

The Covenants, Grace and Law (Part 12)

Why the New Covenant is Better

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We are going to begin once again in Hebrews 8:13 because there is something that I want to clarify. About a month or two ago, a man who is with us wrote in asking questions about the Old Covenant. *When did it cease to exist? When was it no longer in effect? Is there any aspect of it that still applies today?*

I have been thinking about that ever since I answered his letter, and I feel that I didn't answer him as completely or as correctly as I could have; and I want to share this with you. I feel that it's important that we understand an aspect of this, so that it will help us in what we are doing.

Hebrews 8:13 In that He says, "A new covenant," He has made the first old. Now that which decays and waxes old is ready to vanish away.

Doesn't that give you the impression of something growing old that is still in effect? The Worldwide Church of God has chosen to emphasize a little bit different word. The word that they have chosen to emphasize is a correct rendering of the Greek. That is, they have chosen to translate a word as *obsolete*.

In either the last sermon or the one before that, I used that term in reference to the analogy about a 1910 automobile as compared to a 1995 automobile. That is, how the 1995 automobile makes the 1910 automobile obsolete. This is important—*obsolete, but still there!* In other words, the 1910 automobile might still be useful to some degree although, if you had your choice, you would far rather make a trip in the 1995 automobile than you would the 1910 automobile.

The 1910 automobile might be a curiosity that you'd want to look at. You might admire it. There might be some things about it that you would find that are good. But if you had your choice, you would far rather have the 1995 automobile to service you, than you would the 1910 automobile. You are much more likely to get where you want to go, taking the 1995 than the 1910. And so the 1910 automobile is still in existence, but by comparison it is *obsolete*. It is not going to be used where you have the choice of getting to where it is you want to go.

You want to "go" to the Kingdom of God. Your choice of Covenants is going to have to be the New Covenant, rather than the Old Covenant, because the New Covenant is going to get you there. The Old Covenant is probably going to leave you with 'a flat tire' somewhere along the road; and you are not going to make it.

In Acts 2:38 is that very famous verse—to "repent, and be baptized every one of you." Think about to whom Peter was preaching when he said this. Who? Well, the Jews who were listening to him. And who are those Jews in relationship to the Covenant? They were the people who had made the Old Covenant with Him. That is, with God.

Acts 2:39 For the promise [of receiving the Holy Spirit] is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.

It's restricted, isn't it? In the context here, the Holy Spirit is restricted to those whom God calls. And yet, in general, he was speaking to a large group of people with whom God had already made the Old Covenant.

Acts 3:19-21 Repent you therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; and He shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.

God's been advertising this for a long time.

Acts 3:22 For Moses truly said unto the fathers, "A Prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me, Him shall you hear in all things whatsoever He shall say unto you."

To the Israelites, they are going to hear the things that Jesus (who is the Prophet that he is talking about) shall say unto them. But now we can see that is a progressive thing. It's going to be something that is stretched out over the centuries—indeed, over millennia of time. Jesus first preached back in the early first century; and here we are now almost 2000 years later. That word of Christ is still being preached to Israelitish people. And it isn't done yet, because the Millennium has to come—a thousand years, we might say, of preaching the word of Christ to those people. Then comes the Great White Throne Judgment and another period of time when it is going to be preached. This is something that is *gradually unfolding*, and it is given to those whom God calls—*when* He calls them.

What's in force *until* that calling comes? Well, the answer is obvious. The Old Covenant—that which the New Covenant has made obsolete.

Acts 3:23-25 And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that Prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people. Yes, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days. You are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, "And in your seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed."

That's progressive. But, brethren, the blessing has come to you already! That's what we are

talking about. We are in the beginning stages of it, as far as our lives are concerned. The receiving of the blessings that were promised to Abraham and confirmed by Jesus Christ, the fullness of them do not come until *after* we are resurrected. In order to receive them, we have to have eternal life! The New Covenant has very much to do with this, and this is why the New Covenant has made the Old (Covenant) "obsolete."

Acts 3:26 Unto you first God, having raised up His Son Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.

The Old Covenant has been made "obsolete," but it has not yet vanished. It's still there. Elements of it still apply to the Israelites that God has not yet called. Only those to whom the New Covenant has been *proposed*—and who have accepted the proposal—come under the terms of the New Covenant, and come under its promises. Only they, in the fulfillment of God's part of the New Covenant, have the opportunity to take advantage of what comes to us as a result of that New Covenant.

In the meantime, the Old Covenant is still there. It's very interesting to think about in that light. The Old Covenant has not vanished away. Obsolete—yes, it is. But it is only *obsolete* to those who have been able to "trade in," you might say, for a 1995. It is *not obsolete* for those who have not had the opportunity yet to buy that 1995 automobile. That only comes when God calls them, and advertises that it is available.

In the last sermon in this series, we covered the very interesting technicality that the New Covenant is being made with Israel—not with the Gentiles. In reality, a Gentile must become a part of Israel. We also learned that, in reality, it is not *national Israel* that a Gentile must become a part of. It is to *spiritual Israel*—the Israel of God. In that light, it means that national Israelites have to repent. They have to be baptized. They have to receive the Holy Spirit of God. And they have to be made a part of the Israel of God.

We found that the name, or the term, "Israel" has become a code word, or a code name, for those who are *called of God*. We also find in the Bible that these Israelites—"the Israel of God"—are known as "the children of God." It's a synonymous term with "co-heirs with Christ." They are also called "the election," "the remnant," "the children of promise," "the vessels of mercy," "the true circumcision," "the church," and "the body of Christ." It all depends on the context. But every one of those terms mean the same people. They are "the Israel of God." They are the ones with whom God has proposed the Covenant.

What God has done is that He has moved the designation *Israel* to a higher level. It all began with one man who was converted, and his name was changed from Jacob to Israel. Then it became the name of a physical nation—the ones with whom God made the Old Covenant. And then it became the name of a spiritual nation—the nation of those who have made the New Covenant with God.

We also saw how the testament—that is, the will—of Jesus Christ had to do with other important aspects of the Covenant. Remember that the writers of the Bible chose a word that more specifically means *testament* or *will*. The term "covenant" is, at best, a secondary usage of

that word.

A *testament* is a document that requires the death of the person declaring his intentions. That's what a testament does. It is a declaration of what you (the possessor of something) want to occur after you have died. Since they used that word, obviously the death of the One who made out *the will* has to occur before it can become effective. That's why they used that term. But in the death of that Person was actually contained the terms of a new deal. I almost hate to use that phrase because of Roosevelt and all of its connotations; but that's what it is.

What Christ did as God, He took it upon Himself—it was a unilateral decision on His part—to sweeten the pot, to make it better, to insure, to assure that the fault in the people would be able to be 'made up for' so that they would be able to share the inheritance of the promises with Him. So it was not something that was arrived at in a communication between the one part of the Covenant (Christ) and us. Rather, the one part of the Covenant said, "*Hey, I'm going to do this for you. Here's what I'm going to do.*" That's what He did—in plain, simple, business terms. "*I'm really going to make it better for you. Here's what I'm going to do.*" So He declared that, on the basis of His death, this is what would accrue to us—if indeed we were called and decided to act on that calling.

What we are doing is that we are, once again, seeing that God follows a well-established *pattern* for revealing His intention. What He does is this: He announces in a very broad generality something that He is going to do. And then, maybe from one prophet to another—or even through the same prophet—He begins to reveal specifics about what He has announced very broadly before.

We can see very clearly that God—through Jeremiah, for example, in Jeremiah 31—said that He was going to make a New Covenant. He did this in light of Israel's stiffneckedness, and their rebellious and revolting conduct. Ezekiel followed Jeremiah as a prophet. We find through Ezekiel that God was going to give His Spirit; and, in addition to giving His Spirit, He was also going to cleanse their hearts. He was going to remove the stony heart, and this was going to cause them to walk in His law. Now, that's getting pretty specific! That's all in one chapter, within about four verses of Ezekiel 36.

Do you see the pattern? He announces what He's going to do. Then He makes it very specific. But between Ezekiel and Jesus Christ—when it actually became *a reality*—was almost 600 years. That's a long time. Three times longer than the United States, as a nation, is old.

It's good to remember that even as there are words in the normal use of language that are synonymous, so there are biblical terms that are *synonymous*. Remember back to "the children of God," "the church," "the body of Christ." They are synonymous, even though specifically within a given context they may mean something a little bit different. But there's enough overlap in their usage that they are essentially the same. "Circumcision of the heart," "conversion," "changing," and "writing God's laws on our hearts" describe essentially the same thing; but each in its own context.

11 Corinthians 3:3 Forasmuch as you are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the

Spirit of the living God [Remember Ezekiel 36.]; not in tables of stone,
but in fleshly tables of the heart.

Paul makes it very clear that the Spirit that He is going to give us is going to be *the means* by which the laws are written on our hearts. Remember this—that "circumcision of the heart," "writing God's laws on the heart," "conversion," and "changing" are essentially describing the same thing.

Let's go to Deuteronomy 30; and we'll pick up this principle back there. Don't disconnect this from II Corinthians 3: 3 or Ezekiel 36. What we are doing is we are layering the Scriptures and letting them overlap on this subject so that we get a clear picture. All of this is tied into *the will* that Jesus Christ made out. All of this is tied into removing the fault that was in the people and hindering them from keeping the Covenant.

Deuteronomy 30:6 And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart,
and the heart of your seed, to love the Lord your God with all your
heart, and with all your soul, that you may live.

This is a very early prophecy of what He is going to do. What's the terminology? "The Lord your God will circumcise your heart." The Lord your God will change your heart. The Lord your God will write His laws in your heart. Here it *appears* as something that God is going to unilaterally do. Isn't that what it says? Yes, it does.

Deuteronomy 10:16 Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart,
and be no more stiffnecked.

Do you see what He says there? This is not a contradiction. It's a clarification. The changing, the growing, the overcoming, the change in the heart, the writing of the laws on the heart *is cooperative*. *God does His part. We do our part*. If God was going to do everything, then what need would there be for removing the fault? I mean, why do it? God is going to remove the fault so that we can do our part! So it is a cooperative effort.

God does *His part*, and how does He do it? He calls us. And by His Spirit (John 14) the Spirit shall be with you and it shall be in you. By His Spirit (Romans 2: 4) it's the goodness of God that leads us to repentance. So God calls. God opens up the mind. God begins to impact on us in a way that He never did before. By His Spirit to make things mean more to us in a far deeper and more meaningful way. That is, with greater understanding and more passion so that we want to yield to Him. He begins His miraculous work of changing it.

What remains to be seen is what are *we* going to do with it? He does His part by giving us the knowledge. He begins to increase our faith. He reveals to us the true Christ. He reveals to us His law. He reveals to us what the purpose of life is. He reveals to us an interest in His Word that we never had before. What are we going to do? We have to *respond*. As we respond, the changes begin to take place.

We're going to continue to show how God revealed this process that takes place—and the sustaining of the relationship within the Covenant made possible. I think you understand that there were times when Israel's attitude towards God was good, and He delighted in it. The problem was that they could never *sustain* it. Read the book of Judges. When they had a good leader, like Gideon, things went along smoothly for a good while. Gideon would die, and the country went downhill. God had to raise somebody else up. That's the history of the relationship between God and Israel.

You probably have had relationships with people in your life which were the same way—good for a little while, bad for a long while, good for a little while, bad for a long while. Only God doesn't want to marry somebody that He is always having to worry about whether He's going to fight with them or not. He wants to have a marriage with someone who is *like Him*—who thinks like He does, and that He can really be "one" with. Not a relationship that is "hot" one minute and "cold" the next. Not one where they throw their arms around each other and everything is hunky-dory, and nice and toasty, and warm—and then, the first thing you know, somebody is giving somebody else the cold shoulder. That's the kind of relationship that He had with Israel, and He doesn't want that kind of a relationship.

In John 7 we'll see the unfolding of this process that makes it possible for us to have a stable, loving, growing, good, warm *relationship with God*.

John 7:37-39 In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink. He that believes on Me, as the scripture has said, 'Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.'" (But this spoke He of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive: for the Holy Spirit was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)

Here we see Jesus prophesying of the giving of the Spirit that is absolutely essential to the "circumcision of the heart," to the "writing of the laws on the heart," to enabling us to have a good relationship with God. I want you to notice that here He puts conditions to receiving that Spirit. That's something that didn't appear very much in the Old Covenant prophecies about it. But now we are getting close to the place, time wise, in which that Spirit is going to be made available. So now, God's Servant—Jesus Christ—starts telling us *what the conditions* are going to be, if we are going to make this Covenant.

He says that we have to believe. We have to come to Him. That means if we've been called, we have to respond. We have to thirst—to really want it; and then, on top of that, we have to drink. Remember that old cliché? "*You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink.*" It seems to me there are a lot of people like that. They can be led to the truth; but to get them to see it, and take it in, and make it a part of them is very difficult indeed. In addition to that, it would not be given until Christ was glorified. That is, following His death and His resurrection to spirit life.

John 14:15-18 If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will

pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that [it] may abide with you forever; even the Spirit of truth; [which] the world cannot receive, because it sees [it] not, neither knows [it]; for [it] dwells with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.

This is another prophecy. He hasn't died yet. Therefore, He's not resurrected; and He isn't glorified. So the Spirit isn't given. He prophesies again and shows *another condition* (in addition to the ones in John 7). Do you know what it is? "Keep My commandments, and I will."

Notice too that the Spirit is described as being *with* and *in*. What this does is that it clarifies this thing about coming to Christ. We have to be called. We have to respond. If we don't do that, even though God's Spirit is "with" us—leading us to Christ—it will never be "in us" unless we respond and meet the conditions.

For the disciples here, the Spirit was *with them*—in Christ; and it was teaching and guiding. But there was going to be a time when it would be *in them*, literally. Of course, that didn't occur until Acts 2. So it is with us. The Spirit is with us before conversion—for it is by this means that God brings us to Christ. John 6:44 comes in here, where Christ said "*No man can come to Me, except the Spirit of the Father draw Him; and I will raise him up at the last day.*"

If God did not do this miraculous work, the enmity against Him—coupled with our own spiritual confusion—would never permit this process to even get started. Our calling, brethren, is a tremendous act of mercy on God's part and a miracle that we even respond. If it were not for that—for God's mercy in choosing us to be called—we'd never make it there.

Romans 8:7 The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.

God has to work *a tremendous miracle* even to get us to the place where we are willing to come to Christ and begin to drink in. Let's go to that place in Acts 2 again, because there are three more conditions stated here.

Acts 2:37-39 Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Then Peter said unto them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call."

We have to repent. You see how God gradually unfolds before us what the conditions are? Layer upon layer of *truth*, or layer upon layer of *revelation*, is needed to get the fullness of the subject. So we have to repent—a condition that was not mentioned before. We have to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. And (without turning to any other scriptures on this

aspect) we also have to have hands laid on us.

Let's just repeat *the conditions*. We have to be called. We have to repent. We have to believe the gospel. We have to believe in Jesus Christ. We have to begin obeying God, because God gives His Spirit to those who obey Him. We have to be baptized, and we have to have hands laid on us.

I have gone through all of this to help us understand that this "writing of the law on our hearts" is a *cooperative effort*. It is not something done only by God, but it requires absolutely what God does; and it also requires that we do something. Do you know what you are doing when you do these things? You are meeting *the terms* of the New Covenant. These are the terms. It's not all of them yet. But these are the terms.

Did you ever see any terms like this in reference to the Old Covenant? No. What a difference between the two! It's no wonder that the Old Covenant is obsolete. It's no wonder the Old Covenant could not be kept. There is such a flaw, such a fault, in every one of us. God knew that when He made the Old Covenant with them. And since God is love, He did what He did in order to leave you and me an example of how much the New Covenant means to us—so that we could look back on history and understand *whatwesome gifts* have been given to us. And by that He hopes to create within us a deep sense of thanksgiving and a deep sense of obligation.

God has used millions of people as His instruments—to write the record of the Israelitish people that is in this Book—so that we can make it! And it couldn't be done until sin was dealt with. That's why it required the death of a perfect Sacrifice. Let's go to a few more scriptures here, because this series of things that I have given to us here up until this point then opens up the way to other things that are essential to the keeping of the New Covenant.

Titus 2:13-14 Looking for that blessed hope [There's something that is given to us now. We have hope!], and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ; who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

What, that Christ has done, is beginning to open up here? It's beginning to open up to us redemption, purification, and the forgiveness of sin.

Ephesians 5:25-26 Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it: that [Here's the reason He did it.] He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word.

Why did He give Himself? So that we can be cleaned up! He had to die. And we had to recognize this death, so there could be the forgiveness of sin, in order that we might repent, in order that we might be a *fit receptacle* of that Spirit. God is not going to put that Spirit into a receptacle that is not fit. Do you know what *holy* means? It means clean. That's its basic meaning. It means clean and different.

God's Holy Spirit is not defiled and dirty, like the spirit we have by nature. God's Spirit is not defiled and dirty, like the spirit of this world—like human nature. God's Spirit is different! The spirit of human nature is murderous, hateful, and iniquitous in every way. God's Spirit is holy, righteous, good, pure, kind, gentle, merciful, submissive, and childlike. Every good quality that we can think of is resident within that Spirit. Is He going to defile it by putting it into a vessel that is not fit for it? No. So we have to be led to repentance, and there has to be a change.

What does baptism symbolize? It symbolizes a death. It symbolizes a purification. After baptism, God considers us clean enough to put His Spirit in us. If there had not been *the death*, and on the death of that Individual who sacrificed Himself, *a will* left, this could never have occurred. Are you beginning to see that unless He died there would be no recipient for the blessings? There would be no New Covenant, because the Spirit couldn't even be given.

Ephesians 5:25-27a Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of the water by the word, that He might present it to Himself...

He's going to marry this wonderful 'woman,' who is just like He is—in her heart, and eventually spirit.

Ephesians 5:27 That He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy [just like that Spirit] and without blemish.

All these things accrue to those that God calls, that He leads to repentance, that He gives His Spirit to.

I John 1:7a But if we walk in the light...

You know what *walk* means. It means, "conduct your life." So, if we live in the light...

I John 1:7b ...as He [Christ] is in the light, we have fellowship one with another...

I want you to get what He's talking about here. This is a letter written to a church congregation. He is saying that our *fellowship* hinges on walking in the light. And so we have fellowship one with the other.

I John 1:7c ...and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

This is really interesting in the context in which it appears. Let me turn your mind, just for a bit,

to Protestantism. The reason that I want you to turn your mind to that is because Protestantism focuses very heavily on the initial forgiveness of sin that takes place upon belief at the beginning of salvation. Thus, their evangelists have altar calls. People come down before the altar, and they confess their sins. Then people are supposedly "born again." The doctrine continues in this light. That is, once that occurs, then salvation is basically assured. So they put a great deal of emphasis on the initial repentance and forgiveness of sin.

Look at this verse right here, in its context. He says, "If we walk in the light." You can't *walk in the light* until you are called—until you are converted. We are talking about something that occurs after conversion. He says, "If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship." The *fellowship* depends upon what we do after the initial repentance. *Can two walk together except they be agreed?* You can't do it. You don't have fellowship with persons that you don't agree with. The agreement is shown by the way that we conduct our lives—in the way that we conduct the belief system that we have.

"And the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin." This thing is big. Further cleansing, further forgiveness, hinges upon our obedience—walking in the light (which is just a synonym for it—after we are converted. It's exactly the same thing as the forgiveness before we were converted. It hinged on whether we repented. It hinged upon whether we were obeying God. Again, a process!

What we must understand here is that forgiveness, cleansing, and even fellowship is not a once-for-all act; but it is *a process*—even as growing in the grace and knowledge is a process, even as the writing of God's law on our heart is a process. Cleansing is a process. The quality of the fellowship depends upon all of these things. So, if we walk in the light, we have fellowship and His blood cleanses us.

I John 1:3 That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that you also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.

What do we have here? We have fellowship *with God*, and *with Jesus Christ*, and *with one another*—all in the same context. That fellowship in verse 3 hinges upon each of us striving to be good as God is good. That is, walking in the light. There's a wonderful, comforting thing that comes out of this.

I John 1:8a If we say that we have no sin...

If we are sinning, that means that at least for a while there we were not walking in the light. Right?

I John 1:8-9 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Do you know what the wonderful thing is? God does not condemn us simply because we've sinned. That is really comforting! He would have every right to do it—because the wages of sin is death, isn't it? And He could claim that death penalty. He is well within His ruling, His sovereign right to do such a thing. It doesn't say, "*the wages of three sins is death*" or "*the wages of thirty sins is death*." No, the wage of one sin is death.

What does that tell us? It tells us that, even though we've made the Covenant—even though we've come under the blood of Christ, and even though we have fellowship with Christ's brothers and sisters and we have fellowship with God—He is continually working to clean us up. It is not a one-time thing. Everybody ought to be able to see the logic in this. We are surely grown to the place where we understand that, and we can relate it.

Most of us are parents, and we can relate it to our own children; and we know that they don't grow up in an instant. They make mistake, after mistake, after mistake. And some of the mistakes that they have made—and we made in relationship to our parents—are sickening to even think about. But we didn't kick them out of the family (in most cases, anyway); and we understood that they were just growing up, they were just learning. They didn't have the experience. They didn't have the background. And even though what they did was literally stupid and hurtful in every way; and, although we aren't God, in many cases we still dealt with them fairly patiently.

The same process is at work with us—in relations to God. We can stretch *His patience* to the place where He says, "*That's enough. That's it.*" And that patience ends, as He tells us very clearly in the book of Hebrews, when we trample His Son under foot—the blood of His Covenant. But, you see, He is always working towards our perfection—which is just putting this *process* into different words.

I don't want us ever to get away from this central theme of why the New Covenant is different—and why it makes the old one obsolete, and why it is decaying and getting ready to vanish. The New Covenant is so much better than the Old Covenant that there is no comparison. And it took the death—it took the unilateral action on the part of the Testator, Jesus Christ—to make these things accrue to us, so that it could occur in our lives. He will continue to work to remove the real cause of the problem if we confess. Do you know why that's necessary? We have to ~~see~~ *see the need* of Him working in our lives. If we don't see it, we're not even going to confess it.

It's not merely a matter that the New Covenant makes us inheritors of the earth. What we are seeing is that with the New Covenant is not merely forgiveness, but cleansing the nature of the problem. And where's the problem? It's in *our nature*. You cannot change human nature. It has to be *replaced* with one that is holy, pure, good, peaceful, kind, generous, etc.

But, if you are given a gift of something that you have no experience with ever in your life, don't you have to learn to use it? When you were a little kid, if somebody gave you a bike, did you know immediately how to ride it? When we are led to repentance and God gives us His Spirit, we have to begin ~~to~~ *learn how to use* that Spirit—that new nature. The old nature is still there, and it wants to dominate; and it wants us to keep on using it.

Romans 5:1-2,5-9 Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And hope makes one not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us. For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure [perhaps] for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commended His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.

Here we see this process perhaps more clearly in broad terms. In verse 1, "Therefore, being justified." This occurs because of the death of the Testator, because we've been called, because we have responded, and because we now believe in the death of the Testator. We have repented, and we have confessed our sins, and we have been forgiven. The result of that is that we are *justified*.

Again, to the computer analogy, justified means *aligned*. We are aligned with a standard, and the standard here is righteousness. We are brought into alignment in having imputed to us the standard of righteousness. That is, *Christ's righteousness*. We will never be more righteous than when we are justified—because there is nothing more righteous than the righteousness of Christ. You just cannot add to that! All of our works in terms of adding to our righteousness—I mean, it's stupid. It just cannot be done. We are aligned to *the standard of righteousness* by having Christ's righteousness imputed to us.

But from verse 1 on, the discussion moves from beyond what justification is to the wealth of blessings it confers. The emphasis in Romans 5 is on what Christ has done for us through His death. But, at the same time, in Paul's exposition of the basic doctrines it is gradually moving towards *sanctification*. It's moving away from *justification* and towards *sanctification*.

Sanctification makes its first appearance in Romans 6. What Paul is explaining here are acts necessary for sanctification to occur. *Sanctification* is that period during which we grow, are cleansed even further, overcome, are changed, and we are transformed into the image of God. All of these things have to take place to set the stage so this can take place—sanctification. If the Testator hadn't died, this would never occur. If He hadn't unilaterally declared, "*This is what I will do.*" it would have never happened. This is what makes the New Covenant better and makes the Old Covenant obsolete.

Everything in God's Word points to salvation being a *process* that requires certain actions on the part of those making the Covenant. In this sermon, I have been emphasizing what God does. But making the Covenant imposes responsibilities on us. Verse 1, where it says "we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ," that is the way it is translated in the King James. I believe that the New King James is somewhat similar to that. In fact, it may be exactly the same. But that's not quite what it says in the Greek.

We have a cliché that says, "*It takes two to tango.*" Let me ask you a simple question. Doesn't it take *two* to make peace? You can't have *peace* if somebody else is at war with you. There has to be something done on the part of both. Peace with God doesn't happen just because of what He does. We would not be at peace with God unless we responded to what He wants us to do.

There are *conditions* to peace with God, just like there are conditions in other areas as well. The New Covenant imposes responsibilities in us, if we are going to participate in it. It's been offered to us, but we have to meet those conditions. If there's going to be peace, something has to be done on our part. So really that which appears to be a statement—"We have peace with God"—is actually an exhortation. It is saying, "*Let us have peace [with God].*"

We have to do something. God, by His own unilateral action, has done what must be done on His part so there can be peace; but we have to do something as well. He doesn't designate what it is here. That remains for other places. Here, he is only exhorting us to have peace—now that the way has been cleared by God so that we can. But—on the basis of our recognition of what God is, and what God has done through Christ—*how* can we have peace? He demands *absolute, unconditional surrender*.

Normally, if there is trouble between two human parties, the chances are very great that both parties are at fault. But we are dealing with God. Where does the fault lie, when you are dealing with Somebody who is *perfect*? How have we been *imperfect* before Him? We've been making war against Him! The carnal mind is enmity against God. It's at war with Him! And even though we've been at war with Him, He says, "*Hey, here's what I'm going to do. I'm going to die for you—so that you can make peace with Me.*" Literally, that's what He's done.

He's said, "*There's one thing I want from you.*" He said, "*Even though I'm going to give up My life for you, you have to surrender unconditionally to Me.*" "Let us have peace," Paul says. What's he saying? He's saying, "*Surrender! give up your will to Him.*" That's not easy. In fact, many times I heard Mr. Armstrong say that it's the hardest thing in life to do. But that's not what Paul is dealing in right here. He is only exhorting us to do what is necessary to make peace. So then, the exhortation is not to attain peace but to *retain* what has been accomplished through the death of the Testator. "*Hang on to it,*" he's saying.

It's just another way of saying, "hold fast to what you have." He's saying, "*Cling to your treasure.*" He's saying, "*Don't let anyone rob you of it.*" Let us have peace with God. What Paul is saying is that we are to hold on to this blessing—justification—and all it implies on condition that we cooperate in keeping our responsibilities.

If we don't, what will happen? We will return to the unconverted state. As sure as I am standing here talking to you, it will happen. It doesn't matter how we do it. We can do it through open rebellion. We can do it through being lazy spiritually, through sloth. We can do it through negligence, as Hebrews 2 tells us. But we cannot keep this treasure unless we *guard it* with our lives!

In a sense, Paul is saying that life is very much like you are standing on the side of a hill. If we make no effort either to go up, or even just to stand where we are, gravity will take over and pull us down. And you see, in a relationship with God, the "gravity" is *human nature*. It will pull

us down. It has to be fought against.

In verse 2, we find that there is another blessing that accrues to us. He says, "access by faith into this grace." That is, into God's very presence. The picture that is given here is really interesting, and I think it is really meaningful. In the Greek, it gives the impression—where it says "into this grace"—as though a person has stepped into a very great open space. The space, though, is not just space. It gives the impression of openness, and it gives the impression of being big; but it is not empty. Rather, it is a space *with overwhelming abundance* in it combined with *glorious beauty* as well.

What is Paul getting across here? space indicates liberty. It means that you are not crowded in. Because of justification, we have been given *liberty*. Not only that, we have had opened up to us *wonderful gifts* that come from God's abundance; and, in addition to that, *the beauty of holiness*. All three of them jammed into that one word picture—this access into grace. It's a beautiful picture.

Don't ever forget, though, that this is a cooperative effort. Paul never let's us get far from this. It appears in this verse in the word "stand." It doesn't merely mean to continue. It means, or implies very strongly, *resistance* and *stability* at the same time. On the one hand, it is showing that we have been given the ability to do this. That is, to resist or to maintain.

Remember—resist what? Resist sliding down the hill. At the same time, to keep ourselves balanced. If you are standing on the side of a hill, you have to fight to stay balanced. It is indicating that you are not only resisting sliding down the hill, you are also being given the strength ~~to~~ *maintain your balance* so that you don't roll over. Again, don't you have to make the effort to do that? Sure you do.

Here's what he's teaching. *Grace* enables us to stand in the face of the assaults of the on-rushing tide of events that make up life in this insane world. Paul later said to "stand fast in the liberty wherein Christ has made you free." Let's connect this to the sermon. Let's connect it to Christ's death. It is God's gift—His grace—that enables us to do this. So Paul is saying, "*Brethren, don't shrink from being close to God. It's your salvation.*" That's where the strength flows from—into this grace, where all the gifts are. Into this great open space where there is liberty and where there is beauty.

I want you to see why it is that the New Covenant is so much better. It is so exciting. At the foundation of this is the fact that the Testator—the One who inherited the promises—wanted to share them with others. But the only way He could *share* them was to die. In so doing, He secured for us the possibility of eternal life because, you see, you cannot inherit the promises unless you are like Christ. And He is eternal!

We can't have eternal life unless our sins are forgiven. We can't have eternal life unless we are enough like Christ (because we are going to marry Him) that God is willing to have us in His Kingdom. Then those promises accrue to us. But we have to be eternal like He is, and we have to be transformed into His image. That could not occur *unless* He died and opened up the way—so our sins could be forgiven, and we could receive the Holy Spirit, and we could have the same nature that He does. That's what makes the Old Covenant obsolete. That's why it's a *testament* as well as a *covenant*.

