

of the ceremonial regulations regarding unclean things, purification, dietary strictures, tithes, and the Sabbath. But in addition there were doubtless regular local gatherings under the leadership of teaching Levites, in which believers studied God's Word, prayed, and sang together. Although there were many religious exercises under the Old Testament, there were two that were highlighted in the life of the Old Testament believer: circumcision and Passover. The first was the sign and seal of initiation into the covenant community (both religious and political); the second was the sign and seal of continuation in the covenant community (both religious and political). The spiritual seed of Abraham (believing Israelites) carried out all of these religious exercises as expressions of true saving faith; those who were not Abraham's spiritual seed (not believing Israelites) either were not observant Jews, or carried out these religious exercises in order to earn merit and a right standing before God. Neither the sacrifices nor the festivals nor the ceremonial regulations benefitted those unbelieving Israelites who carried them out, since their observance was not mixed with faith in Jehovah or in the coming Redeemer and sin-bearer, the Messiah.

Under the New Testament the Temple service has been abrogated through the atonement of Christ, the religious festivals have either been abrogated through the atonement of Christ or repealed by positive divine enactment, and the ceremonial regulations have either been repealed, their essential principles carried over into the new dispensation, or replaced by fewer and simpler ordinances. Under the New Testament there are two religious exercises that are highlighted in the life of the New Testament believer: baptism and the Lord's Supper. The first is the sign and seal of initiation into the covenant community (now only in the religious sense); the second is the sign and seal of continuation in the covenant community (again only in the religious sense). The spiritual seed of Abraham (believing Jews and Gentiles) carry out these (and other) religious exercises as expressions of true saving faith; those who are not Abraham's spiritual seed carry out these religious exercises in order to earn merit and a right standing before God. Neither these exercises (nor any others) benefit these unbelieving members of the covenant community, since their observance is not mixed with faith in God or in His Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Thus, although there are clear differences of external administration and form between the Old and New Testament dispensations, these differences do not affect the underlying unities of the Covenant of Grace, the Decree of Predestination, and the spiritual seed of all ages.

Are There Then Two Churches?

If there is but one people of God (whether comprised of Jews or Gentiles or both) who are saved by grace through faith on the ground of Christ's atoning work, the question still remains as to whether we need to distinguish between the New Testament Church (which began when the blood of the New Testament was poured out at Calvary) and the Old Testament Church (which began when the blood of the Old Testament was first poured out in the period after the Fall). The clear dispensational differences established in Scripture itself, which pertain not only to the "superior" atonement of Christ as compared with the sacrifices of the Old Testament, but also to the differences of external administration and form of worship between the testaments, would appear to establish a firm foundation for a distinction between the Old Testament Church and the New Testament Church.

Yet because the two covenant communities are really one in Christ, there are not two bodies, two churches, but one. There is one Church, but it appears in two forms: the Old Testament Church and the New Testament Church. And because the believers of both communities are one in Christ, we may properly speak of them as Old Testament Christians and New Testament Christians. Just as Christ built the Old Testament form of His Church by His Word and Spirit, so He is building the New Testament form of His Church by His Word and Spirit.