

## **The Cause of New Covenant Obedience (Not Legalism but Grace)**

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***I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them. (Eze 36: 26-27)***

The dynamic of the Christian life, is best expounded by the New Covenant and not the Old. This is not to say that Old Covenant believers were saved or sanctified on a different basis than us today. They were not. Their salvation, just like ours, is based 100% upon the Grace of God received by faith in the finished work of Christ. God has always had only one plan of salvation. And there is no salvation apart from Christ's Cross. Period.

So when New Covenant teachers, like myself, tell you that there are marked differences between the Old Covenant and the New, and that the Old was according to Hebrews, inferior in every way; we are not telling you that there was a different way of salvation back then. No. We are simply trying to point out that God's plan has always been progressively revealed, and that it has progressed throughout the entire Old Testament, until it finally arrived at the glorious time which perfectly fulfilled Ezekiel's prophecy which we quoted above. We live at the summit of God's progressive revelation, and not in prior times of inferior and incomplete light. When Christ came from heaven, it was "in the fullness of time" (Gal. 4:4), and He was the full light of God's blinding Glory (Jn. 1:14; Heb. 1:3; Col. 1:19). When Christ came, all shadows, foreshadows, types and prophecies were immediately fulfilled in His glorious person and work. The shadow was immediately confronted with the substance of God Himself in the flesh. There can never be any return, or going back, to that which is less than the fullness of God in Christ. Christ is the apex of redemption, history, salvation and faith. No man can come to the Father but by Him (Jn. 14:6). He is God's center. He is God's everything. New Covenant Theology, emphasizes that and nothing more.

Now here is a problem that I see over and over again. There are people who come to Christ for salvation, but who go to the Old Testament for sanctification. Specifically, with respect to the laws. We are taught that the 10 commandments are the "moral law" code of God, and that they are intended for all men, forever. But any careful student of the New Testament will find out that Christ came to "Fulfill the Law and the Prophets" (Matt. 5:17). "The Law and the

prophets were until John, but Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ” (Matt. 11:13; Lk. 16:16; Jn. 1:17). Galatians explains... **“Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law (Gal 3:21).** Many people misunderstand this verse. The point it is making is this...There is no righteousness that can come by the Law! Salvation comes by Grace alone (“the promises of God” fulfilled in Christ), without the law. .

Immediately when confronted with this marvelous Grace teaching, many insecure teachers accuse us of antinomianism, which is the teaching that Grace is a license to sin. They equate the idea of “no law but the Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:2), with the idea of lawlessness, and nothing can be further from the New Testament teaching. Liberty in Christ is never lawlessness. In fact, if you read our text in Ezekiel carefully, you would have to be blind, in order to miss the wonderful truth that applies because of the New Covenant work of the Holy Spirit. **“I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them (Ezek. 36:27).**

The dynamics of Grace, never leads men to sin, but in fact always leads to holiness, obedience and Christ-likeness. The believer walks in God’s statutes, not because he is under them as his *modus operandi*, not because a mandate hangs around his neck like a noose, but because he is under the direct supervision of the Holy Spirit who “causes him to walk in them”. The stony heart of flesh, simply cannot please God, no matter how many laws, no matter how much it tries. So God takes it away, (that old stony heart) and replaces it with a completely new heart, created and controlled by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit becomes our guide, to lead us unto all truth (Jn. 16:13). The developing of a life that increasingly complies with the will of God depends upon the work of the Holy Spirit within us, and not upon anything we do or do not do. We know that unredeemed humanity has no hope of living a life that is pleasing to God. Yet, many Christians are unaware that even the new creature in Christ cannot please God on his own resources. The Spirit of God **must** be the **heavenly cause** that produces a heavenly lifestyle in believers. Fruit does not magically appear on the branches of our lives, it appears because of the vital union between the branches and the vine itself, with it’s roots that dig down deep and drive nourishment from unseen sources.

We become like Christ, not because we try, or strive, or struggle, or pray, but because the Holy Spirit does in us and for us, what we can never do for ourselves. We can never be the cause of God’s effects in our life. He is the cause of His own effects, and not us. In fact, our effects in our own life, are always, failure, sin, weakness, and mistakes. But when Grace comes, as the new operational dynamic of the Holy Spirit within us, the stony heart of the flesh, is removed and a new principium... the tender and lively heart of the Spirit, causes things to happen in us which could never happen otherwise.

So then, what is the reason, why many Christians have lives that appear so inconsistent with these New Covenant promises? I think there are at least three reasons why the transformative power of these promises are not seen in many lives today.

**1) There is a lack of knowledge about the simple teachings of Grace.**

Grace frees from works, not only in relation to justification (positional truth) in Christ, but also in relation to sanctification (progressive truth) in Christ. There is a lot of false teaching extant that says, we are saved by grace, but sanctification is all up to you! This blasphemous and inconsistent doctrine, delivers half an atonement, and half a cross. Take the Cross out of Christianity, and you have a caricature of the grace of God, and not true grace at all. The cross that justifies, and regenerates, is also the cross that sanctifies and makes us like Christ. A deformed Cross that says God did half the work, and we must do the other half, is simply not the cross of Christ. When he said "it is Finished" He said that because He did everything necessary, both in the accomplishment and the application of redemption. He did it all! We do nothing, precisely because He did everything. This needs to be understood and taught correctly. When it is not, the glaring inconsistencies will be quite evident in the lives of Christians, and the body of Christ will appear to be a washed body, trying to keep washing themselves, and trying to complete what God was unable to complete without them. That is a pathetic and God-dishonoring image. But that is the exact picture most people see today in the church...a bunch of people saying they are saved by grace, but acting like they are saved by their own efforts. It's a loathsome and vial inconsistency. It's a left over from Roman Catholicism, which was carried into Protestantism, by way of "Covenant Theology". We are saved by grace, plus, sacrament, means of grace, repentance, prayers, contrition, Sabbath keeping, 10 commandments, Church attendance, etc. on and on ad nauseum. The Bible on the other hand, says we are saved by Grace. Period. The only proper and necessary response is "Thank you Lord!"

"Nothing in my hand I bring.  
Simply to Thy cross I cling."

**2) New Covenant Obedience is Based on Christ's Obedience, not ours.**

Again I am apt to be misunderstood, but that does not change the power, effectiveness or truth, of what I am teaching here. What Christ did, is the basis for what we have become by grace. The Holy Spirit, applies all the benefits of the cross, and works them in us, even though we live thousands of years after the fact of Calvary. We do not apply the effects of Calvary, The Holy Spirit does. Christ's absolute obedience was the Divine Nailing of the Law to the cross. ***"Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross." (Col. 1:14).*** Many people just do not get the fact that Christ fulfilled the

Law, thus nullifying its demands in our lives. A careful study of Romans 8 would help you to understand this if you don't get it. But for now, I just want to present the verses to you for you to mull over in your brain.

**Rom 8:1-5** *There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. 3 For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: 4 That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. 5 For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit.*

There you have it! The reason why we are not now condemned by the Law, and by our inability to keep it, is because we operate not on the basis of flesh, but on the basis of Spirit...the Holy Spirit. We are freed from the law of sin and death, and that has come about solely because Christ did what no man could have ever done...He fulfilled all of God's demands for perfect Law-keeping righteousness. He fulfilled every last jot a tittle, and He did it perfectly. His obedience therefore becomes our obedience.

### **3). Lack of Identification Teaching.**

At some point along the line Christianity has lost the vital importance of the identification truths of "Union with Christ". Union is everything. We hear lots of talk about the importance of being united to Christ, but a thorough exposition and application of this doctrine is largely missing today. What exactly does it mean to be in complete Union with Christ?

The old Baptists, were the great expositors of this doctrine. They recognized the fact, that our solidarity with, and in, Christ, is so complete that when He died, we died. When he was buried, we were buried with him (Rom 6:1-11, Col. 2:12; Col. 3:1-3). When He arose, we rose with him. His death is our death, His life is our life. His cross is our cross, and when we are crucified with Christ, we enter Gods life with Him as well, so that the life that we live, is the very life of Christ expressed, and lived out to the fullest in us, by faith (Gal 2:20).

This powerful set of truths, known as the identification or union truths, is at the core of the doctrines of Grace, as they apply to the daily Christian life. There is no life apart from death, and there is no death more significant than the cross, and there is no cross for a believer to take up daily (Lk. 9:23), without these union truths. His cross is my cross, on which I die daily to any and all reliance upon the flesh, because in me, that is in my flesh, dwells nothing good (Rom. 7:18). So His life becomes the only acceptable basis for my life. He becomes the cause of all God's effects in me, through me, and in spite of me!

## **Conclusion**

I am issuing a call for a return to New Covenant Theology, which is the only proper basis for a belief in the Doctrines of Grace. The damaging effects of “Covenant Theology” which is clearly not a Bible derived system, is seen all through the church. People believe a sort of half-way doctrines of Grace, and bind up the Christian life with all the left-over legalism of the Roman Catholic ideas of Augustine, which were echoed by John Calvin and Luther. While the reformation light was great indeed, in comparison to the darkness of Catholicism, the reformers did not go far enough in carry the church back to the New Testament. Sola Scriptura, demands that we be constantly rethinking our doctrines and practices, in the light of the Bible and the Bible alone. Then, when the New Testament shows us a New and Better way, we will enter it and follow it. This is what true reformation entails. So we need to leave behind the old Reformers, and take up where they left off, and follow the Holy Spirit into “all truth” Just like Christ taught us (Jn. 14:26; Jn. 16:13).

And I am further issuing a simultaneous call for a restoration of positional truth as the basis for progressive sanctification. God’s entire purpose with respect to every believer is summarized in **Rom. 8: 29-30** **“For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. 30 Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.”** Notice... from foreknowledge and predestination, all the way right through to our ultimate glorification, everything is designed by God to “Conform us to the image of Christ” (imago christi). That my friends is God’s way of salvation, and also God’s way of holy living...not law-keeping, but Christ-likeness! that is what God has ordained for each one of his children, and that is what his sole purpose is for our lives...to make us like Jesus! What could be simpler, more beautiful, or more perfect than this? ...the whole body of Christ, looking just like her Lord! Let’s return whole heartedly to these simple but glorious truths, which will radically change our minds, hearts and our witness before a watching world.