

The New Covenant

Have we fully grasped the inheritance we have received
through Jesus Christ's death on the Cross?

Miki Hardy

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by Miki Hardy

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Chapter I

The Glory of the New Covenant

I would like to share on a topic that may not be fully understood by Christians. The New Covenant is very different to the Old Covenant. It is more personal, more profound, and so much more glorious because it's about Christ living in us, the people of the New Covenant, in all His glory.

Removing the veil

In the Church today, we associate God's glory with His presence, and the demonstration of signs and wonders, visibly powerful miracles at work. These are clearly signs of God's glory and we would all agree that He is glorified when these things occur. Yet, though His glory was always something physical or visible in the Old Testament, it was demonstrated in a completely new way after Pentecost. It was no longer something visible but rather, under the New Covenant, the reality of His glory is demonstrated by the presence of Christ living in us.

In 2 Corinthians 3:7-9, Apostle Paul describes the glory of the Old Covenant as 'the ministry of death and condemnation'. He calls what we have in the New Covenant 'the ministry of the Spirit and righteousness', before emphasising in verse 10 just how much more glorious it really is by comparison: *"For even what was made glorious had no glory in this respect, because of the glory that excels. For*

if what is passing away was glorious, what remains is much more glorious.” He continues in verses 12-14, speaking of the fading radiance of Moses’ face, declaring: “But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ.”

The truth of the matter is that until we are born-again, we remain blind. Until the ‘veil is lifted’ from our spiritual eyes, we can read the Bible but not see; neither can we understand the mystery of Christ, the mystery of the Church, or the glory of the New Covenant. There is only one way for this veil to be removed... by being born-again, in Christ.

The glory of the New Covenant touches the life of every person who is born-again. In verses 15 and 16, Paul affirms this spiritual reality by declaring: *“But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.”*

Christ in us

In John 17, Jesus prays to His Father, saying: *“Glorify Your Son, that Your Son may also glorify You.”* This was just prior to the Cross; the time of suffering, sacrifice and death was at hand. In effect, He was

saying: 'As I sacrifice My life on the Cross, I am going to glorify You.' In the same way, we too are called to glorify God by laying down our lives and taking up our cross.

Yet today, so many believers are running after things like power, success, material possessions, and all sorts of tangible things. But, as we have seen from Paul's description, the glory of the New Covenant has nothing to do with material things, or anything else that brings glory to Man.

Its glory, as the Apostle describes so brilliantly in Colossians 1:27, is "*Christ in you, the hope of glory!*" This means His presence in me, and His life being manifested through me. If we want to glorify God as a son or daughter of the New Covenant, we must allow Christ to live His life through us. Our transformed lives are then proof of what Jesus Christ accomplished at the Cross; proof of the power of His death and resurrection. That's the glory of the New Covenant!

Perfection in Christ

Did you know that we are the glory of Christ? That is how Paul describes his co-workers in 2 Corinthians 8:23: "*If anyone inquires about Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker concerning you. Or if our brethren are inquired about, they are messengers of the churches,*

the glory of Christ.” There’s nothing more glorious about the New Covenant than a transformed man or woman whose life reflects Christ. The glory of the New Covenant is not a one-off experience. It is walking with Christ, being transformed from glory to glory, so as to come to His image.

This is the reason Apostle Paul was so willing to give his life... so that he might present every person perfect in Christ. If we believe that we can serve the Lord with any other ambition than bringing people (including ourselves!) to perfection in Christ, then we need to question our motivation and service for the Lord. It explains in part why much of the Church is in such confusion today. Too many leaders are ready to take advantage of sincere Christians and their desire to serve God, by abusing their generosity, and goodness, their humility, and their love for God.

Jesus, the glory of God

Under the New Covenant, Jesus Christ is the glory of God. And God ordained this same Jesus who, “*...being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person...*” was appointed as the heir of all things and the Lord of all the earth, to come and live His life in us and through us (see Hebrews 1:1-3). The goal of our Christian life is to be renewed and changed, transformed into that glorious image of

Christ. People should see Christ in us, hence the glory of God. Our lives should be living epistles that anyone can read, in the same way that Paul commended the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 3:2-3: *“You are our epistle written in our heart, known and read by all men; clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us...”* This doesn’t mean we are perfect, far from it, but we understand that we are being transformed, and that it is God Himself at work in us. He continues to explain this in 2 Corinthians 4:7-8: *“But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair...”*

In verse 16, he declares: *“Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.”* The greatest and most powerful reflection of the glory of God under the New Covenant is Christ in us, living His life through us!

The glory and freedom

The people of Israel experienced the glory of God’s presence in the temple, but it came with the Law and all its obligations to offer sacrifices. For us, the veil has been taken away. In 2 Corinthians 3:16-18, we see how Paul associates the presence of God’s Spirit with freedom and the glory of God: *“Nevertheless when one turns to*

the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.”

This is the freedom that we have, as New Covenant believers. We can enter into His presence, and enjoy fellowship with Him, accepting His abundant, unfailing grace. Even if we have sinned or fallen short, we need only truly repent. There are no more requirements for us to make up for our mistakes, our faults, or our weaknesses. This is true freedom, true liberty! There is no longer any striving to please God, or having to have our sins atoned for; all we have to do is take up our cross and follow Him, and He takes care of the rest.

We cannot separate the order of the New Covenant from freedom. And it is this freedom that is an issue for many church leaders today. It's because somewhere, they want to keep control, or put boundaries in place. But it is impossible to mix the glory of the New Covenant with the Law. Under law, we will never be free or able to demonstrate and impart the very life of Christ. Instead we will impart religion. But God wants His people to be free, despite all their weaknesses and failures.

As we deny ourselves and take up our cross, God deals with our lives, and lives His life through us; then Christ, the glory of God, is seen in us... This work of transformation is not complete. We're not there yet,

but we are being transformed by the Spirit of the Lord from glory to glory, into the image of Christ, who is the glory of God.

Shining the glory of Christ

In the little time left before the Lord returns for His Church, many things will happen. This is why we need to understand that under the New Covenant, we are called increasingly to shine the glory of Christ everywhere we go. We should aspire to having people say of us, and the Church: ‘these men, these women, they are the glory of Christ!’ Not simply because we are born-again, but because our lives reflect Christ as we identify with Him; in His suffering and in His death, and so represent Him on this earth. The glory of God cannot be more real than when Christ lives His life in us, and it is apparent to an unbelieving world. Christ in us, the glory of God!

Chapter II

The Mark of the New Covenant

Let us now look at what I call the 'Mark of the New Covenant'. God's covenants with His people have always been established through the shedding of blood. In Exodus 24 we see that Moses inaugurated the Old Covenant by sprinkling blood on the people of Israel, and on the altar he had built.

Blood must be shed

When sin entered the world, God had to deal with it, and the only way for Him to do so was by the shedding of blood. Nothing else has the power to deal with sin. Throughout the Old Testament we see repeatedly that blood had to be shed, the life of an animal had to be sacrificed or exchanged, in order to atone for the people's sins. However, it is important to understand that the blood of sacrificed animals did not take away sin; it could not cleanse them of their sins.

Instead it was a temporary measure, a foreshadowing of what was to come, as we can see in Hebrews 9:11-12: *"But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption."*

Blood as a sign

For the people of Israel, blood being shed as a sacrifice was a sign of purification and consecration; it reminded them of their sin, and kept them in fellowship and in a covenant relationship with God. As Hebrews 9:22 reminds us: *"...according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission."* This was the Law handed down through Moses, but it was not simply a tradition the Israelites followed. There was a clear meaning behind it all.

The blood of Jesus

For us, as New Covenant people, this ritual and foreshadowing image is no longer of any use, and serves no real purpose any more. Why? Simply, because the reality has come! After Jesus Christ shed His blood and died on the Cross, He went into the Holy of Holies in Heaven, into the very presence of the Father. He presented His blood, the blood of a perfect sacrifice. That is why Jesus had to shed His own blood; and He did it once and for all. The mark of the New Covenant, therefore, is the blood of Jesus Christ!

Free from the Law

We all know that under the Old Covenant, the high priests were of the order of Aaron, from the tribe of Levi. But Jesus, the high priest of the New Covenant, did not come from the tribe of Levi, so that His priesthood would not be compared to, or bound by, the laws and precepts of the Old Covenant. Hebrews 5 tells us: *“When He came into the world He said, ‘Sacrifices and offerings you did not desire, but a body you have prepared for me.’”*

There is no link between Jesus, the high priest of the New Covenant, and the laws applied by the high priests of the Old Covenant. In the same way, we cannot believe that Jesus shed His blood, as the perfect sacrifice, and yet continue to try and live our lives according to Old Covenant rituals and laws. Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the Law (Galatians 3:13).

The Law, received through Moses and the Levitical priesthood, was done away with the moment the veil was torn in two, when Jesus died and rose from the dead, having taken His own blood and presented it to His father in the Heavenly Holy of Holies.

Under the New Covenant, there is only one law: the law of love! If you love God with all your heart, and love your brothers and sisters in the same way, that is all the ‘law’ you need. No one should have to tell you what the Law says you must or must not do. Love, not the Law,

is what will enable you to become a real servant to the point of being ready to lose your life for someone else. We are a free people!

Redeemed and reconciled

John 6:53 states: *“Then Jesus said to them, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you.’”* When we partake of the cup and we eat the bread, we are identifying our lives with the sacrifice of Christ. However, we need to understand what He has done in order to identify our lives with Him; to give Him our life in the same way He shed His blood, and gave His life for us on the Cross.

Without the blood of Christ, there can be no salvation; no remission of sins; no reconciliation with God. We must understand the power of that blood. Ephesians 1:7 declares: *“In Him we have redemption through His blood.”* When we were saved, we confessed our sins and the blood of Jesus Christ purified us and cleansed us from all our sins. In 1 John 1:9, Apostle John says: *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* We are also now reconciled with God, and have made peace with Him through the blood of Jesus. Colossians 1:19-20 describes it well: *“For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him,*

whether things on earth or things in Heaven, having made peace through the blood of His Cross.” This defines a completely new relationship, a new covenant with God; the Law – the instructions, regulations, everything that was required of the people of God in the Old Covenant – has been done away with. We now have direct access into God’s presence. And that is because of the one perfect sacrifice, made by our perfect high priest who is alive forevermore.

Christ our mediator

Good works cannot save us. We can give alms to the poor; give away our money. We can perform rituals and give anything we can think of to God, but none of these things can save us. The Apostle explains this very clearly in 1 Peter 1:18-19, when he describes how that redemption occurred: *“...knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.”* Because of the blood of Jesus, we are no longer under condemnation. Neither the Law, nor our own thoughts have the right to accuse us. Christ is our mediator before the Heavenly Father.

Hebrews 9:13-15 describes it thus: *“For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for*

the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? And for this reason He is the Mediator of the New Covenant..." The words 'and for this reason' refer to the blood. The Scripture affirms that the blood, the mark of the New Covenant, shed by Christ is what makes Him the Mediator. This is how and why we are cleansed and purified every time we come before God to repent and put our hearts right.

Jesus lived a perfect, sinless life on earth because the blood to be shed had to come from a perfect man. This is where the power of His blood lies. It cannot be compared to the blood of bulls. Equally, the laws of the Old Covenant no longer apply to us because of the perfect blood that was shed on our behalf. When we go back to the old principles of the Law again, we are in effect associating the blood of the perfect Lamb, Jesus Christ the Son of God, with the blood of bulls. However, we live under the New Covenant, which was inaugurated by the blood of the Son of God, representing a new order, a new dispensation, a new way of life. Apostle Peter calls us a royal priesthood, a holy nation... all because we have been washed in the precious blood of Jesus!

Why we take up our cross

In 1 Peter 4:1, the Apostle reminds us that we are to be of the same mind as Christ, to be willing to endure suffering in our flesh, because, *“...he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin.”* God deals with our flesh when we are willing to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Jesus. There is no other way to do God’s will. The Bible does not provide quick-fix solutions. To partake of the resurrection life of Christ, we must identify with Him in His sufferings and in His death.

The law of love

Be encouraged by the fact that there is only one law for us Christians, the law of love. It involves giving our life by becoming a servant and serving God and His people, as well as those who are suffering. It is the law of love, brought about through the redemptive work of the Cross, where the blood that is the mark of the New Covenant was shed once for all time. This is the New Covenant, and how wonderful it is. Praise the Lord!

Chapter III

The Foundation of the New Covenant

In order to understand the importance of the foundation of the New Covenant, we need first to look at the Old Covenant and see its role in the life of God's people. Right from the start, Jehovah showed Himself to the Israelites as a God of holiness and righteousness. The Ten Commandments that Moses brought down from the mountain revealed a God who wanted His people to be holy and righteous, and to worship Him, and Him alone. Under the New Covenant, this has not changed. Today, God still wants us to live holy and righteous lives.

A solid foundation is needed

In Psalm 11, we find David, who knew his God, speaking clearly of the importance of the foundation of his faith, when he asks in verse 3, "*If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?*" What he is saying effectively is this: 'If the foundation of our faith is not solid, everything can fall apart; without a strong foundation, we will perish; we will be blown in all directions by every wind that comes along'. We will end up being influenced by the world system, we will accept false teachings, we will seek material things instead of spiritual ones, and we will be subject to the desires of our flesh.

The foundation of the temple

Under the Old Covenant, God gave King Solomon extremely detailed instructions about building a very wide and deep foundation for the temple. Equally, in the time of Ezra the scribe, we read how the people wept and rejoiced as they saw the foundation being laid to rebuild the temple, which had been destroyed. In both cases, it was the temple of God, something physical that would be built on solid foundations. The sturdiness of the foundation of any building or structure is paramount, for whatever is built on it not to collapse under pressure.

The New Covenant temple

Under the New Covenant, a new building, a new temple, is being built. It is the Body of Christ, His Church – the Bible declares that we are His temple! And in exactly the same way, I believe that if the foundation of this temple is not solid, we will go astray. Today, we see thousands of Christians leading unholy and unrighteous lives, experiencing sin and defeat in their Christian walk; there are also many more who have backslidden into the world. Yet, Jesus accomplished everything at the Cross for us to walk in victory. There must be a reason for our defeat! If our foundation is not right, we cannot have victory over the flesh and sin.

Laying the foundation

The New Covenant is one of the heart, and its foundation is Jesus Christ and Him crucified. We must all come to a place of understanding the spiritual foundation that was laid by the apostles in the Early Church, and that is still being laid today by true apostles, because this is what points us to the road we need to walk on. It is not enough just to believe in Christ if we want to please the Father and walk in His ways. We cannot separate Christ from the Cross, for the foundation is Christ and Him crucified.

In 1 Corinthians 3:10, Apostle Paul states: *“According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation.”* We must accept that we are spiritual people, that the Church is spiritual, and therefore, we need a spiritual foundation in our lives. Jesus brought this foundational message to the apostles, and Paul also received this by revelation directly from Jesus. The message they brought to every church was identical: our faith is in Christ, and our lives need to be identified with Him in His sufferings and in His death so that we may carry His life. God is still asking us today for our lives!

This foundation is the same teaching that Jesus brought to His disciples: Deny yourself and take up your cross and follow Me. Jesus also asked them if they could drink of the cup that He was to drink.

At no time did He speak about material things, or financial blessings. Paul tells us in Romans 12:1-2 to offer ourselves as living sacrifices, so *“...that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”* The Apostle Peter describes us as living stones bringing spiritual sacrifices to God. 1 Peter 2:4-5 states: *“Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”* Both apostles spoke about what needs to happen deep down in our hearts, that inner change. Church is not a place that we come to in order to just praise God and then ask Him for things.

Building on the foundation

Paul continues in the same passage mentioned earlier (1 Corinthians 3) with: *“...I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it.”* I’m sure that you can see there is a clear difference between laying a foundation, and building on it. Paul taught Christians to put their lives on the altar, to offer their lives as living sacrifices, to partake in the sufferings of Christ, the same way Jesus taught His disciples to deny themselves and take up their cross.

When the apostles had finished laying the foundation in the churches, the other ministries would come and build in the same spirit. They would have to be careful not to bring another gospel so as to make sure Christians would not forget that their lives no longer belonged to themselves.

Every Christian today needs to grasp this truth; otherwise he will make a mess of his life, because our natural instinct is to hold onto our life. Yet, we know that if we try to keep our life, we will end up losing it. But when we lay down our life, we will gain it. That's how we identify with Jesus Christ in His sufferings, in His death, and in His resurrection. How will Christians today know what God expects of them in the spirit, if pastors are turning the hearts of these believers towards material things? They won't understand the foundation of their faith, or the foundation of the Christian life. If they don't know how to look after their life in the spirit, they won't understand why they must walk a holy and righteous life. They will struggle because they are holding onto their lives, which will result in a carnal relationship and walk with the Lord.

The fellowship of His sufferings

Let me tell you that there was a time when my own life as a preacher was not on the right foundation. I was completely unaware that I was called to lose my life. All I knew and wanted to do was preach; I could quote the Bible chapter and verse, but my life, in my home, and with my fellow elders, was a mess; the church was in a mess! I had good intentions, I was sincere, but I didn't know that I wasn't supposed to be claiming things from God. I didn't know that I was supposed to identify my life with Christ, and have fellowship with His sufferings, as Paul states in Philippians 3:10: *"I want to know Christ in the power of His resurrection and in the fellowship of His sufferings."* I did not know I had to die to my old life in order to carry His life.

The chief cornerstone

Both Paul, in Ephesians 2:19, and Apostle Peter, in his first epistle chapter 2:4-7, speak about Jesus Christ being the chief cornerstone. God has laid in Zion a precious stone, Jesus Christ His son. Jesus has replaced everything – the tabernacle, the Ark of the Covenant, the temple, the Law, the sacrifices, and the Levitical priesthood. Today, we have only one High Priest, and that is Jesus Christ. We no longer have to submit to the Law, instead our lives are to be identified with His sufferings and His death in order to partake of His resurrection life.

The true foundation

At the heart of the foundation of the New Covenant is our faith; not only in Jesus Christ as our Saviour, but in the identification of our lives with His, and in our willingness to lose our life in exchange for His. This is what will open the door for the Holy Spirit to enable us to live a holy and righteous life. The foundation of our faith and of the New Covenant is nothing less than simply Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

When we enter into that communion with Him, we begin to be changed from glory to glory; day by day we become more conformed to the image of Christ. Paul said to the Corinthians that when death works in him, life works in them. He had experienced losing his life in exchange for the life of Christ and the Corinthians were the beneficiaries of that life. This should be the vision of every pastor and minister of the Gospel.

Chapter IV

The Sign of the New Covenant

As we take a look now at the ‘Sign of the New Covenant’, let us remember that for each aspect of the New Covenant we have spoken about so far, we have needed to compare how things are for us as Christians under the New Covenant with how they were for God’s people under the Old Covenant. We must always bear in mind that the New Covenant is not just a continuation of the Old, but the reality of what was only a symbol or foreshadowing of things to come in the Old, and a new lifestyle.

Circumcision of the flesh

In Genesis 17:10, the Lord instructs Abraham with regard to the covenant in this way: *“This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: every male child among you shall be circumcised.”* This instruction was given to him when his son Ishmael was 13 years old. The Bible refers to Ishmael as representing the works of the flesh, whereas Isaac, who had not been born at this point, is described as the son of the Spirit. Quite clearly, the outward sign of circumcision was not what had made Abraham righteous before God. In fact, we know that Abraham had been justified by faith long before this. God wanted a people for Himself, a people set apart for Him; that would represent Him and be like His Son, carrying His life. However, the Israelites soon forgot their covenant with Him and fell prey to wickedness and rebellion. From

this, we can conclude that circumcision of the flesh has no power to help people lead righteous lives.

A symbol of the New Covenant

So, why did God establish such a covenant with His people? It was important for two reasons. Firstly, it was a symbol of the New Covenant to come, showing God's people that His covenant with them was everlasting. Secondly, it acted as a permanent reminder of the covenant - that they were His people, and that He undertook to bless and protect them. Whenever the nation repented of their sins, they could remind God of the covenant He had made with them, as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob... You can see why Abraham took this covenant extremely seriously, for without it, he and everyone would have been cut off, and the promise broken. Another example of the significance of the covenant is found in Exodus 4, where God was ready to kill Moses for his negligence in failing to circumcise his son. Again, in Joshua 5, we see the Lord insisting on the new generation being circumcised as they entered the Promised Land.

The sign of circumcision

To understand our position under the New Covenant, let us look at Romans 4:9-11, where Apostle Paul makes the connection between Abraham, righteousness, faith, and the covenant: *“Does this blessedness then come upon the circumcised only, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness. How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised. And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also...”* Remember Abraham was justified by faith before circumcision. Abraham’s faith was credited to him as righteousness. God called him to righteousness; and circumcision was the outward sign that by faith he was declared righteous. Today, everyone has access to the Kingdom of God by grace through faith.

A covenant of the heart

We are a New Covenant people, and our covenant with God is one of the heart. God knew from the beginning how He would make all who

believe in Christ – Jews and Gentiles – into a special people, a holy nation through the New Covenant. There is nothing outward about it; it is all about the inner man. In rebuking the Galatians in 6:15, Paul states: *“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation.”*

We are called to be a new and transformed people, not having a religious relationship with God, but being true Christians. When Jesus redeemed us through the Cross, He opened the way for us to become His people, not just in name only, but so that we would also carry His heart. We are no longer required to try and please God, as the Galatians did, with outward good works. Instead, we follow God out of a heart relationship with Him. And, it is the Holy Spirit who accomplishes this inner work of circumcision through grace.

A work of the Spirit

Paul gives us further insight into this relationship in Colossians 2:10-11: *“... and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power. In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ...”* I am sure you can see the difference. This is a far cry from being circumcised in the flesh. Paul is speaking of a way of life, a daily walk with God, where we grow in Christ.

We put off the old man with its sinful desires, and put on the new man by allowing Christ to set us free and change us. We are ready and willing to surrender our lives to Him, so that He can deal with the desires of our flesh. This is a work of the Holy Spirit. It cannot be accomplished using our own efforts, our knowledge, or our abilities. This is how we work out our salvation. God works in us as much as we allow Him to, and this continues daily as He changes us into the image of His Son Jesus Christ.

Circumcision of the heart

The sign of the New Covenant is the circumcision of our hearts, the continuous inner change that we experience as we lose our lives, take up our cross and follow Jesus. We begin to grow in Christ as He deals with issues in our lives. He delivers us and sets us free from things that hold us back from serving God in righteousness and holiness.

We must understand that we cannot just rely on the born-again experience. There is more, as the Apostle continues in the same passage in verse 12: “...buried with Him in baptism...” He is not talking about the outward sign of water baptism, but of the total transformation that takes place in us, through baptism, when we identify our lives with Christ in His sufferings and death, in order to live in newness of life. This new life is simply the exchange of our surrendered life for Christ’s.

A new heart

Resurrection life follows when we no longer live for ourselves; when we can say like Paul: *“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.”* Then, we know that we are carrying His life, His anointing and that He is living in us. Once we surrender our lives to what God wants to do in us through the message of the Cross, things begin to change. The sign of the New Covenant is the new heart we receive when we are born-again, the constant putting on of the new man, which is created in righteousness and true holiness after God.

Alive with Christ

We can be encouraged by Colossians 2:13: *“And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses.”* God has made us alive by circumcising our hearts with His hand. We, therefore, no longer need to be circumcised in the flesh, which was just the shadow of things to come.

The Holy Spirit is unable to bring that sanctifying work of growth to our lives, if we are unwilling to identify our lives with Christ. That's what happened to the Galatians when they tried to avoid the persecution brought about by the Cross. Because they were unwilling to lose their lives and suffer for Christ, they eventually returned to the circumcision of the flesh.

It was a way of escape, but of no use to them spiritually. They were, in fact, cut off from the grace of God as stated in Galatians 5:4. It did not mean that they were no longer children of God, but God would not deal with them as before, in other words they had stopped growing spiritually.

We must understand that the New Covenant is the mighty hand of God changing our lives from glory to glory. It is a constant challenge and brings continual confrontation for us to become like Christ, as we surrender our lives daily on this road to perfection.

Chapter V

God's Covenants

As we conclude our series on the New Covenant, it is clear that our God is a God of covenant and that He does not break His covenants. We've discussed previously that the New Covenant is, in fact, the reality of symbols and things foreshadowed under the Old Covenant, which are fulfilled in the New Covenant through a relationship with Christ.

Old Testament covenants

In His first covenant, when speaking to Noah in Genesis 9:8-11, God promised not to destroy mankind and the earth. In Genesis 17:10-13, He then made a covenant with Abraham and all his descendants concerning circumcision. This was followed by the covenant of blood described in Exodus 24:4-8. All of these covenants, or agreements, were made with the people of Israel. In each case they were pointing to something more glorious, and more real that was to come under the New Covenant. They were established with sinful man, and the conditions imposed by God were laws that he had no other option but to obey. As a result, the Israelites were obliged to obey these rules and regulations, and were unable to feel God's heart for them as individuals.

By comparison, the New Covenant is a perfect covenant, established by and through His Son, Jesus Christ; a perfect man, in order to

reconcile man to God once and for all time; opening the way for him to be conformed to the image of Christ. The key difference between the Old and the New Covenant is that the former could only remind men of their sin, whereas the latter has the power to set them free from it.

Events foretold

What is interesting is that throughout the Old Testament, we see God revealing specific things to specific people concerning the advent of Jesus Christ and the Cross. The Bible is very clear that Abel saw Christ in the Spirit, as did both Abraham and Moses. God's plan to save the world by reconciling sinful man to Himself was set into action a long time before the birth of Jesus. The Holy Spirit also allowed men like David to catch a glimpse of the future and the time of the New Covenant. Isaiah and Joel were given detailed revelations of how Jesus would come and that the Spirit of the Lord would be poured out upon the earth, enabling men and women to believe in the Messiah, who would heal the broken hearted and set the captives free, in order for them to be saved and reconciled to God. Even the town where Jesus would be born, and what the Spirit would do in those days was foretold... All of these were indicators of the time of faith and grace that was to come.

The covenant of relationship

Unlike the Old Covenant, the New Covenant is one of real relationship: a relationship of the heart between God and man. We have seen that the people of the Old Testament, as part of their relationship, were obliged to follow the Law, which God used to reveal Man's sin, and as a reminder of His holiness. God knew that one day that same Law would be abolished, and would no longer be necessary as the means to attaining the righteousness of God.

His plan of reconciliation was the death of Christ on the Cross, which would enable man to enter into a new kind of heart relationship – a new and unique covenant – with God. There is only one way for man to be reconciled with God and to live a righteous and holy life: repentance and faith in Jesus Christ! This is the reality of the New Covenant, and it surpasses all the other covenants that God made with man. However, God's covenant with His people Israel will continue to stand until they acknowledge Christ as the Messiah. Then all will be one people, confessing that Jesus Christ is Lord, and that there is only one God and Father.

All of this poses the question, 'how do we Christians of the 21st Century fully benefit from the New Covenant?' We need to understand our freedom as born-again children of God, redeemed by the blood of Christ.

Our freedom from the Law

I stated above that God knew He would remove the Law one day. And He certainly did, completely. Colossians 2:14 states that Christ nailed the Law to the Cross, that same law that was working against us. One of the hardest things for a Christian, is to accept the fact that he is no longer subject to any law. Galatians 3:10-13 also states that those who cling to the works of the Law are under a curse; that Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the Law. Do we fully understand these statements?

There was no law before sin entered the world. The Law was the result of sin, so that sin would be revealed. If Christ died for our sins, and the Holy Spirit now makes it possible for us to live a righteous life, why do we need the Law? As much as it is good, the Law has no power to set us free from sin. As Apostle Paul states so clearly in Galatians 3:19: *“What purpose then does the Law serve? It was added because of transgressions till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made...”* So, under the New Covenant, the Law is done away with and we, who are born-again, are now called to live in freedom under grace.

Our full inheritance

We all need to understand clearly what occurred on the Cross when Jesus died for our sins. We must not look at the Cross with natural eyes; only seeing the physical sufferings and the death of Christ. Much more was being accomplished in the spiritual realm as Jesus hung on that Cross. The Law and the curse that was hanging over man until he accepted Christ as his Saviour and Lord were removed completely. But sadly, many Christians today are still blind to that truth and continue to live under the obligations of the Law, following principles, techniques, etc.

Sadly, because of a lack of revelation, much of the Church has yet to come into its full inheritance under the New Covenant. Many Christians today live under condemnation because they cannot obey all the laws and regulations imposed upon them by men. Even the New Testament has become a book of law to them. Note that in Joshua 1:8 it is the Old Testament that is referred to as the book of the Law, whereas in James 1:25, the Apostle talks about the New Covenant as the perfect law of freedom (liberty). Obviously, we cannot be under the Law and be free at the same time. James is highlighting very clearly the difference between the two Covenants. Our inheritance is freedom from law!

Our victory over sin

Galatians 5:18 declares that, when we are led by the Spirit, we are no longer under the Law. In Romans 6:14, Paul states that sin shall have no power over us, because we are no longer under the Law, but under grace. This is the victory of the Christian!

If sin has no part in our lives, the victory is complete. Having been removed from under the Law, we should now walk in obedience to the Holy Spirit and not in obedience to our flesh. Our victory over sin is the result of denying ourselves, taking up our cross and following Jesus, as stated in Matthew 16:24-25. This is what makes us crucify the flesh with all its passions and desires, and thus have victory over sin. We will certainly be tempted and often fail in word, deed, and even attitude, but we will not feel condemned because we have decided to walk on that road of the Cross where we are convicted of our sin, and sincerely repent before the Lord. Then we will constantly experience the grace of the Lord. Victory over sin does not mean that we never sin; it simply means that it is no longer a way of life for us.

We are not bound by sin any more, and it has no hold over us. God knows how weak we are and that, as long as we are in this natural body, we are bound to fail at times, but as long as we hate sin, and sincerely desire to avoid it, and repent when we do sin, He will forgive us. What matters to Him is the attitude of our hearts; this is how wonderful the New Covenant is!

A better covenant

This is clearly shown in Galatians 5:13, where Apostle Paul reminds us that we cannot use this relationship with Christ as a license to sin: *“For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh...”* But, we experience God’s grace in this relationship all the time. As children of God we are no longer under any kind of curse. We have privileged communion and fellowship with our Father who teaches us to walk in holiness; and He is the One who will perfect us, as 1 Peter 5:10 declares. We also have Paul’s assurance in Philippians 1:6 that: *“He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.”* This New Covenant is ‘more excellent’ because it has been established on better promises!

The New Covenant

The Glory of the New Covenant touches the life of every person who is born again. When Jesus Christ died and rose from the dead, the Law was done away with and we became a free people, living under grace! No longer bound by principles and obligations, we entered into a completely new relationship with God, having direct access into His presence and serving Him from our hearts.

But have we truly understood how profound, glorious and special this Covenant is? Have we fully grasped the inheritance we have received through Jesus Christ's death on the Cross? Are we allowing Christ to live His life through us, transforming us into His glorious image? Or are we running after things that bring glory to man rather than God?

The New Covenant is one of the heart, and its foundation is Jesus Christ and Him crucified. As we are willing to identify our lives with Christ in His sufferings, death and resurrection, our lives are transformed and others can see *"Christ in us, the hope of Glory!"*