

The Covenants, Grace and Law (Part 19)

Christ's Example Verifies the Law

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Last week after services, as several of us were standing around talking about the sermon, one person said that a spokesman from our former association would say that all of those laws stated in the first five books are covered in principle in the New Testament. The implication, therefore, is, "Why bother with them?" If they are already covered, why even bother with them?

I responded to him that I agreed that they are covered in principle under the New Covenant but they are not written in the letter in the New Testament. Therefore, it is needful for them to be written in that way. The person who originally made the statement saw what I was saying immediately. Do you?

Why should we even pay any attention to this? There is a widespread belief that *the spirit of the law* somehow does away with *the letter of the law*. In over 35 years in the church, I have never heard an adequate explanation of how or why this occurs. Brethren, nothing could be further from the truth. Without the letter there is no spirit, because there is no foundation for the spirit of the law; there is no foundation in *fact*.

In fact, without the letter of the law, the spirit of the law does not even exist, because then there is no law for which there can be a spirit—or we might use the word *intent*. The word *spirit* usually means "the essence" or "the essential element," but when it is used in *the spirit of the law*, it means "the true intent," as opposed to the outward formal observance.

The word *intent* has an interesting literal meaning, which I think can give us some understanding. It came into the English language through the Latin. Do you know what it means? It means "the act of stretching out." How can something be stretched out if there is not something to stretch out? This is what I mean when I say that unless there is a law there is no basis for a spirit of the law, because there is nothing to be stretched out.

Then, in the kind of situation about which we are talking, the synonyms of *intent* are "purpose," "aim," "goal," "significance," "drift" (as in, "Do you get the drift?"), or "design." The important fact for us to understand as we begin this is that there can be no spirit without the reality. In this case, the reality is a formally stated law.

There is a second reason why the formally stated law is essential: because everybody has to begin both his understanding and his practice at the beginning, at the foundation. The statements "Who needs them?" or "Why bother with them?" are founded upon a very dangerous, vain, and carnal assumption: that is, that when one is converted, one already knows and understands or will miraculously be given the knowledge and understanding of those laws by virtue of the fact that he now has God's Spirit. Brethren, that defies logic and the experience of actual practice and the truth as revealed in the Bible.

This concept—that somehow you will just be given these things—seems to be built from the

thought that God is going to write these laws in our hearts by His Holy Spirit. This concept turns God into a magician. Indeed, He's writing His laws on our hearts. The question is how. What does His Word say?

He is doing it through the experiences of life—as we pray, as we study, as we meditate, set our wills, make choices, analyze the results or the fruits of our choices, remember, learn, and make changes. There are many clear statements in the Bible that show that having the way of God written on our hearts is accomplished by the same process by which we became what we were before God called us, before we became converted: We grew up; we had experiences; and it was these that molded what we became.

The difference is that before conversion, we learned, we did what we did, and became what we were only with human nature, the influence of Satan, and usually a very weak knowledge of God. After conversion, we have the addition of faith in God and His Word, we have repented, and we have His Holy Spirit.

We are going to look, first of all, at a number of scriptures that show very clearly that what we are involved in here—in having the Word of God, the law of God, the way of God written on our hearts—is *a process*. It is *not* something that occurs magically. Probably the clearest and best known of these scriptures is in II Peter 3.

II Peter 3:17-18 You therefore, beloved [So we know to whom he is speaking.], seeing you know these things before, beware lest you also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be glory both now and forever.

Everybody knows that growth is a process! When a child is born, it is not immediately a full-grown adult with a lifetime of experiences crammed within its cranium while it was in the womb. Mr. Armstrong used to say that the weakest and most helpless of all newborn things must be human babies. They have to be taken care of completely and totally by mother and father, or they would die. Every one of us would die.

Almost all other mammals, when they are born, are at least able to forage for themselves and usually find a way to get something to eat. However, human babies are very helpless. Even though they grow very rapidly—especially in the first number of years before they go off to school—and accumulate a great deal of knowledge and experience, their growth is little by little.

Here we are being told, right in the Word of God, that we, too, are to grow! We are not instantaneously a canister full of all kinds of facts and figures and the knowledge of God. We do not have all the statistics. We do not have all principles. We do not have all wisdom. We do not have all knowledge and understanding. You know very well yourself that it accumulates.

I Peter 2:2 As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that you may grow thereby.

That is a very plain and clear teaching. The Word of God is needful for growth. We do not have it instantaneously upon conversion; it is something that comes into us little by little.

Go back to Hebrews 11, the chapter that gives us so much about great men and women of faith. Paul writes:

Hebrews 11:33-34 Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight.

This passage contains two examples. Whenever God originally called these people, they were not strong enough to do what they eventually did. Out of weakness they were made strong—strong in faith. They *waxed*, which means "increased," or "grew."

Hebrews 5:12 For when for the time you ought to be teachers, you have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God.

Did you notice that? First principles. There are fundamental things, rudimentary things, elementary things. There are things with which we begin, but we have to get off the dime. Something has to be done in order to increase, because if we stay there, we are not very usable. How much good to human society is a baby? If you are following my analogy here, a newly begotten Christian is not a great deal of use. It is a situation that has to be remedied by growth.

Hebrews 5:12-14 And are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For everyone who uses milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongs to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

From unskilled to skilled, from oblivious and uncomprehending to discerning—do you see a process there? You ought to, because it is part of the way of God. It is the way He is writing His laws into our hearts.

Colossians 1:10 That you might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God.

Becoming fruitful and increasing in the knowledge of God. Is fruit produced instantaneously? The apostle could not use this kind of terminology if it did not truly apply. Even as fruit is *not* produced instantaneously on a tree but goes through a process from the bud to the actual

produce, even so with us. There is a process going on by which we become what God is making us.

Ephesians 4:14-15 That we henceforth be no more children, [Here is the description of a child:] tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine [The indication is that one is a child who is unstable in his ways and really does not know which end is up; that is, one who can be tricked, deceived], by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up unto Him in all things, which is the head, even Christ.

So somebody who has grown is somebody who is stable, who is not going to be swept aside by persecutions, trials, deceitful teachings, false doctrines. He is able to fight it off because he understands. He knows. He is convicted, and he goes right on with the truth. However, he did not get there without also going through the process. He had to pray. He had to study. He had to obey. He had to make choices. He had to analyze things. He had to compare. He had to look at the fruit. He had to decide if he wanted to do that again. He had to make the choice of setting his will and changing. As he does that, the growth takes place.

Luke 2:40 And the child grew, and waxed [increased] strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon Him.

Even Jesus—though He was God, deity—had to increase the same way that we do. He had to study God's Word; He had to question; He had to grow.

Romans 8:29-30 For whom He [God] did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. [Notice this process:] 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.

There is actually one step left out there. He could have added *sanctified*. Every one of us ought to understand that *sanctification* is that period of time between justification and glorification. It is during that time of sanctification that we become holy. That is when the growth takes place—between begetting and birth (even as it is with a child).

Everything in regard to this issue shows a process. We are to consider ourselves pilgrims on our way to the Kingdom of God, gradually being transformed into the image of God along the way. The qualities of character (whether human or godly) are *not* produced instantaneously but through the everyday gathering of information, weighing it, making the necessary choices, setting our wills, watching to see the results.

Even as Israel had to walk out of Egypt and across the wilderness to the Promised Land—or

there never would have been a change in their situation—so must we live this process in order to grow and become like God, that we might be in His Kingdom. Brethren, the laws of God are written on our hearts by life's experiences while we have a relationship with God. Like everything else in life, it is a process that has a beginning and end.

Like every educational system, it moves from simple to complex. It moves from that which is clearly stated in the letter of the law to what is less apparent and depends upon a previous background of instruction, experience, and seeing results. It depends upon faith that has grown, and love for God that has grown, and love for man that has grown to understand, and apply, and properly use the spirit of the law.

We must understand that the Bible is not written like other books. It is not difficult to understand. It does not require anything more than a normal education, but it does require a submissive attitude and diligent, earnest, effort—searching its teachings, comparing scriptures with scriptures, and putting God's truth into practice in our lives. This is because the things pertaining to living a righteous life that is pleasing to God under the New Covenant are *not* neatly arranged in one place in the Bible.

We have to search for teachings that define sin and scriptures that definitely state that such-and-such no longer needs to be done, because some laws that apply under the New Covenant, either directly or in their spirit, are found right within the terms of the Old Covenant—between Exodus 20 and Exodus 23.

We have covered two of the four principles that I am giving to help determine a given law's status under the New Covenant. Number one was "*Does the law define sin?*" Number two was "*Is there a scripture which definitely states that such-and-such no longer needs to be done?*" Today we are going to cover principles numbers three and four. Since both of these are shorter than the other two, we should be able to finish these today.

Number three is that *no scripture may say anything directly regarding a particular law, but examples—especially of Christ—will show God's will.* This principle is subtler than the others, because it moves beyond clear statements, such as are found in the Ten Commandments. One of the commandments says, "You shall do no murder." That is clear and dogmatic: a defining of sin that nobody ought to be able to misunderstand.

I will give you another one: "Which stood only in meats and drinks and different washings, and carnal ordinances imposed on them until the time of reformation." That is another clear statement, telling us that the rituals no longer need to be done under the New Covenant.

However, there is no clear statement in the New Testament that says you must keep the Sabbath. Conversely, there is no clear statement that says you no longer need do it. In this case, if we want to please God, we look for examples of what those who pleased God did. This is a very frequently used teaching tool, and I know that every single one of us who speaks (either up here at this lectern, or even to one another) uses it almost constantly in our discussions.

We look for examples, or refer to examples, of Daniel. What did Daniel do? Should not we emulate what Daniel did because he was a man of God? He, Noah, and Job are listed in Ezekiel as being three of the most righteous men who ever lived on the face of the earth. Daniel ought

to be someone we could emulate. We then look in the book of Daniel, do we not? We say, "This is what Daniel did in this situation." If we do the same thing, it should be expected that—if we are living God's way otherwise—the same general result is going to occur.

How about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego? Every one of us would like to please God as they did. There are many, many of these people. How about Abraham? Do you look at him as an example of how a godly man ought to live? How about Jacob? How about David? How about Moses? In a given situation, the ministry especially is drawing upon the examples of these men and women. In every sermon, there may be very many of these illustrations given.

What about Jesus Christ? He ought to be the primary example, should He not?

Hebrews 5:8-9 Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered [Notice: He learned obedience by the things which He suffered]; and being made perfect, He became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him.

Jesus Christ became the author of salvation through obedience. The intent—the stretching out—of God's law is always love towards God and love towards fellow man. We all agree to that. That is the intent of God's law, regardless of when it was given, where it was given, or under what circumstance it was given. Whether it is in Genesis or Revelation or any book in between, the intent is always *love* towards God or fellow man.

Love is the keeping of the commandments. I John 5:3 gives this very simple definition. This is the basis. This is the foundation. This is where, as it were, *love in action* begins; that is, the keeping of the commands of God. Let us add one more thing here: Obedience is righteousness. Nobody ought to disagree with that. Obedience is right doing.

These are the very qualities for which we are striving. Let us understand that in this context here in Hebrews 5:8-9. The word *author* here, in the Greek, means exactly what it does in English. It is a very good translation. It means "cause of." Perhaps you did not understand what the word *author* means. It means "cause of." The person who writes the book is the author because he caused the book to come into existence. Here, we are not talking about a book; we are talking about salvation. Jesus Christ caused salvation to come into existence through obedience.

The next word we want is this word *perfect*. The Greek *perfect* does not mean what the English concept of perfect means. To us, *perfect* means "without flaw," but the Greek is a little bit more extensive than that, and a little bit more specific. In this context it means "to be brought to the goal set by God." In this sense, it has the same meaning that we would use in reference to, let us say, a tool. A Philips screwdriver is perfect for a Philips screw. It does not mean that the screwdriver is absolutely without flaw. It means that it fits what it was designed to do.

Jesus Christ was brought to the goal that God intended. What is the goal in this context? In this context, the goal was that He would be brought to where He could function as our High Priest and to be the cause of our salvation. How was this accomplished? Through obedience! Through obedience, He became the cause of salvation. Also through obedience, He was made perfect so

that He could be our High Priest.

Though Jesus was deity, while He was in the flesh He went through the process of growth in experiencing it as a human being—something nobody in the deity had ever gone through. In order for Him to be High Priest, He had to know what we human beings were experiencing—having to face what we face. It was an essential part of His training to be High Priest.

Let us make this applicable to you and me. So far, it just applies to Christ. What, pray tell, are we being trained to become? A king and a priest! In both responsibilities, we are going to be under and assisting Christ. He is King of Kings. Revelation 5:10 says that we are going to be kings and priests. He is the High Priest. We are also being trained to be a priest under Him, after the order of Melchisedec.

Therefore, brethren, the only difference between Him and us is one of scale. Because He is called to the higher responsibility, the tests and everything that He went through were far greater—of greater magnitude to prepare Him for that—than what we are going through.

We are already sons of God. Rather than being trained to be high priests, we are being trained to be priests. How are we being trained? We are being trained to teach a way of life. We are being trained to teach people how to live. It is the same way of life that He was teaching and that He was living. Therefore, brethren, His example—what He did—is essential to our instruction if we are going to function smoothly with Him and under Him. What the Author does—as well as what the Author states—is important. It cannot be overlooked.

Remember what Hebrews 2:10 calls Him? It calls Him the *Archehos*, or "forerunner"—the one who goes before, the one who blazes the trail on which everybody else will go who follows Him. He is the Author of our salvation. He is the Captain of our salvation. He teaches us both by word and example. We are to walk in His steps.

In that light, what does God's Word say that He did?

John 8:28-29 Then said Jesus unto them, "When you have lifted up the Son of man, then shall you know that I am *He*, and that I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father has taught Me, I speak these things [the spoken word]. And He that sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone; for I do always those things that please Him [His example]."

We have this thing covered from every direction. It does not matter whether Christ said it. If He did it, that is enough. If we are going to live as He lived, if we are going to follow in His steps, then we had better do what He did—or we will not turn out as He did. We will not be perfected.

He said, "I always do..." What Jesus is stating in this context is His complete and total submission to the Father. If the Father spoke to Jesus, it was law—an obligation that He must perform if He was going to be perfect in His obedience and be the Author of salvation. Because His entire purpose was to please the Father, He never did anything that is wrong. His example in the way He lived gives us a perfect model of how we should conduct our lives. The rest of us

are spasmodic and irregular in our submission, but His was continuous, perfect, and complete.

Jesus never said, "You must keep the Sabbath." Neither did He say, "You do not have to keep the Sabbath." However, the Bible does record Him keeping the Sabbath, and it does not record Him keeping any other day. (What an omission.) Luke 4:16 makes it very clear that it was His custom to keep the Sabbath. There is the example.

The same is true of the festivals. It is very clear that Christ kept Passover. I think it is in John 5 that commentators have felt that was either the Feast of Tabernacles or Trumpets. In John 7, the Feast of Tabernacles is clearly stated—that He went up to Jerusalem, and that His brothers expected Him to go there. We find in Luke 2 that His parents took Him to keep Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread. I have no doubt that He continued to keep them the rest of His life because they were His Father's pleasure. If the Father spoke, He was going to do what He said.

It does show Him, in John 10:22, being in the area of the temple during the Feast of Dedication, or Hanukah, as it is called today. The Feast of Dedication was never part of the law of God. You cannot see it referred to anywhere else in the Bible except as a part of history that took place in the book of Esther. It does show us that, at least, there is some indication that it is okay for us to keep national holidays—things that are significant in the history of our country.

I John 2:6 He that says he abides in Him ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked.

We are to do as He did. The implication in the larger context here is that those who claim to be Christian must live morally, as Jesus did. It means to follow His example, and to have the same ethic as He did—especially when it is attached to something such He said there in John 8:28-29, and especially when John 8:28-29 implies very strongly that His behavior was drawn directly from God the Father.

The emphasis here in I John 2:6 is upon the way that one lives. To some people, Christianity is little more than an intellectual exercise. Some of these people may study very frequently and spend long hours doing it. Somehow or another, though, brethren, it never translates into the practical aspects of living; it is purely intellectual. They do a lot of research, but their lives never really change.

Then there are others whose relationship with God is very largely based upon feelings. Because feelings are transient—they come and they go; they change—these people's lives are constantly up and down and highly irregular. They blow hot and cold. What John is stressing in I John 2 is that a Christian must follow the same pattern of life as Jesus lived.

There is another aspect of this, too: Jesus was baptized, but He never sinned. He said to John the Baptist that the reason that He was doing it was to fulfill all righteousness; that is, to fulfill all right doing. We get baptized because of sin—because we have sinned, and because God commands baptism of us. He wants us to make a public statement of our commitment and the giving up of our life, the sacrificing of it to be raised in the likeness of Christ's resurrection.

Christ did not fit any of those perimeters at all. Do you know what the fact that He did it says to

me? He did it in order to do what was going to be required of us, of those who would follow Him. Therefore, He did it as an example. He never offered an animal sacrifice. Why? That was not going to be required of us. Still, it would have not have been technically wrong for Him to do so, even as Paul went through one of the rituals, in the book of Acts.

He did keep the Sabbath. He did keep the Holy days. Those whom He personally trained also did. That is a powerful lesson. We cannot go wrong following His example, regardless of whether a specific law is stated. That ends point three.

Point four is this: *Where does the law appear in Scripture?* This is a very interesting one. I want you to turn to Matthew 19. Jesus was being questioned about divorce and remarriage.

Matthew 19:8-9 He said unto them, "Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered [allowed] you to put away your wives; but from the beginning it was not so. And I say unto you, whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, commits adultery: and whoso marries her which is put away does commit adultery."

I want you to look at what Jesus did in this instance: He leap-frogged right over Deuteronomy 24. Deuteronomy 24 is that chapter in the Old Testament that covers divorce and remarriage, and sets a foundation for giving principles from which divorce and remarriage can be made. Jesus leap-frogged right over it! That is right in the midst of the civil law of Israel. He leaped right over that. He leaped right over the whole Old Covenant, and went all the way back to Genesis 2 for His authority for a judgment regarding marriage and divorce.

There is instruction here. Even though God permitted them to divorce and remarry because of their unconversion (hardness of heart), the higher and greater authority and standard lies where God originally established His intention. Is that clear? There is a clear example right in what Christ did. *The higher and greater authority lies in when God originally established His intention.*

In that light, we are going to leave divorce and remarriage and go back to Genesis 14, where we have an example of Abraham and tithing. This circumstance here was Abraham's return from the war that he had with his men against the kings. He returned with a great deal of booty that was taken.

Genesis 14:20 "And blessed be the most high God, which has delivered your enemies unto your hand." And he gave Him tithes of all.

The speaker there was Melchisedec, and the "he" who gave Him tithes refers to Abraham, as Hebrews 7 very clearly states. What is the time element here? At the very least, it is somewhere around 430 years prior to the making of the Old Covenant. Tithing is not stated here as a law but is introduced into the flow of the story of the Bible as an already ongoing practice, which Abram (Abraham) already knew. How did Abraham know to give ten percent? Why not eight percent or one percent? Why did not he say, "I earned it. We risked our lives. It is mine!" Abraham seems to have had none of those thoughts. He willingly gave ten percent of all.

For us to be instructed by this, I think, at least in part it has to be seen in the light of who Abraham is and what position he occupies in the purpose of God. First of all, Abraham is the father of the faithful. He is a type of God the Father; Isaac was a type of the Son, Jesus Christ. Humanly, he is the head of the family—of those who are loved by God, who love God, and are obedient to Him.

Abraham is the patriarch. He is the leader. He is the elder. He is *the* primary example among men. If we have to put it that way, considering the way God speaks about him, there has been nobody on earth as great as Abraham, except for Jesus Christ. What an example we have here!

If we are Christ's, we are Abraham's seed. Not Moses'. Not Daniel's. Not Noah's. Not Isaac's. Not Jacob's. We are Abraham's kids. Because we are Abraham's children, then we are heirs according to the promise. The Jews recognize some of this. That is why they said to Jesus, "We be Abraham's seed. And we have never been slaves to anybody." In a sense, they knew that name carried a great deal of influence with God. Their ideas were wrong, even though the principle was right.

In Abraham, we are looking at one of the prime examples in all of mankind. The promise is repeated to Isaac, and then in Genesis 26 God says to him:

Genesis 26:5 Because that Abraham obeyed My voice, and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws.

That just about covers everything, does it not? "My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws." Just kind of keep that thought and we are going to turn back to Genesis 18. This is God speaking:

Genesis 18:18-19 "Seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I know him [He means, "by experience I know him"], that [notice] he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which He has spoken to him."

How did Abraham know God's laws since they were not formally written until 430 years later?
By God'