

THE APPLES-TO-ORANGES COMPARISON OF THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS (Part 1 of 2)

Every Bible-believing Evangelical Christian embraces the assertion of the apostle Paul in 2 Timothy 3:16 that *“All Scripture is inspired of God and PROFITABLE (emphasis added) for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”* The problem arises when we fail to ask the question: Is all Scripture EQUALLY profitable and EQUALLY applicable for my life as a Christian? If you have sincerely asked yourself that question and genuinely pursued an answer, then you know that the answer is “no.”

Why? We are not Israelites living under the Old Covenant. We are Christians, followers of our Savior, living under the New (and better) Covenant. Without grasping such a critical distinction, any Christian can be led astray into a variety of beliefs and behaviors which do not apply to them as a follower of Christ. So, we study the Old Testament and learn important lessons from it, which can most certainly enhance our walk with God; and improve our understanding of the New Testament. But we must be careful to compare what we learn there to the newer, better and more relevant covenant to which we belong and under which we must function. Perhaps the most important guideline to ensure that we are not guilty of comparing apples to oranges involves this question: Is the principle or practice stated in the Old Testament repeated in the New Testament? If the answer is “yes,” then it is safe to assume that there is a direct application to each of us. But if the answer is “no,” then it’s time to ask ourselves “why?”

The most obvious example involves the dietary regulations of the Old Covenant. Do they or don’t they apply to us as Christians? The answer is a definitive “no!” Not only are those regulations never mentioned in the New Testament as something which we must obey, but there a variety of instances where we are specifically advised to no longer follow them. The most important occurs with Peter, recorded in Acts 10:9-16. He is on the roof of the house of Simon the tanner, about to pray, becomes hungry, and then sees the same vision three times, encouraging him to eat meat that under the Old Covenant would have been considered “unclean” and prohibited from consumption. But a voice tells him, “What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy.” Peter applies this not only to himself when it comes to a change in his eating habits, but to Gentile unbelievers who needed to be reached with the Gospel. His remarkable reasoning is simply this: “You are what you eat.” And if the food that Gentiles ate was no longer considered to be unclean to eat, then those Gentiles themselves would have no longer been considered unclean to associate with; leading to the initial outreach of the Gospel within the Gentile world (Acts 10:17-48).

Peter’s unique personal experience on the roof of Simon the tanner’s house, and his practical application of it in regard to the household of Cornelius the centurion, is also confirmed for us doctrinally by the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 7:19, where we read this – *“Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but what matters is keeping the commandments of God.”* Considering its significance, this has to be one of the most overlooked principles in the New Testament in helping us avoid the error of making an apples-to-oranges comparison between the Old and New Covenants. On the surface, it seems that Paul is contradicting himself. Was not circumcision a commandment of God within the ceremonial law under the Mosaic Covenant? Then why does the apostle here refer to it as “nothing?” He then follows up by admonishing the Corinthians to focus on what really matters and that is, keeping the commandments of God! Do you see what Paul is doing here and why it has been missed by so many? In no uncertain terms, he is relegating the ceremonial law of the Mosaic Covenant as irrelevant for the Christian; while at the same time, affirming the eternal relevance of obeying the moral law of God. There are many other warnings scattered throughout the New Testament which help us avoid the pitfall of making an apples-to-oranges comparison between the Old and New Covenants. For your own personal study, here are just a few: Romans 14:17; 1 Corinthians 8:8; Colossians 2:16-23; Hebrews 8:1-13; 9:23-28.

For the majority of Evangelicals in America, these thorny issues have been resolved. The most notable exception involves a group of Christian nationalists who desire to turn the United States of America into a theocracy. Please see previous studies where I have dealt with that at length. However, there is another apple-to-oranges issue which has arisen even more recently, which we will delve into, next.