Israel. In other words, although Paul may not be able to go directly to scripture to prove the validity of his message of the Mystery, what he can do is to turn back to some things God was doing or had promised to do in Israel's prophetic program, and show a similarity of principles and concepts. This would demonstrate that Paul isn't just pulling these things out of his own imagination, but there are already parallel issues expressed in Israel's scriptures.

Paul is going to refer to the New Testament, to say to his accusers that what he is preaching is, in principle, something, which God promised to provide to Israel by the New Testament. In other words, there is a connection of sorts between what the BoC gets as part of the Mystery and what Israel gets as part of the New Testament.

That does not mean that we are under the New Testament. But, Paul is borrowing language to support what he is teaching about the mystery of Christ. In other words, Paul is going to point out some parallel issues between what we get under the Mystery and what Israel gets under the New Testament.

If this seems like a stretch, just remember that Paul has done this same type of thing in the past; he has referred to an event in Israel's program to establish a principle for something God is doing in this dispensation of grace.

For example, turn to Romans 9. Now, go back in your mind to when we studied through Romans 9 and recall what that was about. As you know, Romans 9-11 is about the dispensational change whereby God temporarily interrupted His prophetic program with Israel, and brought in his Mystery program in a dispensation of grace. In Romans 9, Paul was answering the objection: "Where does Paul get the authority to say that God has ushered in a new program?"

This is what Paul has been doing throughout the book of Acts during his "to the Jew first" ministry: he is saying to Israelites that God is no longer engaged in His prophetic program with them, He is no longer working with them in accordance with the prophetic program, and He is not presently dealing with them as "His chosen people." God is now doing something else: He is carrying the gospel of Christ to the Gentiles, and when they are saved, He deals with them under the Mystery, as members of the body of Christ, not as Israelites. He makes it clear that in this DoG we are not under the Law, but under grace.

What verses could Paul use to defend his position? To what could Paul appeal to defend his position that God has decided to deal with Israel differently than before?

Well, Romans 9 contains verses Paul uses to communicate to the nation of Israel that there are some principles and concepts which were already true in Israel's program, which should keep Israel from rejecting what Paul is saying, out of hand, as though there is no basis for it whatsoever.

> Romans 9:19 Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? [20] Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed *it*, Why hast thou made me thus? [21] Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?

Paul is using that second phrase in the first question in verse 20, "who art thou that repliest against God?" The idea here is, "Who are you to tell God what He can and cannot do?"

The objection here is: "Paul, you have no right to say that Israel has been cast away. We are God's people. We are His favored nation. We are not numbered with the Gentiles."

Paul's response is in verse 20: "Shall the thing formed say to him that formed *it*, why has thou made me thus?" What is Paul doing? He is taking them back to Jeremiah.

> Romans 9:21 Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?
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> Jeremiah 18:1 The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, [2] Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause thee to hear my words. [3] Then I went down to the potter's house, and, behold, he wrought a work on the wheels. [4] And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter: so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make *it*. [5] Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying, [6] **O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter?** saith the LORD. Behold, as the clay *is* in the potter's hand, so *are* ye in mine hand, O house of Israel.

Jeremiah, as are all of the prophets from Isaiah to Malachi, is a fifth course of punishment prophet. Jeremiah is warning the people that they are about to be carried away captive out of their land. In other words, God is about to do something different with His people.

Paul is not going to Jeremiah to teach the content of Jeremiah's message, which is the judgment of carrying them away captive out of their land in the fifth course of punishment, but rather, Paul goes to Jeremiah to refer to a principle in Jeremiah whereby God says that Israel is the clay and He (God) is the Potter and God will do what He wants with Israel. Just as God can take Israel out of the land He promised them and then bring them back into it, He can also interrupt His prophetic

program with them, lower the nation to the level of the Gentiles, publish a new gospel of grace, take everyone out from under the Law, take away the physical blessings and the physical curses, and make of twain, one new man. And, after the dispensation of grace has run it course, He can resume and complete His program with Israel. As the Potter, God can do with Israel whatever He wants.

> Romans 9:21 Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?

So, as Paul gives this message about God changing how He is working with the nation of Israel, he goes back to the Old Testament scriptures to justify his message to Israel.

The rest of Paul's argument is in verses 22-24, which is one long sentence.

> Romans 9:22 *What* if God, willing to shew *his* wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: [23] And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, [24] Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?

In other words, don't just knee-jerk reject that God is changing the way He deals with you Israelites, because God has already made changes in the past. There is precedent!

Do you see how Paul makes his point to answer their objection by referring back to something in the time past of Israel's program? Paul is justifying his message by showing a parallel issue, but not by the actual content of the OT passage. In other words, Paul is not teaching the actual 70-year captivity, but he is establishing that God has the right to change what He is doing with Israel.

Now, take this back to 2 Corinthians 3. There are two things back in the prophetic scriptures, which Paul can refer to defend his teaching and ministry: 1) Prophetic scripture already promised that there will be a new way of dealing with the nation of Israel, a new relationship which includes a spiritual restoration and renewal. And what is that? It is the New Testament.

Look, keep this in mind, the New Testament is not a dispensation. The NT is God's promise to Israel, it is their future "hope" for 1) how God will make them spiritually fit to be utilized in His plan and purpose for them (as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation), and 2) how God will deal with them throughout eternity (He will cause them to walk in His law).

When it comes to us Gentiles, back during Israel's program, we were excluded from the covenants, we had no promises, and we were without hope. The Mystery changed all that. The DoG is God's surprise gift to us Gentiles; it gave us a "hope."

There is commonality between what God gives to the body of Christ under the Mystery and the spiritual provisions God promised to Israel under the New Testament. What do I mean by that? I mean there is a similarity between the things which God promised to Israel under the new testament, and the spiritual blessings which God is presently (during this DoG) giving to those who are in Christ.

For example, part of the NT for Israel was the forgiveness of sins.

> Jeremiah 31:31 Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that **I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah:**
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> Jeremiah 31:34 And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: **for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.**

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