

[IN GOD'S IMAGE 65 – FROM LAW TO RELATIONSHIP]

We have been looking at the subject of the law in relation to the development of spiritual maturity in God's holy people.

- ◆ We finished last time by looking at the first two reasons why the New Covenant instituted with Christ's blood is so much more effective in producing the character and nature of God in His people than the Mosaic Covenant or Torah.
- ◆ The main reason for bringing about this dramatic change is the coming of the Holy Spirit who takes up residence in God's holy people.
- ◆ In order for what Christ has achieved on our behalf to become a reality in our lives, the Holy Spirit by taking up residence in our hearts and minds is the means by which God now produces His holy nature and character in our lives.

Let's briefly summarise the two points we finished with last time on why the New Covenant of grace is so much better at producing a holy people for God than the Old Covenant of law.

- ◆ 1) With our conversion we are given a new nature that wants to please God.
- ◆ This new nature is the fulfilment of Jeremiah 31:33 where God says, ***"I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts."***
- ◆ This new nature is none other than the Holy Spirit taking up residence in our lives imparting to us the very nature and character of God Himself.
- ◆ This change of heart is a massive transformation from the past and should not be underestimated.
- ◆ 2) We have been set free from the condemnation of the law as the demanding righteous requirements of the law have been fulfilled in us by Christ (Romans 8:3-4).
- ◆ This simply allows grace to be grace.
- ◆ The beauty of grace is we are accepted and continue to be accepted regardless of how far we fall short of the perfection demanded of the law.
- ◆ God knows this and this is why He does not put unrealistic expectations on us now we live under His grace.
- ◆ Christians, far too often, continue to place themselves under the uncompromising demands of the law when there is no need to.

Let's continue with more points why the New Covenant is so much more effective in producing the character and nature of God in His people than the Mosaic Covenant or Torah.

- ◆ 3) The law which condemns and brings death only applies to the old sinful nature of Adam, not the new nature
- ◆ ***1 Timothy 1:9-10 We also know that the law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers,¹⁰ for the sexually immoral, for those practicing homosexuality, for slave traders and liars and perjurers—and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine.***
- ◆ As mentioned above, the law, as a tutor (Galatians 3:24-25), has done its job in bringing sinners to repentance, but once it has completed its job, it no longer applies to believers who are now under grace and are now ***"slaves to righteousness."*** under the direction of the Holy Spirit who now works with our new nature to develop spiritual maturity in God's holy people.
- ◆ So when we try to control believers through the old rules and regulations of the law, we are not taking into consideration the reality of the Holy Spirit and our new nature.
- ◆ The new nature is under the control and direction of God's Holy Spirit who gives us the "mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:16).
- ◆ The other unfortunate consequence of living with the old sinful nature under the law is the proclivity to divert attention from oneself and apply the demanding requirements of the law to others.
- ◆ ***Luke 6:42 How can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,' when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.***
- ◆ The old nature wants to divert attention from its own failings and point the finger at others (Genesis 3:12-13).
- ◆ This results in the unfortunate practice of judgmentalism.

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- ◆ Believers, after experiencing the amazing grace of God and the price paid for their redemption should be humble enough to acknowledge their own failings and concentrate on overcoming the planks in their own eyes rather than concentrating on the failings of others.
- ◆ A proper understanding of grace, and an understanding that the law only applies to non-believers, would prevent much of the judgmental attitude that still pervades Christianity.
- ◆ 4) The motivation for achieving holiness under the Old Covenant was “fear,” while the motivation for being holy under the New Covenant is “gratitude.”
- ◆ This too is a remarkable transition. Under the old legal way of operating, a sinner received condemnation and death for his disobedience.
- ◆ The motivation for being good under this old system was “fear.”
- ◆ And it was a genuine fear as the law demanded “perfection.”
- ◆ But now under the New Covenant instituted with Christ’s blood, we not only receive mercy and forgiveness, but also the promise of eternal life through the life-giving Spirit.
- ◆ ***Romans 8:15 The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.”***
- ◆ And this is granted to us simply because we “believe” or trust what Jesus has done on our behalf.
- ◆ ***1 John 5:13 I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.***
- ◆ Now when we grasp the magnitude of what has transpired here, one can only fall down in deep gratitude in recognition of the grace God has extended to us.
- ◆ In addition to gratitude, new sons of God choose to live up to their new reality as they want to imitate their heavenly brother, Jesus Christ
- ◆ This then becomes our motivation for pursuing holiness under the New Covenant.
- ◆ 5) As we have been welcomed back into the “presence” of God, the New Covenant is again based on a relationship rather than a list of “do’s” and “don’ts.”
- ◆ Adam and Eve enjoyed a remarkable relationship with God prior to their disobedience.
- ◆ They enjoyed God’s “presence” as they walked and talked with God in the cool of the evening.
- ◆ They were the recipients of God’s personal love, assurance and security.
- ◆ There were no long lists of do’s and don’ts, no sacred times or locations, no buildings, no sacrifices, just a loving relationship.
- ◆ However this all came to an end when they failed to obey the one simple command God gave them to test their faith in Him.
- ◆ And what did they do? They hid from God and mankind has been hiding ever since (Genesis 3:8-10).
- ◆ And one of the ways we continue to hide from God is to substitute the law into the position that rightfully belongs to God.
- ◆ Sin is much more damaging than simply breaking the law. It is much more than just an affront to our holy God as it threatens the whole concept of what God stands for, intimate relationships based on His love.
- ◆ Ultimately, this is why He is so opposed to sin and He wants us to understand this as well.
- ◆ Sin destroys relationships.
- ◆ The Torah was an interim step in this direction, but as we have seen it was limited in its effectiveness by the fallen nature.
- ◆ However, under the New Covenant, God wants us to join him in opposing sin not only because it is contrary to the law, but because we now understand its destructive power in shattering relationships.
- ◆ Opposing sin because it breaks the law is replaced by the Spirit inspired knowledge sin threatens the very concept of the godhead itself, intimate loving relationships.
- ◆ Unfortunately, all too often God is regarded as a policeman or a sheriff of the law rather than a merciful loving Father who wants an intimate relationship with us.
- ◆ Those preoccupied with living under the law only magnify this false concept of God as a sheriff.
- ◆ Its true God is a God of justice, but that justice is driven by love and a desire to root out anything that threatens relationships.

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- ◆ However, in our fallen dehumanised state the last thing we want to do is to face up to our guilt and we would rather hide behind the law as we assume it is less confronting than having to acknowledge our sin before a relationship-oriented holy God.
- ◆ The Israelites did the same thing at the foot of Mt. Sinai when they asked Moses to speak to God on their behalf (Exodus 20:18-19).
- ◆ As mentioned above, we also try to hide from God by self-righteously diverting attention from ourselves to others whose sins may be more obvious than ours (John 8:3-11).
- ◆ Remarkably, it is this same God we want to hide from, who wants to, and provides the means for our redemption.
- ◆ The point being, as in the time of Christ, humanity, like the Israelites and the Jewish religious leaders of Jesus' time would rather hide behind the law rather than acknowledge their need for a Messiah.
- ◆ ***John 5:39-40 You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, ⁴⁰ yet you refuse to come to me to have life.***
- ◆ What were the scriptures they were diligently searching? The Torah.
- ◆ As we have learned, one of the main purposes of the Mosaic Law was to point to the promised Messiah (Luke 24:44).
- ◆ The Jews, by focusing too much on the Law, missed the lawgiver, the Messiah, who has the genuine power to give eternal life.
- ◆ Under the New Covenant, Jesus has restored our humanity and has paved the way for us to come out of hiding to once again enter into the very presence of God where we experience the love; security and assurance only a holy God can give.
- ◆ ***John 4:23-24 Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. ²⁴ God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.***
- ◆ Notice it is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ who is now directing our worship.
- ◆ The Spirit includes us in the circle of love that is the godhead where there are no long lists of do's and don'ts, no sacred times or locations, no buildings, no sacrifices, just a loving relationship.
- ◆ God does not want to relate to us through the legal paradigm of the law; He wants to relate to us via the godly relationship that is love.
- ◆ God does not want this covenant relationship to be like a loveless marriage where two parties get together simply to fulfil selfish motives.
- ◆ He wants us to relate to Him as a loving Father rather than a sheriff enforcing a list of "do's and don'ts."
- ◆ And through the New Covenant of grace, He has set in motion the means to achieve this as the Holy Spirit is the master of relationships (2 Corinthians 13:14).
- ◆ God is holding out the ultimate form of relationship to us, the gift of sharing in the same fellowship that exists within the very godhead itself.
- ◆ ***1 John 1:3 We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.***
- ◆ As we read in John 4:23-24, the Father is seeking those who want to join Him willingly and participate in the fellowship which is the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.