



As in the days of Noah

By Andy Snoke

Mat 24:37-42, "But as the days of Noah, so also will be the coming of the Son of Man.

For as they were in the days before the flood: eating, and drinking, marrying, and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah went into the ark.

And they did not know until the flood came and took all away. So also will be the coming of the Son of Man.

At that time two will be out in the field; the one is taken away, and the one is left; two grinding at the mill; one is taken away, and one is left.

Watch, then, for you do not know in what hour your Lord comes."

The Lord gave us the example of Noah as a sign of the last days before and during His coming. The story of Noah has many very important lessons that we can learn from, in the setting evening light of this age, in anticipation of the Kingdom age.

The faith chapter of Hebrews 11, once again lists the example of Noah as a shining light for us to follow:

Heb 11:7, "Being divinely warned by God about the things not yet having been seen, moved with fear, by faith Noah prepared an ark for the salvation of his house; through which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness according to faith."

Let us examine the lessons from this important example of Noah.

Noah was obedient.

In these last days, as it was in Noah's day, God is calling out a body of

believers that are completely obedient to His will and calling. God warned Noah of the judgment to come and gave him specific, detailed instructions regarding the design and building of the ark.

Keep in mind, at that point in human history, it had never rained. A mist went up at night and watered the earth. Yet God is warning Noah of the judgment by water that is to come. This was a warning that really did not make sense, and was seemingly impossible. However, Noah chose to obey God regardless of how foolish the request seemed to be or how foolish he looked to those around him as he built this monstrosity on dry ground.

Noah was obedient in everything. In this hour, we are often called to do things that may seem foolish to those around us. However, God requires obedience.

We "ordain" working men as elders (shepherds) all around the world, in the midst of world full of professional preachers. We teach and practice "body ministry," in a day when Christian entertainment has ruled the largest congregations in the country. We teach systematic "tithing" in all countries and all cultures, in a day when men spend all and give little to the Lord. We teach the wearing of the "head covering" for the ladies as a "sign to the angels" as outlined in 1 Cor. 11, in a day when women want to rule in areas that God may not have called them to rule. We

teach "submission" to the 5 fold ministry as outlined in Eph 4:11, and to one another in a day when men want to be strictly independent with no "check and balances" in their midst.

All of these things, and other truths seem as foolish as building an Ark on dry ground, over a period of about 120 years, when it had never rained, in anticipation of the great flood.

But Noah was obedient. God must have and will have a people that are obedient.

Noah saved a remnant.

2 Pe 2:5, "And spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly;"

Noah was considered and called a "preacher of righteousness," however by the standards of today, he was not much of a preacher! He only saved eight souls! His wife, his three sons, their wives, and himself.

It is perfectly natural for men to think that the larger the numbers, the more successful something is. But God saved the world to come, by saving only eight souls from Noah's day. It was the eight that were completely obedient.

We cannot measure success by numbers. If we did, then we should all become Muslims and embrace the false teaching of Islam, which is the largest growing religion on the face of the earth with some 1.4 billion Muslims

filling the earth!

God has always worked thru a remnant. It is God's design and pattern to first call a Moses, then an Israel to Himself, and ultimately all of His creation.

Noah escaped judgment, and remained in the midst of it.

Noah was not "raptured." He remained in the midst of judgment yet escaped it all. Matt 24 contains some key verses that are often misunderstood:

Mat 24:39-41, "And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two [women shall be] grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left."

Where were the "one" from the field and the "one" grinding at the mill taken? Could it be that it will be "as in the days of Noah," one is taken in judgment while one escapes?

The scriptures proclaim that:

"Thou shalt not be afraid for the

terror by night; *nor* for the arrow *that* flieth by day;

Nor for the pestilence *that* walketh in darkness; *nor* for the destruction *that* wasteth at noonday.

A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; *but* it shall not come nigh thee.

Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked.

Because thou hast made the LORD, *which is* my refuge, *even* the most High, thy habitation;

There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling.

For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways." (Psa. 91:5-11).

God will have a people destined to escape the judgment that will fall on the earth in that last day.

Noah chose to work faithfully every day.

Noah rose each day, and methodically, faithfully, did the work that God had asked him to do. He did

not build the ark on emotion, or anointed energy. He built it by consistently obeying God and doing His assigned work on a daily basis.

Christian men and women often stumble in their walk with God because they attempt to walk by emotion and feelings. God has not asked us to be faithful only when we are emotionally blessed, but on a daily consistent basis. Noah may not have "felt" like working on the Ark every day for 120 years! He could have easily had other distractions but he faithfully worked for God daily.

God will have people in this last hour that faithfully, obediently do His Will in spite of their own emotions and will.

Let us consistently obey, follow the "pattern," and walk daily with our Lord as Noah did.

Gen 6:8-9, "But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD. These *are* the generations of Noah: Noah was a just man *and* perfect in his generations, *and* Noah walked with God."

Responding to the Grace of God

By Gilbert James

The entire Bible seems to focus on one fundamental theme and that is the salvation of humanity by God from the corruption of sin. This full salvation is the divine calling of every believer in Christ and it involves some basic Scriptural principles which we should constantly refer to in our walk with God and never overlook in our quest for more Spiritual knowledge. It is true that from the time of the early Church when the disciples of Christ were first called Christians simply because they manifest the character of Christ whom they had received, the Christian religion has become enormously complex in doctrines, practices, and institutions. However, in the maze of all the complex institutions, and the euphoria of spiritual revivals, movements, sophisticated theologies, and fresh revelations which constitute the Christian religion today, what

essentially matters is how we who believe in Christ stand and walk in the basic truths of our salvation in this present world. It is only as we are grounded on the basic solid doctrine of salvation can we rise and soar into the limitless glories to which we are called in Christ in God.

In this article, we are examining some elementary and fundamental Scriptural principles which underlie our salvation and produce the subsequent godly life of true Christianity. Interestingly, we will discover that these basic Scriptural principles which pertain to our life and godliness in Christ do not constitute a complex regime of theology, rules, and methods, but are simply based on the grace of God and our response to the grace of God in humility and faith.

The Fall

The story of salvation begins with

the Fall of man. In Genesis, God declared His intention to make man in His image and likeness and began by making man a living soul. God placed the first man in the Garden of Eden in an environment where both life and death were made available to him by means of a Tree of Life and a Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil respectively. For reasons known only fully to God, whose wisdom is perfect and whose power is infinite (we will avoid here all the many proposed philosophical speculations which have emerged), the first man did not partake of or enter into Life in the Garden of Eden but partook of or entered through disobedience into Death.

When man entered into Death God at that point revealed His plan of salvation (Gen 3:15; Is 9:6). This would involve a second Man, through whom mankind, though having inherited the

corrupt nature of the fallen first man, would enter into the image of the second Man who Himself bore the fullness of the glory and image of God (Rom 5:19; 8:29).

It is tempting at this point of the story to view the introduction of this plan of salvation and the emergence of the second Man as an unplanned improvisation by God due to the apparent thwarting by Satan of His intended plan to make man in His image and likeness. In fact, a lot of debates and speculations have been generated on the subject. However, we are safe to remain with whatever account given on the subject in the Scriptures. The Scriptures provide several Scripture passages which present the second Man and God's plan of salvation in a manner that reinforces our faith in God as the One whose purpose never fails and that, even with the Fall of the first man, God's eternal purpose to produce man in His image and likeness continued right on stream.

Salvation and the Second Man

First of all, it is important to bear in mind that whatever degree of the image and likeness of God the first man bore, the glory of that image and likeness of God in the first man paled before the glory of the second Man, in Whom, according to the Scriptures, "dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Col 2:9). In other words, it is the second Man who is presented in the Scriptures as the first true representation of the nature and character of God in humanity. And the second Man, though in all points tempted like the first man, remained sinless demonstrating that He truly possessed the fullness of the image and character of the Godhead (Heb 4:15).

In fact, Paul in presenting the emergence of the second Man, whom he also refers to as the last Adam, in the sequence of the divine principle of first the natural and then the spiritual, writes in 1 Co 15:44-49: "There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written, 'The first man, Adam, became a living soul,' the last Adam was a life-giving Spirit. But not the spiritual first, but the natural; afterward the spiritual. The first man *was* out of earth, earthy; the second Man *was* the Lord from Heaven. Such the earthy *man*, such also the earthy

ones. And such the heavenly *Man*, such also the heavenly ones. And according as we bore the image of the earthy *man*, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly *Man*." In other words, according to Paul, as logically as the natural precedes the spiritual in God's order of things, so the first earthy man preceded the second spiritual Man in the unfolding of God's great plan of the Ages.

Moreover, there are other Scripture passages which are even plainer in asserting the truth that the plan of salvation and the emergence of the second Man were no secondary improvisation which God had to introduce unexpectedly to deal with a seemingly unintended catastrophic failure of His project with the Fall of the first man. These Scriptures demonstrate the existence of the plan of salvation and of the second Man, Christ Jesus, even before the foundation of the world.

John 17:24: "Father, I desire that *those* whom You have given Me, that they may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me, for You have loved Me before *the* foundation of *the* world."

1 Pe 1:18-20: "Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, silver or gold, from your vain manner of life handed down from *your* fathers, but with *the* precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot; indeed having been foreknown before *the* foundation of *the* world, but revealed in *the* last times for you."

Rev 13:8: "And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."

Eph 1:3-4: "Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ; according as He chose us in Him before *the* foundation of *the* world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love."

Tit 1:1-2: "Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness; in hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began."

These Scripture passages about the

second Man, Jesus Christ, and His role in the salvation of mankind after the Fall of the first man make a very profound declaration which unveils to us the unfathomable glory of the unchangeable way and wisdom of the Lord. Primarily, these Scripture passages reveal that the emergence of the second Man or the last Adam and the unfolding of the great plan of salvation were not improvised into God's plan after the first man failed. The Scriptures are plain that, set in the eternal purpose of God, the plan of salvation and the emergence of the second Man, the Son of God, were in place even before the foundation of the world. This truth is glorious and it anchors our faith in the wisdom of the unchanging God amidst the winds of satanic oppositions to the purpose of God and amidst the many human surmising and speculations which have been generated about the state of things if the first man had not fallen.

In all of this, the truth which is important to us and is not complex or vague is the fact that when at the point of our salvation we who are believers in Christ awake from the state of sinful death, which we inherited from the first fallen man, we find before us a thorough and effective plan for our salvation. We find already prepared and applied to us forgiveness of sins and reconciliation to God as well as our regeneration or new birth into the divine nature of the second Man, all made possible through the second Man or last Adam. So that rather than looking back to speculate and hypothesize about the story of the Fall in the Garden of Eden, we are plunged into the stream of the unfolding plan of God to make man into His own image and likeness in the second Man Christ Jesus.

Rather than looking backward at the events of Eden to wish and hope that they did not happen or to desire to return to the former state of the first man and of other things before the Fall, we by faith are called to grasp the opportunity now opened before us in this great plan of salvation to bear the image of the heavenly Man even as we have borne the image of the earthy man. Moreover, we are made to appreciate with awe the steadfast hand of the eternal One, who designed the journey from the natural to the spiritual and all that is meant for man to learn in

that journey to glorify the eternal God, who is the beginning and the end. For indeed, we can now rest assured that the new creation we become through this great salvation is, unlike the earthy nature of the first man, that of the incorruptible nature of the last Adam, who now lives and cannot die or fall. Hence, if there is any lesson for us upon reflection of the Fall and its consequences, it is that the earthy, natural state, and more so, the fallen corrupt state, of man and the creation is transient and frail and must give way to the permanence of the spiritual in the eternal God. Peter puts it beautifully this way in 1 Pe 1:23-25: "You have been born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, through the living Word of God, and abiding forever. For all flesh *is* as grass, and all the glory of men as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls out, but the Word of the Lord endures forever. And this is the Word preached as gospel to you."

And so, in the face of such awesome truth, we who have partaken of the benefits of this glorious salvation are moved to bow at the throne of God and worship Him whose ways are passed finding out. Paul expresses this awesomeness of God so well in Rom 11:33-36: "O *the* depth of *the* riches both of *the* wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable *are* His judgments, and His ways past finding out! For who has known the mind of *the* Lord, or who became His counsellor? Or who first gave to Him, and it will be repaid to him? For of Him and through Him and to Him *are* all things; to Him be glory forever! Amen."

Having now placed the puzzling events of the beginning of the story of our salvation in their rightful place in the eternal wisdom of God, let us proceed to explore the glorious benefits of this great salvation and our response to the amazing grace that has brought it down to mankind. Our salvation involves two major elements of initiative on the part of God and two important principles of response on the part of man. They are: reconciliation and grace on the part of God and humility and faith on the part of man.

Reconciliation

The Fall of the first man reproduced in all of mankind a fallen nature of sin and death which alienated mankind

from God. Therefore, the plan of salvation provided for the reconciliation of man to God. Reconciliation is the end of hostility or enmity and the establishment of peace, harmony, communion, and fellowship between parties who were alienated from one another. Sin alienated man from God, but God through the atoning work of Christ for our sins has reconciled to Himself all who believe in Christ.

We read in 2 Co 5:18-20: "And all things *are* of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given to us the ministry of reconciliation; whereas God was in Christ reconciling *the* world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and putting the word of reconciliation in us. Then we are ambassadors on behalf of Christ, as God exhorting through us, we beseech *you* on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."

Reconciliation is a wonderful part of God's plan of salvation. After describing the work of salvation by grace in our lives, Paul goes on to elaborate on the implications and benefits of our reconciliation to God in Eph 2: 11-19: "Therefore remember that you, the nations, in time past *were* in *the* flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; and that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who were once afar off are made near by the blood of Christ. For He is our peace, He making us both one, and *He* has broken down the middle wall of partition *between us*, having abolished in His flesh the enmity (the Law of commandments *contained* in ordinances) so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, making peace *between them*; and so that He might reconcile both to God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity in Himself. And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off, and to those who were near. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. Now therefore you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God."

The Lord Jesus Christ is the

mediator who has brought about that wonderful reconciliation between sinful man and God, the Holy One. And it is important to appreciate the indispensable role that Jesus Christ has played in bringing man into reconciliation with God. Paul describes it this way in Rom 3:23-25: "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, Whom God set forth *to be* a propitiation in his blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (NKJ).

The suffering and death of Jesus on the Cross removed the enmity between sinful humanity and God and opened up the way for every believer in Christ to enter peacefully into fellowship and communion with God. Paul tells us in Rom 5:10-11: "For if *when* we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only *so*, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the reconciliation."

It is important to note also that reconciliation between God and man was brought about totally by God's own initiative. John reminds us in 1 Jo 4:10: "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins."

Law and Grace

It is important that we who have become reconciled to God enjoy the fullness of the benefits of our relationship with Him. To experience the fullness of our reconciliation to God, we must understand and appreciate the basis on which God has reconciled us to Himself and continues to maintain fellowship with us.

The Scriptures plainly reveal that the basis of the relationship between God and man is established in the New Covenant of grace which God introduced through Christ to implement His plan of salvation. Immediately preceding the introduction of the New Covenant, the relationship between God and man was based on what the Scriptures refer to as the Law.

However, with the coming of Christ, the Law relationship gave way to the Grace relationship.

John summarises the transition from the Law relationship into the Grace relationship at the coming of Christ this way in John 1:16-17: "And out of His fullness we all have received, and grace for grace. For the Law came through Moses, *but* grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."

The basis of the relationship between God and man under the Law in what is called the Old Covenant is fundamentally different from the basis of the relationship between God and man under Grace in the New Covenant. In fact, the Scriptures refer to the New Covenant as "a better covenant, which was established on better promises." For instance, we read in Heb 8:6-7: "But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by so much He is also the Mediator of a better covenant, which was built upon better promises. For if that first *covenant* had been without fault, *then* no place would have been sought for *the* second."

Living by the Law

Why is the New Covenant relationship better than the Old Covenant relationship between God and man? The basic principle which underlay man's relationship with God under the Old Covenant of Law may be summarised this way: "If man obey the Law, then he will live by his obedience of the Law." This was a principle which was based primarily upon man's sole initiative or initial ability to obey the Law. In other words, man's obedience to the Law was the basis for man to enter into life and fellowship with God. Several Scripture passages pointed to that Old Covenant principle.

Lev 18:5: "So you shall keep My statutes and My judgments, by which a man may live if he does them; I am the LORD."

Eze 20:11, 13: "And I gave them My statutes and showed them My judgments, which *if* a man do, he shall even live in them. But the house of Israel rebelled against Me in the wilderness; they did not walk in My statutes, and they despised My judgments, which *if* a man does, he shall even live in them. And they greatly profaned My sabbaths. And I said, *I* will pour out My fury on them in the wilderness to destroy them."

Rom 10:5: "For Moses writes *of* the righteousness *which* is of the Law, 'The man who does those things shall live by them.'"

Gal 3:12: "But the Law is not of faith; but, 'The man who does these things shall live in them.'"

However, we know that since the Fall of Adam, human nature became deprived of any ability to obey God. And this was the root of the problem of the relationship between God and man under the Old Covenant.

Human Helplessness

Nonetheless, to this day, it seems that sometimes in all the excitement to exult some instances of the noble and heroic deeds of people, and set these up as examples to be emulated by the rest of society, there is a tendency prevalent even in religion to ignore the categorical truth declared in the Scriptures that humanity is inherently sinful. Man, therefore, cannot become genuinely virtuous by imitation or self-discipline. And, hence, salvation is not another process of social engineering to discipline, rehabilitate or reform the human nature but is effectively a miraculous transformation of a sinner into a saint by God. According to Paul, "But may it never be for me to boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified to me, and I to the world. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision *has* any strength, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation." (Gal 6:14-15).

Therefore, let us review some Scripture passages which plainly state that human nature is inherently void of the ability to obey God.

Eph 2:1-3: "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest."

Isa 53:6: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, each one to his own way; and Jehovah has laid on Him the iniquity of us all."

Isa 64:6-7: "But we are all as the unclean *thing*, and all our righteousnesses *are* as a menstruation cloth. And we all fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us

away. And *there is* no one who calls on Your name, who stirs up himself to take hold of You. For You have hidden Your face from us, and have melted us away because of our iniquities."

Rom 3:9-12: "What then? Do we excel? No, in no way; for we have before charged both Jews and Greeks all *with* being under sin, as it is written: 'There is none righteous, no not one; there is none that understands, there is none that seeks after God. They are all gone out of the way, *they* have together become unprofitable, there is none that does good, no, not one.'"

Tit 3:3: "For we ourselves also were once foolish, disobedient, deceived, slaving for various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another."

1 Pe 4:3: "For the time of life which is past is enough for us to have worked out the will of the nations, having gone on in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, parties, carousings, and abominable idolatries."

Rom 8:7-8: "The carnal mind *is* enmity against God, for it is not subject to the Law of God, neither indeed can *it be*. So then they who are in the flesh cannot please God."

Mar 7:21-23: "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things pass out from inside and defile the man."

And so, the Bible conclusively declares man's inherent sinfulness and inability to obey God's Law in order to lay down the truth that no man can live righteously unto God by his own efforts of obedience to the Law. Paul points out in Gal 3:21: "*Is* the Law then against the promises of God? Let it not be *said!* For if a law had been given which could have given life, indeed righteousness would have been out of Law."

Humanity's sinfulness and inability to please God or to cultivate righteousness plainly shows man's absolute need of God's help if he is to live before God and walk in God's righteousness and enjoy a fruitful relationship with God. Hence, it was necessary for God to introduce a new basis for His relationship with man since the old basis of Law was unfruitful and plunged man into despair.

The Law and the Flesh

From the perspective of the divinely ordained journey from the natural to the spiritual, mentioned earlier in the study, the dismal moral experiences which have befallen man under the Law and in the flesh purposefully demonstrate the corruption of the human nature and the subsequent significance of the need for man's new birth into a spiritual man. In Rom 7, Paul summarises very well for us the despair of relating with God under the Law in the inherently sinful nature of the flesh and the desperate cry of the soul in that condition to enter into a living relationship with God in a new spiritual nature produced by the grace of God. Paul's account in Rom 7 is presented like a parenthesis between his previous and subsequent accounts of the effective work of grace in producing righteousness in man to emphasize the total inability of the flesh and the Law to bring about sinful man's salvation and deliverance from sin.

Paul's account of the victory over sin wrought by the grace of God through Christ in a believer can swiftly flow on from Rom 6 to Rom 8. Nonetheless, it is good that Paul who himself was a zealot of the Law of Moses pauses from the theme of grace and gives us on the side this wonderful insight into man's true experiences of despair and failure in attempting to serve God under the Law with a carnal nature. Therefore, in order to appreciate the profound insights Paul gives in Rom 7, we must read the account within the whole context of Paul's discussion of the effectiveness of grace in contrast to the failure of the Law and the efforts of corrupt humanity in bringing man deliverance from sin. Let's therefore take the time and read the entire account in Rom 7.

Rom 7:1-25: *"Or do you not know, brethren (for I am speaking to those who know the law), that the law has jurisdiction over a person as long as he lives? For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband. So then, if while her husband is living she is joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress though she is joined to another man.*

Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God. For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death. But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter. What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, "you shall not covet." But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin is dead. I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died; and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me; for sin, taking an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. Therefore did that which is good become a cause of death for me? May it never be! Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, so that through the commandment sin would become utterly sinful. For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate. But if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that the Law is good. So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. For I joyfully concur with the

law of God in the inner man, but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin."

This was a heart-felt and relevant account of man's desperate struggle with sin in the flesh under the Law. How hopeless it would have remained without God coming to our rescue by grace through Jesus Christ. In Rom 8, the despair of the flesh under the Law gives way to the glorious hope of victory in Christ by the Spirit through grace.

Rom 8:1-10: *"Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness."*

The New Covenant of Grace

The New Covenant of grace was therefore introduced by God to provide a meaningful basis for reconciling sinful man to Himself. We read in Gal 3:22-27: "But the Scripture shut up all under sin, so that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to those

who believe. But before faith came, we were kept under Law, having been shut up to the faith about to be revealed. So that the Law has become a trainer of us until Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But faith coming, we are no longer under a trainer. For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many as were baptized into Christ, you put on Christ.”

With the introduction of the New Covenant through Christ, man now could make the transition from that unfruitful relationship with God under Law to a fruitful relationship with God under Grace; from a condemning and debilitating relationship with God under the Old Covenant of Law to the reconciling and life-giving relationship with God under the New Covenant of Grace; from the despairing and frustrating efforts of trying to meet God’s standard of righteousness in a corrupt nature under the Law to being transformed into a new creature which is made the righteousness of God in Christ.

Under the New Covenant of Grace, the Holy of Holies, the innermost place of communion with God, which was inaccessible to man under the Old Covenant, is now freely open for man to enter in and commune with God. We read in Heb 10:19-22: “Therefore, brothers, having boldness to enter into the *Holy of Holies* by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He has consecrated for us through the veil, that is to say, His flesh; and *having* a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and *our* bodies having been washed with pure water.”

Therefore, the New Covenant of Grace provides man with a better basis for relating with God than the Old Covenant did. It is a relationship based completely on the grace of God ministered to man through Christ. It strips man of any sort of dependence on his self-efforts or self-righteousness or the so-called virtues of humanity, and brings him naked and helpless at the Cross of Christ to the mercy and grace of God. Understanding the distinct role of grace in the relationship between God and man under the New Covenant is integral for our appreciation of the abundant benefits we derive in relating to God on the

basis of the New Covenant.

There is a significant difference in the basis of the relationship between God and man under the Old Covenant and the basis of the relationship between God and man under the new Covenant. Under the Old Covenant, man’s initiative, his initial good deeds, or his obedience to the Law was a primary condition to relate with God, to live before God and enjoy any benefits from God. In other words, the relationship was conditioned upon man’s ability and faithfulness. The Law demanded human efforts or obedience as a precondition to life and blessings from God. However, under the New Covenant of Grace, the relationship between God and man has been based on God’s ability and faithfulness. Man can now rise from the despair of his own inability and depend on God’s enablement. It is important to understand this wonderful truth. The Old Covenant demanded obedience to the Law from a man who inherently had no ability or will to obey the Law of God. The New Covenant of Grace, having taken into consideration man’s inability and unfaithfulness in obeying the Law, provides forgiveness of sins to man, imputes God’s righteousness to man, and empowers man to live and walk in the righteousness and will of God. Paul summarises it all this way in Rom 5:20-21: “But the Law entered so that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound, so that as sin has reigned to death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Grace Alone

This is where the crucial role of grace on the part of God in the plan of salvation shines. To elaborate on this point, we must review the Scriptural concept of grace. The Scriptures define grace by contrasting it with works. “But to him working, the reward is not reckoned according to grace, but according to debt. But to him not working, but believing on Him justifying the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness” (Rom 4:4-5). Another self-explicit definition of grace in contrast to works is in Rom 11:6: “But if by grace, then *it is* no more of works; otherwise grace is no more grace. But if *it is* of works, then it is no more of grace; otherwise work is no more work.”

Grace is thus God’s primary and unconditional initiative to help helpless humanity. The Scriptures reveal that God, by grace and grace alone, transforms a man from an inherent state of sin and death into a state of righteousness and life in Christ. We read in Rom 5:19-21: “For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of One shall many be made righteous. But the Law entered so that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound, so that as sin has reigned to death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.”

According to the Scriptures, the life and righteousness of Christ is produced in a believer solely by the grace of God. Paul testifies personally of this experience in Gal 2:20-21: “I have been crucified with Christ, and I live; *yet* no longer I, but Christ lives in me. And *that* life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith toward the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself on my behalf. I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness *is* through law, then Christ died without cause.”

It is important to note that what the Law represented in the Old Testament in man’s relationship with God and his search for justification and righteousness is today represented in a similar manner by religious rules and disciplines centred on carnal human efforts. This alternative version of living under the Law may be seen in the super-abundance of rules, instructions, and rituals presented for Christian living with little or no emphasis of the need for a man first to be born again or transformed by the Spirit of God in order to begin or have the ability to live the Christian life. However, in the plain and bold definition of the Scriptures grace completely excludes human efforts or works of righteousness. “And if by grace, then *is it* no more of works; otherwise grace is no more grace. But if *it be* of works, then is it no more grace; otherwise work is no more work” (Rom 11:6).

Therefore, believers in Christ must be careful to discern and avoid the subtle influence of religious legalism and carnal efforts which seek to rob us of the fullness of the work of grace. To those who still would like to seek to relate with God on the basis of the Old

Covenant of Law, Paul gives this solemn warning in Gal 5:4: "Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are seeking to be justified by the Law; you are fallen from grace."

Man's Response to Grace

Seeing that the relationship between God and man under the New Covenant is based initially on the grace of God, how should man respond and relate to God in order to benefit fully from this wonderful relationship? If we agree with the Scriptures that God has given us His salvation and upholds us in His righteousness by grace, then we must boldly exclude every notion of relying on any form of self-help and human effort in receiving God's full salvation. We must be grateful to God for, and must have full confidence in, God's amazing grace. By the grace of God the door to God's mercy and help is open to everyone at any time and in any condition. For instance, we are encouraged in Heb 4:14-16: "Since then we have a great High Priest who has passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast *our* profession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot be touched with the feelings of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted just as *we are*, yet without sin. Therefore let us come boldly to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

Therefore, man should respond to

the grace of God in humility and faith: in humility, because he completely lacks anything to merit God's blessings or to meet God's standard of righteousness, and in faith, because in spite of man's total unworthiness God by grace has provided all that he needs for a fruitful life of godliness. Let us now examine these two important attributes, humility and faith, which should characterize our response to the grace of God.

Continued in the next issue of the Sharon Star

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Sharon Star on line www.thesharonstar.org
Office (306) 445-2733.