

**2015 New Year Camp Meeting**

# **Sabbath School**

(Booklets supplied)

## **The Power and Glory of a Faultless Covenant**

By

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### **Introduction:**

Many Christians love to talk about the New Covenant with 'holy pride'. And sure, it's a blessing to take hold of God's New Covenant.

But then, how many understand the real nature of the New Covenant? Even more important, how many understand the sacred obligations of the covenant partners? Is the New Covenant about the abolition of God's law? And is it completely detached from Israel?

For the average churchgoer, the answers may be somewhat unexpected and even unsettling. But suffice it to say that the New Covenant releases into your life limitless divine power to live God's will as you have never done before! It's your heavenly instrument of holy living, and of true redemption and eternal glory. It's a priceless gift from God to you through Jesus Christ, "the Mediator of the New Covenant".

You embrace the New Covenant, and you embrace the Life that flows from the Spirit. You walk away from it, and you walk into death—cut off from God forever!

I recommend that you embrace Life by accepting your side of the terms of God's New Covenant with your whole heart, and you will receive divine power to live in God's presence forever. And the blessings cannot be quantified:

"And I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear Me for ever, for the good of them, and of their children after them:

“And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put My fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from Me.  
“Yea, I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will plant them in this land assuredly with My whole heart and with My whole soul” (Jer. 32:39-41). Halleluiah!

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### **A Lofty Calling to Heavenly Life**

As believers, we are called to perfect obedience in Christ, a life of perfect conformity to God's will. At first glance, it seems an unthinkable feat. Nevertheless, the following scriptures are clear in their call:

*Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect (Matt. 5:48).*

*And be not fashioned according to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God (Romans 12:2 RV).*

But how could that be, except God makes known to us His will and gives us the power to live that will? Are you ready for a heavenly lifestyle of holiness lived on earth? The answer is to take hold of God's covenant in the higher power of your covenant Partner.

### **Christ, the Mediator of a Better Covenant**

Midway in describing the superiority of the Priesthood of Christ (an eternal Priesthood in the order of Melchizedek, Heb. 8:1-5) to Aaron's, after describing His superiority to angels (in 1:5-14 & 2:1-3) and to Moses (in 3:1-6), we come upon a profound statement in Heb. 8:6-7:

*But now hath He obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also He is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second.*

To explain what fault the first covenant had, many fanciful theories have been put forward as the true reason. It has been suggested that the 'fault' with the covenant was that some aspects of God's law were defective which had to be rectified; some say it has been scrapped altogether for a reign of grace.

The fault with the first covenant is neither of the above postulations. The reason is provided in the text itself.

But, first, what are the elements of a covenant? A covenant has **three basic elements**: the parties to the covenant (usually two), making two elements, and then the terms of the

covenant (or agreement). In God's covenant with Israel, the parties are Yahweh and the children of Israel, and both have binding obligations being the terms of the covenant.

In Exodus 19 where God formally proposes the covenant idea to Israel as a nation, we see all three basic elements present:

<sup>4</sup> *You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself.*

<sup>5</sup> *Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, you shall be My treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is Mine;*

<sup>6</sup> *And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel (Ex. 19:4-6 ESV).*

The "I", the "My" and the "Me" represent God, and the "you" the children of Israel. The terms of the covenant are pretty straightforward:

1. Israel is to obey the "voice" of God and keep His covenant with them.
2. God will, in return, make Israel His "treasured possession among all peoples", in that Israel shall be to Him "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation".

When the people of Israel returned an answer of assent and affirmation to the covenant proposal (Ex. 19:7-8), God descended on Mount Sinai on the third day (Ex. 19:9-11) to give the children of Israel the details of His "voice" which they were to obey and keep—the Ten Commandments spoken by God Himself out of the midst of fire (Ex. 20; Deut. 4:13, 36; 5:22)!

As it turned out, Israel failed to obey the voice of God as found in His law. In Jeremiah chapter 11 God reprimands the people for their blatant refusal to obey His "voice" contrary to the terms of the covenant agreed upon at Sinai:

*"The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying,*

<sup>2</sup>*"Hear ye the words of this covenant, and speak unto the men of Judah and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem;*

<sup>3</sup>*and say thou unto them, 'Thus saith the LORD God of Israel: Cursed be the man that obeyeth not the words of this covenant,*

<sup>4</sup>*which I commanded your fathers in the day that I brought them forth out of the land of Egypt from the iron furnace, saying, "Obey My voice, and do them, according to all which I command you; so shall ye be My people and I will be your God,"*

<sup>5</sup>*that I may perform the oath which I have sworn unto your fathers to give them a land flowing with milk and honey, as it is this day.'" Then answered I, and said, "So be it, O LORD."*

<sup>6</sup>*Then the LORD said unto me, "Proclaim all these words in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem, saying, 'Hear ye the words of this covenant and do them.*

<sup>7</sup>*For I earnestly protested unto your fathers in the day that I brought them up out of the land of*

*Egypt, even unto this day, rising early and protesting, saying, "Obey My voice".*

*<sup>8</sup>Yet they obeyed not, nor inclined their ear, but walked every one in the imagination of their evil heart. Therefore I will bring upon them all the words of this covenant, which I commanded them to do, but they did them not.'" (Jer. 11:1-8; see also Jer. 2:1-11).*

The unfaithfulness of Israel to their side of the terms of the covenant, then, was the fault with the first covenant! Hence "God found fault with the people" (Heb. 8:8 NIV), "for they continued not in My covenant, And I regarded them not [in reaction], saith the LORD" (v. 9b ASV).

As the solution to the problem of Israel's unfaithfulness, God proposed a New Covenant with the same "house of Israel" to replace the Old, not by scrapping His law (being His "voice"), but by changing *how* His law was received by the people. Previously, it had been spoken to them (aurally absorbed) and then written on tablets of stone. This time, however, He will put it in their minds and write it on their hearts (Heb. 8:10).

The law will become their nature. Instead of "the law of sin and death" previously written into their nature (Jer. 17: 1; Rom. 8:2), their thinking and lifestyle choices will be guided by the law of God. Their lives will reflect the will of God.

The result is marvellous! Far from disobeying God and He disregarding them as a result, the people will be so transformed in obedience that no man will teach His brother, "know the Lord; for all shall know Me from the least to the greatest" (v. 11). Meanwhile, God has since changed His posture: He no longer disregards the people. He says, "I will be to them a God, and they shall be to Me a people. I will be merciful to their iniquities, and their sins will I remember no more" (vv. 10, 12).

This is the New Covenant written, not with ink, but with the Spirit of the Living God (2 Cor. 3:3). This is the covenant of which Christ is the Mediator and which has been established on "better promises", namely, "I will be to them a God, and they shall be to Me a people. I will be merciful to their iniquities, and their sins will I remember no more."

In the context of the New Covenant, the term "house of Israel" does not refer to just natural born Israelites but to true believers of all nationalities who have come to repentance and faith in Israel's long-promised Messiah, *Yeshua* (Eph. 2:11-13; Gal. 3:29; Isa. 26:15 & Acts 1:8, Isa. 2:2-3; cp Zech. 8:23; Rev. 21:1-2, 12-14). To these faithful believers also belong the "better promises" of God through their acceptance of the New Covenant by which Christ, the Mediator, is reconciling us with the Father (see 1 Tim. 2:5; Rom. 5:9-10; 2 Cor. 5:18-19; Col. 1:20-23).

The "better promises" of the New Covenant were first conveyed through the prophet Jeremiah in Jer. 31:31-33:

*<sup>31</sup> Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah,*

<sup>32</sup> not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them," declares the LORD.

<sup>33</sup> But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD, "I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

<sup>34</sup> They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," declares the LORD, "for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more" (NASB).

In the tenth chapter of Hebrews which quotes this same Jer. 31 passage, God indicates that not only will He forget their sins completely because they will wholeheartedly obey His voice, but also because there will be a full and perfect remission of sins by the blood of Jesus:

<sup>14</sup> For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.

<sup>15</sup> But the Holy Spirit also witnesses to us; for after He had said before,

<sup>16</sup> "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them," <sup>17</sup> then He adds, "Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more." <sup>18</sup> Now where there is remission of these, there is no longer an offering for sin.

<sup>19</sup> Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, <sup>20</sup> by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, <sup>21</sup> and having a High Priest over the house of God, <sup>22</sup> let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water (Heb. 10:14-22 NKJV).

The pure, sinless blood of Jesus grants us access to God right in the unmatched, unimaginable holiness of His heavenly throne room, "the Holiest" spot of all, because it has brought true and perfect remission of sins! The only thing required of us is 'confidence' to enter the Presence of the Holy One with "a true heart" since we have a flawless, eternal "High Priest" who perfectly intercedes for us and empathizes with us (see Heb. 4:15; 7:22-28; 2:17-18). The blood of Jesus is "the blood of the everlasting covenant" (Heb 13:20), commonly called the New Covenant.

In short, "The new covenant, as prophesied by Jeremiah, will replace the outward imposition of the Law on a people of rebellious heart. Rather...the Law of God will be in the hearts and minds of a forgiven people, who from least to greatest, will 'know the Lord' (Jer 31:33-34)" (Paul Barnett, *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997, pp 176-177. Emphasis mine).

Because of the unique characteristics of the New Covenant (written in the mind and heart, perfect remission of sin), it overflows with obedience (from the people) and goodness (from God). 'Obedience' answers to 'voice' and 'goodness' answers to 'My treasured possession', remember?

And all because the Spirit of God has taken the centre stage. Obedience no longer rests on human will which invariably fails; the Spirit now empowers people to obedience. This is the glorious truth the Apostle Paul teaches in 2 Corinthians chapter three.

### **“The Ministry of Death” Gives Way to “the Ministry of the Spirit”**

The apostle starts off commending the brethren in Corinth after finding them short of the Christian ideal in his first letter to them. In chapter three of 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians, he calls them “carnal” so long as there was “jealousy and strife” among them (v.3). In chapter 5 he takes the Church to task for condoning the abominable sin of a brother who had sexual relations with his step-mother. In chapter 6, lawsuits are the order of the day in the Corinthian church because of rampant cheating and wrong-doing among brethren.

But in 2 Cor. 3 the tune has changed from rebuke to praise:

*You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all.*

*And you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts (2 Cor. 3:2-3 ESV).*

The Spirit had pruned off lingering loose ends, even though some moral issues still remained among those who remained in the flesh (6:14-17; 12:19-21).

The fact of the matter is that New Testament believers have been made ‘capable ministers’ of a New Covenant. So He continues:

<sup>4</sup> *Such is the confidence that we have [as a letter written with the Spirit of God] through Christ toward God.*

<sup>5</sup> *Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God,*

<sup>6</sup> *who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life (vv.4-6 ESV).*

Herein lies the main advantage New Testament believers have over their Old Testament counterparts. God has made us capable of serving the New Covenant because it originates from the Spirit which gives life instead of a written text which kills. A direct result of this is that the glory of the New Covenant is superior to that of the Old Covenant precisely because the outcomes of the two covenants are not the same. The differences are glaring.

The first point of contrast, the apostle cites, is that whereas the Old Covenant is “the ministry of death”, the New Covenant is “the ministry of the Spirit” (v. 7). And the reason why the glory of “the ministry of death” is inferior to the glory of “the ministry of the Spirit” is that the former

was short-lived. Although the Israelites could not gaze at the face of Moses because of the glory beaming from his face [Ex. 34:27-35], it was a glory that soon ebbed away to signify that “the ministry of the Spirit” will be even more glorious (v. 8).

But why label the Old Covenant “carved in letters on stones” “the ministry of death”?

The apostle called the Old Covenant so because *it was associated more with death than with life!* And it was all because disobedience reigned supreme under the Old Covenant because the people lacked the ability to serve the letter of the covenant engraved on two lifeless stone tablets. Right from the word go, the Old Covenant was greeted, not with obedience, but with disobedience. While Moses was atop Mount Sinai with the LORD to receive the Law from His hand for Israel, the Israelites were busy breaking the first precept of the Ten Commandments, belying two earlier solemn pledges to the LORD at both the covenant proposal stage and at the proclamation itself: “All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient” (Ex. 19:8, 24:7). This was the sin of the abomination of “the golden calf” which they worshipped as their god (Ex. 32:1-6).

<sup>7</sup> *And the LORD said to Moses, “Go down, for your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves.*

<sup>8</sup> *They have turned aside quickly out of the way that I commanded them. They have made for themselves a golden calf and have worshiped it and sacrificed to it and said, ‘These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!’*

<sup>9</sup> *And the LORD said to Moses, ‘I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people.*

<sup>10</sup> *‘Now therefore let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them, in order that I may make a great nation of you’.*

<sup>11</sup> *But Moses implored the LORD his God and said, “O LORD, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand?”*

<sup>12</sup> *Why should the Egyptians say, ‘With evil intent did He bring them out, to kill them in the mountains and to consume them from the face of the earth’? Turn from your burning anger and relent from this disaster against your people.*

<sup>13</sup> *Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, to whom you swore by your own self, and said to them, ‘I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your offspring, and they shall inherit it forever’” (Ex. 32:7-13 ESV).*

The LORD eventually did relent from His intended judgment against the Israelites as a nation, but not without making an example of 3000 of them in a slaughter commanded by Moses to stop the revelry and frenzied behaviour of the people (vv. 25-30).

Interestingly, thousands of years later, around the same season of Pentecost, 3000 people were *saved into a life of obedience* when the Church, fully anointed with the Holy Ghost from on high, proclaimed the message of repentance and the baptism of the Holy Spirit:

<sup>38</sup> 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 ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

<sup>39</sup> 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.

<sup>40</sup> And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.

<sup>41</sup> Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about **three thousand souls**.

<sup>42</sup> And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

<sup>43</sup> And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles.

<sup>44</sup> And all that believed were together, and had all things common;

<sup>45</sup> And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.

<sup>46</sup> And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart,

<sup>47</sup> Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved (Acts 2:38-47).

The problem, then, with the ancient Israelites was that they lacked the ability to obey God's law and therefore received "the wages of sin" (the breaking of God's law, 1 John 3:4) which is death (Rom. 6:23). It was not the Law of God itself that constituted "the ministry of death" but the people who were supposed to serve the Covenant through obedience to the "voice" (or law) of God. Moses himself said of the Israelites: "... to this day the LORD has not given you a heart to understand or eyes to see or ears to hear" (Deut. 29:4 ESV).

It was and is a sad indictment on the flesh. As far as the appreciation and observance of divine words are concerned, the flesh—the carnal nature of man—is of no use at all. The Lord Jesus put it on record in John 6:63: "It is the Spirit that makes alive, THE FLESH PROFITS NOTHING. The words that I speak to you are spirit and are life" (MKJV).

And the Ten Commandment Law, spoken by Yah the Spirit and written by Yah the Spirit (Deut. 4:10-13; Ex. 32:16), is spiritual: "We know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin" (Rom. 7:14).

How then could an unspiritual people keep that which was and is spiritual, considering that the Spirit and the flesh are opposed to each other (Gal. 5:17) and that they were already enslaved to sin, as the master of their lives (John 8:34)?

The only outcome would be disobedience leading to death. And deaths were frequent, ranging from isolated incidents to mass deaths. On the very day the priesthood was formally inaugurated, the two oldest sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, were struck dead by the LORD for offering "strange fire" before Him in flagrant disregard for His instructions (Lev. 10:1-3; cp. Ex. 24:1, 9-10; Lev.16:1, 12-13). In another isolated incident, the LORD ordered a man stoned to



death for breaking the Sabbath by going out to the field to gather firewood on the holy Sabbath (Num. 15:32-36).

But those were minor cases. After the mass deaths of 3000 in the abomination of the golden calf, an unnamed number of evil complainers were consumed by fire at Taberah (Num. 11:1-3), followed closely by another unnamed number struck with “a great plague” for their wanton craving for meat at Kibroth Hattaavah (Num. 11:4-6; 31-34; Ps. 78:26-31). Then came the rebellion of Korah, Dathan and Abiram, and they and their supporters of an undisclosed number were buried alive when the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, besides the 250 noble men consumed by fire for usurping the office of the priest and the 14,700 killed in a plague for speaking against Moses and Aaron for the divine judgment meted out to Korah and his company (Num. 16:1-7, 23-35, 41-49). In Numbers chapter twenty-five, 24 000 Israelites fell on a single day because of their participation in the idolatrous orgy of the Baal of Peor (Num. 25:1-9; Ps. 106:28-29; also 1 Cor. 10:8). Meanwhile, Moses and Aaron themselves had a judgment of death pronounced on them by the LORD for publicly dishonouring Him at the waters of Meribah at Kadesh (Num. 20:7-13; Ps 106:32-33).

Finally, of the remainder of the over 600 000 adults of Israel redeemed from Egypt, only two made it alive to the Promised Land—Joshua and Caleb. Disobedience and unbelief were the cause, following the “evil report” of ten of the 12-man spy team sent to explore the land of Canaan (Numbers 13 & 14). The LORD gave the sentence:

<sup>26</sup> *And the LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying,*

<sup>27</sup> *‘How long shall this wicked congregation grumble against Me? I have heard the grumbings of the people of Israel, which they grumble against Me’.*

<sup>28</sup> *‘Say to them, ‘As I live, declares the LORD, what you have said in My hearing I will do to you:*

<sup>29</sup> *‘ your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness, and of all your number, listed in the census from twenty years old and upward, who have grumbled against Me,*

<sup>30</sup> *‘not one shall come into the land where I swore that I would make you dwell, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun.*

<sup>31</sup> *‘But your little ones, who you said would become a prey, I will bring in, and they shall know the land that you have rejected’.*

<sup>32</sup> *‘But as for you, your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness’.*

<sup>33</sup> *‘And your children shall be shepherds in the wilderness forty years and shall suffer for your faithlessness, until the last of your dead bodies lies in the wilderness’.*

<sup>34</sup> *‘According to the number of the days in which you spied out the land, forty days, a year for each day, you shall bear your iniquity forty years, and you shall know My displeasure’ (Num. 14:26-34 ESV).*

Would you not agree with the Apostle Paul that the Old Covenant ministry was indeed a “ministry of death”?

Although the Law was meant to give life—as Yeshua said, “His commandment is life everlasting” (John 12:50)—the people’s failure to keep it meant that only one outcome was

certain—death! And, for sure, the Law gives life (Lev. 18:5-30; Ezek. 20:11) but ONLY IF you are able to keep it, which isn't possible for people of the flesh.

A simple illustration drives home the point. Suppose a doctor prescribes you a highly efficacious drug to cure a deadly disease and thereby keep you alive, but you fail to take it because you dislike the taste. What is likely to be the outcome? The obvious consequence is that you will die, although the drug was meant to keep you alive. So is the Law of God. It's meant to give life, but it gives life to only those who obey it, not to those who disobey it. Moses, the servant of the LORD, impressed this truth on the Israelites in Deut. 4:

<sup>1</sup> *Now therefore hearken, O Israel, unto the statutes and unto the judgments, which I teach you, for to do them, that ye may live, and go in and possess the land which the LORD God of your fathers giveth you.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you.*

<sup>3</sup> *Your eyes have seen what the LORD did because of Baalpeor: for all the men that followed Baalpeor, the LORD thy God hath DESTROYED them from among you.*

<sup>4</sup> *But ye that did cleave unto the LORD your God are ALIVE every one of you this day (Deut. 4:1-4; see also Prov. 8:35-36; 19:16).*

The Apostle Paul explains the issue further in Romans chapter 7:

<sup>7</sup> *What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.*

<sup>8</sup> *But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead.*

<sup>9</sup> *For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.*

<sup>10</sup> *And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death.*

<sup>11</sup> *For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me.*

<sup>12</sup> *Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good.*

<sup>13</sup> *Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful.*

<sup>14</sup> *For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin (Rom. 7:7-14).*

The simple but profound message of the apostle is that the Law of life ended up bringing death because the sinful flesh exploited the knowledge of good and evil taught by the Law to stir up evil passions which, when carried out in violation of the Law, resulted in death—the God-imposed penalty for transgressing His Law. Nevertheless, the law, in its true nature, is “holy, righteous and good” (v. 12), but the problem is that unregenerate man is of the flesh and therefore sold in bondage to sin (v. 14).

Thus the remedy lies with the Spirit, in so far as “the carnal mind is enmity against God” being unable to submit to God’s law and that “they that are in the flesh cannot please God” (Rom. 8:7-8).

And the good news is, New Covenant believers “are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Him” (Rom. 8:9 ESV).

For those who belong to Christ because they have His Spirit, theirs is a life of freedom from sin and therefore live in harmony with God’s Law by the power of His Spirit:

<sup>1</sup> *There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.*

<sup>2</sup> *For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.*

<sup>3</sup> *For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh:*

<sup>4</sup> *That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit (Rom. 8:1-4).*

This is the way of the New Covenant; it’s served through the Spirit. So then, if, even under this dispensation of the New Covenant, a person continues to live a life of disobedience, he shows by his life that he has rejected the way of the Spirit and therefore serves “the ministry of death”. Such an individual is spiritually dead now (1 Tim. 5:6; Rev. 3:2) and will surely die on the Day of Judgment (Rev. 21:8; 20:11-15; cp Matt. 10:28).

That’s why we are warned in 1 Cor. 10:

<sup>1</sup> *... brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea;*

<sup>2</sup> *And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea;*

<sup>3</sup> *And did all eat the same spiritual meat;*

<sup>4</sup> *And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ.*

<sup>5</sup> *But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness.*

<sup>6</sup> *Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted.*

<sup>7</sup> *Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.*

<sup>8</sup> *Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand.*

<sup>9</sup> *Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents.*

<sup>10</sup> *Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer.*

<sup>11</sup> *Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.*

<sup>12</sup> *Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall (1 Cor. 10:1-12).*

So make sure you don't serve "the ministry of death" by catering to the flesh in breach of the letter of the Law which you know but are unable keep. Instead, repent sincerely in return for the free gift of God's Holy Spirit, and the Spirit will "cause you to walk in His statutes, and ye shall keep His judgments, and do them" (Ezek. 36:26-27). "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever" (Heb. 13:8). Although He was the "Rock" who followed the Israelites as their Deliverer, He destroyed those who spurned the instructions of His Spirit and instead delighted in the works of the flesh (Jude 1:5).

The "wages of sin" is still death, "but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ" (Rom. 6:23) whose way is the way of the Spirit. So be forewarned: "if you live according to the flesh you will die [lose eternal life], but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live" (Rom. 8:13 *ESV*; cp Rev. 21:27). "The ministry of the Spirit" is the glorious choice to make. The Holy Spirit sent from God in Heaven is the heavenly cause for living the heavenly life on earth. It's the heavenly power that frees us from the clutches of carnality so that we may be free to live the life God wants us to live—His holy, righteous life (Eph. 4:24).

### **"The Ministry of Condemnation" versus "the Ministry of Righteousness"**

The second point of contrast the apostle cites in his comparative analysis of the Old and New Covenants is that the Old Covenant is "the ministry of condemnation", while the New Covenant is "the ministry of righteousness" (v.9). This description of the Old Covenant as "the ministry of condemnation" is closely related to the previous idea of "the ministry of death" and indeed gives us insight into how the Old Covenant became a "ministry of death" in the first place: the people were condemned to die for their disobedience!

Condemnation can never outshine righteousness. Hence, "the ministry of righteousness" far exceeds "the ministry of condemnation" in glory to the point of completely eclipsing its (inferior) glory (vv. 9-10). The simple explanation for this disparity in glory is that what is transitory cannot be expected to have more glory than that which lasts forever (v. 11).

The apostle's choice of terms in reference to the Old and New Covenants tells a story: the outcome of the 'ministry of condemnation' is the 'ministry of death' but the outcome of the 'ministry of the Spirit' is the 'ministry of righteousness', in that the Spirit promotes obedience leading to righteousness.

### **Christ Faithfully Rules His own House—Greater Obedience is Required**

In Hebrews 3, New Testament believers, described as "holy brethren" and "partakers of a heavenly calling" (cp Phil. 3:14), are warned against disobedience stemming from hardness of heart as found among the ancient Israelites. And it's all because of the One who speaks "today" as well as the severer spiritual consequences of disobeying His voice. At the heart of

the warning message is the statement in verses 7 and 8: "Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts".

Whose "voice" is this, and why should we be careful not to adopt a stubborn attitude towards Him? Besides, are there any lessons to learn from the Israelites and therefore precautions to take to avoid repeating their examples of disobedience?

Again, the personality of the speaker holds all the key: We must not harden our hearts towards Him who speaks "today" (Heb. 1:1-2) because of who He is:

Christ, the Apostle and High Priest of our faith (Heb. 5:5, 10; 7:26, 28), is superior to Moses (Heb. 3:1). Although they share the common trait of faithfulness in God's house (3:2; cp Num. 12:7), Jesus is worthy of more honour than Moses (v. 3) since the builder of a house has more honour than the house itself (3b), and JESUS AS GOD is "the builder of all things" (v. 4; see Heb. 1:8-12; Col. 1:15-19).

A study of the scriptures easily reveals that one of the popular ways the New Testament represents the body of believers is as a "house" or "household" of which Christ is the builder and head. Christ Himself alluded to the metaphor when He stated in Matt. 16:18: "... on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it". The Church, the house Jesus built, is an impregnable fortress because it's built on the Rock, the invincible Christ and His truth. In Ephesians 2, we read the following in relation to the spiritual unity of all true believers:

*<sup>19</sup> Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, <sup>20</sup> having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, <sup>21</sup> in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, <sup>22</sup> in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.*

The "members of the household of God"—who are supposed to be "a holy temple in the Lord" in which God dwells in the Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16-17)—must conduct themselves in a manner befitting their status. The house of God is not just another building, but "is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15). What is more, we believers are the building blocks of this spiritual building which is the means by which we, as the holy priests of God, "offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 2:5).

The "spiritual sacrifices" refer more specifically to four divine obligations expected of us as believers: the offering of our bodies as "a living sacrifice to God" (Rom. 12:1), the sacrifice of our substance in support of God's work (Phil. 4:18), "the sacrifice of our praise to God" (Heb. 13:15) and the sacrifice of good works (Heb. 13:16). But they also refer in general terms to all our holy activities in the Lord as *functioning* members of God's building. The contribution of each member using his/her God-given spiritual gifts and talents is vital to the development of

the building—but each should ensure that his work is founded on the foundation laid by Christ and is of high quality:

<sup>9</sup> For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building. <sup>10</sup> According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. <sup>11</sup> For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. <sup>12</sup> Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, <sup>13</sup> each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. <sup>14</sup> If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. <sup>15</sup> If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire (1 Cor. 3:9-15 NASB).

The building is Christ's, and He will examine each man's work with fire. He 'knows' our "works" (Rev. 2:2, 9, 13, 19, 23; 3:1-2, 8, 15) so we must be careful how we contribute to the growth of His building, which is us and in which He lives through His Spirit. His reward is with Him to give to every man according to his work: "Behold, I come quickly; and My reward is with Me, to give every man according as his work shall be" (Rev. 22:12).

Not so with Moses. He was 'merely' a servant, and his faithfulness illustrated things that would later be unfolded (Heb. 3:5). But Christ is a Son and is faithful over His own house—which we are as long as we "hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end" (Heb. 3:6).

Because as Christ's 'house' we must remain confident and hopeful in Him till the end, what the Holy Spirit says about Him in Ps 95:7-11 deserves our attention: "Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts" as in the provocation in the day of trial in the wilderness" (Heb. 3:7-8; cp 1:2).

But in what specific way did the Israelites provoke God in the wilderness as a sign of their hard-heartedness? The answer is in Heb. 3:9: They 'tried God by testing Him' (Grk), even as they witnessed His works. The words translated as "provocation" and "trial" correspond to *Massah* and *Meribah* in Hebrew and mean 'trial' (temptation) and 'contention'. The words primarily refer to Israel's first open quarrel with Moses in a show of mistrust in God because there was no water for them to drink (Ex. 17:1-2). Amazed at their lack faith and impatience for a people just delivered out of bondage in Egypt with the mighty power of God, Moses said to them:

*"Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?"<sup>3</sup> But the people thirsted there for water; and they grumbled against Moses and said, "Why, now, have you brought us up from Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?"<sup>4</sup> So Moses cried out to the LORD, saying, "What shall I do to this people? A little more and they will stone me."<sup>5</sup> Then the LORD said to Moses, "Pass before the people and take with you some of the elders of Israel; and take in your hand your staff with which you struck the Nile, and go."<sup>6</sup> Behold, I will stand before*

*you there on the rock at Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink.” And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel.<sup>7</sup> He named the place Massah and Meribah because of the quarrel of the sons of Israel, and because they tested the LORD, saying, “Is the LORD among us, or not?” (NASB).*

If this incident at Rephidim was both a provocation and a trial for God because they put God to the test whether He was indeed able to relieve them of thirst, what about 38 years later when He was similarly provoked and tested by the same Israelites, again, on account of thirst? If in the first case their young faith could be excused, what about now? Yahweh was so provoked Aaron and Moses were the unexpected casualties of His anger:

<sup>8</sup> *“Take the rod; and you and your brother Aaron assemble the congregation and speak to the rock before their eyes, that it may yield its water. You shall thus bring forth water for them out of the rock and let the congregation and their beasts drink.”<sup>9</sup> So Moses took the rod from before the LORD, just as He had commanded him;<sup>10</sup> and Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly before the rock. And he said to them, “Listen now, you rebels; shall we bring forth water for you out of this rock?”<sup>11</sup> Then Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock [which he was supposed to speak to!] twice with his rod; and water came forth abundantly, and the congregation and their beasts drank.<sup>12</sup> But the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, “Because you have not believed Me, to treat Me as holy in the sight of the sons of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them.”<sup>13</sup> Those were the waters of Meribah, because the sons of Israel contended with the LORD, and He proved Himself holy among them” (Num 20:8-13 NASB).*

In accordance with the death sentence pronounced on both Moses and Aaron for the trial and contention at the waters of Meribah, Aaron died on Mount Hor (Num. 20:24-29) and later Moses on *Mount Nebo* where he had a bird’s eye view of the Promised Land from the summit *Pisgah* and then died there (Deut. 32:48-52, 34:1-8; see also Num. 27:12-20).

By now, *Massah* and *Meribah* had come to epitomize Israel’s rebellious spirit against God, and He never spared the opportunity to remind Israel of their stubborn attitude with reference to *Massah* and *Meribah*. We read in the following scriptures:

*Deut. 6:16:*

*You shall not put the LORD your God to the test, as you tested Him at Massah.*

*Deut. 9:22*

*Again at Taberah and at Massah and at Kibroth-hattaavah you provoked the LORD to wrath (NASB).*

As Moses pronounced his last blessings on the tribes of Israel, He said of Levi:

*“Let Your Thummim and Your Urim belong to Your godly man,  
Whom You proved at Massah,  
With whom You contended at the waters of Meribah” (Deut. 33:8 NASB).*

*Ps 81:7:*

*You called in trouble and I rescued you; I answered you in the hiding place of thunder;  
I proved you at the waters of Meribah (NASB).*

*Massah and Meribah had become the byword for Israel’s rebelliousness which involved provoking and testing God. But the mother of all Massah and Meribah provocations was the flagrant display of a complete lack of faith in God’s ability to lead them to the Promised Land as recalled by Moses in Deut. 1:19-39:*

*<sup>19</sup> Then we set out from Horeb and went through all that great and terrifying wilderness that you saw, on the way to the hill country of the Amorites, as the LORD our God commanded us. And we came to Kadesh-barnea.*

*<sup>20</sup> And I said to you, ‘You have come to the hill country of the Amorites, which the LORD our God is giving us.*

*<sup>21</sup> See, the LORD your God has set the land before you. Go up, take possession, as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has told you. Do not fear or be dismayed.’*

*<sup>22</sup> Then all of you came near me and said, ‘Let us send men before us, that they may explore the land for us and bring us word again of the way by which we must go up and the cities into which we shall come.’*

*<sup>23</sup> The thing seemed good to me, and I took twelve men from you, one man from each tribe.*

*<sup>24</sup> And they turned and went up into the hill country, and came to the Valley of Eshcol and spied it out.*

*<sup>25</sup> And they took in their hands some of the fruit of the land and brought it down to us, and brought us word again and said, ‘It is a good land that the LORD our God is giving us.’*

*<sup>26</sup> Yet you would not go up, but rebelled against the command of the LORD your God.*

*<sup>27</sup> And you murmured in your tents and said, ‘Because the LORD hated us He has brought us out of the land of Egypt, to give us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us.*

*<sup>28</sup> Where are we going up? Our brothers have made our hearts melt, saying, ‘The people are greater and taller than we. The cities are great and fortified up to heaven. And besides, we have seen the sons of the Anakim there.’*

*<sup>29</sup> Then I said to you, ‘Do not be in dread or afraid of them.*

*<sup>30</sup> The LORD your God who goes before you will Himself fight for you, just as He did for you in Egypt before your eyes,*

*<sup>31</sup> and in the wilderness, where you have seen how the LORD your God carried you, as a man carries his son, all the way that you went until you came to this place.’*

*<sup>32</sup> Yet in spite of this word you did not believe the LORD your God,*

*<sup>33</sup> who went before you in the way to seek you out a place to pitch your tents, in fire by night and in the cloud by day, to show you by what way you should go.*

*<sup>34</sup> ‘And the LORD heard your words and was angered, and He swore,*



<sup>35</sup> 'Not one of these men of this evil generation shall see the good land that I swore to give to your fathers,

<sup>36</sup> *'except Caleb the son of Jephunneh. He shall see it, and to him and to his children I will give the land on which he has trodden, because he has wholly followed the LORD!'*

<sup>37</sup> *'Even with me the LORD was angry on your account and said, 'You also shall not go in there.*

<sup>38</sup> *'Joshua the son of Nun, who stands before you, he shall enter. Encourage him, for he shall cause Israel to inherit it.*

<sup>39</sup> *'And as for your little ones, who you said would become a prey, and your children, who today have no knowledge of good or evil, they shall go in there. And to them I will give it, and they shall possess it' (ESV).*

It was a dreadful pronouncement. A whole generation sentenced to die for one act of disobedience? Was God being overly harsh? Not when you know the ways of God. He puts incalculable value on the loyalty of hearts!

As we learn further in the Book of Hebrews, God's decision to condemn the people to death in the wilderness was not made on impulse in a fit of anger! He boiled with anger at that whole generation of Israelites, because, as the searcher of all hearts (1 Chron. 28:9; Jer. 17:10; Ps. 44:21), He had thorough knowledge of their inner disposition and the hidden inclinations of their hearts. And it was not a cursory observation or a hunch (although as God He's all-knowing); it was an observation made over time. The spiritual state of the Israelites was beyond redemption; their inner self was corrupt and alienated from God (see Deut. 9:24). Thus He said of them: "They always go astray in their hearts; they have not known My ways" (Heb. 3:10 *ESV*).

The errant disposition of their hearts manifested in behaviours which showed that they did not know the ways of God. In a display of a profound understanding of the spiritual malady of the then Israelites, the Psalmist describes them as "a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation whose heart was not steadfast, whose spirit was not faithful to God" (Ps 78:8 *ESV*). It was a deep-rooted problem born of their fundamental nature. Their will would not surrender to God's will; their will was on a collision course with His!

Things had come to a head: God's wrath solidified into a vow of condemnation, "They shall not enter My rest" (Heb. 3:11).

What are the lessons for us New Testament believers, "the brethren" being addressed now (v.12)?

The first lesson is that we need to guard our hearts against degenerating into "an evil, unbelieving heart" (the main flaw of the Israelites) because it will certainly cause us to 'fall away from the living God' (v. 12).

A credible approach to this is mutual exhortation on a daily basis—the essence of the ‘today’ in the call to heed His voice—with the result that none of us will be “hardened by the deceitfulness of sin” (Heb. 3:13).

As believers, the ideal occasion for us to engage in this mutual exhortation is at our formal meetings where the Word is shared and prayers are held. For anyone serious about safeguarding his heart from being “hardened by the deceitfulness of sin”, he must not neglect the meeting of the saints “as the manner of some *is*; but exhorting *one another*: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching” (Heb. 10:25). Indeed, we have an obligation to build each other up in our “most holy faith” through prayers in the Holy Ghost and the protective power of the love of God, as we wait for the Lord Jesus to give us eternal life in His mercy (Jude 1:20-21). Considering that the community of believers serves as a buffer against ungodly influences, you only expose your heart to “the deceitfulness of sin” if you neglect the companionship of fellow believers in preference to unbelievers. We are warned in 2 Cor. 6:

<sup>14</sup> *Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?*

<sup>15</sup> *And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?*

<sup>16</sup> *And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.*

<sup>17</sup> *Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you,*

<sup>18</sup> *And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be My sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty (vv.14-18).*

“Yoked together” is a strong expression denoting a close inseparable unity, the state of being joined together as if with a yoke. But then, it’s “unequally yoked”. It’s a flawed joining to begin with—because the whole relationship is an inappropriate one; it’s an unnatural union that shouldn’t have been!

“Unequally yoked together” is an image the Apostle Paul borrowed from Deut. 22:10 where God prohibits the yoking together of two different kinds of animals for ploughing purposes. The two are not natural companions; they are not of the same kind and therefore any resulting union is that of two un-equals. Hence ‘what meaningful fellowship can a righteous person possibly have with an unrighteous person?’ The two are as different from each other as light is from darkness and Christ is from Belial, the devil.

In other words, if you could persuade light to have partnership with darkness and Christ with Belial, then you may associate with the unrighteous unbeliever! However, know that, as long as you separate yourself from unbelievers and therefore do not touch the unclean things they handle, you are the temple of the Living God in which He lives and walks. God’s solemn promise to you is that He will be a Father to you and you will be His child.

The holy God has set the condition for His relationship with His people: separate yourself from the sinful unbelievers, and I will make you My dwelling place. If you understand the implications, you will not put a *mismatched relationship* with unbelievers (be they relatives, coworkers, school mates, or neighbours) before God for anything in the world. Surely, you will not want to risk being an enemy of God for the sake of friendship with the world (Jam. 4:4). Will you? Apart from jeopardizing your relationship with God, participating in the ungodly social life of unbelievers (1 Pet. 4:1-4) is a recipe for self-destruction, since “bad company ruins good morals” (1 Cor. 15:33 *ESV*).

But much more than that, you will cease becoming a partner with Christ. And that is what makes the call to congregate regularly for mutual exhortation all-important beyond the benefits of Christian camaraderie: We are sharers in Christ only if we hold our original confidence in Him firm to the end (Heb 3:14)—especially while it’s still being said: “Today if you hear His voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation” (v. 15).

The reminder not to harden our hearts is worth repeating because the basic cause of all the rebellion of the Israelites was that even though they “heard” on being led out of Egypt by Moses, they rebelled—they failed to keep their hearts from being hardened to the voice of God (Heb. 3:16). The result was that God was angry with them for forty years—a reaction which sin would inevitably provoke. Consequently, they suffered the sentence of death in the wilderness (v. 17), because God swore in His wrath that they would not enter His rest for their disobedience (v.18 *RV*), done in tandem with “unbelief” (v. 19).

So, how should we respond to the words of His “voice” at this time of the New Covenant?

Hebrews chapter four tells us how:

While His promise of entering His rest still stands (just as His voice is still heard today), the right attitude from us is to “fear lest we fail to reach it” (4:1). This is because the gospel message that has been preached to us was the same message preached to the disobedient Israelites, except that, in their case, what they heard proved unbeneficial to them because it was not united with faith (v. 2).

Otherwise those of us who believe the message we hear do enter His rest regardless of the vow made in His anger not to give them rest, “although His works were finished from the foundation of the world” (v. 3).

So then, the negative promise of not allowing the disobedient into His rest connotes a tacit positive promise of rest for the obedient, given that the promised rest was finished from the foundation of the world.

Only we must not forget to “fear”; we must consistently have the mind to reverence the “voice” promising us rest. This is not satanic fear which leads to bondage (Rom. 8:15; 2 Tim. 1:7; Heb. 2:15) but godly fear which produces faith by which the “voice” is believed and obeyed. The

Apostle Paul wrote to the brethren in Philippi: “Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12).

So, do you “fear” the voice? If so, you are blessed, for faith and obedience will surely follow leading you into God’s rest. Prov. 28:14 says, “Happy is the man that feareth always: but he that hardeneth his heart shall fall into mischief”.

The man who “fears always” in a godly way is the man God looks to reward with rest—because he trembles at His Word:

<sup>1</sup>*Thus saith the LORD, The heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool: where is the house that ye build unto Me? and where is the place of My rest?*

<sup>2</sup>*For all those things hath Mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the LORD: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at My word (Isa. 66:1-2).*

The word translated “tremble” comes from the Hebrew word *chârêd* (Strong’s 2730) and means “*fearful; reverential: - afraid, trembling*”. It denotes an unquestioning readiness to obey the Word in a spirit of reverence; it’s a mind so eager to please God it dares not contemplate disobedience! Rather, it trembles to obey!

Can the same be said of you? Do you tremble at the Word with a view to believing and obeying it? Or, like the ancient Israelites, does your inner disposition remain adamant to it on ‘hearing’ it? Will God see in you a heart that always strays from His will, or a heart that is agreeable to His will? Is your spirit faithful to Him? Do you trust God in the secrecy of your heart?

You can never hide your true feelings from God. Your very breath (Heb. ‘*ruach*’= spirit/breath) is His lamp by which He searches all your innermost being (Prov. 20:27). Therefore know for certain that if your heart is not right with God, He will reject you as He rejected such ones under the Old Covenant. Disobedience and unbelief cannot be held back; they will inevitably rear up their ugly heads!

The tenor of the message of Hebrews under discussion clearly indicates that all the transgressions which invited instant punishment from God in the Old Testament still remain punishable in the sight of God; the only difference is that this time the ‘death sentences’ have been deferred to the last great day of judgment when all shall appear before Christ’s “great white throne” of judgment to be judged for every evil and secret deed done with the body (Eccl. 12:13-14; Rom. 2:13 & 16; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 20:11-15). That’s why we are warned in Heb. 2:1-4:

<sup>1</sup>Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip.

<sup>2</sup> For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward;

<sup>3</sup> How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard Him;

<sup>4</sup> God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to His own will?

The warning not to harden our hearts at the “voice” of Christ is as relevant today as when it came to the then Hebrew Christians in danger of apostasy (see Heb. 10:32-35; 12:3, 12-13). The message of repentance “first” spoken by Christ in Mark 1:14-15 is the same message He bequeathed to and authorized His immediate followers to preach. And He bore witness to it with signs and wonders to authenticate and identify the message as His own.

In other words, Christ has not done speaking! The signs and wonders which still accompany the preaching of the true gospel is the evidence that His “voice” is still heard! However, the big question staring us in the face is this: “How shall we escape if we neglect (deliberately ignore) so great salvation” being His “voice”, His message?

In Heb. 10:26-31 we read:

<sup>26</sup> For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins,

<sup>27</sup> But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.

<sup>28</sup> He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses [Deut 17:6]:

<sup>29</sup> Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?

<sup>30</sup> For we know Him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto Me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge His people.

<sup>31</sup> It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

That a ‘certain fiery judgment awaits all wilful sinners’ in this New Testament era of greater grace is proof that those who have rejected the leading of the Spirit and so live in disobedience face condemnation just as their Old Testament counterparts faced. They also serve a “ministry of condemnation”. So don’t delude yourself; unless you allow the Spirit to empower you to obey His “voice” being His commandments, be certain that God will visit His wrath upon you:

<sup>3</sup> But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints.

<sup>4</sup> *Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving.*

<sup>5</sup> *For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.*

<sup>6</sup> *Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience” (Eph. 5:3-6 ESV).*

Strictly speaking, it’s incongruous and anachronistic to be described as ‘a disobedient New Covenant follower of God’, but it does happen—it is true of the supposed New Covenant adherent who has rejected the Spirit. Otherwise, it’s all glory for all Spirit-filled New Covenant believers as evidenced in the lives of the apostles and the vast majority of the Biblical New Testament saints. While Old Testament giants like David, Aaron and Solomon stumbled over such sins as fornication and idolatry, the New Testament scriptures carry not one report of such vices in the post-conversion lives of the apostles and the majority of the church membership.

The New Covenant, whereby “true worshippers worship the Father in spirit and in truth” (John 4:21-24), is truly “the ministry of righteousness”. The instrument of that righteousness is Christ, the Spirit, at work in the “true worshippers:

<sup>9</sup> *You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Him.*

<sup>10</sup> *But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness” (Rom. 8:9-10 ESV).*

Christ, the Spirit, is the Redeemer who has saved us from our sins (Matt. 1:21) by His grace through our faith and created us anew to do “good works” which “God foreordained that we should walk [i.e. be occupied with] in them” (Eph. 2:8-10). That is to say, in re-creating us in His likeness of righteousness and holiness (Eph. 4:24), Christ put righteousness in our being; He designed for us for “good works” or righteousness, being the evidence of His salvation work in us. Little wonder, we are supposed to be “zealous of good works” (Tit. 2:14); that is, enthusiastic, or keen about doing them. It’s a natural reflection of our new essence received from Christ, or we are not His product or “workmanship”, His *carbon copy*! (See Gal. 4:19).

This is the glorious nature of the New Covenant ministry of righteousness where, as we tremble at His Word, “God works in us both to **will** [i.e. prefer, be inclined or disposed to, wish, love,] and to **do** [or work] for His good pleasure (Phil. 2:12-13). Christ in us is surely “the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27)!

### **A Ministry without Veil: the Ever Glowing Glory of the New Covenant**

The point has already been made that the New Covenant possesses greater glory than the Old Covenant in both duration and brightness. But what does this greater glory specifically mean for the Spirit-led New Testament believer?

It means being more and more like Christ in His glorious character.

But how is this accomplished? How does the New Covenant make us progressively Christ-like?

The Apostle Paul explains the process in the concluding verses of 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians chapter 3. In doing so, he basically answers the question, ‘what has been the impact of the New Covenant in the light of its greater glory?’

The overall effect of the New Covenant “ministry of the Spirit” and of “righteousness” is that because it inspires the hope of a permanent glory (vv. 11-12), it produces great boldness in New Testament believers unlike Moses, who out of fear of the Israelites seeing the glory fade and vanish away, veiled his face (v. 13).

The Old Testament ministry was never an end in itself; it always anticipated the more glorious New Covenant ministry of the Spirit. And all the prophets from Moses down lived in expectancy of that immensely glorious era. Moses himself prophesied: “The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto Him ye shall hearken” (Deut. 18:15; cp John 1:21, 25; 45; 6:14). This greater Prophet is Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ) (Acts 3:21-26). He is the originator of the New Covenant ministry of the Spirit (Matt. 26:28; Luke 22:20) which possesses greater grace and greater glory—as the Spirit of the Messiah in the Old Testament prophets had all along indicated:

*<sup>10</sup> As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful searches and inquiries, <sup>11</sup> seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow. <sup>12</sup> It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things into which angels long to look (1 Pet. 1:10-12 NASB).*

Although some believers feel some kind of nostalgia for the Old Testament because most of the phenomena of miracles and divine manifestations were more physical rather than spiritual, the truth is that New Covenant era is a much more wonderful time to worship God.

And it’s all because the veil has been removed. Unlike Moses who needed to veil his face in speaking to the Israelites lest they see the fading glory of his face, all true believers in Christ have the veil, symbolic of spiritual blindness or dullness, taken away from their minds (2 Cor. 3:13-14 & 16). That “the veil” is still on the hearts of unbelieving Jews explains why they lack the ability to understand the spiritual import of the Old Testament scriptures to this day (v. 15).

No wonder Jesus said to the Jews of His day, “Did not Moses give you the Law, and yet none of you carries out the Law? Why do you seek to kill Me?” (John 7:19 NASB; cp 5:46-47). Standing before the Sanhedrin on a false charge of blasphemy (Acts 6:8-14), Stephen also lambasted them:

<sup>51</sup> *Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye.*

<sup>52</sup> *Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers:*

<sup>53</sup> *Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it (Acts 7:51-53).*

But how is the veil taken away from people's hearts? *One only has to turn to the Lord*, just like how Moses removed his veil whenever he turned from the people to speak to the LORD (Ex. 34:32-35), and the veil is removed (2 Cor. 3:16).

Although the "veil" in question patently refers to the face veil Moses used to cover his shining face when he descended from Mount Sinai so the Israelites could come near him, there's another kind of veil which has also been removed to grant God's people greater access to divine glory! That veil is the veil of the Temple separating the holy place of the Temple from the Holy of Holies.

Back in the early days of Israel's sojourn in the wilderness, God had instructed Moses:

<sup>31</sup> *And you shall make a veil of blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen. It shall be made with cherubim skillfully worked into it.*

<sup>32</sup> *And you shall hang it on four pillars of acacia overlaid with gold, with hooks of gold, on four bases of silver.*

<sup>33</sup> *And you shall hang the veil from the clasps, and bring the ark of the testimony in there within the veil. And the veil shall separate for you the Holy Place from the Most Holy.*

<sup>34</sup> *You shall put the mercy seat on the ark of the testimony in the Most Holy Place" (Ex. 26:31-34 ESV).*

This was the veil (replicated in Solomon's temple, 2 Chron. 3:14) that was torn from top to bottom when Yeshua Messiah died on the cross:

*And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up His spirit.*

*And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split (Matt. 27:50-51 ESV).*

The miraculous tearing of the veil "from top to bottom" symbolized the appearance of Yeshua's Spirit in the Holy of holies in heaven as He yielded up the ghost on the cross. At that moment He appeared before the Father with the blood tokens of our redemption paid in full with His holy blood:

<sup>11</sup> *But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building;*

<sup>12</sup> *Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by His own blood He entered in once into the holy place [in heaven], having obtained eternal redemption for us.*



<sup>13</sup> For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh:

<sup>14</sup> How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Heb. 9:11-14; cp Rev. 5:6-9).

<sup>22</sup> And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission.

<sup>23</sup> It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.

<sup>24</sup> For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us:

<sup>25</sup> Nor yet that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others;

<sup>26</sup> For then must He often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself (Heb. 9:22-26; cp Lam. 3:44).

By this ever efficacious Blood, believers spiritually have access to God's throne room, the holiest place there is—which under the Old Covenant only the high priest could enter once a year (Heb. 9:6-8) and that in the earthly, not heavenly tabernacle—by “a new and living way”, that is through His flesh (Heb. 10:19-22).

As a Spirit-filled New Covenant believer, therefore, you should have boldness to approach God on His throne of grace in the throne room of heaven to petition Him for your needs, unlike Aaron's annual cautious entry into the holy of holies:

*The LORD spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they drew near before the LORD and died, and the LORD said to Moses, ‘Tell Aaron your brother not to come at any time into the Holy Place inside the veil, before the mercy seat that is on the ark, so that he may not die. For I will appear in the cloud over the mercy seat’ (Lev 16:1-2 ESV).*

In effect, Christ has done away with two veils of the Old Covenant producing two glorious outcomes: (1) an unhindered appreciation and application of the spiritual Law given at Sinai and (2) an unhindered access to the holy of holies in heaven.

BUT ONLY IF ONE TURNS TO THE LORD. This is because the removal of the veil is done by the Spirit who is the Lord Himself—the Lord in whose Presence Moses took off the veil whenever he turned to speak with Him. He is the Spirit who grants people freedom [from spiritually having a veil on their heart and thus able to gaze at the glory] (2 Cor. 3:17).

So have you turned to Christ, the Spirit?

Repentance is the first step. When we respond to God’s call to repentance, we “turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God” (Acts 26:18, 20). In the process, God delivers us from the kingdom of darkness and transfers into the kingdom of His dear Son (Col. 1:12-13).

In short, to turn to the Lord is to turn our backs on the world and its sins and evil pleasures so that we may focus on Christ, the Spirit, and His spiritual things. Again, we have an example in Moses. He chose to throw in his lot with the suffering people of God rather than live the ungodly, affluent life of a prince of Egypt:

*By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season;*

*Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward (Heb. 11:24-26).*

From the moment we turn to the Lord, the Spirit, our way of living changes from life in the flesh to life in the Spirit—just as Moses experienced when he turned to the Lord, the Spirit!

As clear proof of his life in the Spirit, Moses fasted for forty days and forty nights apiece (making a total of 80 days and 80 nights) on the two occasions he communed with Yahweh (*the Christ*, Acts 7:30-32, Deut. 4:12-13; Ex. 23:20-23; Isa. 63:9) on Mount Sinai to receive the “fiery law” from His hand for Israel (Ex. 24:18; 34:27-29; Deut. 9:9-10:5; 33:2).

Moses didn’t receive the Ten Commandment Law from God by means of the flesh. But sadly the same could not be said of the people who were supposed to keep a law received by means of the Spirit. While he fasted, the Israelites partied and engaged in “works of the flesh” (Ex. 32:1-6; 1 Cor. 10:7; Gal. 5:19-21). Is it surprising that they broke the law before Moses even brought it down to them? (Ex. 32:7-9).

The Apostle Paul states the underlying reason concisely in 1 Cor. 2:14: “A person who isn't spiritual doesn't accept the things of God's Spirit, for they are nonsense to him. He can't understand them because they are spiritually evaluated” (*ISV*). As a direct consequence of this, such a fellow can in no way please God, who is Spirit: “Those who are in the flesh cannot please God” (Rom. 8:8 *ESV*).

The only exceptions are those who turn to the Lord, the Spirit—a blazing Spirit who enjoys a prolonged, close fellowship with only those in the Spirit:

<sup>15</sup> *And Moses went up into the mount, and a cloud covered the mount.*

<sup>16</sup> *And the glory of the LORD abode upon Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days: and the seventh day He called unto Moses out of the midst of the cloud.*

<sup>17</sup> *And the sight of the glory of the LORD was like devouring fire on the top of the mount in the eyes of the children of Israel.*

<sup>18</sup> *And Moses went into the midst of the cloud, and gat him up into the mount: and Moses was in the mount forty days and forty nights (Ex. 24:15-18; cp. vv. 9-14).*

So then, we need to sustain the spiritual life we entered into when we initially turned to “the Lord, the Spirit” through repentance. In either Testament, none of the people who ever saw God was in the flesh. Daniel was fasting by the Tigris River when he saw the pre-incarnate Christ in a vision (Dan. 10:3-9; cp Rev. 1:10-17; 19:12); Ezekiel saw the glory of God by the river *Chebar* (apparently while praying and fasting there) when “the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God” (Ezek. 1); Isaiah also saw the “Glory” through the only means possible—in the Spirit (Isa. 6; John 12:41); Paul (modestly referring to himself as “a man I know”) saw visions of God because he was a man of the Spirit (2 Cor. 12:1-9; Gal. 1:15-18). In Revelation, John declares, “And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and One sat on the throne” (Rev. 4:1-2; 1:10).

So, that’s the culture; that is the way it’s done. If you have turned to “the Lord, the Spirit”, you must be in the Spirit; you must continue to live in the Spirit through a life of righteousness and fasting-prayer after having experienced the baptism of the Spirit at conversion. Have absolutely no confidence in the flesh: “... we are the circumcision who worship God in the spirit and rejoice in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh” (Phil. 3:3 MKJV).

But why is life in the Spirit of such crucial importance?

The reason is simple: We have freedom to see the Glory as long as we abide in the Spirit—for “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty” (2 Cor. 3:17b)!

Otherwise, we will have eyes but won’t be able to see. The “Mysteries of the Kingdom” are given to only the true disciples of Christ because they are in the Spirit, having turned to the Master, the Spirit:

<sup>10</sup> *And the disciples came, and said unto Him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables?*

<sup>11</sup> *He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given.*

<sup>12</sup> *For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath.*

<sup>13</sup> *Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand.*

<sup>14</sup> *And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive:*

<sup>15</sup> *For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.*

<sup>16</sup> *But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear.*

<sup>17</sup> *For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.*

<sup>18</sup> *Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower (Matt. 13:10-18).*

The veil has been removed. Our faces have been unveiled by the Spirit of the Lord; therefore, true believers freely behold the glory of the Lord as if looking in a mirror, with the result that we are being transformed into His glorious likeness by the Lord who is the Spirit from one degree of glory to another (v. 18). In contrast to the transient glory of Moses' face!

The whole purpose of the covenant is to instill in us the character of God, but that won't happen immediately but gradually as we yield to the leading and discipline of the Spirit through obedience to His Word. The Apostle Peter wrote:

*But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To Him be glory both now and for ever. Amen (2 Pet. 3:18).*

In Jam. 1:22-25 we read:

<sup>22</sup> *But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.*

<sup>23</sup> *For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror.*

<sup>24</sup> *For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like.*

<sup>25</sup> *But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing (Jam. 1:22-25 ESV).*

What is the apostle trying to put across?

All he is saying is that we engage with the Word to do it, or else we deceive ourselves if we are content with just hearing it. This is because when we hear (or read) the Word, the Word, like a mirror, shows us an exact portrait of the righteous life we will live if we obey it. Hence by limiting ourselves to just hearing the Word rather than doing it, we fail to retain that image of godliness portrayed by the Word in our lives. In effect, we forget what the Word portrayed of us as prospective doers of it and thus miss the very purpose for which we listened to the Word in the first place.

The beneficial approach is, therefore, to persevere in conforming to the godly image the Word—the “perfect law” of God—paints of all its disciples in return for a reward—a reward of blessing!

Being God-like in character is the reason for the “holy, righteous, and good law” of God (Rom. 7:12), the terms of the covenant. But the enabling power is the Spirit; the instrument of our

transformation into the divine image is Christ, the Spirit. Hence “For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:18b *ESV*).

If so, any attempt to keep the Law of the Covenant without the Spirit is an exercise in futility. This was the missing component under the Old Covenant dispensation but has now been supplied under New Covenant dispensation of the Spirit:

<sup>1</sup> *There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.*

<sup>2</sup> *For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.*

<sup>3</sup> *For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh:*

<sup>4</sup> *That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.*

<sup>5</sup> *For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit (Rom. 8:1-5).*

And the Ten Commandment Law (which is distinct from the abolished law of animal sacrifices and circumcision, 1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 7: 19; Col. 2: 14; Eph. 2: 15; Rom. 2:28-29; Gal. 5; Heb. 9: 12; 10: 1-4) is a “thing of the Spirit”. “For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin” (Rom 7:14). So then, under the New Covenant, you either have the Spirit or forget about being a party to the covenant. The Spirit is the natural ally of the Law—commandments spoken by the Lord, the Spirit, out of the midst of fire (Deut. 4:32-33)!

The Transfiguration of Jesus witnessed by Peter, James and John on the mountain is a vivid portrayal of the *glorious image* of the Lord we are destined to be transformed into, as the Spirit works on our hearts transforming us from within so we will conform to the *righteous image* of God contained in the Law of His covenant. The transfigured Christ glowed with full glory from head to sole:

<sup>1</sup> *And after six days Jesus took with Him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves.*

<sup>2</sup> *And He was transfigured before them, and His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became white as light.*

<sup>3</sup> *And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with Him.*

<sup>4</sup> *And Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah."*

<sup>5</sup> *He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to Him (Matt. 17:1-5 *ESV*).*

The three disciples had a glimpse of Christ's glorious post-Resurrection body. This was the same glorious appearance the Apostle John saw on the island of Patmos while "in the Spirit" on Christ's holy Sabbath day (Mark 2:27-28; Isa. 58:13):

<sup>10</sup> *I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet,*

<sup>11</sup> *Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea.*

<sup>12</sup> *And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks;*

<sup>13</sup> *And in the midst of the seven candlesticks One like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle.*

<sup>14</sup> *His head and His hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and His eyes were as a flame of fire;*

<sup>15</sup> *And His feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters.*

<sup>16</sup> *And He had in His right hand seven stars: and out of His mouth went a sharp twoedged sword: and His countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.*

<sup>17</sup> *And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. And He laid His right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last:*

<sup>18</sup> *I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death (Rev. 1:10-18).*

Here, the focus has shifted from 'image' in the sense of character to 'image' in the sense of appearance or form. But there's still a link—without having His righteous character which comes from His Spirit in making us conformable to His Law, we will not have His glorious body. This is the truth the Apostle John draws our attention to in 1 John 3:

<sup>1</sup> *Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God [in that we have His character, Heb. 12:9-11, 1 John 2:29]: therefore the world knoweth us not [in our present form], because it knew Him not [in His human form].*

<sup>2</sup> *Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, WHEN HE SHALL APPEAR, WE SHALL BE LIKE HIM; for we shall see Him as He is.*

<sup>3</sup> *AND EVERY MAN THAT HATH THIS HOPE IN HIM [of transformation into His likeness] PURIFIES HIMSELF, EVEN AS HE IS PURE.*

<sup>4</sup> *Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.*

<sup>5</sup> *And ye know that He was manifested to take away our sins; and in Him is no sin.*

<sup>6</sup> *Whosoever abideth in Him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen Him, neither known Him" (vv. 1-6 Emphasis mine).*

How to keep ourselves "pure" so we will have His likeness when He does appear has been made PLAIN in the passage: it's by **not** transgressing the Law of God, an act which constitutes sin. In fact, for anyone who aspires to be "pure" like Him that is the logical thing to do, since (1) He came to the earth to take away our sins (i.e. our transgressions of the law, Matt. 1:21; John

1:29; Isa. 53:5-6), and (2) He has no sin in Himself (John 8:46; Heb. 4:15; 1 Pet. 2:22). Because of the foregoing reasons, anyone who lives in spiritual union with Him cannot go on sinning; otherwise, he shows by his sinful deeds that he has neither seen Him nor known Him (who is pure because He is sinless).

Beloved, have you purified yourself by His grace because you keep His commandments (Tit. 2:11-12)?

If yes, you are a sure candidate for His glorious, spiritual body. He was made a “life-giving Spirit” as “the last Adam” to ensure we are raised in power in His imperishable, spiritual body—described as the “image of the Man of heaven”:

<sup>41</sup> *There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory.*

<sup>42</sup> *So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable.*

<sup>43</sup> *It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power.*

<sup>44</sup> *It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.*

<sup>45</sup> *Thus it is written, ‘The first man Adam became a living being’; the last Adam became a life-giving Spirit.*

<sup>46</sup> *But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual.*

<sup>47</sup> *The first man [Adam] was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man [Christ] is from heaven.*

<sup>48</sup> *As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven.*

<sup>49</sup> *Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.*

<sup>50</sup> *I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable” (1 Cor. 15:41-50 ESV).*

The “image of the Man of heaven” is borne not by means of the flesh but by means of the Spirit. Hence “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable”.

Again, that is the way of the New Covenant. It emphasizes Spirit-generated obedience leading to our transformation into Christ’s image. In contrast, the Old Covenant—marked by fruitless efforts to obey by the flesh—has faded away: “In speaking of a new covenant, He makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away” (Heb. 8:13 *ESV*).

What has taken its place is *spontaneous obedience* generated by the indwelling Spirit. We read in the following scriptures:

*But regarding brotherly love, you do not need that I write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another (1 Thess. 4:9 MKJV).*

*But the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as His anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true and no lie, and as He has taught you, abide in Him (1 John 2:27 MKJV).*

Here, it's God stimulating obedience and compliance with His will—just as He promised to do in prophecies given to Jeremiah and other prophets concerning...

### **An Everlasting New Covenant**

In Jer. 32, Yahweh promises to make “an everlasting covenant” with His people Israel—a covenant which will *never be broken*—because He would personally guarantee the obedience of the people. With such a covenant, what outcome could we expect? The results are simply marvellous, as God fulfills His side of the covenant to the fullest:

<sup>39</sup> *And I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear Me for ever, for the good of them, and of their children after them:*

<sup>40</sup> *And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put MY FEAR in their hearts, that they shall not depart from Me.*

<sup>41</sup> *Yea, I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will plant them in this land assuredly with My whole heart and with My whole soul.*

<sup>42</sup> *For thus saith the LORD; Like as I have brought all this great evil upon this people, so will I bring upon them all the good that I have promised them (Jer. 32:39-42).*

Since the fear of God is expressed through the keeping of His commandments and indeed is synonymous with them (Eccl. 12:13; Ps 111:10), God putting His fear in our hearts is the same as God putting His commandments in our hearts as is the case under the New Covenant. It's this singular act that makes the New Covenant “an everlasting covenant”, unlike the Old Covenant which lasted for some 1500 years (1491 BC – 31 AD) fraught with disobedience and its resultant punishments, including the uprooting of the ten-tribe northern Kingdom of Israel from the land (2 Kings 17:6-18) and the deportation of the southern Kingdom of Judah to Babylon years later (2 Chron. 36:11-21).

The wonderful nature of the New Covenant is best expressed by the LORD Himself: “I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put MY FEAR IN THEIR HEARTS, that they shall not depart from Me”.

The fear of Yahweh in the hearts of the people makes all the difference for both parties to the covenant: Because of it, God won't ever turn away from His people nor will His people depart from Him. His fear is in their hearts! That is the “one way” their hearts, united in a single grand



purpose, will wholeheartedly pursue: “And I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear Me for ever, for the good of them, and of their children after them”.

He insists in Jer. 24:6-7:

<sup>6</sup> *I will set My eyes on them for good, and I will bring them back to this land. I will build them up, and not tear them down; I will plant them, and not uproot them.*

<sup>7</sup> *I will give them a heart to know that I am the LORD, and they shall be My people and I will be their God, for they shall return to Me with their whole heart (ESV).*

In Ezekiel 37 God calls the everlasting New Covenant “a covenant of peace” in description of the harmonious relationship that would exist between a people who have His fear in their hearts and Himself as their God who delights to do them good because of their obedience:

<sup>26</sup> *Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them: and I will place them, and multiply them, and will set My sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore.*

<sup>27</sup> *My tabernacle also shall be with them: yea, I will be their God, and they shall be My people.*

<sup>28</sup> *And the heathen shall know that I the LORD do sanctify Israel, when My sanctuary shall be in the midst of them for evermore (Ezek. 37:26-28).*

Although the prophecy pertains more to the millennial age when the Messianic King David shall reign over all Israel (vv. 21-24), it is not completely divorced from the prevailing effects of the New Covenant. In fact, its promised blessings of peace and reconciliation with God flow from the new order ushered in by the New Covenant whereby we have peace and reconciliation with God through the blood of Christ (Rom. 5:10; Heb. 2:17; Col. 1:20-22). Moreover, we have been given His Holy Spirit to ensure that the peace and reconciliation we have with God is not jeopardized through disobedience: “Neither will I hide My face any more from them: for I have poured out My Spirit upon the house of Israel, saith the Lord GOD” (Ezek. 39:29).

This is the grand glory of the New Covenant. God is the capable Guarantor of the New Covenant who has made us capable of serving it by His Spirit of grace poured into our hearts. If we still fall short, God is in no way to blame; He has made the fullest provision for us to be New Covenant-compliant believers. The fault will be entirely ours—and all because of one thing: we will have closed our hearts to His voice and Spirit. He says in Prov. 1:23: “Turn you at My reproof: behold, I will pour out My Spirit unto you, I will make known My words unto you”.

Will you do so today so that He may pour out His Spirit upon you together with the Words of the everlasting covenant? (See Isa. 59:21). If the answer is yes, be assured that God is committed to operating in you to “make you perfect in every good work” through Jesus Christ:

*Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant,*

*Make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen” (Heb. 13:20-21).*

The blood that has obtained “eternal redemption” for us to the extent of cleansing even our conscience (Heb. 9:12-14) is eternally efficacious or the ‘redemption’ will not be ‘eternal’. This blood is “the blood of the everlasting covenant”—the blood by which the New Covenant was sealed and ratified (Mark 14:24). It is the blood that has secured freedom for us: “As for thee also, because of the blood of Thy covenant I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water” (Zech. 9:11 RV). Because of “the blood of the everlasting covenant”, God will cure every deficiency of ours so that, in doing His will, we will be fully equipped for every good work, which is actually His enabling power at work in us through Jesus Christ, “the Guarantor of a better covenant” (Heb. 7:22 *ESV*).

What more could the New Covenant believer wish for?

*In those days, and in that time, saith the LORD, the children of Israel shall come, they and the children of Judah together, going and weeping: they shall go, and seek the LORD their God. They shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward, saying, Come, and let us join ourselves to the LORD in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten (Jer. 50:4-5).*

### **Time to Claim Our Covenantal Promises**

With the Spirit empowering us to keep the covenant, *making it an unbroken, eternal covenant*, the time is ripe for us to come into the covenantal promises of God. Once we have kept our side of the terms of the covenant, God is obliged to fulfill His side of the covenant, made up of both spiritual and temporal promises of blessing, to us His “treasured possession”. He solemnly promises in Deut. 30:6-9:

<sup>6</sup> *And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live.*

<sup>7</sup> *And the LORD thy God will put all these curses upon thine enemies, and on them that hate thee, which persecuted thee.*

<sup>8</sup> *And thou shalt return and obey the voice of the LORD, and do all His commandments which I command thee this day.*

<sup>9</sup> *And the LORD thy God will make thee plenteous in every work of thine hand, in the fruit of thy body, and in the fruit of thy cattle, and in the fruit of thy land, for good: for the LORD will again rejoice over thee for good, as He rejoiced over thy fathers.*

The promised blessings are contingent on obedience, but that obedience is no longer dependent on man. God Himself causes us to obey the holy laws He has put in our heart through His Holy Spirit living within us. The spotlight is now on Him to fulfill His side of the covenant: “*you shall be a peculiar treasure to Me above all the nations; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation*”.

As God's 'special possession', God elevates His covenant people to a status unattainable by any other peoples: "a Kingdom of priests and a holy nation". Called "a chosen generation" in 1 Pet. 2:9, our main priestly duty is to declare "the praises" of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvellous light.

The Greek word (*arête* Strong's #703) translated "praises" could have just as rightly been translated "manliness (valor), excellence, a virtuous course of thought, feeling and action; virtue, moral goodness" (Strong's and Thayer's Greek Dictionaries). So then, when we declare His "praises", we declare His virtuous thoughts and actions towards us arising from the fulfilment of His covenantal promises to us.

What are some of these promises, the fulfilment of which manifests the excellence and moral goodness of God?

Deut. 28 mentions a set of blessings of a temporal kind promised to the faithful covenant people of God, followed by a list of curses pronounced on the disobedient. In the 'blessing section' of the chapter, Yahweh promises unmatched greatness for His faithful people arising from the blessings He will command on them (vv. 1-2, 8).

The blessings do not involve anything magical or extraordinary. They are mostly associated with our everyday, bread-and-butter means of making a living—but then with God's deliberate, active help and favour:

- Your work in the city as a trader or professional will be blessed; you will make good sales and you will never run out of customers (v. 3).
- Your work in the field as a farmer or hunter will be blessed; your crops will do well and you will have a bounty harvest and a good catch (v.3<sub>b</sub>; Lev. 26:3-4; cp Hag. 1:10-11).
- Your children will be blessed—healthy, brilliant children with bright prospects (v. 4).
- Your livestock will produce large, healthy offspring—not runts (v. 4<sub>b</sub>).
- Your farm produce will be healthy-looking and succulent (juicy & tasty) (v. 5).
- You will have all-round blessing: your everyday movements will be paved with blessing (v. 6; Isa. 48:17; Ps 37:23; Jer. 10:23).
- Because of God's abundant blessings in your life, do expect enemy attacks. But be assured that God has doomed your enemies to defeat and therefore they will flee from before you in panic—by "seven ways" (v. 7; Lev. 26:7-8).
- The successes in your life are not mere 'lucky breaks'—they are blessings deliberately commanded by God on your life (v. 8). He's the One who gives you "power to get wealth" (Deut. 8:18).

- The purpose of all His blessings in your life is to “establish you as a holy people to Himself” in accordance with His oath to you as an obedient, faithful covenant-keeper (v. 9).
- The secondary purpose is to make all the *non-covenant* peoples acknowledge you as a person identified with Yahweh, so they will stand in awe of you (v. 10; Lev. 26:9; Zech. 8:23).
- Being identified as such—a man or woman of Yah—is itself a further incentive for more and more blessings from Him (v. 11).
- As a covenant-keeper know that the LORD has a “rich treasury” in heaven—and all the largesse is for you, be it timely rain to water your crops or large enough money to lend to others (v. 12; Ps 31:19; Phil. 4:19; Deut. 11:11-15; cp Deut. 28:43-44).
- The overall effect of God’s abundant blessings in your life as a covenant-keeper is that you will be “the head and not the tail” (v. 13).

Such is your destiny as a covenant man and woman of God; it’s a destiny of success and blessing to hold God to as His covenantal obligation to you. And His essential character trait of faithfulness will ensure the fulfilment of His promises in your life. He said concerning His covenant with David:

*My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of My lips.  
Once have I sworn by My holiness that I will not lie unto David.  
His seed shall endure for ever, and his throne as the sun before Me (Ps 89:34-36).*

However, the fulfilment of God’s promises of earthly blessings is just a dress rehearsal of what He actually has in store for His covenant-keeping people. We read in 1 Cor. 2:9:

*But as it is written, ‘Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him’.*

In so far as the New Covenant is an “everlasting covenant”, it presupposes that we must have ETERNAL LIFE in order for God to be ETERNALLY OBLIGATED to doing us good forever. This is the reason for the ETERNAL STATE OF BLESSEDNESS promised us His ‘special possession’ in the ETERNAL KINGDOM of God. It’s God’s way of loving us forever, blessing us forever, and giving us glory forever—all in fulfilment of His everlasting covenant with us. In His eternal Kingdom, our status as a “kingdom of priests” or “royal priesthood” to Him will not be spiritual in nature as it’s now; we will literally be so:

*Rev. 5:9-10:  
And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation;*

*And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth” (cp 1:6).*

*Rev. 20:6:*

*Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.*

Our royal city as the king-priests of God will be the heavenly Jerusalem—that’s where our covenant-keeping God will lavish all His goodness on us:

<sup>1</sup> *And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.*

<sup>2</sup> *And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.*

<sup>3</sup> *And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God.*

<sup>4</sup> *And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.*

<sup>5</sup> *And He that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And He said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.*

<sup>6</sup> *And He said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely.*

<sup>7</sup> *He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be My son (Rev. 21:1-7).*

All in exchange for taking hold of His New Covenant, namely the everlasting covenant, through the Spirit. Will you do so today? The Spirit is eager to write the New Covenant on the fleshly tables of your heart if only you are willing:

*John 7:37-39:*

<sup>37</sup> *Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink.*

<sup>38</sup> *He that believeth on Me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.*

<sup>39</sup> *But this spake He of the Spirit, which they that believed on Him were to receive: for the Spirit was not yet given; because Jesus was not yet glorified” (RV).*

*Rev. 22:17:*

*And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And he that heareth, let him say, Come. And he that is athirst, let him come: he that will, let him take the water of life freely (RV).*

The New Covenant of the Spirit is the instrument of our divine glory; it is the means by which God formalizes His relationship with us on a permanent basis. “I will be their God, and they shall be My people”.

Dear reader, you cannot afford to walk away from the everlasting New Covenant of the Spirit. The power to keep it does not depend on your human strength but comes from the Lord, the Spirit. You only have to be willing to be led by Him (Rom. 8:14). The choice is entirely yours:

*I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live (Deut. 30:19).*

The Old Covenant “ministry of death/condemnation” is how the Law of God functions for those who are not in Christ, who have a spiritual veil over their hearts, and who fail to have God’s Spirit inscribe His “holy, righteous, and good” Law in their hearts.

In contrast, the New Covenant “ministry of the Spirit/righteousness” is how the Law of God functions for those who are in Christ, who have the veil over their hearts removed, and who have His Spirit inscribe His righteous Law in their hearts (Isa. 51:7). These live in the freedom (from disobedience and condemnation) He grants to all those who “walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit”.

You have no excuse not to “choose life” which comes from the New Covenant; the Spirit is your enabling partner: “By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you” (2 Tim. 1:14 ESV). The Lord, the Spirit, won’t fail you. Once you turn to Him, you will take hold of God’s covenant and live in His holy presence forever. He makes us capable ministers of the New Covenant through the power of His indwelling Spirit. Halleluiah!

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